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Bishop of Kalamazoo

A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO



AN INVITATION
TO BOLDLY
OPEN THE DOOR
TO A VIBRANT
LIFE OF FAITH

WE
DARE
TO SAY

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An invitation to boldly open the door
to a vibrant life of faith

A Pastoral Letter to the People
of the Diocese of Kalamazoo

December 2012



By Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley, D.D, M.S.W.
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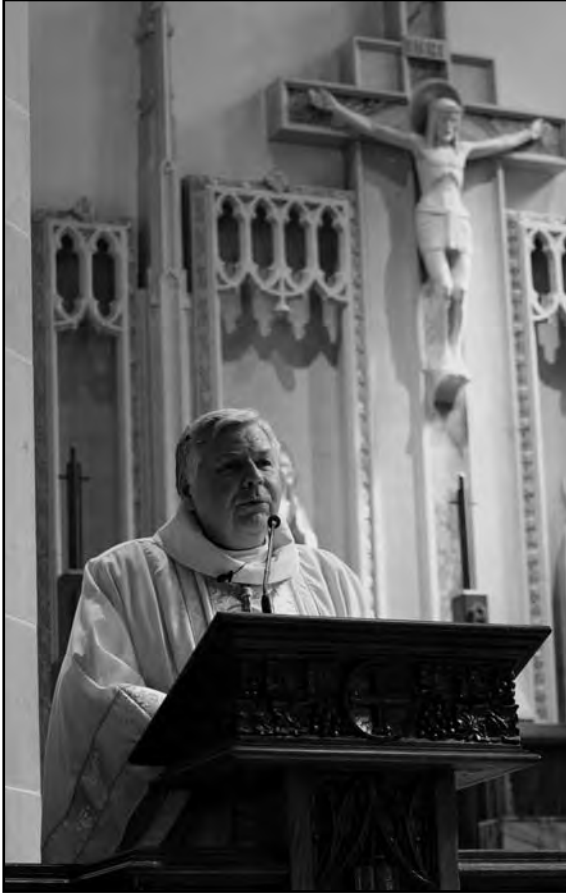


“Waiting in Joyful Hope”

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God wants us to be one with Him here in
this life, and also in the life to come.
All that is needed is for us to dare to say,
“Come in!”*





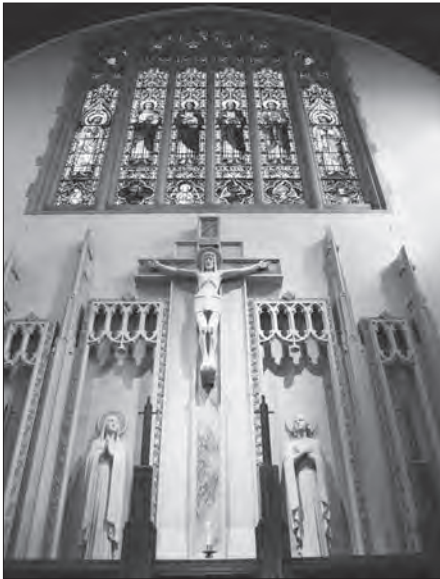
Dear Family of Faith,

Greetings in the Good News of God’s unconditional and everlasting love for all people!

I write this pastoral letter with a message of joy and hope rooted in the greeting of God’s free and amazing love for you, for me, for us. As a spiritual father to the family of faith, and as a fellow pilgrim on the journey of life, I reach out through this letter to all women and men in the nine counties of southwest Michigan who I consider members of God’s family of faith. And within that one family, I greet active and practicing Catholics, lapsed and disengaged Catholics, fellow Christians, those who believe in God, and even those who do not currently profess any faith. I truly hope that you might read this letter with an open and receptive heart, and allow the love of God our Father, through the saving mystery of His Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to renew and deepen your faith in God, and to reignite your love for God, as well as your neighbors — your fellow pilgrims on the journey of life.

I. A BOLD AND DARING FAITH

For those of us who identify ourselves as Christians — those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who brought salvation to the world through His suffering, death, and resurrection — our faith is bold, strong, reality-focused, hope-filled, and life-giving. We not only believe that the God of all the universe — the God who created all the world and sustains that creation — loves us unconditionally, but we believe that God became one with us in our humanity in the birth of His Son, the Word made Flesh, and the way He lived the same kind of human existence that we are living. The Letter to the Hebrews puts it so well: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who has been similarly tested in every way, yet without sin” (Heb.4:15). Jesus taught us that God was not some being to be feared, but rather a Trinitarian family of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And it was the Son of God, Jesus our brother, who taught us to be so bold and daring as to call God by one of the



most intimate and loving names we know as human beings. When Jesus taught us how to pray, He told us to use the same word that He uses when He speaks to his Father: “Abba,” which means “father.” In complete submission to His Father’s will, Jesus’ death and resurrection reconciled the world to the Father once and for all. And by doing so, we have been given the hope of

spending eternity with God in heaven when our time in this world has been completed.

As followers of Christ we share those basic tenets of our faith. For those of us who are Catholics, we dare to believe that Jesus, the Son of God, remains with us through the most wonderful gift of the Holy Eucharist. We also dare to believe that through the Eucharist, Jesus gives us His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, to be our spiritual food and drink.

Just before we receive Holy Communion at every Mass, the priest introduces the prayer of the “Our Father” in these words: “At the Savior’s command, and formed by divine teaching, *we dare to say...*”

This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. This is the faith that I write to you about with the hope that you too will *dare* to believe — *dare* to choose to follow Christ and live your faith with conviction. I have purposely written this pastoral letter during the “Year of Faith” that our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has called the entire Universal Church to observe from October 11, 2012, until the Solemnity of Christ the King on November 24, 2013. In announcing this special year the Pope issued an apostolic letter entitled: *The Door of Faith (Porta Fidei)*. Those title words are first found in the Acts of the Apostles (14:27) in reference to the heroic evangelical missionary efforts of St. Paul who helped to *open the door of faith* to people throughout the world. In his letter, the Holy Father writes: “Knowledge of faith *opens a door* into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God” (#18).

The image of the *door of faith* is meaningful. A door can be opened; a door can be closed. A door can invite; a door can exclude. And we have the freedom to choose to open and walk through the door, or leave the door closed. *The Light of the World*,

WE DARE TO SAY

a classic painting by William Holman Hunt (1854), depicts Jesus knocking on one side of a door. The artist created the painting to illustrate the Scripture verse: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door [then] I will enter his house and dine with him and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

What makes this painting particularly interesting is that the only handle is on the other side of the door from Jesus. In other words, Jesus wants to come into our hearts, but the decision to “open the door” to a relationship with Him — the decision to “open the door of faith” — is our choice!

It is with loving concern that I extend this same invitation to those who read this letter to open the door of faith. Perhaps there are some who have never before accepted an invitation to faith. There may be others who have seen their faith life grow lukewarm. And maybe there are some whose faith is active and strong, but could move to a deeper level. If we stop and reflect on Who it is that is knocking at the door of our hearts — the God of the entire universe who has given us the right to call Him our loving Father — I am confident that we too would take that *daring* step to profess: “***I believe.***”

It is for this reason that I have entitled this pastoral letter: ***We dare to say.*** As people of faith, we need to be daring, and even courageous, particularly now when we are living at a time when faith and belief are increasingly unpopular and under attack. Some see faith and religion as good but outdated traditions. Others see them as a type of quaint practice or superstition. Some think that it is responsible to go to church on Sundays, but that’s as far as faith should go. However, our Catholic faith proclaims the Good News that: the God of all the universe is our loving Father who loves us unconditionally and eternally; that Jesus Christ is alive and present among us in the Truth of God’s revealed word and in all the

sacraments, especially in the Holy Eucharist; and that the Holy Spirit of God dwells within us who are baptized and constantly inspires and guides us toward goodness. And the best news of all is that our loving God wants us to be one with Him here in this life, and also in the life to come. All that is needed is for us to **dare to say: “Come in!”**



II. WE ARE GOD’S CREATION — WE ARE GOD’S FAMILY

All human beings have common elements basic and essential to our nature. We seek knowledge and truth, and we have learned that there are many ways that we can attain knowledge: by reason, experience, and observation. However, as human beings, we are made up of body and soul. It is through reason and through faith that we can become the whole person God has intended us to be. Reason leads us to the conclusion that the human person is at the pinnacle of earthly existence. We also realize that of all the qualities that distinguish us from the rest of creation, such as the abilities to laugh and to worry, the most unique characteristic by far is the ability to freely choose either right or wrong. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, unlike other creatures, the human person “can initiate and control his own actions” (#1730). This makes the human person, alone among all earthly creatures, free. The *Catechism* also states: “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life” (#1731).

