

“CO-RESPONSIBILITY IN THE MISSION OF EVANGELIZATION”
EVANGELIZATION LEADERSHIP SUMMIT
OHIO DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY, COLUMBUS, OHIO
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Good morning. I am very happy to be with you for this Evangelization Leadership Summit. Let me express my gratitude to Fr. Adam Streitenberger, Liz Christy, the Office of Evangelization, and to all who have made this event possible, especially Ohio Dominican University and the Dominican Sisters of Peace for hosting the event.

At my installation, I could not help but think about how our local church put forth the best face of Catholicism. The occasion was one of joy, not only for me, but for our whole church. It was good to see everyone together and to celebrate – to set aside divisions and the polarization that afflicts society and the Church and to simply be together, gathered with the Lord. I hope our gathering today recaptures some of that unity and joy.

At the installation, I highlighted two top priorities for the Diocese of Columbus: evangelization and vocations. We are at the conclusion of National Vocation Awareness Week, and I believe the two – evangelization and vocations-go hand in hand.

In his first year as Pope, the Holy Father wrote *The Joy of the Gospel*. There he gave us the essential program of his pontificate, which involves being a missionary Church. For the Pope, the whole missionary endeavor begins with an encounter with Christ. *Evangelii Gaudium* begins:

“The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is born anew.”
 (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 1.)

Just as Pope Francis begins with the encounter with Christ, so too Pope Benedict XVI began his first encyclical with this encounter, writing:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. (POPE BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *DEUS CARITAS EST*, 25 DECEMBER 2005, 1)

We gather here to meet Christ, the One who gives our life direction and who brings us joy. We also come to encounter one another as brothers and sisters. We do not exist in a vacuum, adrift from relationships; rather, we are inserted into a determined people and share a common lifestyle. We are the one People of God who reveal the many faces of God. (cf. *EG*, 115-118)

Pope Francis has a dream for the Church. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (*EG*, 27)

To understand what he means, consider his words during his visit to Brazil. There he spoke of our “Continental Mission”, which is both *programmatically* and *paradigmatically*. The programmatic mission is a series of missionary activities; while, the paradigmatic mission:

“involves setting in a missionary key all the day-to-day activities of the particular churches. Clearly this entails a whole process of reforming ecclesial structures. The ‘change of structures’ will not be the result of reviewing the organizational flow chart, which would lead to a static reorganization; rather, it will result from the very dynamics of mission.”
(POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE LEADERSHIP OF CELAM, 28 JULY 2013)

He dreams of a new missionary spirit. Only from this paradigmatic choice to be a missionary Church will authentic reform, vital for evangelization, flow. Just as wind pushes against a sail and causes a boat to move upon the water, so too the Spirit of God pushes the whole Church to go forth into the world, attentive to the signs of the times and the needs of the people, jettisoning that which is obsolete. Pope Francis adds that “What makes obsolete structures pass away, what leads to a change of heart in Christians, is precisely *missionary* spirit.”

Characteristics of an Evangelizing Church

It is in this “missionary spirit” that the Church goes forth (cf. *EG* 20-24). Paragraph 24 of *Evangelii Gaudium* begins with these words:

“The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.” (EG, 24)

In his address to the General Congregation of Cardinals before the 2013 conclave, then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio said:

“When the Church does not go out of herself to evangelize, she becomes self-referential and then she gets sick. [...] When the Church is self-referential, without realizing it, she believes she has her own light. She ceases to be the *mysterium lunae* and gives rise to the grave evil of spiritual worldliness. [...] Simplifying, there are two images of the Church: either the evangelizing Church that comes out of itself, [...] or the worldly Church that lives in itself, of itself, for itself. This should illuminate the possible changes and reforms that will have to be made for the salvation of souls.”

