



Sunday, May 24, 2026
The Solemnity of Pentecost

Stewards of God's Gifts:
Building the Kingdom of God
in the Diocese of Belleville

The Power of the Holy Spirit

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit changes all things.

As an infant is brought to the living waters for the Sacrament of Baptism, the water itself is blessed, as it was in the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, but each time by the power of the Holy Spirit. "May the power of the Holy Spirit, O Lord, we pray, come down through your Son into the fullness of this font, so that all who have been buried with Christ by Baptism into death may rise again to life with him." The Spirit's presence moves one from the darkness of death to the hope of the resurrection.



Daily, in churches throughout the Diocese of Belleville and in the Church around the world, the power of the

Spirit is called down by priests upon humble bread and wine. "Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." In that moment, as the Church has believed through two millennia, the simplicity of the gifts, first given by God, becomes our hope for salvation: the Body and

Blood, Soul and Divinity of the One who came in the flesh to set us free.

The Holy Spirit regularly changes the lives of young people in the Sacrament of Confirmation, too. As the Spirit's precious gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord are poured out upon those already reborn from water and the Holy Spirit, we trust that these gifts will assist them in leading blameless lives, with the hope of eternal life in the joy of the Kingdom of God as they strive to live more obviously as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Again, as a young man is ordained for service as a Priest of Jesus Christ, we call upon the same Spirit. "May he be a trustworthy co-worker with our Order, so that by his preaching and through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the words of the Gospel may bear fruit in human hearts and reach even to the ends of the earth." These are amazing requests, made possible by the cooperation of the priest with the presence and propulsion of the Holy Spirit.



Let us recall, too, that first Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit drew people from many places into one. The Spirit's presence was known in the sound of a driving wind, in the appearance of tongues of fire, in the proclamation of different tongues. The power of the Spirit demolished the division of various dialects and languages and allowed them all to hear as they were able of the mighty acts of Jesus Christ in their own time and place.

Since January 7, 1887, the day Pope Leo XIII established the southernmost 28 counties in Illinois as the Diocese of Belleville, and even

before that, the People of God in Southern Illinois have known, witnessed, and marveled at the power and work of the Holy Spirit as followers of Christ. We have survived, have grown, and have thrived because of the Spirit's presence. And today is no different.



Servants on Christ's Mission

It could have been no accident that Archbishop Michael McGovern, then Bishop of Belleville and now Archbishop of Omaha, promulgated his Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Belleville,

Servants on Christ's Mission, on Pentecost Sunday, 2024. As you recall, in that plan, he boldly identified four fundamental priorities for the Diocese:

1. Youth and Young Adult Initiative
2. Family Life
3. Faith Formation
4. Revitalizing Parish Life and Ministry: Growing God's Family.

Under each priority, after broad consultation in the diocese, he articulated goals. These priorities of our diocesan Church



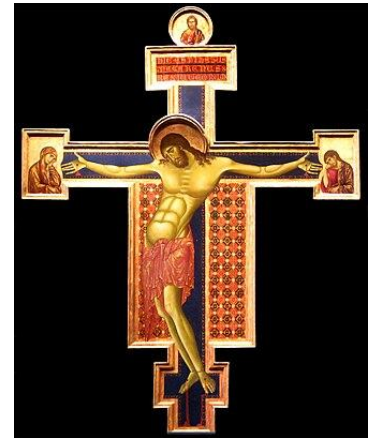
are not novel or outrageously progressive. However, they are the foundations of life in the Church in our day.

As I take up the work as Shepherd of this local Church as the tenth bishop, along with the ninth bishop before me, I envision the bold and beautiful fruits of parishes, partnerships, and communities who place these areas of ministry as our focus in the years ahead, fueled by the

presence of the Holy Spirit, and nourished by Word and Sacrament in the Eucharist.

