
Diocese of Austin

The Catholic Church of Central Texas



Pastoral Plan

***Living our Legacy:
Christ-Centered Communities***

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I. Introduction

In the fall of 2007, the Catholic Diocese of Austin initiated the process of creating a new pastoral plan to revise the plan launched in January 2003. Bishop Gregory M. Aymond asked the Bishop's Advisory Council (BAC) to serve as a coordinating committee to facilitate the pastoral planning process. An outside consultant, Dominic Perri, was retained to assist the process.

The first step was a thorough evaluation of the previous plan, which revealed a highly successful implementation. Ninety percent of the plan's 99 goals had been completed or were in progress.

The new pastoral planning process was launched in January 2008. The focus of this plan was ministry to parishes, as the Catholic Schools office was developing a plan of their own. The process had several goals:

- Solicit input from the many diverse groups in the Diocese
- Identify a vision that responds to the needs of the Diocese and the call of the Spirit
- Create focused goals in support of the vision
- Develop a plan that would provide parishes, ministries and diocesan offices a common focus that all could work toward together.

The goal of soliciting input from many diverse groups was achieved. Input was collected from:

- More than 400 parishioners from 74 parishes in town hall meetings and online forums
- More than 100 priests of the diocese
- More than 25 religious serving in the diocese
- Eighteen diocesan offices

The BAC considered suggestions from these groups in creating the pastoral plan contained in this document. The purpose of this pastoral plan is to provide a common focus for the Diocese of Austin for the five-year period from 2009-2014. It is prayerfully submitted in hopes that it may serve the Church of Central Texas.

II. Theological Framework

In developing this pastoral plan for the Diocese of Austin, Bishop Gregory M. Aymond and Catholics throughout the diocese reflected on some fundamental questions:

- To what is the Holy Spirit calling us?
- How can we live the Gospel in central Texas and beyond?
- How can we use our pastoral plan to best unite our efforts?

The answers to these questions all focused on helping each Catholic in the diocese deepen his or her encounter with Christ. Catholics who deepen their own faith can then translate their beliefs to work that transforms our society and the world. The parish is where the majority of Catholics experience themselves as the People of God. Therefore the parish provides the greatest opportunity to initiate and implement the ongoing conversion of Catholics in central Texas.

This discernment leads to a clear focus: strengthening our Christ-centered parishes. The plan's vision statement articulates this focus:

We are committed to strengthening our Christ-centered parishes. Therefore the Diocese of Austin will provide formation and education to laity, religious and clergy so they may be leaven to transform our parishes and renew the world.

The vision statement proposes a collaborative project for our diocese: strengthening our Christ-centered parishes. Our parishes are already Christ-centered, but this work must deepen and continue. All diocesan offices, ministries and parishes should continually ask how they can work together to strengthen all parishes in the diocese as Christ-centered communities.

Extensive consultation at the parish level yielded five strategies to achieve the vision. Each of the five invites people to a personal and communal relationship with Jesus Christ. The strategies are as follows:

1. **Conversion to Christ:**
Call all people to conversion.
2. **Holy Families:**
Nurture and strengthen families.
3. **Young People:**
Include youth and young adults in our parishes
4. **Welcoming Communities:**
Renew efforts to become more welcoming parishes.
5. **Strong Leaders:**
Develop leaders for our local church.

John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* also emphasizes the five core strategies identified in parish town halls:

Conversion to Christ: “I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness. ... the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine "training in holiness", adapted to people's needs (30-31).”

Holy Families: “At a time in history like the present, special attention must also be given to *the pastoral care of the family*, particularly when this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis (47).”

Young People: “In making these recommendations, I am thinking especially of the pastoral care of young people...We must learn to [invest their] enthusiasm like a new talent (cf. Mt 25:15) which the Lord has put into our hands so that we can make it yield a rich return (40).”

Welcoming Communities: “A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters (44).”

Strong Leaders: “Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works. (46)”

The five strategies follow a natural progression from the individual call to holiness to the family and to the parish community. Thus, the first step is to nurture conversion in each individual, so they in turn can then devote themselves to building holy families and strong parish communities.