Thus, I want to outline the characteristics of an evangelizing Church, which the Pope himself names in *Evangelii Gaudium* (24), characteristics which we could have here – and which we do have to some extent in the Diocese of Columbus, but which could also be more prominent. First, we are *a Church that goes forth*, which the Holy Father described in this way:

“Instead of just being a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. The ones who quit sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return. But that takes audacity and courage.” (INTERVIEW WITH ANTONIO SPADARO, 21 SEPTEMBER 2013)

To go forth to the spiritual and existential peripheries demands courageously leaving our comfort zone. This is true even with the Real Presence Real Future initiative. It is not just about closing and merging parishes, but about evangelizing and going outside our comfort zone and our ordinary way of doing things. We cannot simply maintain what we have or had.

Second, the community of missionary disciples takes the first step: it *shows initiative*. Pope Francis invites us to be “imitators of God” by having foresight. God seizes the initiative with us and calls us to do the same with those at the peripheries.

The term *primerear* captures this idea. We need to be proactive rather than reactive. We need to be spiritual entrepreneurs for Christ. The Holy Father writes:

“An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative; he has loved us first (cf. 1 John 4:19), and therefore, we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.” (EG, 24)

Third, the evangelizing community is *involved or engaged* with its members. The clear majority of the faithful are lay Catholics who have been made priest, prophet, and king through baptism. They have talents and expertise to offer the Church and the world. The bishops and priests have the task of animating their vocations, including those of the permanent deacons who also serve beside us in the Lord’s vineyard. Do we engage those who are truly expert in our community in the work of evangelization?

The Holy Father sometimes uses the word *balconear*, which means to stand by the window or balcony to see what is happening, but without personal engagement. A person sees and criticizes everything without ever personally getting involved in the mission. The Pope proposes Jesus as the opposite of this sort of person:

“Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples, ‘You will be blessed if you do this.’ An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances. It is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.” (EG, 24)

I think within the Diocese and within the presbyterate, we can fall into patterns of gossip and negativity or simple resignation. We critique but without offering a proposal. It is a temptation. I have been pleasantly surprised by your willingness to offer ideas and responses to the proposals of Real Presence Real Future and for some of you to meet with me to tell me what is on your mind and on the mind and hearts of your people.

Fourth, a community of missionary disciples *accompanies* others. Speaking in Assisi, Pope Francis said:

I repeat it often: walking with our people, sometimes in front, sometimes in the middle, and sometimes behind: in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support; and at the back in order to keep it united and so that no one lags too far behind, to keep them united. (FRANCIS, “MEETING WITH CLERGY, CONSECRATED PEOPLE, AND MEMBERS OF DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS,” CATHEDRAL OF SAN RUFFINO, ASSISI, 4 OCTOBER 2013.)

Accompaniment entails guiding, encouraging and supporting, and uniting. We journey with our people in the Diocese of Columbus, even if the future is not always certain. As we accompany others, we learn the art of dialogue. We live in a time of epochal change. We, who announce the Gospel, cannot evangelize by neglecting the new forces at work affecting new generations who have their own expectations and aspirations, including those who are coming to this country.

I spoke earlier of the suffering of many, but others are frightened of change and frightened of strangers. Rather than seeing a brother or sister as a member of the family, they see them as a threat or competitor. What will this new person mean for me, my future, and my existence? I think we are like this with our priests and other parishes; rather than see them as brothers or part of our corporate body, we see them as competitors.

In the face of this existential fear, one approach would simply be to build a wall around ourselves, but this would never banish their fear. This would not help them live in a new way or experience the joy that comes with freedom offered by Christ and the Gospel.

The alternative to building walls is dialogue. At the heart of dialogue is the communication of one’s own personal life to others. It is a sharing of the existence of others in one’s existence. It is not always about proving oneself right. It is about a mutual sharing that deals with how to live in harmony, while offering the best of our Tradition. I am hopeful that our gathering today will allow us to share something of ourselves with one another, even if we don’t necessarily know a priest or seminarian particularly well yet. Despite our theological, personal, and even political differences, I think through dialogue we begin to learn that we share far more in common.

