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## Let Us Put Out Into The Deep!

A Pastoral Letter  
in Anticipation  
of

April 25, 2005

The 25th Anniversary of the Diocese of  
Lake Charles

By

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton  
Bishop of Lake Charles

Dear People of God:

### I.

#### Our 25th Anniversary as a Diocese

My first year of pastoral service as the Bishop of Lake Charles has been a whirlwind of activities in Southwest Louisiana. I have found each day very interesting and rewarding. I can never thank the priests, deacons, religious and people of the Diocese and the larger community enough for the welcome, encouragement, cooperation and support that I experience every day.

In my installation homily one year ago today, I said:

"Now, the moving viewpoint of my life brings me to the bishop's chair of Lake Charles, Louisiana, a world completely unknown to me, destined to become the neighborhood of my life. Let us take our inspiration from Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter, "At the Dawn of the New Millennium." Looking back on the Great Jubilee celebrations, the pontiff said, "Now we must look ahead, we must "put out into the deep," trusting in Christ's words to the apostles who had fished all night without catching any fish. He said, "What we have done already cannot justify a false sense of complacency, it should inspire in us new energy."

On this first anniversary as your bishop, I invite you to look ahead to the 25th anniversary of our Diocese, April 25, 2005. Let us give thanks to God for the many blessings of the past. Let us look to the needs of the future and put out into the deep with renewed energy.

Our Silver Jubilee is a great occasion for which we should certainly plan special celebrations in our parishes and for the entire diocese. Soon, I will consult with the Senate of Priests concerning the establishment of an appropriate committee to begin the initial planning. In the meantime, we must build up and strengthen our Local Church, the Catholic community in Southwest Louisiana, in a variety of ways. I wish to propose in this Pastoral Letter that we "put out into the deep" as individuals, as parish communities and missions, and as a diocese, in order to strengthen our ministry and the infrastructure of the diocese for years to come. If we are renewed in our vision as individuals, the diocese will be renewed as well, since it is made up of all of us as unique individuals bound by our common faith in Jesus Christ and His Church.

### II.

#### Highlights of My First Year

Before looking ahead to the future I would like to look back on the many activities of this first year during which I have tried to "put out into the deep" as your new bishop and share with you some of the most significant experiences.

Among the highlights of this year have been the opportunity to spend a great deal of time with my priests and getting to know them better, visiting every parish and mission and celebrating the Eucharist for the parishioners, ordaining new priests and deacons, getting to know our seminarians, our deacons and their wives as well as the dedicated people who work in our diocesan offices over informal dinners at my residence, active involvement in strengthening our parish confirmation programs, my Sunday morning television ministry, getting to know the staff at St. Patrick Hospital, visiting our prisons, restructuring and increasing the goal of the Bishop's Services Appeal, honoring Bishop Speyrer at the Bishop's Charity Dinner, reorganizing the administration of the diocese, developing a new Diocesan Directory, making the needs of our missionary diocese known locally and to the larger church, spending time with ministers of other Christian traditions, and getting to know the business and civic community, especially developing a friendship with our Mayor, Randy Roach.

I have also enjoyed delivering what I hope have been thought provoking scripture based Sunday sermons from the pulpit of my Cathedral, being with families during times of great sorrow (My custom of attempting to call every family in the Diocese when a family member dies has been a very fruitful ministry.), traveling to the Sudan in Africa and supporting the efforts of the Catholic Church to end the civil war there, and sharing my written reflections in The American Press and in The Southwest Catholic, especially following the terrible events of September 11, 2001. I am gratified by the many positive responses to my article on religion and war, "Is God on Our Side?" and my article on the monotheism of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, "We All Worship Allah!"

I have deeply appreciated the invitation from Temple Sinai to be an honored guest at their Seder Supper this coming Passover, the invitation from Lake Charles Symphony conductor Bill Kushner to be the narrator for the October performance of Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait," taking a tour of the marshes in Cameron parish in an air boat with David Richard, and the chance to learn about the good work of Catholic Social Services and Abraham's Tent.

