

# A SPIRITUAL REFLECTION ON THE PATH OF DISCIPLESHIP

*An Extended Study Guide for Families and Groups on  
Archbishop Paul Coakley's Pastoral Letter "Go Make Disciples!  
Building a Culture of Conversion and Discipleship"*



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# Introduction

Welcome to the “*Go Make Disciples*” Pastoral Letter Extended Study Guide. This guide is designed for you, your family and your parish community as a spiritual reflection on the path of discipleship described in Archbishop Coakley’s 2019 pastoral letter to the faithful of the Archdiocese Oklahoma City. This study is intended to be shared with another person or group of persons (ideally five to seven people). May the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writing of this letter, inspire you as your group reflects on the call to discipleship and the mission of Jesus Christ’s Church.

## How to Use the Study Guide

The study guide is divided into five sessions. The format allows for a 30-minute gathering so that you can meet anytime or anywhere such as before or after Mass, before work or while waiting to pick up children from school or religious education sessions. Your group may choose to meet for longer sessions to allow for extended discussion time. The study is simple and easy to facilitate using the italicized directions within the text preceded by the  symbol. The facilitator role is not that of teacher or spiritual director but of coordinator, ensuring everyone has an opportunity to share within the designated time. A weekly reading guide with passages from Scripture and the “*Go Make Disciples*” pastoral letter is provided at the beginning of each reflection session in preparation for the following week. Each gathering follows the same structure of *Gather, Proclaim, Share* and *Send*:

- **Gather** is a time to be centered in God in his Word and to be connected with each other in prayer. The Scripture passage may be accompanied by a reflection question. (Allow approximately 2-3 minutes with the exception of Day 1.)
- **Proclaim** is time to learn about each stage of the path of discipleship. (10 minutes)
- **Share** is time to consider what that stage means in your life and the lives of others you know. This time is prompted by reflection questions, which will be shared among your group. (15 minutes)
- **Send** is the call to prayer and action for the upcoming week. (2-3 minutes)

The hope is that this study guide will help you along your faith journey, to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church, and to share the Good News with those in your world.

## Reflection 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PASTORAL LETTER

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#### **Gather** (5-7 minutes based on study group size and familiarity)

🗨️ *Welcome everyone to the study group. Before joining in one mind and heart in prayer, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves to each other. After introductions, slowly pray this prayer together as a group:*

**O Lord, open our eyes to see where you would lead us. Awaken our ears that we would hear your voice guiding us. Inspire our minds that we may comprehend your love for us. Guide our feet to walk in your way. Fill our hearts with peace and joy as we gather together now in name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.**

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#### **Proclaim** (10 minutes)

🗨️ *Ask the group to consider these questions quietly: When was the first time you left home for a trip? What was it like? How did you prepare? When you travel now, do you pack too much or do you leave items behind? After a moment of consideration, invite the group to take turns reading the following text aloud.*

In January 2019, Archbishop Coakley released his pastoral letter, “*Go Make Disciples: Building a Culture of Conversion and Discipleship*” to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. In the letter, he reflects on his journeys on the Camino de Santiago and how he fervently prays to the Holy Spirit for the grace and wisdom to faithfully serve the archdiocese. He shares his hopes and plans for building the Kingdom of God in Oklahoma. Such hopes and plans are rooted in his prayer for a New Pentecost to lead to a New Evangelization in the archdiocese. At the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles who were in hiding for fear that they too would be put to death. A mighty wind rushed through the upper room where they gathered and tongues of fire rested upon each of them. The images of wind and fire are biblical images of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. That day the Apostles were filled with this power, their fear was transformed into courage and boldness and their silence broke into joyful proclamation of Jesus Christ. From that moment on, the Apostles traveled to the ends of the earth proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Archbishop Coakley prays that the same Holy Spirit stirs in each one of us a renewed commitment to encounter Jesus daily in ongoing transformation, and a burning desire to share him with a world that so desperately needs him. Every baptized person has been made a child of God, a member of Jesus Christ’s Body—the Church, and a participant in his mission of building up the Kingdom of God. Living as a disciple of Christ is living our deepest identity. It benefits us to often reflect on our call to discipleship.

