



# BEATITUDES

*from the*

# HEARTLAND



THE ARCHDIOCESE  
OF KANSAS CITY IN KANSAS

*Made by the Archdiocese of KCK for the Archdiocese of KCK*

# INTRODUCTION

## WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS SERIES

This four-part series is intended to encourage all Catholics to deepen their engagement in their faith and in their parishes, especially through participation in parish ministries and membership on parish councils. In addition to new or established Bible study/faith sharing groups, this series is intended for the following:

- members of a parish's pastoral, finance, stewardship and school advisory councils;
- catechists, youth ministers or youth group leaders and teachers;
- extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, sacristans, lectors, hospitality ministers, choir members or others who fill a role for parish liturgies;
- parish clergy and staff; and
- anyone who wants to grow in their faith.

Based on the experiences of those who have participated in a series like this, if new small groups are being formed, it is optimal for those groups to be composed of members who don't usually interact. For instance, a parish pastoral council member could form or join a small group of parishioners who are not part of the pastoral council or other ministries in which the pastoral council member is engaged. This encourages communication and planning across the entire parish.

Furthermore, those involved in ecclesial ministries and communities which overlap with our parishes are encouraged to participate. This includes religious communities, Catholic Charities, ministries for prisoners and their families, health care facilities, and communities organized around universities and high schools.

Beatitudes from the Heartland is similar and yet different from other small group faith-sharing material. Usually, faith-sharing groups exhibit five attributes: the members engage in prayer, faith sharing, learning, support and faith-directed action. The focus in these groups is typically on personal growth.

The sessions in this booklet support these five attributes. In addition, the content is intended to challenge each participant to go deeper into understanding their responsibilities as a baptized Catholic toward others. While participants can expect to grow personally in their faith, the goal is also to encourage a renewal and growth in the life and health of their parish.

The series references the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) from the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium and Pope Leo XIV's apostolic exhortation Dilexi Te. Consider reading these seminal Church documents which are guiding our Catholic Church today in being true to the mission entrusted to it by Our Savior Jesus Christ. Especially relevant sections are provided in the appendix.

*“Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours” (Lk 6:20). God shows a preference for the poor: the Lord’s words of hope and liberation are addressed first of all to them. Therefore, even in their poverty or weakness, no one should feel abandoned. And the Church, if she wants to be Christ’s Church, must be a Church of the Beatitudes, one that makes room for the little ones and walks poor with the poor, a place where the*

## How to use the Beatitudes from the Heartland program

To encourage healthy and Spirit-filled sessions, group members are encouraged to agree to abide by the following.

### WELCOMING

- Prepare an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality to set the tone. Make sure the setting is comfortable (including the chairs) and that other activities or individuals will not interrupt the group.
- A welcoming and prayerful setting can also include a candle, Bible, crucifix and perhaps flowers, a table runner, an image or a prayer card to engender an atmosphere of recollection. **Simple is better than elaborate.**
- Encourage people to share something about themselves (if they do not know one another) as they gather initially.
- Keep the social and refreshment aspects to a minimum.
- Start and end on time. Each session should take 60-90 minutes.
- Plan for some “collection” time at the start of each meeting; allowing 5-10 minutes for all members to arrive, greet one another and settle in.
- Welcome members promptly. Don’t let members visit too long, gently remind them they could visit after the meeting, if anyone is causing a delay. Open your meeting in prayer. Use the “Opening Prayer” provided on page 4.
- Close with the “Closing Prayer,” on page 5, at the end of each meeting.

### SHARING

- Commit to coming prepared and being present at all sessions, except for emergencies. The group is lessened when a member is missing.
- Understand this is a “safe place” for people to share matters of the heart and soul. Respect others’ need for confidentiality.
- Share honestly.
- Listen to others without “correcting,” judging or attempting to preach at them. Ask questions to help you understand another person’s beliefs, opinions or knowledge better.
- Help to ensure everyone who wants to speak has an opportunity to do so; do not interrupt others. Allow silence so those who are more hesitant may have the time to gather their thoughts.
- Help the group stay on topic.
- Pray for one another, your parish, the archdiocese and the universal Church between sessions.

