



# CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD



eloved Brothers and Sisters,

With this greeting we often start our encounters. What meaning do these words, normally used among close persons have? Why do Christians define relationships amongst themselves with these terms? Is it a way of indicating how Christians must behave among themselves with others or do they indicate something real? If it is real, what importance does a definition like this assume in our life?

I beg your pardon, if I start this letter with a series of questions; this seems to me a way of quickly entering the theme which I intend to share with you: *«Brotherhood in the Christian Community»*.



## WHY THIS THEME ?

The Diocesan Synod had indicated the Parish as a «*fraternal community*»(72), «*a community of fraternal love*»(272): This description shapes the image of the Parish community and at the same time indicates a need to pursue.

This need is the reason why I chose this theme for this year: that our parishes and our diocesan church grow in brotherhood and become more aware that this characteristic is decisive to be true disciples of our Risen Lord and collaborators in His mission. This is the path on which we should walk in order to renew the life of our communities, to incarnate more our faithfulness to the Gospel, to nourish our missionary endeavor, and to favor forms of collaborations in all levels. In particular, in this perspective are found the reflection and the focus of the Pastoral Units, which the diocesan Synod has launched. The choice of this theme strongly intertwines with the proclamation of the Year of the Faith on the part of the Holy Father, in the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Vatican Council II and of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

WHAT MUST  
CHRISTIANS  
DO TO CALL  
EACH OTHERS  
«BROTHERS  
AND SISTERS»?

In the proclamation letter is written: *«It will start on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2012, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Vatican Council II, and will end on the solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ King of the Universe, the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2013. The 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2012, coincides also with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the text promulgated by my Predecessor, the Blessed Pope John Paul II, which aims to illustrate the force and the beauty of the Faith to all the faithful».*

In relation to our pastoral theme, the Pope again writes in his letter: *«Because of faith the disciples formed the first community gathered around the teaching of the Apostles, in prayer, in the celebration of the Eucharist, putting in communion all that they possessed in order to sustain the necessity of the brethren»* (cfr At. 2:42-47).

Even our Diocese will open as a community the Year of the Faith this coming 11<sup>th</sup> October, with a particular celebration in the Parish Church of “Sotto il Monte”, in the liturgical memory of the Blessed Pope John XXIII, who is very dear to us. The memory and the veneration of Pope John, united in a renewed understanding of his magisterium, of his testimony and prophetic courage which started the beginning of the Vatican Ecumenical Council II, will characterized our way of celebrating the Year of the Faith in order to arrive at a more significant celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death which took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1963. In this sense, the Diocese, the Pope John XXIII Foundation, the Sotto il Monte Parish together with the PIME community, will propose

WHAT ARE  
WE CALLED  
TO SHARE  
TODAY FOR  
THE CHRISTIAN  
COMMUNITY?

some initiatives of particular significance. Among these, which from now on, I allow myself to emphasize: the diocesan Pilgrimage to Rome and the pilgrimages of the different parishes to “Sotto il Monte”. And another I propose to all the youth, a pilgrimage by foot from Assisi to Rome through the Via Francigena, which will happen in the month of August.

In the encounter with the Diocese of Bergamo, in the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the election of Pope John, Benedict XVI addressed the pilgrims from Bergamo: *«The Diocese of Bergamo is in feast and cannot miss the spiritual encounter with his illustre son, “a brother who became father as willed by the Lord”, as he himself once said. Near the Confession of the Apostle Peter reposes his venerated mortal body. From this place, dear to all baptized, he repeats to you: “I am Joseph, your brother”... It is in the parish where one learns to live one’s Faith concretely... With much trust Pope Roncalli entrusted to the parish, the family of families, the task to nourish among the faithful the sentiments of communion and of brotherhood. Molded by the Eucharist, the parish can become - as he thought - healthy ferment of unrest in the widespread consumerism and individualism of our time, reawaken solidarity and opening in Faith the eye of the heart to recognize His father, who is selfless love, eager to share with His children His own joy».*

WHAT DOES  
«LIVING  
CONCRETLY  
ONE’S FAITH»  
MEAN?



