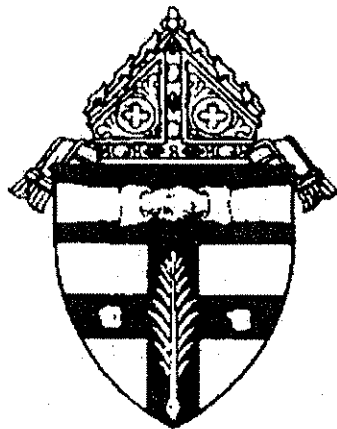


PRESBYTERATE OF THE
DIOCESE OF OWENSBORO



CULTIVATING UNITY FOR THE SAKE OF OUR MINISTRY
WITH AND FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD AND THE WORLD

Cultivating Unity For the Sake Of Our Ministry With And For the People of God and the World

A bishop is designated by the Holy Spirit as a successor of the apostles and in union with the Holy Father and the College of Bishops is consecrated to continue the work of Christ in a particular church.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit received at baptism, all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. Within this common priesthood is the ordained ministry of service conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. A priest, called by God from among the faithful and found to be worthy, serves the people of God in the name of and in the person of Christ by preaching, presiding over the sacraments and leading the communities of faith. Priests share in the bishop's priesthood and mission, and are co-workers with him in the presbyteral order.

"The Church continues to deepen her understanding of priestly ministry and life that emerged in the Second Vatican Council; namely, priests are not priests simply one by one, but they are priests and serve the mission of the Church in a presbyterate in union with the bishop. The corporate sense of priestly identity and mission, although not fully developed even in official documents, is clearly emerging as an important direction for the future." (*Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests*, pg. 93)

"A presbyterate with a 'corporate sense of priestly identity and mission' does not happen automatically. It must be intentional. Intentional presbyterates must be willed into existence by those individual members who are concerned enough to make the commitment to see that it happens." (*Intentional Presbyterates*, pg. 16)

Presbyteral Unity: The Goal of Ongoing Formation

Presbyteral unity is a response to God's grace for the sake of the mission and ministry to the People of God entrusted to our care. Presbyteral unity is the goal of the ongoing formation of presbyterates. God has formed us into the Presbyterate of the Diocese of Owensboro through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The ongoing formation of the presbyterate is our responsibility and is advanced through the *deliberate cultivation of unity* with our bishop and each other. The *Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests* states that the ongoing formation of presbyteral unity has a three-fold purpose:

Missionary and Ministerial: "The ongoing formation of a presbyterate aims to forge a *collective sense of study and prayer* among the priests of the presbyterate for the sake of their service to the people of God entrusted to their care." In addition, there is the recognition of the necessity to forge a *collective sense of ministry* with each other and the People of God.

Promoting Pastoral Charity: "The ongoing formation of a presbyterate's unity cultivates the bonds of *fraternal connection, support, and challenge*."

Sacramental Purpose: "The ongoing formation of a presbyterate's unity makes the very presbyterate a *more transparent sacramental sign*. "This unity among priests...makes [them] witnesses of Jesus Christ, who prayed to the Father 'that they may all be one'" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, no. 74). And the very purpose of that unity is a sacramental one, in the order of efficacious signs, to draw others into faith: "that the world may believe that you sent me" (*John 17:21*). (*Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests*, pg. 94-95)

Our Response to God's Grace

We, the bishop and priests of the Diocese of Owensboro, aware of our bond to Christ the High Priest through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and having been formed by God's grace into a presbyterate, commit ourselves to the deliberate cultivation of our unity for the sake of our ministry with and for the People of God and the world.

As bishop, I commit to articulate regularly to the presbyterate the mission of the local church of the Diocese of Owensboro. Further, in communion with the presbyterate, I will encourage ongoing formation, and establish and support the necessary means and guidance to ensure that we are faithful to the ministry we have received.

As clergy, we commit to our personal ongoing human, intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual formation at every age and all conditions of life so as to grow in and with our presbyterate in union with our bishop.

Collectively, we commit ourselves to the three-fold purpose of ongoing formation of our presbyterate and the deliberate cultivation of unity in the following ways.

