

An Executive Summary
Based on
Personal Interviews and Listening Sessions
Conducted in and for the

Roman Catholic Diocese of Sacramento

Sacramento, CA



June 28, 2010

Respectfully submitted by



MISSION ADVANCEMENT SERVICES



I. This report is divided into sections as follows:

- I. Introduction
- II. Major Accomplishments
- III. Progress
- IV. Shortfalls
- V. Strengths
- VI. Weaknesses
- VII. Challenges/ Opportunities
- VIII. Threats
- IX. Review of Programs
- X. Vision
- XI. Missing Elements
- XII. Synod Initiatives Implemented
- XIII. Three Items to Accomplish





II. Major Accomplishments

What are the Major Accomplishments of the Diocese over the last five years?	
Cathedral Renovation	11
Evangelization/ Formation	27
Sense of unified diocese after Synod	19
Diocesan-wide Youth Conference	4
Cultural Integration	9
Bishop Soto's presence	14
Capital Campaign success	2

Accomplishments



The primary responses to the question of major accomplishments of the diocese were Evangelization/Formation. Most interviewees answered this question with examples of how their parish has taken steps in the area of adult and youth catechesis, additional Masses, reaching out to other parishioners in areas of hospitality ministry. Consistently, respondents also cite the sense of a unified Church after the Synod. The experience of working together towards identifying common priorities allowed many people to expand their knowledge and understanding of the Church while appreciating that the Synod ‘considered the voices of the clergy and lay community.’ Almost evenly mentioned as accomplishments were Bishop Soto’s presence, Cathedral Renovation and Cultural Integration.





III. Progress

What progress toward implementation of the Synod initiatives have you observed?

Responses to this question varied greatly. Some of the pastors and lay people responded by pointing to very specific Synod initiatives and detailing their progress. Many commented, ‘our priests motivated our pastoral councils to develop a plan of action into implementing the initiatives of the Synod.’ Unfortunately, many believe the follow up from that point has been weak citing lack of resources and time to effectively carry out the plan. Additionally, many respondents could not answer with any examples of progress that the Synod has made.

Other participants cite an increase in regional ministry training, greater collaboration among parishes in the areas of ministry, and the youth conference in Yuba City. A few participants mention that their faith formation programs in the parish are linked to very specific Synod initiatives and emphasized that more education opportunities are now offered regionally.

Overall, respondents believe that the Synod recognized the voice of the clergy and the lay people which created great value. They acknowledged the hard work of the Synod participants, but believe that implementation of initiatives is lacking. There has not been a clear plan with measurable steps in place for the diocese.





IV. Shortfalls

What have been the major shortfalls or challenges of the Diocese of Sacramento during the past five years? What actions can we take to minimize these challenges?

Participants cite frequently the geographic size of the diocese as a major challenge. The size, along with the cultural diversity, is a challenge that the diocese must deal with in order to effectively serve and minister to the people. As one participant responds, “evangelization of 900,000 Catholics is a superhuman task without the right resources never mind the cultural diversity present within the diocese.”

Another challenge that is frequently mentioned is the ‘formation of priests.’ This response consists of a wide category of perceived shortfalls. Respondents cite a large number of foreign born priests that do not receive enough training to successfully acclimate to American culture. Many of the foreign priests have a disconnect with the realities of the Church in the United States. Although people are grateful for the sacrifice that these men make, participants believe that, by not properly preparing these men, the diocese is not positioning them to be successful in their ministry. Others mention the preparation of priests is lacking in the area of parish administration. Respondents believe the diocese needs classes on financial and administrative responsibilities and encourage additional intellectual preparation. Many respondents believe there should be lay parish administrators in every parish responsible for the day to day operation of the parish, allowing priests to spend their time fully immersed in ministry.

The state of Catholic education in recent years is also mentioned as a challenge. Many respondents frequently state that recent school closings due to financial shortfalls as well as Catholic identity issues within the schools are both challenges. There is a sense that the Church has failed to communicate the ‘value’ of a Catholic education to the lay community. Respondents also believe there are some pastors who don’t support the mission of Catholic education. Catholic identity issues are also mentioned as undermining the real ‘value’ of Catholic education. Some respondents say that the schools’ ‘identity is not firmly located in Eucharist.’ Some see the current reorganization of the governance of schools as a move in the right direction; others believe the diocese needs to more heavily emphasize the formation of teachers in the faith.

