I’m blessed, humbled and honored to have a chance to be here this evening to give this talk. I learned a long time ago that the one sure way to learn about something is to teach it or give a talk on it. It also gave me a chance to pray and reflect on my 18 years as a priest. I am grateful for all your kindnesses to me. This talk is on The History, Charism, and Spirituality of Diocesan Presbyterates. I hope and pray that it is helpful.

Allow me to tell a story as I begin. One day, when I was about twelve, I was in the car with one of my classmates and his dad. We drove through a neighborhood about two miles from our neighborhood. The people in that neighborhood dressed in different clothes and had a different skin color. My friend’s dad told us that most of the people who lived in this neighborhood were lazy, and were dangerous, and we should never walk through this neighborhood.

A couple weeks later, my dad asked me one Sunday afternoon to go on a walk with him. Walks with my dad were a regular occurrence and often we would walk and talk for an hour or two. On this day, we took a familiar route, and the made an unfamiliar turn. As we continued, I realized that we were going to walk right through the center of that other neighborhood, where the people dressed in different clothes and had a different skin color, through that neighborhood where I had been told the people were lazy, and dangerous. I thought about the warning given by my friend’s dad. Honestly, I was a bit afraid of what might happen. My
dad and I walked and we talked, and I saw people in that neighborhood cutting their grass, watering their flowers, children playing in their yards, people grilling and eating. It reminded me a lot of my neighborhood. To my surprise, nothing happened even though the people dressed in different clothes and had a different skin color.

Sometime after my dad died, I was sharing stories about my dad with my mom. And I recounted this story. And she asked, "Do you know why that happened? Your dad heard you tell someone that the people in the other neighborhood who wore different clothes and had a different skin color, were lazy and were dangerous. He wanted you to see for yourself that they are a lot like we are, a lot like you are. He wanted to show you that sometimes we draw the wrong conclusions about people who look differently, who dress differently, than we do."

Please bear with me as I offer a second story. A few years later, I was working with my dad in his hardware store. And a man who had a different skin color rented a rug scrubber. When the man was a week late in bringing back the rug scrubber, I told my dad, and he tried to reach the customer by telephone. The number was no long in service. The man never returned the rug scrubber. My dad was upset. As a fifteen year old, I offered my unsolicited advice to my dad on what we should do, suggesting that we needed to stop renting equipment to people
who had a different skin color. My dad’s response was direct, to the point, and unforgettable. As long as their money is green, treat everyone the same.

So why do I tell these stories? You might know that there is a quote attributed to Mark Twain that goes something like, "If I knew the world was coming to an end, I would go to Cincinnati because everything happens ten years later in Cincinnati." I confess to you, that I’m probably ten years behind in my theological reading, not that my failure will change the day the world ends. I know that many of you are more current, and I am grateful for the times you have shared your knowledge and been patient with me. One of the many things that I have learned in the past year in the reading and listening that I’ve done is that there are priests and bishops known as Vatican II priests and bishops, and priests and bishops known as John Paul II priests and bishops. I’ve learned that sometimes they don’t see eye to eye on what it means to be a member of a presbyterate. Sometimes they dress differently which seems to catch the attention of some. Sadly, sometimes, they don’t treat each other with respect. But in praying and reading and preparing for this talk, in reading the Bible, Vatican II documents, the Catechism, the Code of Canon Law, and Blessed John Paul’s, I Will Give You Shepherds, and some other materials, I did not find the phrases “Vatican II priests and bishops,” or “John Paul II priests and bishops.” So, if the Church does not use these phrases in her documents, I wonder why they’re used in some circles? There
is only one deposit of faith to which we must remain faithful. I’m reminded of what St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, 3:26-28, “For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Maybe we can begin the conversation about “The History, Charism, and Spirituality of Diocesan Presbyterates” by remembering what is diocese is. So if you would open the copy of the Code of Canon Law you brought with you to Canon 369 we find this definition, “A diocese is a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop for him to shepherd with the cooperation of the presbyterate, so that, adhering to its pastor and gathered by him in the Holy Spirit through the gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.”

