

# **Be Not Afraid**

## **Bishop John M. LeVoir's Monthly Column for *The Prairie Catholic***

February 2014

### **Pastoral planning in union with the Lord, who never disappoints**

At present, there are 76 parishes in the Diocese of New Ulm. Among them, there are a number of small parishes that are struggling to remain vibrant faith communities. Looking into the future as best we can, it seems that some parishes will want to merge with others in order to remain vibrant Catholic faith communities. This will require change.

Concerning change, the diocesan "Fourth Plan for Parishes" states: "Change is seldom easy. It can be difficult when it involves a faith community that we hold very dear, such as our parish. It can be especially difficult when it involves a church building that has become so familiar and important in our lives over so many years. Both are often intimately tied to one's town, one's family, and their respective histories. Perhaps one's grandparents were among the founding members of the parish. Perhaps it was through parish events that a person met a spouse or best friend. Perhaps the church building is where mom and dad got married, or where their funeral Mass was celebrated. Perhaps the parish and its church are the center of life for a rural community, which has already witnessed the closure of so many other institutions" (p. 119).

As difficult as it might be, parishioners of small parishes are asked to work with their priests and pastoral administrators to assess their future. This should be done through a process of prayerful discernment and honest, charitable discussion. The "Fourth Plan" states: "The process of discernment that small parishes are to undertake first involves a prayerful examination of their pastoral activities. How are we being nourished by the Word of God, the Eucharist, and the other sacraments? How are we communicating the life of Christ to others? Are we living out our Christian vocation to imitate Christ in his offices of priest, prophet, and king as we should through participation in the parish? Is our parish as vibrant as it once was? Can we reasonably expect it to have our current level of activity in the future, given the area's demographic trends, e.g., declining numbers of individual members, households, and youth in the parish?" (p. 119). These are all important questions for small parishes to ask themselves as they discern.

Catholics of the diocese must also take into account the declining number of priests. The "Fourth Plan" states: "It is projected that the number of active priests in the diocese will decline from 44 in 2012 to 33 by 2022. Of this number, 23 will serve as pastors, four will be senior associates, and another four will be recently ordained associates. The projection assumes that the number of international priests serving in the diocese will not change from the two whom we have currently. The projected loss of a quarter of our priests in the next 10 years underscores the need for all members of the diocese to promote and to pray for vocations" (p. 131).

"The declining number of priests and the expectation that they should celebrate only a limited number of Sunday Masses on a weekend entail that certain small parishes will only be able to celebrate Mass at their church every other weekend. The limited availability of a priest may translate into further reductions in the sacraments and other pastoral activities" (p. 119).

With these things said, there is hope for renewal. The renewal of the Catholic faith in the diocese – for us and for those Catholics who no longer live their Catholic faith – should concern us and occupy our time. Renewal comes from the joy of the Gospel message. The joy of the Gospel will attract those who have

lost hope in their Catholic faith, and help our parishes to grow and to become more vibrant. Effective evangelization is capable of reversing the troublesome trends that are seen in some of our small parishes.

In his first apostolic exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis writes: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. In this exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” (no. 1).

Commenting on the attitude of someone filled with the love of Jesus and enthused about evangelizing, or sharing the Good News with his or her neighbor, Pope Francis writes: “An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that ‘delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow. . . . And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient, or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ” (no. 10).

It is critical for us to plan for the future prayerfully, honestly acknowledging how our parishes are doing and where they can expect to be in five, 10, and 20 years. It is also critical for us to have hope and to be joyful evangelizers. In all of this, we are all called to trust in God and to work together. If we do, we will not be disappointed.

As Pope Francis said recently, trust in the Lord “is the key to success in life. Trust in the Lord – let us entrust ourselves to the Lord!” He concluded: “This is a gamble we must take: to entrust ourselves to him. And he never disappoints. Never, never!” (Homily, Jan. 20, 2014).

# **No Tengas Miedo**

## **por Obispo John M. LeVoir**

febrero 2014

### **La Planificación Pastoral en Unión con el Señor, que Nunca Decepciona**

En la actualidad, hay 76 parroquias en la diócesis de New Ulm. Entre ellos, hay un número de parroquias pequeñas que están luchando para permanecer como comunidades de fe viva. Con vistas al futuro, parece ser que algunas parroquias se quieran unir a otras parroquias con el fin de seguir siendo comunidades religiosas católica vibrantes. Para ello será necesario un cambio.

Por difícil que sea, se les pide a los feligreses de las parroquias pequeñas trabajar con sus sacerdotes y administradores pastorales para evaluar su futuro. Esto se debe hacer a través de un proceso de discernimiento en la oración y de un diálogo sincero. El “Cuarto Plan” afirma: “el proceso de discernimiento que las parroquias pequeñas han de emprender implica primero un examen de oración de sus actividades pastorales. ¿Cómo estamos siendo alimentados por la Palabra de Dios, la Eucaristía y los demás sacramentos? ¿Cómo nos comunicamos la vida de Cristo a los demás? ¿Estamos viviendo nuestra vocación cristiana a imitar a Cristo en su oficio como sacerdote, profeta y rey, ya que se debe a través de la participación en la parroquia? ¿Es nuestra parroquia tan dinámica y activa como una vez lo fue. ¿Podemos esperar razonablemente que tenga nuestro nivel actual de actividad en el futuro, dada las tendencias demográficas de la zona, por ejemplo, el descenso en el número de miembros individuales, familiares y jóvenes en la parroquia” (p. 119). Todas estas son preguntas muy importantes para las parroquias pequeñas.

Los católicos de la diócesis deben tener en cuenta que el número de sacerdotes está disminuyendo. El “Cuarto Plan” afirma: “se proyecta que el número de sacerdotes activos en la diócesis disminuirá de 44 en el 2012 a 33 para el 2022. De esta cifra, 23 sacerdotes servirán como pastores, cuatro como asociados y otros cuatro se estarán ordenando. La proyección supone que el número de sacerdotes internacionales al servicio de la diócesis no va a cambiar de los dos que tenemos actualmente. La pérdida proyectada de una cuarta parte de nuestros sacerdotes en los próximos 10 años nos dice de la necesidad de que todos los miembros de la diócesis de promover y orar por las vocaciones” (p. 131).

“La disminución del número sacerdotes y la expectativa de que deben celebrar sólo un número limitado de las misas dominicales en un fin de semana implica que ciertas parroquias pequeñas sólo podrán celebrar la Misa en su iglesia cada fin de semana. La limitada disponibilidad de un sacerdote puede traducirse en reducciones adicionales en los sacramentos y otras actividades pastorales” (p. 119).

Con todo esto, hay esperanza para la renovación. La renovación de la fe católica en la diócesis – para nosotros y para los católicos que ya no viven su fe católica – que nos debe preocupar y ocupar nuestro tiempo. La renovación viene de la alegría del mensaje del Evangelio. La alegría del Evangelio atraerá a aquellos que han perdido la esperanza en su fe católica y ayudar a nuestras parroquias a crecer y a ser más vibrante. La evangelización eficaz es capaz de revertir las tendencias problemáticas que se observan en algunas de nuestras parroquias pequeñas.

En su primera exhortación apostólica, “La alegría del Evangelio,” El Papa Francisco escribe: “la alegría del Evangelio llena los corazones y las vidas de todos los que se encuentran con Jesús. Aquellos que aceptan su oferta son liberados del pecado, tristeza, soledad y el vacío interior. Con Cristo, la alegría está en constante nace de nuevo. En esta exhortación deseo alentar a los fieles cristianos a embarcarse en un nuevo capítulo de la evangelización marcada por esta alegría” (no. 1).

Es fundamental para nosotros planificar el futuro con oración, reconociendo honestamente cómo están nuestras parroquias y que se puede anticipar en cinco, 10 y 20 años. También es fundamental tener esperanza y ser evangelizadores alegres. A todo esto, todos son llamados a confiar en Dios y a trabajar juntos. Si lo hacemos, no nos decepcionará.