PASTORAL PLAN

ENCOUNTER THAT LEADS TO TRANSFORMATION

Diocese of Austin
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“\textit{I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailing each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.” The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.}”

\textit{Evangelii Gaudium, 3}
I. Introduction

“THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL” fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew ... I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”

Evangelii Gaudium, 1

In late November 2013, Bishop Joe Vásquez initiated a process to develop the next Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Austin. Pastoral leaders and the faithful engaged in a year-long process of prayer, reflection and discussion to identify how the people, parishes, schools and diocesan offices might answer the call of Pope Francis to embark upon new paths on our common journey to Jesus Christ. This is a call to encounter Jesus Christ in a more intentional way with a deeper faith so that we can be transformed for greater Christian witness through renewed ways of ministry.

This Pastoral Plan is an intentional invitation to people and faith communities of Central Texas to an Encounter that Leads to Transformation. First, all the people of the Diocese of Austin are invited to continue on their pathway of discipleship through a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ. Second, the invitation to renewal and transformation is also addressed to parishes, schools, Catholic agencies and associations so they may help people deepen their encounter with Christ. Finally, the plan is an invitation to diocesan structures and offices to be transformed to support parishes, schools and individuals.

II. Mission Statement

This Plan is designed to build upon the existing mission statement of the Diocese of Austin, which reads:

"We, the Diocese of Austin, through the Word and Eucharist, prayer, formation, education, social ministries and advocacy, embrace diverse cultures throughout the diocese so that together, as the Catholic Church, we may continue the mission of Christ in the world today."
III. Diocesan Vision: Encounter that Leads to Transformation

The vision for the Pastoral Plan, "Encounter that Leads to Transformation" describes the "desired future" the people of the Diocese of Austin seek. It is the foundation upon which the Pastoral Plan’s priorities and objectives are built.

At its heart, this vision contains two key elements: Encounter and Transformation. The research, conversations and spiritual reflection that were part of the development of this plan all led to the conclusion that as the Diocese of Austin encounters significant change in its demographics and pastoral ministry there is a need for transformation to meet these opportunities and challenges. The path to transformation begins with this encounter.

“We are only Christians if we encounter Christ … Only in this personal relationship with Christ, only in this encounter with the Risen One do we truly become Christians … Therefore let us pray the Lord to illumine us, to grant us an encounter with his presence in our world, and thus to grant us a lively faith, an open heart and great love for all, which is capable of renewing the world.”

Pope Benedict XVI, Vatican City, Sept. 3, 2008

This vision is embodied through three areas of focus:

1. ENCOUNTER. It is through this profound encounter with Christ, and Christ in the other, that we are formed, inspired and spiritually nourished. “Feed my sheep.” Jn 21:17
2. MINISTRY. Our ministry, built upon encounter and transformation, embraces servant leadership, inclusion, collaboration and invitational outreach. “So we, though many, are one body in Christ.” Rom 12:5
3. WITNESS. Our encounter and transformation leads us to be signs of God’s kingdom on earth. We become disciples: people witnessing the joy of the Gospel “Make disciples of all nations.” Mt 28:19

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

Every good plan should help the community move to a "desired future." What is this desired future for the Diocese of Austin? By the end of the four-year period this plan covers, the goal is that Catholics throughout the Diocese of Austin might say something like the following:

We are a very different diocese than when we started this plan. After listening to people throughout the Diocese of Austin we recognized a deep hunger for an Encounter with Christ. We focused on this Encounter and we were led to a powerful Transformation individually and as a Catholic community. Through this Encounter we put Christ at the center of our lives. The value of which cannot be underestimated.
This Encounter with Jesus Christ also Transformed our approach to ministry. Our parishes have become highly collaborative. We moved from a silo mentality where we were focused solely on our own needs to creating deep partnerships. Our diocesan offices are service-oriented, focused on supporting our parishes and schools. These changes have allowed us to become profound missionary disciples and witnesses to our faith throughout Central Texas. We are able to share our faith within our neighborhoods and communities, particularly to inactive Catholics, to the poor and the disadvantaged, and to all those who need the message of the Gospel.