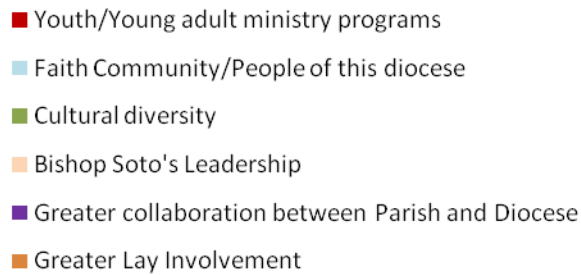




V. Strengths

What are the Strengths of the Diocese?	
Youth/Young adult ministry programs	6
Faith Community/ People of this diocese	37
Cultural diversity	9
Bishop Soto's Leadership	35
Greater collaboration between Parish and Diocese	12
Greater Lay Involvement	4

Strengths



The participants who were interviewed for this study consistently note the faith community/people of the diocese as the greatest strength. The faith community is often described as visible, active and very competent at serving in ministry and administration. The people of this diocese have a ‘great faithful spirit’ and are so generous of their treasure and their time in reaching the underserved population of the diocese.

Additionally, Bishop Soto’s leadership is perceived as one of the most visible strengths. He is perceived to be ‘front and center’ and confident in making statements on controversial subjects. He is consistently seen as ‘prayerful and intelligent.’

Also frequently mentioned as strengths are the greater collaboration between the parish/diocese and the cultural diversity present within the diocese. Youth/young adult ministry and greater lay involvement in the ministries of the Church are all mentioned as strengths.





VI. Weaknesses

What are the weaknesses of the Diocese?

The most consistently cited weaknesses have to do with the challenges posed by the physical size of the diocese. Many cite communication issues and the need to more directly engage technological solutions to bridge the distances throughout the diocese. Many suggest video conferencing and the need for a social media outlet to connect the faithful. Respondents mention that the website is also in need of revision so as to allow more frequent communications among parishioners but also more updated information. The suggested increased use of technology will serve to provide additional opportunities for lay training and perhaps help to ease the ‘parochialism’ that can exist within a geographically diverse diocese.

Other mentioned weaknesses include shortage of priests, closings of schools, lack of stewardship teaching and the time to resolve marriage tribunal cases. Many respondents, both Hispanic and Anglo, raise concerns about the different understandings of stewardship among these two cultures. They call for greater efforts at teaching financial stewardship in both communities.



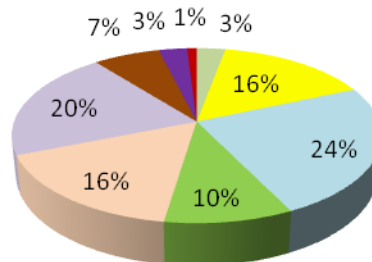


VII. Challenges/Opportunities

What challenges/opportunities face the Diocese over the coming five years?	
Aging Priests	3
Lack of local vocations	16
Catholic Schools	25
Economic resources	10
Communication to/ from Pastoral Center/ Parishes	17
Evangelization of young people	21
Diversity (dual parishes/ ministries)	7
Financial disparity between urban/rural parishes	3
Physical size of diocese	1

Challenges

- Aging Priests
- Lack of local vocations
- Catholic Schools
- Economic resources
- Communication to/from Pastoral Center/Parishes
- Evangelization of young people
- Diversity (dual parishes/ministries)
- Financial disparity between urban/rural parishes
- Physical size of diocese



Of the primary responses to the question of opportunities to seize in the coming five years, the largest percentage of respondents (24%) name Catholic schools, followed closely (at 20%) by those naming formation of young people. As indicated in Bishop Soto's vision statement, these two concepts are closely linked. Challenges that are most often cited as examples of areas to be dealt with in the near future include the affordability of Catholic education, quality of Catholic education, competition with secular society for the attention of young people, and the responsibility of parents to work as partners with the Church and their schools in the formation of the faith of their children. Outside of the arena of Catholic schools, issues of economic resources for faith formation programs as well as the ability of the programs to be run either from the Pastoral Center or as strictly parish-based programs were provided as principal challenges to be met.

Many respondents indicate that a key to these issues and others is the shortage of priests. The need to raise local vocations is often mentioned as a vital need in the diocese. However, many respondents also admit that it is unlikely that sufficient numbers of new priests can be raised in the short term. These respondents generally offer one of two solutions for the near term; first they state a need to better prepare lay ministers and leaders for our parishes. We also need to better train our priests in how to work with lay leadership and ministers in both the temporal administration of the parishes and the delivery of service and ministry to the faithful; second is mentioned a need to clarify the role of the deacons in parish ministry and then prepare priests to be able to work with deacons appropriately to improve ministry overall.

Also mentioned as a challenge is the rapid growth of the Hispanic/Latino community. Some respondents see this as the future of the Church and lament a perceived lack of planning for this eventuality.





VIII. Threats

What Threats will need to be addressed?

