

January 13, 2010

My Dear Christ's-faithful:

We continue our Synod Process! Thank you so very much for your involvement, now at the deanery level. I know your deanery discussions will be lively and provide valuable insight for us as we continue to discern God's will and way for us here.

During my retreat at the beginning of January, I reviewed and prayed over the information gathered from our first discussions. With the help of the Preparatory Commission, I have prepared the following material for the discussions at the deanery level. As you will see, the material is gathered around three descriptors of the Church: the Church - Sanctifier; the Church - the People of God; the Church - Light to the Nations. With each of these descriptors there is an "Emerging Theme." These themes have arisen from the discussions already conducted and from prayer. With each descriptor and its theme, you will find three sets of questions, each set addressing in a somewhat different way, the specific topic and theme and inviting your input.

Please study the material and (this is particularly important) pray with the material in preparation for your discussion. I know you will enjoy discussing these questions (and others that may arise) with your brothers and sisters in the Lord and I know too that God will be with you as you do.

Sincerely, in the name of the Lord Jesus,

Bishop Hoepfner

The Church – Sanctifier

Emerging Theme: *Searching for Identity and Longing for Simplicity*

The Church is the sacrament of salvation and, as Vatican Council II reminded us, all in the Church are called to holiness (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 39). "The Church has her origin in the Holy Trinity, and that is the source of her holiness. ... Christians grow in holiness by working to live in conformity to the Gospel of Jesus and thus to become more like him, especially in the totality of his love for others shown by his sacrifice of himself on the Cross." (*United States Catholic Catechism For Adults*, p, 129)

What makes a person holy? How does one identify a holy person? What is prayer and how does one go about praying? How can a parish help people pray? What are the

ingredients for a good spirituality for busy parishioners? How does one come to appreciate God's Word? What might a parish do to foster appreciation of God's Word for all parishioners? What might make the Liturgy of the Word at Mass more effective?

What makes a person realize they need the sacraments? What fosters understanding and appreciation for Christ's presence in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist? Why do people stay away from Sunday Mass? What would make the Liturgy of the Eucharist more effective at Mass?

What keeps people away from God today? What is sin and how do we identify it today? What are the particular hindrances to holiness people encounter today? How do people deal with sin today? How does a parish best help people to deal with sin? What makes for a good conscience? How might a parish provide the best help to parishioners in forming their consciences?

The Church – The People of God

Emerging Theme: *Longing For Authentic Community*

The word "church" (*ekklesia*) means "the assembly, those gathered." "The mark of oneness reflects the unity of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and the Son, unites all the members of the Church as the one People of God." (*United States Catholic Catechism For Adults*, p. 127)

When is a parish truly an authentic Christian community? When is it not? Do the people of our parishes feel the sense of being one? Do they realize they are called to interact with one another? What makes a group of people a community; a Christian, Catholic community? Do our people understand the requirements of membership? What fosters Catholic Christian community? What hinders it? What are the qualities of good leadership in an authentic Christian community? How do we best deal with differing views of Church?

What does the experience of Jesus in community look like today? How do people have personal religious experiences in their parish? Are our parishes places of conversion? How is conversion experienced in our parishes? How is faith effectively shared? How do our parishes do at engendering enthusiasm for living and sharing the faith? Why do people not share their faith? What makes for a welcoming parish? How does life in our parishes involve individuals, families, and all people in the ongoing work of taking care of one another, of social justice and of charity?

How is faith shared in the domestic church, the home and family? How do married couples experience the help of God in their married life today? What are the significant difficulties and challenges to living marriage that couples encounter today? What are the significant difficulties and challenges family life experiences today? How might the parish be a good place married couples and for families to find support and nourishment for their marriage?

The Church – Light to the Nations

Emerging Theme: *Personal Integration*

Personal Integration – Evangelizing Ourselves. “The entire community of Christians received the Apostles’ proclamation of the Gospel, and so the Church in her entirety is called ‘apostolic.’ Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church as a whole remains and will always remain faithful to the teaching of the Apostles.” (*United States Catholic Catechism For Adults*, p. 132)

What are the most effective means parishes employ for helping the faithful- both adults and the young – grow in their understanding of the faith? How do we best train for discipleship today? Are we aware of the cost of discipleship today and are we willing to pay it? How do parishes best enable parents to be the first and best teachers of their children in the faith? Do the faithful of today understand the social teaching of the Church and see it as central to the life of a good Catholic –yes/no; why/why not? How is the social teaching of the Church best presented in a parish? Do the faithful of today clearly hear and understand the Church’s moral teaching – yes/no; why/why not? How is the moral teaching of the Church best presented in a parish?

Personal Integration – Evangelizing Others. “The word ‘catholic’ means ‘universal.’ The Church has lived and continues to live in a diversity of cultures and languages because she is led by the Spirit of Christ to being the Gospel to all peoples. She has known how to accept what is true and good in all cultures and, at the same time, to infuse the truth and goodness of her tradition and life into them.” (*United States Catholic Catechism For Adults*, p, 129)

How might a parishioner best go about inviting people to Church? How might a parishioner best go about reaching out to those who do not participate in a church community or who seek the fullness of faith? How does a parish become a “welcoming parish?” How might parishioners best be engaged in the work of evangelization, carrying the values of the Gospel into their homes, workplaces and all places? What makes a parishioner a good witness of the faith and what makes for a poor (hypocritical) witness of the faith? What difficulties do we face in our work of evangelization in our world today? How can a parish help parishioners surpass these difficulties? How do parishes best involve the faithful – both adults and the young – in the Church’s works of justice and love? How do parishes best enable the faithful to be involved in public policy?

Personal Integration – Vocations. Do committed adults share their vocation story with young people? What are the major hindrances young people face in saying “yes” to a call to serve in the Church? What can parents and grandparents do to help young people say “yes” to a call to priesthood or religious life? What can/should every parish do to foster vocations?