

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”—SEEING BEYOND OUR BOUNDARIES —Fr. Steve Lape

With the Eucharist at the heart of our Catholic identity, it's important to recognize our faith connection with people all over the world. Mindful of “catholic” meaning “universal,” we join our prayers and celebrations with members of the Body of Christ (the Church) across the globe. With around 2.1 billion Christians in the world (the biggest world religion), almost 1.3 billion of them are Catholic. According to Cindy Wooden's National Catholic Reporter article from April 8, 2017, almost 49% of Catholics live in North or South America. The article listed the top 10 countries with the most Catholics (as listed in the Vatican Statistical Yearbook). From 1 to 10, they are: Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, the U.S., Italy, France, Columbia, Spain, Congo & Argentina. The article also stated that from 2010 to 2015, the global Catholic population grew 7.4%, with the biggest percentage growth in that period being in Africa (19.4%). Such statistics make me recall the words of the Risen Jesus, as told to the Apostles at the end of Matthew's Gospel: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (28:19-20) Celebrating Eucharist is the central way that we as Catholics acknowledge that sense of mission & belief.

Many people often get very territorial when it comes to parish life. Many are hesitant about going to other parishes for their events, opting to stay and do things “in their own backyard,” so to speak (in their own parish). Many complain about clustering of parishes because they fear losing their parish's identity. Many become angry and filled with grief over having their church closed. Many even get a bit “bent out of shape” when someone else sits in their usual pew place. (Jesus always desires us to be more welcoming to all, especially visitors, not possessive or self-serving.) Yet, as challenging as these may be, they also afford us, as a local & universal Church, new opportunities to grow, especially in understanding what it means to be Church. It's not just our relationship with a local building or local people (or people we like or prefer) or a local village or town. Being Catholic is, first and foremost, about our relationship with Jesus Christ and all His disciples, wherever they may

be. The Eucharist best embodies that sense of unity that our Lord desires for us. We're united in the Lord through love, faith, and prayer with other Catholics all over the Earth, going beyond buildings, languages, ethnic backgrounds, economic conditions, races, and local customs. Wherever we go to Mass in the world, even though language, music, artwork, or other customary expressions may differ from place to place, the Mass is still basically the same, underlining our unity in Christ.

With less than 3 months remaining in our diocese's “Year of the Eucharist,” I also think of our parish's unity with all the other Catholic parishes around our 12-county Diocese of Rochester, which is 150 years old this year. Originally a part of the Diocese of Buffalo,



the Rochester Diocese began when Pope Pius IX assigned 8 counties (Monroe, Livingston, Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, Yates, Tompkins, & Cayuga) in 1868 to Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid. At the time, about 54,500 Catholics lived in our diocese, with 35 parishes and 29 mission churches. In 1896, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga, & Chemung counties joined our diocese from the Buffalo Diocese. Bishop McQuaid served as our local ordinary (bishop) the longest (1868-1909) of any of our 9 bishops in our diocese's history. After McQuaid, our bishops included: Thomas Francis

Hickey (1909-28), John Francis O'Hern (1929-33), Edward Mooney (1933-37), James E. Kearney (1937-66), Fulton J. Sheen (1966-69), Joseph L. Hogan (1969-79), Matthew H. Clark (1979-2012), & Salvatore R. Matano (since Jan. 2014). Currently, our diocese has 88 parishes, with 208 priests (active, religious, or retired), 102 permanent deacons, 11 seminarians, and 547 religious sisters, all serving about 350,000 Catholics in various capacities. It is good, then, to constantly give thanks for the many ways that our Lord keeps nourishing & sustaining us--through our many ministries & especially through the Eucharist--as individual members of His One Body through all these years, with all its ups & downs, trials & triumphs! May we always strive to build up that Body with our generous hospitality, selfless love, active purpose & great hope in the many blessings to come!