



**DIOCESE of
PROVIDENCE**

THREE PATHWAYS ONE MISSION

AN INVITATION TO RENEWAL

Over the past year, I have visited many parishes, schools, and ministries. It has been a great source of joy and inspiration to meet so many of you. I've seen and heard a lot. While much of what I've experienced is truly wonderful, I've come to understand that the transitions in episcopal leadership over the past three years have left their mark on us and created some challenges.

Having three bishops in the course of three years is rare. The extended period of transition can produce administrative stagnation, change fatigue, and loss of personal connection. Changes in leadership style and priorities can drain the morale of the clergy and diocesan staff. Programs initiated by one bishop may be put on hold or abandoned before they can bear fruit. Each transition requires the new leader to "learn" local history, culture, and traditions, a process that can take more than a year. So much change over three years can leave us feeling that we are in a prolonged state of "learning" rather than "doing."

This present situation, understood in the light of the dramatic shifts and changes that we have experienced in the years since Covid, compels us to pause and reflect deeply on who we are and where we are going as the Catholic Church in Rhode Island. What follows is the fruit of much prayer, consultation, and reflection. Please take time to read each section carefully. This is an invitation to renewal.

Pastoral Patterns for Renewal

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37) with its striking detail compels us to be charitable toward those in need. After describing the help that the Good Samaritan offers to the man who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead, Jesus concludes with "Go and do the same." While the parable certainly serves as an instructive guide for our good deeds and our works of charity, it offers much more for our reflection.

Take a closer look at the parable. Notice these important details. The man who was beaten and robbed receives help from the Good Samaritan. The "good" helper is an outsider. He stops, and by treating the man's wounds, offers lifesaving care. He then takes the man to an inn where further assistance is given. He even leaves an advance payment, two silver coins, for care not yet given. He promises that he will return.

The parable is a catechism in miniature. It succinctly elaborates key elements that resonate with Jesus' own ministry. Jesus is an outsider. He is from heaven, the Son of God the Father. He meets all of humanity by the side of the road. Humanity has been robbed, beaten, and left for dead. Remember the book of Genesis and the Serpent's trick (Genesis 3). By falling into the devil's trap, Adam and Eve are robbed of intimate friendship with God. They lose their place in paradise. Suffering and death become their lot. The devil beat them, robbed them, and left them for dead.

All people – you and I – have been beaten, robbed, and left for dead by the devil. Jesus, who is goodness itself, stoops down and offers healing and a lifesaving remedy to us and all of fallen humanity. And more, he lifts us up and takes us to an inn: a place full of people, a community, the place where people on a journey stay. The inn is the Church. The innkeepers are the disciples, the Church's ministers. Jesus offers what is more valuable than two silver coins: Word and Sacrament, which sustain and nourish all until he comes again.



The pattern of Jesus' ministry is easily deciphered here. Jesus' Incarnation, his Passion and Death, and the Eucharist are foundations of Faith and mysteries to be pondered, undoubtedly, but they also form a pattern for ministry. By his Incarnation, Jesus inserted himself into our human experience. By his Passion and Cross, he took on our human suffering as his own. The Eucharist and his Resurrection save us from sin and death, offering us a place in the kingdom. In our ministries, we should "Go and do the same."

The Crib

Through the Incarnation, God took on our human condition and entered into the lives of sinners, the sick, and the poor. God becomes one with us in all things but sin (Hebrews 4:15). In Jesus Christ, God encounters our frail humanity. God chose to become fully present within the messy reality of human history. For us, this serves as a pattern for radical engagement with the world and everyone in it, rather than withdrawing or retreating from it. Renewal happens when pastoral ministers witness the joys and sorrows of the people they serve in their local communities. By listening to them, speaking their language, and understanding contemporary culture, we follow the example of Jesus' own immersion into human flesh, making the Gospel tangible, deeply relational, and accessible.¹

The Cross

On the Cross, Jesus embraces completely what it means to be human. He is one with us in suffering and dying. He takes the lowest place, in solidarity with all who suffer physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. The Cross introduces a pattern of dying to self to make room for new life. Renewal requires a willingness to let go of comfortable structures, outdated methods, worn-out routines, and clerical privileges that no longer serve the mission of the Gospel. Just as Christ's death looked like defeat but led to the Resurrection, we must embrace the painful process of the renewal of institutional structures brought about by a personal, pastoral, and missionary conversion. This paschal pattern reminds us that true renewal does not come from a corporate strategy, but from a sacrificial surrender that allows the Holy Spirit to bring forth unexpected, resurrected life from institutional graves.

The Eucharist

Jesus, risen from the dead, shows us our destiny, the glory that awaits us. He is not only our Redeemer through his Passion and Resurrection; he also gives us the fullness of that Redemption in the Eucharist. Our Lord does this for the sake of our transformation and liberation, a "here and now" experience of resurrected life, of heaven on earth.