The results are extraordinary. We see a deepening and new energy in our own faith lives. There are more people participating in Sunday Mass and the sacraments, especially Penance. Our parish activities are full of people and our adult prayer groups, retreats and Bible studies are signs of the vitality of our local Church. There is a noticeable increase in youth and young adults who are excited about their faith and the Church. People from every cultural group feel welcome and are highly visible in pastoral leadership positions. Our Catholic Schools have full enrollments and are able to welcome families from all economic levels. Above all, the people of Central Texas are aware of the wonderful presence and good works of the Catholic community. Our Encounter has Transformed us!

Three words sum up what we seek as our desired future: ENCOUNTER, MINISTRY and WITNESS
IV. Today’s Opportunities and Issues

The year-long planning process, led by a steering committee of committed pastoral leaders (priests, deacons, religious and lay women and men) involved monthly meetings for prayer, reflection and discernment. A broader engagement of pastoral leaders and the people throughout the Diocese of Austin also contributed to the development of the Plan through multiple listening sessions (in English and Spanish) across the diocese, a diocesan-wide survey, interviews with priests, deacons and religious of the diocese, focus groups with key constituents and the study of the current demographic and pastoral research. The directions, ideas and recommendations expressed in this plan are the result of the hard work of many people.

Two messages emerged powerfully in the input from across the Diocese of Austin: a deep hunger for an Encounter with Christ and the need for Transformation in individual lives and ministerial structures. These two elements comprise the foundation of the vision for this plan.

Other consistent messages heard during the planning process were that as Church (individuals, parishes, schools, diocesan structures) we are at our best embracing all people, providing supportive and welcoming communities, celebrating inspiring liturgies, focusing on the family, caring for and being advocates for the poor and suffering, having clear and crisp messaging and helping people encounter Jesus Christ in their daily lives.

We also heard that the Diocese of Austin is shaped by, and must respond pastorally to the many issues, opportunities and challenges affecting our country, state, counties, cities and towns. These societal, demographic and cultural changes can be viewed as challenges, but they are also great opportunities for mission and ministry; therefore, this plan pays particular attention to:

- A continued population growth alongside significant demographic changes.
- A growing and shifting diversity within cultural families of faith and age generations, especially a continual increase in the Hispanic communities.
- A growing Catholic population requiring a sustained growth in the number of vocations and active priests, deacons and religious women and men.
- Shifting demographic changes within parish communities requiring:
  - greater sensitivity to the diversity of the cultures of families,
  - a mutually shared vision, an increasing organizational complexity, a need for dynamic and new skill sets for effective ministry,
  - a broader level of collaboration and teamwork, and
  - a greater attention to leading pastorally in new and different ways.
- A particular strategy to attend to the realities of families today with diverse pastoral, cultural and life experiences.
**PASTORAL LIFE IN CENTRAL TEXAS**

**RAPID GROWTH AND CHANGE**

During the planning period, the total population in the Diocese of Austin is expected to continue to grow rapidly (a projected 10 percent increase in the period from 2012 to 2017). As the table below shows, Census projections indicate that the non-white population will nearly match the white population in size by 2017. Also noteworthy is the fact that by 2017 the Hispanic population is projected to double the number identified in the 2000 Census.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000 Census</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>2017 Projection</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>1,366,160</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
<td>1,691,676</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>235,959</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>301,490</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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<td>21.9%</td>
<td>984,413</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Other (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>103,404</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>226,642</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Currently, nearly 108,000 Catholic families live in the Diocese of Austin, approximately 450,000 Catholics, but this number is increasing rapidly, primarily due to the growth of the Hispanic population. The fastest growth will occur along the I-35 corridor, particularly in the counties surrounding Travis County, where an estimated 76% of the population of the Diocese of Austin resides. The Austin metropolitan area is projected to grow 50%-100% by 2040.

**PARISHES**

The Diocese of Austin has 127 parishes in 25 counties. In 2014, 76% of diocesan Catholic families belonged to only 40 parishes consisting of 1,000, up to over 6,000 families or more, while 24% reside in 87 parishes with less than 1,000 families. This distribution presents a challenge to diocesan entities dedicated to supporting parishes, as most parishes have staffs consisting of only a pastor and a secretary, often part-time, thus limiting the range of services available at parish level. The challenge will be to find ways to extend diocesan services beyond the top 40 parishes, i.e., education, youth and social ministries.

**PRIESTS, DEACONS AND RELIGIOUS**

In 2014, there were 220 priests, 212 deacons, approximately 51 brothers and 94 sisters serving in the Diocese of Austin. The number of “active” priests is expected to decline over the plan period from 189 active priests in 2014 to 160 or fewer due to retirements, deaths and health issues. An opportunity to adjust this expected decline is a new emphasis on vocations that can create enthusiasm and energy for ordained ministry, especially among Hispanics. If not, this decline in priests could be more than 15% in the face of a rapidly increasing and changing demographic. It will be a growing challenge for the Diocese of Austin to provide adequate sacramental and catechetical presence.
Further, there is expected to be a decline in Spanish-speaking priests in the face of the rapidly growing Hispanic population. In 2014, approximately 56 priests offer 94 Masses in Spanish in 58 parishes. This level of sacramental and catechetical ministry will be difficult to maintain given the growing challenge to serve the soon-to-be majority population. Indeed, there will be increasing pressure upon the Diocese of Austin and the priests in the plan period to provide sacraments at the same level as in 2014. And, it will be a challenge to maintain the presence of 10% of all priests who provide sacraments to 1% of the families in the smallest 20 parishes with fewer than 100 families. The Diocese of Austin will have to prepare plans to help adapt to these challenges.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Catholic schools have a long history in the Diocese of Austin reaching approximately 1% of all potential K-12 students, and 5% of potential Catholic students. Over the past 10 years, the enrollment of Catholic Schools increased 9% reaching the highest enrollment in 2012-2013. Creative ways to increase enrollment need to be found and implemented in Catholic schools. Concerns over the affordability and accessibility of Catholic education must also be addressed.

At the heart of it all, the issues and realities noted above are opportunities and challenges for people and institutions to deepen their faith by encountering Christ and being transformed by that encounter.

CONCLUSION

As we think about the present lived experience of people, it becomes imperative that the audience for this Pastoral Plan is not solely institutions but individuals as well as communities of faith. The plan must first engage the individual person before it can start with the Diocese of Austin or the parish. Once it begins there, the role of the parish is to provide a supportive community to accompany people on the journey of encounter and transformation. This requires the parish to shift its focus from how many people come to the parish to how the parish reaches out to and supports the encounter with Christ and his people. The Diocese of Austin must in turn do the same.
V. Guiding Principles

In the process of creating this plan a series of principles were identified to guide its implementation. These principles reflect the important realities, values and best practices that must always be addressed.

FORMATION AND SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT

1. The first task of evangelization and catechesis is to connect people with Jesus Christ by nurturing and strengthening their relationship and encounter with Christ lived through the Church community.
2. Christian formation is directed to all people and takes place at all times in a person’s life, including those who minister within the Church.
3. Evangelizing Formation nurtures the faith of people in the pews, reaches out to inactive Catholics and extends an invitation to come and see to non-Catholics.
4. The desired outcome of formation, worship and discipleship is a lived Christian witness in everyday life that propels us to announce the good news and serve our sisters and brothers on the periphery of society.

INVITATIONAL OUTREACH

1. Pastoral outreach addresses the needs of the people of the Diocese of Austin through their lived experiences recognizing the diversity of cultures, age groups and geographic realities.
2. Pastoral ministry strengthens faith life through an intentional and inclusive invitation to encounter Christ, participate in parish life through transforming hospitality, relationship building and effective communication.
3. Pastoral outreach has a particular focus on the poor and those with special needs.

COLLABORATIVE TEAMWORK

1. Encounter and Transformation take place through ministry built upon a mutually shared vision, collaborative teamwork; and a willingness, value and desire to share resources, knowledge and experiences.
2. Leadership training, including pastoral formation, mentoring, coaching and outreach to new and different people as leaders is an intentional value of the Diocese of Austin at all levels.
3. Sound pastoral practices and guidelines for calling, forming and sustaining missionary disciples are embraced and practiced throughout the Diocese of Austin.
4. Pastoral leaders call forth, form and nurture inter-culturally competent ministers.

HISPANIC CATHOLICS

1. In response to the growing Hispanic Catholic population in the Diocese of Austin, every initiative of this plan answers the question of how it will serve Hispanic Catholics.
2. All major initiatives of the plan are available in both English and Spanish.
3. In addition to Spanish-language translation, plan initiatives must also recognize and address the unique cultural context of Hispanic Catholics.
VI. Strategic Priorities and Objectives

Strategic Priority 1: PROVIDE SPIRITUAL FORMATION THAT LEADS TO ENCOUNTER

Transformed by encounter (with Christ), we are formed, inspired and spiritually nourished. “Feed my sheep.” Jn 21:17

Objective 1: Develop a spiritual formation strategy that fosters Encounter by awakening faith, engaging the heart and Transforming believers.

