It is for me a distinct honor to address this conference of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. For I consider you and your membership to be a powerful force toward developing a wise and thoroughly Catholic response to the most daunting challenges facing our nation and Church today. You are in my estimate a genuine blessing for your fellow citizens and especially for your fellow Catholics, and for all of this I am delighted to have this opportunity to express my admiration and my heartfelt gratitude as well.

This evening I would like to share with you some of my thoughts and positions regarding a very specific challenge, the challenge of leadership facing members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy who head dioceses and archdioceses in the United States at this moment in history. The subject was suggested by my good friend, Dr. Joseph Varacalli, and I was more than pleased to accept his proposal. What I have to say about it is the fruit of fifty-five years of being a priest, nine years of acting as secretary to two cardinal archbishops of Chicago, five years of teaching in a seminary in Rome, fourteen years of working in the Roman Curia as Judge of the Tribunal of the Sacred Roman Rota, four years of serving as an auxiliary bishop to James Cardinal O’Connor, eleven years as Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport in Connecticut, and ten years as Archbishop of New York. I speak, therefore, out of a good deal of experience. Thus, I will endeavor to make my remarks as concrete as possible and, above all, not overly long. For it has been bruited about that Dr. Varacalli knows how to give speakers “the hook” when necessary.

There are many possible approaches to dealing with the challenges currently facing episcopal leadership in our land. Fourteen hundred years ago, Pope St. Gregory the Great penned a masterpiece on the subject,
which bore the title, *Regula Pastoralis*, and contained a set of very specific rules for those who would be pastors in the early Church. After him, numerous popes, saints, and scholars have treated the self-same matter at considerable length, regularly accommodating what they had to say to the needs and demands of their particular eras. I dare to hope that my humble offering at this time in history, and in this beloved land of ours, will be of interest, and perhaps even of assistance, to my brother bishops and to concerned and involved laity like yourselves, whose insights and guidance prudent pastors of souls always earnestly seek.

Borrowing the terminology of Pope St. Gregory the Great, permit me to develop my theme by proposing and commenting on five “rules” that I believe to be basic guides for any prelate in charge of a diocese or archdiocese in the United States today. They are rules about which I have thought a good deal, and prayed even more.

I

The first of them is this: Stay focused on what are, and have always been, the essential duties of a bishop. These duties are three in number: 1) A bishop is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, whole and entire, and as compellingly as he can, all the while assisting those who preach the gospel under his direction to do the same; 2) A bishop is to make the “means of salvation” (Mass, sacraments, and traditional prayers and devotions of the Church) available to his people as devoutly and abundantly as he can, all the while assisting those who participate with him in this work to do the same; 3) A bishop is to lead the faithful in carrying forward the works of justice, compassion and peace as vigorously as he can, all the while assisting those who join him in this endeavor to do the same.

All of these duties the bishop is to fulfill in his parishes, in the various Catholic institutions of education and catechesis in his diocese, in diocesan and parish-based programs of charity, in apostolates for particular ethnic groups, in pro-life and family-life activities, in diocesan communications, and in all other undertakings of Catholic outreach and service.

Clearly, this is a tall order that will demand an immense amount of time and energy even in a relatively small diocese. If, however, a bishop is dealing effectively with these three basic duties, he should be very much at peace, even though he knows that he must never be satisfied with what is being achieved. The preaching of the gospel can always be made more cogent. The Mass, the sacraments, and devotional prayer can always be made more inspiring. And leadership in justice, compassion, and peace can always be made more dynamic.
The Challenge of Episcopal Leadership Today

Still, what I wish to emphasize in this first of my rules for diocesan bishops is that these are the basic episcopal duties that must take precedence over all other projects and concerns. It is on them that a bishop must fasten his attention first and foremost, and it is on his success in discharging them that his episcopal leadership must ultimately be judged. If they are well in hand, he is meeting the fundamental and essential demands of his office. If they are not, he is not.

II

All of which brings me to the second of my rules for diocesan episcopal leadership, namely: Do not let anything get in the way of fulfilling your three basic duties. What, one might ask, might get in the way? Self-promotion and showboating might get in the way, and they must not. A wise and conscientious bishop must regularly ask himself whether what he is doing is being done to gather applause or attention to himself. If it is, adjustments need to be made, and made immediately.