## A GREATFUL GLANCE

Three years have passed since the beginning of my ministry among you: I thank the Lord with all my heart and the entire community of Bergamo. I am still amazed by your cordial affection and the faith with which you have received me. The three intense years during which I proposed to myself to know and to encounter our Diocese and our society; the journey taken has rendered me aware of the enriching experience that cannot be constricted to such limited time. I seem to have noticed, even partially, some characteristics of this community: the vitality of the parish and the oratory, the attachment to the religious and cultural traditions, the significant role of the Diocese, the strength of the different forms of voluntary activities, a particular missionary impulse and concrete and bountiful generosity in every field, the presence of the processes of identification strongly felt, the centrality of work, and the wealth from the naturalistic, landscape, artistic, cultural and economic points of view.

All of these, and all those which I did not recall, had contributed to the formation of a patrimony which would be unwise to waste. At the same time, there are imminent realities which cannot permit to postpone decisions regarding what they represent:

HOW IS IT  
POSSIBLE TO  
KEEP THE  
TRADITION INTO  
THE MODERN  
WORLD?

the financial crisis, economic and social, with their very distressing productive and occupational implications and with the risk, which is not at all theoretical, of social fragmentation and division which is increasingly marked and accompanied by dangerous effects on persons and on the weaker categories of people; the questions, the demands and the provocations expressed and not, by the young generation; the imposing and structural presence of immigrants, whether Christian or of other religions, which implies a disposition to dialogue and sharing capable of resisting easy and widespread temptations of indifference, rejection or discrimination; the questions of globalization, of the economic, scientific and technical development, of the world of communication, of medicine, of research, with extraordinary excellence in our territory, which encourage united effort; the diffusion of secularization and the lost of a shared horizon of values and above of all for us Christians, the demands of the Gospel which lead us to continuous processes of personal and communitarian conversion.

The condition of change must not frighten us. It is one of the criteria for interpreting our time and for being faithful to the evangelical solicitations as well as those of life.

HOW TO LIVE  
THE CHANGE  
IN ORDER TO  
BE FAITHFUL  
TO THE GOSPEL  
AND LIFE?



## A WAY OF SHARING

In these years, I tried to listen and to revive what is important to the Christian community and to all the other communities, trying to pursue a style of sharing and experiencing beauty and difficulty. Sharing belongs to the world of mutual listening, of significant encounter, of sincere dialogue, of challenging relationships, of exciting experiences and proposes the search for truth, overcoming schemes, experiences and ideas that are only ours, with the desire to arrive at a broader truth and shared by many. It does not entail interested processes in gathering a broader consensus , neither is it resigned respect to one's own beliefs, but are intended to recognize a greater truth and deeper understanding of one's own, capable of moving one to a commitment and to shared responsibility. In this sense, it seemed to me that encouraging meetings and moments of listening to all the realities and individuals correspond to this need: I am grateful to all the ecclesiastical, institutional and social sectors that have permitted me this kind of relationship.

In this perspective participate in a meaningful way, vicariate meetings with priests, parish pastoral and vicariate organisms, with catechists. In particular, I feel the desire to renew the conviction and the spirit of the

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COMMUNITY  
LIFE?

ARE OUR  
«SUGGESTIONS»  
A SOURCE OF  
COMMUNION  
AND SHARING?

Diocesan Councils, with the hope that they can also become an exemplary sign for those vicarial, parish and every ecclesial organism. The road is still long, but I sense the sincere desire to follow it, above all by using the criteria of community discernment, which is the method characteristic of the Christian community.