Fifth, the evangelizing community is *fruitful*. In paragraph 24, the Holy Father refers to the parable of the weeds and wheat, writing:

“An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient with the weeds. The sower when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear.” (EG, 24)

Fruitfulness demands discernment and patience. The fundamental task is discernment. The parable of the weeds and wheat speaks of distinguishing what is from the Son of Man, who sows good seed, the children of God, in the field from the weeds, the children of the Evil One, sown by the Devil. In Greek, the word used for weeds is *zizania*, which specifically refers to ryegrass. *Zizania* looks like wheat as it begins to grow, but only when it is mature can one discern the difference.

Jesus cautions his disciples of the need to be patient and to discern because things are not always initially clear. While farmers discern between wheat and weeds, the Church embraces people, who have the possibility of responding to the Divine Initiative and who, by grace, can be transformed from sinner to saint, from weeds to wheat. Following Jesus’ example, we try to be patient. Patience in the art of accompaniment and discernment allows the whole Church to move forward.

Pope Francis sees patience as a mark of holiness:

“I see holiness in the patience of the People of God ... I often associate sanctity with patience; not only as *hypomoné*, taking charge of events and circumstances of life, but also as a constancy in going forward, day by day. This is the sanctity of the militant Church also mentioned by St. Ignatius.” (INTERVIEW WITH ANTONIO SPADARO, 21 SEPTEMBER 2013)

The final characteristic of an evangelizing community is *joy*. It celebrates even small victories in the work of evangelization. (cf. EG, 24) Joy is the greatest experience of the Church that goes forth. The Eucharist is the source and summit of all life in the Church. The Eucharist is the sacrament which nourishes Christian joy.

It is the strongest sacramental sign of the Paschal Lordship of Christ, recalling his victory over sin and death. In the Eucharist, Christ is among us. The joy that He has won is preserved and shared. Eucharist joy is not incomplete or fading like the pleasures of this world; it is a lasting joy. Joy is fruit of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus breathed on the Apostles at Easter, when they rejoiced to see the Risen Lord!

The Church celebrates the Eucharist with the spousal joy of one promised to Christ. It is a foretaste of the eschatological banquet in which those invited will share in the heavenly banquet of the kingdom in its fullness. Through the Mass, the Church brings the world joy. Thus, the Holy Father writes:

“Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy...The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving.” (*EG*, 24)

I think we need to examine whether our local church and parishes demonstrate the joy, which flows from the Eucharist? The Eucharistic Revival affords an opportunity for the Church in the United States to experience and celebrate the nuptial joy of a community that is loved by the Lord, a clear mark of a community that evangelizes and is herself evangelized!

Barriers to Joy

Pope Francis points out that there are barriers to this experience of joy and to the Church’s evangelizing efforts. One such barrier is our own internal structures which are in urgent need of pastoral and missionary conversion for evangelization rather than for the Church’s self-preservation. (cf. *EG*, 25, 27).

A second barrier is sin. Pope Francis speaks of the Church as a “field hospital”:

“I clearly see that what the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and warm the hearts of the faithful, closeness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after a battle. ... One must treat her wounds. Then we can talk about everything else.”

I think we need to name the sexual abuse crisis as a major wound to the victims of abuse, to their families, and to the faithful. Our evangelizing efforts will be hindered unless we accept our responsibility and take concrete action to ask forgiveness, while remaining vigilant in the protection of minors. The credibility of the Church to speak on many other issues is directly impacted by her lack of credibility in this area, even though we have many protocols in place. It will be long, hard work to heal these relationships, not only of those who have been hurt, victimized, and betrayed, but also the relationships between priests and their bishops, as many priests lack trust in this relationship too. Our own shame, woundedness and

experience of mercy may allow us to be more empathetic and to accompany those who are hurting.

