



CALLED TO CONVERSION AND HOLINESS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

As I begin my eighth year as Archbishop of Philadelphia, I am filled with profound gratitude to Almighty God for the countless blessings that he has bestowed upon our local Church. These blessings are daily evident to me, and find their expression in all of you: the bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and laity of our Archdiocese.

I am mindful of the words from the Gospel according to Saint John, which also serve as my episcopal motto – *Verbum caro factum est* – *the Word became flesh* (Jn 1:14). The Son of God took our flesh, our humanity as his own, so that we could share in his divinity. This is the great calling of the Christian: to be united with Jesus Christ and to share in his mission. It is a calling that finds expression in every time and place, including our own. It is the call to conversion and holiness.

As the Archbishop of Philadelphia, I write at this time to inform you of pastoral initiatives that are underway in our Archdiocese which find their impetus in the call to conversion and holiness. I wish also to confirm my priorities as Shepherd of this local Church to ensure that we are faithful to the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ.

The call to conversion and holiness is at the core of the history of our great Archdiocese. Only two years ago, we celebrated the Bicentennial of our local Church. In doing so, we were provided the opportunity to reflect on our rich heritage. We were reminded of the fidelity of so many priests, religious, and lay faithful, who had accepted the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ as their own. We are daily reminded of this history in countless ways: through the numerous parishes that they built and served; through Catholic education, especially our elementary and secondary school system; through the supremely providential role fulfilled by Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary; and through the vast charitable work accomplished in our midst through the institutions, agencies, and programs of Catholic Human Services.

Our Bicentennial Year was a graced time for the Archdiocese. The very act of celebrating history does not leave one with mere nostalgia, however, but of necessity it also draws into clearer relief the challenges and blessings of the present moment and the importance of looking to “a future

full of hope” (Jer 29:11), so that our very faith may be continually and fruitfully celebrated for the present generation and for each new generation to come.

In fact, the fidelity of past generations does not make us complacent in our faith, but compels us to recommit ourselves to that faith and to recognize our own place in history. Therefore, the call to conversion and holiness takes on an urgency so that we may continue to live this rich heritage and actively transmit it. Our share in the mission of Christ then is a seamless receiving, living and transmitting of the faith passed onto us.

While the call to conversion and holiness is universal and a part of the fabric of every time and place, each generation faces challenges particular to its own time. In our day, I am keenly aware of the challenges faced by our people in living out their faith. I am also aware of the challenges that face the institution of the Church, challenges which confront our parishes, our Catholic schools, our charitable services and so many other entities of the Church.

Some of these challenges are perennial and have confronted the Church and her members in every age. Some are unique to our own day. We are reminded, however, that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

“Super-Priorities” of the Archdiocese

The basis of all our efforts, from the founding of our Archdiocese to the present day, is our fidelity to Jesus Christ and his Church. It is a fidelity which is expressed in our turning away from sin and our turning toward Christ. It is a fidelity rooted in the Sacraments and it is a fidelity that unites us as members of the Body of Christ.

During the Bicentennial Year, I spoke of certain “super-priorities” for the Archdiocese, so that together, we might be ever more effective in advancing the mission of Christ. I wish now to reaffirm my commitment to these super-priorities and emphasize them as the means of our recommitment to conversion and holiness. These super-priorities will sustain all our efforts and encourage us to be faithful in carrying on the mission of Christ.

The Holy Eucharist – First, I renew my call for an evermore worthy and fervent celebration of the Holy Eucharist, especially on Sundays. In addition, flowing from our celebration of the Mass, the abiding gift of Jesus in the Eucharist calls us to deepen our love and devotion for the Most Blessed Sacrament through Eucharistic adoration. Christ’s mission was perfected on the Cross, and so it is through his Sacrifice that we are most intimately united with him and join in his mission of salvific love.

The Sacrament of Confession – If we are to experience the fullness of union with Jesus in the Eucharist, then we must have hearts generously in love with him. Therefore, I renew my call to all of us to be a people of conversion, in particular through more frequent celebration and use of the Sacrament of Confession. Through this Sacrament, we receive in Christ the Divine Healer the forgiveness of our sins. Yet, the glory of this Sacrament rests not only in the forgiveness of our

sins, but also in the gift of sanctifying grace that cleanses us and disposes us for the particular graces needed to withstand temptation and to remain faithful and holy in our daily lives.

Special Need for Priestly Vocations in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia – The Sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession do not exist without the ministry of the priest. Through the ministry of priests, Christ shepherds his Church and makes his merciful love effective in our lives. And so, I renew my call to pray for and encourage vocations to the priesthood, so that many more young men will respond to the invitation of Christ to minister to his people in the Church of Philadelphia.

The worthy and fervent celebration of the Holy Eucharist; more frequent reception of the Sacrament of Confession; the daily offering of prayers for an increase of priestly vocations – these are the super-priorities that must guide us as we seek to follow the call to conversion and holiness. They must also be the basis for other evangelizing and sanctifying initiatives as we support the vocation to Christian marriage, promote vocations to the consecrated life, and encourage all those called to a dedicated single life of service.

Strengthened by the Eucharist, by the grace of Confession, and encouraged by the presence of Christ among us through the ministry of the priest, our Catholic faith will more deeply take root in our daily lives.

Evangelization

Cognizant of the riches of our faith, we will become a people more committed to evangelization, to sharing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ with others through witness and through charity, especially with the poor, the marginalized and all those who, for one reason or another, have set aside the practice of their Catholic faith. We will strive to educate our children in the truths of our Catholic faith through Catholic schools and parish religious education programs that form the whole person, mind, body and soul. We will recognize that our faith formation is not limited to our young people or to sacramental preparation, but that the deepening of our knowledge of the faith is a program for adults for the whole of life. And as we recognize the fullness of unity to which conversion and holiness call us, we will realize that our apostolic endeavors, especially in our parishes, must serve all ethnic communities that make their home among us. We must be particularly attentive to our recent immigrants, including large numbers of Asians and Africans, and the most numerous group, the Hispanics. In addition, there must always be a special concern in our parishes for persons with disabilities, for the sick, and for those in suffering and pain.

If all these are to be priorities, then the call to conversion and holiness will also demand of us an examination of our resources and the ends to which they are dedicated.

Financial Stewardship

Presently, our Capital Campaign, *Heritage of Faith ~ Vision of Hope*, is drawing to a close. This campaign has been an extraordinary undertaking designed to meet particular challenges for the

Church at this historic time. Recognizing the heritage of our faith and the vital works of the Church, our people have generously responded to the campaign. Such sacrificial generosity is rooted in our Christian identity, by which the blessings we have received are readily shared with the whole community of the Church.

I am grateful to all who share their resources so readily and who collaborate in the mission of the Church in this important way. I encourage all the faithful of the Archdiocese to continue to be good stewards and to support the vital pastoral works which the Archdiocese takes up daily.

In response to the good stewardship of our people, the Archdiocese pledges careful and responsible stewardship of this generosity, and renewed stewardship of all her financial and material resources. Our resources must be used efficiently and effectively in support of the essential mission of the Church to help her people heed the call to conversion and holiness.

Strategic Planning for Education

One of the greatest assets of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is Catholic education, especially our elementary and secondary schools and our various parish religious education programs. The schools and programs form a part of the rich heritage of our local Church that over time has educated countless youth in the truths of our Catholic faith. Such an education provides the foundation for a life of virtue and committed discipleship. I express profound gratitude to all our generous and dedicated Catholic educators over the years, acknowledging the outstanding particular contribution of our women and men religious.

Our schools and religious education programs also serve to evangelize our communities, introducing children and families to the Gospel and welcoming them into the Church. The Church herself is strengthened by such outreach and each local community is enlivened by welcoming new members into the parish.

If our schools and parish religious education programs are to be more effective, however, it is essential that they truly serve the purposes for which they exist. The realities of changing demographics, lower enrollments in some schools, and the higher costs of providing quality education are greatly straining some of our schools and religious education programs. We must, therefore, review all our schools and religious education programs to ensure that they are effective in their mission and that the religious education of our youth remains the priority in their operation and maintenance.

I have asked the Office for Catholic Education to undertake a comprehensive study of our elementary and secondary schools, as well as our religious education programs, and to recommend an effective plan to respond to the challenges which we are facing in this critically important component of our mission. The Office for Catholic Education will be guided in this effort by the services of a “Blue Ribbon Commission” whose members I will be announcing. The Commission will be composed of various experts who will assist us in developing our plan to realign and strengthen Catholic education in the Archdiocese. The recommendations of the Commission are

expected by the fall of 2011. Pending those recommendations, school issues requiring more immediate attention will continue to be addressed.

There will be no one solution to the challenges facing us, as the needs and difficulties of each community must be assessed. Yet this effort will be guided by the one goal of forming and educating all of our youth in the Catholic faith.

Planning Initiatives for Archdiocesan Office Structure

As Archbishop of Philadelphia, I am greatly assisted through our Archdiocesan Curia. These offices support me in the governance of the Archdiocese and provide an invaluable service on behalf of all our people. So that they may be ever more effective in their work and aligned properly with the priorities of the Archdiocese as outlined in this letter, I have directed the Auxiliary Bishops to collaborate in developing a realistic plan to restructure archdiocesan offices to better serve our parishes and other institutions for implementation in July 2011, the beginning of the next fiscal year. It is my hope that through this reorganization, we will reduce any redundancy of activities and unnecessary bureaucracy in our structure, and help to ensure that archdiocesan offices are more efficient, effective, and responsive in their service.

Parishes and our Priests

If we are to respond to the call to conversion and holiness and are to realize our super-priorities and the other priorities which flow from them, then our careful attention must also be given to the heart of our Archdiocese, our parishes. It is in the parish that we are configured to Christ through Baptism and so given a share in his divinity. It is in the parish that our sins are forgiven through the Sacrament of Confession, that we receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, and that we are permitted a share in the very sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the celebration of Mass and the reception of Holy Communion. In the parish, our families unite with the whole family of God.

We are blessed in the Archdiocese by the vibrancy of so many parish communities, by the fidelity of our priests, the service of our deacons, the contribution of our religious, and the active participation of our laity. This vibrancy does not deny the need to examine our parishes to ensure their holiness, but rather this rich history and vibrancy demands that we be proactive in guaranteeing that our parishes have what is needed to accomplish their role in the mission of Christ.

Specifically, we must examine our parishes to see if the super-priorities of the Archdiocese are truly evident in the life of the community. What additional attention must be given to ensure a worthy and fervent celebration of the Holy Eucharist? How attentive are the people to the need for ongoing conversion and more frequent reception of the Sacrament of Confession? And how diligent is the parish community in fostering and in praying for priestly vocations, which in turn helps create a culture of vocations, an attentiveness to God's will in the life of each person?

If we are to respond to the call to conversion and holiness, our parishes must be centers of prayer and communion. Conversion leads to union with God and communion with his Church. Hence, a parish that is rooted in conversion will experience a deep communion among its parishioners, and with the Archdiocese and the universal Church.

Therefore, we must try to ensure that each parish possesses what is necessary for it to promote effectively the mission of Christ. To do so requires that we examine the demographics of our parishes in light of the number of priests available to serve our communities, in light of the migration of our people, and in light of our financial resources to maintain and support our parishes. This review of parishes will begin in January 2011.

Such an examination is itself a moment of great hope for each parish community. It serves as an opportunity to renew the commitment of the people to the priorities of our Catholic faith and our archdiocesan family. It also calls forth the gifts of all in the parish and presents an opportunity for collaboration appropriate to the state of life of each person. In order to accomplish this examination, I have announced the appointment of a coordinator of Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives, who will work closely with the Auxiliary Bishops in coordinating our planning.

As we study the needs of the Archdiocese and respond to those needs as required, we will have the benefit of the experiences of other dioceses, who have undertaken similar initiatives in recent years, so that we may learn from what has been effective and less than effective.

In all of this, I reiterate the necessity of being attentive to the increasing cultural diversity of the Archdiocese. Our history is one of an immigrant Church, who continues to open her arms in welcome to those who are new in our midst. We must also recommit ourselves in our care for the poor and less fortunate, so that their needs may remain our concern and draw from us a response of genuine charity.

Throughout our 200 year history as a diocese, the Church of Philadelphia has been blessed by countless people who have daily followed the call to conversion and holiness. I am profoundly grateful to all the faithful of the Archdiocese for their fidelity to Christ and His Church. I encourage each of you to remain open to the call to conversion and holiness in your own life so that the Church herself may be drawn ever deeper into the mystery of Christ's love. And so that our pastoral initiatives may be truly enhanced by all, I ask the full collaboration and dedicated partnership of everyone in the months ahead.

In the name of Jesus the Good Shepherd, I turn to all those who, for one reason or another, no longer attend Mass, and I invite you to return to the community of the Church, where you will be welcomed with joy and honor.

To you, our lay faithful, I say: By your willingness to be involved in the Church's life, either by active witness and service, or quiet prayer and sacrificial offerings, you are a true sign of hope. You who are married providently show forth the fruitfulness of God's love through your openness to his will. You who are single freely offer yourselves in service to others. I encourage you all to

be a leaven in our world so that the conversion and holiness you experience may be a sign to all people of God's mercy and goodness.

For you, our men and women religious, I give thanks to Almighty God, recognizing your service to the Archdiocese, in particular in our parishes, social services and educational institutions. I encourage you to be the charity of Christ and a sign of his holiness, faithfully making your charisms ever more evident in service to the Church.

For you, our seminarians, I offer thanks as I see your generous willingness to follow Jesus as you discern a priestly vocation. May you persevere, remaining united with Christ and open to his grace, which makes all things new.

For you, our deacons, I express deep appreciation as you make Christ the Servant present in our midst. May your selfless service daily renew you in your dedication to the Church.

Turning to you, my brother priests, with immense gratitude I acknowledge your fidelity and tireless service to Christ and his faithful people. I personally am ever thankful for your close collaboration and joyful zeal. I renew to you the challenge to be holy and to serve as icons of Christ's mercy and fidelity.

United with Mary, our Mother, with Saint Joseph, her husband, and with Saint John Neumann and Saint Katharine Drexel, our own patron saints, we give joyful praise to God for his countless blessings. Together let us renew our commitment to answer the call to follow our Lord Jesus Christ in hope, as we faithfully strive to fulfill our share in his mission, generously responding to his call to conversion and holiness.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Card. Rigali". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop of Philadelphia

October 19, 2010
Memorial of the North American Martyrs
Saint John de Brébeuf, Saint Isaac Jogues, and their companions