Filling the Jars to the Brim

A Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Toronto 2026 to 2033

Executive Summary



Quis ut deus

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2026 to 2033

Archdiocese *of* Toronto

www.archtoronto.org/pastoralplan



ILLUSTRATION BY GISELE BAUCHE



A Pastoral Vision Rooted at Cana

The Archdiocese of Toronto's Pastoral Plan takes its inspiration from the Wedding Feast at Cana. When the wine runs short, our Mother Mary recognizes the need and brings it to her son. At Jesus' command, the servants fill six stone jars "to the brim"[1] and he transforms the water into wine. In this Gospel scene, we find a pattern for the life and mission of the Church: to recognize the needs of the present moment, listen attentively to the Holy Spirit, respond faithfully to Christ, and generously offer what has been entrusted to us, trusting him to bring about the transformation.

This pastoral plan is, therefore, an exercise in ecclesial discernment and pastoral conversion. It seeks to identify where the Lord is calling the local Church at this moment and to provide a common missionary proclamation for the lay faithful, families, clergy, consecrated persons, parishes, schools, ministries, lay ecclesial movements and associations, and apostolates. Pastoral renewal requires us to examine our structures, priorities, resources, and ways of working, so that everything remains at the service of encounter with Jesus Christ, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the building up of the Kingdom of God.

The plan emerged from an extensive process of listening and discernment that began in 2023. Approximately 3,450 people (laity, clergy, consecrated persons, seminarians) participated in the archdiocesan consultation, from which thirteen recurring pastoral priorities were identified. Through further prayer, reflection, and consultation, these were brought together into six interconnected areas of pastoral focus, symbolized by the six jars at Cana: Family Life at All Stages; Social Outreach to the Poor, Sick and Vulnerable; Prayer, Spirituality, and Sacramental Life; Catechesis and Formation; Vocations and Charisms: Discernment and Promotion; and Youth and Young Adults.

The resulting seven-year journey moves deliberately from discernment to pastoral action. Year 1 establishes the foundation through listening and assessment of pastoral councils. Each of the following six years then gives particular attention to one of the six jars (priorities), while recognizing that none can be separated from the others.


ECCE PANIS ANGELORUM
FACTUS CIBUS VIATORUM











YEAR 1

Listening, Discernment and Assessment

Before determining how the jars are to be filled, the archdiocese must first listen carefully, discern prayerfully, and understand honestly, the pastoral reality before it. Year 1 focuses on establishing an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, and ensuring functional Pastoral Councils in every parish, entrusting these bodies with a prayerful assessment of the present pastoral situation.

Pastoral Councils are concrete expressions of communion, participation, and shared responsibility within the People of God. They are not governing or operational bodies, but places where clergy, consecrated persons, and lay faithful listen together, examine pastoral realities, recognize the signs of the times, and offer well-discerned counsel concerning the Church's mission.

Using the six jars as a common framework, Pastoral Councils will bring together quantitative information, the lived experiences of the faithful, and, most importantly, spiritual discernment of what the Holy Spirit may be revealing through these realities. Each community will seek to recognize signs of life and fruitfulness as well as wounds, gaps, and unmet needs, leading to the identification of realistic and mission-oriented pastoral priorities.

Year 1 asks three fundamental questions: Where are we? Where is the Lord calling us? What must we do?

The answers provide the baseline from which the following six years unfold.











YEAR 2

Jar One: Family Life at All Stages

The first jar begins where Cana itself begins: within the ordinary reality of family life. The family is the first community of life and love, the first school of faith, the place where prayer is learned and forgiveness practiced, and ordinarily the first setting in which vocation is discovered and the Gospel is handed from one generation to the next. As the domestic Church, the family is not simply one pastoral concern among many; it is foundational to the renewal and future of the Church and our archdiocese.

Year 2, accordingly, seeks to strengthen family life at every stage, by accompanying engaged couples with greater care and depth; supporting marriages throughout the changing seasons of life; equipping parents as the primary educators of their children in faith; walking with families experiencing difficulty, illness, separation, grief, loneliness, or other burdens; and honouring and integrating the elderly as active participants in the life and mission of the Church.

The aim is not merely to provide more services for families, but to help families themselves become communities of faith, accompaniment, hospitality, vocation, and mission. Strengthened families do not turn inward. Communion with Christ opens outward in love, preparing the way for the second jar.