To forge a collective sense of prayer we commit ourselves:

- To respond to the bishop's call to assemble as a presbyterate for gatherings such as Chrism Mass, ordinations, funerals of clergy, annual retreats, and days of reflection and study.
- To pray the Liturgy of the Hours individually, and collectively whenever possible.
- To remember each other in daily prayer.
- To foster personal spiritual growth through our individual ongoing formation in discipleship, celibacy, obedience, and simplicity of life.
- To explore the possibility of offering days of reflection or mini-retreats.
- To provide resources and encouragement for those interested in support or prayer groups.

To forge a collective sense of study we commit ourselves:

- To attend the annual Convocation and other programs of continuing education and formation.
- To promote study and dialogue on current issues facing priests today.
- To continue to provide the opportunities and resources for sabbaticals.
- To continue to identify factors that contribute to division among us, and to encourage reconciliation and healing.
- To identify and respond to the fears of the newly ordained and seminarians.

To forge a collective sense of ministry we commit ourselves:

- To develop a process to identify the needs of the diocese and strategies of response through dialogue with one another and the faithful.
- To provide ongoing formation in the areas of preaching, presiding, and the leadership of our faith communities.
- To continue our intellectual and pastoral growth through our individual ongoing formation to increase our skills and competency in ministry.
- To continue to call and empower the faithful to use their gifts of ministry.
- To work collaboratively with each other, diocesan and parish staffs, and the faithful.

To cultivate the bond of fraternal connection we commit ourselves:

- To provide periodic opportunities for honest and direct communication between bishop and priests.
- To take the initiative to be an active member of the presbyterate by being present at gatherings and meetings.
- To continue to develop ways to connect to each other across formational generations.
- To organize more informal gatherings with other priests for recreation and support.
- To take the initiative to invite other priests for lunch or social activities.
- To develop a form of written communication to share information with each other.
- To develop ways to welcome back priests who have been serving outside of the diocese, and to introduce and welcome international missionary priests and the newly ordained into the presbyterate.
- To sustain our human development through ongoing formation so as to care for our physical well-being; to sustain an active and invested life; and to sustain the integration of our sexuality and celibacy.
- To develop ways of maintaining contact and communications with our priests on assignment outside the diocese.

To cultivate the bond of fraternal support we commit ourselves:

- To keep faithful to our promise of respect and obedience to the bishop.
- To sustain the awareness of the necessity to attend to group maintenance.
- To provide education and resources on health and wellness.
- To continue to develop ways to support the younger clergy, and to keep in contact with the retired priests and those on leave.
- To continue to develop the “mentor” program for the newly ordained, new pastors, and international missionary priests.
- To identify and make known people willing to serve as Spiritual Directors and encourage active participation in spiritual direction.
- To provide opportunities for conversation about our aspirations, concerns, fears, hopes, and issues directly related to priests, and to work toward concrete solutions for problems that are articulated.
- To stop downward-spiraling talk.
- To be attentive to God’s grace in our lives and hopeful for the future.
- To avoid any behavior that would cause scandal.

To cultivate the bond of fraternal challenge we commit ourselves:

- To adhere to the law, policies and procedures of the universal church and diocese.
- To listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to us through each other and to seek help and guidance to address personal issues, addictions or problems.
- To hold ourselves accountable for our individual ongoing formation and ministry.
- To strive for competence and professionalism in ministry, appearance, and behavior.

Authorization

This articulation of a corporate means for cultivating unity among the bishop and priests of the Owensboro Diocesan presbyterate is offered for the personal and voluntary subscription of each member of the presbyterate upon the approval of the Priests' Council and the promulgation of the Bishop of Owensboro. This same document shall be reviewed regularly by the proper presbyteral bodies for effective implementations and shall be made subject to amendment, approval, and re-subscription every two years following initial approvals.


May God who formed us, loves us, forgives us, and who began the good work in us, bring it to fulfillment.

Approved by the Owensboro Diocesan Priests' Council on May 15, 2006



Fr. Mike Williams
Chair, Priests' Council

Promulgation by the Bishop of Owensboro on the Solemnity of Pentecost, June 4, 2006



Most Rev. John J. McRaith
Bishop, Diocese of Owensboro

Personal Subscription

Priest's Signature & Date