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29 December 2025

The Fifth Day of the Octave of Christmas

***Letter of the Fifth Bishop of Allentown
Announcing the 65th Jubilee Anniversary Year of
the Diocese of Allentown
A Eucharistic and Marian Year of Grace***

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we approach the Sixty-Fifth Anniversary of the establishment of our beloved Diocese of Allentown, I invite you to join me in celebrating this milestone as a Jubilee Year of Grace, beginning 28 January 2026, and ending 28 January 2027. This sacred time will be a Eucharistic and Marian Year dedicated to giving thanks for the blessings we have received and imploring new graces for the future of our local Church, especially for vocations to the Priesthood and the Consecrated Religious Life.

Our Diocese was established by Pope Saint John XXIII on 28 January 1961, carved from the territory of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to serve the faithful of Berks, Carbon, Lehigh, Northampton, and Schuylkill Counties. Since that day, generations of clergy, religious, and laity have worked together to build up a vibrant Catholic community rooted in faith, education, and service.

From our first Bishop, Most Reverend Joseph McShea, who laid the foundations of diocesan life and Catholic education; to his successors—Bishops Welsh, Cullen, and Barres—each shepherd has guided our Church through the joys and challenges of the times, ever striving to proclaim Christ in our region of Pennsylvania. Today, we continue to stand on that legacy, grateful for all who have handed on the Faith with

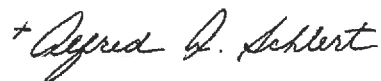
The Lord continues to call, and His mercy never tires. May our parishes become welcoming homes for all who seek spiritual comfort, forgiveness, and belonging.

As we celebrate sixty-five years of grace, we look back with gratitude and forward with hope. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the founding of our Diocese continues to guide us today. Let us walk together—clergy, religious, and laity—as a Roman Catholic family of faith, united in the Holy Eucharist, devoted to Mary, and steadfast in our mission of bringing the Light of Christ to every soul.

Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and Saint Catharine of Siena, Patroness of our Cathedral, may this Jubilee Year be a time of renewal, healing, and joy for all of us.

With heartfelt gratitude and every prayerful good wish, I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Alfred A. Schlert".

✠ Most Reverend Alfred A. Schlert
Bishop of Allentown

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

January 2026

Holy Family Church

A community empowered through the Holy Spirit to promote the Kingdom of God

One Minute Meditations

St. Genevieve of Paris

Born in 422, in Nanterre, France, St. Genevieve consecrated herself to God when she was fifteen. She became known for her charity and gift of prophecy. She predicted Paris would be spared from attack by the Huns and led the people in fasting and prayer. Paris was spared. When King Childeric and his son Clovis I conquered Paris, Genevieve convinced Childeric to release his captives. She became a trusted advisor to Clovis, who converted to Christianity.

The Jesus Prayer

January is dedicated to the Most Holy Name of Jesus, reminding the faithful of the power and reverence due to His Name: *"At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth"* (Phil 2:10). A fitting prayer for this month is the Jesus Prayer, long cherished in Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Simple yet profound, this prayer can be repeated throughout the day. Prayed attentively, it deepens love and reverence for Christ, invokes His saving grace, and helps cultivate a steady spirit of prayer, humility, and interior peace.

"The things that we love tell us what we are." St. Thomas Aquinas

Turning our hearts back to God

Converting our hearts back to God begins with an honest pause – not a dramatic moment, but a decision to look at our lives as they really are. What shapes our days? What gets our best energy, our first thoughts, our deepest trust? Whatever holds that place is, in practice, what we put first.

Putting God first starts with intention. We make room for Him by removing what crowds Him out. A few minutes of prayer before reaching for a phone. A short passage of Scripture read slowly instead of rushed. These small choices retrain the heart. They remind us to whom we belong.

Repentance is part of the return, but it is not about shame. It is about direction. To repent means to turn. We admit where we've drifted and choose a better path. God does not demand perfection before welcoming us back. He asks for honesty and willingness.

Trust follows close behind. Many of us profess trust in God but still rely

on our own control. Putting Him first means surrendering outcomes we cannot manage anyway. It means praying not only for help, but for guidance, even when the answer may change our plans.

Faith moves us to action. When we

"Do not let the past disturb you. Just leave everything in the Sacred Heart and begin again with joy." St. Teresa of Calcutta

align our choices with God's teachings, our hearts follow. Faith leads to action. Forgiving when necessary. Serving when it is inconvenient. Giving when it feels risky. These actions reshape our priorities.

Community matters. Worship, shared prayer, and accountability keep our hearts oriented toward God when we are tempted to drift.

Turning back to God is rarely instantaneous. It is daily, deliberate, and deeply personal. Each step taken toward Him strengthens the heart's true center.

Why Do Catholics Do That?

Blessing ourselves with holy water when entering a Catholic church recalls the ritual washings of the Old Testament, through which the Jews purified themselves before approaching God in the Temple. St. John the Baptist built on this tradition by using water as a sign of repentance and conversion.

Why do Catholics bless themselves with holy water?

Today, this gesture reminds us of our Baptism and renews our commitment to live the Faith. As a sacramental, holy water disposes us to receive God's grace, strengthens us against temptation, and, with proper repentance, helps remit venial sins.

New Year, new habits build change that lasts

Starting and maintaining New Year's resolutions can be difficult for the same reason: cultivating virtue is difficult; both require forming new habits. Perseverance rarely comes from sheer willpower alone. Practical strategies, supported by grace, make growth more sustainable.

Begin with achievable goals. Set yourself up for early success by practicing self-denial in small, manageable ways. Learning to say no in minor matters builds the discipline needed to resist greater temptations later.

Replace, rather than simply remove. It is often easier to abandon an unhealthy habit when it is substituted with a better one. Just as swapping potato chips for pretzels can make dietary

changes more attainable, uprooting vice is aided by cultivating the opposing virtue. Greed is weakened by generosity.

Seek accountability. A trusted friend, exercise partner, or prayer companion can provide encouragement and consistency for change. Knowing someone is watching makes it more difficult to give up when motivation fades.

Above all, rely on grace. God invites us to call upon Him, especially in moments of weakness, often marked by anger or anxiety, fatigue, hunger, or sadness. In those moments, turn to the Holy Spirit for strength and consolation, trusting the Lord's promise: *"The Lord will fight for you; you have only to keep still"* (Exodus 14:14).

from Scripture

Matthew 4:12-23, Discipleship is the greatest adventure

This Gospel passage recounts the call of the first disciples. They may not have known Jesus personally at first, but they knew about Him through John the Baptist (John 1:35-42). Hearing the invitation to know Jesus better and follow Him closely, the men dropped what they were doing "at once" and left everything behind.

Under Christ's leadership, the disciples went on to do amazing deeds. They worked miracles, brought the Gospel to distant lands, won countless souls for Heaven, and suffered many

hardships, even martyrdom. The secret of their success was their relationship with Christ as their God, Savior, Teacher, and Friend who promised to be with them always (Matthew 28:20).

All of us are called to be saints - friends of God. Jesus Christ invites each of us, in particular, to know and follow Him. While few of us are called to leave everything behind, we can still offer everything we have to God's service. We can still give our "Yes." Pursuing authentic holiness isn't boring but a great adventure!



Why is the feast of the Epiphany important?

The Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated this year on January 4, is important because it celebrates the public revelation of Jesus Christ as Savior of the whole world. The word epiphany means "manifestation" or "revealing."

Originally, the feast commemorated the visit of the Magi, wise men from the East, who followed the star to Bethlehem. In honoring the Magi, the Church proclaims that salvation is universal and that Gentiles are fully included in God's plan.

Traditionally, Epiphany also encompasses two other key moments of revelation: Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan and His first miracle at the wedding at Cana. At His Baptism, the Father's voice and the descent of the Holy Spirit reveal Jesus as God's Son. At Cana, Jesus manifests His divine power publicly for the first time. Together, these events reveal who Jesus truly is.

Epiphany calls us to respond as the Magi did: to seek Christ, to worship Him, and to offer Him our lives. It reminds us that faith is not meant to be hidden, but proclaimed.

Feasts & Celebrations

January 1 - Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. When we celebrate this feast, we honor Mary, but also acknowledge Jesus as true God and true Man. Mary's title highlights God's humility, in that God chose to come to us through Mary, as a vulnerable newborn. This year, it is a holy day of obligation.

January 5 - St. John Neumann (1860). The first American bishop to be canonized was born in the present-day Czech Republic in 1811. St. John traveled to New York as a missionary before becoming bishop of Philadelphia. He built up the Catholic school system and established diocesan

schools. He also built more than 89 churches, several hospitals and orphanages.

January 11 - The Baptism of the Lord (1st Century). Jesus began His public ministry by getting baptized by St. John the Baptist. Jesus was to be baptized to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). This was also when God reveals Jesus as His "beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17).

January 13 - St. Hilary of Poitiers (367). St. Hilary converted to Christianity as a young man and was elected bishop around 350. St. Hilary spent most of his office battling the Arian heresy, which denied the Divinity of Christ. He was exiled to Phrygia. He spent his four-year exile writing and teaching against Arianism until the emperor begged him to return home.

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