



OFFICE *of the* BISHOP

The New Moment

2018 Lenten Journey

January 24, 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In his 2017 Lenten Message, Pope Francis reminded us that Lent is the favorable season for renewing our encounter with Jesus Christ. From his very first encyclical to the present day, by his words and actions, the Holy Father has shown us that the hearts of those who truly encounter Jesus Christ are filled with the joy of the Gospel. Our lives, church, nation, and world need that joy.

The holy season of Lent begins this year on Wednesday, February 14. During the 40 days that follow, I encourage you to renew your encounter with Christ Jesus, the Lord, through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The prophet Joel instructs us to return to God “with your whole heart” (2:12), and so we use these practices to draw closer to Christ, detach ourselves from the false idols of this world, and accompany more closely those in our midst who are poor, suffering, and vulnerable.

Reports have shown that people derive more satisfaction and pleasure from providing things for others in need rather than acquiring something unnecessary for themselves. In Gospel terms that can be translated as, “Whatever you do for the least of your brothers and sisters, you do it for me.” Our almsgiving becomes an encounter with Christ that brings joy. Fasting helps us to take our eyes off ourselves and see others in our midst while prayer liberates us to listen the voice of Christ calling us to respond to the least of our brothers and sisters. This is the journey of our 40 Days of Lent – taking up our Cross and dying to self so that we may better love God and others. It is a journey that culminates in the full joy of Easter.

As a means of giving alms, I encourage parishes, schools, and individuals to support the Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl effort, formerly called Operation Rice Bowl. The Rice Bowl provides us with a very tangible way of living in solidarity with those who are poor and vulnerable around the world. Twenty-five percent of the donations raised through the Rice Bowl effort stay in the Diocese of Des Moines to assist local people in need. The other 75 percent is donated to Catholic

Relief Services to support people who live in poverty in more than 100 countries around the world.

Once again this year, I ask schools and parish religious education programs to sponsor “Building the Kingdom,” a project which raises funds for a high school seminary in Nigeria led by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. There are currently four priests serving in the Diocese of Des Moines who are members of this congregation. They are Fathers Anthony Adibe, Felix Onuora, Remi Okere, and Eze Venantius Umunnakwe. Generous support over the last several years has resulted in renovation of the seminary’s academic building, students’ living quarters, modernization of restroom facilities, and a recreation area, all of which were in dire need of repair and updating.

During this season of Lent, let us pray for one another as we deepen our love for Christ and His Church. May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion so that through the grace of God, we will be led to a renewed encounter with Christ and a deepened awareness of the joy of the Gospel.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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The Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines

Enclosure