# Opening and Closing Prayers

Each of the four sessions uses the same opening and closing prayers.

## OPENING PRAYER

**Leader:** Let us begin with the sign of our faith: + In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Let us hear again the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

### All Together:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me.

**Leader:** Lord Jesus, in your teachings and example, you tell and show us how we can "bring glad tidings to the poor" to those who are in the throes of the Beatitudes. May we use our time together to listen with our hearts and minds to your words, both in Scripture and spoken to us by the Holy Spirit through our friends.

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

**Leader:** Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,

**All:** and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

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*"The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking. Where the world sees threats, she sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome. And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community" (Dilexi Te, 75).*

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## CLOSING PRAYER

**Leader:** We leave renewed by our time together reflecting on God's great blessings. What prayers of petition, thanksgiving or praise can we offer?

**Spontaneous prayer, each ending with:** ...Let us pray to the Lord.

**Response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** We conclude with the ancient prayer asking for the Holy Spirit

**ALL:** Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful  
and kindle in them the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,  
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

**Leader:** O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful  
by the light of the Holy Spirit,  
grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise  
and ever rejoice in his consolation.  
Through Christ our Lord.

**ALL:** Amen



# MODULE I

## **THEME:** Being blessed with a poverty of spirit

This module invites us to “be” the Church and to recognize poverty of spirit as the doorway to discipleship. By reflecting on the Beatitudes and the teachings of the Church, we discover how humility, dependence on God, and love for the poor transform both our personal faith and parish life.

**OBJECTIVE:** To grow in humility and openness to God’s grace so we can help our parish become a welcoming community rooted in the spirit of the Beatitudes.

### **OPENING PRAYER** (see page 4)

The Leader can ask individuals to alternate reading these paragraphs or ask people to read silently together.

The Beatitudes take the Ten Commandments to the next level. Instead of a list of “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not,” Christ provides us with a “cause and effect” explanation of what it means to be his disciple. If I am “poor in spirit,” I will experience the kingdom of God. If I enter into suffering and mourning, I will be comforted. Discipleship requires ongoing conversion, a deepening understanding of God’s dream for humanity and our world. The Beatitudes explain how we can be disciples.

Archbishop Shawn McKnight describes the Beatitudes as “forms of the first and fundamental Beatitude, ‘poverty of spirit,’ which brings salvation to those who embrace it.” He says:

“All of [the Beatitudes] are moments that draw the Holy Spirit to us and when we are closest to God (hence, they are true ‘Beatitudes’ or ‘blessed opportunities’ that bring a deeper meaning to life and spiritual satisfaction like nothing else). Those who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst, who are merciful, who are clean of heart, who are peacemakers and who suffer persecution all experience a poverty of spirit, which comes with its own blessing.”

Christ provides the “perfect example of the Beatitudes in his own life and ministry” for his disciples, explains Archbishop McKnight. “Whenever we follow the Lord’s command to take up our Cross daily and follow him, or to die to ourselves like a grain of wheat, we experience the most meaning in our lives as Christians and are closest to the Lord, receiving all the blessings of the Kingdom.”

When an entire community embraces these “blessed opportunities” as ways to grow closer together, we fulfill Christ’s commandment: “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

In Pope Leo's first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, he focuses on our understanding of how our relationship with others, especially the poor, is what shapes our relationship with God.

### **Reading from *Dilexi Te*, No. 21:**

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus appeared in the synagogue of Nazareth reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and applying the prophet's words to himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good tidings to the poor" (Lk 4:18; cf. Is 61:1). He thus reveals himself as the One who, in the here and now of history, comes to bring about God's loving closeness, which is above all, a work of liberation for those who are prisoners of evil, and for the weak and the poor. The signs that accompany Jesus' preaching are manifestations of the love and compassion with which God looks upon the sick, the poor and sinners who, because of their condition, were marginalized by society and even people of faith. He opens the eyes of the blind, heals lepers, raises the dead and proclaims the good news to the poor: God is near, God loves you (cf. Lk 7:22). This explains why he proclaims: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours" (Lk 6:20). God shows a preference for the poor: the Lord's words of hope and liberation are addressed first of all to them. Therefore, even in their poverty or weakness, no one should feel abandoned. And the Church, if she wants to be Christ's Church, must be a Church of the Beatitudes, one that makes room for the little ones and walks poor with the poor, a place where the poor have a privileged place (cf. Jas 2:2-4).

