



BECAUSE
HE FIRST
Loved
US...

A CAMPAIGN FOR CATHOLIC LIFE



An Invitation from Bishop Vetter

The Lord is calling us to a new apostolic mission in the Diocese of Helena.

After many months of careful prayer, planning and consultation, we are embarking on a major campaign initiative. This exciting campaign will raise funds to support key needs in our Diocese and parishes and, at the same time, invite each of us to a closer relationship with Jesus.

God created us out of love; love is at the core of His Person. As stewards of that love, we desire nothing more than to share His love through the joyful announcement that Jesus Christ is a living Person to be encountered, who through His Resurrection has defeated sin and death.

We have chosen this well-known verse from 1 John 4:19 — “**Because He First**

Loved Us ...” — as the theme of our Campaign for Catholic Life because it is the necessary starting point of our lives. Upon discovering that we are beloved sons and daughters, loved into being, we are filled with gratitude to love and be loved, and share that love to all ends of the Earth.

Because He First Loved Us ... each of us is called to welcome others into a relationship with God that will transform them completely. **Because He First Loved Us ...** we have been given an indescribable gift; we seek to share that love with others.

I am excited about the future of the Catholic faith in Western Montana, because I am excited by the mission

and life of our Catholic faith. We cannot achieve this mission without your own conversion and support.

Every heart in this Diocese is being called closer to the Lord: to be grateful, to be generous, to be more like Jesus in every moment. This is the challenge God gives to us.

I ask for your prayers and support; know of my continued prayers for you.

In Christ, I am

Most Reverend Austin A. Vetter
Bishop of Helena



We invite you to prayer.

Quiet your mind, your heart, your breath. Take a moment to read the scripture. Now read it in silence two more times, slowly, focusing on what God's word is speaking to you.

As you read the scripture...

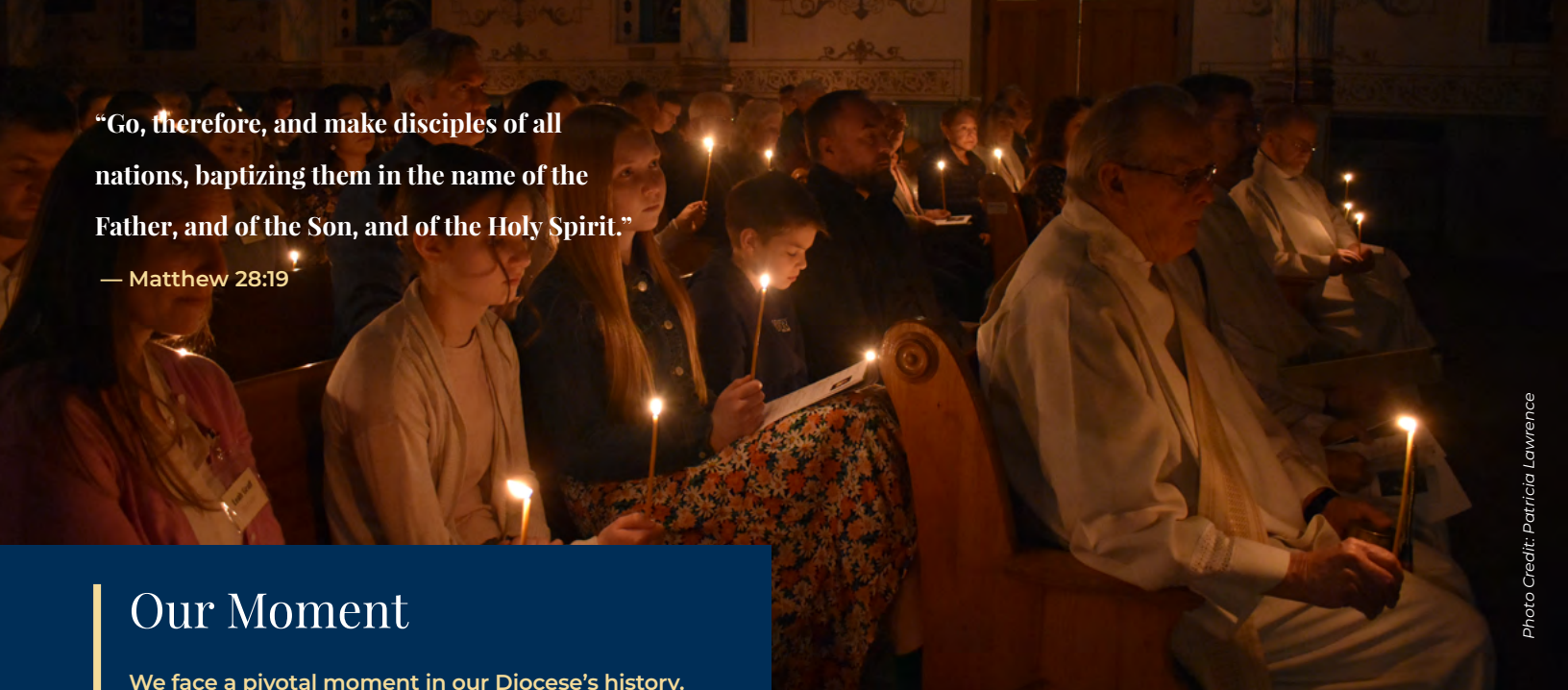
What word or phrase stood out to you?
Use this as your invitation to dialogue with God.

What images/experiences/feelings do these words raise in you?
Share your answers with God.

Why is God giving you this message?
*Quietly become aware of God's loving presence.
Take time to rest silently in God.*

Thank you for joining us in this encounter with Christ.

- 7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.
- 8 Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.
- 9 In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him.
- 10 In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.
- 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another.
- 12 No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.
- 13 This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit.
- 14 Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world.
- 15 Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God.
- 16 We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.
- God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.
- 17 In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world.
- 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love.
- 19 We love *because he first loved us.*
1 John 4:7-19

A photograph of a church service. In the foreground, a young girl with long dark hair is looking down at a book. Next to her, a young boy is also looking down at a book. In the background, several other people are seated, many holding lit candles. The lighting is dim, with the primary light source being the candles and some overhead lights. The atmosphere appears solemn and focused.

“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.”

— Matthew 28:19

Our Moment

We face a pivotal moment in our Diocese’s history.

We recognize the changes that our Diocese and parishes have seen during the past few generations. We continually experience the stresses of a culture that is becoming increasingly secular. We know that families are increasingly isolated, fragmented, and polarized.

But we also know there is great hope in Jesus Christ – because through Him, all things are possible.

Jesus’ words to His disciples in the Great Commission gave them the simple mission to witness – and proclaim – His Gospel to all ends of the earth.

That mission given to Jesus’ first disciples is the same mission for each of us in the Diocese of Helena. **Because He First**

Loved Us ... we are called to do the same, to invite others into a relationship with God that will transform them completely inside and out.

As disciples, our paramount mission must be to help people encounter Jesus Christ personally and intimately, in a genuine living relationship.

After prayerful reflection and thoughtful planning, we have identified several strategic priorities totaling \$30 million which we know will advance the mission of the Church. We are excited to begin a Campaign for Catholic Life in the Diocese of Helena to ensure key investments in our people, parishes, and ministries – all with an eye toward sharing Christ’s love.

Our Campaign for Catholic Life will prioritize the following:

Grow Priestly Vocations

\$8,000,000

\$8,000,000 will be raised to establish an endowment fund for ongoing seminarian education and priestly formation to ensure, in perpetuity, that no vocation is hindered due to financial need.

Care for Our Retired Priests

\$4,000,000

The campaign will raise \$4,000,000 to provide greater security for the retirement needs of our priests who have served us so well.

Strengthen Our Parishes

\$9,000,000

Our local parish is the place where we encounter the depth of God's love, and this is where our efforts will be centered. More than \$9,000,000 is expected to be allocated to parishes for their own needs and dreams.

Restore Our Diocesan Cathedral

\$1,500,000

\$1,500,000 from the campaign will be used to restore the exterior of our diocesan cathedral and ready it for the next generation of disciples.

Help Others Discover Christ

\$4,500,000

The campaign will provide \$4,500,000 to create an endowment for ongoing support for our shared work of evangelization so that we can more effectively reach out to all of God's people wherever they may be in their faith journey.

Working together, this campaign will empower each of us to embrace our faith more fully and to share the healing, teaching, and loving presence of Jesus Christ with all those we encounter. The campaign will help us lead more people to the Kingdom of God.



Photo Credit: Patricia Lawrence

“No one can see Christ; but everyone sees the priest, and through him they wish to catch a glimpse of the Lord!”

— St. Pope John Paul II



Photo Credit: John Ramirez



Photo Credit: John Ramirez

Grow Priestly Vocations

\$8,000,000

Priests take on the role of shepherds, administrators, counselors, and teachers. The most vital role of the priesthood is spiritual leadership through the celebration of the sacraments.

It's no secret that a shortage of priests in our Diocese has left many parishes without a pastor. Some parishes tragically have had to suspend liturgical and sacramental celebrations, as our Diocese acknowledges the fact

that we have far fewer priests than just a decade ago.

But by God's grace, many men in the Diocese of Helena are responding to the call to discern a vocation to the priesthood. Last year, our Diocese was blessed to have had 15 seminarians studying for the priesthood, which is extraordinary for a diocese our size!

The cost for one seminarian's annual education averages in excess of

\$60,000, including tuition, room and board, health care, and travel. Due to our exceptional number of seminarians, the total cost to the Diocese approaches \$1 million annually.

We will raise \$8 million to establish an endowment fund for ongoing seminarian education and priestly formation to ensure, in perpetuity, that no vocation is hindered due to financial need.

Care for Our Retired Priests

\$4,000,000

The priests of our Diocese have given their lives in service to God – and us.

Whether assigned to a parish, mission, school, college, hospital, or another ministry, our priests celebrate Mass, preach the Gospel, hear our confessions, officiate our weddings, baptize and teach our children and grandchildren, and comfort us in our sorrow. They are there for us in the best and worst times of our lives.

Today, we have 25 retired priests receiving retirement benefits. More than a dozen priests currently with assignments are within ten years of retirement. We will soon have more retired priests than active ones.

After a lifetime of sacrifice and service, no priest should face retirement with financial uncertainty. While parishes support their priests during their active ministry, once retired, our priests depend on their monthly diocesan retirement income, Social Security, and personal savings to meet all their living expenses.

Because of the great needs among our aging clergy, this retirement plan for priests is underfunded by about 40%. Through this campaign, we seek to grow the trust to meet the anticipated need of our aging priests.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to assure our priests a comfortable and peaceful retirement after many years of faithful and generous service. **We will raise \$4,000,000 to provide greater security to the retirement needs of our priests who have served us so well.**



Photo Credit: John Ramirez

“. . . like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

— 1 Peter 2:5





“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

— Colossians 3:16

Strengthen Our Parishes

\$9,000,000



The love of Jesus is at the heart of our Diocese. Afame with a love for His people, the place where we encounter the depth of His love is at the local parish.

As Catholics, we experience our faith most profoundly through the sacraments, participation in liturgy, and the relationships made in our local parish community. It is through our parishes that our faith is passed down, lived, and sustained. Each of our 56 parishes and 38 missions is a community of faith, action, and hope.

But most of our parishes also find themselves in need of renewal of their ministries, programs, and facilities. We must ensure these sacred spaces are able to provide opportunities to encounter Christ, as well as to equip people to reach out to

those who are no longer practicing their faith or those who are seeking a faith home for the first time.

Because healthy, vibrant parishes are so critical, the largest share of gifts to the campaign will be directed to strengthening our parishes, with 40 percent of the funds that parishes collect remaining in parishes to be used for their own evangelization needs.

The parish is where the Church lives, and the **Because He First Loved Us ...** campaign will provide parishes with more than \$9 million for their own needs and dreams. The Eucharist is the center of that home, and a key objective of our campaign efforts will be to strengthen our life in the Eucharist by strengthening our parishes for mission through the transformative love of our Lord.

Restore Our Diocesan Cathedral

\$1,500,000

The Cathedral of St. Helena is far more than just an awe-inspiring sight on the town's skyline; it is also the mother church of the entire Diocese of Helena. As the mother church, it is a symbol of the Church's universality, standing as a sign of both the local church and of our communion with the entire Catholic Church throughout the world.


The nearly century-old interior of the Cathedral has been lovingly restored over the years and truly symbolizes both

the glory of God and of the Church. But the outside of the Cathedral is a different story.

Visitors to this house of God are greeted by prominent caution signs, warning of "POSSIBLE FALLING ROOF DEBRIS." The limestone exterior of the Cathedral is dingy and streaked, having last been cleaned in 1991. Similarly, three decades have passed since the structure has been tuckpointed and, because of weather, the eaves and façade have degraded. The granite exterior front

steps which lead visitors to the nave need strengthening and replacement. And the majestic red spires, rising 230 feet above the street, and other areas of the roof are in desperate need of repair.

This once-in-a-generation restoration of the exterior of the Cathedral is expected to cost \$4.5 million and, owing to its significance as the mother church in our diocese, **\$1,500,000 from the campaign will be used to restore the exterior of the cathedral and ready it for the next generation of disciples.**



“Sacred buildings and requisites for divine worship should, moreover, be truly worthy and beautiful and be signs and symbols of heavenly realities.”

— General Instruction of the Roman Missal #288

Help Others Discover Christ

\$4,500,000

Challenges abound for us. The number of active Catholics in the Diocese has dropped from 66,000 in 2000 to just 46,000 in 2022. Enrollment in Catholic schools and in faith formation programs is down. The number of people getting married in the church has fallen by forty percent since 2000. And sadly, for many, Mass attendance is now an entirely optional weekend activity.

Knowing this, what is God asking of each of us? How will we help others encounter Christ? **Every disciple is baptized into the mission of evangelization.** As such,

we will join with our clergy in accepting our responsibility as people of prayer, actively participating in the Mass each Sunday and intentionally offering God our lives.

Because He First Loved Us ... we must learn to share that love by:

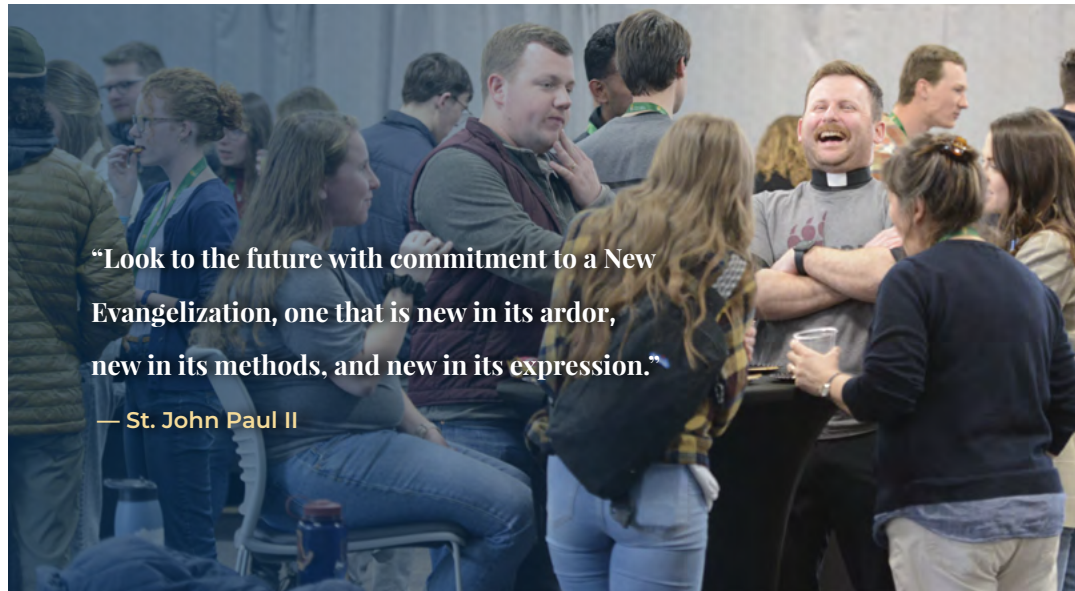
- Involvement in innovative outreach to our communities.
- Training our clergy and parish staff in effective evangelization
- Mentoring the laity in evangelization strategies
- Providing ongoing formation in the faith to children and adults

We will emulate Jesus' ministry of mercy to those in need – to the neglected, the fallen away, the hurting, the unseen and the unloved, so that in doing so, we may set hearts ablaze for the love of our Lord.

Embracing anew the Great Commission of Jesus to “go and make disciples,” we will provide \$4,500,000 to create an endowment fund to provide ongoing support for our shared work of evangelization, so that we can more effectively reach out to all of God's people wherever they may be in their faith journey.



Photo Credit: Patricia Lawrence



“Look to the future with commitment to a New Evangelization, one that is new in its ardor, new in its methods, and new in its expression.”

— St. John Paul II

An Invitation to Love as Stewards

“It is He who gives to everyone life and breath and everything.” – Acts 17:25

All that we are, all that we have, we owe to the loving grace of the One whom we come to know as our Lord Jesus Christ who loved us first—and loves us always.

None of us would know love without Christ’s presence in the world. But because of Christ’s presence ... because Jesus first Loved us ... we love.

Everything starts with God’s love for us. Every good deed we undertake, every kind word we utter, and every time we reach out to our neighbor is rooted in love.

And because He loves us, God has entrusted each of us with unique talents, gifts, and resources. He always gives us more than we deserve; but He does so because He wants us to be stewards, not owners, of what He has entrusted to us. He wants us to use our blessings to bless others—and to lovingly commit ourselves to build His Kingdom here and now.

Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that “to love is to give, to offer what is ‘mine’ to the other.” Quite beautifully, ***we find our life when we give it away as Jesus did.***

Please join your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ throughout Western Montana as we seek to use God’s blessings God’s way for God’s glory. Join us as we continue the work of building God’s Kingdom of love in our world.

May we be people who love ... ***Because He First Loved Us***



Campaign Prayer

O Lord, my God, teach my heart this day
where and how to see You, where and how to find You.

You have made me and remade me,
and You have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess, and still I do not know You.
I have not yet done that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek You,
for I cannot seek You unless You teach me,
or find You unless You show Yourself to me.

Let me seek You in my desire;
let me desire You in my seeking.
Let me find You by loving You;
let me Love You when I find You.

AMEN

— St. Anselm



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