If *reason* leads to the conclusion that the human person is at the pinnacle of earthly existence and created by God, then *faith* leads to the conclusion that God, the creator of all things, made us in a sheer act of love to be united in communion with each other

and with Himself. As we read in the Book of Genesis: “Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness... God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26-27). We also read: “The Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the **breath of life**, and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7).



The “*breath of life*,” which God blew into our first parents, Adam and Eve, and into every person who has lived since the beginning of human history, not only enables our mortal

human bodies to begin to function, but also instills within each human person a *soul* that has an eternal destiny.

All of us, at one time or another, wonder why we are here, why we are alive, and what our purpose is. Reason, plus faith, leads us to conclude that we are not alive by accident. We each have a purpose for being alive. It is faith that helps us to realize that God made us. And He made us so that we could get to know Him, to love Him, and to learn to live our lives according to His ways in this world, and then when our lives in this world reach their end, to experience eternal happiness united with Him forever in Heaven. Of course, since God created us with the precious gift of free will, the ultimate and most significant choice we will make in our lives is whether we choose to accept and respond to God’s purpose for us.

At the very center of our human nature, we find a tension

between the desire to live our lives according to God's ways, and the desire to live our lives by our own rules. That tension is the result of the Original Sin which occurred from the distorted desire of the first man and woman to be their own ultimate authority, rather than being accountable to God. For those of us who have been baptized, we know that one of the effects of that sacrament is that we are washed clean of Original Sin; however, we are never free of the effects of Original Sin — including the lifelong tension we face when we are making choices between objective good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and sin.

Even more powerful than that internal inclination toward sin is that there is also something deep in our human spirit, which constantly reminds us that we have the “breath of God” within us — the *spark of the divine!* In the beautiful words of our diocesan patron, St. Augustine, one of the most famous teachers of the faith: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You” (Confessions, 1:1). That “restlessness” — that certain disquiet within each of us, can only be satisfied when we choose to unite ourselves to God, our Creator, and discover in our relationship with Him the peace for which our hearts long.

While Jesus has given us the right to *dare* to call God “Father,” God's plan of salvation for all the world is even more bold and amazingly *daring*. God's plan to restore the relationship between Himself and His human creation, which had been fractured due to sin, was to send His only-begotten Son to become God with us in Jesus Christ. At the First Council of Nicaea and the First Council of Constantinople in the fourth century, what we believe about God's plan of salvation was authenticated, codified and articulated as a creed, a statement of faith that is shared by all Catholics, which we have come to know as the Nicene Creed. In those words we find the essence of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ!

**III. GOD’S MOST PRECIOUS GIFT — HIS SON;
OUR RESPONSE — THE GIFT OF FAITH**

My dear pilgrims on the journey of life, *we dare to say* that this creed is the “door,” and that Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts, our souls, and our lives. Faith is a gift from God — a gift that He extends to all. And He patiently and lovingly waits for us to turn that handle and open our hearts to faith and to His Son.

Today, perhaps more than ever, many people refuse to open that door, or to make any room for God in their lives. For some, faith is unreasonable; for others, faith is irrelevant; for still others, faith is secondary to all the other activities, interests, and here-and-now concerns in their lives. Perhaps for those who reject faith or refuse to open the door, there may be some misunderstanding of what faith is. Faith is not an abstract set of rules and regulations; faith is not the same as belonging to a club, a fraternity or sorority, a political party, or an organization. But, what is faith?

The Letter to the Hebrews provides a powerful insight: “Faith is a realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). So, faith starts with hope, and hope results from our conviction that Jesus has overcome the ultimate enemies for all human beings: evil, sin, and death. Because of what Jesus has done, once and for all, we can live with the hope that our lives have a purpose and a destination. While we can not yet see what awaits us when our life in the world is completed, we have faith in the evidence that Jesus has given to us. He will fulfill the promise He has made to us who follow Him. Faith is the willingness to embrace the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, faith is not a “...theory, but an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church” (#11, “The Door of Faith”). Faith, then, is entering into that personal relationship with

the living Christ through our membership in the Church, the Body of Christ.

The Catholic faith, first and foremost, is a way of life rooted in the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world. He has given us a new way of living our lives in this world until He comes again.

