

Bishop's Appeal Homily 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This year is the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Green Bay. Christianity was first brought here by the Jesuit fathers in the early 1600s, but the Diocese of Green Bay was created by the Holy Father in March of 1868.

Since our first Bishop, Joseph Melchior, the priests, religious and people of faith in this part of Wisconsin have worked hard to grow the Church and to expand the good done by the Church here in northeastern Wisconsin. You and I are the beneficiaries of expansions of growth in faith and education through the years by the sacrifices of our ancestors. We have received a tremendous legacy of faith and culture.

In the second reading today, St. Paul writes *“If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it.”* In other words, Paul was so deeply in love with Jesus Christ and the message of salvation, that he said, *“I have made myself a slave of all so as to win over as many as possible.”*

Like St. Paul, we have been preparing to fully embrace the New Evangelization through the process called “Disciples on the Way”. In the last two years, we have prepared several thousand leaders in discipleship. This year and in the coming years, this will be shared with all of our parishioners.

Enthusiasm is building among our leaders in parishes, schools and in the diocesan staff as we prepare ourselves to fully embrace a life of friendship with Jesus and the Church. To do this, we follow the example of Pope Francis who is showing us how to “reach out” to those who have fallen away from the faith or even to those who have never heard of or experienced friendship with Jesus Christ or the Church.

In parishes and Catholic schools, people of all ages are discovering what it means to be a disciple. As part our faith formation ministries young people experience the love of God in sacred scripture and through stories of the saints. They learn how to pray and to enter into a friendship with God. Our Catholic schools are centers of discipleship. Here students find opportunities to share their faith, to engage in daily prayer and receive an exceptional education. Your gift to the Bishop's Appeal helps our Catholic teachers by providing them with the tools to encourage young people to embrace a life of discipleship.

At Camp Tekakwitha, children are being inspired to recognize God's presence all around them. Camp is a wonderful place for children to connect with Jesus Christ while exploring His playground in the northwoods.

As our children grow older, their faith journey continues through youth ministry and college campus ministry programs. This continuation of their friendship with Jesus is a building block in forming them to be missionary disciples for life.

Learning about Jesus and understanding the teachings of the Church is very important. In the Emmaus Lay Ministry Formation program men and woman take the next step in their faith journey. After their formation they are ready to inspire other disciples to grow deeper in their faith. We are also forming our Hispanic brothers and sisters in a similar way through the Discípulos de Cristo ministry.

Your gift to the Bishop's Appeal does this and so much more. You help with the education and formation of our deacons. Last year five deacons were ordained thanks to your support.

Also, another diocesan ministry you support is Marriage Preparation. These seminars help young couples make Christ the very center of their marriage and family.

Through prison ministry we are able to be the face of Jesus Christ to those seeking God's love and mercy. Caring for those who are struggling most is the work of Catholic Charities. Their professional staff helps families and individuals through Adoption Services, Budget Counseling and Mental Health Counseling to name just a few of their many ministries.

Sharing God's love also happens through care ministry. Our diocese is blessed with more than 1,400 care minister volunteers who pray with and bring Holy Communion to people who are homebound or sick. This compassionate work is possible because of your generous support of the Bishop's Appeal.

Please prayerfully consider making your gift to the Bishop's Appeal today.

With your gift many people are beginning to embrace a life of discipleship. At this time, I would invite your priest or pastoral leader to share a bit more information about how you can participate by making a pledge to this year's Bishop's Appeal.

Thank you so much and may God bless you abundantly in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.