This letter also becomes an opportunity to mature the method of sharing that will orient a reflection of the method of pastoral work of our Diocese, particularly on the modality represented by the pastoral program. As you can tell, this does not intend to suspend the proposal of a pastoral program, almost as if on a sabbatical year, rather, to ask ourselves on what can improve the diocesan proposal regarding a shared journey, to make it more effective, but above all so that it becomes an even better sign of communion to testify and a message of hope to all our contemporary women and men and our countrymen. I will be happy to gather during the year the proposals that you will want me to have regarding this aspect, be it made on a personal level, as well as on the level of community organizations.





## A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

The council of priests of this year discussed the theme of Pastoral Units, which I think deserves to be brought to the attention of the entire diocesan community: it is the intent of this letter to offer the reasons that inspire it and the characteristics that mark it and not to deal with the organization of these Units.

The world has changed and we cannot think that it is only for the worse. The Risen Christ and the Gospel lived by many people are capable of giving hope and salvation to the entire world, which also reveals the signs of His presence. I am thinking of the continuously increasing conviction of those who live a community life, of the untold group dedication of un-countable persons, of the spreading love for the Word of God, of the daily hardships and joys of many families in embodying the Faith, of the testimony of a multitude of priests, consecrated persons and lay people. I am also thinking of some essential issues that question us: the vitality of the Faith of those who are baptized, the incarnation of the Gospel in contemporary culture, and the significance of the Christian proposal in relation to the life of contemporary man, of his personal and social dimensions. Christian brotherhood is not a

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PERCEIVE THE  
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AND SALVATION  
AMONGST US?

tender and comforting feeling to cultivate among people who think the same way and who feel affective and elective affinities with each other: it is the way to which we are called to live and to bear witness to the Gospel, not alone but together.





## TO THE SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

Christian brotherhood qualifies as a brotherhood in Faith, but even more so as a brotherhood in Christ the Lord. In fact, the word brother and sister aside from indicating family ties, expresses religious and social bonds as well. Among the baptized on the other hand, it indicates not only a common sense of belonging but a fraternal bond of Christ with each of them and thus a bond of brotherhood between them. Precisely, the brotherhood of Christ with his disciples and of His disciples among themselves, cultivates brotherhood with every human being not only because of their belonging to the human race, but more so as it is reached by the love of God in Christ Jesus. In this sense, Christian brotherhood does not present itself in exclusive terms, but rather in terms of service to it among all men. Christian brotherhood therefore, does not belong only to the world of feelings nor only to the necessary scale of fundamental values, but it is the gift and the fruit of Christ's Resurrection.

WHO WILL  
SEPARATE US  
FROM THE  
LOVE OF  
CHRIST?

Clear, such as on Easter morning, is the appearance of the Risen Christ to Mary Magdalene. To her humble embrace,

WHO IS MY  
MOTHER?  
WHO ARE MY  
BROTHERS?

Jesus responds by indicating to a her the task that reveals the bond: *«Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, “I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”»* For Christians, brotherhood is a grace that comes from God. Jesus in his Passion, saves us in the relationships that we have with others, opening for us the doors to a new brotherhood, which will be the hallmark of the new Christian communities. He, as the Apostle says, is the *«firstborn of a multitude of brethren»*.

A brotherhood which Jesus himself teaches us in the Gospel. *«Only in the following of Christ leads to new brotherhood»* (Benedict XVI).

In the search for His mother and His relatives, Jesus responds by indicating new ties: *«Then his mother and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him because of the crowd. He was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.” He said to them in reply, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it”»* (Lk 8,19-21). These bonds spring from the Community listening to God's Word and of its shared implementation.

In the parable of the judgment Jesus extends the dimension of brotherhood to all the little and the poor, with whom He identified, calling them brothers: *«And the king will answer them: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me”»* (Mt 25,40).

In the powerful antithesis of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provokes his listeners with surprising new perspectives: *«You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect»* (Mt 5,43-48).

«IN FACT, IF YOU LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, WHICH REWARD WILL YOU RECEIVE FROM THIS?»

