



# *Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord*

**A pastoral letter on evangelization**

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson • Archbishop of St. Louis



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MOST REVEREND ROBERT J. CARLSON

ARCHBISHOP OF ST. LOUIS





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Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As we enter the Year of Faith, a time called by Pope Benedict XVI for strengthening our commitment to evangelization, we should be reminded of the importance of our commission to go forth and proclaim the Gospel message.

Effective evangelists are well formed in their faith and possess a solid conviction of the Truths revealed to us by Jesus Christ. These convictions are routinely challenged in today's society, and it is imperative that we prepare ourselves for proclaiming the Gospel.

This pastoral letter is intended to reinvigorate your spiritual formation so that all may better proclaim the Word of Christ and the teachings of His Church.

During the Year of Faith, I hope all of you will commit to improving your understanding of the important yet often misunderstood works of the Church's bishops at the Second Vatican Council and of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. These important works provide a foundation for today's evangelists as we navigate "the highways of the world to proclaim His Gospel to the peoples of the earth," as the Holy Father wrote in his apostolic letter *Porta Fidei*.

As you read this letter and reflect on the questions at the end, consider that our faith is not merely a private act. The

New Evangelization – reintroducing the Church to those who have forgotten or rejected her – requires that we work in unity, as one body, as a *Catholic* Church.

In rediscovering the joy and freedom found through Our Savior, we can share His Word peacefully and eloquently, through charity and love.

It is through our Christian witness that we, as the Church community in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, proclaim that we are *Alive* in Christ. This Year of Faith is our time to renew our own faith while helping our neighbors discover and rediscover His Word.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+ Robert R. Carlson*



# *Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord*

A pastoral letter on evangelization

This is an important time in our history as a people, as Catholics, as Americans, and as members of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. As the universal Church is about to begin the celebration of a special year devoted to a deepening and rediscovery of faith, the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Vatican II, and the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it would be good for us to reflect on what all this means for us here in the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

All of these celebrations and anniversaries are celebrated in conjunction with the Synod of Bishops in Rome, October 7–29, to deliberate on how we as a Church can respond more effectively to the recent Popes' calls for a "new evangelization." This follows on Pope Benedict XVI's establishment of the first new Vatican department in many years, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. What had been strongly proclaimed by Blessed John Paul II – the need for a "new evangelization" or "re-evangelization" – has now been given an enduring institutional focus as we move forward as Catholics to face the challenges of this new millennium.

While there is a multiplicity of anniversaries and events, there is a core focus that all of them share. When Blessed John Paul II published his inspiring Encyclical on evangelization on the 25th anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican II, *Redemptoris missio*, he stressed the very important link between the "universal call to holiness" and the "universal call to mission." And this is the heart of the renewal that was the intended goal of Vatican II. These fundamental realities, based in



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our sacramental union with God, initiated at baptism, are at the heart of what all the anniversaries and celebrations and deliberations are about.

The call to mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness . . . The **universal call to holiness** is closely linked to the **universal call to mission**. Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission. (*Redemptoris missio*, 90)

It is now appropriate to briefly evaluate where we are as an Archdiocese and how these special themes apply to our present situation.

### Where we are as an Archdiocese

The Archdiocese of St. Louis has a truly inspiring history. The Catholic Church has flourished here because of the faith, devotion and generosity of generations of our Catholics. Ste. Genevieve Parish in Ste. Genevieve has existed for more than 250 years, and St. Rose Philippine Duchesne opened the first school for girls west of the Mississippi in 1818. Today this great saint, who had a heart for evangelization, is buried in our Archdiocese.

St. Louis is sometimes called the “Rome of the West” because of the great numbers of religious communities who responded, years ago, to the call to evangelization with their many schools, hospitals and outreach to the poor. The Archdiocese was one of the first to respond to the needs of the Church in South America, our priests and religious

have served in Bolivia for almost 60 years. Blessed with a strong clergy and active parish communities, the roots of the faith are deep, and yet today, this precious heritage is in danger, and is already diminishing.

Like many dioceses and archdioceses, the call of the Holy Father to a “new evangelization” must be answered. If we are to pass on to our children and grandchildren a way of life that is in harmony with God’s plan for humanity, His plan for happiness here on earth and the eternal salvation of our children and grandchildren, we can’t go on with “business as usual” or we will be, for the most part, out of business.