YEAR 3

Jar Two: Social Outreach to the Poor, Sick and Vulnerable

At Cana, Mary notices what others have overlooked. Her simple words, "They have no wine"[2], reveal an attentive heart capable of recognizing need and bringing it to Jesus. Jar Two calls us to cultivate this same Marian attentiveness: to notice before being asked, listen before speaking, and accompany before directing.

Social outreach is not an optional activity added to parish life. Communion with Christ necessarily opens us toward others in our extended family and takes concrete form in service, solidarity, justice, advocacy, accompaniment, and the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

In this light, Year 3 seeks to foster five interconnected cultures: (i) a culture of life, defending and accompanying human dignity from conception to natural death; (ii) a culture of encounter, overcoming anonymity and isolation through genuine relationships; (iii) a culture of dialogue, engaging others with truth, humility, respect, and confidence; (iv) a culture of fraternity and togetherness, building communities of belonging and solidarity; (v) and a culture of care, in which accompaniment becomes a way of life.

The goal is a missionary Church of presence: communities in which no one is invisible, no one suffers alone, and those who are poor, sick, isolated, wounded, or vulnerable encounter the closeness of Christ through his Church.

Yet Mary does not merely notice the need; she turns toward Jesus. Christian service cannot be sustained by human generosity alone. Mission draws us toward the source from which Christian love flows.











YEAR 4

Jar Three: Prayer, Spirituality, and Sacramental Life

At the heart of the pastoral plan stands the conviction that pastoral renewal must flow from divine grace. Prayer does not withdraw us from the world; it enables us to enter more deeply into the world with the mind and heart of Jesus.

At the centre of this renewal is the Eucharist, the "source and summit of the Christian life"[3]. The Eucharist gathers the Church into communion with Jesus and sends her forth in mission. Year 4, then, calls parishes to be increasingly Eucharistic communities, centres of sacramental encounter, communities of contemplation and mission, schools of prayer, and sanctuaries of spiritual accompaniment, healing, and hope.

This includes renewing Sunday Eucharistic life; moving from sacramental maintenance toward sacramental evangelization; fostering Reconciliation and the experience of God's mercy; strengthening Eucharistic Adoration, Marian devotion, popular piety, and contemplation; supporting prayer within the home and everyday life; and expanding opportunities for spiritual accompaniment and healing.

The Church gathered in prayer is always a Church preparing to be sent. Moreover, authentic encounter with Christ awakens the desire to know him more fully. Prayer leads to listening, and encounter leads naturally to formation.













YEAR 5

Jar Four: Catechesis and Formation

At Cana, Mary tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you"[4]. Her words express the heart of discipleship: listening to Christ, trusting his word, and following where he leads.

Catechesis is far more than the transmission of religious information or preparation for the sacraments. Its purpose is communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ and the formation of missionary disciples. The goal is not simply informed Catholics, but transformed disciples who know Jesus, understand the faith of the Church, discern faithfully, and live the Gospel with conviction and joy.

Year 5 seeks to accomplish this by strengthening parish catechetical programs; deepen the theological, spiritual, and pastoral formation of catechists and leaders; make lifelong adult formation a normal dimension of Christian discipleship; equip families to hand on the faith within the home; and more intentionally integrate evangelization, prayer, outreach, catechesis, and mission.

Authentic formation shapes the whole person: minds capable of understanding the faith, hearts capable of loving God and neighbour, consciences capable of moral discernment, communities capable of communion, and disciples capable of mission.

As disciples mature, a deeper question naturally emerges: *Lord, what are you asking of me?*










MYSTERIVM FIDEI

YEAR 6

Jar Five: Vocations and Charisms — Discernment and Promotion

Every baptized person is called by God and entrusted with a place within his saving plan. Marriage, priesthood, consecrated life, the permanent diaconate, dedicated single life, lay ecclesial ministry, apostolic and professional service, contemplative witness, and the many charisms given by the Holy Spirit, all contribute in distinct ways, to the life and mission of the Church.

Vocation is not first about choosing a role, but about responding to a relationship with Christ. Year 6 seeks to cultivate an environment in which every person is encouraged to listen for God's voice, recognize the gifts entrusted to them, and respond generously in holiness, service, and mission.

