



## ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

*The Church in Central and Southern Indiana*

## Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

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### Proclaiming the Gospel of Joy: Living Christ's Mission

*Proclaiming the Gospel of Joy: Living Christ's Mission*, the pastoral plan for our Archdiocese that was published on December 3rd last year—after many years of consultation and discussion with clergy, religious and lay—provides us with a simple but profound statement of our mission as the Church in central and southern Indiana:

*We, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis, joyfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people by living his mission of mercy, hope and salvation.*

The essential mission of the Church never changes. Our Lord gave this to His disciples as He ascended into Heaven, telling them to *Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to everyone* (cf. Mk 16:15). However, the way we express this mission can, and should, be adapted to the particular needs and circumstances of every time and place.

Our pastoral plan's "new" mission statement reflects the essential and unchanging task given to us by Christ to proclaim His Good News to all, but it uses language that has special significance for us here and now. Concepts such as joy, mercy, hope and salvation are timeless and universal, but they are also quite appropriate and timely given the challenges we face today as we emerge from more than a year of global pandemic, violence and economic difficulties.



As the Church in central and southern Indiana, we *joyfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people*. We refuse to be “sourpusses” (as Pope Francis says in “The Joy of the Gospel”). We have experienced the Resurrection of Christ our Redeemer, and we know with the certainty of faith that no one can take from us the profound inner joy that comes from the love of God which fills our hearts to overflowing.

This joyful proclamation is much more than lip service. Our commitment is to live this mission in our actions as well as our words. The Gospel that we proclaim is not reduced to a philosophy or a code of ethics or even a set of spiritual principles. It is *a way of life* that transforms everything we do or say into a genuine expression of our love for God, for all our sisters and brothers, and for all God’s creation.

Our mission compels us to live what we proclaim joyfully. It demands that we reflect in our daily lives Christ’s gifts of mercy, hope and salvation. As individuals and families, as parishes, schools and ministries, we proclaim God’s love and forgiveness. The way we live in this world—with all its troubles—is a sign of hope and comfort to all. And this is where we discover our salvation—in the Cross of Christ which leads us to the unending peace and joy of the Resurrection.

We are blessed to be missionary disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ here in central and southern Indiana. As we plan for the future, we ask only that the tender love of God our Father, the healing power of His Son, Jesus, and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen and sustain us we strive to faithfully carry out our mission.

Please familiarize yourself with *Proclaiming the Gospel of Joy: Living Christ’s Mission* ([www.archindy.org/archbishop/pastoral2020-en.html](http://www.archindy.org/archbishop/pastoral2020-en.html)). It outlines our plans and priorities for carrying out the mission of our Archdiocese in the years ahead. It also challenges us to be accountable for our actions as missionary disciples called to joyfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people, but especially to our brothers and sisters here in our 39 counties of southern and central Indiana.

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## **A Selection from Archbishop Charles C. Thompson’s Introduction to *Proclaiming the Gospel of Joy: Living Christ’s Mission***

[Pastoral Letter and Plan for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis](#)

**Published December 3, 2020**

In his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis invited the entire Church “to embark on a new chapter of evangelism.” He also challenged us to understand ourselves as a “community of missionary disciples” who are “permanently

in a state of mission” (EG #s 1–3). This state of mission defines our Church’s ministry in both good times and hard times.

Even in challenging times such as these, God takes the initiative, and he gives us everything we need to carry out his work. Our responsibility as disciples and missionaries is to gather around the Lord to pray, to listen to God’s Word and to encounter him in the sacraments and the liturgy. Then, we must accept his commission to “go out to the whole world” in our proclamation of the Gospel and in service to others.

This state of mission, that is the essential nature of the Church, has taken different forms at various times and among diverse communities in the Church’s 2,000-year history. What the Church looked like in its earliest days during the Roman Empire was far different from the forms it took in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Counter-Reformation and the succeeding periods of Church history. As she remains the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church that we profess in the Nicene Creed, our Church today must be attentive to “the signs of the times” and adapt her organization and ministries to the needs of people today—while always remaining faithful to her core teaching and practices.

This is why popes convene councils and synods to assess issues that confront the People of God. It’s also why bishops and pastors periodically engage in pastoral planning to help identify needs and respond appropriately to the demands of our permanent state of mission in a rapidly changing world.

“Christ the Cornerstone” is my episcopal motto. St. Peter uses this expression, “the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” in his first letter to the Gentile converts in Asia Minor (cf. 1 Pt 2:7). He is quoting Psalm 118, verse 22. “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” St. Peter and other New Testament writers interpreted this verse as referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the one who was rejected by the political and religious leaders of his time but is now the foundation on which our lives are built. All our planning initiatives in the Church must have the person of Jesus Christ as their foundation or cornerstone.

More than 20 years ago, Pope St. John Paul II outlined the task that the Church faced as we prepared to enter into a new millennium:

We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you!

It is not therefore a matter of inventing a “new program”. The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a program which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time

and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This program for all times is our program for the Third Millennium. But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community.

What awaits us therefore is an exciting work of pastoral revitalization—a work involving all of us (Pope St. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* #29).

Pope Francis echoes this teaching when he speaks about the importance of “pastoral conversion” which is much more than restructuring our parishes, schools and diocesan institutions. The “exciting work of pastoral revitalization” that St. John Paul says awaits us all is what Pope Francis means when he talks about “pastoral ministry in a missionary key.”

According to Pope Francis, pastoral planning challenges us to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way.” It invites us to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in our respective communities. Planning that seeks to translate the permanent mission of the Church into pastoral initiatives that can effectively address the challenges and opportunities of our contemporary situation must reflect deeply on the Gospel and the essential teachings and practices of the Church. As Pope Francis makes clear: “A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory.” The Holy Father goes on to say that “the important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment” (EG #33).

As Archbishop of Indianapolis, it is my responsibility to lead this archdiocese in assessing the needs of the Church in central and southern Indiana and planning for the future. This is not something I can, or should, do all by myself. Successful planning requires broad consultation and teamwork. It requires a profound sense of openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit—as this is manifested both through the rich history of the Church in this region and in the present circumstances. Ultimately, sound pastoral planning demands that we be willing to trust that although we cannot predict the future, Divine Providence will show us the way to carry out God’s will for us in the years ahead.

+Charles C. Thompson  
Archbishop of Indianapolis

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### **A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope**

Though it is true that [the Church’s] mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord’s

work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is “the first and greatest evangelizer.”

In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways.



The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that “he has loved us first” (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone “gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:7). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us (EG #12).

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### **My Prayer for You**

May St. Francis Xavier and St. Theodore Guérin, co-patrons of our Archdiocese, intercede for us as we seek to live Christ’s mission here and now. And may all the holy women and men who have served this Local Church as bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, and lay faithful inspire and guide us as we implement our pastoral plan with the help of God’s grace.

*+ Charles C. Thompson*