## Reflection 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PASTORAL LETTER

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The call to discipleship is an invitation for every person. Discipleship is not a “one and done” experience but a lifelong journey. The destination is the same for every person who accepts the invitation to follow Jesus, but each person’s path will look different because of their life situations and experiences. This study reflects on the various stages of discipleship, which Archbishop Coakley introduces on pages 23-25 of his pastoral letter. The four stages of *encounter*, *accompany*, *community* and *send* are somewhat cyclical as each new experience of encountering Christ builds on the previous and leads to a more intimate accompaniment. Therefore, this study is helpful for people at any stage along the path of discipleship. Our group includes people at different stages. We are called to learn from one another to encourage one another, and journey with one another. The path of discipleship is never meant to be traveled alone.

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#### Share (10 minutes)

🗨️ *Open the group discussion by prompting the following questions and inviting participants to respond.*

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “disciple?”
- In what ways have you experienced the call to discipleship?
- What do you need right now to further or strengthen your journey of discipleship?
- How does your family or parish live as a community of disciples?

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#### Send (2-3 minutes)

🗨️ *Thank everyone for participating. Invite them to write the names and contact information of group members in the front of their study guides. Encourage them to pray for each other during this study. Explain that there is a daily reading guide on the next page to lead them through a section of the Archbishop’s pastoral letter in preparation for the next session. Close with this invitation: Throughout the upcoming week, ask the Lord for a deeper desire to know him and experience his love. Surrender your journey to him, having confidence that he will be your guide and your companion. Simply state throughout each day this week:*

**Jesus, I trust you and I want to know you more.**

## Reflection 2


### ENCOUNTER

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#### Weekly Reading Guide to Prepare for Session 2

- Day 1: Preface, pgs. 4-7
  - Day 2: Disciples on “the Way,” pgs. 6-8
  - Day 3: Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23
  - Day 4: Good soil, bearing good fruit pgs. 8-11
  - Day 5: Acts 9: 1-19
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#### Gather (5 minutes)

 Welcome everyone to the study group. Before joining in one mind and heart in prayer, take a moment to consider this quote from Pope Francis: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them...” *Evangelii Gaudium (Joy of the Gospel) par. 3*. Then, lead the group in the Lord’s Prayer.

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#### Proclaim (10 minutes)

The first stage on the path of discipleship is encounter. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “encounter” as 1) *noun*: a particular kind of meeting or experience with another person; (2) *verb*: to come upon or experience, especially unexpectedly. Encounters have a way of affecting us, whether we meet a 90-year-old war veteran, hold a newborn baby or participate in a cause. An encounter with Jesus, however, is different because it is personal on a much deeper level. This personal encounter is a key event in the life of every disciple that can potentially alter the direction their life forever. We see this happen often in the lives of those who encounter Jesus as recounted in the Scriptures.

In John 4, a woman of Samaria encounters Jesus at the well. It is an unexpected encounter because the Jews and Samaritans detested each other. It was unexpected timing because the woman had gone to fetch water during the hottest part of the day to avoid public ridicule. In Jesus’ encounter with the woman, he revealed intimate details of her life as well as revealed himself as the promised Messiah. She responded by returning to the others in the village and sharing her experience. Her witness drew others to seek him.

## Reflection 2

### ENCOUNTER

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Another encounter we are familiar with in the Gospel of Luke is Jesus' appearance to two of his disciples on the way to Emmaus. They did not recognize him in his glorified body and thought him a stranger. Jesus accompanied them for some distance. When they invited him to dine with them, it was in the breaking of the bread that they recognized their Lord. They realized that their hearts had been burning while in conversation with him on the road. At once, they ran back to the others in Jerusalem to share the good news.

Lastly, we recount Saul's experience on his way to Damascus to persecute the followers of Jesus. Saul was a devout Jew who believed in his quest of defending the Jewish faith from dissenters. He likely observed the Mosaic Law meticulously, yet his heart was hardened. Saul's life was forever changed when Jesus spoke to him along the path. In that brief exchange found in Acts 9, Paul was transformed – even his name was changed to Paul – as was his objective. Saul's mission against the early Church transformed into the mission of building up the Church.

Encounters with Jesus may seem unplanned or unexpected, but they are divinely designed. Jesus knows the paths we are traveling, and he knows our needs every step along the journey. Sometimes, like the Samaritan woman or Saul, an encounter with Jesus Christ can be confrontational in that it challenges us to change the way we think or behave. Jesus challenges us because he wants each of us to live life to the fullest, to be one with him, to be a fruitful disciple. Because he already knows each of us so intimately, he encounters us in ways unique to each one of us.

