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OFFICE OF
THE ARCHBISHOP

July 26, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I hope that you are enjoying the summer season and many blessings from our loving God and Father. As our archdiocesan pastoral planning process moves forward, I want to thank the thousands of people who responded to the *Your Voice Counts* survey, or who accepted an invitation to participate in Focus Groups which met throughout the Archdiocese. We received written and online survey responses from 17,098 people, and verbal input from 248 individuals who attended the 16 Focus Groups, as well as input as a result of phone calls and letters.

Let me update you on some basic findings and themes that have emerged as a first step towards renewing our sense of mission as Catholics in the face of today's realities. It is a mission that is ours by Baptism and Confirmation, a mission to bring others to Christ within our shared communion as his Body and Bride, the Church. We do so in response to Pope Francis' challenge of *"a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation."*

The major themes that emerged from the survey and focus groups can be grouped into the following areas:

- **Evangelization**
- **Relationships**
- **Leadership**
- **Community Outreach**

Evangelization

Respondents told us that we all need to work together more closely to *"get more people in the pews"* and to find better ways to welcome new or returning parishioners with a heightened sense of *"hospitality."* They also recommended building upon established youth-sponsored Church programs that have a *"positive impact"* on young Catholics. With *"millennials"* in particular, they asked for activities that make the Church much more *"approachable"* and *"inviting,"* with a view to keeping our youth engaged with the Church after they receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. Respondents said that the high incidence of divorce and *"broken homes"* creates a special need spiritually to embrace and protect children. All of these desired goals echo what Pope Francis has said about *"seeking those who have fallen away"* and *"welcoming the outcast."*

Relationships

Respondents indicated that they want a closer connection with the Archdiocese, and with me as your Archbishop. They overwhelmingly agreed that living a lifestyle characterized by the love of God and neighbor is the most important way we express our Catholic faith. Many indicated a desire for more updates, videos, and stories about community service and other religious teachings to share with family, friends and others. It was clear that parishioners are eager for the Archdiocese to make use of the new social media to communicate their Catholic life as it is celebrated and lived. Now that we have a better sense of parishioners' preferred social engagement platforms, we can strive to employ social media in more effective ways to improve relationships, coordination and communication; including communication between parishes.

Leadership

In the teaching of Pope Francis, the Church “*goes forth*” as a community of missionary disciples who boldly take the first step, who lead. Leadership emerged as an important theme in the survey responses. Respondents requested more leadership guidance from the Archdiocese, for the purpose of a more strategic approach to inter-parish sharing of information, planning and best practices. They would also like to see Pastors less burdened by responsibilities that “*distract*” them from spiritually “*shepherding*” the flock. Trained lay leadership and an enhanced role for Permanent Deacons have been mentioned, as well as new recruitment approaches for vocations to the priesthood.

Community Outreach

The majority of respondents said they were “*inspired*” and “*encouraged*” by the community service and charitable works of the Archdiocese and parishes. They rated Catholic Charities as being “*very important*.” Although this year’s Archbishop’s Annual Appeal has been successful, many requested that the campaign be revitalized moving into the future. The feedback also encouraged more “*community-based action*” through local events, workshops, fairs, Church-sponsored athletic programs, leagues that teach children teamwork and the like.

These are some of the principal themes that emerged from the survey and focus groups. A survey that involves thousands of responses is necessarily limited in what can be asked and answered, but the results give some significant indication for moving forward. For the full survey results and a focus group summary, go to <http://bit.do/SurveyUpdate>. This link will lead you to a dedicated page on our new website, a primary place to find future pastoral planning updates.

The next step in the process of pastoral planning is to work with pastors and parishioners in each Vicariate to develop a plan of action that corresponds to the circumstances and priorities of that locality. There are many steps ahead of us as we “*go forth*” together as “*missionary disciples*” – to chart a future direction for our beloved Church. The goal is a more joyful, faithful, engaged, and missionary outlook on the part of all of us for the sake of a spiritually rich and vibrant future for the Archdiocese.

Thank you again for your cooperation and support.

In two months, we will be welcoming our Holy Father Pope Francis to the United States. Let us pray that his apostolic visit will be a source of renewed faith, hope, and love, not only for us, but for all people of good will.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford