



Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Toledo +

4 January 2017

Dear Priests, Deacons and Pastoral Leaders,

As we strive to carry forward the spirit of the recently concluded Jubilee Year of Mercy, we recall Pope Francis' request to make evident that the Church's mission is to be a witness of compassion. First, by being recipients of the Father's compassion for us through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, and then by being witnesses of that same mercy and compassion for our brothers and sisters.

In this context we see that love is never abstract, but visible and concrete. God not only affirms, but demonstrates His love through action. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." Mercy is never abstract, it is active, and it is through action that we take up anew the work of evangelization in the Diocese of Toledo.

This letter is intended to convey my sincere hope that the Jubilee Year of Mercy has set the tone of evangelization for our Diocese for years to come.

It is my wish that our encounter with mercy this past year carries us forward in what our Holy Father calls, "a move from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly *missionary* pastoral ministry." In order to accomplish this, I would request each of our parish staffs to reflect on how our parishes may find new ways to extend open arms to the non-practicing parishioner and the unchurched.

Allow me to highlight one particular resource the Pastoral Center can assist with implementing new strategies for evangelization of the unchurched as well as our fallen away parishioners. *The Alpha in a Catholic context program* is a series of interactive weekly sessions that explore the basics of the Christian faith. Alpha is a proven parish tool for evangelization that is being used by thousands of Catholic parishes in over 70 countries around the world.

The Alpha program is based on welcome and hospitality, sharing and prayer. Each session includes a meal, a talk and small group discussion, where no question is too simple and no answer is pre-packaged. Alpha offers an excellent environment for those asking the big questions of life in a friendly, open, and informal environment. The Alpha in a Catholic Context program has had concrete positive results in Catholic parishes across the country and already in parts of our own Diocese.

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It is my wish that programs such as Alpha can include former “outsiders” as evangelized “insiders” in parish ministries and in deeper formation such as the *Symbolon* program. Our Pastoral Center is ready to assist in these initiatives as well. If you have any inquiries on evangelization efforts at your parish or require assistance starting an Alpha at your parish please contact our Department of Discipleship and Family Life. Our Evangelization Coordinator & Staff will be ready to assist you in any need with their best efforts. Such as the *Symbolon* program now available through Formed.org.

Please know how much I appreciate your commitment to help in nurturing and advancing the graces of evangelization begun with the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and I look forward to the fruits our Lord has planned for our Diocese. With a remembrance in prayer and depending on your good prayers, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel E. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas
Bishop of Toledo