This pastoral plan offers a means for all Catholics to participate in their communal call by strengthening parishes to be truly Christ-centered. In so doing, we will not only serve Catholics but all people in the diocese as a sign of Christ's much-needed presence in our world.

III. Pastoral Plan as a Collaborative Project

Working Together with a Common Focus

This pastoral plan will help diocesan offices, ministries and parishes align their efforts and collaborate in service of all Catholics in our diocese. Therefore, the primary question for all ministries in the diocese is “How can we support parishes in their efforts to become more Christ-centered?”

Diocesan Offices

The role of diocesan offices is to provide formation and education to parishes to help them become more Christ-centered. Diocesan offices will need to coordinate their efforts so that parishes experience a cohesive outreach. Therefore, the goals for this plan are designed to be collaborative projects among diocesan offices, with the intent of increasing their contribution to parish life.

Parishes and Individual Catholics

At times individual Catholics and parishes can lose sight of their connection to the larger diocese and focus at the level of their own parish. This pastoral plan challenges all Catholics in the diocese to adopt a broader perspective. Just as diocesan offices are asked to work together, parishes are also asked to work together to support one another in their common goal of deepening their Christ-centeredness.

Five Key Questions

Each parish, office and ministry of the diocese should evaluate what it is doing to help Catholics in the Diocese, particularly in parishes, become more Christ-centered. To review their progress, they should assess themselves with the following questions:

What are we doing to:

- Call all to **deeper conversion and personal commitment to Jesus Christ?**
- Nurture **holy families** that are rooted in the practice of the Catholic faith?
- Incorporate **youth and young adults** into every aspect of parish life?
- Assure that **our parishes and our diocese are communities that offer welcome and evangelization to all**, as well as outreach in charity and justice?
- Build a solid foundation for the future of our Catholic faith by **training and forming effective leaders for parish life?**

IV. Development of the Plan

The table below summarizes the major steps of the process of developing the pastoral plan.

Plan Development Timeline

November 2007	Evaluation of the previous pastoral plan published in <i>Catholic Spirit</i> .
Feb-March 2008	Over 400 people attended five town hall meetings offered at sites throughout the diocese from 74 parishes. A sixth town hall was offered for religious of the diocese. ¹
April-June 2008	Eighteen diocesan departments received input from town hall meetings. Each department conducted Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis and generated proposals for the Pastoral Plan.
May 2008	Presbyteral Council, deans and priests of the diocese reviewed input from the town hall meetings and offered proposals for the Pastoral Plan.
July 2008	BAC analyzed input from town hall meetings, diocesan departments and the May priests' gathering. Five core strategies identified.
August 2008	Five core strategies presented to diocesan staff for input and dialogue about implementation.
October 2008	Five Strategies presented to Priests' Convocation and Presbyteral Council for input and dialogue about implementation.
November 2008	Goals developed for each strategy and reviewed by diocesan staff.
December 2008	Pastoral plan presented to the Presbyteral Council. BAC developed strategy for rollout of the Plan.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a summary of the input from the Town Hall meetings.

V. Vision and Strategies

The Vision and the Five Strategies that developed as a result of the Pastoral Planning process are as follows.

Vision Statement

We are committed to strengthening our Christ-centered parishes. Therefore, the Diocese of Austin will provide formation and education to laity, religious and clergy so they may be leaven to transform our parishes and renew the world.

Five Core Strategies

➤ **Conversion to Christ**

Call people to deeper conversion and personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Offer multiple paths to a conversion experience through Liturgy and Sacraments, Word of God, prayer and retreats, and service.

➤ **Holy Families**

Build holy families that are rooted in the practice of the Catholic faith, with healthy marriages, effective parenting, active stewardship, and lifelong faith formation.

➤ **Young People**

Incorporate youth and young adults into every aspect of parish life, so that they will actively practice their faith now and for the rest of their lives.

➤ **Welcoming Communities**

Assure that our parishes and our diocese are communities that offer welcome to people of all races and cultures, outreach in charity and justice, healing for the alienated and non-practicing, and evangelization to all.

➤ **Strong Leaders**

Build a solid foundation for the future of our Catholic faith by training and forming effective leaders for parish life – priests, deacons, religious, lay ecclesial ministers, volunteer leaders, young adults, and youth.

VI. Goals for Each Strategy

A. Conversion to Christ

"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mk. 1:15)

Support for Priests

1. Provide a diocesan initiative to support/sustain priest support groups.
2. Provide a program to encourage and pair each priest in the diocese with a spiritual director.
3. Provide a program for priests, deacons and lay leaders in the vision of "Deus Caritas Est."

Resources for Parishes

4. Provide a toolbox of resources, including annual online and print updates, to assist parishes in the implementation of this pastoral plan.
5. Provide retreats and educational opportunities for clergy, religious and laity focused on conversion to Christ at the parish level.
6. Provide a Stewardship Program for parishes.

B. Holy Families

"Observe, my son, your father's bidding, and reject not your mother's teaching; Keep them fastened over your heart always, put them around your neck; For the bidding is a lamp, and the teaching a light ..." Prov.6:20-22

1. Provide marriage and family enrichment retreats throughout the diocese.
2. Provide parishes with resources containing daily and devotional practices for integrating faith into family and daily life.
3. Create, train, and support English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean Marriage Preparation teams in parishes and deaneries.
4. Train volunteers in parishes and deaneries to address a) support for divorced and separated Catholics and their families, b) bereavement support, and c) parent training.

5. Provide a chaste living curriculum in parishes, schools, campus ministry centers, and families.

C. Young People

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth” (Ecc 12:1)

1. Provide resources to educate parishes about what young adults and youth seek from the Church and how to best minister to and with them.
2. Create a Young Adult ministry advisory council to coordinate diocesan initiatives for ministry to and with young adults.
3. Create a Youth Ministry advisory council to coordinate diocesan initiatives for ministry to and with high school youth.
4. Provide parish resources for welcoming young adults into parish life.
5. Provide resources for facilitating the transition of young adults to and from college life.
6. Provide advocates to serve as resources for developing local youth/young adult ministers in deaneries, especially for smaller and rural parishes.
7. Provide an initiative to assist young adults in the discernment of their vocation to marriage, priesthood, religious life, or single life.

D. Welcoming Communities

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many” (1Cor.12:12-14)

1. Provide resources to help parishes offer more welcoming hospitality, music, and liturgies.
2. Provide resources to help parishes create a welcoming environment for all who live in the parish boundaries.
3. Provide resources to assist parishes in ministering to people of multiple racial/ethnic backgrounds, as well as the elderly and persons with disabilities.
4. Provide a structured process for pastor transition in parishes that includes resources for both the priests and the parishes involved in the transition.

5. Develop more online and print materials for non-English-speaking Catholics in the Diocese (Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean), as well as guidelines for which materials are to be translated.

6. Provide resources to assist parishes in welcoming and ministering to inactive and alienated Catholics.

E. Strong Leaders

“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.” (1Pt.4:10)

1. Provide an integrated program to promote and foster vocations in the home, in schools, and in parish life.
2. Standardize diocesan leadership and certification programs.
3. Provide training for parishes regarding calling forth volunteers, discerning their gifts, and training and working with them.
4. Provide leadership and governance training for parish pastoral and finance councils.
5. Provide parish resources related to financial practices.
6. Provide a comprehensive leadership training program for clergy.
7. Provide training and opportunities for enhanced collaboration between priests and deacons at both the parish and deanery level.
8. Provide training for laity and clergy in the areas of advocacy and civic engagement.
9. Assist parishes and local ministries in developing local pastoral plans.
10. Assist parishes and diocesan ministries regarding best practices in personnel policies.

VII. Plan Implementation

The following three issues must be considered in the implementation of the pastoral plan and its goals.

Multi-cultural nature of the Diocese of Austin

Addressing the dynamic multi-cultural nature of the Diocese of Austin while implementing this plan is essential for success. This means ensuring that program materials are available in Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean, as well as English.

Because culture involves much more than language, simply translating materials is not sufficient. Those involved in the implementation of this plan must go beyond the language barrier, and consider the socio-cultural diversity of the region.

Addressing the socio-cultural and language disparity of the diocese may take additional time and effort. However, this step ensures the needs of all Catholics in the diocese are served. Moreover, it integrates the tremendous cultural richness with which the diocese is blessed.

