



Office of the Bishop  
Diocese of Providence  
One Cathedral Square  
Providence, RI 02903  
Phone: (401) 278-4546

Dear Friends in Christ:

In my nearly five years as Bishop of Providence, I've never requested that a pastoral letter be read from the pulpit. The fact that I'm doing so today indicates the importance of a new initiative in the Diocese – namely, our Year of Evangelization.

The Year of Evangelization began in October and will continue through the Christmas Season of next year, concluding in January of 2011, a period of approximately sixteen months. It is a program that I hope will engage every member of our Diocesan Church.

From the time Jesus ascended to heaven, saying to His Apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... baptizing them... and teaching them," the Church has been committed to the work of evangelization. It is an essential characteristic of being a Christian in every age – to believe in Christ and to share that Good News with others.

At the same time, there are moments in history that call for a renewed emphasis on evangelization, and I am convinced that we are currently living in one of those moments. Because of the internal challenges the Church has faced in recent years, and because we live in a very secular, even atheistic age – an age "without God" – the Church has both an urgent need and a special opportunity to strengthen our faith and to share it with others.

The Year of Evangelization has three purposes. The first is to renew our personal enthusiasm about, and our commitment to, our Catholic Faith. The second is to reach out to those many, many Catholics who have drifted away from the Church, people who were baptized Catholics but who, for a variety of reasons, no longer practice the faith. The third goal is to invite individuals who have no religious affiliation, the "unchurched," to visit us and learn more about our Catholic Faith.

Indeed as Catholics we should be proud of our faith and aware of the good things, the great things, the Church does everyday – for individuals, our families and the entire community – by providing personal assistance and pastoral ministry, and through many programs of education, health care and social services. And in sharing our faith with others, it is important that our identity as Catholics be strong and clear – in our teaching, liturgy, prayer, and daily life.

So, what can you do to participate in the Year of Evangelization? Well, there are three things.

The first is to be aware of and supportive of the variety of evangelization programs and outreach initiatives that will be taking place throughout the Diocese and in your parish during the coming year. Indeed it is my hope that every parish of the Diocese will do *something* to evangelize – to increase its outreach, to be more welcoming and inviting to visitors.

In just a few weeks the Diocese of Providence will sponsor a high profile and very professional media outreach program called, “Catholics Come Home.” These television ads will appear frequently throughout Rhode Island and speak directly to inactive Catholics, inviting them to return to the Church. The experience of this program across the country has been that many people will accept our invitation and return to the Church in their local parishes. It is critically important, then, that when they do so – when people “come home” to your parish – that they receive a warm and sincere welcome, and that you do your very best to help them become part of your parish community.

The second thing you can do is to become a “personal evangelist.” While we realize that our expectations have to be realistic – that we cannot touch every soul, meet every need and solve every problem – I encourage you to identify just one person, perhaps a member of your family, a former parishioner, a neighbor, or co-worker and invite them to return to the Church, or as the case may be, visit the Church for the first time. Think about it – if every active member of the Church in our Diocese could motivate just one individual return to the Church, or join the Church for the first time, what a difference it would make for us! In short, if our evangelization program is to succeed it will happen, “one soul at a time.”

Thirdly, I ask you to pray fervently for the success of our Year of Evangelization. This work, like every work of the Church, is a combination of the human and the divine. And so while we will work very hard, we will pray even harder. As Pope John Paul reminded us, in our lives and in our work, “*It is fatal to forget that without Christ we can do nothing.*”

The Advent Season is a perfect time to launch our evangelization efforts. In this season when we prepare for the coming of Christ, we focus on the person and preaching of John the Baptist who was a messenger of the Kingdom and preached a message of repentance and forgiveness: “*Prepare the way of the Lord.*” And in this holy season we also reflect upon the image of our Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, who through faith and trust, welcomed the Word of God and presented Christ to the world.

Brothers and sisters, if like the Virgin Mary we have faith and trust and welcome God’s presence into our lives; and if, like John the Baptist, we boldly proclaim the Kingdom to others in word and deed, our Year of Evangelization will be a great success. As God’s People we will be able to echo the words of the Psalm: “*The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.*”

Dear friends, it's a great time to be a Catholic, and our Year of Evangelization is an historic and blessed moment for our Church. I hope you will join me in this effort.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Tobin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning of the first letter.

Thomas J. Tobin  
Bishop of Providence

December 6, 2009