In approximately the last 20 years – from 1991–2011 – this is what we have seen:

	Numbers	% Change
Number of Parishes	from 243 to 185	– 23.86 %
Diocesan Priests	from 547 to 363	– 33.63 %
Religious Priests	from 426 to 346	– 18.78 %
Religious Sisters	from 2,763 to 1,759	– 36.33 %
Religious Brothers	from 181 to 123	– 32.05 %
Catholic Elementary Schools	from 175 to 119	– 32.00 %
Catholic Elementary School Enrollment	from 45,603 to 27,179	– 40.40 %
Baptisms	from 9,348 to 5,454	– 41.66 %
Converts	from 1,268 to 1,080	– 14.80 %
Catholic Marriages	from 2,248 to 1,278	– 43.15 %
Mixed Marriages	from 1,286 to 627	– 51.24 %
Total Marriages	from 3,534 to 1,905	– 46.10 %

In the archdiocese, 69% of elementary-aged students receive Catholic instruction; 39% of those students are enrolled in Catholic schools and the rest are in Parish Schools of Religion. While the number and



total enrollment of our Catholic high schools has been holding fairly steady, with only a slight decline over the past 20 years (from 29 to 28 high schools and from 13,969 enrolled to 12,795), there has been an alarming decline in the number of high school students attending public schools who receive Catholic instruction (from 1123 to 94, a decline of 91.6%). Only 34% of high-school-aged Catholic children are receiving any religious instruction.

I share these sobering statistics with you to impress upon you the realities we must deal with. Unless we confront these issues, we will not be able to come up with viable solutions. To deny that there are some significant problems we are facing is only to contribute to a further decline. This means not only a collective facing of reality but also

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a personal examination of conscience. And it must be said that these problems are not unique to St. Louis. As sobering as these statistics are, there are many dioceses and archdioceses that have been strongly Catholic, as we have been, that are suffering even steeper declines.

There are many alarming things that the above statistics reveal, but I would like to draw your attention to a few in particular. If fewer Catholic parents are having children or baptizing the children they have, what does that tell us about our future? If fewer Catholics are marrying in the Church or bothering to marry at all, what does that

tell us about our future? If only 34% of our high school age students are receiving any religious instruction at all, what does that tell us about our future? Although our Lord promises us that the gates of hell will not prevail over the Church (Mt. 16:18), with such sobering statistics we can also rightly understand and echo our Savior's open-ended question: "But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" (Lk. 18:8)

### **What are the reasons for the decline?**

There are multiple reasons for the decline, and lengthy books have been written delving into causes, but for our purposes I would like to suggest three of the main reasons.

#### **Post Vatican II Confusion**

Those of us who are old enough to remember the years just after Vatican II (1962–1965) will remember it as a time of both exhilaration and confusion. Exhilaration because it seemed that "renewal" was going to bring to the fore many things that would help our faith and life as Catholics: the Liturgy in the vernacular, emphasis on the role of lay faithful, a more positive assessment of modern developments with its accompanying openness to "dialogue," the overcoming of hostility among Christians with a new emphasis on ecumenism, etc.

There was confusion because many theologians and pastors seemed to think that Vatican II ushered in a time where "anything goes" and as long as you acted in accord with "conscience," whatever you did was fine. While the Council was intended to better equip the Church to carry out her mission of showing Christ to the world, for many Catholics an uncritical openness led to an invasion of the world into the lives of Catholics, along with a diminishment of faith. Many Bishops, puzzled about how to properly evaluate many of these developments, sometimes remained silent to the detriment of their people. During this time of experimentation, entire generations of Catholics



were never taught in a clear and convincing way what the Catholic Church really teaches and why. This is why the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published 20 years ago, was such a significant development and remains such a valuable resource for all of us today.

In the midst of such confusion, it is no surprise that the doors were opened for the world, the flesh and the devil to gain much ground in the life of many Catholics. This is a situation that we must squarely face and about which I will say more later.

### Secularization

Long and insightful books have been written about the process of secularization and how it has affected the mindset of many, including many Catholics. Aggressively anti-Christian intellectual currents born in Enlightenment Europe in the 18th century have undermined the faith of many. When governments who adopt or embrace these currents in whole or part come into power, they almost invariably attempt to destroy faith in their countries by hard or soft persecution. They attempt to use the state educational system to indoctrinate students into a worldview that undermines faith in direct or indirect ways. They may use economic punishments and rewards to direct people toward the state ideology. These intellectual currents, hostile to faith, elevating “pure reason” to a status it doesn’t possess, perceiving the Church as an obstacle to creating a secularist “brave new world,” have penetrated the university and cultural environments in a pervasive way and have filtered down into popular culture in increasingly open and blatant ways. Many Catholics, not well grounded in the faith, not truly knowledgeable about the Sacred Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, or sufficiently grounded in personal relationship with the Lord to be able to differentiate His voice from the voice of the Enemy or their own flesh, or the “doctrines of demons” infiltrated into the culture through “plausible liars” (1Tim. 4:1–2) have now been captured by this deception and fail to see its incompatibility with being a Catholic.

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Fifty years ago the American culture of the time and its “social pressure,” supported fidelity in marriage, saving sex for marriage, honoring God and the 10 commandments, keeping holy the Lord’s Day, etc. Now the situation is radically different. Powerful indoctrination is occurring in our educational and political establishments, as well as through the multiple forms of media to which we all are exposed, to influence us to accept as “normal” what is neither acceptable nor normal with dire effects to the stability of marriages and the well-being of children. The very structures

and rhythms of our lives are being relentlessly pressured to eliminate time and desire for God and a life of holiness and mission. The family dinner hour and even Sunday mornings are increasingly being overwhelmed by the demands of ever expanding sports programs that no longer respect the values of family and Church. Constant exposure to electronic media endangers the contemplative silence that needs to exist in the depth of our souls to enable us to hear God and respond to the gentle inspirations of the Spirit. We need to learn a new way of being in the world, but not of it.

What we currently are facing in our struggle to preserve the right to religious freedom in this country is only one more effort by these forces to silence the voice of Christ in the culture; to silence the call for everyone to repent, for the Kingdom of God is indeed at hand, and only those enter it who repent and believe.



## Personal Choices

We are not simply determined by what is happening in the wider culture of the Church or society. We all respond to what we encounter with choices that are rooted in freedom, despite the influences that bear upon us. Unfortunately some, against the advice of St. Paul not to use our freedom as an excuse for the flesh, (Gal. 5:13) have indeed done so. Sadly, some of us have chosen to say yes to “teachers” (2 Tim. 4:3) that are telling us what our fallen nature wants to hear. If we are honest with ourselves, sometimes we come to “believe” something because it gives us “permission” to follow our disordered desires. Sometimes we foolishly embrace teachings that don’t require us to pick up our cross daily and follow in Jesus’ footsteps. Sometimes,



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out of a badly misguided compassion, we ignore the truth about human life revealed to us by God himself in order not to hurt others.

The first culture that we need to transform is not the wider culture of the Church or the world, but the culture of our own heart. We can plead with the psalmist, “Lord, bend my heart according to Your will and not to the love of gain.” (Psalm 119:36) Have we been co-opted and corrupted by the society in which we live? Have we believed people who told us what we wanted to hear rather than what is true? Have we given in to disordered desires, comfort, convenience, lukewarmness be-

cause they are easier paths? If our answers to any of these questions are “yes,” we need to repent. We need to acknowledge our foolishness and ask God’s forgiveness for “what we have done and what we have failed to do.” Only then can a real renewal happen in our own lives and then in the wider Church and society. Such a renewal, in our personal lives and in our Archdiocese, will include embracing both the universal call to holiness and the universal call to participate in the mission of Christ, those foundational themes that Blessed John Paul II identified as key parts of what the Spirit is saying to our Church, today.

### What can we do?

#### A “Yes” to Holiness

Blessed John Paul II pointed out that one of the most important teachings of Vatican II is its emphasis on the “universal call to holiness.” Among other things, Vatican II was a rediscovery of what it means to be a baptized Catholic. Baptism isn’t just a ceremony or ritual, it is a sacrament; a sacrament brings us into a living relationship with God. The Lord himself dwells within us through baptism and desires us to share in His holiness and mission. Holiness is not just for a few special people or for priests and nuns; it is for every baptized person. In fact the scripture indicates how essential it is that we embrace this call to holiness: Strive for “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” (Heb. 12:14)

Holiness isn’t measured by how many pious practices we do, although such practices are important, but by our growth in love. What the whole Christian life is about is little by little growing in love: love for God and love for our neighbor. Holiness is about bringing our whole will into union with God’s will and living more and more fully the purpose for which we’ve been created. (Gal. 5:19–23)

Besides repenting for any ways we have drifted from our fidelity to Christ in our personal lives, I would like to propose that each of us



commit ourselves to a daily period of personal prayer. The final section of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on prayer would make wonderful spiritual reading as we begin or deepen this practice of personal prayer. (If you read the Catechism, 2 pages a day, you can get through the whole prayer section during the 40 days of Lent.) Another great resource that many lay people have found of great help in having a regular daily prayer time is the monthly publication *Magnificat* which can be obtained at [www.magnificat.com](http://www.magnificat.com).

