



Most Reverend Louis Tylka
Diocese of Peoria
Office of the Bishop

Easter 2022

Dear People of God in the Diocese of Peoria,

Every year as we celebrate Easter, we hear from the Gospels of the first encounters with the Good News: “Jesus has risen from the dead!” These historical events that are recorded in the Scriptures convey the experience of those first disciples with the empty tomb and the Risen Lord. In each of these “awakenings,” the one who discovers that Jesus is risen is moved to go forth from the empty tomb and tell others what they have witnessed. Some are moved interiorly by the joy they carry in their heart; others are told explicitly by Jesus to go and tell others. In either case, we see *evangelization* taking place. Our Savior is risen; we must go and share this Good News!

In the present day and in our own way, we too must hasten to share our faith in Jesus. The task of evangelization has always been at the heart of the Church’s mission, and it is for us today to take up the task anew in the midst of the joys and hopes, and the fears and anxieties, of the world in which we live. Our discipleship is rooted in having “encountered” Our Lord in a way that touched our heart, and our willingness to give witness to this experience of God’s love.

At the beginning of this past Lent, on March 3, 2022, I succeeded Bishop Daniel Jenky, CSC as the Diocesan Bishop for the Diocese of Peoria. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to serve as the Coadjutor Bishop for nineteen months. It afforded me the opportunity to meet many of you and to experience the life of the Church across the twenty-six counties of our diocese. Since coming to the “Heart of Illinois,” I have experienced firsthand the vibrant faith in our parishes and I have seen the good work done by our priests, deacons, religious, and generous parishioners. I have listened to people’s hopes and dreams, their struggles and fears, and most especially their faith in Jesus and their love for the Catholic Church. Bringing all of this into my

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prayer and reflection, I have asked daily for the grace of the Holy Spirit for the guidance necessary to shepherd the Church. I write today to share the fruit of my prayer, along with the knowledge and wisdom that you have offered as we discern the path forward. And while there will be much more to discern in the months and years ahead, I offer to you *five foundations* for us to build upon as we take up the Lord's Great Commission.

1. **Evangelization:** Everything we do as a Church (diocese) needs to focus on our efforts of evangelization. The development of strategies to form missionary disciples to witness to our faith in Jesus must undergird all our activities. The review of structures, resources, and efforts must be undertaken to align for the present reality so that we may find ways for people to encounter Jesus and commit themselves to living as disciples in the Church. As the Holy Father reminds us, we are living in a new Apostolic Age. So while the truths of our faith remain unchanging, the manner we present our truths must adapt. It is not simply a matter of instructing a fallen world on the teachings of the Church; rather, we must continually invite others to experience the joy of knowing Jesus in a personal way. We must learn to become comfortable with witnessing to our experience of Jesus in our own lives and thereby help others to share in the same transformative relationship. Evangelization is about our relationship with Our Lord and this must be at the heart of all we do.
2. **Eucharist:** The source and summit of the Church's life is the Holy Eucharist. Deepening our own appreciation for the Eucharist in our lives is essential to deepening our relationship with Christ. Eucharistic revival is a priority for the Church in the United States and in our local Church. The Eucharist is always an encounter with Jesus Christ, whether that be at Mass or in Eucharistic Adoration. We must not only teach about the Real Presence of Christ in the Most Sacred Body and Blood, we must also help others to encounter this most intimate gift of the Lord. Within the Diocese of Peoria, we will align our efforts with the three-year plan of Eucharistic Revival culminating in the National Eucharistic Congress in 2024. The most important thing we do every week is to participate in the Eucharist! This is a truth that we should all live by.
3. **Discipleship - Forming Minds, Shaping Hearts, Developing Christian Leaders:** A hallmark of discipleship is the ongoing deepening of one's own relationship

with Jesus. After encountering Our Lord, a disciple begins the life-long journey of learning more about Jesus and who we are called to be as his followers. The ministry of catechesis whereby one learns the truths of our faith and the teachings of the Church is an important aspect of this. However, evangelization is more than catechesis. It entails facilitating an encounter with Jesus that, by divine grace, enables one's heart and mind to be captured by Christ. When this happens, those who have experienced the love of God naturally desire to have their minds and hearts more deeply formed so they become more like Christ. This formation occurs in our parishes and Newman centers, in our schools and religious education programs. It happens first in Christian homes! The development of creative and engaging catechetical models along with the formation of leaders is important in every age.

4. **Vocations:** Everyone has a vocation! As disciples of Jesus, we naturally want to strengthen people's response to God's call in their life. The promotion of strong families and the gift of matrimony as a Sacrament inspire the other vocations within the Church. In particular, the promotion of vocations to the priesthood and religious life are key. We all share the responsibility to encourage and support those who believe they have a divine call to serve the Church as a priest or religious. The seeds we plant today - especially in our families - will bear fruit for the sake of God's kingdom.

5. **Archbishop Fulton Sheen:** We are committed to promoting the cause for the canonization of the Venerable Fulton J. Sheen. Our beloved native son, ordained to serve as a Priest of Jesus Christ for the Diocese of Peoria, went on to serve the universal Church by his dynamic, creative, and inspiring ministry as a bishop. Utilizing the cutting-edge technology of his time, combined with the gift of his great mind and his natural ability to communicate, Sheen is a model of evangelization for us today. While imploring the Church to move forward on his official cause of beatification and ultimately canonization, the Diocese of Peoria will work tirelessly to share the legacy of this holy man and his tremendous impact on the world.

My dear brothers and sisters, as we celebrate Easter, we celebrate a new life in Christ Jesus. The first disciples encountered the Good News of the Resurrection, and their

hearts were stirred by the Holy Spirit to go and share what they witnessed. Even before they fully understood all that had transpired - because of their personal encounter with Jesus, their experience of his love, and the renewal of their minds and hearts that had taken place through his teaching - they knew what they had to do: "Go and tell the others." And thus, through the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives, the Church began to grow. And now, in our time, we commit ourselves anew to this same essential task. "Christ is Risen! Christ is truly Risen!" This truth has changed our lives and it continues to have the power to change the world. Let us then hear the Risen Lord say to us as well:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

This is the joy of Easter and the joy of discipleship!

Blessings to you and your loved ones. Know of my daily prayers for you as I ask for yours. Together let us join in singing God's praises: Jesus Christ is risen today! Alleluia!

Happy Easter!

Peace and Prayers,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Louis Tylka".

✝ Most Reverend Louis Tylka
Bishop of Peoria