We do what we do because of our faith in Jesus Christ and our desire to know, love and serve him and make his Church present. All that we do derives its power and force from Christ. The ministry we share is to proclaim the Word of God, to celebrate the Sacraments, and to guide the community in charity in the name and in the person of Jesus Christ. And as canon 1752 reminds us, we keep before our
eyes the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church. What we do, we do for the Lord and we do for others.

Let us talk about presbyterates, what presbyterates look like, and how we might understand a presbyterate.

- For each member of a presbyterate, our priestly vocation is a gift from God, and while it is a great gift to each of us personally, it is also a gift to the Church as a whole, a benefit to the life of the Church and to the mission of the Church, leading others to more faithfully and more fully exercise their baptismal priesthood. I like this image: A presbyterate is a group of priests who function together in a diocese in close union with one another and have a strong bond with the diocesan bishop. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote, “Your presbytery, which is a credit to its name, is a credit to God; for it harmonizes with the bishop as completely as the strings on a harp. And priests must be coworkers with bishops with whom they are joined in the priestly office and with whom they are called to the service of the people of God.

- Blessed John Paul II wrote this in *I Will Give You Shepherds*:

  By its very nature, the ordained ministry can be carried out only to the extent that the priest is united to Christ through sacramental participation in the priestly order, and thus to the extent that he is in hierarchical communion with his own bishop. The ordained ministry has a radical "communitarian form" and can only be carried out as "a collective work."
When someone pointed this quote out to me, the word radical jumped out at me. We know radical used as an adjective might mean, favoring or making economic, political, or social changes of a sweeping or extreme nature. It also might mean relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something. I donned the hat of a canonist and thought about the phrase, “radical sanation,” healing at the root. The communitarian form we use is fundamental, taught to us by the Lord, and is rooted in our Lord. The sacramental relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church is not the individual possession of a priest. Priests exist as priests in a presbyterate gathered with its bishop, that what we do as a presbyterate we do collectively as a community rooted in the Lord as we serve and shepherd people.

- Working for unity within a presbyterate is an essential part of our lives, not something that is nice to do if we feel like it. We see our individual ministries as a share in a collaborative ministry with the bishop and fellow priests.
- Being a member of a presbyterate means a willingness to respond to a call for fraternal charity and brotherhood and a willingness to collaborate and participate within the diocese for a more fruitful ministry.
If you would take a picture of an effective presbyterate, it would include these qualities:

a. Experienced members willing to mentor inexperienced members, and inexperienced members willing to be mentored by experienced members, with the activities being governed by a desire to serve the Lord and save souls. Experienced priests, therefore, should receive newer priests as true brothers and help them in their first undertakings and priestly duties. Older priests should likewise endeavor to understand the mentality of younger priests, even though it may be different from their own. Younger priests should respect the age and experience of their seniors; they should seek their advice and willingly cooperate with them in everything that pertains to the care of souls. I was at St. John’s in Harrison for a wedding shortly after I was named chancellor. I was ordained about 9 years, and Fr. Ed Shine, the pastor, about 45 years. Fr. Ed congratulated me and I would say, mentored me, by saying, Joe, I know you’ll do a great job. But there are three things you need to do each day. First, pray everyday, and pray especially for the guidance of God before you make decisions. Second, be in the office every day. People need to know that you’re available.
Third, return voice mail messages promptly, especially those from priests. We wouldn’t call you if we didn’t need an answer. Sage advice from a wise priest.