The issue of threats to the diocese and the vision elicited some substantial themes. It is clear that many respondents do not see the Church as having dealt well with the priest abuse scandal. This issue is paired with a strong declaration that the popular media is a threat on two fronts. Respondents see the continuing issue of the media's influence on secularization and hedonistic humanization of our culture in general. They also see the media as directly antagonistic to the Church. Many respondents call for a more confrontational approach to the media in defense of the faith and Catholic life and values.

Respondents also express concern over the multicultural nature of the diocese. However, this concern is cast in opposing viewpoints. Some respondents see the diocese as needing to do more to reach out and include faithful of other cultures (more than just Hispanic). Opinion is split on the success of past/current efforts to fully integrate cultures. On the other side of this issue are respondents that state the diocese is doing too much to emphasize inclusiveness and is alienating traditional Catholic populations. Both sides of this issue recognize that a dual parish system has developed in many places essentially creating two completely separate faith communities sharing facilities. Solutions offered to address this issue range from an acknowledgment and acceptance of this as the future of the Church to a call for greater efforts on the part of the non-Anglo communities to fully integrate into the existing parish communities. One concern expressed from both sides of this issue is a sense that the financial support of parishes and programs comes primarily from the Anglo communities. Stewardship education for the Hispanic and other communities is seen as essential.

A significant number of respondents express concern over the general lack of understanding on the part of the faithful regarding the place and role of the diocese in the daily life of the parish. The perceived threat most often stated is breakdown in communications between parishes (more than is already seen) leading to an inability to fulfill the mission of the Church. Related to this is a concern about the sheer size of the diocese. The travel distances involved make collaboration across more than neighboring parish lines difficult.

Interestingly, lack of vocations is seen as a threat, but is often not mentioned first when this question is posed.

Finally, the poor economy is still seen as a threat to the continued health of the diocese and its ability to effectively carry out its ministry.





IX. Review of Programs

What current programs might be eliminated to conserve resources?

When confronted with a question of eliminating diocesan programs in order to conserve resources, the majority of respondents indicate that all possible cuts have already been made. Some also indicate that their interaction with the Pastoral Center is not sufficient for them to offer an opinion.

Most often respondents with concerns about programs will call for reorganization rather than elimination. Examples include the Tribunal and Catholic cemeteries.

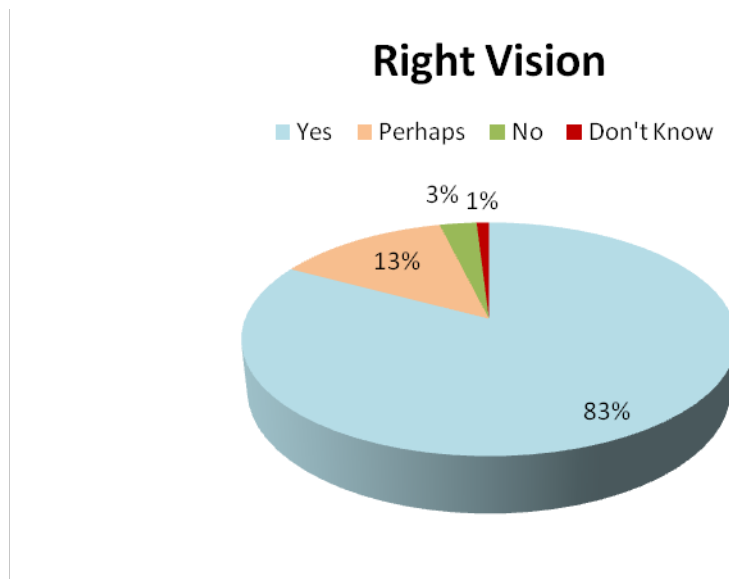
Many respondents call for more resources to be put into diocesan programs rather than less.





X. Vision

Is this the right Vision?	
Yes	87
Perhaps	14
No	3
Don't Know	1



The bishop's vision is greeted with a strong sense of enthusiasm by the majority of respondents (83%). These individuals hail this as the right vision and generally agree that the priorities are correct. Those respondents indicating that "perhaps" this is the right vision (13%) generally group their concerns into the following areas:

- Lack of inclusion of demographics other than youth (i.e. young adults, young families, elder adults)
- Lack of specificity
- Resource requirements
- Ability to actually implement this

The small group (3%) stating that this is not the right vision generally question the focus on Catholic schools or simply state that the vision is "unrealistic."

The support for the vision appears to grow not only from an acceptance of the needs being addressed, but also from personal support for the leadership of Bishop Soto.