One very good way of praying is to avail ourselves of the various opportunities for Eucharistic adoration in parishes that sponsor such times. Signing up for a weekly hour of adoration has been the occasion for the deepening of many Catholics' faith.

Blessed John Paul II urged us to let our prayer grow in depth and breadth so it includes not just asking for things when we need them, although that is always a good thing to do, but:

Our Christian communities must become **genuine “schools” of prayer**, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly “falls in love.” (*Novo millennio ineunte* 32)

What a beautiful description of the direction in which our lives as individuals and parishes must tend.

Another practical step I would like to suggest is that each of us conduct an examination of conscience, asking the Holy Spirit to show us if we have embraced false teachings or rationalized sinful behavior, and opening ourselves to the grace of repentance. It would be most helpful and a great blessing if we have not availed ourselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to do so. Don't worry if you can't remember the “proper prayers.” The priest will be happy to accept your own words. What are important are honesty and a sincere desire to change, depending on the grace of God – but we have to receive the Sacrament of Penance.

Since it's becoming more difficult to follow the Lord as a faithful Catholic in the secular culture in which we live without support; "getting connected" somehow is becoming more and more important. Whether it be a parish Bible study, a prayer group, an adult education class, a volunteer service, participation in the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Knights of Columbus, periodic spiritual renewal conferences and retreats or any of a number of other things, getting connected is a great support to our faith and more and more important. We need each other not only to carry out our mission together but to support each other in our lives.

Recently Pope Benedict XVI pointed to a greater clarity that is coming to the Church about the battle we are currently engaged in and the need for friends in the midst of this battle.



One very good way of praying is to avail ourselves of the various opportunities for Eucharistic adoration.

Today the word *ecclesia militans* [church militant] is somewhat out of fashion, but in reality we can understand ever better that it is true, that it bears truth in itself. We see how evil wishes to dominate the world and that it is necessary to enter into battle with evil. We see how it does so in many bloody ways, with the different forms of violence, but also masked with goodness and precisely this way destroying the moral foundations of society . . . . We are in this struggle and in this struggle it is very



important to have friends. (Address of Pope Benedict XVI to Cardinals, May 21, 2012)

I would also like to suggest that you see if you can arrange your schedule to include participation in the Eucharist on some day of the week in addition to Sunday, even daily, if possible. For example, informal communities of faith grow up around the daily Eucharist, and these can be very supportive. These opportunities for growth and deepening of spiritual life follow the old Latin maxim, *Nemo Dat Quod Non Habet* (You Cannot Give What You Do Not Possess) and lead us to our next topic of discussion:

### A “Yes” to Evangelization

I want to spend more time elaborating on this point since it is a particularly strongly emphasized theme in the life of the Church right now. We Catholics are not used to the word “evangelization,” although we are hearing it more and more frequently. The core definition of evangelization is helping other people come to know Jesus Christ and His Church, or to come back to Jesus and the Church. Vatican II devoted an entire document to the mission of lay Catholics. It made the essential point that lay Catholics don’t have to wait for their pastor or bishop to ask them to do something, since they have already been asked, in baptism, by Jesus! Jesus wants to continue His mission in and through us to “seek and to save those who are lost.” (Lk. 19:10)

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While evangelization has a broad meaning that encompasses virtually everything that the Church does, it has a more specific meaning that is focused on its end: Christian conversion. Blessed John Paul II's definition of the conversion that evangelization aims at is well worth pondering.

The "good news" is directed to stirring a person to a conversion of heart and life and a clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; to disposing a person to receive Baptism and the Eucharist and to strengthen a person in the prospect and realization of new life according to the Spirit. (*Christifideles laici* 33)

The proclamation of the Word of God has **Christian conversion** as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and His Gospel through faith . . . Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming His disciple. (*Redemptoris missio* 46)

There are many who are lost today. Many who have been baptized have drifted away from the Church. Often there is no big reason for this but simply a gradual drifting away, consumed or distracted by other things. Many of us have family members in this situation.