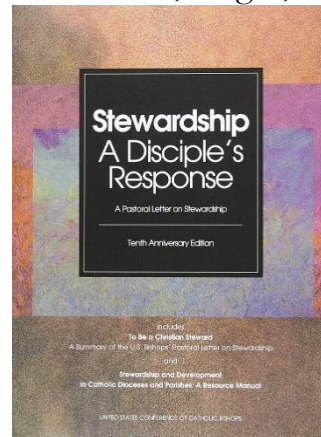
What is our Mission?

If we are to be credible witnesses of the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus our Lord, then we must each count ourselves, not merely in word, but in



action, **disciples** of the One who claims us and calls us. If we want young people in the Church, families thriving in the Church, well-formed believers in the Church, parishes marked by vitality, strength, service, and hope, then we must begin by counting ourselves, each one of us, as those **called** by Jesus to a particular way of life, **summoned** by Jesus to Him regularly, as daily students **taught** by the Master, as disciples who, with Jesus, **eagerly** hear the cry of the poor and answer that cry.

Nearly a quarter-century ago, the United States Bishops taught the faithful the answer to this question: if I am a disciple of Jesus, called, summoned, taught, and eager, then what? In



2002, in the Pastoral Letter entitled, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, our US Bishops taught the importance of hearing the call and making the intentional choice to follow Jesus. They reminded us that Jesus' way is not always our

first inclination, and that living as stewards, Christian disciples have extremely important work to do.

Stewardship begins with a glimpse of something new, a glimpse of God's grandeur, according to the Bishops. Quoting St. Paul, they teach what a Christian is to do: *Serve one another through love... bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 5:13, 6:2). Then they go on to say these pivotal words: "The life of a Christian steward, lived in imitation of the life of Christ, is challenging, even difficult in many ways; but both here and hereafter it is charged with intense joy." Do we all wish to be disciples of Jesus? If so, then our way of acting must be different than the world's way of acting.



Getting the Glimpse

For too long in too many places, not only in Southern Illinois, the fundamental question of the parish is: "Will we be next to close?" The question is far too close to: "Will I be the next to die?" Christian stewards do not envision a future of death and decay, but a Church that thrives, communities that are alive and holy and welcoming and growing.

Could our initial glimpse of God's grandeur come to us when we focus less on the question of death and more on the possibility of life?

How would the Church be in Southern Illinois if our primary questions had to do with hospitality, prayer, formation, and service rather than the fears of struggle and survival?

With firm faith and deep hope, I believe we can shift our gaze from the fear of death to

greater questions. Who needs to know the love of Christ today? Who hungers for the food and company we enjoy? How do we best welcome and form young people for following Christ? What is God asking of me today? Will I listen carefully to the call of God and the cry of the poor? How might we grow in our understanding of the Church's life-giving Tradition? Could I be a better disciple if I knew why the Church taught what it did or even what the Church actually teaches? These questions are all about life, about living after the example of Jesus. Notice that not one is about funding the parish school or keeping the lights on or the doors open for the sake of a building, but each is about using the gifts God has given us to build up the Church that is always mystical but practical, always conserving a tradition and reading the signs of the times. Schools and buildings and projects are part of a living Church. They are ministries of parishes and the diocese. But each fits into a beautiful vision of a Church alive, filled with grace, and drawing others to the way of Jesus.



Moving Forward

1. Understanding the Disciple's Response

Before **All Saints Day, November 1, 2026**, I intend for every parish to have sent leaders to one of several workshops on Stewardship offered by the Diocesan staff in various areas of the Diocese. These half-day retreats will be designed to help us all turn our thoughts away from mere survival toward the exquisite and

energetic life of following Jesus with deeper faith and greater hope. Realizing how gifted we are, we will seek to become practitioners of gratitude and generosity with our time in prayer, our talent for living the mission, and our treasure building the Kingdom.



2. Envisioning a Future of Hope

Beginning in **Advent (November 29) 2026**, smaller groups of parishes within a vicariate will have gathered for a two-hour discussion surrounding the practicalities of how our various regions might better build the Church. Each part of each Vicariate has so many astounding gifts to offer the rest of the diocese – gifts of practical wisdom, piety, faith, and joyful service, which sit alongside our struggles and fears. A future full of hope comes primarily from the presence of the Holy Spirit, teaching us how we might best put ourselves and our gifts at the service of something larger than ourselves, something greater than our families and parishes. What does your grouping of parishes have to offer the rest of the diocese along the lines of the four essential priorities: youth and young adults, family life, faith formation, and growing God’s family? What might others learn from us as we seek to work together for this hope-filled future?

3. The Church’s Fruitful Retreat: Lent



During **Lent of 2027**, beginning February 10, we will enter an intentional time of spiritual retreat diocesan-

wide, even as we go about the regular work of

the Lenten season. As we anticipate the joyful new life made visible in the catechumens and candidates for initiation into the Church, we will, as a Diocese, pray fervently for the outpouring of the Spirit in many different ways.

At the same time, groups of leaders in the diocese working together, in regional groups – priests, deacons, consecrated religious, and lay faithful, youth and seniors, men and women – will begin the significant task of en fleshing the priorities for the next two years for their region. Recognizing our resources – personnel, financial, and all others – how might we best build the Kingdom in our area?

4. Resurrection in Christ

Although there will be no magical solutions to the question of the number of parishes and schools and priests and deacons and religious and lay ministers we have



available, there very well may be a renewed direction for our parishes to work in concert with one another, not competing, so that the Church might flourish, so that disciples might be renewed and increased, so that hope might become the norm in our communities because of our parishes and parishioners.

By the end of the Easter Season, May 16, 2027, each regional grouping will present to the Bishop the positive, practical movement ready to be set in motion regarding all four priorities. The diocesan staff will stand ready to support these efforts as much as possible. The proposals will be shared throughout the diocese.

God bless you all!

Most Rev. Godfrey Mullen, OSB
Bishop of Belleville

The Vicariates

EAST

Carmi – Enfield
Fairfield – Piopolis
Lawrenceville – ***Olney*** – Wendelin – Stringtown
Mt. Carmel – St. Sebastian

METRO-EAST

Cathedral – St. Mary
Blessed Sacrament – ***Queen of Peace***
St. Augustine – St. Henry
St. Teresa – St. Luke
Cahokia Heights – Dupo
Caseyville – Fairmont City
Columbia
East St. Louis
Fairview Heights
Freeburg – New Athens
Waterloo – Hecker – Valmeyer
Mascoutah – St. Libory
Shiloh – Lebanon
Millstadt – ***Smithton*** – Paderborn
St. Clare*
St. Nicholas*
Renault – Tipton

NORTH CENTRAL

Albers – Damiansville
Aviston – St. Rose – Beaver Prairie
Bartelso – Germantown
Beckemeyer – ***St. Augustine**** – ***St. Dominic**** (Breese)
Carlyle – Marydale – ***Centralia*** – Sandoval
Mt. Vernon
Nashville – Posen
New Baden – Trenton
Okawville – Lively Grove
Radom – Scheller – Dubois
Salem – Kinmundy – Flora

SOUTH

Benton
Cairo – Metropolis
Carterville – ***Herrin***
Eldorado – Harrisburg – Vienna
Elizabethtown – Ridgway
Johnston City – Marion
Royalton-Ziegler – ***West Frankfort***

WEST

Anna – Cobden
Carbondale – Newman
Chester – Ellis Grove – Prairie du Rocher
DuQuoin – Tamaroa – ***Pinckneyville*** – Todds Mill
Evansville – Walsh – Sparta
Murphysboro – Raddle
Red Bud – Ruma

DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

Sister Thea Bowman
Mater Dei High School
Althoff High School
Gibault High School

Bold Italics = Parishes with Schools or Diocesan Schools
* = Shared School