
STUDY GUIDE



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





Archdiocese of Louisville

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Dear Sisters and Brother in Christ,

May God bless you!

I am pleased to present this *Study Guide* that is designed to be used with my pastoral letter, *Your Parish: The Body of Christ Alive in our Midst*. The purpose of the guide is to allow individuals, small groups, and parish committees to engage with the pastoral letter, to think about how God is calling you to grow in holiness, and to reflect on how you can participate in your parish's vibrant witness as the Body of Christ alive in our midst. This guide also will allow you to thoughtfully offer input into the parish discernment process called for by my pastoral letter.

First, I encourage you to read the pastoral letter carefully and to take advantage of opportunities your parish offers to discuss it with others, either in small groups with other parishioners, regularly scheduled committee meetings, or other opportunities such as your Bible study or faith formation group. You also may wish to read, study, and respond individually.

The *Study Guide* consists of three major sections and a prayer for the discernment process. These sections correspond to the three main themes of the pastoral letter: Family Life, Education and Formation, and Service and Outreach. Questions are provided that invite you to consider how God is calling you personally, how God is calling your parish, and how you might take the next step to help your parish grow more fully as the Body of Christ in our midst. Whether you are using the *Study Guide* within a group setting or as an individual, I encourage recording a summary of the reflections in response to these questions. These summaries will be helpful as we move into the next step of the parish discernment process.

The next step for the parish discernment process will take place when your parish holds large group listening sessions. All parishioners are encouraged and invited to participate, and your participation in this study process will prepare you to participate well. Groups who study the document together can consider delegating one member to attend the listening sessions and share the reflections from the small group process.

As you study and reflect on the pastoral letter and participate in the discernment process, please bring this process to prayer. We have developed a "Prayer for Parish Discernment" that is included in this document and that will be used by your parish.

Please be assured of my prayers for you as you read and reflect on the pastoral letter and as you respond to the questions posed in this *Study Guide*. May our Blessed Mother Mary inspire you to be receptive to God's grace in your life and in the life of your parish. May the Holy Family serve as a model for all of our parishes, as a family of families formed by God's grace into the Body of Christ.

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Archbishop of Louisville

Study Guide for Your Parish: The Body of Christ Alive in Our Midst

This study guide addresses the three major themes explored in Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz's pastoral letter on parish life. The guide is intended to supplement the pastoral letter, which you are encouraged to read carefully and reflect on prayerfully before responding to the reflection questions following each of the three themes. Responses may be kept for personal reflection or shared in small discussion groups.

Prayer for Parish Discernment

God of mercy and source of all wisdom, we ask your blessing on our parish discernment journey:

May we be a place to encounter you in Word, Sacrament, and Service.

May we be a "family of families," diverse and yet one.

May we embrace lifelong learning, formed by Church teaching.

May we be people of charity, justice, and peace - authentic witnesses to the dignity of life and the common good.

May we grow in holiness by sharing your Good News with others and serving those who are most in need, both within our parish and beyond its boundaries.

May we celebrate your abundant gifts and be good stewards of all that you have given us.

May we be a community that exists not for ourselves, but for your saving mission.

Most of all, may we embody your son Jesus, alive in our midst.

As we seek to discern the spiritual and material needs of our parish, help us to pray fervently, listen attentively, and decide where you are calling us to go.

We ask this through your son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever and ever,

Amen.

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” (pg. 3).

“Families are schools of love and the building blocks of the parish” (pg. 3).

“To be successful in growing as the Body of Christ, we must support, equip, and form families as vital instruments of evangelization” (pg. 3).

“Special attention should be given to those families who struggle and are in need of support” (pg. 3).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion – Personal or Small Groups

Please discuss as many questions as time allows. The parish listening sessions will focus on the last three questions.

- 1. What are some moments in my life when I have been drawn closer to Christ through my family?
- 2. When I think of my own experiences in family life, I am...
- 3. What do we have to celebrate? Please identify two or three ways your parish currently fosters growth within family life.
- 4. What is God’s hope for our parish? As a result of prayer, reflection and discussion what are 2-3 ways in which the Lord is calling us to go within the area of family life?
- 5. How can we get there together? What specific programs or activities do you recommend as priorities in this important area of parish life?

Notes:

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG FORMATION

“In our parishes, we have made an extraordinary commitment to the lifelong formation and education of adults, youth, and children” (pg. 3).

“Our emphasis is not on institutions but on the persons being served” (pg. 3).

“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” (pg. 3).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion – Personal or Small Groups

Please discuss as many questions as time allows. The parish listening sessions will focus on the last three questions.

- 1. What are some moments in my life when I have been drawn closer to Christ through my experience of Catholic formation?
- 2. When I think of my own experiences of education and formation in the faith, I am...
- 3. What do we have to celebrate? Please identify two or three ways your parish currently fosters Catholic lifelong formation and education.
- 4. What is God’s hope for our parish? As a result of prayer, reflection and discussion what are 2-3 ways in which we believe the Lord is calling us to go in the area of Catholic education and formation?
- 5. How can we get there together? What specific programs or activities do you recommend as priorities in this important area of parish life?

Notes:

SERVICE AND OUTREACH

“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” (pg. 3).

"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" (pg. 3).

“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” (pg. 3).

“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” (pg. 5).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion – Personal or Small Groups

Please discuss as many questions as time allows. The parish listening sessions will focus on the last three questions.

1. What are some moments in my life when I have been drawn closer to Christ through service and outreach?
2. When I think of my own experiences in service and outreach, I am...
3. What do we have to celebrate? Please identify two or three ways your parish currently fosters service and outreach. Include any engagement and/or collaboration with another parish, both within and outside the Archdiocese.
4. What is God's hope for our parish? As a result of prayer, reflection and discussion what are 2-3 ways in which we believe the Lord is calling us to go in within the area of service and outreach?
5. How can we get there together? What specific programs or activities do you recommend as priorities in this important area of parish life?

Notes:

This page can be used to provide a summary of your reflections to be shared at the parish large group listening session.

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