And in the instructions regarding relationships among His disciples Jesus teaches: *«As for you, do not be called “Rabbi”. You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven»* (Mt 23,8-9).

The words of the Risen Master reveal the reason and the source of this new brotherhood: the Fatherhood of God. There is no brotherhood possible until its origin is recognized: Jesus, the only Son, reveals to us the image of God the Father and His Resurrection makes us a part of it. We now are already children of God, John says in his letter and the Apostle Paul will be the voice of this unimaginable paternity. *«For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, “Abba, Father!”*

*The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him» (Rm 8,14-17).*

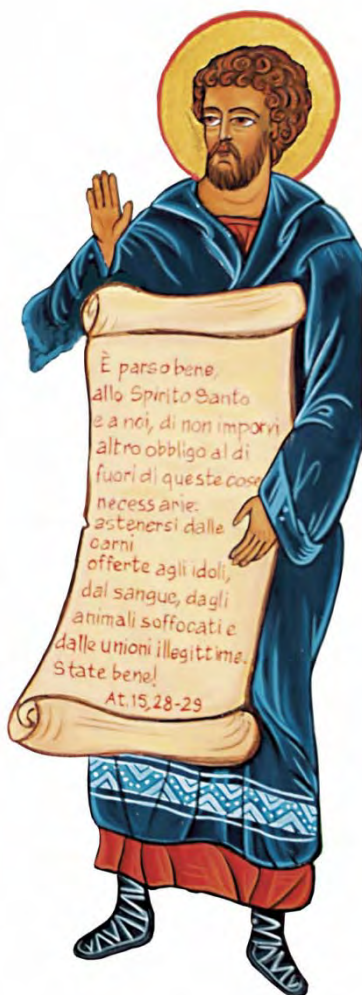
With His obedience and with the gift of Himself, Jesus puts us in the right relationship to be children of the same Father, and precisely for this reason we are invited to live as brothers and sisters in truth. The filial relationship is strengthened by listening to the Word of God and in the communion with the bread of heaven. The Holy Spirit that we have received as a gift introduces us into a communion with the Trinity. We cannot expect to build Christian brotherhood, without living a profound union with God our Father.

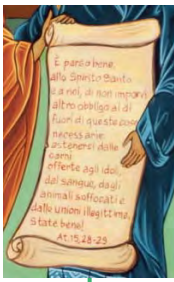
Brotherhood according to the Gospel is missionary in the sense that the Church's mission springs from a widespread and deep consciousness and community experience. Listening to the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles, we realize that the proclamation of the Gospel and the transmission of faith are born precisely in an intense community context, at the same time, we can prove that the mission, such as the Spirit of the Lord promotes it, brings about abundant and significant fruits of brotherhood. Neither should it be forgotten or overlooked that the recipients and privileged protagonists in the practice and proclamation of brotherhood in the early communities were often the poor. It is not for nothing that the terms and attitudes that indicate brotherhood, recur with great frequency precisely in the book of Acts.

HOW  
ARE WE LIVING  
BROTHERHOOD  
IN ACCORDANCE  
TO THE GOSPEL  
IN OUR  
PARISHES?

At this point some questions arise: How are we living brotherhood according to the Gospel in our parishes, between the parishes, between the different ecclesial communities, in the Diocese and in its relations with every person who constitutes the world in which we live? What widely spread temptations should we overcome? Which paths should we follow in the contemporary context?

WHICH  
MENTALITY  
MUST WE  
OVERCOME TO  
LIVE AS  
BROTHERS?





## THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF BROTHERS

We have recalled that brotherhood among the baptized draws from the amazing condition of being children of the one and the same Father. It is a gift that we have received and is a part of the mystery of communion. The life of God is communion, indeed He is communion: unimaginable communion, which we profess in the mystery of the Trinity. Communion creates communion: it cannot be contained, as love that has no measure. The Church is the sign and instrument in history of this mystery of communion, whose source is God himself who has communicated it in Jesus and who reaches us through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Church, therefore, is a manifestation of God's communion. This is its originality, this is its uniqueness: the Church is necessarily one, with countless diversities and articulations, but essentially one. The historical divisions are painful wounds in the life of the Church and every effort and step to overcome them are reasons of comfort, joy and hope. There are not only historical divisions and the fruit of our sins: there is also the danger of conceiving the Church as a sum or a federation of churches, whether these be the Dioceses

WHAT CHOICES  
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THE CHURCH:  
THE MYSTERY OF  
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OUR HISTORY  
AND IN OUR  
COMMUNITY?



or parishes or other forms of Christian community life. The Church is one and all that which nourishes this union, corresponds to its identity and to the mystery that constitutes it. That is why, what I am indicating you through the Pastoral Units, is not only a new form of organization feared by some as a disease or as a pastoral error or considered simply as a necessity dictated by many, but a way of living our Christian vocation in a Church capable of brotherhood and which is still enthusiastic about the mission that the Lord calls to fulfill with Him.

Brotherhood is one of the fundamental connotations of the Christian community. Jesus Himself speaks of his disciples as brothers, evoking however, a relationship which already was recognized by his people as indicating something beyond the family organizations: *«how good and joyful it is that brothers are together»*. The apostles use this terminology to address the disciples of Jesus Christ and to trace the features of life of the first Christian communities. The life of the first community is consigned to us as an example of fraternal life. The underlining emphasis in this sense is on particular vocations, such as monks and nuns, the consecrated persons, the presbytery, who are not excluded, but rather, prophetic or exemplary of a condition proper of everyone baptized in relating with other baptized persons and with all the other human persons. It deals with a brotherhood which somehow belongs to a profound level much superior to that determined by family bonds.

DO WE  
CULTIVATE A  
SPIRITUALITY OF  
BROTHERHOOD  
IN OUR  
PARISHES?



## FRATERNAL LIFE

If brotherhood is a gift, it is also a commitment that is carried out according to the Word of God. One of the modalities that characterize those who live consecration to Our Lord in the celibate and virginal life is represented by fraternal life. I wish to thank them for this type of ecclesial testimony and encourage them to be ever more brilliant. How cannot we not recognize how fraternal life has inspired many other forms of Christian witnessing in the history of the Church; how can't we not recognize today even communities of lay people and families adapt among themselves styles and forms that want to be witnesses of fraternity in a particular efficient manner. And finally, I think we will give a great offense to our parish communities, if we don't recognize them as places of fraternal life experience. We are tempted to evidence the limits and the contradictions of this fraternity that is anonymous, the divisions in exclusive groups, clans, families, and even opposing groups that wish to be authentic communities or as the true parish; but these sins cannot darken the simple fraternal life lived day by day by those who live not only the belongingness, but also the service to the community and mutual help in faith and in charity.

DO WE KNOW  
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WAYS PRESENT  
IN OUR DAILY  
LIVES?

I nourish the desire that in every parish community, religious or associated and in the wider ecclesial form including the diocesan, reflects on the concreteness of brotherhood, starting from faith, recognizing it and translating it to charity. The articulation of this reflection can be subdivided in this way: fraternity in the parish, fraternity among parishes, fraternity among various experiences of Christian life, fraternity with all men and women, and in the various forms of social sharing. This last aspect I think is very necessary with regards to what the Church is called to become not only as a sign but also as a significant and effective instrument.

If In these years we have proposed through the pastoral programs to follow a process of transformation in order that our parishes may become more, each day an authentic Christian community. I believe that the attention towards fraternal life is absolutely coherent with its commitment. The theme of the pastoral unity is placed clearly in this situation: as I have often repeated, it is not a matter of thinking about abolishing parishes, nor is it about forming the so called groups, but to grow in communion through experiences that nourish a fraternity that is not exclusive, but is an always evident expression of the belongingness to the unique Church. This is the indispensable condition necessary for every communication and transmission of faith, for every evangelization, and for new evangelizations, for the mission, for the renewal of the itinerary of Christian life initiation: Christian communities truly fraternal, capable of living brotherhood within themselves and among themselves and finally witnessing and offering it to all men.