Objective 2: Create pastoral strategies that support the family as the Domestic Church; a place of transforming spiritual growth for forming disciples.

Objective 3: Identify pastoral approaches that overcome obstacles and increase opportunities to participate in the Church’s sacramental life as a means of deepening faith and witness.

Strategic Priority 2: DEVELOP A CULTURE OF MINISTRY THAT SUSTAINS TRANSFORMATION OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES TO BE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

Transformed by Encounter, ministry embraces servant leadership, inclusion, collaboration and invitational outreach. “So we, though many, are one body in Christ.” Rom 12:5

Objective 1: Strengthen, nourish and support ministry by focusing on the spiritual and professional formation of priests, deacons, professed religious women and men and ecclesial lay ministers.

Objective 2: Change the culture of ministry within the Diocese of Austin so that it is collaborative, transformative, unified and shared.

Objective 3: Call, form and support pastoral leaders from different cultural communities and demographics, especially among Hispanic youth and young adults.

Strategic Priority 3: STRENGTHEN CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND OUTREACH TO TRANSFORM INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

Transformed by encounter, we go forth to be signs of God’s kingdom on earth. “Make disciples of all nations.” Mt 28:19

Objective 1: Strengthen the commitment to be disciples in contemporary society by being Transformed through an Encounter with Christ.

Objective 2: Create strategies and initiatives to strengthen and enliven our outreach and engagement to and with culturally diverse communities.

Objective 3: Strengthen outreach and engagement with those at the perimeter of society including the poor and the disadvantaged.
APPENDIX:  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASTORAL PLAN

The following insights directly flow from the various listening sessions, interviews, surveys and consultations and suggest the following findings should guide the development of the Pastoral Plan:

1. The Plan should present a creative vision for the church in the Diocese of Austin—telling the story of faith. The Pastoral Plan must be synergistic, connect things together and identify big issues.
2. The Plan is a vehicle for creating energy, enthusiasm, direction (focus) for ministry in the church. (We can’t do everything at one time, so what is it that we need to do now?)
3. The Plan should use language that clearly identifies the desired “results” (outcomes for the work of the Diocese of Austin) with measurable objectives while leaving specific pastoral ministries to be developed at the parish, school and local level.
4. The Plan can be a roadmap for “disciple making” by the Diocese of Austin, parishes, schools and institutions.
5. The language of the plan should be clear, simple and engaging to all people of the Diocese of Austin.
6. The plan should clearly point towards effective ministry that addresses the needs of the people of the Diocese of Austin and their lived experiences recognizing the diversity of cultures, age groups and geographic realities.
7. The communication of the Pastoral Plan should be done through various mediums (multimedia) not just in a written format.

FINDINGS RELATED TO MINISTRY PRIORITIES FOR THE DIOCESE OF AUSTIN

1. Education and formation in faith at all stages of life should be a focused priority in the plan. That is, lifelong formation/catechesis can be accomplished so that understanding and knowing one’s faith is something people value for themselves and their descendants.
2. Making disciples: Training people to be disciples in service to the Gospel, especially within local communities and society, should be a focused priority of the Plan.
3. Prayer and worship should be spiritually uplifting, inspiring, participative and accessible to all the families of faith that make up the diversity in the Diocese of Austin (including age and culture).
4. The family should be a focus priority in the plan. What does a diocese, parish, school or group look like when focused on ministry through the lens of family life?

FINDINGS RELATED TO HOW THE CHURCH ACCOMPLISHES ITS MINISTRY

1. The Plan should include a priority that supports leadership training, including pastoral formation, mentoring, coaching and outreach to new and different people as leaders; including identifying sound pastoral practices and guidelines for calling, forming and sustaining missionary disciples.
2. The Plan should promote and strengthen collaboration and teamwork through sharing of (human and financial) resources, knowledge and experiences (best practices) between/among parishes, between/among schools, within diocesan offices, and between diocesan offices and parishes.
3. The Plan should promote and strengthen outreach and invitation to participation in parish life through invitation, relationship building and effective communication.
4. The Plan should create within the Diocese of Austin an ecclesial culture rooted in prayerfulness, hopefulness and mercy.
5. The Plan should provide guidance and be a roadmap for effective and efficient use of technology, including communication technologies.