Paul's experience was unlike any other. We do not have to have a "Road to Damascus" moment, a complete and dramatic reversal in our lives, to fully encounter Jesus. We may encounter him in Scripture, in the people we serve through the corporal works of mercy, and in the Sacraments. These types of encounters, while more common, are no less powerful if we are open to responding to them. This openness is like the Parable of the Sower that Archbishop Coakley references in his pastoral letter. Which soil best describes our hearts? Are we like the hardened soil that cannot be broken through, the soil that also grows thorns or the rich fertile soil? The parable is about us. It's about the condition and receptivity of our hearts. Ultimately, it's about fruitful discipleship.

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#### **Share** (10 minutes)

- Have you ever encountered Jesus? If so, how did he challenge or change you?
  - What areas of the Catholic faith have been most helpful in connecting to Jesus Christ – both in good times and in personal trials. (Consider the sacraments, Catholic friends, the Mass, serving others, personal prayer.)
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#### **Send** (2-3 minutes)

Be intentional this week about opening yourself to encounter God in unexpected places, people or circumstances. Begin each day with a prayer asking the Lord to open your mind and heart to be mindful of such encounters.



## Reflection 3

### ACCOMPANY

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#### Weekly Reading Guide to Prepare for Session 3

- Day 1: Obstacles to fruitfulness: paragraphs 1-7
  - Day 2: Obstacles to fruitfulness: paragraphs 8-11
  - Day 3: Tilling good soil, paragraphs 1-6
  - Day 4: Tilling good soil, paragraphs 7-9
  - Day 5: Tilling good soil, paragraphs 10-14
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#### Gather (5 minutes)

☞ *Welcome everyone back and ask if anyone would like to share how they encountered Jesus Christ in a special way this past week. After a few group members offer their experiences, ask the participants to consider these two questions: Who is your dearest friend? What do you appreciate most about them? State that today's reflection focuses on accompaniment and then ask one person to slowly read this passage from Deuteronomy 31:6:*

**"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."**

*Pause and ask another group member to read the passage again. Repeat one more time.*

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#### Proclaim (10 minutes)

☞ *Invite participants to take turns reading the following text aloud.*

In our last session, we read and talked about encountering Jesus Christ in our lives. Some may have experienced a "St. Paul moment" while others' encounters with Jesus Christ were more subtle. Jesus knows what we need and at what moment. Typically, Jesus is not going to "bust through the door" or "knock us off our horse." In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus Christ desires an encounter that always offers an invitation to respond. Will you open the door and invite him in? If your response is "yes," then that encounter leads to accompaniment.

## Reflection 3

### ACCOMPANY

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The Lord has a plan and purpose for every person and his accompaniment is along his path, not along our own self-directed path. He is the Way. This path of discipleship is one of formation and transformation as we learn from the Master-Teacher. Jesus guides, encourages, molds us through Scripture, prayer, study, fellowship, service and the Sacraments. His desire is to have a personal and intimate relationship with us. As with any genuine relationship, “being a fruitful disciple requires being intentional in cultivating the relationship with Christ.” (page 24) We must make a concerted effort to spend time with the Lord to know, to listen, and to be loved by him. Just as with other relationships worth nurturing, however, obstacles can present themselves.

Archbishop Coakley dedicates three pages to discussing the obstacles to fruitfulness. He writes of the world, the flesh, and the devil as distractions that keep us from deepening our relationship with Jesus. The world presents much “noise” that can drown out Divine whispers. “Television, streaming technology, social media, sports, tasks at home and work are not bad in themselves, but if we do not temper them with restraint, they can dominate our lives to such an extent there is no capacity for solitude and reflection.” (page 12) In our flesh, we can experience temptations from food, entertainment or substances. Laziness, like busyness, also can draw us away from spiritual fruitfulness. Lastly, a spiritual battle is taking place in our midst, though the devil’s greatest trick is convincing the world he doesn’t exist. The devil wants nothing more than to sever any relationship we have with God, and he will prey on our vulnerability to accomplish his goal. This is why we must also accompany each other, to provide strength and accountability on the path of discipleship.

As we grow in our own relationships with Jesus and are conformed to him, we also must be Jesus Christ to others. We are called to emulate our relationship with Jesus by meeting others where they are and accompanying them on their own journey. This requires us to accept others, to share our faith story and to listen to their own story. If you find yourself at the early stages of discipleship, who can you find to accompany you? If you are further along your journey, whom can you accompany?