I have had the privilege of dedicating the new Salvation Army residence and shelter for the homeless, participating in the dedication of the I-210 bypass honoring Vietnam hero and local Catholic 1st Lt. Douglas Fournet, teaching scripture on Sunday afternoons in December (Advent) in my Cathedral (I will do it again on three Sundays during Lent.), visiting the sick in our local hospitals, visiting every classroom of our seven Catholic elementary schools, frequently visiting St. Louis High School as well as a number of public schools, and spending a terrific Saturday morning this month in lively dialogue with 400 of our teenagers.

I was moved by the experience of participating in the services honoring Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Kevin Yokum, killed on September 11, in the Pentagon, and addressing a prayerful rally on the steps of the court house on January 22, on the dignity and value of all human life from conception to natural death.

All of the activities that I have mentioned and so many more have been a part of the process of getting to know my new neighborhood. I have sought to follow the teaching and example of Pope John Paul II who urges all bishops to read the signs of the times and get involved in the challenges facing the Church in the modern world and "put out into the deep with renewed energy."

Perhaps my most positive experience during this first year has been the wonderful welcome, support, cooperation and understanding that I have received from Bishop Speyrer, the priests, deacons, seminarians, sisters and faithful people of the diocese. This has made my servant-leadership much easier. I cannot say too much about the priests. As the College of Priests, of which I am the head, they constitute the extension of my ministry into every region of the diocese. I am fortunate to have such dedicated and zealous priests. My only regret is that I do not have more of them!

Perhaps the most challenging experience of this first year has been the reality of being uprooted from my familiar worlds in St. Louis and Chicago. It is very difficult for me to be so far from my family and the friends of a lifetime. I miss them all very much. I still call my Mother Dear, every day, no matter what. A particularly rewarding challenge has been the process of getting to know the worlds and the cultures of rural Southwest Louisiana, with which I was unfamiliar. The warm welcome of the people of all faiths has certainly made that process easier and enjoyable. Of course there is the constant challenge of not having enough hours in a day for all the prayer, work, study, writing, reflection, recreation, exercise, socializing and rest that I would like to include in each day!

### III.

#### Looking to the Future: Let Us Put Out Into The Deep

As we look ahead to our jubilee in 2005, it is obvious that our ongoing spiritual growth and renewal must be the foundation of all other renewal. I invite and urge all of the members of the Church to renew their lives of genuine personal prayer. If we are to grow in holiness in our personal lives at home, at work and in our communities we must pray for the humility to heed the call to personal and communal conversion. By this I mean conversion to an active openness to the presence of God in our lives, conversion to a scripture and liturgy based personal relationship with Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, conversion to a vital and enthusiastic membership in the Church community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, conversion to moral integrity in our personal lives, which means living by the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments each day of our lives. Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist is the source and summit of this ongoing conversion.

I hope you will read this Pastoral Letter in conjunction with my recent Lenten Pastoral, "Up To Jerusalem," which contains a number of specific suggestions of ways in which we can genuinely renew our life of faith between now and Easter.

As you know, our priests make an essential contribution to the spiritual development of our parish communities. As Heralds of Christ, they faithfully support those in their care by their daily service to the People of God. I call upon the faithful of our parishes to support our priests by your personal example of Christ-centered faith and by your genuine concern for them in their rewarding but often challenging and sometimes exhausting ministry. I have recently reminded all of our priests of some of the fundamentals that guide our daily lives as priests. I have urged them to see their spiritual directors regularly, to faithfully make their annual retreat, to go to the sacrament of reconciliation often, and to integrate personal prayer into every day no matter how busy they are.

I have also asked them to take their allotted week for continuing theological education and formation and to renew themselves by reading worthwhile pastoral and theological literature, to make sure they get appropriate rest and recreation, to take their annual four weeks of vacation, to get a regular physical, to care for their health with proper nutrition and exercise, to avoid cancer causing cigarettes and other tobacco products, and to avoid the abuse of drugs or alcohol. I have further urged them to be attentive to the integration of sexuality and the need for love and intimacy in their lives. This is essential if priests are to live their celibacy authentically, maintaining appropriate conduct with the women, men and children who are dear to us. It can happen that priests may feel that they cannot do some of these things alone. Priests should

not hesitate to form support groups, seek in-depth spiritual direction or professional help in any of these areas if their experience or the thoughtful suggestions of others indicates that they might benefit from them.

