

May 10, 2024

Dear <<Salutation>>,

May the peace of the Lord be with you,

As I write to you one last time, I am filled with profound gratitude and joy, mingled with a hint of bittersweet farewell. These past fourteen years as your Bishop has been nothing short of a sacred journey, illuminated by your unwavering faith, love for Christ, and profound compassion for those in need. Your steadfast commitment to our shared mission has been a source of inspiration and blessing, shaping our diocese and the wider Church community.

Throughout our journey together, your generous support of the Diocesan Annual Appeal has been the cornerstone upon which we have built a legacy of service and love. Your past contributions, which have made a significant difference in the lives of those we serve and played a crucial role in shaping our diocese and the wider Church community, are a testament to your faith and commitment. Your ongoing support is not just a financial contribution but a testament to your faith and commitment to our shared mission, and it is deeply appreciated. Together, we have achieved so much, and I am proud to have been a part of this journey with you.

The Journey and Regency programs for our seminarians vividly demonstrate the transformative power of your contributions. These initiatives, which have become a beacon of hope for those discerning a vocation to the priesthood, directly result from your support. They provide a year of profound spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual formation to our seminarians, who are the living testament of your generosity. Your continued support of the Diocesan Annual Appeal will help us continue to provide these life-changing opportunities to our future priests and inspire hope and optimism for a brighter future.

Through the support of the Diocesan Annual Appeal, we have expanded our FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) campus ministries from one to three of the UW campuses in our diocese, with hopes of adding the fourth campus soon. These FOCUS ministries, amid the recent unrest on many college campuses, offer a place where students can gather and practice their faith, reach out to others, evangelize, and provide a wholesome alternative to the decadent party lifestyle that permeates many campuses. FOCUS has been a gateway for many to enter the seminary and religious life, including one of our priests. Your continued support of the Diocesan Annual Appeal will help us reach even more students and profoundly impact their lives.

Over the years, the Diocesan Annual Appeal has played a pivotal role in supporting our outreach to the Hmong people through our Hmong Ministry. This support has led to the establishment of the first and only parish the Church calls a 'personal parish' for the Hmong citizens of the Wausau area. A personal parish is a type of parish established by the diocesan Bishop to serve the spiritual needs of a particular group of the faithful rather than being defined by geographical boundaries. With their distinct cultural background, the ministry bridges the Gospel and Hmong cultures. This stand-alone parish is growing and thriving, and as a result, efforts are underway to build the first Hmong Catholic Church, all made possible by the past generous contributions to the Diocesan Annual Appeal.

But our impact extends far beyond the confines of our diocesan and parish communities. Through your generosity, we have been able to reach out across the globe to those on the fringes of society, offering the Gospel and a lifeline to those trapped in the cycles of addiction, homelessness, and poverty. Thanks to your unwavering support, children like those at Casa Hogar Juan Pablo II in Peru have been given a chance to break free from the shackles of poverty.

At the heart of our Diocesan Annual Appeal lies a sacred bond of faith that unites us as one family under God's loving embrace. Your contributions fund thirty-eight essential ministries, each a testament to our commitment to living out the Gospel message of love and compassion. These ministries, such as our outreach to the Hmong people, the Journey and Regency programs for our seminarians, and the expansion of our FOCUS campus ministries, are part of a more extensive network of initiatives transforming the wider Church community. Your support of the Diocesan Annual Appeal is not just about our local diocese and parishes but our collective mission to spread the Gospel and love for Christ to all corners of the earth.

As Ecclesiastes 4:12 wisely reminds us, "*A cord of three strands is not easily broken.*" Your support of the Diocesan Annual Appeal is the third strand that completes our sacred bond of love for God and neighbor. Without it, our call to bring the good news of the Gospel to the corners of the earth is incomplete.

So, I humbly ask you, one last time, to prayerfully consider the impact your generosity can have on the lives of those in need. Your investment in this year's Diocesan Annual Appeal will undoubtedly transform countless lives near and far and pave the way for a future filled with hope and compassion. I am confident that, with continued support, our mission will continue and thrive, and our impact will only grow stronger. Your support is not just a financial contribution but a beacon of hope for those in need, a testament to the power of our shared faith and mission.

As I embark on a new chapter in my journey, please know that you will always remain in my prayers. Your love for Christ and commitment to serving others inspire me, and I am grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside you on this sacred path. Our bond is not just one of faith but of shared experiences and values, and I am honored to be a part of it. So let us rejoice in the good our ministries produce and, with open hearts, welcome Bishop Gerard Battersby as the eleventh bishop of the La Crosse Diocese. I have collaborated closely with Bishop Battersby and can confidently assure you that he is a man of deep faith, compassion, and dedication to our mission. I am confident that our diocese will continue flourishing under his leadership, instilling a sense of faith and hope in our shared future.

From the depths of my heart, I want to thank each of you for your prayers and financial support over the years. Your stewardship has made a significant difference in our mission, and I am deeply grateful for your support. Your stewardship is a testament to your faith and dedication to our shared mission. Let us continue to be instruments of God's love in the world, shining brightly as beacons of hope and compassion.

With deepest gratitude and fondest blessings and personal good wishes and prayers, I remain yours, in the service of Jesus and Mary,

Most Reverend William Patrick Callahan,
Bishop Emeritus of La Crosse

"P.S. If you've already sent your gift, thank you so much! Our letters may have crossed paths in the mail. Please continue to pray for the success of the Diocesan Annual Appeal and the ministries it supports.