



DIOCESE OF HARRISBURG — Office of the Bishop

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March 25, 2009
Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Dear Friends in Christ,

On this solemn feast of Our Lord and Our Lady, the Annunciation, I am happy to announce a special year in the Diocese of Harrisburg in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This diocesan Marian Year will begin on October 24, 2009 with a diocesan pilgrimage to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. It will end on October 2, 2010 with a diocesan pilgrimage to the National Shrine of the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes at Mount Saint Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

The reason I am declaring this Marian Year in our diocese is spiritual: to lead all of us closer to the Lord Jesus through deeper devotion to Mary. We are already planning several diocesan and parish celebrations and activities for the Marian Year. A preliminary listing of these celebrations and activities can be found in the centerfold of this edition of *The Catholic Witness*.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, under the title of the Assumption, is the secondary patroness of the Diocese of Harrisburg. This glorious mystery will be particularly highlighted in the Marian Year.

Reflecting on Mary's Assumption to heaven, we are led to better understand the plan of divine providence for humanity. We see that because Mary is with God, she is very close to each one of us, hears our prayers, and shows us the path to heaven. We are a pilgrim people, journeying towards God, where Christ, and behind Him, Mary, has preceded us. We learn from her to find our joy in Christ our Savior.

Evangelization, the fundamental mission of the Church, and catechesis will be important aspects of the Marian Year. We will be using the "Coming Home" media campaign to invite non-practicing Catholics to come home to the Church, to return to the active practice of the faith.

There are five special prayer intentions designated for the Marian Year. I invite all to pray in a special way, imploring our Blessed Mother's intercession, for:

- 1) The return of non-practicing Catholics to the Church.
- 2) The protection of human life from the moment of conception until natural death.
- 3) The protection of marriage and the strengthening of family life.
- 4) A more just and peaceful world and an end to all terrorism and violence.
- 5) An increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.

Though the Marian Year will not begin until October, I wanted to announce it well in advance so all can mark their calendars for the special events and prepare and plan accordingly in parishes, schools, and other institutions of the diocese.

I hope and pray that our diocese will grow spiritually and be renewed by God's grace and Mary's prayers through the experience of the Marian Year. May Mary, the first creature to enjoy eternal life, accompany us with her love and prayers. May she, who welcomed the Son of God in her virginal womb and in her heart, lead us ever closer to Him!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Kevin C. Rhoades

Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades
Bishop of Harrisburg