



BISHOP WACK'S Pastoral Letter Overview



BISHOP WILLIAM
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His Excellency William A. Wack, CSC, will publish his first pastoral letter as Bishop of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee on November 5, 2021, the 46th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese. Following is an overview of “Sharing the Gift.”

SUMMARY

“The Church exists to evangelize!” The words of Pope St. Paul VI encapsulate the Christian mission. Put simply, if we believe that Jesus Christ suffered and died for us, and then rose again to set us free from sin and death, we are compelled to share that Good News with everyone around us.

In this letter, I hope to instruct, exhort, and join you in living as a missionary disciple of our Lord. I ask all the faithful in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee to read it, pray with it, and put it into practice so as to heed Jesus’ call: “Go and make disciples of all nations ...” (Mt. 28:19)

INTRODUCTION

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ is not something that we, His followers, do in our spare time. It is not optional. It is the heart of everything we do.

We have received the incredible gift of everlasting life, and all God asks of us is that we extend it to others.

BIBLICAL HISTORY

From the first moment of creation, God has been calling humanity to communion with Him. The story of Israel is ultimately one of God selecting a people to

form after His own heart in anticipation of the coming of Christ and His saving mission.



EARLY CHURCH

Filled with the Holy Spirit, the early Christians preached the Good News fearlessly, establishing local churches everywhere so that they, in turn, could preach and evangelize more people. The witness of the martyrs demonstrates the essential role of holiness of life and total love for the Lord in bringing people to Christ.

CONSTANTINE AND CHRISTENDOM AND THE “DEATH” OF CHRISTENDOM

Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire throughout the 4th century. With the expansion of this vast political system — and, in the many centuries that followed, the colonization of new lands — Christianity spread exponentially in the world. Much more recently, however, it has come to pass that

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Christianity is no longer accepted as the ‘norm’ for the (Western) world; rather, it appears to be under attack nearly everywhere. We can no longer take it for granted that people know the Lord and the Gospel.



RENEWAL: THE NEW EVANGELIZATION AND MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

Vatican II recognized the need to return to our original charism. Pope St. John Paul II was the first to use the term “New Evangelization” and described it as being new “in its ardor, methods, and expression.” Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI taught that our faith is not merely a program but rather an opening of the heart to the person of Jesus Christ. Finally, Pope Francis has spoken of missionary discipleship, urging clergy and laity alike to seek out and save the lost as Jesus did.

EVANGELIZATION HISTORY OF THE DIOCESE OF PENSACOLA-TALLAHASSEE

The history of our local church is rooted in evangelization. The seeds were sown here by the Holy Spirit before the first missionaries came to this land. Northwest Florida is the first place in the contiguous United States to have been evangelized, and we have maintained a mission territory character for the entirety of our existence. It is worth noting that even after hundreds of years, Catholics only comprise five percent of the population across 18 counties. This realization compels us more than ever to answer the call of discipleship.



EVANGELIZATION TODAY

Especially considering the decline in church attendance, evangelization is urgently needed. The goal is not simply to bring people back to church; it is to help them find LIFE in Christ Jesus. One need not be eloquent or perfect to do this. There are specific, concrete ways for each one of us to bring others to the Lord; many efforts are currently underway in our Diocese. It is imperative that we shift our thinking of parishes as ends unto themselves, to being centers of evangelization and formation.

GUIDED BY THE BLESSED MOTHER AND THE SAINTS

In all of this, we call on Mary, our Blessed Mother, and all the saints to guide us and to intercede for us. They, too, received the gift of the faith from the Holy Spirit and from others in their own day. We honor this “cloud of witnesses” for their embrace of the Gospel and for their zealous efforts to evangelize others. †

The Pastoral Letter will conclude with a closing prayer; appendix, which will include a brief history of the Diocese, as well as evangelization resources; and endnotes.