And this is what the "new evangelization" is all about. Traditional missionary work of the Church is geared towards those who have never heard the gospel message. This dimension of evangelization is also called "primary" evangelization. But today many of the baptized are not living as disciples of Christ, and there is a need for a "re-evangelization" or "new evangelization," directed now, not to far off individuals, but to people in our own families, neighborhoods and parishes who don't know what it means to live as a disciple of Christ and haven't committed their lives to follow Him in the life of the Church.

What is "new" about the "new evangelization" is to whom it is directed – the already baptized who aren't living their faith or who are living it in a much diminished way. (*Redemptoris missio* 33)



Blessed John Paul II also has called for the “new evangelization” to be characterized by “new ardor, methods and expressions” and to be characterized by the passion, fervor, enthusiasm and confidence in the Holy Spirit that followed Pentecost. (*Novo millennio ineunte* 40) To my brother priests, let us adopt the heart of our patron, St. John Vianney, by including in our breviary intercessions his own daily prayer, “Grant me the conversion of my parish; I consent to suffer all you wish the whole of my life.”

The purpose of leadership in the Church is not to do the whole work of the Church, but, as it says in Ephesians 4, the risen Christ gave leadership gifts to the Church – apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists – not to do the whole work of the Church but “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” (Eph. 4:11–12) And yes, you are the saints. In the early Church all the baptized were considered to have been made holy by their baptism – not ready to be canonized yet necessarily, but “on the way.” I and those who work with me throughout the Archdiocese want to do all we can to help you to understand and embrace the call you have received from Jesus himself to a life of holiness and a participation in His mission of evangelization. As Blessed John Paul II put it:

The risen Christ gave leadership gifts to the Church . . . “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.”



I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid

this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples. (*Redemptoris missio* 3)

There are many simple and natural ways of sharing the good news with others. How easy it is to invite someone who we know could benefit by meeting Christ in a more personal way to a parish mission or adult education lecture. How natural it is to pass on to others a book or CD we have just read that we found inspiring and drew us closer to the Lord. How comfortable it can become to share our own “testimony” of how we came to a deeper faith in Christ and what difference it makes in our lives! And if we’re asked questions to which we don’t know the answers, just say so: “I don’t really know what the Church teaches about that or why, but I’ll check and get back to you.”

All of us are Christians under construction, but even so, it is absolutely important that we look for opportunities to invite others to join us, and join the ranks of others who are under “construction.” And of course we are also a Church under construction – not yet without spot or wrinkle but on the way. I know many have been deeply scandalized, and rightly, by the clergy sex abuse crisis and the lack of effective episcopal leadership to deal with it in many cases. There has always been human weakness in the Church – which is never an excuse for those who do evil or overlook evil – but it is important to keep our eyes on the treasure that is contained in these “earthen vessels.”

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor. 4:7)

The weakness of the vessels doesn’t make the treasure they contain – Jesus Christ and eternal life – any less precious. He still is the pearl of great price and is worth every sacrifice to obtain and keep and share with others. While demanding proper accountability, let us not forget to keep our primary focus on He who is the key to all human happiness and wellbeing; Jesus, our Lord.

The reasons for us to embrace our call to evangelization are many: Jesus has solemnly commanded us to proclaim the gospel, and He is



living within us, desiring to reach out through us; many have drifted away because no one cared enough to encourage them back; if we're going to have parishes, schools and vocations in the future, evangelization is a must. But the most important reason of all is that the salvation of our family and friends, neighbors and co-workers, is at stake.

What Vatican II taught, based on the scripture and our doctrinal tradition, about the all-important issue of salvation is that even though it is possible under certain conditions for people who have never heard the gospel to be saved, "very often" (*Lumen gentium* 16) these conditions are not met, and it is urgent that these people are invited to faith and baptism in order to be saved.

If we drift along with an aggressively pagan culture, we are drifting toward destruction, in both this life and in the life to come. That is perhaps why Jesus said that "the kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent bear it away;" (Mt. 11: 12) the violence of conversion, of sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ through the sacraments, the violence of saying no to temptation, to disordered desires, and taking up our cross each day out of love for God and love of our neighbor. Many of us have drifted into a comfortable, complacent haze that presumes that almost everyone will be saved and that all roads lead to the same heavenly destination. This is a lie of the evil one and directly contradicts the whole thrust of scripture and multiple warnings of Jesus.

