

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2025
AND COMMUNION FOR MISSION CAMPAIGN ANNOUNCEMENT

I have an important announcement to make to the parish today. Rather than have both a slightly complex announcement and a homily, I have decided to incorporate the announcement with the homily. This will make for a longer homily, but will obviate the need for a long announcement, and will connect the announcement better with our worship.

In today's Gospel, Luke 10:25-37, Lord Jesus tells the "Parable of the Good Samaritan" about a semi-foreigner who does mercy far beyond what the law requires.

The Lord Jesus built this Parable on a story recounted in 2 Chronicles 28: 8-15. After the death of King Solomon, built-up resentment exploded and tore apart the kingdom that his father David had founded. The largest tribe, Judah, centered on Jerusalem, continued to be loyal to David's line, while all of the northern tribes did not. The northern kingdom never achieved political stability, but it did establish a new capital, Samaria. The Kingdom of Samaria and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, two feisty lightweights, wrestled almost continually for control of the land of Israel (until heavyweights Assyria, Babylon, and Persia came along) During one of those battles, four soldiers of Samaria captured some men of Jerusalem. They had the legal right to treat them as prisoners of war. Instead, having compassion on their miserable condition, the men of Samaria washed them, put them on donkeys, and brought them to the Jerusalemite outpost of Jericho.

By the time of the Lord Jesus, the people of Jerusalem had come to live in many places outside of the old homeland of Judah; but, wherever they lived, they were called "Jews", and were proud of their pure observance of Moses' ancient law, of their worship in Jerusalem's temple, and of their pure ethnic descent. The people of Samaria, on the other hand, had become ethnically mixed, did not worship at Jerusalem's temple, and did not precisely observe the Law of Moses. Jews looked down on them, and they bitterly resented that. Jesus used the old story about merciful soldiers of Samaria as the foundation for a new story about a modern Samaritan who is not bitter, but merciful.

The Jew who was beaten more than half way to death on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho looked like a corpse. The Law of Moses declared that anyone who touched a corpse was unable to participate in Temple services, until he had undergone an inconvenient rite of purification. Thus, the Parable's priest and Levite, on their way to Jerusalem to participate in Temple services, have a legal excuse for not taking a close look at the body beside the road. They are within their legal rights. On the other hand, the Samaritan has no legal obligation to assume responsibility for caring for the wounded Jew, but he does so. He goes far beyond his legal obligations.

In this Parable, Jesus establishes a new standard for holiness, one that involves going beyond our strict legal obligations to take advantage of any opportunity for doing good. The law is not ignored, but it is reinterpreted. The law is meant to put a limit to our selfishness, not to our kindness. We are challenged to respond generously to opportunities to do good.

As a mission diocese, the Diocese of Cheyenne has always received many gifts from outside, gifts for which we should be grateful. For example, as the Bishop remarked at Fr. Lee

Noel's recent ordination, the new priest's seminary education was paid for by Catholic Extension Society, to which he appropriately gave thanks.

God bless those external Catholic organizations and people who have helped the Diocese of Cheyenne perform its ministry. That said, wouldn't it be a good thing for our Diocese to be more able to support its own ministries, letting people like Catholic Extension Society help Catholics in poorer places?

To that end, realizing that all of the Catholics of Wyoming are co-responsible for the mission of the Church in our state (the State of Wyoming's 135th birthday was July 10, by the way), the Diocese of Cheyenne is in the midst of "Communion for Mission", a campaign to move the Catholic Church in Wyoming in the direction of being self supporting (in the direction - we will remain a mission diocese). Every parish will receive 25% of what is pledged by its parishioners, and every parish will participate in the campaign. The parishes that participated in the pilot phase were quite successful, I am pleased to say. That encourages parishes like ours that are in Wave One. Some parishes in Wyoming will be part of Wave Two.

Overall, the campaign seeks to raise \$36 million, \$26 million in pledges paid over five years, and \$10 million in legacy gifts. Rather remarkably, I think, the Pilot Phase raised \$21 million in five year pledges, and \$5 million in legacy gifts. This is quite encouraging, since our Diocese has a lot of work to do in terms of strengthening parishes, forming missionary disciples, educating seminarians, serving the needy, and caring for sick and elderly priests.

When I entered priestly ministry in Wyoming in the mid 1990s, it was painfully clear that the Catholic infrastructure built in Wyoming between 1905 and 1965 was rapidly collapsing. Convents were closing. Our one Catholic high school had closed. Our one Catholic hospital had closed. Catholic grade schools and St. Joseph's Children's Home were in grave danger of closing, and mostly have been so for the past three decades. Now, we cannot build a time machine and recreate the Catholic world of 1965. What we can do is start building a Catholic infrastructure in Wyoming suitable for the needs of the 21st Century. In my view, "Communion for Mission" is the first serious effort our Diocese has ever made to do that.

The heart of a sound Catholic infrastructure is a network of good parish church facilities. To that end, 25% of what every parish raises will go to the needs of the local parish church. Our facility's most urgent need is a truly handicapped accessible bathroom, and slightly expanded gathering space at the entrance of the church. This is something our parish will do. At least 25% of what you pledge to "Communion for Mission", along with the parish building fund, will go to that.

Overall, \$3 million in pledges and \$1.5 million in legacy gifts will go towards endowing a seminarian education fund. Educating a seminarian today costs \$75,000 a year, a number that does not surprise people who know about higher education today, but that does surprise most people. Right now, our Diocese has four seminarians, and cannot afford to educate all four. We depend on outside help to do that. This state of affairs is unacceptable, especially since we need to have more than four seminarians! Of all the infrastructure needs addressed by "Communion for Mission", this may be the most urgent.

Wisely, Bishop of Newell, of revered memory, set up a priests' retirement endowment, St. Joseph's Society, back in the 1960s. Right now, it is not close to fully funded (though it has been very well handled in comparison with the retirement funds of many state and local

governments) \$1.3 million in five year pledges and \$2 million in legacy gifts should bring it close to being fully funded.

Since the closing of Wyoming's one Catholic hospital (in which I was born), we have struggled in Wyoming to find ways of fulfilling the Lord's command to His Church to care for and serve the sick and needy. Conditions in the 21st Century require not trying to start up an old style hospital, but, rather, trying to give some real muscle to Catholic Charities of Wyoming. \$1.25 million in pledges and \$2 million in legacy gifts are directed towards starting to provide Catholic Charities of Wyoming with an endowment that will support an expansion in its services throughout the state.

In the depression ridden 1930s, Bishop McGovern was determined to found a Catholic orphanage in Wyoming. With great (and not always gentle) effort, he did so. St. Joseph's Orphanage in Torrington was never just about caring for literal orphans. It was always about a wider mission of providing life-changing support to Wyoming's most vulnerable children and youth. Under the name "St. Joseph's Children's Home", that mission continues. I personally know more than one person whose life was changed for the good by St. Joseph's Orphanage and Children's Home. One man I know was sent to St. Joseph's Orphanage in the 1950s because of various circumstances that completely overwhelmed his wounded and hopelessly struggling birth family. From St. Joseph's Orphanage, he went on to join the United States Marines, and he still attributes his rescue and success in this world, under God, first to St. Joseph's Orphanage in Torrington and then to the U.S. Marines. He adds that he isn't sure who was tougher, the Sisters of St. Francis or the Marines. St. Joseph's hasn't had sisters for a long time, and educational styles have changed, but the mission of providing life changing support for desperately vulnerable children and youth endures. Adding \$3.5 million in five year pledges and \$4.5 in legacy gifts to its endowment would deliver St. Joseph's Children's Home from its perpetual state of financial crisis.

The diocesan staff is poorly housed right now in a dreary little bunker-like building next to the Cathedral in Cheyenne. That site used to hold the old Carnegie Library, sold by Laramie County in the 1970s to a savings and loan outfit, who tore down the nice old library and replaced it with a dreary little bunker. During the savings and loan crisis of the 80s, the savings and loan outfit went broke (a just punishment for bad taste?), and Bishop Hart acquired the bunker for the diocesan staff and Catholic Charities of Wyoming. It was never big enough, really; and as Catholic Charities of Wyoming becomes larger and more active, new space is urgently required. The diocese already owns the new space, actually, Cheyenne's old police station. As you might imagine, a lot of work is required for turning an abandoned police station into suitable offices for the bishop, diocesan staff, and Catholic Charities of Wyoming. \$5 million from the campaign is set aside for that purpose.

I can say from lots of personal experience that it is absurd to expect the parish priest to function as superintendent of the local Catholic grade school. I can say by observation that it doesn't work for directing the formation of deacons to be a volunteer position, and that we cannot count on always finding external grants for a director of Hispanic ministry in Wyoming. Funding those positions, as well as expanding St. Paul's Newman Center in Laramie to be able to serve 500 students, all come under the heading of "forming missionary disciples", for which \$8.2 million from the campaign are dedicated. All of these are part of the somewhat neglected work of providing our Diocese with an adequate infrastructure of ministry.

As noted, at this point the most urgent infrastructure need at St. Barbara's is a handicapped accessible bathroom. 25% of our parish goal of \$387,000 will go to that purpose. 50% of anything raised above our goal will go to that purpose.

I want to express deep gratitude to those who have agreed to serve on the Campaign Committee for St. Barbara's Parish. Kelly Speiring is the Chair, and the Members are Dan and Linda Rodriguez, Brian Duyck, Aaron and Kelsey Black, Sharon Bailey, Mike Dunleavy, Brad and Donna Ferguson, and Jim and Marcia Wysocki.

Over the next two or three months, the campaign committee members will be contacting parish families in different ways to share the news about the campaign and the ways in which it will help our parish. When the volunteers call you, please greet their call with an open heart, and accept an invitation to meet with them or myself.

Clearly, the Communion for Mission Campaign is about ways and means, but it is always foolish to forget about the end to which all ways and means in the Church are directed. The end, ultimately, is the salvation of souls. Works of charity, worship, and education, if they are authentically Catholic, are all about giving people hope that life is truly worth living, because there is a living Lord, the conqueror of sin and death, Who is still active in this world through the hands and voices of those who believe in Him.

I want to end by returning to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The victim of robbers is the human race, attacked by the forces of evil, led into sin, and left doomed to death. The priest and Levite are all merely human efforts to help the human condition. At their best, they do real good; but even at their best they fail ultimately in the face of sin and death. The Good Samaritan is the Lord Jesus Christ, Who rescues human beings from sin and death, and brings them to the "inn" of the Church, where they are healed by God's word and by the holy Sacraments.

May the Communion for Mission Campaign be effective in helping souls come to the sacred "inn" where there is help and healing.

Please join me in praying for the success of the Communion for Mission Campaign, and in reflecting on how you can contribute to the campaign.

I thank you for all you have already done for our parish and diocese. May God reward you.

May God richly bless and powerfully guide our efforts towards a renewal of Catholic life in Wyoming.