



Bishop Hicks' Column



July 2022 | A life centered on Christ promotes unity

Towards the end of June, about 220 bishops from the United States gathered in the Diocese of San Diego for a special assembly. Instead of attending to the usual topics of business and governance, we focused on prayer, conversation and discernment. This convocation centered on the theme of "Episcopal Fraternity and Communion." In other words, we discussed how bishops might move away from public division and polarization and instead lead, shepherd and relate to each other with mutual respect in a spirit of "togetherness."

As I participated in this gathering, I could not help but think that the theme fit well into my vision for our diocese: Catechesis, Evangelization and Faith into Action. Let me share with you some connections I made.

Catechesis: Catechesis invites us to know something ABOUT Jesus and the teachings of our Church. Therefore, our presenter, Archbishop Anthony Fischer, OP, from Sydney, Australia, helped us grow in knowledge as he took us on an in-depth journey through Scripture and pointed out that for over 2,000 years, there has always been tension and disagreement in our Church.

Unfortunately, division and polarization are not something new.

He asked us to reflect on what has kept the Church together all these years despite our internal and external discord: Namely, we are a church centered on Christ, bonded in love for God and neighbor and guided by the Holy Spirit. We are also a church at its best when we actively practice synodality - that is, truly listening to each other and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelization: Evangelization motivates us to know and love Jesus and have a true encounter with him. During this gathering, we had the opportunity to do just that in extended periods of prayer together, including daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, the sacrament of penance, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction. We were reminded that it is only by praying with each other that we may be more united in the heart of Christ instead of viewing each other as strangers simply working for the same company.

During this time of growing in mutual love for the Lord, we also had some fun moments together. For example, one evening we all were invited to watch the recently

released movie, "Father Stu." Going out to the cinema or getting together to view a livestreamed film is a normal thing that friends do in our society, and it was wonderful to watch a movie with my fellow bishops.

Faith into Action: This step recognizes that once we know about Jesus and truly love him, we will be propelled to put our faith into action. During this convocation, we were not just preached at, but we also all gathered daily in small, random groups to practice synodality and truly listen to each other on a variety of topics. We tried to listen with respect and without judgment. These settings provided a needed opportunity for dialogue and collaboration. Also, on a personal note, I got to put faces to names of many bishops that I talked to for the first time since being ordained a bishop in 2018.

Perhaps the highlight of this convocation for me was when we all boarded buses one late afternoon and journeyed to the Catholic parish located at the southernmost border of the diocese. Together we celebrated Mass, joined by Archbishop Francisco Moreno Barrón of Tijuana, Mexico. From our seats, we had a firsthand view of the border that separates San Diego and Tijuana. As we gazed at the stark contrast between the two countries, we were reminded repeatedly by our presider, Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, to pray in solidarity with and for immigrants, the poor and the marginalized.

As we departed to return to our own dioceses, there was a general consensus of profound gratitude for our time together. It is good for bishops to remember - as well as our entire Church - that our baptism forms us in Christ, and we are strengthened by the Eucharist to live as one body, the Church. We might have differences of opinions on many topics, yet if Christ is truly at the center of our lives, then our ultimate goal and desire is to see the face of Christ in everyone we meet.

While there will always be things that cause tension and division, my hope is that we can never forget that as the Catholic Church, we belong to God and to each other. In other words, "How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers and sisters dwell together as one!" *Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum habitare fratres in unum!* (Psalm 133:1) †