Moreover, a bishop must frequently stand back from what he is doing so as to inquire of himself and those upon whose counsel he depends whether he is permitting even altogether worthy but less than essential initiatives to overwhelm what is basic, necessary, and fundamental. A bishop may have particular interests and enthusiasms that hold for him a special appeal. As long as they are in accord with his calling and do not interfere with the fulfillment of his three basic duties, he is clearly free to pursue them. He must, though, be careful not ever to allow them to take over. For, human nature being what it is, they easily can. And when they have, they are hard to set aside.

A certain bishop may be interested in a particular educational institution or a particular charitable agency outside of his diocese. Another may see great value in a particular scientific or artistic endeavor. A third may be captivated by participation in programs of social justice on a national or international level. And all of this can be altogether above reproach. Nonetheless, the preaching of the gospel, the deepening of the prayer life of the people, and leadership in justice, compassion, and peace are always to be accorded pride of place. Nothing is ever to trump them.

III

My third rule for being a diocesan bishop who is properly addressing the challenges of his times is this: Judge how well or poorly you are doing on the basis of solid, well-documented facts. While I am confident that a rule of this kind will be rightly understood by professional social scientists like yourselves, I fear that it might easily be misconstrued by others.
Unquestionably, faith, prayer, and the promotion of gospel virtues are all matters primarily of the spirit and, as such, defy adequate measurement in terms of mere numbers, graphs, and other purely material criteria. Still, the circumstances in which faith, prayer, and the promotion of gospel virtues are fostered are all, I believe, quite susceptible to precise evaluation on the basis of altogether factual information and can be quite revealing as well.

Allow me to offer a number of examples of such circumstances by positing the following uncomplicated questions of fact:

1. Are the numbers of persons registered in the parishes of the diocese growing or declining?
2. Are the numbers of students enrolled in Catholic institutions of education or catechetical formation in the diocese growing or declining?
3. Are the numbers of laity involved in parish or diocesan organizations and programs growing or declining?
4. Are the numbers of individuals and groups assisted by Catholic charitable efforts in the diocese growing or declining?
5. Are the numbers of vocations to the priesthood and religious life growing or declining?
6. Is financial support of the parishes and the diocese growing or declining?

Let the bishop uncover the answers to these six questions of fact, and I believe he will come to know quite accurately how well he is doing; that is to say, how effectively he is dealing with the challenges of the times.

There is not enough time to comment on each of my queries. Let me, therefore, say a word about just the first three, noting that something similar might be observed regarding the others, *mutatis mutandis*.

First, regarding question 1 above: This, in my opinion, is a real “showstopper.” In some quarters, especially in Western Europe, certain “experts” in matters ecclesiastical have attempted to skirt the crucial importance of this question, and especially the embarrassment a precise response might rightly occasion, by speaking of ecclesial “groups” or “movements” that are doing or allegedly will one day do what parishes have been doing over the past many centuries. This, I am convinced, is perilous self-deception.

Parishes are not just “groups,” nor can they properly be reduced to “movements.” They are living communities of faith, prayer, and virtuous activity, grounded in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and uniquely equipped to pass on the faith to generations to come. If they are healthy, the diocese is healthy. If they are not, the diocese is not. Basic evangelization, ongoing religious instruction, and identity with the Church universal through a pastor who exercises his priestly powers in virtue of authoriza-
tion from a bishop make the parish an essential reality without which the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, His Church, will inevitably flag and fade.

For the most part, the People of God know little about the bishop of the diocese and his key collaborators. They rather know their pastor and his key collaborators. For it is he and they who are for the people the Church alive and immediately accessible.

John Cardinal O’Connor used to tell the story of an incident when he was processing up the aisle in St. Patrick’s Cathedral to celebrate an anniversary of his appointment as Archbishop of New York. In a pew close to the aisle sat an elderly couple who were watching him with rapt attention. The husband turned to his wife and asked, “Who is he?” and, according to the Cardinal, the wife responded in a stage whisper, “His name is either Spellman or Cooke, and one of them is dead.” Although no one has ever mistaken me for Cardinal Spellman, I have been greeted on a number of occasions as Cardinal Cooke and Cardinal O’Connor and, of late, as Cardinal Dolan as well. Nor should any of this come as a surprise to anyone. The bishop and his collaborators are the Church remote and “downtown.” The pastor and his collaborators are the Church real and “up-close.”