Much of what I have shared with my brother priests applies also to our deacons, religious and the Christian faithful. None of us, whether we are the bishop or a lay parishioner, can be effective as spiritual guides to ourselves. I invite all of you who are reading this letter to evaluate honestly where you are in your relationship with yourselves, with God, with Jesus Christ, with the Church, with your families and friends and with the larger community and to "put out into the deep" by taking whatever steps are necessary to renew and strengthen those relationships.

### IV.

#### Our Parishes and the Diocese

As we approach our 25th anniversary in 2005, I would like everyone who is involved in positions of leadership in our parishes and missions and all interested members of the laity to collaborate with me and with the priests and deacons to renew and strengthen our parishes in the following areas.

a) A new and creative emphasis on evangelization.

b) An aggressive effort to encourage vocations to the religious life, diaconate and most of all to the priesthood.

c) Look for every possible way to enhance and improve liturgy (especially Sunday, special seasons such as Lent-Easter and Advent-Christmas), including the best possible environment for worship (appropriate, racially diverse religious art in all parish buildings that is actually good art and spiritually moving music of high quality).

d) Support and encourage, well prepared, thought provoking, engaging, scripture-inspired homilies.

e) Create a true spirit of parish hospitality and Christian welcome of all, including, elderly, disabled, marginalized. Confronting racism and prejudice of any kind wherever it is present as contradictory to the gospel.

f) Put in place the parish structures called for by the Vatican Council and the American Bishops. Every parish should have a functioning parish pastoral council, liturgy team, and finance committee.

g) Look enthusiastically for ways to renew ecumenical contacts with Christians of other traditions.

h) Take a personal interest in the state of youth ministry (especially confirmation preparation), work to establish quality, theologically sound adult education and formation that is faithful to the teachings of the Council.

i) Find appropriate ways to call forth proper stewardship of time, talent and treasure (including tithing) for the work of the Church. This is often more effective when it comes from the laity rather than the priests.

j) Cultivate and welcome and (where necessary) train qualified lay leadership, especially women.

As we approach our 25th anniversary in 2005, I would like everyone who is involved in positions of leadership in our parishes and missions and all interested members of the laity to reflect and pray with me and the priests and deacons about ways to renew and strengthen our diocese as we consider the feasibility and appropriateness of the following possible activities and projects for the future.

Should we:

a) Develop a long-term strategic plan for the pastoral ministry and direction of the diocese for the years 2005-2015?

b) Plan a diocesan wide religious event before or during 2005? A Convocation? A Mission? A Renewal program?

c) Call forth a diocesan pilgrimage to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception? To Rome? To Israel? Or to some other appropriate place (with an emphasis on prayer for vocations)?

d) Work towards a diocesan wide participation in the annual January pro-life march in Washington?

e) Look for a way to have a diocesan wide Dr. Martin L. King Jr. celebration that is truly diocesan wide?

f) Schedule week end pastoral visits to all of our parishes during which I would celebrate and preach at all Masses, meet staff members, parish pastoral council, and perhaps visit some of those confined at home?

g) Renew and expand the distribution of The Southwest Catholic (our diocesan newspaper which has a circulation of only 3,000 in a diocese of over 90,000) the Catholic Calendar (our bi-monthly page in the American Press which has a distribution of over 44,000)?

h) Monitor the growth of the Bishop's Services Appeal (changed from a parish "tax" to a parish "goal" and raised from \$400,000 to \$500,000 this year)? In comparable dioceses our size, the annual appeal has increased each year and it is now \$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000.

i) Undertake development, building and renovation projects?

I have been "thinking out loud" with a number of groups in the diocese about undertaking a number of development, building and renovation projects that would strengthen the identity and infrastructure of the diocese and make our reality as a Local Church more visible and more effective.