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#### **Share** (10 minutes)

🗨️ *Invite participants to share by prompting the following questions:*

- How do you cultivate friendships? How can you be more intentional in cultivating a relationship with Jesus?
  - How do you accompany others (spouse, child, neighbor, co-worker, friend) along their faith journeys?
  - What are opportunities for accompaniment in your parish community?
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#### **Send** (2-3 minutes)

🗨️ *Invite participants to consider the following question and challenge for the upcoming week:*

- Which obstacles are preventing you from fruitful discipleship (of flesh/world/the devil)?
- Be intentional about preparing yourself for the Sacraments (Mass/Reconciliation). Invite someone to join you.

## Reflection 4

### COMMUNITY

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#### Weekly Reading Guide to Prepare for Session 4

- Day 1: Responding to the call to holiness, paragraphs 1-2
  - Day 2: Responding to the call to holiness, paragraphs 3-5
  - Day 3: Responding to the call to holiness, paragraphs 6-8
  - Day 4: Responding to the call to holiness, paragraphs 9-10
  - Day 5: 1 Corinthians 12:25-27
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#### **Gather** (5 minutes)

*You may want to take a moment to share within the group how people accompanied another or were accompanied last week. Then pray together:*

*God our Maker, We praise you for the gift of community. Thank you for the communities in which we work and live. Thank you for the community that is your Body, the Church. Fill us with your Spirit today so that, as one, we may reflect your light and love to each other and the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.*

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#### **Proclaim** (10 minutes)

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to share our lives with others. Our Catholic faith is rooted in relationship because God made us in his image and likeness, a trinitarian *communion* of love. For most, the earliest experience of community is our families, the domestic Church. It is here that we first learned to love and encourage one another, work together, pray together and forgive one another. Marriage and family life are the primary places to grow in holiness. Parents have the greatest responsibility of forming their children as disciples and accompanying them on the journey of faith. The life of the greater Church depends on this evangelization within the family.

We also share our lives within a larger family, the parish community. We welcome and value every member as we accompany each other along our faith journeys. We are called and challenged to commit ourselves to life together as a people of God. Like our families, there is no perfect community, but we are called to grow in perfection, that is, holiness. Scripture reminds us to love one another, teach and correct each other, encourage each other, pray for

*(continued)*

## Reflection 4

### COMMUNITY

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each other, forgive each other, and bear each other's burdens. Scripture also calls us to be kind, compassionate, and generous in hospitality. We call on the Holy Spirit to strengthen our bonds of love and bring forth the gifts that create a vibrant and loving community. As we respond to the call to holiness, consider how relationships with our families and larger communities can help us grow in virtue.

While we all may strive for family and parish unity, there are obstacles that stand in the way. Sin brings division, pain and heartache. It separates us from our families and from Jesus. Because of our tendency to sin, we find an even greater need for the community of faith to help us stay the course. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "But God has so composed the body ... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now, you are the Body of Christ and individually members of it." In his pastoral letter, Archbishop Coakley reminds us of the importance of community in our journey:

*"Many of us struggle with patterns and habits of sin in our lives. As Pope Francis likes to remind us, the Church is not an enclave for the saved, but a 'field hospital' for sinners. The Church exists to accompany sinners along the path of healing, forgiveness and freedom. If you struggle, I encourage you to accept the grace that is available to you; accept the friendship and support of other believers and take the risk of being transparent about your struggles with others who can walk with you and help you. You do not need to be bound in sin any longer!"*

The Christian community is meant to strengthen and mature as the Body of Christ. Additionally, parishes witness to the power and presence of God in the world. Parish communities, by their character and actions, are called to reach out to a hurting and broken world. Jesus' disciples are to be the light of the world and salt of the earth. Each member of Christ's Body has been blessed with unique talents and spiritual gifts that are meant to be shared in service to others. Regardless of how we live out our vocation – either married, single, a member of clergy or religious life – we grow in holiness as we share our lives with others.

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#### **Share** (10 minutes)

- What God-given gifts and talents can you share to strengthen your family and parish?
  - How have you helped grow or strengthen your parish community in the past 12 months?
  - On what areas does our parish need to work\ to strengthen itself as a community of faith?
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#### **Send** (2-3 minutes)

- Invite someone from your parish out for coffee this week or breakfast after Mass.
- Visit your parish website and discover the various ministries offered. Prayerfully consider where you can serve.

