

Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Pope Benedict XVI began his service to the Universal Church with the proclamation, "The Church is alive!" During these five years of serving as your shepherd, I have witnessed with you, the many profound ways the church is alive here in our nine counties of Central Florida.

*"Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is the Lord"* (Jer 17:7). As I travel throughout the 9,600 square miles of the nine counties of our Diocese, and visit with you at our 92 parishes and missions, and 36 elementary and 5 high schools, Catholic Charities of Central Florida, Hope Community Center and Bishop Grady Villas, I see in so many ways how we as a Catholic community witness to hope here in Central Florida.

Scripture puts before us a choice: we can live either for the "kingdom of God"; or, for our own "consolation". Is our pursuit of happiness -- or in more biblical language, our pursuit of "blessedness"--to be exhausted only in terms of this earthly life; or do we look beyond a greater horizon -- to eternal life?

Without Jesus, all human drama would end in tragedy. Jesus invites each one of us into the drama of His own life--so that through His cross and resurrection, which might seem to be the way of poverty, of weeping, of persecution and exclusion, we might become truly rich by possessing the kingdom of heaven.

*"Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied."*

To grow in our personal living and loving relationship with Jesus in and through His Church, we must be fed at the Lord's Table, nourished by Word and Sacrament. Our participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass gives glory to God but also gives us the strength to go out and face the world.

- Liturgical ministries enhance our Worship, offering training for 3,466 Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and musical guidance and direction for our music programs.
- This year we support the formation of 27 seminarians, one of our largest classes in the history of our diocese. 264 priests and 180 deacons are refreshed through retreats and convocations.
- We gather to pray and praise the Lord at celebrations, such as the Blue Mass, Chrism Mass and the Corpus Christi procession.
- Catholic radio through Buena Nueva FM and Catholic news through The Florida Catholic or El Clarin as well as the celebrations of our multi-cultural ministries, allow us to experience the Real Presence of the Lord in communion and solidarity with our brothers and sisters of other lands.

*"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven."*

Every baptized Catholic is called to lead each other to holiness through a life in Christ. Our leadership is about developing a

lifestyle of self-giving in imitation of Christ. Through this self-giving, we follow a path to holiness that unites us to Christ.

- We prepare and welcome more than 1,000 new Catholics at Easter each year. 2,890 adults were engaged in adult faith formation. We help train more than 950 teachers and 2665 catechists so we may educate 38,000 students in the richness of our Catholic faith.
- The use of our media center continues to grow as we seek to educate our future leaders of faith. The Diocesan website brings important information about our faith to internet users of all ages.
- Representatives of the Family Life Office form all aspects of our families' spiritual health, from marriage preparation to parenting classes to special Masses for separated and divorced people, as well as those celebrating silver and golden anniversaries.

*"Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours."*

We are committed to sharing. We are not isolated individuals. We are one family of faith called to share in God's abiding presence through our time and talent as faithful stewards--to serve those who are near to us and those who are in most need.

- We welcomed 202 new refugees to our country last year, advocate for immigrants, and continue to develop partnerships with area businesses to offer farmworkers better working conditions as they labor in our fields to supply food for our tables.
- We share the Kingdom of God distributing more than 4.8 million pounds of food out of 6 service centers of Catholic Charities of Central Florida and offer care to more than 1600 older citizens, homeless individuals or sick or injured children and families. The community of Bishop Grady Villas is offered an environment of developmental opportunities. The people of the Dominican Republic are given a message of hope through construction and medical missions and a religious & elementary education program.
- We helped mobilize more than 138,000 to promote the Gospel message affirming the value of human life from conception to natural death through the FOCA post card campaign.
- Almost 900 pastoral leaders are trained to offer hope to the bereaved, bring life to the sick and provide theological formation for those who serve in other ministries.

Your contribution to Our Catholic Appeal provides the needed resources so that we are able to grow, lead, and share our living faith in Him. I again invite you to continue your journey with me as we proclaim our hope is in the Lord. Through your support, you allow the Lord to use you to change lives--your own and the lives of those our Diocese can serve thanks to your generous support of Our Catholic Appeal. Please be generous. May your gift come from your heart and be based on love.