The Eucharist provides the ultimate pattern for a communal and missionary lifestyle. In the Mass, the bread is taken, blessed, broken, and given away—a fourfold movement that defines the identity of the Church. Renewal occurs when we move from viewing the Eucharist as only a private devotion to viewing it as a mandate for sacrificial service and the proclamation of the Gospel.² The Church must allow itself to be "broken" out of love for the marginalized and "given" as nourishment to a spiritually hungry world. By living for and from the Eucharist, parishes can be transformed into Spirit-filled centers of prayer, charity, evangelization, and unity.³

The Paschal Pattern

Each of us, according to our own vocation, continues the mission of Jesus. Crib, Cross, and Eucharist form the paschal pattern of that ministry. How we approach evangelization – liturgical prayer, the celebration of sacraments and faith formation, community building, social service and outreach – is enlivened by this dynamic. In each instance, we enter into the experience of the other; we take on their burdens as our own; we

¹ See *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1

² See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no.1397, "The Eucharist commits us to the poor..."

³ See *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 22



journey with them toward transformation and redemption, leading them to our Lord and his Church. The Incarnation, the Cross, and the Eucharist are truly blueprints for the renewal of our parishes, diocese, and ministries. They form a living, cyclical rhythm that all the baptized are called to embody.

The Three Pathways that follow rely on these pastoral patterns. This Christ-centered pastoral vision integrates the movements of the mystery of our salvation directly into the strategic renewal of our diocese. Jesus' life, death, and ongoing presence provide the theological underpinnings for planning, forming, and living out his missionary mandate to "Go and Make Disciples" (Matthew 28:19).

THE THREE PATHWAYS

The Diocese of Providence is a diocese on mission. We are entering a time of renewal. This renewal is not a temporary initiative or a single plan with an end date; it is an ongoing prayerful process of personal, pastoral, and missionary conversion. This process will inform pastoral planning and the setting of pastoral priorities for the diocese, parishes, schools, and ministries for the next 3 to 5 years and beyond. The goal is for every parish, school, and ministry to form disciples, lead all people to salvation, and live the call to evangelize.

To guide this renewal, I present Three Pathways: Living, Forming, and Planning. These pathways unfold simultaneously and inform one another. Together, they give us a clear way to discern the missionary shape of the local church, to form leaders for mission, and to live the Church's mission through an ongoing faithful response to our baptism.

Living the Mission

God has a plan for each of us, and he desires to reveal it. He calls us to live as disciples on mission. In our parishes, we are gathered by Christ, nourished by his Word and sacraments, formed as disciples, and strengthened for mission. From there, we are sent to our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities to witness to the Gospel. Just as he calls individuals, he also calls each parish, and the diocese as a whole, to live the Church's mission faithfully within this time and place.

In this pathway, the People of God regularly turn to the Lord in prayer to discern the next step he is inviting them to take. This ongoing process of prayerful discernment moves into action across key pastoral areas which may include:

- Sacramental preparation
- Initiatives to share the kerygma, the basic truth of God's love for us in Christ
- Marriage and family life
- Vocations to priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life
- Charitable outreach and pastoral care of the poor
- Pastoral needs as they emerge

Living the mission means more than maintaining parish activity. It means cultivating a missionary culture that listens attentively to the Holy Spirit, responds faithfully to the needs of the people, and continually seeks to proclaim the Gospel more effectively. This discernment is not carried out by clergy alone. It is the shared work of the Church, as all the baptized pray, listen, reflect, and act together for the sake of the mission.



Forming For Mission

Guided by the Church's teaching, this pathway invites us to seek a shared vocabulary and acquire the competencies needed for missionary discipleship and evangelization. As Pope Francis instructed us, "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus; we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries', but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples'."⁴ Our aim is to understand and live parish life through the call given to us at our baptism. In some places, this work is already underway. In others, it requires further support and development. This pathway focuses on three areas:

Leadership Formation

Healthy parishes need faith-filled leaders who understand the mission of the Church. Our goal is to build a shared vision and common language while equipping leaders with the practical skills needed for missionary discipleship and evangelization. This formation begins with pastors and parish staff, school leadership, and core-teams, then extends to councils, leaders of ministries, and key disciples so that those serving in leadership roles are working from a shared framework.

Formation includes:

- The universal call to holiness
- Personal renewal and ongoing conversion
- Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Walking with people on their faith journey and helping them grow as disciples
- Sharing personal testimony
- Discovering gifts for service and ministry
- Small group leadership
- Formation in Church teaching, especially the documents of Vatican II

Nurturing Future Leaders

Many pastors have shared the challenge of finding well-formed lay leaders, both for open staff positions and for leadership roles within parishes and school. This pathway helps raise up future leaders by forming men and women to serve the Church in various ways.