b. In a fraternal spirit, priests extending hospitality, cultivating kindliness and sharing their goods in common. I have been taken by and am grateful for the hospitality of priests who have either voluntarily opened their homes to me (Msgr. Robert Amann and Fr. Timothy McNicholas at Holy Angels when I was in the Seminary and not only to me, but to a dozen or so seminarians during my last four years in the Seminary, Fr. Stretch Mierenfeld and Fr. Jim Manning and later Fr. Don West, when I was an intern at St. Henry Parish, Fr. Bill Krumpe, when I needed a place to stay for about two weeks during the summer between the two years of my canon law studies, and Fr. Bob Farrell, who invited me to continue living at St. Barts when I was named Archbishop Pilarczyk’s Master of Ceremonies), or welcomed me when I was assigned to the parish where that they were pastoring: Fr. Jim Collins along with Fr. Don Behler at St. Dominic, and Fr. Chris Armstrong and Archbishop Pilarczyk at St. Louis Downtown).
c. Priests being particularly aware and concerned for their fellow priests who are sick, afflicted, overburdened with work, or lonely.

I was speaking with a priest recently who said that when he learned that one of his brother priests was rushed to the hospital, he went to the hospital and stayed with him, leaving at 1:00am after the priest’s family had arrived. He wasn’t looking for accolades; he was just trying to help.

d. Priests gladly and joyfully gathering together for recreation, remembering Christ's invitation to the weary apostles: "Come aside to a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mk 6:31). Many priests of our presbyterate vacation together and play golf together. The annual Melchizedek Open is an example of this.

e. Priests finding mutual assistance in the development of their spiritual and intellectual life, so that they may be able to cooperate more effectively in their ministry and be saved from the dangers of loneliness and isolation which may arise. Having some sort of common life is something to value because there is something beneficial that comes by sharing a common life, whether it is living under the same roof and having a common table, by going on
retreat together, or having spiritual days together or being in a support group together.

f. Priests treating with fraternal charity and generosity of spirit those who have failed in some matters, offering prayers to God, and continually showing themselves as true brothers and friends.

Priests realizing that they are obliged in a special manner toward those priests who labor under certain difficulties, trying to give them timely help, and also, if necessary, admonish a fellow priest discreetly out love and concern.

g. Priests holding diversity as a blessing rather than as blight. Gifts and talents are cherished and freely given; think of First Corinthians 12:7-11: to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.
h. Members of the presbyterate not demonizing other members because they think differently, not charging others with the worst possible motives, members looking for goodness in one another.

i. Priests working to find common theological ground on which to resolve differences, rather than opposing sides picking and choosing and perhaps taking out of context citations from church documents and writings of the Church to support their conclusions.

j. Priests holding a mindset that is optimistic about the future of priesthood because of the presence of Christ in that future.

k. Priests desiring to act in ways that strengthen the presbyterate and seeking to resist those things that threaten the unity of the presbyterate.

l. A place where individual accomplishments are directed toward a common goal, which is excellent priestly ministry to the people of God. A presbyterate that celebrates successes together.

One final thought in this section, if a presbyterate is effective, others would be drawn to become members of that presbyterate.

So that is a bit about presbyterates, what presbyterates look like, and how we might understand a presbyterate.
What does the Church say about presbyterates and their relationship to diocesan bishops?

In a personal letter to each bishop written two weeks before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII wrote, “A bishop who is himself holy, will most certainly have a following of holy priests whose holiness will in turn redound to the religious perfection of the entire diocese.” Holiness must be a part of our lives. Bishops should make the effort to foster holiness among clerics, religious, and laity in the diocese, and also, be mindful of the obligation to live holy lives and to be a good example through charity, humility and simplicity of life.

In a particular diocese, priests form one priesthood under their own bishop. Even though priests are assigned to different duties, nevertheless they carry on one priestly ministry for people. All priests are sent as co-workers in the same apostolate, whether they engage in parochial or extra-parochial ministry. We are to join together in the building up of the Body of Christ.

Bishops and priests are bound together in brotherhood. Bishops and priests exist in a world of fellowship of life, work and charity. Bishops and priests have a responsibility to support each other. The long hours and the endless needs of people impact our lives. Bishops should always welcome priests with a special love since priests assume a part of the responsibilities and cares of a bishop and
carry the weight of these responsibilities and cares each day. A bishop should regard priests as friends. A Scripture passage comes to mind, John 15:15, where Jesus names his followers as friends. The Gospels tell us that Jesus needed companionship and others to share in his ministry. He spent time instructing them, sending them out, and then reviewing what happened.