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Mt. 7:13–14)

While the gate initially may appear narrow and the way indeed be hard, this is only particularly true of the way in its initial stages of repentance and conversion. As we enter through the narrow gate and set out on the narrow way, we find ourselves led to true food and true drink and the goodness and love of companionship with Jesus and

the indwelling of the Spirit and the love of the Father, the healing of our soul. As Blessed John Paul II put it when talking about our embrace of the call to holiness and the depth of wisdom in our Church in the writings of the saints and the relationship this leads to:

It shows how prayer can progress, as a genuine dialogue of love, to the point of rendering the person wholly possessed by the divine Beloved, vibrating at the Spirit's touch, resting filially within the Father's heart. This is the lived experience of Christ's promise: "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love Him and manifest myself to Him." (Jn. 14:21) (*Novo millennio ineunte* 32)

Jesus warns us of the two ways and two destinations only to invite us to set out on the true way, which He himself is, which leads to profound peace and the fulfillment of our purpose for existing – this must be our deepest desire.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Mt. 11:28–30)

Not only is the situation of unbelievers precarious, as regards salvation, but so is the situation of nominal Catholics who aren't living in a relationship of friendship and discipleship with Jesus. As Vatican II put it:

**The most important reason of all is that the salvation of our family and friends, neighbors and co-workers, is at stake.**





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Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but “in body” not “in heart.” All children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in thought, word and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be the more severely judged. (*Lumen gentium* 14)

Indeed, as Jesus has made unmistakably clear:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Mt. 7:21)

I would like to conclude this pastoral letter with a heartfelt plea. We in the Archdiocese of St. Louis are facing difficult challenges. The fundamental challenge, though, is spiritual. I need you, with me, to seek the Lord with all your hearts! To build into your life the regular practice of personal prayer, to sort out, with the help of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, what is really the truth revealed to us by God for our salvation and to embrace it with all your minds and hearts. To embrace the call to share our faith in Jesus and the Church with all we care for and indeed, anyone whose paths we cross, for the sake of their salvation. There really is a heaven and there really is a hell, and what we believe and how we live is determining our eternal destiny. As the Vatican II document on the laity says:

Lay apostles are earnest also about revealing Christ by word to those around them. It is a fact that many people cannot hear the Gospel and come to acknowledge Christ except through the lay people they associate with. (*Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*, 13)

The time has come to challenge our culture and ourselves. The time has come to stop following our culture, which tells us to keep God



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out of the public square and inside the walls of worship, and start following the Lord, who tells us that we will be His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is time for us to stop conforming to the world and accommodating the culture, and time for us to start transforming them. It is time for a new springtime of holiness and evangelization in the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

Let us move forward with confidence, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit that gave the first Christians both courage and joy, faced with circumstances even more difficult than our own. Let us move forward also counting on the continuing intercession of Mary for a new Pentecost for our Archdiocese, invoking the intercession of Blessed John Paul II, and St. Louis himself, that the kingdom of Christ and the King of that kingdom reign and rule in our midst and gather more and more to his loving care.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

**Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson**  
Archbishop of St. Louis



## Pastoral Letter Reflection Questions

### The Current Situation

As you consider various signs of decline in the last 20 years, what saddens you most?

As you consider our current situation what encourages you most – what signs of hope do you see?

### Transforming the Culture of Our Own Hearts: “Lord, bend my heart according to Your will.”

Ask the Holy Spirit:

Is there anything I need to repent of – an area in my life where I have drifted from fidelity to Christ?

Are there any areas of my life where I have expected the Church’s teachings to change to conform to my desires, rather than have my desires change to conform to the Church’s teaching?

Is there an area of my life where I have not “picked up my cross”?

## Pastoral Letter Reflection Questions

### A Yes to Holiness

What signs of holiness have you seen in others?

Are there any ways that you would like to grow in holiness?

One way that I could grow deeper in relationship with the Lord is ...

Do you find time for a daily period of prayer?

*If yes, when?*

*If no, when could you?*

Are there groups that *support* your practice of the faith?

Are there groups that *hinder* your practice of the faith?

### A Yes to Evangelization (helping other people come to know Jesus Christ and his Church)

What are some ways you *have* given witness to your faith?

What are some ways you *have not* given witness to your faith?

What are some ways you *could* give witness to your faith?



## Pastoral Letter Reflection Questions

*"The time has come to challenge our culture and ourselves."*

Do you know someone who has drifted away from the Church?

*Say a prayer for them right now.*

If the salvation of someone depended on you saying, "I wish you would come to Church with me," would you do it?

If someone asked you to give an example of how Jesus has touched your life, what would you say?

## Go and Announce the Gospel of the Lord

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### Notes



## Notes





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YEAR OF FAITH 2012 2013