The image of the Church as a field hospital highlights another key element of Pope Francis' Pontificate: mercy, which the Pope reminds us cannot be a parenthesis in the life of the Church. This mercy is shown in the Sacrament of Penance *and* through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Catholic Social Doctrine, in particular, our outreach to the poor, the marginalized, and the migrant, as well as our educational endeavors, help show forth the merciful and maternal face of the Church. The Church has been prophetic in its openness toward those suffering from a humanitarian crisis at the border, and for decades, it has been passionate in its defense of the unborn. Now, following the *Dobbs* decision, the "Walking with Moms in Need" initiative takes on new importance in showing forth the maternal tenderness of the Church for all her children, demonstrating that the priority is Mercy rather than harsh judgment.

Co-Responsibility for the Church

The Holy Father wants a missionary Church in which everyone is an evangelist. For example, the Pope wants a "a poor Church for the poor," yet he reminds us that the poor are not to be instrumentalized as an object of the Church's charity; rather, they should be equipped, through more just economic structures, to be protagonists in their own future. Thus, he writes:

"For the Church, the option for the poor is a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one" (EG 198). This helps to understand God and the world from God's perspective. The poor are the "hermeneutic place" from which to look at reality. Being friends of the poor means not only approaching them with benevolence, but allowing oneself to be evangelized by them."
(APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 198)

Beyond the poor, this applies to the other members of the People of God whom the clergy, ourselves included, assist in growing to maturity and accepting co-responsibility for the mission of the Church. This co-responsibility for the Church can be a renewed way of being the Church. Benedict XVI described it:

"It is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is gradually promoted, with respect for vocations and for the respective

roles of the consecrated and of lay people. This demands a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as “collaborators” of the clergy but truly be recognized as “co-responsible”, for the Church’s being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.” (BENEDICT XVI, “DISCORSO ALL’APERTURA DEL CONVEGNO PASTORALE DELLA DIOCESI DI ROMA SUL TEMA: ‘APPARTENENZA ECCLESIALE E CORRESPONSIBILITÀ PASTORALE,’” MAY 26, 2009, IN *INSEGNAMENTI* V, 1 (2010) 903-904.)

Key words here are *mature* and *committed*. It is notable that three of Pope Francis’ major documents – *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato Si*, and *Amoris Laetitia* – conclude on a spiritual note. The exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* meditated on universal call to holiness. Even *Desiderio desideravi* called for a greater liturgical formation of both the clergy *and* the laity. The strong emphasis on discernment during these years is intended not only for Pastors but also for individuals and communities.

This causes unease, if we neglect or have neglected the proper spiritual and liturgical formation for the laity. However, if we fulfill our duty, then we can more easily *trust*, as the Pope does, the entire People of God and accompany them on the path to ever-greater spiritual maturity. Just as seminary formators accompany seminarians to reach affective maturity, so too is it our task, as ministers of the Church, to accompany the lay faithful so that they may accept co-responsibility for the Church and the world.

Our collective efforts to promote the dignity of the person and the Kingdom of God can be more effective, leading to the pastoral conversion of structures necessary for our joint mission. We may have differing roles and degrees of authority, but everyone has a part to play in this evangelizing mission. The unease can be transformed into an opportunity. Maurice Blondel provides this insight:

“Without the Church, the faithful would not be able to decipher the true writing of God whether in the Bible or on the soul. However, if each member of the faithful were not to bring his or her contribution to the common life, then the organization would not be entirely living and spiritual.” (MAURICE BLONDEL, *HISTORIE ET DOGME. LES LACUNES PHILOSOPHIQUES DE L’EXEGESE MODERNE* IN *LES PREMIERS ECRITS DE M. BLONDEL* (PARIS: PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DE FRANCE, 1956) 216)

In *Gaudete et Exsultate* (cf. nn. 6-7), Pope Francis reminded us of the “holiness next door,” challenging us by stating: “We must not think only of the blessed and canonized, because the ‘Spirit spreads holiness everywhere.’” How are we promoting ordinary holiness in our diocese? Are there sufficient spiritual directors and guides for our priests *and* laity? What contributions might the lay ecclesial movements make to the growth in holiness of “rank-and-file” parishioners?

The Holy Father invites us, as pastoral ministers, to accompany others in their spiritual journey *and* in their *human* journey. We are well aware of the brokenness of the family and the demands of Catholic teaching, particularly in the domain of morality, including human sexuality, marriage, and family life. The recent synodal report indicates that many of our own people – for diverse reasons – do not accept Church teaching. While we as teachers can articulate right doctrine in a more attractive and understandable way that the faithful may receive it, we also need to accompany them along the path so that they may live their faith in a way that offers them peace of heart, experiencing the true, the good, and the beautiful.

In *Amoris Laetitia* (cf. 302), Pope Francis references the *law of gradualness*, which had been emphasized by Pope John Paul II more than forty years ago in *Familiaris consortio* (cf. FC, 34), when he wrote:

“... what is known as 'the law of gradualness' or step-by-step advance cannot be identified with 'gradualness of the law,' as if there were different degrees or forms of precept in God's law for different individuals and situations. In God's plan, all husbands and wives are called in marriage to holiness, and this lofty vocation is fulfilled to the extent that the human person is able to respond to God's command with serene confidence in God's grace and in his or her own will.” (POPE JOHN PAUL II, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO*, 22 NOVEMBER 1981)

We show respect for persons, not by lowering our standards of morality, but by helping everyone to recognize the call to holiness and creating the conditions by which they can live their call, offering them the tools in their concrete situations to pursue holiness and accept responsibility.

The growth in personal maturity and holiness can help the whole Church in the United States as it enters the continental phase of the synodal process, which demands discernment. In *the Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis invited every particular church to enter into a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform so

that the missionary impulse of the Church might be more focused, generous, and fruitful, adding 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*, 30; 33)

Three phrases that help us understand discernment are: *to recognize*; *to interpret*; and *to choose*. We need to recognize the reality of our situation, including the changed cultural context in which we live and the epochal change which we are all experiencing; to interpret this reality in light of the Gospel and a living Tradition, and to deliberate prayerfully in order to choose.

Synodality is exercised in the local church, in which priests and laity are called to “cooperate with the bishop for the good of the whole ecclesial community.” (POPE FRANCIS, “ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS,” AAS 107: 1142.) Again, everyone has to be engaged in the mission, but as a Bishop, in the end, I must choose, but I do not need to make every choice alone. We all need to trust the *sensus fidelium*, and, above all, the voice of God.

A Path Forward: The Offering of the Church

To this point, I have traced what Pope Francis has outlined during the last decade, but rather than look backward, we also need to look ahead – to where we are going with the People of God. What is it that we have to offer?

In the Acts of the Apostles, Simon Peter says, “*I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have, I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!*” (Acts 3:6). We cannot be paralyzed by the challenges that we face, because what we offer – the One we offer – has the words of everlasting life. It is ultimately He who has the capacity of transforming lives, and it is our task to facilitate an encounter with Him – to proclaim Him who brings us joy. Joy is the effect of a deep experience of God, of an encounter with God who takes us beyond ourselves to reach our truest being, from which springs evangelizing action. (cf. *EG* 8).

Evangelizing is principally the normal reaction of those who have perceived the meaning of the Gospel and the encounter with Jesus, capable of transforming lives. Those who have encountered Jesus know also how to love their brothers and sisters. This is why in *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope used the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The path forward, especially in a country with such a rich history of welcoming the stranger and offering freedom and opportunity, is to open our hearts to all – from the unborn, to the disabled, to the elderly, to those of other faiths.

Following the way of love ultimately requires an adequate anthropology. Pope Francis rightly laments the throwaway culture. In response, we can offer a broader vision which is truly good news about man and woman, about marriage and family life, and about the human person in relationship to all of creation. We cannot be silent about these fundamental and saving truths. Recently, the *Catechumenal Pathways for Matrimonial Life* were published. The Church can be a protagonist in the future of civilization by accompanying men and women along the course of their engagement and married life, so that they can be builders of communion and stewards of the gift of life and creation.