Ecclesial groups and movements have played a significant role in the life of the Church from time immemorial. They can be and almost always are an immense blessing for the Church universal and for the local Church as well. Still, nothing that is not institutionally dependent upon the teaching, sanctifying, and ruling authority of a local successor of the Apostles, nothing that rises or fall with the waxing or waning of particular problems or enthusiasms, nothing that is not held together humanly and meaningfully by such clear realities as local boundaries or ethnic identities, nothing, indeed, that does not reflect those earliest communities of faith in the Church (cf. Acts 2:42), which were rooted in “the teaching of the Apostles” and “the breaking of the bread,” can ever adequately do the work of the perennial Roman Catholic parish. Look into whether the parishes of a particular diocese are growing or declining in membership, and you will know with remarkable accuracy how well the bishop is meeting the challenges of his times and, with no less accuracy, what the future has in store for the diocese. Such, at least, is my conviction.

The same, I would insist, holds true as regards Catholic institutions of education and catechesis. What lies ahead for the Church in no small measure depends on how strong or how weak they are. We have had too many generations of Catholics with no Catholic educational experience and little or no substantial catechetical formation. Accordingly, our congregations are greying with frightening speed. That phenomenon, however, can be reversed if and when the “faith of our fathers” is again taught—or better, instilled—
Edward Cardinal Egan

with academic excellence and religious fervor in Catholic educational institutions on all levels and in catechetical programs as well. Let Catholic educational institutions languish, and watch the Church follow suit. Learn from accurate enrollment statistics that they are prospering, and you will have another clear indication that the bishop is handling his challenges well.

To all of this allow me to add a sidebar. As noted above, one of the three basic duties of a bishop is to lead in justice, compassion, and peace, and to lead not only with words but also and especially by example. In the great metropolises of our nation, that leadership shines forth with particular brilliance in the Catholic schools that are operating in the most deprived and troubled neighborhoods at immense cost to the diocese or archdiocese in question, and operating magnificently.

When I was Archbishop of New York, the archdiocese was blessed with 279 elementary and secondary schools. In 115 of them, at least 65 percent of the students came from families that were living below the federally-defined poverty level. Over the years, these schools came to be identified as our “inner-city schools” and might have been expected to have been performing in a less than ideal fashion. In point of fact, however 96 percent of their high school students were graduating in four years, and 93 percent were going on to college or university. And this in a city where less than half of the students in public high schools were graduating in four years and only 23 percent were prepared for post-secondary school education, according to a report issued by the City College of New York just three years ago. The sacrifices made by the archdiocese, its parishioners, and its benefactors to keep Catholic inner-city schools open and functioning so well were, and continue to be, nothing short of gigantic. Still, the poorest of the poor are being served for no other reason than Christlike compassion; and the community at large observes and, I can assure you, takes genuine inspiration from what it sees.

To indicate the relevance of the numbers of lay men and lay women involved in diocesan and parish organizations and programs when measuring the effectiveness of episcopal leadership, it is perhaps enough simply to identify who these lay persons are. In parishes, they are catechists, volunteers in schools, members of parish councils, members of St. Vincent de Paul Societies, youth council members, coaches, readers at Mass, choir members, ushers, servers, sacristans, and many more. In dioceses, they are members of school boards, members of boards of charitable institutions, members of finance councils, members of child-abuse review boards, members of seminary boards, members of communications boards, members of cemetery boards, pro bono legal advisers, pro bono insurance advisers, pro bono real estate advisers, and again, many more. When they are growing in
numbers and involvement, one can be confident that a diocese and its parishes are on the right course. When accompanied by growth in parish membership and growth in enrollment in Catholic educational and catechetical endeavors, they constitute, in my estimation, a manifest sign of success in episcopal leadership, just as parallel declines bespeak exactly the opposite.

