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**Bishop**  
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**Charge to the Faith Formation Planning Commission**  
January 17, 2006

In his 1998 apostolic exhortation on the Vocation of the Lay Faithful, *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II echoed the Second Vatican Council by lifting up the call to holiness as "an undeniable requirement arising from the very mystery of the Church." (CL, no. 16)

Lay men and women hear and answer the universal call to holiness primarily and uniquely in the secular realm. According to *Lumen Gentium*, the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, they are found "in each and every one of the world's occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence. There they are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world from within, like leaven, in the spirit of the Gospel, by fulfilling their own particular duties." (LG, no. 31, as quoted in USCCB, *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*. 2005)

Five months ago, I addressed the members of the "first Commission," whose task was to assess the needs of adults in the diocese concerning faith education and formation. Those members consulted widely, utilizing a variety of open meetings and listening sessions, discussions at deanery meetings, interviews with pastors and staff, surveys both written and web-based, tracking of letters and phone responses. Some similar opportunities to respond were offered to the Spanish-speaking Catholics of the diocese.

The process affirmed what, in part, we all knew: that Catholics -- from the bishop, to pastors, parish staff, and parishioners -- need and desire a diocesan program that provides instruction in the faith and spiritual enrichment and formation.

Church documents list various dimensions of faith formation, and many if not all of these were noted in the study of the first Commission: knowledge of the faith; moral formation; prayer; liturgical life; community life; and a missionary spirit. (see USCCB, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*).

The report of the commission provided, with some specificity, a better sense of the range of needs in these regards.

1) There is a need and desire for individual adult education classes for the purpose of enrichment and ongoing education in the faith. People would like to be able to choose to take one or several courses. Some of these should be short-term courses of perhaps three to four weeks, or specialized workshops.

Please note: The lay faithful not actively engaged in what is sometimes called "lay ecclesial ministry," that is, those Catholics who are not working primarily within structures and functions

of their diocese, parish, or other Catholic institutions, represent perhaps 97% of the adults of the Church. They have no less a challenge as they try to bring their faith to bear on the ordinary circumstances of their work. It is my hope that whatever this commission recommends will offer support to this largest segment of the faithful.

2) The faithful also see the homily at Mass as an occasion for instruction and formation in the faith. They are helped by interactions with their pastors, and want priests and deacons to be well-formed.

Please note: We know that the Sacred Liturgy itself is perhaps the most profound expression of the transcendent mysteries of the faith, and an unparalleled means to holiness. This fact compels us to celebrate it in purity and integrity, and not obscure its supernatural efficacy.

3) There is a need and desire for a comprehensive curriculum that will be the foundation of preparation for catechists and some parish, agency, or school staff.

Please note: At this time, the diocese is investigating separate opportunities for men in deacon formation that better meet the requirements for ordination.

4) There is a strong desire for spiritual enrichment opportunities: spiritual retreats; formation in prayer; availability of small faith communities; and opportunities for charitable outreach based on Gospel principles of Catholic social justice.

5) We must continue to offer opportunities in the Spanish language and provide support in adult religious education and formation to local Catholics of other cultures.

Please note: The diocese intends to establish an office of Hispanic ministry which will assist to some degree in coordinating Spanish-language programs.

6) The needs assessment found a continuing desire for the diocese to sponsor participation in a more intensive program for Catholics which would grant a graduate academic degree.

This is a demanding but reasonable starting point for your efforts here. While we may not immediately succeed in meeting all these expectations satisfactorily in the space of the next months, I ask your assistance in crafting a proposal which will move us toward the accomplishment of these worthy goals.

In my encouragement to members of the first "needs assessment" commission, I acknowledged the legacy of the Center for Pastoral Life and Ministry. I would be remiss not to acknowledge the first director of the Center, Father William Bauman, who has graciously accepted my invitation to serve as a member of this commission.