This requires the interconnection of the cultures of discernment, vocation, charisms and co-responsibility, accompaniment, and missionary discipleship. Vocational ministry must be more than recruitment. Families and parishes should create the conditions in which people encounter Jesus, discover that their lives are gifts, discern their particular vocation and charisms, and recognize that they have a mission within the Church and the world.

Every vocation is ultimately ordered toward mission. The question, *Who is God calling me to be?* necessarily leads to another: *How is God calling me to serve?*











YEAR 7

Jar Six: Youth and Young Adults

The final movement of the Cana narrative draws our attention to the disciples. Having witnessed Christ's sign, they begin to believe. Their faith is young and still developing, yet these same disciples will one day become apostles, evangelizers, leaders, and witnesses.

Youth and young adults are, consequently, not merely the Church of tomorrow; they are an essential part of the Church today. They must be known personally, listened to attentively, accompanied patiently, formed deeply, entrusted with responsibility, and encouraged to place their gifts at the service of the Church and the world.

Year 7 seeks to foster four interconnected cultures: belonging and participation; accompaniment and hope; leadership; and lifelong discipleship. Young people should experience the parish not simply as somewhere they attend, but as a spiritual family in which they are known, trusted, needed, and invited to participate. They require relationships and communities where questions can be welcomed, faith can mature, vocation can be discerned, and Christian hope can take root.

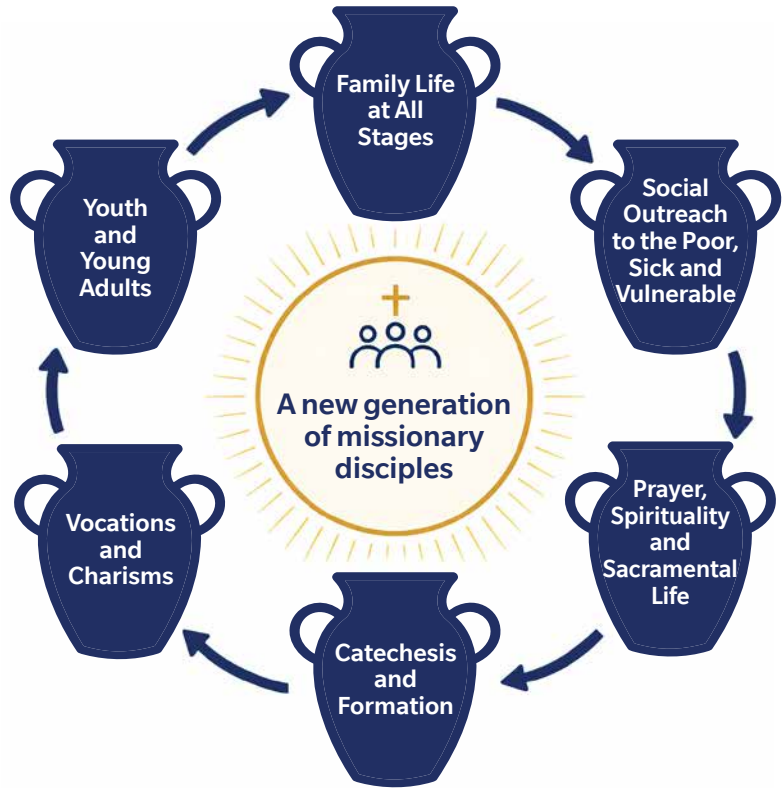
Particular attention must be given to the transitions in which young people frequently become disconnected from ecclesial life: post-Confirmation; from secondary school to post-secondary education or employment; and from young adulthood to marriage, family life, and beyond. The goal is not simply retention, but transformation: lifelong disciples whose relationship with Jesus continues to mature through every season of life.

One Integrated Path of Pastoral Renewal

The six jars are not separate priorities or independent programs. Together they form an interconnected cycle of pastoral renewal.

The journey begins with the family, where faith is first received, lived, and handed on. Families formed in Christ turn outward in service and outreach. Encounter with human need draws disciples more deeply toward prayer, the Eucharist, and sacramental life, where mission receives its strength. Encounter with Jesus awakens the desire for greater understanding which is accomplished through catechesis and formation. Mature formation enables believers to discern their vocation and charisms and to place their gifts at the service of others. These dimensions converge in the accompaniment of youth and young adults, who receive the faith, assume responsibility for the Church's mission, and carry the Gospel into the next generation.