IV. FAITH LEADS TO A DARING LIFE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH

This new way of living our lives as persons of faith in a personal, sacramental, life-giving relationship with Jesus is a way of living that is shared with other Catholics and many Christians. The Nicene Creed, our profession of faith, begins by each of us speaking individually: **“I believe...”** But when we do so in union with all those who share that same belief, we realize that our faith is both personal and communal. While each of us makes the choice to “open the door of faith,” the journey of faith is never a journey in isolation; rather, by the very nature of the Good News of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, we share in His victory over sin and death for the entire world. Each of us is part of the whole; each of us is a member of the one Body of Christ. On the day of our baptism, we began that journey of faith with a clear destination of eternal union with God in heaven. As we move through life on our journey of faith, we do so in union with all those fellow believers with whom we became united in the Body of Christ through baptism, and integrally united with Christ Himself, the Head of the Body. As St. Paul wrote: “As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12-13).



United with all other people of faith through membership in the Body of Christ, the Church, we are supported and strengthened in fulfilling our common vocation: to grow in

holiness through a daily conversion of life (that is, attempting each day to cooperate with God's grace and to turn away from the influence of sin) and an ongoing renewal and deepening of our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus summed up our common vocation during a conversation He had one day with a scribe, an official of the Law, who asked Him which of all God's commandments was the greatest. Jesus answered: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Our common vocation is to love God and to love one another. Jesus, our model, showed us how to live, how to treat others with respect and dignity, even those who hurt us. He showed us how to forgive, how to heal, and how to love. Jesus came into our world to reveal to us that we are all children of the Father, and that He, as the Son of the Father, is our Brother — the one who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6). We, who are baptized into Christ, are also committed to live our lives in the example of Christ.

In God's amazing plan of love for the human family, Jesus found a way to continue His presence here among us through the establishment of His Church — the gathering place for all those who follow Him and the way for us to be supported and encour-

aged along our journey of faith. Jesus knew that when His mission in this world was completed, He would entrust the ongoing mission of salvation to His Church. One day, as Jesus and His apostles were walking along the road, Jesus asked them: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” The apostles began to report to Jesus various opinions. But that was not what Jesus wanted to know; He needed to know what they thought, and so He asked: “And who do you say that I am?” St. Peter spoke up with bold conviction: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus chose to build His Church upon the faith and conviction of those who were His disciples, under the leadership of St. Peter, and his successors:

“Blest are you, Simon son of Jonah! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. I for my part declare to you: you are ‘Rock,’ and on this rock I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven”
(Mt. 16: 15-19).

The Church is our spiritual home, the place to regularly gather together with other believers so that we can continue to give witness to Jesus’ Good News (*evangelization*) and to continue building God’s kingdom here in this world (*mission*). And thus...

It is in and through the Church that:

We are connected to Christ and to each other.

It is in and through the Church that:

We encounter the living Lord. We have the privilege of celebrating the Mass, as we listen to God’s holy word, and sacramentally encounter Him in the precious gift of His Body and Blood. Jesus promised that He is always present in the Eucharist

when He said: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (John 6:51). As Blessed John Paul II wrote reminding us about the centrality of the Holy Eucharist in our lives: “The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is the source and summit of the Christian life. ‘For the most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our Passover and living bread. Through His own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, He offers life to men.’ Consequently the gaze of the Church is constantly turned to her Lord, present in the sacrament of the altar, in which she discovers the full manifestation of His boundless love” (On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church, #1).

It is in and through the Church that:

We are empowered and guided by God’s Holy Spirit through the *Sacrament of Confirmation*, that we can live lives of ongoing conversion from sin and regularly renew our efforts to follow Christ faithfully through the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, and that we find healing and comfort in our bodily or spiritual weakness through the *Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*.

It is in and through the Church that:

We make commitments to our life vocations, including that of free, total, faithful, and fruitful love in the *Sacrament of Matrimony*, and that of committed ordained ministry through the *Sacrament of Holy Orders*, as well as the tremendous life of witness of *Consecrated Religious Life*.

It is in and through the Church that:

We are motivated to do works of charity to help those in need, and works of justice for the weak, oppressed, and marginalized as well as those victimized by the powerful forces of society.

And so...

