

*"From age to age you gather a people to yourself,
so that from east to west
a perfect offering may be made
to the glory of your name."*

Eucharistic Prayer III

NOTES:

1. The *Constitution on The Sacred Liturgy* was the first of all the documents issued from the Second Vatican Council. It provides the basic doctrines and principles that have guided all liturgical reform since that time.

2. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was issued in 1992 and is a statement of Catholic doctrine and faith as seen through Scripture, Tradition, the Liturgy and the teachings of the Church through the ages.

3. This pattern of dying and rising with Jesus begins at our Baptism. St. Paul in the letter to the Romans says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Every time we celebrate Eucharist we remember that dying and rising of both Jesus and ourselves and renew our commitment to this way of life in Jesus.

4. Diocesan Mission Statement:

"We, the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Rochester, joyfully embrace our baptismal call to worship God, to preach the good news of Christ, to build up the community of faith and hope in the Holy Spirit, and to serve those in need.

As pilgrims nourished by the Eucharist for our journey of faith, we work with other churches and with all who seek harmony within the human family to advance the reign of God.

Continuing our diocese's century-old tradition of courage and creativity, and responding to the Second Vatican Council's call for the ongoing conversion of the Church, we strive to meet the needs of our community in this time and this place."

5. Synod Values:

In pursuit of this mission, our work will be guided by these values, which have emerged from our Synod process:

- To be a collaborative church
- To call forth lay leadership
- To utilize fully the richness of our diversity
- To be open, trusting and respectful in our dialogue with one another
- To engage in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

In the history of the Church, changing situations and conditions often compel the community of faith to reflect deeply on the way in which it lives and celebrates the mystery of Christ and to discern how best it can remain faithful to the gospel. Such a time of discernment has arrived for the local churches in our country and around the world. This is because of both the opportunities presented by changing patterns of ministry in the Church and the challenges presented as fewer priests are available to our growing parishes.

During this past year, primarily through the Priests' Council, the Priests' Convocation and our diocesan Spring Ministry Day, but also among many parish staffs, parish councils and liturgy committees, the Church of Rochester has begun to reflect on what it means to say the Eucharist is central to our lives as Catholic Christians. The question concerns both how we celebrate the Eucharist and what it means to be a eucharistic people living a eucharistic life.

THEOLOGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is the central event and action of reconciliation for a community of faith. God's people gather to hear the word, to offer themselves with the gifts of bread and wine, to remember the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ and, in so doing, to join themselves to Jesus Christ who is the Perfect Offering. We gather at the table, and then go forth to live what has been said and done. This action of sacrifice and worship is the way we celebrate and keep as our focal point the event of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Week after week, year after year, since the time of the earliest Christian communities, Catholic Christians have come together to celebrate Eucharist on the Lord's Day. This Sunday gathering of the community for the purpose of celebrating Eucharist has been and still is a hallmark of the Church.

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is crucial to our understanding of our Christian identity. It is the centerpiece of the Church's Liturgy, which the Second Vatican Council refers to as the "summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church's power flows." (Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy, #10)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the place of the Eucharist in the life of the community in this way: "It was above

all on 'the first day of the week,' Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection, that the Christians met to break bread.' From that time on down to our own day the celebration of the Eucharist has been continued so that today we encounter it everywhere in the Church with the same fundamental structure. It remains the center of the Church's life." (CCC#1343)

This understanding of the Eucharist as the action of the whole community gathered at prayer is a defining characteristic of our Catholic faith. In this action of praise and proclamation, offering and receiving, we know Jesus present in the midst of the assembly, in the proclamation of the Word and in the bread and wine, now the Body and Blood of Christ. In this eucharistic action we are fed and nourished so as to go out into the world to be the presence of Christ, to live Christ's dying and rising in our worlds of family and friends, work and play, neighbor and stranger.

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CALL FOR DIALOGUE

The increased awareness of this focus of our lives, coupled with the reality of a diminishing number of priests, occasions the current discussion. Because this discussion affects the entire diocesan church, I call upon all the people of the Church of Rochester to enter into this dialogue so that we may make decisions about our future that will be informed by the rich streams of our ancient faith, as well as the diversity, talent and imagination that God has given to us.

I ask that we enter into an open, prayerful and honest conversation in the same manner and with the same spirit that marked our recent Synodal discussions. Then, as the Holy Spirit works among us, we may arrive at answers that will carry us into the new millennium eager and ready to meet the challenge of living out the Gospel mandate to gather the People — to tell the Stories — and to break the Bread.

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