

REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
CELEBRATION OF THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Dear Religious, Permanent Deacons, and Lay Faithful of the Archdiocese of Hartford,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis, and I assure you of his paternal affection, spiritual closeness, and heartfelt congratulations as you celebrate the 175 year legacy of faith in this Archdiocese. In a special way, I want to recognize and thank Archbishop Leonard Blair for his kind invitation to be with you this evening and for his leadership in this Archdiocese. It truly is wonderful to celebrate the special bond between this Metropolitan See of Hartford and the See of Rome.

In celebrating one hundred seventy-five years of faith, we rejoice not only in what has been accomplished, but also that the Heavenly Father has given you an opportunity as the People of God to be in a permanent state of mission in this Archdiocese. Two years ago, the Holy Father said that our mission requires passion:

“We need to have the passion of young lovers and wise elders, a passion that turns ideas into viable utopias, a passion for the work of our hands, a passion that makes us constant pilgrims in our Churches. ... I ask you for passion, the passion of evangelization.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF CELAM, 7 SEPTEMBER 2017)

Do we have that degree of passion? Sometimes we can come to a celebration like this and be filled with gratitude for all the men and women through the years who made so many sacrifices – to build churches and schools, to educate and form others in the faith, to welcome new immigrants and families. With fondness we can reflect upon the sacred ministers and religious who served us and nurtured our faith. All of this fills us with joy.

Yet, occasionally, our joy is tempered by reality. The reality that society is becoming more secular and Hartford, in particular, is becoming post-Christian. The decline in Mass attendance and sacramental practice; the merging and closing of those very schools and parishes that once nurtured our faith; the rise of the nones; and persistent problems of poverty, violence, and exclusion could quickly turn our joy to despair.

Instead, we do not despair; rather, we have hope, because we know the person of Jesus Christ. The Holy Father does not want you to be trapped in fear and despair as you confront the pastoral situation here; rather, he calls you to be “stewards of tomorrow”. The people who look ahead – to a better tomorrow – are the dreamers.

Pope Francis has a dream for the Church. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, 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. (EG, 27)

To understand what he means, consider his words during his visit to Brazil for World Youth Day, when he spoke of our “Continental Mission”, which is both *programmatic and paradigmatic*. The programmatic mission is a series of missionary activities; while, the paradigmatic mission:

“involves setting in a missionary key all the day-to-day activities of the particular churches. Clearly this entails a whole process of reforming ecclesial structures. The ‘change of structures’ will not be the result of reviewing the organizational flow chart, which would lead to a static reorganization; rather, it will result from the very dynamics of mission.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE LEADERSHIP OF CELAM, 28 JULY 2013)

He dreams of a new missionary spirit. Only from this paradigmatic choice to be a missionary Church will authentic reform, vital for evangelization, flow. Just as wind pushes against a sail and causes a boat to move upon the water, so too the Spirit of God pushes the whole Church to go forth into the world, attentive to the signs of the times and the needs of the people, jettisoning that which is obsolete. Pope Francis adds that “What makes obsolete structures pass away, what leads to a change of heart in Christians, is precisely *missionary spirit*.”

You are undergoing a difficult but necessary process of pastoral planning. But why? It is not simply that previous structures will no longer suffice; rather, it is because you are passionate about Jesus and what He offers to the world – mercy, hope, life. It is Christ who took the initiative with us – who attracted us and captivated our hearts and called us, with our diverse gifts, to the work of ministry and formed us into an evangelizing community. The Holy Father writes:

“An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative; he has loved us first (cf. 1 John 4:19), and therefore, we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 24)

Your Archdiocese has a rich history of evangelizing, and it was not always easy. Tragically, your first Bishop survived only five years as Bishop, dying of consumption. Your second bishop drowned at sea. Bishop McFarland saw your church through the Civil War and the First Vatican Council, but died shortly thereafter. None of this slowed the growth of the Faith. Bishop Galberry laid the cornerstone for the cathedral but died before its completion, and his successor Bishop McMahon would oversee its completion and preside over the growth of this local church. But that glorious cathedral burned during the fire of 1956, and yet the people of this Archdiocese were resilient. The new cathedral was erected and remains a beautiful testament to the spread of the faith. Christ continues to rebuild and renew.

In your history, despite many tragedies, the Faith has perdured. It is a testimony to the power of Christ at work in you. I am sure that Archbishop Cronin, Archbishop Mansell, and Archbishop Blair could tell you of the many challenges they have faced, but I am equally sure that they could tell many more stories of the blessings that have come through the power of Christ.

As the Archdiocese of Hartford looks forward in hope, I offer you the words of the Holy Father in his recent exhortation *Christus vivit*:

“Christ is alive! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this, because we can risk seeing Jesus Christ simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us

unchanged, it would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals us and consoles us is someone fully alive.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *CHRISTUS VIVIT*, 25 MARCH 2019, 124)

He is alive and at work in you! May He continue to be present in the life of this Archdiocese, filling it with light and blessing the People of God in Hartford with His missionary Spirit, transforming them into “stewards of tomorrow.”