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### **Reading from *Joy of the Gospel*, No. 28:**

In *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), Pope Francis tells us why our parishes are so key to our ability to be faithful believers.

"The parish is not an outdated institution," he writes. "Precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be 'the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters'.

This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.

The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary

# MODULE I

where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach.

"We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented."

## Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of the Beatitudes are most comforting to you? Which are most challenging to you?
2. Do you recognize your parish in the passage from Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*? Is your parish "a useless structure," "a self-absorbed group" or "an environment ... for growth in the Christian life," "a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey?" Can you give specific examples of why any of these descriptions resonate with you?
3. How do the Beatitudes relate to this description of a parish?

## A Church of the Beatitudes

"If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). Jesus teaches consistently that love for God is impossible without a love for our neighbors.

Understanding that God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God in him. (1 Jn 4:12,16), Pope Leo writes in *Dilexi Te*:

For this reason, works of mercy are recommended as a sign of the authenticity of worship, which, while giving praise to God, has the task of opening us to the transformation that the Spirit can bring about in us, so that we may all become an image of Christ and his mercy towards the weakest. In this sense, our relationship with the Lord, expressed in worship, also aims to free us from the risk of living our relationships according to a logic of calculation and self-interest.

We are instead open to the gratuitousness that surrounds those who love one another and, therefore, share everything in common. In this regard, Jesus advises: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (Lk 14:12-14).

"The Lord's appeal to show mercy to the poor culminates in the great parable of the last judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46), which can serve as a vivid illustration of the Beatitude of the merciful. In that parable, the Lord offers us the key to our fulfillment in life; indeed, "if we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged." The clear and forceful words of the Gospel must be put into practice "without any 'ifs or buts' that could lessen their force. Our Lord made it very clear that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*)."

A sign of thriving parishes is the engagement of all parishioners in its mission, so that our worship reflects our response to the greatest commandment of love for God and our neighbors.

1. How does the lay leadership of your parish engage all parishioners in the parish's mission so they can experience the opportunity to love one another? Are there specific ways more people could be engaged?
2. Is your parish known in the community for its hospitality and welcoming spirit? How are laity making the parish known for its hospitality and welcoming spirit? What can be done to extend that welcoming spirit even further?

## **CLOSING PRAYER** (see page 5)

## Go Deeper

Review the document *Lumen Gentium* ("Light of the Nations") (see the appendix of this booklet).

## NOTES

# MODULE II

## THEME: Sanctuaries of Mercy

This module explores mercy as essential to Christian life and parish identity. We reflect on Scripture and Pope Leo's teaching that the poor are not just recipients of our action, but teachers of the Gospel. We examine how our parish can move from a transactional mindset to relationships shaped by generosity, compassion, and peace.

**OBJECTIVE:** To deepen our understanding of mercy and learn to practice compassionate, Gospel-centered relationships that help our parish become a true sanctuary of mercy.

### OPENING PRAYER (see page 4)

*The Leader can ask individuals to alternate reading these paragraphs or ask people to*

For two thousand years the Church has walked alongside the poor, caring for them; it has always been an essential part of our mission because we believe God cares for all of his creation, especially those who suffer.

"God is merciful love, and his plan of love, which unfolds and is fulfilled in history, is above all his descent and coming among us to free us from slavery, fear, sin and the power of death ... Wanting to inaugurate a kingdom of justice, fraternity and solidarity, God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed, and he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favor of the weakest" (Dilexi Te, 16).

### Reading from Colossians 3:12-17:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,

bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.