A presbyterate should be about offering the faithful the best possible ministry in concert with the diocesan bishop. Bishops should gladly listen to their priests, consult them and engage in dialogue with them in those matters that concern the pastoral needs, and the administration of the diocese. Think of the roles of priests on the College of Consultors, the Presbyteral Council, the Archdiocesan Finance Council, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, the Priests Personnel Board, the Deans, the priests involved in the school visioning process that is wrapping up this summer, and numerous other boards, councils and committees in place to advise the Archbishop about the diocese. In the time that I have been a member of the Presbyteral Council, the College of Consultors, and the Archdiocesan Finance Council, and the year that I have been attending Priests Personnel Board meetings and the meetings of the Deans, I have been impressed with the desire of the priests on those councils to offer the best possible advice to the Archbishop.
Priests who make up a presbyterate should sincerely look upon the bishop as their father and reverently obey him. Bishops should attend to priests and be concerned about priests who are involved in any danger or who have failed in certain respects.

Bishops should be concerned for the spiritual, intellectual and material condition of the priests within a presbyterate so that they can live holy and pious lives and fulfill their ministry faithfully and fruitfully. Bishops should encourage special meetings in which priests might gather from time to time for the renewal of their spiritual life and for the acquisition of knowledge on subjects, especially Sacred Scripture and theology, the more important social questions, and the new methods of pastoral activity. Maybe the word “Convocation” comes to mind, or the priests retreat days, or the continuing education days that the Office of Priestly Formation offers.

There is a unity evident, and this has been the case for centuries, when at an ordination ceremony, the ordaining bishop imposes hands and the priests who are present are invited to do the same, and when the priests concelebrate with the bishop. (That is what happened on May 19, 2012 when Matt, Marc, Dan and Jon-Paul were ordained priests.) That is what happened to all of us on the day of our ordination to the priesthood. And the effect is that each and every priest is united with his fellow priests in a bond of charity, prayer and total cooperation. The unity
shared by priests and bishops is not left at the altar or in the Cathedral, but each and every priest in a presbyterate is joined daily by the bonds of prayer, charity, and cooperation. Imagine a priest who was having some difficulty in his ministry, not because he was doing a poor job, but because he was involved in a number of administrative tasks that he was doing for the first time. He felt overwhelmed, stretched beyond his mortality, and reached out several times to his neighboring pastor. The neighboring pastor was always available for his fellow priest. When the neighboring priest was asked why he was always available and took time to talk, advise, listen, pray and simply be a friend to his friend, he said, “If I can’t be available for a brother priest, who can he turn to? What are we here for if we don’t support one another”

In administering all sacraments, priests are bound together with the bishop. And so in a certain way they make the bishop present in every congregation. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy sees the presbyter as the representative of the bishop in liturgical actions. Because it is impossible for the bishop always and everywhere to preside over the whole flock in his Church, he cannot do other than establish assemblies of believers. Parishes, set up locally under a pastor who takes the place of the bishop, represent the visible Church.

Priests gather together God's people for prayer and lead them in the Spirit, through Christ, to God the Father. And as priests sanctify and govern under the
bishop's authority, they must strive to lend their effort to the pastoral work of the whole diocese, and even of the entire Church. By reason of the gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to priests in Holy Orders, bishops regard priests as necessary helpers and counselors in the ministry and in their role of teaching, sanctifying and shepherding the People of God.

Priests stand by their bishops in sincere charity and obedience. This priestly obedience, filled with a spirit of cooperation is based on the very sharing in the episcopal ministry which is conferred on priests both through the Sacrament of Orders and through the canonical mission.

