

**The Institute of Saint Joseph** is a public association of the faithful in the Diocese of La Crosse. We are dedicated to the evangelical life according to our particular state in life.

We are grouped into four fraternities: **The Monastic Fraternity of Nazareth** (those who live the monastic life), **the Annunciation Fraternity** (consecrated celibate lay men and women), **the Incarnation Fraternity** (diocesan priests), and **the Holy Family Fraternity** (married men and women). We live the Spirituality of Nazareth, based upon the evangelical counsels, as found in Pope Paul VI's address at Nazareth in 1964. Our association is contemplative in its focus upon the "universal call to holiness" and providing the formation in prayer and the spiritual life in all the states in life. Our membership and structure is similar to many new communities in the Church, composed of men and women, celibate and married, priests and laity.

The following essay describes some of the aspects of the spirit and mission of the Institute of Saint Joseph.

### ***The Evangelical Life: Proper Perspective on the "new" and the "old"***

#### ***The Beauty of Being a Christian and the Joy of Communicating It***

Pope Benedict XVI met on the Vigil of Pentecost of this year with the members of the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities. Around 400,000 people assembled in Saint Peter's Square to pray with the Holy Father and one another. It was very inspiring and gave a hopeful ray of light in the midst of so much darkness, confusion, disobedience and mediocrity that is the state of things both in the Church and in the world. His message to them was full of encouragement and support; he has experienced the life-changing and life-giving effects of these new groups in the life of the Church for many years before being elected Pope. We who are members and aspirants in the Institute of Saint Joseph are representative of many of these new movements and communities. Because we do not fit into a particular model of the evangelical life in the Code of Canon Law, we manifest a new prompting of the Holy Spirit in our times; this is both a blessing and a curse. We have struggled to maintain the founding charism over these past 18 years without having a clear-cut path. This has caused misunderstanding, division, and even rejection of those who are unable to appreciate the gift of our presence in the Church. This is the usual experience of any new undertaking in the Church. This is the Passion that purifies and strengthens any new manifestation of evangelical life. The Gamaliel principle has always sifted the authentic gifts of the Holy Spirit from those of mere human origin (cf. Acts 5, 38). If we are the result of man's initiative, we will not be able to persevere; if we are of God's initiative, we cannot be stopped.

The inner reality of the "new" must always be rooted in Christ's teaching and the Tradition of the Church. But its outward manifestations will be suited to the times and will enable us to carry out the mission to which we have responded. Our mission, our goal is nothing other than the experience of those first Christians at Pentecost who

inflamed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit set out to transform the world for Christ and His Church. This is the meaning of the “new evangelization.” The universal call to holiness that we speak of so often is nothing other than the inner dynamism of being “alive in Christ” and making that concrete in everyday life.

The theme of the meeting of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities was “The Beauty of Being a Christian and the Joy of Communicating It”. Our life in Christ must radiate beauty and communicate the supernatural joy that comes from living consecrated to Him. But it is sometimes difficult to find beauty and joy in the struggles and demands of living the Gospel. It is hard to die to self; we not like conflict; suffering can be overwhelming, at times. Sin keeps us from responding to God, but there is something even underneath this. This theme confronts us head-on: what is it that keeps me from seeing the beauty of being a Christian and knowing the joy of communicating it? What is it that is so difficult? In the common struggles of daily life, am I truly living a supernatural outlook? Do I look to Jesus and His Message to give me the strength to overcome myself? Being a Christian, a follower of the Lord Jesus, means that the Sermon on the Mount, in particular the Beatitudes, should form my inner life and fill me with joy. Why does it seem that I make so little progress and am bogged down in a purely naturalistic frame of mind when I should be confident and joyful in living the message and making it known?

The meeting of the new communities with the Holy Father inspires us to return to the source of vocation--our baptism and confirmation. I was immersed in the death of Christ and rose with Him in my baptism, becoming a temple of the Holy Spirit and a child of God. The Holy Spirit empowered me at my Confirmation to live as Christ’s witness and to count on His strength to serve Him. Baptismal consecration makes us followers of Christ Jesus. Each one of us is called to be holy. We are called to have a personal relationship with the Lord that is based in faith and a desire to be like Him. My concrete following of Christ in a particular state in life will be fruitful. The universal call to holiness is the reality that all people need to be reminded of today.

### ***The New Evangelization***

The undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, Guzman Carriquiry, stated:

***We need to form a new generation that lives in holiness in all dimensions of life, that lives, not with a vague Christian inspiration devoid of content.***

This, in essence, is what we, as members of the Institute of Saint Joseph, are all about. This is why we exist. We want to help one another live in holiness in all dimensions of life with a very clear Christian inspiration. We have to die not only to sin but to the love of the world if we want to be followers of Christ. It is not enough to settle for so-called “middle-class” values that allow us to be comfortable in this world. We have to be detached from even good things. We cannot have a naturalistic outlook that has a veneer or covering of religious practices and avoiding mortal sin with attitudes that are merely human. The radical nature of the Christian vocation must always be at the center of our daily life.

The Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, left us a plan. He outlined it in his Apostolic

Letter,

*Novo Millenio Inuente (At the Beginning of the New Millenium)[NMI]*. He calls them 'pastoral priorities' for implementing and extending the 'new evangelization.' This is found in the Third Part entitled, "Starting Afresh from Christ." It is both encouraging and challenging to realize that our mission and stated purpose from the very beginning in the Institute of Saint Joseph is an expression of these 'pastoral priorities'. This is what convinces me that we are being inspired by the Holy Spirit and that we have followed an authentic inspiration in founding the Institute of Saint Joseph. These priorities are very simple and yet, if they are lived, are the only source of fruitfulness for the Church in this Third Millenium. Pastoral planning and projects do not need to be over-complicated. Unfortunately, the more complication the better, in some peoples' minds. It is a plan that can be implemented by an individual, a family, an association such as ours. Its effects have eternal consequences.

### ***Pastoral Priorities of the Third Millenium***

***Holiness*** is the first pastoral priority is The Jubilee grace of renewal and purification must be translated into the rediscovery of the 'universal call to holiness' described in *Lumen gentium* of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council as "an intrinsic and essential aspect" of the Council Father's teaching on the Church (*NMI*, 30). The Church is holy because she is the Bride of Christ. The objective gift of holiness is given to all the baptized. But the gift must be returned by the individual as a task that shapes the "whole of Christian life" (30). The Pope refers to the Scripture passage that we chose as our focus in the Institute of Saint Joseph: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thes 4:3). The call to holiness is for all: we must not become mediocre; we must not allow our lives to be "marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity"(31). John Paul II re-proposes to us "this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in the direction" by a "genuine 'training in holiness'...[that integrates] the traditional forms of individual and group assistance, as well as the more recent forms of support offered in associations and movements recognized by the Church" (31). This is the purpose for our association. We strive to be a place of "training in holiness."

***Prayer*** is the second pastoral priority. Prayer is the center of our common commitment; we founded the Institute of Saint Joseph to help form contemplatives in each state in life. John Paul II calls prayer "an art". And it truly is one. Prayer is a "conversation with Christ." It is a mutual giving. John Paul II writes: "Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father's face. Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the Church's life, but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life" (32).

This is the purpose of Eucharistic adoration, of spiritual reading, of meditating upon Sacred Scripture, of the daily Rosary, and most importantly, the frequent, mindful and devout participation in the Eucharistic mystery. We have made spiritual formation a

priority in the Institute of Saint Joseph in order to assist the development of the contemplative life, this personal encounter with the Holy Trinity in the Lord Jesus. We are trying to be a “school of prayer”(33) so that you are given the help and inspiration to experience your “meeting with Christ...in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening, and ardent devotion until the heart truly ‘falls in love’”(33). The monastic fraternity lives this call to prayer in a radical and concrete fashion for all of you. But it is not just those who are called to monastic life that are called to live this mystery fully and deeply. The Pope reminds us that, “It would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today’s world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but ‘Christians at risk,’” They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of ‘substitutes,’ accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions” (34).