For more than 20 years, our diocese has provided resources for adult faith formation, not only to the faithful of this local Church, but also to a number of other dioceses throughout the country. Many laity, religious and deacons have participated in the New Wine and Foundations in New Wine courses, and have assumed roles of leadership here and elsewhere. The Center has been instrumental in forming a culture of lay leadership in the diocese and has guided many discernment "practica" and leadership training sessions.

While in August I acknowledged the contribution of the Center, I also challenged all of us to

look at some factors that have changed to some degree.

1) The financial resources and priorities require us to accomplish and even expand our responsibilities with a different and less costly configuration of staff. The diocesan contribution to the Center's budget was more than one-half million dollars annually. Whatever you propose for the future of these endeavors must be operable on an allocation from the diocesan budget of not more than \$250,000. Other budget needs, if any, will have to be provided for by fees or other concrete revenues. While I do not rule out the discovery of grant moneys, I strongly caution against budgeted reliance on these more elusive annual revenue sources.

2) Forty years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, we are in a time of a more mature self-understanding in the Church, than the period immediately following the Council. More than ever, the Council documents deserve careful reading and study. They have been used at times to justify experimentation that was interpolated on what has been sometimes called the "spirit of the Council." Now we must allow ourselves to see how they are an incentive for renewal in continuity with the Church's tradition. The Sacred Scriptures, interpreted by the Church, and illuminated by the Fathers and other anchors of Catholic Tradition, and the Magisterium, presented concisely in the Catechism and other teaching documents of the Holy Father and the Councils, are the "sine qua non," or the fundamental resources for our efforts. Our diocesan program must supply elements of a "core curriculum" and a solid faith foundation which will help the faithful withstand the rather constant challenges of the secular culture.

3) We are in a era of Catholic education and formation that is now clearly dominated by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Catechism, first available to most English-speaking Catholics in 1994, must be a primary reference point for all catechetical endeavors. The Compendium of the Catholic Catechism, soon to be available in English, will provide a particularly handy and less cumbersome instrument for utilizing the Catechism, and recognizing its essential elements.

4) The methodology of the new program must be less "process" and more content. This does not mean that learning will not be interactive. Faith formation requires reflections and a dialogue of faith that strengthens our participation in the proclamation of the truth.

5) While computer-based learning does not seem to allow the same community dimension of faith formation, the Internet could provide opportunities to reach and interact with Catholics of our diocese and beyond.

6) Some other dioceses have developed successful programs that address some of the same needs we experience. Comparison of such programs may be helpful in the development of a creative proposal that addresses our unique needs. As always, parishes may prove to be the best providers of some important elements of faith formation.

Our proximity to the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas, and other Catholic institutions may allow some sharing of resources, or other collaboration.

The needs assessment that we have carried out confirms -- to a significant degree -- that Catholics wish to become more knowledgeable of the deposit of faith. apologetics, properly understood as the practice of elucidating the articles of faith and explaining their authentic history and profound meaning, must find its rightful place again in Catholic education and formation.

At the same time, today's disciples of our Lord, like those of every age, desire with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, to know the Lord Jesus, and not just "about Him." Our efforts must promote a dynamic blend of catechesis and evangelization. The Gospel experience of Jesus Christ, what we call "evangelization," will be shallow if it is not fortified by the content of the truth of His teaching entrusted to the Church. The knowledge of the deposit of the faith, what we call "catechesis," will become sterile if it is not awakened in the living light of the encounter with the Incarnate Lord and Savior.

The goal of the proposal you make is, therefore, not merely a program that harnesses a curriculum, but a human construct that will be formed in prayer and study and has supernatural goals. I know that the Holy Spirit will help you in this work.

Ground your efforts -- individual and collective -- in prayer, and study the direction the Church gives us in her considerable documentary resources in this regard. I am confident in you and know that Dr. Sasso will be a knowledgeable, capable and committed guide for you in your work.

You are helping to provide a foundation for our diocesan efforts for some years. This is a very significant undertaking and I am very thankful for your willingness to assist me in this work.

You have my gratitude, my prayers and my blessing.