No priest can on his own accomplish his mission. He can do so only by joining forces with other priests. Because priests and bishops are called to work together to serve the people, collegiality is a trademark of a presbyterate. Being a lone ranger is not a trademark of a member of a presbyterate. No member of a presbyterate is in private practice. Members of a presbyterate share with the bishop in the responsibility for the well-being of a community. When I was on retreat in mid-May, Archbishop Al Hughes, archbishop emeritus of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, said that the Church doesn’t need individualistic bishops and priests who want to be remembered as super heroes. The Church needs priests and bishops who are willing to work together to build up the kingdom in the community. That it the Body of Christ in action and that is what people see
and notice. We strive to bring the faithful together in one family and lead them to God. They have a hand in leading us to God, too. The hope is that through the grace of the Holy Spirit and in the way we live our lives and through our preaching, the Gospel may bear fruit in human hearts.

Perhaps this is a nice summary of what the Church says about presbyterates and their relationship to diocesan bishops. Participating in a presbyterate brings mutual responsibilities. The bishop is instructed to consider the priests his cooperators as brothers, sons and friends. He takes an interest in their material and spiritual welfare and has responsibility for their sanctification. He listens to them and seeks their advice concerning the pastoral needs and well-being of the diocese. To this end, a council or senate of priests is established to represent the priests and to advise the bishop in the management of the diocese. The priests are to recognize the bishop as their father and obey him with a spirit of cooperation. Their brotherhood with each other is manifested in spiritual and material help, whether spiritual or pastoral, in reunions, and in community life work and fraternal charity.

How do religious order priests working in a diocese fit into local presbyterates?

Pope John Paul II in *I Will Give You Shepherds* wrote that each priest, diocesan and religious, is united to other members in a presbyterate because of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and by particular bonds of apostolic charity, ministry and fraternity. All priests, whether diocesan or religious, share in the priesthood of Christ the Head and Shepherd, and each are called to work for the same cause, which is the building up of the Body of Christ. All priests, both diocesan and
religious, because of Orders and ministry, fit into this body of bishops and priests, and serve the good of the whole Church according to their vocation and the grace given to them. Religious priests are by consecration assumed into the responsibilities of the presbyterate so as to become cooperators of the episcopal order. They can be said actually to belong to the clergy of the diocese inasmuch as they share in the care of souls and in carrying out works of the apostolate under the authority of the bishop.

Having lived in the Cathedral deanery these past twelve years, I have had the chance to see the desire of all the priests in the deanery to serve the Church. I have attended meetings, which have included diocesan priests, and priests from three or four religious orders. We worked and planned together. The Cathedral deanery is not alone. Religious priests serve throughout the Archdiocese and some of the orders have been serving in the Archdiocese more than 150 years. If you look at the territory of the current 11 deaneries, over the 191-year history of the Archdiocese, a religious order priest has served as a pastor in at least one of the parishes in the deanery. The Archdiocese and the faithful are richer because of these religious priests.

Over the 57 years of my life, religious priests serving in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati have influenced my life. My oldest memory of meeting a religious priest was at midnight Mass when I was six or seven years old at St. Anthony
Friary in Cincinnati. My most recent memory was this past Saturday when I met with Fr. Khoa Nguyen, a Franciscan, with members of the Vietnamese Community in Dayton. Religious priests have touched the lives of the faithful living in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati: as pastors and administrators of parishes, teachers and administrators at universities, schools and at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary, leaders of ministries, members of the Presbyteral Council and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, as spiritual directors and confessors and chaplains, leader of pilgrimages and retreats, and in other capacities, they have been fellow workers, living the charism of their institute, sharing in the care of our souls and the souls of so many of the faithful.

While diocesan priests are not required to vow to embrace the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, the counsels help to keep priests and all the faithful on the road to heaven. Religious priests can teach us how to live these counsels.