Thus, the sixth jar leads us, in a certain sense, back to the first. Those formed as young missionary disciples will live their vocations within the Church and world; many will establish families of their own; they will serve those in need, build lives rooted in prayer and the sacraments, hand on the faith, exercise their gifts and charisms, and accompany another generation toward Christ.



This pastoral journey is therefore not linear but generative. The jars are filled anew as each generation receives the Gospel, lives it, and entrusts it to the next.

From Discernment to Pastoral Action

The pastoral plan is not intended simply to produce new programs, nor does it presume that every parish or community will respond in precisely the same way. The archdiocese is diverse, and pastoral realities differ considerably from one community to another. What unites the journey is a common vision and a common process of discernment.

The movement of the plan can be summarized as:



Pastoral councils have a particular role in sustaining this process, but responsibility for renewal belongs to the whole People of God. Bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated persons, lay faithful, families, educators, volunteers, young people, seniors, lay ecclesial movements and associations, schools, ministries, and apostolates, all bring gifts through which they participate in Christ's mission.

Implementation must remain rooted in prayer, attentive to local circumstances, faithful to the teaching and mission of the Church, and directed toward concrete pastoral action. Structures and resources are important, but they remain instruments. They must always serve the greater purpose of forming communities increasingly capable of encounter, communion, participation, evangelization, accompaniment, and mission.

The Measure of Renewal: Encounter with Christ and Mission

The success of this pastoral plan will not ultimately be measured by statistics, programs, committees, meetings, or initiatives, important though these may be. The deeper measure is whether our parishes and communities increasingly become places where people encounter Jesus Christ and are transformed by his grace.

Will families be strengthened? Will the lonely find accompaniment and the wounded experience healing? Will those who are poor and vulnerable encounter dignity, solidarity, and care? Will the faithful grow in prayer and sacramental life? Will mature disciples be formed? Will vocations and charisms be discovered and generously lived? Will young people find belonging, hope, and a place in the Church's mission? Will the Gospel be proclaimed with renewed conviction?

The horizon within which these questions must be answered is the Kingdom of God. Every family, parish, school, ministry, institution, vocation, and work of service exists not as an end in itself, but as a place in which the reign of Christ can be received, lived, proclaimed, and made visible. Pastoral renewal means allowing the Gospel increasingly to order our priorities, shape our choices, deepen our communion, and direct our energies toward the mission Christ has entrusted to us.

At Cana, the filling of the jars culminates in something greater than the abundance of wine: Christ reveals his glory, "and his disciples believed in him"[5]. This is also the ultimate purpose of the pastoral plan. We fill the jars not for their own sake, but so that people may encounter Jesus, come to believe in him more deeply, allow their lives to be transformed by his grace, and become witnesses who help others encounter him in turn.

Mary, Our Lady of Cana, remains the model and companion of this pastoral journey. She teaches us to recognize the needs around us, bring them to her son, listen to his word, and trust in his providence. Her instruction to the servants remains our own: "Do whatever he tells you".

At Cana, the servants offered what was asked of them. The miracle itself belonged to Jesus. The same remains true for us today. Authentic renewal is the work of God's grace, but grace invites our generous cooperation.

For the work is his.

Our task is filling the jars to the brim.

Endnotes

1 John 2:7.

2 John 2:3.

3 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1324.

4 John 2:5.

5 John 2:11.



Pastoral Plan Prayer
Filling the Jars to the Brim

Father in Heaven,
as we undertake this journey of renewal and mission,
draw us closer to you and to one another,
and send us forth to share the joy of the Gospel.
Strengthen our faith, deepen our hope,
and make our local Church a living witness to your love.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you revealed your glory at Cana,
and transformed what was offered to you.
Receive the offering of our lives and service,
and make our efforts fruitful through your grace.

Holy Spirit,
guide us on this pastoral journey.
Teach us to listen with open hearts,
to discern your will with faith,
to respond with courage,
and to serve with generosity and love.

Mary, Our Lady of Cana,
accompany us with your maternal care.
Show us how to be attentive to the needs of others,
and to follow your Son faithfully,
so that, united in mind and heart,
we may become a living sign of his Kingdom.

Amen