News



Bishop James Checchio of Metuchen, New Jersey, swings a censer near an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe Dec. 12, 2018, her feast day, during a prayer service at the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi in Metuchen. The liturgy marked the official launch of a "Year of Awakening" for Catholics in the diocese that will lead to a consecration of the diocese to Jesus through Our Lady of Guadalupe on the same date in 2019. (CNS/The Catholic Spirit/Michael Ehrmann)

by Catholic News Service

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Metuchen, N.J. — February 14, 2019

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By launching a "Year of Awakening," the Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey, said it aims to renew and awaken the faith" in each and every heart" and begin a new "great wave of evangelization" in all of the four-county diocese's parishes and institutions.

Hundreds of worshippers filled the Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi Dec. 12, 2018, for the official launch.

Metuchen Bishop James Checchio presided at the evening Mass marking the start of the yearlong effort, which will lead to the consecration of the diocese to Jesus through Our Lady of Guadalupe on the same date — which is her feast day.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is known as the patroness of the Americas and the star of the new evangelization.

In explaining the initiative, Checchio spoke of the importance of a unified effort among Catholics of the diocese to embark on a journey of spiritual renewal.

"It's been a joy to get to know the people of the diocese since I first arrived here; and what I picked up during my pastoral visits over the past two-and-a-half years is the need for a renewal of our commitment to God and to our church," the bishop said in his homily. "While we have been planning this consecration for over a year, recent events have made this need for renewal more urgent in my mind. This is a perfect time to begin."

The bishop explained, "The term 'consecration' basically is a 'setting apart' of people or an object — in this case, our diocese — to make something sacred or holy, usually for a particular purpose, in order to deepen our relationship with God."

"The purpose of the consecration is to be reinvigorated in our relationship with Jesus, and to see that we are part of God's purposes," Checchio said. "What the world needs most is love — God is love — and He chooses to love the world through us."

In that light, he said, "I pledge to you to do my part, to renew my commitment to Christ, to use this time to deepen my own fervor for him and his Gospel message, and to try to be an even better servant for you, the people of God of this diocese."

Checchio emphasized the need to "renew and awaken the faith in each and every heart" and in doing that "begin a new great wave of evangelization in parishes and institutions."

He wants all in the diocese to "become kindling so that the Holy Spirit could set us on fire and enable us to go out and be his disciples in the world, as he asks us to do." He outlined this in his first pastoral letter, "Lighting a Fire in the Heart of Our World."

"It's a hard challenge but it's God's call to us," Checchio said. "I know I can count on you."

Br. Patrick Reilly, a member of the Brotherhood of Hope religious community, has been involved in the planning of the consecration since the beginning. He is director of the Catholic Center at Rutgers University.

"This is a privileged time for us. I believe the Lord wants to do something for the Diocese of Metuchen that helps to rebuild our church in a real way," he said in a statement.

"Despite difficult times in the church, past and present, we look to the saints to help us rebuild our church," Reilly added. "For Catholics, Mary is the mother of the church and the queen of saints. By consecrating the diocese to Jesus through Mary, she will allow us to understand how to receive God's grace and how to evangelize and be missionary disciples."

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Fr. Timothy Christy, vicar general of the diocese, called it "truly inspired" that Checchio is placing "this renewal initiative under the patronage and protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe."

"By placing our need — in an intentional way before Mother Mary of Guadalupe — we are making clear that we are not about business as usual, but recognize God's

grace as the source of all conversion," he said. "God has acted in the past through Mary's intercession, and we have expectant faith he will act in our plea for her help now."

The diocese's Evangelization Office has set up a website to share information, updates and resources related to the initiative: www.lightingheartsonfire.org.

Jodie D'Angiolillo, diocesan director of evangelization, who is leading the planning and implementation efforts, said everyone in the diocese's four counties are being invited to participate in some way, whether they regularly attend Mass, no longer come to church and or "have not yet made the personal decision to follow Jesus Christ."

Various events are being planned through the year to help people come together and prepare for December's consecration.

Events include eucharistic Holy Hours, which will provide "kerygmatic" preaching (basic preaching in the manner of the apostles), teaching and witness along with an opportunity for confession, as well as pilgrimages, movie nights, bible studies and youth-centered rallies.

The diocese said the events will be promoted in Catholic parishes and schools and via its print, online and social media platforms.

This story appears in the **The Field Hospital** feature series. View the full series.