About the last three of my six queries, that is, about the number of needy individuals and groups being assisted by diocesan and parish charities, about the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and about the amount of financial support that a diocese and its parishes are receiving, similar analyses can be made; and, I am persuaded, similar conclusions apply. Tell me the facts about all six, and it will be a “piece of cake” to divine how well the bishop is confronting the challenges of his time.

IV

Supposing that a bishop is clear about the essential duties of his office, supposing that he is committed to properly regulating his participation in non-essential activities, and supposing that he looks to precise and accurate information in order to gauge what is being achieved under his leadership, I move on to number four of the five rules that I referenced at the outset: Be sure, Bishop, that you are relating fittingly to members of three specific groups: first, your priests; second, your lay advisors; and third, those in the area served by your diocese who are of religious persuasions other than Catholic.

When a priest or auxiliary bishop is appointed by the Holy Father to head a diocese or archdiocese, he has a number of decisions to make concerning his relations with his priests. He must reckon them to be his primary and essential collaborators in the mission of the Church. He must pray for them daily. He must see himself as their servant, recognizing that it is they who are closest to his people. And, every bit as importantly, he must accept the fact that he has been assigned to be a father to his priests and, therefore, one who will under certain circumstances have to give them directives with the understanding that they are to be followed.

In an era so ill-at-ease as ours with regulations and obligations, this last “must” may evoke some negative reactions. Still, it needs to be embraced if a diocese is to be united and moving forward in an orderly and effective manner. When I was living in Rome some twenty-seven years ago, and it was announced that I was to conclude my work in the Curia so as to return to the United States as an auxiliary bishop, an Italian cardinal who had more than sixty years of experience in dealing with bishops and dioceses across the world invited me to lunch. We had become friends several years earlier, and I had always enjoyed his “upbeat” opinions and attitudes about matters ecclesiastical. Hence, when toward the end of the meal he looked
me squarely in the eye and told me to listen carefully to what he was about to say, I was a bit taken aback. “Don Eduardo,” he said, “if one day they make you the bishop of a diocese, love your priests with all your heart and soul. But do not forget that you are their ‘father in the Lord’ and will at times have to make demands of them and insist upon their fulfillment. This is all part of the episcopal office, and you have nothing to do but accede to it with total trust in Your Divine Savior. If you cannot do this, decline the appointment.” When four years later I was named Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport, I received a letter from my cardinal friend. It read as follows: “Remember what I told you during our luncheon before you left Rome. Love your priests with all your might, but do not hesitate to guide them and to expect them to follow your guidance, which must always be the fruit of humble prayer. Be assured that I will be remembering you and your priests at the altar as long as the Lord gives me breath.” I have read and re-read that letter many times, and I firmly believe in its message.

Even though educated primarily in the fields of philosophy and theology, when a priest or auxiliary bishop is named to lead a diocese of archdiocese, he suddenly finds himself deeply immersed in administrative and financial matters—from investments to insurance, from budgeting to fund-raising, from audits to real estate. As a consequence, he inevitably needs guidance and needs it primarily from lay experts who are willing to provide it. Thus, he necessarily enters into a dialogue that requires him to recognize that, while the decisions he makes for his diocese or archdiocese are always his responsibility, the process whereby he makes them must include listening to and learning from lay men and women who are endowed with the experience and expertise he lacks.

When I came to New York as archbishop, Catholic Charities of the archdiocese was at a crossroads. The greatly admired executive director was up in years and looking to retire after almost two decades of dedicated service. Thus it was that I met with a committee made up of business leaders and key experts in the field of social service to ask what they believed I should do regarding the leadership of Catholic Charities. After many hours of discussion in a series of meetings, it was recommended that I speak with Mr. John J. Phelan, the retired chairman and chief executive officer of the New York Stock Exchange and a dear friend of mine for many years, so as to invite him to chair a newly reorganized Board of Catholic Charities. Mr. Phelan graciously accepted the invitation and in collaboration with a new and gifted executive director, Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, “set his hand to the plough.” He met monthly with me and almost daily with Msgr. Sullivan, either in person or by telephone. He was in the central offices of Catholic Charities or in the local offices of its ninety-eight agencies sev-
eral times a week and meticulously reviewed every major decision, first with the staff and then with the board. Before long Catholic Charities was growing beyond all expectations in the numbers of individuals and groups it was serving and in the quality of service that was being offered. In the ten years of my tenure as Archbishop of New York, the annual budget of Catholic Charities rose by more than 125 percent, just to give one indication of the progress that was made.

