

Open Your Hearts in Welcome!

By Bishop Anthony B. Taylor
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Open your hearts in welcome! During the past 2½ years a number of our priests participated in the Good Leaders, Good Shepherds program and I participated in the bishop's version of that program.

In the most recent session for bishops, they emphasized identifying the biggest priorities for our dioceses over the next 18 months and then devising a single, clear unifying message ... a sort of "rallying cry" that will help us move forward in a focused way to the accomplishment of these goals, these priorities.

And so what is my rallying cry for the next 18 months? Open your hearts in welcome! Changes are headed our way and our openness to growth will enable us to embrace with loving hearts the blessings that the Lord is working among us today.

One such blessing is the new English translation of the Roman Missal, which we will begin to use starting the First Sunday of Advent this year. Another is the implementation of training in Natural Family Planning as a required component of marriage preparation in our diocese beginning in 2012. And a third blessing is the ongoing growth of our Church: there are many newcomers in our midst and we have twice as many seminarians as 10 years ago! The Lord has many blessings in store for us in the coming year. Open your hearts in welcome!

Open your hearts to welcome the new Roman Missal, which is a more formal, literal translation from the Latin than the more colloquial translation we are using presently — and as such is similar in some respects to the first English translation that we used following Vatican II. This new translation uses an elevated, noble, more nuanced vocabulary — often taken directly from Scripture.

The prayers said by the priests will be much richer — and a little harder to follow — because the theological precision of the Latin original will once again be rendered fully into English. This will take some getting used to, especially as we relearn some of the responses of the congregation at Mass.

For instance: we will now be responding "and with your spirit" — a direct translation of the Latin "et cum spiritu tuo" instead of our present more informal "and also with you." Some of the most jarring changes will be the result of returning to our former practice of using exact quotations from Scripture.

For instance, in consecrating the Precious Blood, the priest presently says: "It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven" but if you read the account of the Last Supper in the Gospels what Jesus actually says is that it "will be shed on behalf of many" — as opposed to "few" but also as opposed to a blanket free pass for those who die in a state of mortal sin.

Another example of returning to our former practice of quoting Scripture will be just before Communion when we will now say the exact words of the

Centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof” instead of our present more colloquial “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you.”

This new translation also reflects more accurately the fuller acknowledgement of personal sin contained in the Latin original and restores the striking of our chests during the Confiteor as we say “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.” This had been omitted in our present English translation, though significantly not the translations into Spanish and other languages.

Now we will be saying exactly the same prayers as are being said in every other language. People using missalettes with English and Spanish on facing pages will be able to verify this because starting November 27, the prayers in both languages will line up closely, which they don’t do at present.

One thing that will help us to open our hearts to welcome this new translation will be for us to use this time of change as an opportunity to learn more about the Liturgy in general. For this reason, I ask that every parish in our diocese offer an adult education course on the Liturgy this Fall to help us deepen our understanding of the Mass, and lead us to a more active and fruitful celebration of the liturgy. It is easier to welcome change when we understand why!

Open your hearts in welcome also to training in Natural Family Planning, which will now become a required part of marriage preparation in our diocese. Marriage in the United States is in a state of crisis: fifty percent of marriages end in divorce and our society suffers the consequences, especially our children. We have been trying to address this problem with well-designed marriage preparation programs, but the results of our efforts have been disappointing. Catholic marriages still end in divorce at about the same rate as those in the rest of society.

One component of our present marriage preparation program is a brief introduction to Natural Family Planning, the use of which is the single greatest predictor of marital success today. Unfortunately, very few couples actually take the next step and avail themselves of the training necessary to use Natural Family Planning in their own marriages — despite the fact that Natural Family Planning training is available at 17 locations in Arkansas.

Last fall our Presbyteral Council recommended to me a plan to make Natural Family Planning training a required component of marriage preparation for couples of child-bearing years, effective Jan. 1, 2012, which I am announcing today.

Our Office of Family Life has recruited and trained additional teaching couples in English and in Spanish so that Natural Family Planning training will be readily available in all eight deaneries of our diocese. Instructors and class schedules are available through the Family Life Office and diocesan website.

Open your hearts in welcome to the newcomers in our midst! Open your hearts to welcome those who are inquiring about our faith and those in RCIA preparing to enter the Church. Open your hearts to welcome immigrants and to thank God for them — they are an important part of the present and future

of our Church. Open your hearts to those who have chosen to retire in our beautiful, Natural State, and younger people who have relocated here and now call Arkansas their home.

Open your hearts to welcome back those previously inactive Catholics who are now, perhaps for the first time in their lives, getting to know Jesus personally and returning to the practice of their faith. We all know what it is like to be a newcomer and how much it means to receive a warm welcome in the place that is to be our new home — and no place is more home for a Catholic than our parish Church!

Let me tell you about an exemplary Catholic named Genevieve Charlton. She was part Pottawatomie (and French and Dutch) and attended St. Elizabeth Academy, a school for Native Americans in Purcell, Oklahoma founded by the future St. Katherine Drexel. She married a non-Catholic from Hollis, a town in the far southwest corner of the state ... in a county in which there were practically no other Catholics — the nearest Church was 45 miles away.

Due to her religion and humble origins, she was never really accepted by her husband's family — which was one of the most prominent families in town. She was a courageous woman who lived her faith sincerely and passed it on to her daughters who at the time were the only three Catholics in the local school.

One of the things that Genevieve prayed for most fervently was that through some miracle, God might establish a Catholic parish in her town and lo and behold, in the early 1960s a large group of Mexican migrant workers moved to Hollis ... and she realized that God had answered her prayers! I don't have time here to do justice to her remarkable story, but what most stands out in my memory is that the more Genevieve became aware of the appalling conditions in which these people were living, the more she became a crusader for the human rights of the disenfranchised.

She worked hard to improve their living conditions and get them medical care. She helped them enroll their children in school and prepared them to receive the sacraments. She helped people sort out misunderstandings that arose and was simply there for them as an advocate and as a friend. She regularly visited the barracks in which people were living in subhuman conditions, she talked to them about the Catholic faith and got a priest to come to celebrate Mass, first in a home, then in a theater and finally they were able to build a small mission Church.

She knew from her own bitter experience what it was like to be treated as an outsider and the big difference that one warm-hearted, courageous, welcoming person can make — especially a person courageous enough to speak up and defend their rights! The people stayed and Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic mission continues to thrive today, in part because this simple, faithful woman opened her heart in welcome and let God use her for his purposes. And the love was reciprocal — by the time I knew her, Genevieve was 75 years old and godmother of half the people in the parish! And she didn't even speak Spanish ... but she did speak the language of love!

Open your hearts to welcome God's call in your life! Another group of people who have opened their hearts to let God use them for his purposes are

the 35 seminarians and three discerners presently studying for the priesthood for the Diocese of Little Rock, four of whom will be ordained to the priesthood this coming spring and summer.

This month we celebrate the work of Bishop John B. Morris. In order to accomplish his priority of ministering to more Catholics and to reach out to non-Catholics, he needed more priests and opened St. John Seminary in Little Rock 100 years ago. The seminary opened in September 1911 with a mere 10 students.

Some of you will recall that our diocesan seminary was closed in 1968 for lack of vocations. Two years ago we were able to open, in a rented house in Little Rock, a house of formation for young men discerning a vocation. We outgrew that house and I am now happy to report that we are in the process of remodeling the former convent at Good Counsel parish in Little Rock to serve as our permanent house of formation going forward.

It will also serve as a gathering place for all of our seminarians when they are home from the seminary and as a center to promote future vocations among those who have just begun to discern God's call. The people of Good Counsel have opened their hearts to welcome our seminarians and our seminarians have opened their hearts to welcome God's call in their life. How about you? One-third of our priests in active ministry are over 70 years of age and even if all our current seminarians get ordained, we will still have a shortage of priests. Open your heart to welcome God's call in your life — whatever it is!

All of my four priorities for the diocese for the next 18 months are also highlighted in the recent issue of the Arkansas Catholic. In addition to the regular subscribers, ALL registered households should have received the special bilingual issue in the mail in the past couple of days. I encourage you to read this issue, subscribe if you are not already a subscriber and ask others to do the same. Our award-winning newspaper is my primary way of communicating to you about the new and exciting projects happening in the Church in Arkansas.

Open your hearts in welcome! Changes are headed our way and our openness to growth will enable us to embrace with loving hearts the blessings that the Lord is working among us today — the new Roman Missal, training in Natural Family Planning as a component of marriage preparation, the blessing of newcomers in our midst and the blessing of the Lord's call in our lives. In these and many other ways, the Lord has blessings in store for us in the coming year. Open your hearts in welcome!