As I was preparing this talk, I was reminded of the teaching in the Catechism that the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience are offered to every follower because the evangelical counsels are based on Christ’s teachings and his example of living. Fr. Basil Cole, one of the Dominicans living at St. Gertrude in Maderia, has encouraged me on more than one occasion to reflect more on the evangelical counsels in my life as a diocesan cleric. Regarding
poverty, I continue to reflect on my lifestyle. How well do my living quarters at St. Louis Church or my office at 100 E 8\textsuperscript{th} Street need to be decorated? How big does the television I watch need to be? Do I need to eat as much as I eat? How many books and clothes do I need to own? Do I practice what I preach about sharing my blessings and resources with others? If parishioners at St. Louis Church compared my lifestyle to theirs, would they see me living evangelical poverty? Or would they perceive me to be too much of a person of the world even after 18 years as a priest? If I’m too concerned about all my stuff, how well am I serving the people? There is a certain asceticism we need to live.

Chastity means the integration of sexuality within the person. When I was in the seminary, part of our formation pertained to living a chaste celibate lifestyle because of the promise of celibacy we make to the diocesan bishop. I still remember the day that Bob Obermeyer, Ted Kosse and Jim Schutte met with my classmates and me more than 20 years ago and spoke with us about how they lived a chaste, celibate lifestyle. Each way of living a chaste, celibate lifestyle was different, but each had a desire to live the commitment, to live the promise made at ordination in dedication to our Lord to give up everything for the sake of the kingdom. We make this choice to be celibate because of our love for the Lord, of our giving ourselves completely to the Church, and it is a sign of our love of communion and gift of self to others. Priestly celibacy is the gift of self in and
with Christ to the Church and expresses the priest’s service to the Church in and with the Lord.

Diocesan priests make a promise of obedience to the diocesan bishop. In the Catechism, the teaching about obedience, includes the story of the rich young man and the challenge of Jesus, “go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Jesus' call to the rich young man to follow him is about the obedience of a disciple. Our obedience is also to the Holy Father and the Episcopal College. Our obedience is to cooperate together. Like celibacy, obedience frees a diocesan priest to be available to serve others. While the promise of obedience is made to a bishop, in a way, it is a commitment to other members of a presbyterate to be a team player for the sake of the common mission of service to others. Obedience includes a willingness to allow other priests the opportunity to make use of the talents and abilities and setting aside all jealousy, envy and rivalry. Obedience means being ready to serve others, to be willing to respond to the needs of others, to follow the Lord always.

What is specific to the spirituality of diocesan priests?

One definition of spirituality that I found is: Spirituality refers to one's conscious relationship with God. So our spirituality affects the way we see God and the world. Blessed John Paul II in *I Will Give You Shepherds* wrote, “The
spiritual life of the priest is marked, molded, and characterized by the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity.” So let me offer these thoughts.

Our spirituality is rooted in the spirituality of a baptized person, the daily living of what it means to be a faith-filled follower of Jesus Christ.

Specific to the spirituality of a diocesan priest is incardination to a particular diocese, to a particular local church. For the diocesan priest, his call is to be available to the diocese and to the flock, through his faithful promises of obedience and celibacy.

Diocesan priests are called to remember that connection with other members of the presbyterate and generous cooperation with their bishop helps us to grow in holiness. We carry out our ministry in imitation of Christ as we witness to God by what we say and do and, what we don’t say or don’t do.

The celebration of the Eucharist is important to the spirituality of a diocesan priest. In an adliminal address to bishops of the United States in September 1983, Pope John Paul II said, “The spirituality of all diocesan priests is linked to the Eucharist. Here they obtain the strength to make the offering of their lives together with Jesus, high priest and victim of salvation. Through the Eucharistic sacrifice, celibacy is confirmed. From the cross the Lord speaks to all his priests, inviting them to be, with him, signs of contradiction.”
In his book, “Priests for the Third Millennium,” then Msgr. Timothy Dolan tells the story of Dominic Tang, the Chinese archbishop who was imprisoned for twenty-one years for nothing more than his loyalty to Christ and His one, true Church. After five years of solitary confinement, in a windowless, damp cell, his jailers came to tell him he could leave it for a few hours, to do whatever he wanted. Five years of solitary confinement, and he had a couple of hours to do anything he wanted! What would it be? A hot shower? A change of clothes? Certainly a long walk outside? A chance to call or write family? “What will it be?” asked the jailer. “I would like to say Mass,” replied Archbishop Tang. Msgr. Dolan writes that there are a lot of opinions on just what “the spirituality of the diocesan priest” is. But all agree on one thing: it has to be centered on the daily celebration of the Eucharist for the priest’s people. Dolan continues by writing,