This alludes to the attraction to the New Age Movement, to Eastern non-Christian techniques of prayer and philosophy, and even the dabbling in the occult. We need to signs of hope and authentic Christian living as a group and as individuals. We can help others to learn to pray and to encounter the Lord in the living light of Tradition, the Sacraments, and in His Word. This is the antidote to the unbelief and error that is in the very air that we breath today.

***The importance of the Sunday Eucharist*** to the life of the Church and to the Christian family cannot be exaggerated. The Pope calls upon all of us to make Sunday truly the Day of the Lord.

He calls it “a special day of faith, the day of the risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the truly weekly Easter”(35). The challenge today is to go against the tide of modern culture which sees Sunday as either a “free day” or as just another day of the week with no real significance. Even Catholics can absorb this mentality and opt for habitual Saturday evening Mass in order to do unnecessary work, recreational activities, or shopping on Sunday. John Paul II calls upon all Catholics to see Sunday observance as a part of their identity and to take measures to be a stronger witness to the primacy of Sunday as the Lord’s Day. To restore Sunday as the Day of the Lord is to return to making Sunday morning Mass the center of the day. It is the witness of Christian families and individuals who do not conform to the predominant culture that make this reality a sign for others.

***The Sacrament of Penance*** is the next pastoral priority that I wish to address. We are to receive the Sacrament of Penance at least monthly according to our Rules of Life. In order to grow in appreciation and understanding of this Sacrament that we may approach confession and sacramental absolution with a contrite spirit and a renewed amendment of life, it is essential that we see Christ as the One who “shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself” (37). We know there is a crisis of this Sacrament either from lack of understanding, formation, or rejection of the Church’s teaching regarding mortal sin and the reception of Holy Communion by only those who are properly disposed, that is, those who are free from certain mortal sin. We can be signs for others by receiving this Sacrament often and encouraging those with whom we have

contact to receive the Sacrament often or in the case of those who are struggling with serious sin, to go to Confession in order to be absolved and to gain freedom of mind and heart. The Pope encourages pastors to present the teaching of the Church on the Sacrament of penance clearly and lead people to appreciate it with “more confidence, creativity, and perseverance” (37). The joy and peace that frequent confession brings enables us to pray and serve with greater fidelity and perseverance. Devotional confession is profitable when we approach the Sacrament with sorrow for all sin and realize that Christ’s Precious Blood poured upon us in absolution deepens our communion with Him and with the whole Church. A renewal of this Sacrament of Mercy will come about when the message of God’s powerful action through the grace of absolution is a reality in people’s lives. We contribute to this renewal by our word and example.

***The Primacy of Grace/Listening to the Word/Proclaiming the Word*** The next pastoral priorities are interconnected and so I speak of them together. John Paul II speaks of the primacy of grace, listening to the Word and proclaiming the Word. When we are immersed in prayer we are aware that it is Christ’s action that is fruitful and lasting. Our own efforts and initiatives must be united in His grace. The “primacy of the interior life and of holiness” is the very reason for the monastic life. It is not a value for those who see only natural means to bringing about a goal. This is the reality of living with a supernatural outlook. We must be immersed in the life of Christ, in His grace and Word, in order to fulfill our mission. The frequent meditation upon Sacred Scripture, listening to the Word, forms the mind of Christ within us. *Lectio divina*, or sacred reading, is the slow, meditative reading of God’s Word in order to be available to its action within our hearts. Being “servants of the Word” means that we make our Christian witness a top priority. This is the summons to the ‘new evangelization’: “to..rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardor of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost” (40). With confidence we must present Christ to all: in our example and sometimes by our words.

The beauty of being a Christian and the joy of communicating it is found in falling in love with Christ and seeing our relationship with Him, in and through the Church, as an adventure. Then, we can communicate with joy all that He is to us, all that He has done for us. This is the ‘new evangelization’; this is the purpose and mission of our association.