Technology

Technology must be a key component of the implementation of this pastoral plan, since it provides an important means for collaboration and communication. Emerging technologies provide opportunities for parishes throughout the diocese to actively participate with diocesan offices in implementing this plan.

The challenge will be to match diocesan and parish needs with appropriate technology. Listservs, Church DB, teleconferencing, video conferencing, and distance learning resources have the potential to be of great assistance. The first step in implementing new technology will be to conduct a technology needs assessment, ensuring the correct technologies are matched to parish needs.

Role of the Diocese

Diocesan ministries play an important role in the implementation of this plan by identifying and providing resources to parishes as they work to become more Christ-centered. Diocesan ministries must listen carefully to the needs of parishes, identifying and allocating resources to appropriate parishes. A key element in this process will be finding ways to effectively communicate with parishes to ensure they are aware of the resources available.

Appendix: Summary of Town Hall Meetings

As part of the Diocese of Austin Pastoral Planning process, Catholics in the diocese were invited to attend one of six town hall meetings held in February 2008. The Vicar General, Msgr. Michael Mulvey and a professional facilitator led each gathering. Over 400 people attended the six sessions.

Each session featured a video of Bishop Aymond, who asked participants to reflect on how the Diocese can help parishes be more Christ-centered. The facilitator then offered three areas for discussion. The resulting issues, dreams for the future and ideal church models that arose from discussion are summarized in this report. Participants were asked to identify:

- The most important issues facing the Diocese of Austin
- Their dreams for the future
- How they think about church

Most Frequently Named Issues Facing the Diocese of Austin

The following is a list of the issues most frequently named by participants in the Town Hall meetings:

- Evangelization
- Vocations
- Children's faith formation
- Families/Marriage
- Alienated/Non-Practicing Catholics
- Youth Ministry
- Social Justice/Outreach
- Catholic Schools
- Economic Issues/Financial Demands

Participants' Most Frequent Dreams for the Diocese of Austin

The following is a list of the dreams most consistently identified at the gatherings:

- Marriages and Parenting that are rooted in Catholic faith
- Catholics practice their faith in everyday life
- We will have all the priests we need?
- Affordable Catholic education
- Evangelization
- Welcome back alienated/non-practicing Catholics
- Stewardship

Participants' Models of Church

Each participant at the Town Hall meetings completed a 20-question survey testing which of Avery Dulles' five "Models of Church" they most closely identified with. Among the models, Church as Institution was distinctly not preferred. Participants gave equal weight to Church as Community, Herald and Servant, showing a slight preference for Church as Sacrament over these three.

Issues not mentioned

These results make little mention of Sunday liturgies. Participants do not name preaching, music, Mass times or any other aspect of weekend liturgies in their hopes and dreams. One possible explanation for this is the participants are pleased with their current situation. A second explanation may be a reluctance to address these issues with parish priests in attendance at the gatherings.

Overall Summary – What These Conversations Tell Us

The responses from the exercises at the Town Hall gatherings give us three areas of focus for coming years:

1) Catholics within the parish

- Assist couples to connect their marriage and family lives to their faith
- Instruction in their faith and how to live it out in their daily lives
- Church as Sacrament and Church as Community

2) Catholics outside the parish

- Welcome back inactive and alienated Catholics
- Evangelization
- Church as Herald and Church as Servant

3) Preparing for the Future

- Children's faith formation
- Provide affordable Catholic school education to educate the next generation of Catholics
- Support vocations by ensuring there are enough priests to serve parishes

Taken together, these responses suggest that participants want their parishes to be places that:

- Provide support for family life
- Provide good faith formation for themselves and their children, helping to deepen their faith and apply it to their daily lives
- Offer affordable Catholic education
- Welcome back inactive and alienated Catholics

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Issues of social justice and stewardship also peak interest, but with less attention than the issues listed above.

Lastly, these results indicate that participants have a balanced view of parish life. Their input names issues both internal and external to the parish. Participants also addressed the next generation of Catholics in the diocese. Furthermore, they do not opt for one model of Church but prefer a blend four models. What they request is fundamental to parish life: faith formation for themselves and their children, assistance in living their faith in daily life, and communities that evangelize and welcome back inactive Catholics.