These thoughts include exploring the possibility of:

1) Using the land behind the Pastoral Center (the chancery office on Iris Street) as the site for building a diocesan office which we urgently need. This would be The Bishop Jude Speyrer Catholic Center which would incorporate all of our diocesan offices in one building with adequate space.

2) A renovation of Immaculate Conception Cathedral to adapt it to the liturgical directives of the Vatican Council and make the sanctuary more suitable for diocesan-wide episcopal liturgies, such as ordinations.

3) A redevelopment of the present Chancery as a diocesan residence for the diocesan bishop and 1 or 2 other priests, with guest quarters for visitors. It could be very beneficial and time saving if the cathedral, chancery and diocesan residence were in one area.

4) Improvements for St. Louis High School (N. B. This is a very high priority. But it would be a separate campaign independent of the first three points.

I have consulted with a variety of people about these projects. Most have agreed that these are things that we need to do. They have suggested that if they are not done in the coming years they will probably never be done, because interest rates on loans will never be as low and costs of materials and labor will continue to escalate.

I am very aware that these are ambitious undertakings. They would probably have to be approached in stages. No decisions can be made to act on these explorations until the diocese does further consultations with those who will be effected, until we obtain accurate estimates of the cost and learn more from potential donors and lenders. I am proceeding very cautiously and carefully in this exploratory stage. An important part of this exploration is sharing these possibilities with you in this Pastoral Letter.

You should know that the Church wisely establishes checks and balances for these types of undertakings. For example, if these projects require the borrowing of more than \$3,000,000, (as they probably would), I will need to do more than the informal consultations that I have been doing with various groups in recent months. It will be necessary to consult formally and get the approval of the Priests Diocesan Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Committee, and the Holy See (appropriate offices at the Vatican) itself. The diocesan bishop does not need permission to undertake these projects. The consultations are only needed when it is necessary to borrow funds to complete the work. This structure of consultations provides a very good safeguard for diocesan resources.

I wish to stress that after everything is thoroughly examined, it is possible that I will conclude that only part of this is possible, or I may conclude that none of this is possible at this time. This is an exploratory process.

### V.

#### Conclusion

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ: As we look ahead to the celebration of our 25th anniversary as a Local Church, let us be serene and prayerful. Whether or not these development projects can be undertaken, our primary focus in the years ahead remains the same. All of us must look for ways to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in everything we do as members of the Church, responding to God's personal call of each one of us to holiness. With or without these improvements, let us commit ourselves anew to building up the Church in Southwest Louisiana in faith, hope, love and Christian service.

In the same Apostolic Letter in which our Holy Father, Pope John Paul challenges us to put out into the deep, he teaches us that all the members of the Church should strive to live in spiritual unity or, to use his word, in communion. The Pope says this communion is born in our hearts when we contemplate the mystery of God, Father, Son and Spirit, dwelling within us, enabling us to see divine light shining forth from the faces of those we meet on the street in every day life. This spiritual unity requires each of us to be willing to attend to the needs of other members of the Church and to offer them deep and genuine friendship. As a result, we see what is positive in those who are quite different from ourselves, welcoming their talents as gifts from God. Perhaps most importantly, the pope teaches that when members of a faith community, like Lake Charles, live in spiritual communion, they make room for one another and bear each other's burdens resisting the temptation to selfishness. Without these inner attitudes of communion, the pope warns, changes in Church structures and policies and improving buildings will be lifeless and have no lasting effect.

I have written you this Pastoral Letter with a deep awareness of the truth of the pope's words. I have written out of a desire for all of us who make up the Church of Lake Charles to experience the joy and peace of that spiritual communion in a deeper way as we approach our Day of Jubilee in 2005.

I am confident that with God's help we will experience that spiritual communion as we follow Christ's imperative and put out into the deep! What we have done already cannot justify a false sense of complacency, it should inspire in us new energy. We will put out into the deep with renewed eagerness and like the apostles before us bring forth nets that are overflowing with everything that is needed for the continued growth of the Church in Southwest Louisiana!

+Edward K. Braxton

22 February, 2002  
The Feast of the Chair of St. Peter  
The First Anniversary of my Installation