It is in and through that Church that:

We dare to say that we encounter Jesus Christ, who is “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” As Pope Benedict XVI explains: “We need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the ‘pioneer and perfecter of our faith.’ In Him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness in the face of an offence received, and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfillment in the mystery of His incarnation; in His becoming man; in His sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of His resurrection. In Him who died and rose again for our salvation, the examples of faith that have marked these two thousand years of our salvation history are brought into the fullness of light” (The Door of Faith, #13).



**V. FAITH BUILDS COMMUNION
AND LEADS TO MISSION**

Our baptism into Christ gives us the gift of faith and begins our spiritual life in God. Faith focuses on that most important dimension of our lives, our relationship with God and His plan for all people to be one with Him, both in this world and in the life of the world to come. And so, faith builds a sense of communion with God and with our fellow believers through the Church as we claim Jesus as our brother and our model — to be the pattern for our own lives. *The mission of our entire lives is to live, act, and love like Jesus.*

Sometimes the term “practicing our faith” is used in reference to being active in our faith. But what we really mean more precisely is that we are fulfilling certain obligations, such as going to Mass

on Sundays and holy days of obligation. In addition to practicing our faith, our goal should be to live our faith — living, in everything we do, as a person who loves God, believes in Jesus, and makes every attempt to live in imitation of Jesus by following His teachings communicated through the Church.

Faith means being strengthened and nourished through the Eucharist for the purpose of putting faith into practice. Faith leads to “good works” which aim to improve the world and build God’s kingdom. St. James tells us very clearly: “Be doers of the word, not hearers only... faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 1:22; 2:17).

One of the most concrete examples of Jesus’ teaching on this important point is found in the parable of the final judgment, sometimes known as the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus relates that at the end of all time, God will gather together people from all the nations and separate them into two groups: the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Those on His right will be invited to inherit the eternal kingdom of glory that had been prepared for them from the beginning of time; those on His left will be sent away and condemned for all eternity. According to the text, the sheep on the Lord’s right were rewarded because they had reached out in loving service to those who were in need: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison. Those on His left, the goats, did none of those things. When questioned by the sheep on His right as to why they were being rewarded, Our Lord said: *“I assure you, as often as you did it (these acts of charity and justice) for one of my least brothers or sisters, you did it for Me.”* And similarly, to those “goats” on His left being condemned for all eternity, Our Lord explained that because they did not do these acts of charity, love, and justice, they had, in effect, ignored or mistreated God.

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In this very clear message, we come to understand that living our faith goes well beyond merely fulfilling our Sunday obligation. Our faith needs to be an integral part of our identity. When we ask ourselves the question “who am I?” we should know, “I am a child of God; I have been redeemed by the sacrificial love of Christ, and I am one in the Holy Spirit with my sisters and brothers in the family of the Church.” That is why, when teaching us how to pray, Jesus taught us to call God “*our* Father,” not “*my* Father.”

Therefore our faith is much bigger than a dialog between “me and God,” and our obligations extend beyond Sunday and holy day Mass attendance. The obligations that flow from our faith touch on who we are in our most intimate



relationships with our family members, and who we are with those whom we associate with at school and at work; they cover also our role as citizens and how we make choices and decisions about the leadership of our country. Faith obligations also extend to who we are as members of the human family, and how we care for God’s creation, protect the environment and safeguard the world for future generations. Because of our faith, we realize that we have obligations to care for the poor and the needy, to work for justice and to right wrongs. We are obliged to protect the sacredness of marriage, to respect human life at all stages of development and to work in defense of the dignity and sanctity of the human person in every circumstance. Faith in Jesus Christ requires us to relieve unnecessary suffering wherever we find it, and to make every effort to reconcile ourselves with others in the circle of our relationships.

In other words, our mission should be aligned with Jesus' mission as He outlined it in His first public sermon in His hometown synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; therefore He has anointed Me. He has sent Me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners; to announce a year of favor from the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). Where Jesus goes and what He does, so should we in faith dare to be willing to go and to do.

VI. WHAT FAITH LEADS US TO DO — TO DARE

During this Year of Faith, I urge you to be daring and renew your life of faith. I urge you to reach out in faith and confidence, **daring** to call God "Our Father." In the midst of our increasingly secularized society, Jesus continues to stand at the "doors" of our lives, knocking, and waiting for us to invite Him into our hearts. What is so amazing about "Our Father" is that there is never a time when it is too late. God is always ready to come into our lives whenever we are ready to invite Him to come through the **door**. All we need to do is to be **daring** enough to open the door in faith and God's amazing and merciful love will come in and make His dwelling with us forever. The choice is ours, but I assure you: if you choose to "**open the door of faith,**" your lives will be enriched and transformed.

