Dear Fellow Co-Workers in the Vineyard,

"The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2). In the very near future, we will only have 55 assignable priests available for 119 churches. There are currently 25 active priests serving over the age of retirement, and 12 seminarians in formation for our diocese. We have already had to take bold steps as a diocese this year to try to creatively respond to the ever-growing pastoral need, but I also believe we need to take an even bolder step as a diocese in the field of Vocation Promotion.

Upon the recommendation of our current Director of Vocation Promotion, Fr. Jason Hage and his collaborators, I have decided to declare a Year of Vocations in the Diocese of Syracuse under the patronage of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. This special year will begin on Saturday, November 14th with a Mass in honor of St. Joseph in the Cathedral at the start of the Vocations Summit. It will conclude on the Feast of Christ the King on November 21, 2021. The Year of Vocations will be placed under the care of St. Joseph because I would like to commemorate in a formal way the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph being solemnly declared Patron of the Universal Church by Pope Pius IX in his decree Quemadmodum Deus.

When considering the task of Vocation Promotion in our diocese, we must first go to Joseph a compelling model for all vocation promotion strategies for our diocese and for our parishes. St. Joseph teaches us that all vocations come from the home, and that vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life are the crowning jewel of married life. During the Year of Vocations, we will pray not just for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, but to married life as well. With fewer and fewer young people approaching the Church for the Sacrament of Matrimony, it is most evident that the "vocations crisis" extends to all states of life. It is my sincerest wish that all of our efforts during this Year of Vocations will be aimed at creating a culture of vocations throughout our diocese and in our parishes, so lay people can more readily discern and respond to God’s particular call in their life.

When considering the task of Vocation Promotion in our diocese, we must also go to the laity. There is no more effective step in Vocation Promotion than to train the laity to be the first promoters of a vocation on the parish/local level. In order to provide our laity with the tools they need to accompany a discerner in the initial stages of their discernment, I have invited Rhonda Gruenewald, author of the book Hundredfold: A Guide to Parish Vocation Ministry, to offer a workshop that will equip our laity to form a vocation ministry in their parishes that can more effectively reach our young people and encourage them to respond to God’s call.

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The Syracuse Vocations Summit, hosted by the Office of Vocation Promotion, will take place on the same day I will be officially launching the Year of Vocations on Saturday, November 14th at the Cathedral. We can host up to 200 lay people for this training safely inside the Cathedral with all social distancing and safety protocols. I am asking each parish to choose two representatives to be trained in this art of lay vocation promotion. More information will be forthcoming through the Office of Vocation Promotion on how to pre-register for this special day in our diocese.

Fr. Jason Hage as well as two other members of the Vocation Promotion Team currently pastor multiple parish assignments. I think this reality provides our diocese with the opportunity to consider a new model for vocation promotion, and this model would recognize the lay person as the first promoter of a vocation at the parish/local level, and then the Office of Vocation Promotion as the support system through which lay people can effectively accompany young people in their discernment. This new model will encourage co-responsibility and co-ownership among our lay people in the work of promoting Church vocations. Those who attend the Syracuse Vocations Summit will be commissioned at the end of the training as a lay promoter and sent out as new lay collaborators with the Vocation Promotion Team.

Lastly, I cannot emphasize enough how much this new movement needs to be covered in prayer. Without prayer, our efforts will come to nothing. “Beg the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Matthew 9:38). At the Votive Mass of St. Joseph in the Cathedral on November 14th I will be blessing a traveling icon of St. Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church. I am going to ask parishes to consider hosting this icon for a week at a time during the Year of Vocations. This icon is to be placed in the sanctuary of the host parish with a votive candle faithfully lit in front of it. Any parish that volunteers to host this traveling icon will also commit themselves to praying as a parish in an intentional way for vocations throughout the week they have the icon in their possession. I would ask especially these parishes to offer, during the week, a Holy Hour for an increase in vocations for their region. Our goal is to create an unceasing diocesan-wide prayer for this special intention. More information and materials will be forthcoming from the Office of Vocation Promotion on how to host this traveling icon.

In advance, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for your support, encouragement, and enthusiasm for this year of grace and all that it entails. I would especially ask for your constant prayer for the success of this year and that God will pour forth abundantly, through the intercession of St. Joseph, a spirit of generosity and heroism among our young people to say yes to God’s call for their lives.

In the Name of Jesus,

Most Reverend Douglas J. Lucia
Bishop of Syracuse