The Second Vatican Council tells us in *Lumen Gentium* that:

“They [pastors] also know that they were not ordained by Christ to take upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind.” (LG 30).

This is particularly important in the field of family pastoral care. Evangelization must lead to the involvement and enhancement of all pastoral agents, especially the laity, in the accompaniment and care of families. Here, too, lies a great challenge for evangelization: to get people to understand that family pastoral work is everyone’s responsibility. If we want to have a strong Church, we need to have strong families. Every vocation is born in the family. Married couples, in the first place, must become instructors and companions for other younger married couples. This is what is suggested by the *Catechumenal Pathways for Matrimonial Life* document.

Underlying this ‘collective responsibility’ is the very nature of every family and their irreplaceable mission in the Church and the world. If there were no families, the Church would simply disappear. It is families who ensure the most stable and reliable presence in parishes; it is they who participate most regularly in the sacraments; it is they who are the most generous in giving their support, including financially, to parish activities. Families supply us with catechists; it is in families that priestly and religious vocations are born; it is families that volunteer for charity services and outreach carried out by the Church.

The same can be said in the social sphere: without strong families present in the area, the number of lonely people increases and with it the spread of depression

and various forms of mental distress. The elderly end up being neglected with serious repercussions, among other things, on the costs of public assistance. Without families, society deteriorates!

If we are well aware of the crucial role of families in the Church and society, we can understand why the entire parish community must have families at heart and why *family-based catechesis* is so vital. If nothing else, parents as primary educators of their children must play a vital role.

Everyone in the Church is called to help young people form new families, to support and encourage those already established, to accompany them through the different stages of their lives, and to care for their human and spiritual growth.

With this collective involvement in support of families in mind, Pope Francis speaks first of all of “the need for a more adequate formation of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers” (AL 202) to which is added “the need for training lay leaders who can assist in the pastoral care of families, with the help of teachers and counsellors, family and community physicians, social workers ...” (AL 204).

The whole Church can be a protagonist in evangelization through its care for creation. In *Laudato Si*, at its core, there is a common theme in seeing creation as a gift for all, demanding a united effort in the care of our common home rather than simply using and abusing the world and its resources. This conspicuous consumption, often accompanied by a radical individualism, degenerates into the dehumanization of the person.

The Church can offer the People of God an *integral ecology*, which encompasses not only the dignity of the human person as the crown of creation but also the social dimension of life on this earth. This social dimension – concern for our brothers and sisters – is ultimately a very Catholic dimension, which awakens the conscience to the needs and the plight of many of our brothers and sisters and can be an effective instrument for overcoming selfishness that leads to unjust exclusion in society.

Finally, the Church, not without its growing pains, is just beginning to think and live in a synodal way. This involves listening, understanding, and patience and demands dialogue in a concrete and respectful manner. It seems to me that much of the division in the country, in neighborhoods, in families, and in the Church, is a result of forgetting how to be and speak with one another.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 236), Pope Francis uses the famous image of a polyhedron (rather than a sphere) to emphasize the idea of integrating the richness of the diversity of communities. With its many faces touching one another, a polyhedron allows for an exchange of ideas, cultures, and traditions, which can help build bridges and build community rather than divide. Without imposing a homogeneity, the Church in the United States can *integrate* the gifts of the People of God through dialogue and by being patient, living in a creative tension.

It is tempting to always think of the Church in crisis, but if you look at history, the Church emerges from the crisis by God's grace. Each crisis affords the opportunity to discern the presence of the Lord and to refocus on the mission and where we are going together. It is my sincere hope that through this Evangelization Leadership Summit we may have a clearer picture not only of where we would like to go but where the Lord is leading us. Thank you.