From this they will know you, says the Lord, by the love that you have for each other.





## CONSIDERATIONS ON PASTORAL UNITS

The term Pastoral Units must be understood correctly: Let us say clearly what it is not. It is not the abolition of any parish. The Diocesan Synod reaffirmed the centrality of the parish and focused on what it means to the contemporary world, without nostalgic focusing on the past, but with renewed determination with respect to the present and the future. The parish is called to be a true Christian community: this is the task that the Synod has entrusted to us, offering the guidelines to proceed in this direction. The parish is a community called to live and bear witness to communion and evangelizing mission. Precisely for this reason, the parish alone is not enough: it is not enough to witness a communion that tends to become a sign of hope for all mankind, not just to the mission that inevitably exceeds the boundaries of the parish. I think of those existential areas of the mission: the family, young people, immigrants, the world of work, school and university, health, politics, culture and communications, leisure, emotional and relational dimensions, those of human frailty, the cultural ferment, trends, transgressive phenomena, the processes of globalization.

TO WHAT  
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BETWEEN  
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MAKE GOOD  
USE OF THEM?

These are realities that surpass the borders and the experiences of a single parish, even great, and at the same time cannot be entrusted only to broader levels (as the Vicariate and the Diocese), because we know clearly what impact they have on people's daily experiences that form a community. What we are addressing to then is to pursue together the responses, the testimonies and the ways that seem better suited for the mission which the Lord entrusts to us, aware that the dimension of the community enlivened by the fraternity actually lived remains decisive.

It is not therefore to abolish parishes or even to merge them. The latter is a term adopted at a time when some parishes, on the occasion of the revision of the Agreement of 1984 were abolished and merged with others. Now this is not that. It is not even a matter that concerns only the clergy and its distribution. It is true that the experience of the Pastoral Units was established in many Dioceses in Italy and abroad for reasons dictated by the decrease in vocations and priestly presence; It is true that at this time we are not, by the grace of God, in this condition within our Diocese; It is true that unfortunately even in our Diocese response to the priestly vocation has decreased and that the clergy is aging fast; It is true that, with all the faith of which we are capable, we ask the Lord to give us the gift of new vocations to the priesthood and that to enlighten and give strength to anyone who receives this gift, to pursue it with confidence. It is equally true that the shape of the Pastoral Units corresponds to a need that is independent from the centrality of the parish, but the

values it in terms of co-responsibility, of ministerial wealth, of the rediscovery of the presbyter, shared awareness with other parishes of pastoral responsibility towards the territory and especially in terms of mission.

The forms of Pastoral Units may be different but share these traits: it has organized forms of collaboration among multiple parishes, established in an organic way, permanent and recognized by the Bishop. They are characterized by a pastoral program and a shared united ministry. I have described pastoral unity in terms that give a brief summary of what it is and what it is not, but I think this way will suffice insofar as we become increasingly aware of what Christian fraternity means. Someone may think that broadening the boundaries of the parish community, through forms of partnership with other parishes, may diminish further the sense of belonging and fall in organization forms increasingly far removed from the lives of the people. It is a concern, which is already quite felt in the life of individual parishes. We cannot imagine that this sense of belonging can be implemented as in the past, when the pace of life, the organization of time, mobility, the life of the people were ordered in slower terms and marked by centuries or of a world less dispersed and less complex compared to ours. Today the neighborhood, which still sees in the figure of a priest an irreplaceable figure must be a shared proximity as a community, an essential closeness and, ultimately, once again fraternal. A perspective of this kind causes an inevitable reflection on the figure of the priest and his

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A SIGN OF  
SERVICE TO  
COMMUNION?

service. In this way, the testimony of fraternity among priests is encouraging and even decisive. For this reason I support all forms with which it can be done.







## FROM COLLABORATION TO CO-RESPONSIBILITY

Our Diocese is made up of nearly four hundred parishes. The great part, but not all, for some time have a resident pastor. In recent years, in the face of dwindling numbers of priests and their aging, the problem we have deeply felt is the diminishing of young priests to post to our oratories and to engage in youth ministry. This is a serious problem. There are significant initiatives of experiences of collaboration among parishes in these areas; the greatest part of our oratories, not having a curate or assistant pastor, is guided and animated directly by parish priests; voluntary work and collaboration qualifying in many forms have proved to be an enormous richness that ensures continuity in many activities of the oratories, to educational proposals and introduction to faith; families are often protagonists in the oratory initiatives; in some situations lay presences are outlined more stable and with responsible directives, in some cases, the service offered by cooperatives with educational purposes provided a satisfactory solution, without becoming a subject to which we should extend the oratory and its specific proposal linked to the life of the community; the UPEE service is substantial support to the various needs that have been

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ONES?

HOW TO RENEW  
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BETWEEN THE  
PRIEST AND  
COMMUNITY?

expressed. But we do not want to stop here. Praying always, that the Lord grant us young priests for younger generations, we want to pursue with profound conviction the mission to young people and we can do if we are going to work together. It is not sustainable that a young priest is asked to share his services across multiple communities and oratories without changing anything of the pastoral organization: it is a matter of instead, of thinking that more parishes, with a greater awareness of their mission and under the banner of fraternity, cooperate with one another for a significant mission for and with youth; It will be within this cooperation that the service of a young priest at the service of young generations can be defined. Where this is happening, you can already see the fruits or at least fruit buds. Even a priest with responsibility for guiding more communities can spread out his services to ensure each service that maintains the past and that is separate from what is happening in the Church, in the world and in order to develop Christian awareness. Few times I have had the impression that some people in our parish communities do not give attention to Christian life and to the experience of faith and simply were worried so obstinately to be guaranteed an identity certainly not Evangelical and a fidelity to the past that mortifies the transforming power of the Gospel.

In this context, awareness of the Christian community as such is destined to grow: for a long time we have identified the parish with the parish priest. The renewed awareness of identity and the task of the Christian community, in light of the councilor teachings and guidance of the Synod, we realize that fundamental

subject of Christian life is not represented by the priest alone, but by the priest with the community. Indeed, the priest is at the service of faith, grace and charity which constitute the Christian community because it can be really such and in fact testify to the world with humility, the truth of the Gospel. The path of the pastoral units feeds on this awareness: it is not only a question of priests, but communities experiencing the full implications of the faith. The fact that no longer exists and always a correspondence between the parish and resident Pastor goes by drawing a different mode of community life, which does not decrease, but it highlights the awareness and responsibility of the community itself and the conscience of the Parish priest's and the priests' mission in the community of the baptized.

We can therefore say that not all parishes will constitute in Pastoral Units, but all parishes are and will be called to live the community and brotherhood among the communities in the same territory.

It is good, however to distinguish the collaborations on specific projects from systematic and organic collaborations that characterizes a Pastoral Unit. We must also distinguish the form of local Vicariate from the Pastoral Unit: while the Vicariate is a subdivision of the Diocese, with particular attention to the territory, the Pastoral Unit has as protagonists the parishes involved.

It is evident that a perspective of this kind requires pastoral choices favoring the essential elements of the life

WHICH  
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AND BETTER  
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IN THE  
COMMUNITY  
AND BETWEEN  
COMMUNITIES  
MATURE?

of the Christian community and foster serious and recognized ministry, including the one represented by the permanent diaconate.

