

Diocese of Richmond

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Office of the Bishop

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We recently celebrated an historic moment in the life of our Catholic Church in the United States with the visit of Pope Francis. From his invigorating public speeches to his individual interactions with people, it is evident that he has the heart of an evangelist and seeks to make the love and mercy of Jesus Christ more fully known to us all. Following the Holy Father's example, we too must be heralds of the love and mercy of Jesus Christ in our own lives.

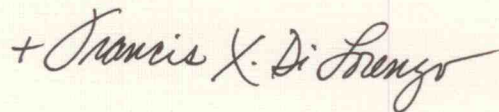
As I have traveled around the Diocese over the past year, I have experienced a tangible energy enlivening our parishes. Since the launch of the pastoral plan for the work of evangelization entitled "*Encounter the Joy of the Gospel – and Set the World Ablaze*", I have seen Evangelization teams design creative plans to make the Mass more accessible to the homebound and those whose primary language is not English. I have seen parishes implement initiatives like evangelization training programs and Bible studies. And I have seen parishioners give public testimony recounting a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. I am pleased to announce that we have formally transitioned to Stage 2 of the pastoral plan so that parishes can build upon all their great work by focusing on "Building the Domestic Church."

The timing of stage two is auspicious. It coincides with five major events in the life of the Church; namely, the Holy Father's visit to the United States, the World Meeting of Families, the Synod of Bishops focusing on issues surrounding the family, and the Year of Mercy beginning December 8, 2015, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Additionally, for the first time in the history of the Church, a married couple was canonized. Louis and Zelig Martin, the parents of Saint Therese of Lisieux, were canonized during a recent Mass where Pope Francis noted that they "practiced Christian service in the family, creating day by day an environment of faith and love which nurtured the vocations of their daughters."

Focusing on the Domestic Church provides an opportunity to evangelize our families and empower them to be agents of evangelization. Like Louis and Zelig Martin, every family has the God-given capacity to bear love and mercy to the world. To that end, on December 20th just prior to the 11 a.m. Mass at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, I will officially designate a door as a jubilee door for the faithful during this upcoming Year of Mercy. Each parish will participate in the Year of Mercy in a way that is consistent with the needs of their local communities – keeping in mind the particular instance of mercy where it is needed in families and in the unceasing work begun in stage one of the pastoral plan (i.e. strengthening our individual relationships with Christ).

I am inspired and energized in seeing the many people who have come alive in their faith because of the dedicated work of our evangelization teams and our own diocesan Office for Evangelization. I again invite pastors and parish evangelization teams to join us in this effort, and I assure you of my prayers on behalf of this endeavor to invite Catholics within our Diocese to encounter the joy of the Gospel, and equip them to set the world ablaze!

Sincerely yours in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Francis X. Di Lorenzo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Francis X. DiLorenzo
Bishop of Richmond

October 26, 2015