



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Disciples and Missionaries Responding to the Lord's Call

Here lies the fundamental challenge that we face: to show the Church's capacity to promote and form disciples and missionaries who respond to the calling received and to communicate everywhere, in an outpouring of gratitude and joy, the gift of the encounter with Jesus Christ. We have no other treasure but that. We have no other happiness, no other priority, but to be instruments of the Spirit of God, as Church, so that Jesus Christ may be known, followed, loved, adored, announced, and communicated to all, despite difficulties and resistances. This is the best service—his service!—that the Church has to offer people and nations. (Concluding document, Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Conferences, Aparecida, Brazil, 2007 #14)

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

During this season of Easter joy I invite you to join me on the road to Emmaus. You will recall that St. Luke tells the story of two disciples. The day of our Lord's resurrection, they left Jerusalem on a journey to a small village called Emmaus. They were not aware of the great miracle that had occurred that day, and they were filled with sorrow and disillusionment. On the way, they met an apparent stranger who helped them understand the Good News found in God's Word. When they broke bread together, this stranger revealed himself as Jesus, the Messiah, who died and rose. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" the disciples exclaimed afterward. Then they returned to Jerusalem to take up the missionary calling that the Lord has entrusted to all his disciples. (See Lk 24: 13-35.)

All Catholics are called to undertake a similar journey and to receive the gift of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The Lord calls us to know him, follow him, adore him and proclaim him to the whole world, despite all the difficulties and resistance we experience in our society and within ourselves.

Here in our diocese we have been blessed with a rich tradition of faith that dates back 160 years to the first Mass celebrated in Sacramento by a Dominican missionary priest in 1850. The Sisters of Mercy established the first Catholic hospital in Northern California in 1857. In the same year they opened an elementary school for 115 children.

We have always been a missionary people called to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Our diocese's mission statement affirms this, challenging us to be disciples who spread the Gospel by our prayer, our personal witness, our sacramental life, and all the ministries provided by our parishes, schools and other diocesan services.

We, the People of God of the Catholic Diocese of Sacramento, guided by the Holy Spirit, are called by Christ to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God through prayer, praise and sacraments and to witness the Gospel values of love, justice, forgiveness and service to all.

Like every diocese, we are faced with many challenges as we are called to be disciples and missionaries of our Lord Jesus Christ. These challenges offer us the opportunity to grow in faith, and seek an encounter with the living Christ. He comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, in prayer and meditation on God's Word, as well as through our works of charity and justice. To be faithful disciples and missionaries today, as in every age, we must rely on the power that comes from on high, the zeal and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

What are some of the opportunities, and challenges, we face today? We are blessed with a vibrant and growing Catholic community which includes the northern and eastern regions of California covering more than 42,000 square miles, the largest geographical diocese in California. Meeting the growing needs of our Catholic community has stretched our resources of human, physical, and financial. The challenge is to be good stewards of these resources in order to properly serve the spiritual, sacramental, social and educational needs of the more than 900,000 Catholics in our Diocese.

In the city of Sacramento, we face the challenge of influencing our state government with the reason and common sense of our Gospel values. In the rural areas of our diocese we face the challenge of declining numbers of Catholics due to shifting demographics and economic distress faced by communities largely dependent on agriculture. How do we evangelize the diverse communities we serve in all regions of our Diocese? How do we persuade legislators, lobbyists and government employees that the Gospel of Life can bring liberty and justice to all? How do we continue the proud legacy of Catholic Charities when there are always more needs than we can possibly address?

In all regions of our diocese, we face the urgent challenge of educating adults, youth and children in the beliefs, traditions and morals of our Catholic faith. Forming disciples who will be missionaries for Christ is one of the Church's top priorities in every time and place. For more than 2000 years, we have sought to develop institutions and methodologies for entrusting the faith to each new generation, inviting young women and men to discover the ways to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus. Some question whether yesterday's approach to Catholic education remains valid for the challenges of today. I remain totally convinced that Catholic education—especially our schools, our parish religious education programs, and our ministry to youth and young adults—is vitally important to the mission of our diocese. The challenge is to make Catholic education truly Catholic with the richness and diversity of our faith traditions. Catholic Education must be accessible and affordable for all who choose to take advantage of this great gift!

Our Diocese is rich in cultural diversity. We are blessed with an ethnically diverse population that includes Hispanic, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, African American and many other cultures who form the one community of faith that is the Diocese of Sacramento. As a Diocese, we are proud of this rich cultural heritage. How do we take full advantage of the gifts our people bring to this local Church? How do we minister in the diverse cultural communities and ethnic groups so as to carry out the Church's mission most effectively?

The contributions of the Sisters of Mercy and the Mercy Health Care System, now a member of Catholic Health Care West, are an integral part of the history of our diocese. The fact that healthcare is one of our region's largest employers, provides the Church with a challenge and a wonderful opportunity to partner with the Sisters of Mercy and their colleagues to develop leaders locally who are skilled professionals committed to Catholic moral values while continuing the healing ministry of Jesus.

My vision

As we give thanks to God for the gifts he continues to give our local Church, we are called to face the challenges and opportunities of our time with hope and joy. This is my vision for the Diocese of Sacramento:

We will be faithful disciples, and zealous missionaries, who bring to the world the sacramental gifts of the Kingdom of God through our prayer, teaching, and works for charity and justice.

Priorities

We have no priority other than to be sacraments of God's grace, disciples and missionaries who are called to continue Christ's work on earth. In this effort we are also called to be wise stewards of the human and financial resources of our diocese. We must identify the pastoral priorities and strategic directions for our efforts to proclaim the Gospel here in the Diocese of Sacramento.

I am pleased to announce a strategic planning process in our diocese to help us better prepare for the future.

The strategic planning process will help me discern what pastoral priorities require additional human and financial resources. These needed resources would then be included in a possible future capital campaign. The planning process and feasibility study will take two years. A capital campaign could potentially begin in 2012. I realize there is much uncertainty about the bleak economic forecast for the North State. This is not a reason to delay this effort. It provides even more reason to carefully plan and strategize our future efforts to build the Kingdom.

Let me share with you the priorities I presently see with the hopes of initiating a dialogue among clergy, religious and laity. The vision of the 2004 Diocesan Synod has been my guide in this regard as well as the experience of serving here in Sacramento for the last two years.

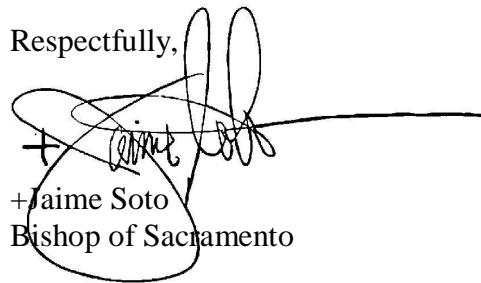
Here are the priorities mentioned in the 2004 Diocesan Synod that I wish to strategically address in the coming years. Any effective strategic plan requires the proper allocation of resources. I believe a diocesan capital campaign can help us better address these pastoral priorities and others by together raising the resources that no single parish can do alone.

- **Evangelization and Faith Formation:** Catholic Schools are the most effective institutions for the faith formation of our children and young people. The future of the Church will depend on a system of Catholic education that nurtures and cultivates the whole person with Catholic faith and culture.
- **Youth and Young Adult Ministry:** The Church must invest both human and economic resources into our youth and young adults so that they begin now to participate actively in the Church and exercise leadership.
- **Vocations:** An active youth and young adult ministry is the most fertile ground for development of lay, religious, and ordained vocations.
- **Formation of Lay Ministry and Lay Apostolate:** The Diocese requires formation programs that prepare competent pastoral agents from various cultural groups to minister to the Catholic community. The success of youth and young adult ministry will depend on preparing skilled youth ministers who can serve their peers and young people.

I am convinced that by addressing these priority needs, we will be better able to address *all* the pastoral needs of our diocese. There is a fundamental connection between the formation of our youth and assuring the sacramental, educational, and charitable works of the Church. Identifying and nurturing vocations to the ordained ministry, the consecrated life and lay ministries will sustain and develop the Catholic legacy in this rich, diverse portion of God's vineyard.

My brothers and sisters, I invite you to join me on this new leg of our journey with Jesus. I began with a reference to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. A journey that began with sadness and uncertainty led to an encounter with the Risen Christ in the scriptures and in the breaking of the bread. They ran back to Jerusalem, their hearts burning with gospel zeal. Let us together ask the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary so that we may journey towards the New Jerusalem, our hearts may burn with that same zeal as disciples and missionaries for Christ here in the Diocese of Sacramento.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jaime Soto", with a long horizontal line extending to the right. The signature is written over a circular stamp or seal that is partially obscured.

+ Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento