

the source of renewed life in the Church.

52. Women have been remarkable donors of such life throughout the history of the Church. Contemporary women can be proud of this spiritual heritage in the lives of such saints as Monica, Elizabeth of Hungary, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Bridget of Sweden, Frances Cabrini, Elizabeth Ann Seton and many others.

These women were shining examples of the holy life — not only because they lived in God through prayer and humble service, but because they spoke the truth to the Church and called her to reform. Their voices spoke the truth in love and, because they did, the Church has been enriched.

We are ever in need of this kind of contribution from the women of the Church and as a community must search for ways to invite and encourage it. We are less strong than the Lord wants us to be when we do not have it.

53. Women today are called to articulate to the Church and the world the meaning and dynamics of their own spirituality. Such a spirituality may place more emphasis on relatedness, intimacy, growth and community than other forms prevalent today. This influence is needed by the whole Church, male and female, clergy and laity, for balance and wholeness.

54. Part of that call to women today is, I believe, to share this spirituality concretely within the Church by forming groups devoted to prayer, healing, meditation on the Scriptures and the study of the great mystical writers of the Church. This will contribute much to our ongoing renewal because it will strengthen the capacity of our communities — all of our people — to heal, encourage, reach out, sacrifice, bear one another's burdens, endure, console and share.

This effort will deepen our awareness that the spirituality of the Church is rooted in the gentleness of Christ who cared for his people like a hen gathering her chicks under her wings. Such spirituality reflects the life of God who is like the mother who cannot and will not forget the child of her womb, like the woman who searches for the lost coin and rejoices in finding it.

55. I ask all women to reflect on the holiness which is in them, to be aware of its power for the good of the Church, and to realize that it can be and is being shared by all of us in a multitude of ways.

VII

WOMEN
AND THE MISSION
OF TODAY'S
CHURCH

56. There are many ways to describe the nature and mission of the Church. In fact, the Church discovers and re-discovers herself and her mission in every age under the patient, persistent guidance of the Holy Spirit who continually speaks fresh words to us through the Sacred Scripture newly understood, through the re-examination of our traditions, and through the conditions and signs of the times.

All of us are called to put on Christ, to assume his mission to this world and to be consecrated to Christ's holy tasks: to teach what he understood and proclaimed; to unify with his justice, eagerness and compassion; to sanctify and be sanctified by the presence of his holiness, which is the love of God poured out upon us, first and everlastingly.

57. When we think of women and of all the laity in relation to this work of Christ, we realize that there is much which needs to be made more explicit, more open and more inclusive.

Vatican Council II affirmed that pastors have the "duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their services and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart." For from Christ "the whole body (being closely joined and knit together through every joint of the system according to the functioning in due measure of each single part) derives its increase to the building of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).¹⁷ The Fathers of Vatican Council II said of the laity:

They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world.¹⁸

58. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church was promulgated in November, 1964. As we look back on that document after eighteen years, we find ourselves remembering the many ways in which the Church has translated into its daily practice the meaning of such phrases as "their proper roles," and "the functioning in due measure" and "in their own way." At the same time we struggle to understand how the reality of the present day constantly calls the whole Church to a renewed understanding of her mission which is our "common-undertaking."

59. It is part of our work in this local Church to deepen our understanding of how each of us can become more fully "sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ."

For the present there is much which can and should be done to affirm the rights and responsibilities of lay men and women to participate in the teaching, shepherding and sanctifying work of the Church.

VII
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THE CHURCH
AS PROPHET,
TEACHER,
PROCLAIMER
OF THE GOSPEL

60. Jesus came among us to proclaim day in and day out the Good News of his Father's unfailing love for us. He taught and preached to those who would listen; he touched and healed as he moved among the people. He proclaimed the truth of God in his words and work, giving himself fully to his Father and his people in his moment of glorification.

It is for us to teach in the same way, with the same wholeheartedness, the same alertness to the present moment, the same singleness of purpose.

61. Women have for centuries demonstrated a natural teaching ability in their homes and far beyond. Now more than ever they need to be encouraged to teach the Gospel in every way — at home and away from home, in places of business and commerce, to adults and children, in schools and prayer centers, in public media and in personal spiritual direction.

Opportunities for their continued education in the faith should be encouraged so that their own growth might be fostered and their contributions to the life of the Church might be made even richer.

62. Many women have also demonstrated that they have the gift of inspired preaching, that they can explain the Word of God in a way so moving that it reaches the minds and hearts of their hearers and thereby strengthens their faith.

We have such women in this diocese. In our liturgical and other prayer assemblies, and in all events wherein we witness to our faith, we need to be creative in designing ways and providing opportunities for women with such gifts to share this richness with the community.

63. Our common vocation to proclaim the Good News should be of prime