In particular, it will develop a proposal for a comprehensive and sustainable Eucharistic Sunday celebrations, a program of Christian initiation, including baptism, according to one model, a proposal for adolescents and youth, involving all the communities of Pastoral Unit, shared training initiatives aimed at people engaged in various ministries, the organization of concrete forms that manifest themselves in a life of community charity. Paradoxically the creation of Pastoral Units orients towards the recognition and development of small communities such as the centers of listening to the word of God, the cells of evangelization, family communities, basic ecclesial communities and other experiences re-directed to the life of the parish and of the parishes in the Pastoral Unit.

It is not therefore to pursue simplifying policy of merging or a type of centralizing, but to work continuously as Christian communities living significantly fraternity among themselves. If indeed a part of the «*autonomy and self-sufficiency*» of the parish is sacrificed, it grows stronger in the level of missionary communion in an area that is limited and circumscribed. The processes of identification and belonging, which certainly keep the meaning in a situation that tends to organizational depersonalization, continually need to be revisited and converted to an Evangelical dimension and a perspective of communion.

The considerations which I have tried to explain are not a treatise on Pastoral Units but they are proposed as points for reflection around which every parish and every community is invited to reflect during this year with the consciousness that the progressive realization of Pastoral Units in our Diocese should have a strong pastoral connotation, having as protagonist the community along with the priest, not just the priests regardless of the community.

HOW TO LIVE  
THE  
IDENTIFICATION  
AND  
BELONGINGNESS  
IN A  
PERSPECTIVE  
OF  
COMMUNION?





## INDICATIONS FOR THE PASTORAL YEAR

I conclude by remembering some passages that can characterize, during this year, the life of the Diocese, of the parishes, of every ecclesial community.

The initiatives for the Year of the Faith and for the fiftieth death anniversary of Pope John XXIII, according to the directives of the Holy See and the Diocesan Organizations. Some are already in the Diocesan Calendar.

Particularly I desire to point out some attention to:

### DIOCESAN LEVEL:

the formation of the commission for Pastoral Units; to review the existing experiences regarding this aspect; the proposal regarding the pilgrimages as indicated already at the beginning of the Letter; the related initiatives on the ecumenical commitment and interreligious dialogue; the more conscious and grateful recognition of the sign represented by the religious' fraternal life.

### VICARIATE LEVEL:

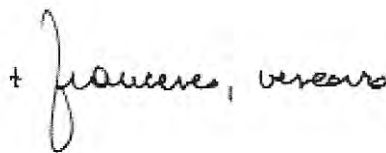
the vicariate meeting of the Bishop with the catechists; the enhancement of Vicariate Pastoral Council, the study of possible Pastoral Units in the vicariate territory, the recognition and promotion of experiences-sign of fraternal life.

### PARISH LEVEL:

- the groups of the Word/Bible around the diocesan biblical – catechetical Itinerary on the theme on brotherhood;
- promotion of the awareness of the Sunday Eucharist as the originating experience of Christian brotherhood . A relative study on the reduction of the Eucharistic celebrations in this prospective;
- forming of neighboring communities for concrete experiences of brotherhood;
- carry out forms of economical solidarity among neighboring parishes;
- to enhance the pastoral parishes organism;
- acknowledgement of the associations, groups, movements and confraternities as visible signs of fraternal communion with the entire parish community;
- single out the existence of the mission and formation to be shared with the nearby parishes without neglecting the ones in the vicariate;
- to follow up the forms of collaboration between the pre-schools in the parishes.

Beloved brothers and sisters, the beautiful icon of the Council of Jerusalem, inspires and enlightens the reflection and the fulfillment of the Christian brotherhood in our communities.

I invoke Mary, Mother of the Church to watch over us, and through the intercession of Blessed Pope John XXIII, for which we bless the Lord for this significant anniversary.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Francesco, vescovo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

SOLEMNITY OF SAINT ALEXANDER, MARTYR  
PATRON OF THE DIOCESE OF BERGAMO  
YEAR 2012