

Executive Summary (Part I)

Bishop Lucia's Pastoral Letter "In You All Find Their Home" (Ash Wednesday 2026)

On Ash Wednesday, Bishop Douglas J. Lucia issued a new pastoral letter to the Diocese of Syracuse entitled "*In You All Find Their Home*." The title comes from Psalm 87 and expresses the Bishop's desire that every parish in our diocese become a true spiritual home—where people are welcomed, encounter Christ, receive sound formation, are nourished by the Sacraments, and are sent forth on mission.

The Bishop begins by challenging the idea that we live in "post-Christian times." Rather than decline, he sees a moment of spiritual awakening. The human heart still longs for meaning, truth, and hope. The Church's task is to listen to these aspirations and orient them toward Jesus Christ, who alone satisfies the deepest desires of the human person.

Lent, he reminds us, is a forty-day retreat calling us to "remain in Christ" (John 15:4) and renew our Baptismal promises at Easter. This letter is meant to guide that renewal.

The Biblical Image of "Home"

To illustrate what "home" means, the Bishop reflects on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (Luke 2:22–39). In the Temple, Mary and Joseph bring Jesus, and Simeon and Anna recognize God's action. This Gospel scene becomes a model for what our parish churches are meant to be.

He identifies four essential characteristics of a parish that is truly a "home":

1. **A Place of Welcome** – Our churches must be places where people feel genuinely received and not treated as burdens or outsiders.
2. **A Place of True Worship** – The Sacraments and liturgy are not mere rituals, but living encounters with God's grace.
3. **A Place of Encounter with the Word of God** – The parish must be a space where Scripture is proclaimed, heard, and allowed to shape our lives.
4. **A Place that Sends Us Forth** – Our encounter with Christ in the Eucharist sends us on mission into our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and community.

The Bishop reminds us that Jesus "grew strong, filled with wisdom" (Luke 2:40) not only within His family—the Domestic Church—but also through faithful participation in worship and instruction. Growth in faith requires both home and parish, family and Church.

This is the Bishop's central vision: our parishes must become places where people truly find their home in God.

Executive Summary (Part II)

Evangelizing Catechesis for Mission

A major focus of the Bishop's letter is the renewal of catechesis. He reminds us that catechesis is not simply religious instruction or information about Catholicism. It is formation in discipleship.

Drawing from Pope Francis and the Church's *Directory for Catechesis*, the Bishop explains that catechesis must lead people:

- To know the faith (Scripture and Tradition)
- To celebrate the mystery (Liturgy and Sacraments)
- To live a moral life in Christ
- To learn how to pray
- To participate in community and discover their vocation

The goal is to form missionary disciples—men and women who not only believe, but live and share their faith.

The Bishop emphasizes that parents are the first catechists of their children. Faith is handed on not only in classrooms but at the family table, through witness, prayer, and daily life. Parish programs are meant to support families in this sacred responsibility. He also highlights the Diocese's new Curriculum Guidelines (Grades 1–6), designed to strengthen faith formation in Scripture, Sacraments, moral life, prayer, Church teaching, and discipleship.

In short, catechesis must be intentional, structured, and rooted in the whole life of the Church. It is not an optional activity, but central to our mission.

The Word of God

The Bishop calls for renewed love for Sacred Scripture. He references Word of God Sunday and encourages parishes to deepen biblical engagement year-round.

Quoting the Second Vatican Council, he reminds us:

“Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

The Word of God is described as:

- Strength for faith
- Food for the soul
- A lasting source of spiritual life

Parishes are encouraged to promote Bible study, reflection on Sunday readings, and familiarity with Scripture—especially among young people.

The Bishop's message is clear: parish renewal depends on being rooted in God's Word.

Executive Summary (Part III)

Strengthening Sacramental Preparation

Another central theme of the letter is sacramental preparation. The Bishop makes an important distinction between general religious knowledge and the immediate preparation needed to receive a Sacrament fruitfully.

General faith formation (“remote preparation”) is important, but it does not replace proximate (immediate) formation before Baptism, First Penance, First Eucharist, Confirmation, or Marriage.

He points to the Church’s OCIA model (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) as an example of intentional formation before receiving the Sacraments. He also notes new diocesan Sacramental Guidelines and an updated Framework for Marriage Preparation & Accompaniment.

A key insight in this section is that sacramental preparation is not only about children. It is an opportunity to evangelize entire households.

The Bishop writes that sacramental preparation should:

- Involve parents
- Focus on the symbols and prayers of the rite
- Deepen family participation in parish life
- Invite ongoing conversion

Sacraments are privileged moments of grace and evangelization. The Bishop desires renewed seriousness, consistency, and pastoral care in how we prepare for them.

Pastoral Ministry and Hospitality

The Bishop then speaks candidly about pastoral ministry and the importance of hospitality.

He acknowledges that sometimes people approach the Church seeking help and are met with rigidity, dismissal, or indifference. He expresses concern about instances where individuals are turned away or treated as inconveniences.

He reminds us that while Church law must be upheld, pastoral charity must guide how we accompany people toward spiritual maturity.

He offers a powerful lesson from his early priesthood. When he asked a monastery superior how the sisters handled interruptions during prayer, she replied:

“We leave Christ, to meet Christ.”

In other words, when someone comes to us in need, we are meeting Christ Himself.

Parish communities are called to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, living out Jesus’ words:

“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Executive Summary (Part IV)

Clergy, Laity, and Shared Responsibility

The Bishop affirms the essential role of priests and deacons in serving the People of God, especially through the Sacraments.

He emphasizes the importance of availability for:

- Confession
- Anointing of the Sick
- Marriage preparation
- Pastoral accompaniment

At the same time, he reminds us that pastoral ministry is not the work of clergy alone. The laity, by virtue of Baptism, are called to step forward in service and exercise their gifts for the growth of the Church.

Renewal requires collaboration.

“Catholic” Means Hospitable

In his concluding reflections, Bishop Lucia returns to the theme of “home.” He highlights that true Catholic spirituality is hospitable. To be hospitable is to invite someone home.

A home is:

- Lived in
- Loved
- Cherished
- Used
- Made one’s own

Our parishes should be places where the love of the Heart of Jesus is alive and active.

Rather than focusing on darkness in the world, the Bishop directs our attention to Christ, the Morning Star, whose light never fades.

The Bishop’s Prayer for Our Diocese

Bishop Lucia concludes with a hopeful prayer: that through renewed catechesis, stronger sacramental preparation, deeper love for Scripture, and authentic hospitality, all may find in God—and in our parishes—a true home.

This letter is both an invitation and a challenge.

It calls each of us to examine our own role in building parish communities where Christ is encountered, formed, celebrated, and shared.

May we receive it prayerfully and allow it to shape our Lenten journey—and our life together as the Church.