## Reflection 5

### SEND

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#### Weekly Reading Guide to Prepare for Session 5

- Day 1: Where do we go from here, paragraphs 1-3
  - Day 2: Where do we go from here, paragraphs 4-5
  - Day 3: Where do we go from here, paragraphs 6-9
  - Day 4: Where do we go from here, paragraphs 10-14
  - Day 5: Where do we go from here, paragraphs 15-19
  - Matthew 28:18-20
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#### Gather (5 minutes)

☞ *Welcome participants back and ask how they experienced community over the past week. After brief sharing, ask participants to quietly reflect on these two questions before the Scripture reading: When have you been a bearer of good news? What was that experience like for you?*

*Ask someone to read **John 20:1-18**. Ask the participants what surprised, impressed or challenged them about this reading.*

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#### Proclaim (10 minutes)

In the Resurrection account, we see once again an encounter with Jesus Christ, one that forever changed Mary Magdalen. Jesus accompanied her, though briefly, as she recognized him as her beloved teacher and he explained that he cannot stay but must return to the Father. Jesus sends Mary Magdalen back to the community of disciples and charges her with the mission to share the Good News of his Resurrection. As the first person to proclaim the Risen Lord, Mary Magdalen is called “apostle to the Apostles.”

Mary Magdalen did not recognize Jesus in his glorified body, but she did recognize him when he called her by name. In the very same way, Jesus calls each of us by name and tells us to go and share the Good News. To be a disciple of Christ means being a *missionary* disciple (from the Latin word *mission* meaning “sent”). As we have reflected on the path of discipleship over the past weeks, we have recalled our own unique encounters, accompaniment, community and sending. A life in Christ means participating in the building of the Kingdom using our unique God-given talents and gifts. Our mission fields are our individual homes, schools, places of work and communities. The question that may remain is, “How do we accomplish this?”

## Reflection 5

### SEND

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First, Jesus promised to send the Advocate after returning to the Father. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost and filled them with the courage and power to proclaim Jesus Christ. The same Holy Spirit was given to us at our Baptism and we were sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit at our Confirmation. Second, Mary is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. Her “yes” permitted the Holy Spirit to come upon her and she bore the Incarnate Word. She is the model disciple who guides us like a star. For this reason, Archbishop Coakley consecrated the archdiocese to Our Lady of Guadalupe, whom Saint John Paul II entitled “Star of the New Evangelization.”

It is through the intercession and guidance of the Holy Spirit and Mary, under the title Our Lady of Guadalupe, that Archbishop Coakley defined and promulgated the archdiocesan pastoral plan *Vision 2030*. In preparing for this plan, the archbishop listened to the desires and hopes of the people of the archdiocese. He asked his staff to organize six listening sessions open to all clergy, staff and parishioners. Participants represented the cultural, generational and communal diversity of the archdiocese, yet the input and feedback were consistent. Five priorities and two lenses were identified to focus and guide the Church of Oklahoma in becoming an intentional place of conversion and discipleship. *Vision 2030* is the articulation of archdiocesan strategy over the next 10 years.

This plan was publicly released at the Archdiocesan Convocation on Dec. 7, 2019. *Vision 2030* is for every member of the Church in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City – clergy, laity, young, old, families and single people. This plan illustrates how we are collectively called to serve as missionary disciples. Appropriately, the archbishop concluded the day with the celebration of Mass and the consecration of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City to Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe. May we continuously look to Mary as our model and may our “yes” to Jesus Christ allow us to fruitfully bear him in the world that so desperately needs him. May we, individually and collectively as an archdiocese, respond to the invitation to “go make disciples.”

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#### Share (10 minutes)

🗨️ *Invite participants to share by prompting the following questions:*

- What are the areas of missionary discipleship that I experience as the most challenging to me?
- How are these areas calling me to ongoing conversion?
- How do we encourage parishioners to publicly witness to the Christian life?

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#### Send (2-3 minutes)

Visit [archokc.org/Vision2030](http://archokc.org/Vision2030) to view the presentations from the Convocation. Become familiar with the *Pastoral Plan Vision 2030*, which is available in English and Spanish on the same webpage.



Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
You, who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
Welcomed the word of life  
In the depths of your humble faith:  
As you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
Help us to say our own “yes”  
To the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
To proclaim the Good News of Jesus.

Star of the New Evangelization,  
Help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
Service, ardent and generous faith,  
Justice and love of the poor,  
That the joy of the Gospel  
May reach to the ends of the earth,  
Illuminating even the fringes of our world.  
Mother of the living Gospel,  
Wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones,  
Pray for us.  
Amen. Alleluia!

*Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel*