



My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Greetings in the name of the Lord! Having experienced our Lord's Resurrection and the breath of the Spirit at Pentecost, we speak today as Disciples of Christ of this relatively young Church of the Diocese of Orlando.

For more than three years, you have participated in the *Alive in Christ* Campaign to strengthen the ministries of our parishes and our Diocese. I am grateful to you as I realize that many of you have made pledge commitments through 2015. Still, your stewardship is already bearing much fruit as twenty of our parishes are currently in the planning, design or construction phase or completed a building project. Thirty-three of our parishes have accessed their *Alive in Christ* funds to support other parish priorities.

I am reminded of Peter whose life is most defined by conversion. Peter's daily living changes when he first meets Jesus. In Luke, 5:1-3, Jesus boards Peter's boat and requests him to put out a little from the land. From there, he begins to teach the crowds on the shoreline. Pope Benedict XVI points out in his book, *The Apostles*, "Thus, the boat of Peter becomes the chair of Jesus."

And Jesus said to Peter, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Lk 5:4). Peter does as he is asked at Jesus' word with a trusting faith, almost like a son to a father. He trusted in the Lord that all would be well.

When we began the *Alive in Christ* Campaign, we placed our trust in the Lord to embark upon our journey of stewardship together. It is because of God's faithfulness that so many of our parishes are moving forward with projects that will grow and strengthen our Catholic community for years to come. As Peter's faith in the Lord did provide the fish for nourishment of the body, so our trust has led to nourishment so that we might grow in our faith.

How many times in our lives have we placed our trust in another? Has our trust been well placed or have we fallen into trust in a false god?

The Lord calls Peter to him, "Do not be afraid: henceforth, you will be catching men" (Lk 5:10). Perhaps it is Peter's impulsiveness which proffers a yes to Jesus. Yet, this impulsiveness was not short-lived; rather, it became a steadfast covenant with Jesus. Peter's sacrificial yes was one of great courage.

We have made a covenant with God through our baptismal call. As we live our lives, we continually discern the call from the Lord. Are we being faithful in our following? Honoring our commitment to the *Alive in Christ* Campaign is a discernment of faith.

Later in Peter's time with Jesus, Jesus asks his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8:29). It is Peter who says, "You are the Christ." Peter's enthusiasm for the Lord inspired this proclamation. It was sometime later when Peter truly understood the meaning of his words.

When the *Alive in Christ* Campaign began, there was much talk and anticipation about the parish and Diocesan priorities. We learned together that our spoken and written words are now better understood as we complete the process. We also learned that it is important for us to fulfill the entire process so that we might truly come to realize the gifts which will be shared by each of us within our parishes, as well as those served throughout the entire Diocese and beyond its boundaries.

Remember when Peter stepped out into the water to be with the Lord (Mt 14:28-32)? The winds frightened him and he called out to the Lord for deliverance. Like us, Peter had expectations of who his Messiah would be. Are our expectations founded in faith, or do we sometimes stumble as Peter had, believing something because of false pretenses, instead of believing because of faith, inspired through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's stumbling gives us hope. Even though we experienced some of the most difficult economic times as we began the *Alive in Christ* Campaign, your faith continues to lead others to Christ through the fulfillment of your pledges. I ask that you, too, seek the Lord in faith and do not get discouraged.

Pope Benedict XVI writes in his book, *The Apostles*, "This is the great alternative that we must learn over and over again: to give priority to our own expectations, rejecting Jesus, or to accept Jesus in the trust of his mission and set aside all of our too human expectations." So it is for our own Diocese as we continue to realize God's vision for our diocese, knowing He will bring it to fruition at the proper time, not *our* time.

I close these thoughts, my disciples of Christ, with Peter's prophecy in John 6:67-69. Jesus asks of the Twelve, "Will you also go away?" Peter's answer is our witness, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace, encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good deed and word.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Noonan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "N".

Most Reverend John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando