



PASTORAL LETTER



*Your Parish: The Body of Christ
Alive in Our Midst*



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The letter is also available online at archlou.org.



MY DEAR FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE,

Your parish community is such a great gift to your life of faith: it is the Body of Christ alive in our midst! May this message be a greeting of joy as we seek to renew this great gift.

This August I began my tenth year serving as your Archbishop. In nearly a decade, one of my great joys has been to visit you in your parishes. Even in the midst of the well documented challenges to the life of faith today, including the number of those who have grown distant from Christ and His Church, I have witnessed your lively faith. Each time I confirm the youth of your parish, dedicate a new ministry or building, install a pastor, or celebrate a parish anniversary, I have seen firsthand your goodness, your commitment, and the vibrancy of your parish. Indeed, parish life is at the heart of where and how we grow as the Body of Christ.

Saint Paul was likely the greatest missionary that the church has ever known. In the first decades after the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Paul traveled the known world establishing local churches. As a missionary, he did not stay in one place very long. Even as he moved from place to place, however, he kept in touch with the local faith communities he had established and maintained a lively interest in all of the local churches he had visited. Many of the epistles handed down to us in Sacred Scripture from Saint Paul give lively testimony to his deep concern that the local church continue to deepen and grow in her Savior, Christ Jesus.

Saint Paul referred to these churches in various cities not simply as gatherings of believers but truly as the Body of Christ: “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” (1 Cor 12:27). Recall the very words of Jesus, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). Again in the Acts of the Apostles, the Savior said the following to Saint Paul just before his great conversion, “Why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4). Saint Paul reflected on the presence of the Risen Jesus in the assembly of the faithful, seeing them as the Body of Christ.





When he wrote, he often addressed the situations unique to each local church. To one, he spoke of the Holy Eucharist and the need for active and deep participation (see 1 Cor 10:16-22 and 1 Cor 11: 23-29). To another, he spoke of the gifts of each member and the need for each to care for one another, often very specifically calling forth right conduct (see 1 Thess 5:14-22). Once he spoke in great praise when one local church took up a collection to help with another (see Rom 15:25-28). He was constant in his interest in each local church and in their ways of living in communion with each other in Christ Jesus.

The modern diocese is the local church of Saint Paul's time. As the church grew, we found that the local church required parishes, and so it is that the local church in the Archdiocese of Louisville can be described as 110 parishes growing more deeply into the Body of Christ and helping one another to do just that.

Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation on the *Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, paragraph 28, addressed the parish as the primary location for evangelization – the announcing of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Quoting Saint John Paul II from paragraph 26 of his 1988 apostolic exhortation, *On Christ's Faithful People (Christifidelis Laici)*, Pope Francis describes the parish as "... the church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters." Evoking an image dear to Saint John XXIII from the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42), the Synod Fathers of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops described the parish as the village fountain, where individuals meet Jesus and have their thirst quenched and from which they are sent to serve the broader community. All of these images speak to the central mission of the parish as an evangelizing community that exists not for itself but for the mission of Christ.

While many priorities emerge as part of the parish mission of evangelization, in this time, three in particular stand out. These include family life, education and formation, and service and outreach.

- Pope Francis has called the parish “the family of families.” In his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia)*, Pope Francis speaks of an historic moment for family life. In spite of all the challenges families face today, the family is not a problem to be solved but a gift to be cherished. Jesus sees our struggles and our hurts, and He calls us to healing and hope in Him. Families are schools of love and the building blocks of the parish. To be successful in growing as the Body of Christ, we must support, equip, and form families as vital instruments of evangelization. Special attention should be given to those families who struggle and are in need of support.
- In our parishes, we have made an extraordinary commitment to the lifelong formation and education of adults, youth, and children. Our emphasis is not on institutions but on the persons being served. Catholic schools have exceptional gifts and unique challenges that need to be addressed where they exist. In addition, our concern is to ensure that all parishioners continue to learn and be formed by Christ and His church by attending to the legacy of Catholic education and religious formation of children, youth and young adults, adults, and to ongoing formation that emphasizes family life.
- Our Archdiocese and parishes have a longstanding tradition of partnerships with government and community groups that enrich human dignity through acts of charity and social justice. As we build on these successes, we want to integrate more effectively the work of Catholic Charities with ministries that take place in individual parishes. We seek to support and sustain these efforts by exploring new opportunities to make our church and our society authentic witnesses to the dignity of life and the common good, while encouraging parishes to teach, integrate, and carry out the very rich social teaching of the Church through parish programs and ministries. In a special way, we heed the call of Pope Francis to go out to the peripheries, serve those who are poor, extend mercy, work for peace, and care for the Earth and all of its treasures. As we carry on the work of justice, we seek ways to be engaged mutually in the life of other local churches throughout the world and with parishes within the local church of the Archdiocese of Louisville.



BECOMING THE BODY OF CHRIST

I write to tell you of exciting plans for a process of discernment in your parish as we seek the direction of the Lord Jesus for us over the next decade. I issue a special invitation to pastors and all priests who as my “co-workers” share in the ministry of the bishop to preach, celebrate the sacred mysteries, and provide pastoral leadership and care. I invite you, the faithful, to join my brother priests and me as together we embark on a renewal of our parish life by growing more deeply as the Body of Christ. Does this mean:

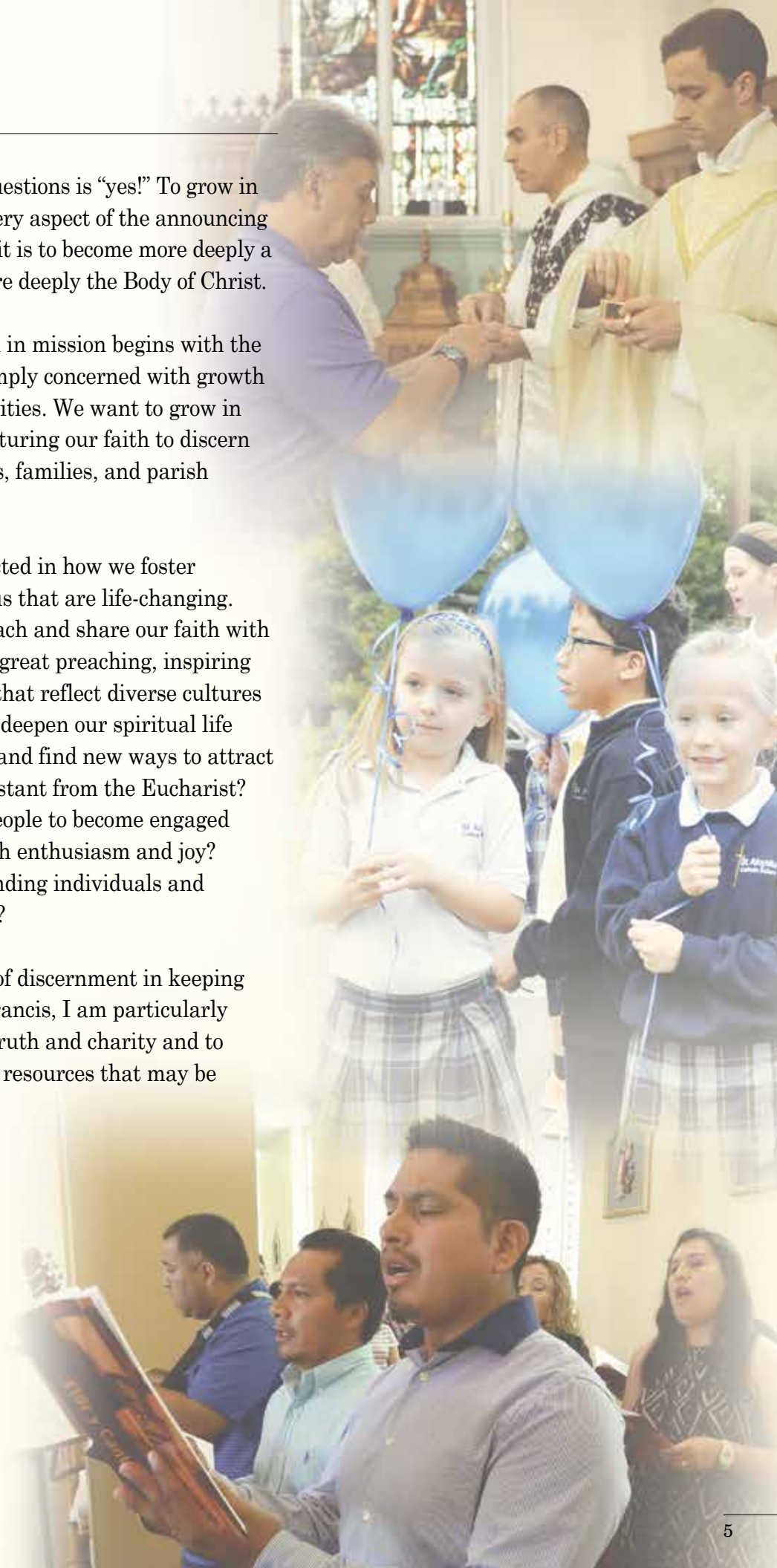
- To grow more deeply in holiness?
- To grow by increasing the members of our church?
- To grow by reaching out to those who feel distant from the church?
- To grow in service to those most in need within our communities?
- To grow in generosity beyond the boundaries of our parish in serving the needs of other parishes or even the wider global community?

The answer to all of these questions is “yes!” To grow in Christ Jesus is to attend to every aspect of the announcing of the Good News. In essence, it is to become more deeply a vibrant parish – becoming more deeply the Body of Christ.

To be authentic, this growth in mission begins with the call to holiness. We are not simply concerned with growth in numbers, programs, or facilities. We want to grow in holiness by deepening and maturing our faith to discern God’s will for us as individuals, families, and parish communities.

Growing in holiness is reflected in how we foster personal encounters with Jesus that are life-changing. How do we most effectively teach and share our faith with others? How do we encourage great preaching, inspiring liturgies, renewing devotions that reflect diverse cultures and spiritualities? How do we deepen our spiritual life formed in the Holy Eucharist and find new ways to attract and welcome those who are distant from the Eucharist? How can we invite all God’s people to become engaged in the work of discipleship with enthusiasm and joy? How are we equipping and sending individuals and families to reach out to others?

As we embark on a process of discernment in keeping with the leadership of Pope Francis, I am particularly concerned to ensure unity in truth and charity and to foster good stewardship of the resources that may be required for this growth.



In fostering good stewardship, I am promoting a theology of abundance that reminds us that God has given us everything we need to grow as the Body of Christ and to plant, cultivate, and water the seeds of growth in our Archdiocese. We trust that God will make us ever more generous so that, as we grow spiritually, we also will provide what is needed materially to sustain that growth as we seek to be good stewards.

Such a discernment process begins with five major movements within your parish:

- To bring this discernment process to prayer, both individually and as a parish community. Of course, the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the life of the parish, and parish vibrancy will emerge from the grace of Jesus Christ, as together with other parishioners, you approach the Eucharist with reverence, devotion, and joy.
- To listen attentively, both individually and communally, with the ears of Christ, steeped in the knowledge and love of Sacred Scripture and the living tradition of the Church and open to emerging needs of the parish and broader community.
- To celebrate the many gifts that are part of your heritage as a parish, appreciating those faithful parishioners of the past as well as those who have labored into the present.
- To decide where you are being called to grow as a vibrant parish and what is needed to get there.
- To develop the necessary resources to support the steps you need to take within your parish.

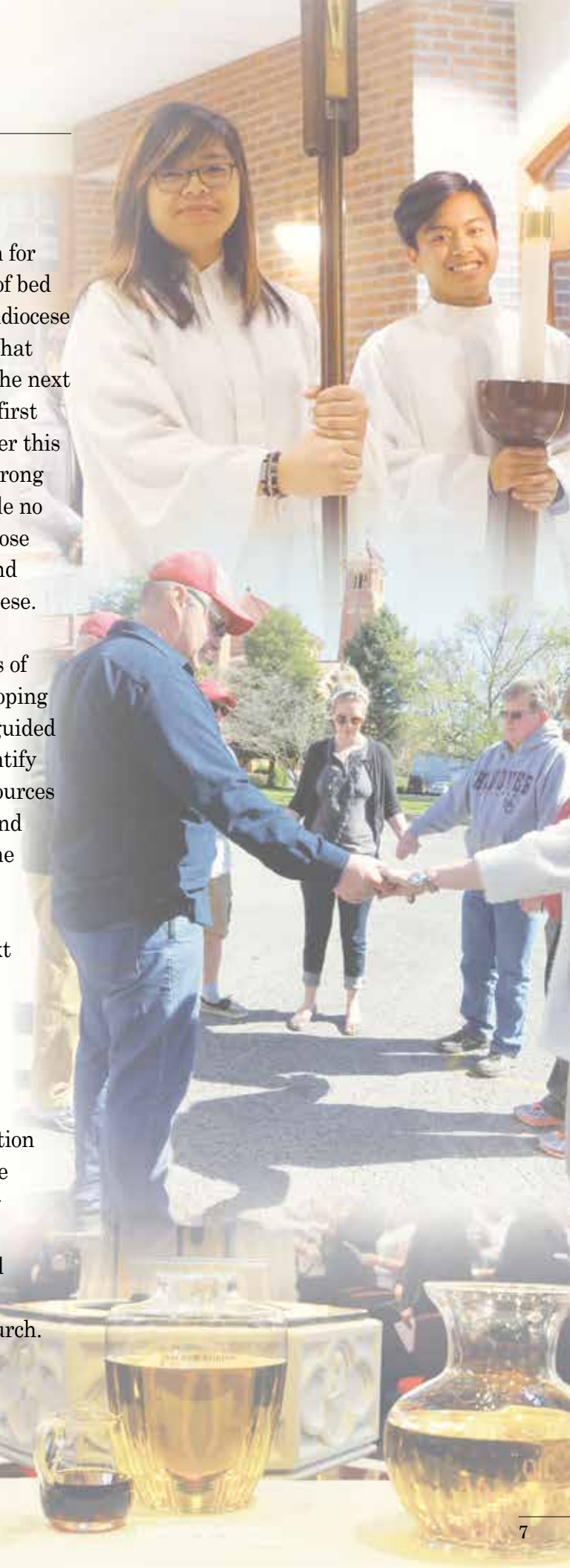
With a deep trust in the grace of Jesus Christ alive in our hearts and with a firm awareness of the reality of sin and the need for conversion in each of our hearts and in our communities, we move forward.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

I like to say that people with a sense of hope, plan for the future. People without hope can't even get out of bed in the morning. For almost three decades, the Archdiocese has had the practice of developing a strategic plan that identifies priorities deserving special attention for the next five years. This process has served us well. When I first came to the Archdiocese, I asked our pastors whether this process was valuable. Resoundingly, I received a strong "Yes." In fact, many pastors reminded me that, while no parish perfectly matches archdiocesan priorities, those parishes that have planned for the future often found their parish priorities mirrored that of the Archdiocese.

This discernment process with its five movements of praying, listening, celebrating, deciding, and developing will take place over the next two years and will be guided by those equipped to assist us. The process will identify a road map of priorities for each parish and the resources needed to meet the goals. Whether it is preparing and equipping leaders, ensuring proper facilities, or some other initiative, your parish will grow through this process. I hope that every one of our 110 parishes will take advantage of this opportunity over the next two years.

Every year during the celebration of the Chrism Mass during Holy Week, clergy, religious, and lay representatives from parishes in all regions of our Archdiocese gather at the Cathedral of the Assumption in a demonstration of our unity and solidarity as the Church in Central Kentucky. The annual gathering is a powerful reminder of who we are – and who we are called to become – as missionary disciples called to give witness to Gospel joy and, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to witness growth within the Church.

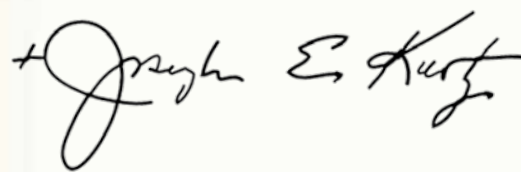


With this pastoral reflection, *Your Parish: The Body of Christ Alive in Our Midst*, I am inviting parishes in all regions of our Archdiocese to engage in this prayerful process of discernment.

Through prayer, reflection on God's word and church teachings, and our collaborative efforts to proclaim and live the Good News of Jesus Christ, we seek to carry out our mission faithfully and cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit so that this Archdiocese will grow in faith, hope, and love. Please join me in becoming more deeply who we are: the Body of Christ here in Central Kentucky.

My prayer for you and for the 110 parishes that serve as spiritual homes for individuals, families, and communities throughout our 24 counties is that we will be enthusiastic and engaged co-workers with Christ who trust that, if we do our part, sharing generously all the gifts we have received from God's abundance, the world will recognize us for who we are: the Body of Christ.

As we embark on this exciting journey, let us seek the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, whose wholehearted "yes" is the inspiration for all of our efforts to cooperate with God's grace and look to the Holy Family, whose journey of faith serves as a model for our parishes as a family of families, formed by grace into the Body of Christ.



Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Archbishop of Louisville
30 December 2016, Feast of the Holy Family



PARISHES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE

HOLY CROSS CHURCH · SAINT CHARLES CHURCH · SAINT MICHAEL CHURCH
HOLY NAME OF MARY CHURCH · SAINT BERNARD CHURCH · SAINT ROSE CHURCH
SAINT THOMAS CHURCH · SAINT AUGUSTINE CHURCH · BASILICA OF ST. JOSEPH PROTO-CATHEDRAL
SAINT THERESA CHURCH · SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL CHURCH · SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH
ALL SAINTS CHURCH · SAINT BONIFACE CHURCH · SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH
SAINT IGNATIUS CHURCH · SAINT DOMINIC CHURCH · SAINT CATHERINE CHURCH
HOLY ROSARY CHURCH · SAINT GREGORY CHURCH · SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER CHURCH
SAINT MARTIN OF TOURS CHURCH · SAINT JAMES CHURCH · SAINT PAUL CHURCH
CATHEDRAL OF THE ASSUMPTION · SAINT MARTIN OF TOURS CHURCH
OUR LADY OF MERCY CHURCH · CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION · SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH
SAINT LOUIS BERTRAND CHURCH · SAINT AUGUSTINE CHURCH · SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH
SAINT ALOYSIUS CHURCH · SAINT BRIGID CHURCH · SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM CHURCH
SAINT AMBROSE CHURCH · OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP CHURCH · HOLY TRINITY CHURCH
HOLY TRINITY CHURCH · SAINT MARY MAGDALEN OF PAZZI CHURCH · SAINT EDWARD CHURCH
SAINT AGNES CHURCH · SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH · SAINT FRANCES OF ROME CHURCH
HOLY NAME CHURCH · SAINT JOHN THE APOSTLE CHURCH · SAINT HELEN CHURCH
SAINT WILLIAM CHURCH · SAINT ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY CHURCH · SAINT JAMES CHURCH
SAINT BENEDICT CHURCH · SAINT BRIGID CHURCH · OUR LADY OF THE HILLS CHURCH
SAINT THERESE CHURCH · SAINT ALOYSIUS CHURCH · SAINT ANN CHURCH
SAINT RITA CHURCH · CHRIST THE KING CHURCH · HOLY FAMILY CHURCH
HOLY ROSARY CHURCH · HOLY SPIRIT CHURCH · MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT CHURCH
OUR MOTHER OF SORROWS CHURCH · IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH
SAINT BARTHOLOMEW CHURCH · SAINT THOMAS MORE CHURCH · SAINT RAPHAEL CHURCH
OUR LADY OF FATIMA CHURCH · SAINT STEPHEN MARTYR CHURCH
OUR LADY OF LOURDES CHURCH · SAINTS SIMON AND JUDE CHURCH
SAINT JOHN VIANNY CHURCH · SAINT MARGARET MARY CHURCH · SAINT GABRIEL CHURCH
HOLY SPIRIT CHURCH · IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY CHURCH · SAINT LAWRENCE CHURCH
SAINT LEONARD CHURCH · OUR LADY OF THE CAVES CHURCH · SAINT MONICA CHURCH
GUARDIAN ANGELS CHURCH · OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL CHURCH
SAINT CHRISTOPHER CHURCH · SAINT ALBERT THE GREAT CHURCH · SAINT ATHANASIUS CHURCH
SAINT MARTHA CHURCH · IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH · SAINT BERNARD CHURCH
SAINT IGNATIUS MARTYR CHURCH · GOOD SHEPHERD CHURCH · ASCENSION CHURCH
CHRIST THE KING CHURCH · SAINT LUKE CHURCH · INCARNATION CHURCH
HOLY REDEEMER CHURCH · EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH · CHRIST THE HEALER CHURCH
SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON CHURCH · EMMANUEL CHURCH · SAINT MICHAEL CHURCH
HOLY CROSS CHURCH · SACRED HEART CHURCH · SAINT PATRICK CHURCH
SAINT MARTIN DE PORRES CHURCH · SAINT BERNADETTE CHURCH
SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE CHURCH · SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA CHURCH
GOOD SHEPHERD CHURCH · MARY QUEEN OF PEACE CHURCH · SAINT JOHN PAUL II CHURCH



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