My dear sisters and brothers, I would like to highlight these four particular areas of our human experience where you can open, and walk through, the "door of faith" — to **DARE**. What do those letters stand for? **D**omestic Church, **A**postolic Works, **R**elationship with Christ, and **E**vangelization.

Domestic Church — the Church of the Home:

It is common to use the phrase “going to Church” when actually, it is more precise to say that the “Church comes together.” Jesus told us: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Our membership in the Church is experienced at four different levels:

- 1 – as members of the Universal Catholic Church with Pope Benedict XVI as our shepherd;
- 2 – as members of a diocese — a geographical grouping of parishes in a region. Here in our diocese all Catholics in the nine counties of southwest Michigan are united together with me as the Bishop — the shepherd of the Diocese of Kalamazoo;
- 3 – as members of a particular parish shepherded by the pastor; and
- 4 – as members of the Domestic Church—the one that we experience at every moment—the Church of our homes.

It is in the Domestic Church where we learn and live out the principles of faith, where we embody the Gospel values, where we put into practice the virtues of patience, tolerance, forgiveness, love, and compassion. While we may leave our homes to go to the parish Church to celebrate our faith, it is in our homes where we are living out our faith.

I offer the following practical suggestions for deepening and strengthening the experience of living your faith in your home.

Prayer: Set aside times for prayer, perhaps at meal times: grace before meals and a prayer of thanksgiving after the meal. Prayer upon rising in the morning, to thank God for this new day, and prayer before going to sleep, to ask God’s forgiveness for any sins or mistakes and to ask God’s blessing for a restful and peaceful

sleep, are wonderful daily practices for individuals or for families together. Designate family and household times of prayer during special seasons — for example praying the rosary together on certain evenings, or when the family is experiencing a stressful time.

Holy and devotional reminders: Incorporate tangible reminders of our Catholic identity in our homes. Crucifixes or devotional images and artwork prominently displayed in our homes help remind us of God’s unconditional love for us. Those kinds of devotional and holy images also remind us of our Catholicism and let others know that we are proud to be followers of Jesus Christ. These items can also be a subtle way for us to share in the responsibility we have as baptized Catholics to evangelize and to proclaim the Good News to the entire world.

Conversation: Talk about your faith. Among all the day-to-day important matters, we should root our daily discussions and conversations in our faith in God. We should feel free and comfortable to openly discuss our beliefs with one another, both family members and invited guests. We should make sure that we have a Bible in our homes and that it has a prominent place of respect, and can easily be used for personal or family reading and sharing.

Apostolic Works — reaching out in loving service:

Doing works of charity and acts of justice are essential for each of us as a follower of Christ. To use a quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel and when necessary use words.” Loving service to others is the expression of our faith in action. Throughout our diocese there are countless examples of our sisters and brothers feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, visiting the imprisoned, fighting for justice, and welcoming the immigrants and newcomers. Whatever the act of love happens to be from the most simple to the most heroic, when it is done because of our love for Christ, it is a visible witness to His saving grace. Perhaps you

can find ways to give of your time in a local community project. Maybe you might be aware of a special need that a family has, or that a segment of your local community is experiencing, and you can help to organize a service or charitable response.

Relationship with Christ — Relationship with Others:

Our faith is an expression of a deep and personal relationship that we have with God in the person of Jesus Christ. We need to continually find ways to deepen that relationship with Christ through the way we keep our relationships with others strong and vibrant. To grow in our faith we must know what we believe and why we believe it. We should be open to study and learning as a “student of faith.” Perhaps we can devote time each day to reading God’s holy word in the Bible. Perhaps we can become familiar with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as the other versions of the *Catechism*, such as *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, *The Compendium to the Catechism*, and the *YouCat*.

Making sure that we celebrate Sunday Mass weekly with devotion and attention, and trying to attend daily Mass occasionally, are also wonderful ways to deepen our relationship with Jesus present to us in the Holy Eucharist. In addition to study and learning as a way to deepen our relationship with Christ, we should also consider spending quality time with our Lord. Praying in our home, or while driving or jogging, is a wonderful way to stay connected with God; however, spending quality time with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is an exceptional way to deepen our loving relationship with Jesus. Many parishes within our diocese hold regular times of Eucharistic adoration. Anytime we pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, we are in God’s real and true presence.

Evangelization:

While our faith is rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus, and brings us into a communal relationship with the entire Body of Christ in the Church, the essence of faith is that it must be witnessed to, proclaimed and shared with the entire world. The final words spoken by the risen Jesus as He ascended into Heaven were: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to carry out all the commands I have given you. And know that I remain with you always, until the end of the world” (Mt. 28:19-20). We have the obligation to live our faith in our lives; but we also have a responsibility to share the faith with others. Once again, Jesus told us: “You are the light of the world... No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket; they put it on a lamp stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way, your light must shine in people’s sight so that seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:14-16). The technical term for achieving this is evangelization. We might think that evangelizing is reserved for priests, deacons, or professional religious leaders. But each of us, baptized into Christ and a member of the Body of Christ, also shares in the mission to “proclaim Christ” (1 Cor. 1:23). What that means for most of us is that we live our faith openly and with conviction. In doing so, others may very well take notice and be drawn to consider a life of faith for themselves.

There are other ways that we can evangelize. We can invite others to join us when we go to Mass; and we can clearly share with others why our faith is important to us, and how the practice



of faith brings us joy and peace.

During this Year of Faith, I encourage you to “DARE.” with renewed conviction: to live your faith in your home, the “**D**omestic Church”; to perform “**A**postolic Works” in communion with the Body of Christ as you offer loving, Christ-like service to those in need; to deepen your “**R**elationship” with God and His Son through communication in prayer, through study, through participation in the sacramental graces of the Holy Eucharist, and through the Holy Presence of our Lord when you pray before the Blessed Sacrament; and to “**E**vangelize” by joyfully living and sharing your faith each day.



My dear Family of Faith, I have shared with you my thoughts, hopes, and practical suggestions about matters that are of true and eternal importance in each of our lives. We have been given the precious gift of human life for a reason. We are not living in this world by accident; each of us is an important and precious part of our Father’s plan. God knocks at the doors of our hearts offering us the gift of faith — a gift that helps us to see beyond the here and now and realize that we have an eternal destiny. That gift of faith also gives us the eyes to see clearly what *is* here and now and with God’s perspective of what is right, good, true, and of eternal consequence. When we open the door of faith and welcome God into our lives, we see that as we make our journey of faith through this life, we are never alone, and we have a clear focus on our ultimate destination, which we hope and pray, will be with God forever in heaven.

WE DARE TO SAY

During this Year of Faith, I pray that all of us will open the door and accept God's presence with us along our journey of faith through our active participation in the Church, to be strengthened by the sacraments, to be nourished through the Eucharist, to be guided by the Church's teachings, and to be united with Jesus himself in the Body of Christ.

Our loving God, who made us in His image and likeness, respects our freedom to walk with Him, or to separate ourselves from Him. The choice is ours. I pray that you will listen to Jesus and dare to see God as Jesus sees Him: as Abba — as Our Father. I pray that you will **dare** to accept Jesus' invitation to follow Him who is the way, the truth, and the life. I pray that you will **dare** to renew and deepen your faith, and live your faith with joy and enthusiasm because we believe in the Good News that Jesus has overcome sin and death and won for us the true freedom to be daughters and sons of God.

Let us open the door to Christ, and walk our life journey in faith, hope, and love all the days of our lives. Through the loving intercession of our dear Blessed Mother who gave birth to the Word made Flesh, and who therefore brought hope into the world, may we continue to embrace the precious gift of faith as, with confidence, *we dare to call God, Our Father.*

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Paul J. Bradley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley, D.D., M.S.W.
Bishop of Kalamazoo

Given at Kalamazoo on the
First Sunday of Advent,
this 2nd day of December,
in the year of our Lord 2012.



THE NICENE CREED

*I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven
and earth, of all things visible and invisible.*

*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son
of God, born of the Father before all ages.*

*God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
Through him all things were made. For us men and for
our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the
Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried, and rose again
on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand
of the Father.*

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and
the dead and his kingdom will have no end.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the
Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.*

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

*I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and
I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the
life of the world to come. Amen*

Year of
FAITH
October 2012 - November 2013



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