Current opportunities include:

- Certificate in Catholic Theology: evangelizeri.org/certificate
- Certificate in Catholic Leadership: evangelizeri.org/leadership

Parish Renewal Support

This third area of forming for mission is not a program. It is a process of renewal. For pastors who desire support, staff members from the Secretariat for Evangelization will walk with parishes through a process that helps order ministries, programs, and parish life toward missionary discipleship and evangelization. The process begins with the pastor and parish staff and gradually extends to leaders of ministries and the wider parish community, indeed all of the baptized.

While the Church's mission remains the same, each parish has its own history, culture, strengths, challenges, and pastoral character. For this reason, renewal may look different in every parish. The goal is not uniformity but to assist each parish in living the Church's mission faithfully and fruitfully within its own local context.

⁴ See *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120



Through this process, parishes are strengthened as places where people can encounter Jesus Christ, deepen their faith, and be formed and sent as disciples on mission. Each parish moves at a pace that reflects the people's discernment, the needs of the parish, and the concrete realities of the local community.

Planning For Mission

This pathway is designed for parishes with a genuine pastoral planning need. It brings pastors together with two to three parishioners from each parish within a defined geographic or pastoral grouping for a period of discernment. Together, they ask, "What is God calling us to do in this region of the diocese so that we may serve the Church's mission more faithfully and effectively?" It is important to note that this pathway is specific to designated pastoral planning areas to be determined in consultation with the bishop and chancery staff. The goal is not restructuring for its own sake, but to ignite a missionary dynamism grounded in pastoral realities, sacramental life, and the hope of salvation.

Examples of possible parish groupings:

- Urban
- Suburban
- Demographics
- Ethnic and cultural communities
- Stewardship, history, and beauty of sacred buildings
- Drive-time and proximity
- The Church's mission to the poor

One of the ways we will live these pathways is through the parish and diocesan assemblies.

THE ROLE OF ASSEMBLIES

The assemblies bring the baptized together for prayer and guided discussion in order to set pastoral priorities. They are not intended to challenge perennial Church teaching or alter the Sacred Liturgy. Rather, they are a means to listen together for how the Holy Spirit is calling us to live the Church's mission in our time and place, to identify pastoral needs, to discern next steps for ministry, evangelization, and renewal, and to strengthen shared responsibility for the ministries of our parishes and our diocese.

There are two types of assemblies:

- Parish: clergy and all the baptized of the parish
- Diocese: clergy and 4-5 representatives chosen from each parish

Guiding Questions for Assemblies

Assemblies are guided by prayer, the teaching of the Church, and a consistent set of pastoral questions:

1. What is our parish doing well?
2. What needs to be strengthened or improved?
3. What is something we need to begin doing?
4. What is something we need to stop doing?
5. What should the diocesan priorities be at this time?
6. What do you need from your parish or the diocese at this moment?

Feedback from the assemblies is gathered and synthesized to shape ongoing planning, formation, and implementation, resulting in a pastoral letter.



The Proposed Timeline

Most parishes will host their assembly during one of the following two weeks:

- September 21-27
- September 28-October 4

Seasonal parishes that find it appropriate may host their assembly on one of these summer weekends, which would serve in place of the fall assembly:

- July 25/26 or August 1/2

The Diocesan Assembly will be held on November 14, 2026, at La Salle Academy.

A FINAL WORD OF INVITATION

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ—clergy and all of the baptized of the Diocese of Providence—I invite you to step forward with courage into this new season of renewal. Three Pathways, One Mission is a spiritual itinerary meant to help align our hearts with the life, ministry, and mission of Jesus Christ.

Renewal is rooted in the Mystery of the Incarnation—God clothing himself in our humanity—so that we might carry his Divine light into our homes, neighborhoods, parishes, and schools. Yet, to live this mission fully, we must also embrace his Passion and Cross, abandoning self-protection, nostalgia, and fear so that Christ's sacrificial love can heal our wounds.

The Paschal Mystery—this movement through death into the triumph of the Resurrection—finds its ultimate expression and source of power in the Eucharist. It is at the altar that our pattern for renewal is forged: we, together with Christ, are taken, blessed, broken, and given for the life of the world. Let the Eucharist be the beating heart of our planning, our formation, and our witness. United as one body, nourished by God's grace, and burning with missionary zeal, let us be renewed so that we can go forward together to live, proclaim, and manifest the saving mission of Jesus Christ in every corner of the Ocean State.

Our Lady of Providence, pray for us!

Given on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
June 7, 2026


Most Reverend Bruce A. Lewandowski, C.Ss.R.
Bishop of Providence