And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

## Reflection Questions:

1. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." "And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful." What relationships or circumstances in your life do you need the peace of Christ to control your heart? Can you recount a time when you were able to let go and let God be in control of a relationship or a situation? How did that turn out?
2. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Have you experienced mercy when you forgave someone for causing you grief? Has a fellow parishioner caused you grief and needs your forgiveness?

## A Church of the Beatitudes

In Pope Leo's first apostolic exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, he focuses on our understanding of how our relationship with others, especially the poor, is what shapes our relationship with God.

In *Dilexi Te* the Holy Father explains that "the poorest are not only objects of our compassion, but teachers of the Gospel. It is not a question of 'bringing' God to them, but of encountering him among them" (*Dilexi Te* 79) because "while it is true that the rich care for the poor, the opposite is no less true. This is a remarkable fact confirmed by the entire Christian tradition. Lives can actually be turned around by the realization that the poor have much to teach us about the Gospel and its demands." (*Dilexi Te* 109).

The Holy Father highlights that "no Christian can regard the poor simply as a societal problem; they are part of our 'family.' They are 'one of us.' Nor can our relationship to the poor be reduced to merely another ecclesial activity or function" (*Dilexi Te* 104). Furthermore, he recalls St. John Paul II's teaching on work to reflect on "the active role that the poor ought to play in the renewal of the Church and society, thus leaving behind a certain 'paternalism' that limited itself to satisfying only the immediate needs of the poor" (*Dilexi Te* 87).

Strengthening the parish's capacity as a center of charity and sanctuary of mercy requires us to move away from the pervasive commercial, or transactional, mindset of our culture. Instead of considering encounters at our parishes as transactional (we give someone something in exchange for something else, like a commercial transaction with money) we are called instead to see them as moments to fulfill our mission as a parish; they bring mercy and deepen our relationships with one another and with God.

At one synodal listening session, a self-described "church lady" shared how she became part of a group of people who would take "Andrew" home to his government housing after Sunday Mass and the just-as-essential coffee and doughnuts. One Sunday he shared with her that he'd been diagnosed with throat cancer ("He smoked like a chimney."). In a matter of weeks, he moved into a nursing home and then died. The parishioner was notified by the hospital that Andrew had died and was asked where she wanted to have his

# MODULE II

body sent, since he had listed her as emergency contact. She and about 50 fellow parishioners lived the corporal work of mercy of burying the dead. They honored Andrew with a funeral service (complete with the requisite coffee and doughnuts after the service), provided a resting place for his remains and cleaned out his apartment, donating all salvageable items. Along the way, our “church lady” realized she was called to care for Andrew as a brother and her parish lived as a sanctuary of mercy.

1. Are there barriers which prevent “certain people” from having access to the sacraments or to the ministries of your parish? What can you do to remove those barriers?
2. What, if any, difference do you see in charging a fee for parish services (such as for a meal after a funeral, rental of a hall, etc.) or accepting a donation or free-will offering? Is a fee a commercial transaction?
3. How do we make room on our calendars and in our bank accounts for those seeking mercy?

## **CLOSING PRAYER** (see page 5)

### **Go Deeper**

Review the apostolic exhortation of Pope Leo XIV, *Dilexi Te* (see the appendix of this booklet).

## NOTES

# MODULE III

## THEME: Co-responsibility

This module explains co-responsibility as a shared mission of clergy and laity. We reflect on clericalism, humility, and the need for every baptized person to contribute actively to parish life. We explore how to support our pastor and offer our spiritual gifts to strengthen the whole community.

**OBJECTIVE:** To embrace our baptismal call to co-responsibility by discerning and offering our spiritual gifts to strengthen our parish and support the mission of the Church.

### OPENING PRAYER (see page 4)

*The Leader can ask individuals to alternate reading these paragraphs or ask people to read silently together.*

Co-responsibility is a relatively new term for many of us, but it is rooted in the fundamental values of Catholicism. It is a way that we fulfill the Christian definition of being a community: a group of people who agree to grow together in relationship with God.