What a practical approach to the spirituality of the diocesan priest that is! We make our daily Mass the heart of the day. That means we prepare for it, by meditating on the readings beforehand, by a spirit of prayer and recollection prior to Mass, by a reverent, sincere celebration of the Mass, and by a period of thanksgiving afterwards. If we do that, we’re on our way to “the spirituality of a diocesan priest,” then realizing that we bring that Christ whom we have offered up and received with our people, in our ministry, throughout the day.

Perhaps specific to the spirituality of the diocesan priest is concelebration with the diocesan bishop, in a place filled with the faithful. Think of ordination ceremonies, confirmation ceremonies, the Chrism Mass, or the funeral of one of
our fellow priests. Praying together as presbyterate is a sign of the unity and cooperation.

The spirituality of a diocesan priest includes the celebration of the other sacraments. When I was a newly ordained priest, Fr. Jim Collins, the pastor of St. Dominic Parish told me that being available in emergencies to visit someone or to anoint someone was one of the most important priorities of a priest. I remember him telling me in my first week…when a call comes, unless you’re presiding at Mass, or in a meeting you can’t leave…GO! He lived that directive better than I did. If the phone rang in the middle of the night, he always answered it before I did. I remember in the first ten days at St. Dominic, I presided at Masses, made First Friday Communion calls, heard dozens of confessions, assisted with two funerals, baptized children, anointed someone, and presided at a wedding…and then took time to reflect on these experiences. I gave thanks to God for Jeff Kemper, Rick Walling, and Del Staigers who helped me to learn how to celebrate these sacraments as a seminarian. It was a blessing for me that I saw recently the first couple at whose wedding I presided. I saw them a few weeks ago at IHM when their older daughter was confirmed. Bob was the one who recognized me, and said, Thanks! It’s been 18 great years. Peggy and I are truly blessed. That conversation, as well as the prayer, the music that evening, and the celebration of
the sacrament of confirmation impacted my spirituality, the way I see God and the world.

Daily prayer outside of Mass is an important part of the spirituality of a diocesan priest: the liturgy of the hours, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, prayer and faith formation to begin and end a meeting. Regular reception of the sacrament of reconciliation is an important part, too. Spiritual direction is helpful for keeping us in the road we need to be traveling.

Our spirituality is marked by an attitude of service to the People of God, relating to others in a way that creates trust and a willingness to cooperate. We work for the Lord by working for others. By our actions, done out of love for the Lord and others, we model service given freely and willingly. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self that makes Christ’s love present for his followers. We are called to love with a love that is generous and self-detached, a total gift of self to the Church following the example of Christ, a love that witnesses to Christ’s spousal love for the Church, his bride. We evangelize others, but we need to be evangelized, too.

The spirituality of the diocesan priest includes helping other priests and offering support to one another given our unique ministries and living arrangements. We hopefully grow in holiness by our faith in Jesus Christ and our actions in response to our faith. The good news is that Our Risen Lord is in our
midst and breathes in us and calls us to move beyond any personal challenges we may have in order to care about one another.

A few words of summary….There is only one deposit of faith to which we must remain faithful. All of us are one in Christ Jesus. In virtue of our common sacred ordination and mission, all priests are bound together, aiding and supporting each other as we serve others in unity with the bishop. Our priestly vocation is a gift from God, and while it is a great gift to each of us personally, it is also a gift to the Church as a whole, a benefit to the life of the Church and to the mission of the Church, leading others to more faithfully and more fully exercise their baptismal priesthood. We need the Lord and we need each other. We depend on the Lord and we depend on each other.

May the Lord bless us, our efforts, and all those that we serve and love. The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. May God graciously bless us and those we serve, and may we take the time to count our blessings.