I report all of this to illustrate how I believe a bishop is to relate to his advisers. If he is to be a father to his priests, he is in a certain sense to be a son to those who make available to the Church their time, their wisdom, their concern, and their expertise. Mr. John J. Phelan and the Board of Catholic Charities that he put together knew more about administering and financing a hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars enterprise such as Catholic Charities of New York than most bishops could ever even hope to learn. It is with this experience and others like it in mind that I would urge all who head dioceses to choose their counselors well and to listen to them with gratitude, humility, and unalloyed attention. The author of the Book of Proverbs got it right when he observed that the safety and security of a leader reside with advisors who are wise and many.

There is one final relationship to which I would draw your attention, the relationship that the leader of a diocese or archdiocese needs to have with those who are outside of the fold, that is, with person of other faiths, denominations, or no belief at all. As we all understand in this current era of ecumenical and interfaith relations, a Catholic diocese does not live and work in a vacuum. It rather lives and works in the midst of a wider community with which it needs to have the most excellent of relationships if it is to realize the goals that the Lord has set for it. Forgive me if I illustrate the point with another personal account.

During my years of working with John Cardinal Cody of Chicago as his secretary and later co-chancellor, much of my work had to do with the Protestant and Jewish communities and the various social-action organizations of the Windy City and environs. The Cardinal made it abundantly clear that I was to do everything I could to foster the warmest of feelings and best of relations with all of these groups, not only because of the benefits that would redound to the work of the Archdiocese of Chicago then, but also—and especially—because of the benefits that would redound to the work of the Church in other areas and in the future as well. “The ‘pay-off,’” he used to assure me, “will exceed anything you might imagine now.”

Shortly after being installed as Archbishop of New York, I was invited to address the annual convention of one of the most prominent Jewish organizations in the land. Not surprisingly, I was quite concerned about how
my message would be received. The concern, however, evanesced when the master of ceremonies introduced me by reading to the audience four extraordinarily kind letters of friendship and support for me from a former president of the Chicago Board of Rabbis, a former executive director of the Chicago Board of Rabbis, a former president of the Chicago branch of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the son of a rabbi, who wrote that, because of help I had given his father in a time of crisis, I could properly be considered a “mensch.” I do not recall what I said in my address, but I will never forget the four letters that constituted the introduction.

They convinced me, if I needed convincing, that the statement of the Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago about cooperation and friendship with those outside the Catholic fold was right on target. Spiritual father for his priests, a kind of son to his advisors, and a caring colleague with those of other religious and social persuasions are, I would insist, a winning formula and one, I would add, that sums up rather succinctly my fourth rule about the key relationships a bishop must pursue and nourish if he seeks successfully to address the challenges that face him and the diocese he has the privilege to lead.

My fifth and last rule for prelates in charge of dioceses or archdioceses can be expressed in four words: Pray for your people. It needs no commentary here, even though it is every bit as important as the other four rules, and perhaps even more important when all accounts are closed. Canon Law requires that the episcopal leader of a diocese or archdiocese offer Mass every Sunday and Holy Day pro populo, that is, for the people; and good sense requires that he pray for his people every day without exception. If he does, he can be confident that the Savior Who brought the Church into existence twenty centuries ago will be ever at his side, encouraging, inspiring, and guiding.

Stay focused on what are and always have been the essential duties of a bishop. Do not let anything get in the way of those essential duties. Judge how well or how poorly you are doing on the basis of solid, well-documented facts. Be sure that you are relating appropriately to your priests, your advisers, and those outside the pale of the Catholic Church. Pray for your people. These are my five rules for a diocesan or archdiocesan bishop confronting the challenges of our times.

If, however, I might be allowed a sixth rule, it would be this: In season and out of season, beg the faithful to pray for their Church and their bishops as well; and this is precisely what I would like to do this evening as I conclude my remarks and thank you most sincerely for your very kind attention. God love you all.