Clericalism is the exact opposite of co-responsible behavior. While it is often associated with priests who distinguish themselves from others with a sense of entitlement, Pope Francis reminds us it is an attitude to which lay people can also succumb.

In a meeting with young Italians in 2018, Pope Francis said<sup>1</sup>, “But I often think of Jesus knocking on the door, but from inside, because we [do not] let him go out, because we often, without witness, hold him prisoner to our formalities, our closures, our selfishness, our clerical way of life. And clericalism, which is not just clerics, is an attitude that affects all of us: clericalism is a perversion of the Church. Jesus teaches us this path of exit from ourselves, the path of witness. And this is the scandal – because we are sinners! – that we do not go out of ourselves to give testimony.”

In *Dilexi Te*, Pope Leo XIV wrote, “All the members of the People of God have a duty to make their voices heard, albeit in different ways, in order to point out and denounce such structural issues [causing poverty], even at the cost of appearing foolish or naïve. Unjust structures need to be recognized and eradicated by the force of good, by changing mind-sets but also, with the help of science and technology, by developing effective policies for societal change. It must never be forgotten that the Gospel message has to do not only with an individual’s personal relationship with the Lord, but also with something greater: the Kingdom of God.

### Reading from 1 Peter 5:1-6

So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed.

Tend the flock of God in your midst, not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit, but eagerly.

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/august/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180811\\_giovani-italiani.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/august/documents/papa-francesco_20180811_giovani-italiani.html)

Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock.

And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Likewise, you younger members, be subject to the presbyters. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for:

“God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble.”

So humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What does the Beatitude “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land” mean to you?
2. How can leaders in our parishes — whether ordained or lay — exhibit true humility and a hunger and thirst for righteousness, especially for young people who may only see hypocrisy and irrelevance in the Church? Are we hampered by fear of appearing “foolish or naïve?”

### **A Church of the Beatitudes**

A parish’s spiritual health and strength is directly impacted by the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental well-being of its spiritual father, the pastor. A healthy flock, willing to engage their gifts and talents in the mission of the parish, provides the shepherd with the optimal environment in which he can devote more of his time and efforts to the core spiritual functions of his ministerial priesthood.

No. 10 of Lumen Gentium states: “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.”

1. What are you doing, or could you do, to get to know the priests who serve your parish? How can you help them be healthy and holy pastors?
2. What are some practical ways that the laity can exercise “the common priesthood of the faithful?” Are there functions done by the pastor that you could be doing?

### **CLOSING PRAYER (see page 5)**

# MODULE IV

## **THEME: Blessed are the persecuted, for your reward will be great in heaven.**

This module focuses on courageous Christian witness, even in the face of misunderstanding, difficulty, or cultural resistance. We reflect on the healing power of God at work through us and distinguish between volunteering and true stewardship of God's gifts. We are encouraged to use our gifts for the sake of the next generation of believers.

**OBJECTIVE:** We will grow in courageous witness and faithful stewardship, using our God-given gifts to build up our parish and inspire the next generation of disciples.

### **OPENING PRAYER** (see page 4)

*The Leader can ask individuals to alternate reading these paragraphs or ask people to read silently together.*

1 Peter 4:8-11 offers specific guidance for what it means to be a witness and bring forth the next generation of believers: "Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

It's difficult being in a leadership position these days. We're surrounded by people who prefer to be idolized — and people who are willing to idolize — as opposed to being willing to love with the intensity that "covers a multitude of sins" and draws people to a deeper, everlasting relationship with Christ.

In this story told in Acts, Peter and John perform a miracle which changes everything: not just for the person who was physically healed, but for many others who witnessed the physical healing and were seeking spiritual healing.

### **Reading from Acts 3:1-10**

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o'clock hour of prayer.

And a man crippled from birth was carried and placed at the gate of the temple called "the Beautiful Gate" every day to beg for alms from the people who entered the temple.

When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms.

But Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."

He paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them.

Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, [rise and] walk."

Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong.

He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God.

When all the people saw him walking and praising God,

they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him.

## Reflection Questions

1. The passage from Acts is part of a longer story; Peter tells people the miracle wasn't due to Peter or John, but because of God's love for his people. Do you consider yourself worthy of being saved or of having a miracle happen to you?
2. Can you allow God's healing, miraculous power to influence your family, friends, even fellow parishioners? What would that look like?

## A Church of the Beatitudes

What's the difference between being a volunteer and being a steward of God's gifts?

Frank has a good job working for an aircraft company. He also likes to garden. He loves the smell of the earth and the feel of the soil in his hands. There are times when his children wish he would find another hobby, especially in late summer. There are only so many ways one can cook, bake, fry, or prepare zucchini! They are delighted when the parish picnic coincides with the zenith of zucchini from Frank's garden.

Susan works with Frank at the same aircraft company. Even though her job title is not "teacher," Susan has the gift of being a teacher. In her conversations with others, she teaches. In the manner she conducts her work, she teaches without words. According to a dictionary, a teacher is a person who helps others to acquire knowledge, competences or values. Susan is a teacher, always helping others to acquire knowledge, competences or values. It's not what she does. It is who she is.

Frank is a volunteer — he shares the results of his hobby, gardening, but it's something optional, depending upon his health, time and desire, and not always needed by the recipients of his sharing.

# MODULE IV

Susan is a teacher. She willingly shares this talent, this gift, and sometimes feels she can't stop herself from teaching! She is also a life-long learner, eager to acquire knowledge and competency in her gift of teaching.

Parishes, just like any association of people, need volunteers to accomplish certain tasks. As Catholics, we also are to be stewards of the talents and time given to us by God, and to use our talents and time wisely to help our parish community flourish. Parishes need volunteers and stewards.

A value of a healthy parish is that good faith formation is being provided for our children, youth and young adults, and families within a culture of lifelong formation for all adults.

1. What gifts do you have which God is calling you to share?
2. Is your parish nourishing the gifts of parishioners so they can properly share those gifts with the next generation? How can we call forth catechists who are “natural” teachers or catechists, and give them the tools they need?
3. What other gifts are needed so that lay people can ensure a culture of lifelong faith formation is being provided in your parish?

## NOTES

# A Renewal from the Heartland

A pastoral planning process for the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

With this faith-sharing program, Beatitudes from the Heartland, our archdiocese is beginning a new pastoral planning process to help every parish become a true center of charity and a sanctuary of mercy. This effort will guide clergy and laity, working together, to strengthen our sense of communion and live out the mission of the Church.

Parishioner involvement is essential! We'll be following the universal Church's plan outlined in *Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod (2025–2028)*, which requires input from everyone. Stay tuned for opportunities to participate and make your voice heard as we journey together in faith by visiting [www.archkck.org/renewal-heartland](http://www.archkck.org/renewal-heartland).

## Calendar

Lent 2026	Beatitudes from the Heartland: a small group faith sharing program held in every parish
April 12-26, 2026	Listening with the Heart: listening sessions throughout the archdiocese
June 1-15, 2026	Online survey
Sept. 12, 2026	Archdiocesan-wide gathering of pastors and parish pastoral council representatives

In addition, gatherings of clergy and parish lay leadership will provide opportunities to share information and begin the collaboration necessary for effective pastoral planning. Those meetings will be held in each deanery, simultaneously. If you are a member of a parish advisory council or in parish leadership, check with your pastor for more details.

# Appendix

## **Dogmatic Constitution on the Church** **Lumen Gentium**

Solemnly promulgated by Pope Paul VI

Full document available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html)

Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, is one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council. As is customary with significant Roman Catholic Church documents, it is known by its incipit, “Lumen gentium,” Latin for “Light of the Nations.”

The eight chapters of the document can be paired thematically: chapters one and two treat the Church’s nature and historical existence, chapters three and four treat different roles in the Church, chapters five and six treat holiness and religious life, while chapters seven and eight discuss the saints and Mary.

Some sections of the document especially pertinent to today’s call to a more synodal way of being church include:

“At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right. God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness [...] Christ instituted this new covenant, the new testament, that is to say, in His Blood, calling together a people made up of Jew and gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God. For those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the word of the living God, not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit, are finally established as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people ... who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God.” (LG, 9)

"Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity." (LG, 10)

"The laity are gathered together in the People of God and make up the Body of Christ under one Head. Whoever they are they are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification ... Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth." (LG, 33)

"But the Lord wishes to spread His kingdom also by means of the laity, namely, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace." (LG, 36)

"Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history. The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one — that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity." (LG, 40, 41)

## **Apostolic Exhortation**

### **Dilexi Te**

The Apostolic Exhortation “I have loved you” (Rev 3:9), focused on love for the poor, was signed by Pope Leo XIV on Oct. 4, 2025, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, and published on Oct. 9. *Dilexi Te* is Pope Leo XIV’s first apostolic exhortation, building upon Pope Francis’ fourth encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*.

Pope Leo XIV places poverty at the center of his reflection, presenting it as a structural and universal issue affecting all societies. Drawing from his own experience, the lives of the saints and others, he outlines how we must be “A Church for the Poor,” if we are to imitate God’s complete love for and identification with the poor. It has five chapters: “A Few Essential Words,” “God Chooses the Poor,” “A Church for the Poor,” “A History that Continues” and “A Constant Challenge.” The exhortation emphasizes that a concrete commitment to the poor must be accompanied by a change in mentality that can have an impact at the cultural level (DT, ch. I).

Some sections of the document especially pertinent to the Beatitudes include::

“At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus appeared in the synagogue of Nazareth reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and applying the prophet’s words to himself: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18; cf. Is 61:1). He thus reveals himself as the One who, in the here and now of history, comes to bring about God’s loving closeness, which is above all a work of liberation for those who are prisoners of evil, and for the weak and the poor. The signs that accompany Jesus’ preaching are manifestations of the love and compassion with which God looks upon the sick, the poor and sinners who, because of their condition, were marginalized by society and even people of faith. He opens the eyes of the blind, heals lepers, raises the dead and proclaims the good news to the poor: God is near, God loves you (cf. Lk 7:22). This explains why he proclaims: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20). God shows a preference for the poor: the Lord’s words of hope and liberation are addressed first of all to them. Therefore, even in their poverty or weakness, no one should feel abandoned. And the Church, if she wants to be Christ’s Church, must be a Church of the Beatitudes, one that makes room for the little ones and walks poor with the poor, a place where the poor have a privileged place (cf. Jas 2:2-4). (DT, 21)

“It becomes clear, then, that “our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members.” I often wonder, even though the teaching of Sacred Scripture is so clear about the poor, why many people continue to think that they can safely disregard the poor.” (DT, 23)

“For the Christian faith, the education of the poor is not a favor but a duty. Children have a right to knowledge as a fundamental requirement for the recognition of human dignity. Teaching them affirms their value, giving them the tools to transform their reality. Christian tradition considers knowledge a gift from God and a community responsibility. Christian education does not only form professionals, but also people open to goodness, beauty and truth. Catholic schools, therefore, when they are faithful to their name, are places of inclusion, integral formation and human development. By combining faith and culture, they sow the seeds of the future, honor the image of God and build a better society.” (DT, 72)

“Charity has the power to change reality; it is a genuine force for change in history. It is the source that must inspire and guide every effort to “resolve the structural causes of poverty,” and to do so with urgency. It is my hope that we will see more and more “politicians capable of sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots — and not simply the appearances — of the evils in our world.” For “it is a matter of hearing the cry of entire peoples, the poorest peoples of the earth.”” (DT, 91)

“92. We must continue, then, to denounce the “dictatorship of an economy that kills,” and to recognize that “while the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies that defend the absolute autonomy of the market-place and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is being born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules.” There is no shortage of theories attempting to justify the present state of affairs or to explain that economic thinking requires us to wait for invisible market forces to resolve everything. Nevertheless, the dignity of every human person must be respected today, not tomorrow, and the extreme poverty of all those to whom this dignity is denied should constantly weigh upon our consciences.” (DT, 92)



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