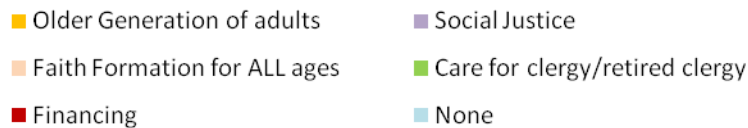




XI. Missing Elements

What elements are missing from the vision?	
Older Generation of Adults	8
Social Justice	17
Faith Formation for ALL ages	31
Care for clergy/retired clergy	7
Financing	3
None	36

Missing Elements



A slight majority of respondents (35%) state that they find nothing of significance missing from the vision. This is closely followed by a group (30%) of respondents that see the most significant missing element in the vision as consideration for faithful of all ages. This group most often says that, while a focus on youth ministry is good, it should not be to the exclusion of all else. This group of respondents states a desire to expand the vision to include ministry to:

- Young adults
- Young married couples
- Families of all ages
- Senior adults

Respondents complain about the lack of programming in these areas often driving Catholics to other churches where their unique needs are better met.



Seventeen percent of respondents complain that social justice is missing from the vision. This is an element often cited as an initiative of the Synod that was never really implemented. Eight percent of respondents see a lack of vision here in how we are to minister (beyond issues of faith formation) to our older generation of adults. This is closely partnered with those (7%) that feel vocations promotion should include care for our retired clergy.

Finally, three percent of respondents express concern that the vision makes no mention of how to generate the resources that will be required to make the vision a reality.





XII. Synod Initiatives Implemented

Will this Vision implement the Synod initiatives?

A significant majority of respondents to this question state, without reservation, that this vision will implement the Synod. Those indicating reservations feel that the eight Synod initiatives are not fully represented here. A somewhat smaller group states that the priorities of the vision will pave the way for the implementation of the broader set of Synod initiatives.

A minority of respondents state that the vision will not lead to the implementation of the Synod. The reason most often given is that the vision is too vague.





XIII. Three Items To Accomplish

Three most important things to be accomplished in the coming five years?

When asked to consider the top three priorities for the next five years, the item most often mentioned is Evangelization. Many respondents call to mind the core mission of the Church - to evangelize. For many of these respondents evangelization includes much more than outreach to non-Catholics and non-Christians. These individuals frequently emphasize the need to evangelize our own Catholic population. Apathy, ignorance of the faith and lack of connection are cited as issues to be addressed among the Catholics of the diocese in order to build a stronger foundation for all the works of the Church.

While many continue to stress the need to serve all demographics, formation for youth and young adults as well as for the lay ministers who work with them is stressed as a vital issue for the immediate future. This tends to be stated not only in terms of Catholic schools, but also with regard to parish ministries and liturgy.

For many respondents, all of the needs for the coming years have their roots in effective evangelization. For these individuals a focus on building and empowering evangelization will lead naturally to solutions for all other issues faced by the diocese.



APPENDIX A

RESPONSES TO LISTENING SESSION



Introduction:

In addition to the personal interviews, listening sessions create a unique platform for inclusion of a large and diverse audience in the Situation Analysis phase of the Strategic Planning Process. For the Diocese of Sacramento, O'Meara Ferguson conducted a listening session in each of the deaneries with additional listening sessions focused on the Hispanic communities throughout the diocese.

Pastors were asked to invite 5 -7 members of their parish leadership to come to the listening sessions. Since some of the pastors attended pastor only deanery meetings or had participated in the personal interviews, it was optional for them to attend these. Some did, but more often, the majority of people in attendance were laity.

The format of the listening sessions is designed to provide attendees with core information to enable them to actively participate in a facilitated discussion and answer a questionnaire. A representative of the diocese was always present to provide an overview of the bishop's vision statement. Usually members of the lay diocesan leadership and/or members of the Strategic Planning Leadership Team were also present to observe and contribute. A representative of O'Meara Ferguson served as the facilitator.

Attendees were provided with an overview of the bishop's vision and then asked to take 30 minutes to complete a questionnaire designed to elicit their feedback on the state of the diocese and the vision presented. Following this, they participated in a facilitated discussion designed to highlight their input without performing an in-depth analysis of the entire breadth of the questionnaire.

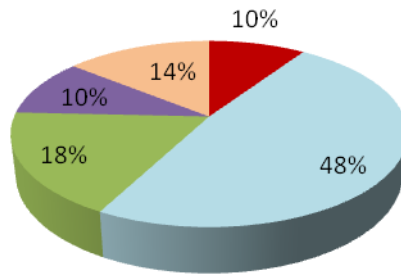
The Questionnaire:

There were five primary elements of the questionnaire chosen by O'Meara Ferguson to illustrate the overall tone of responses as they relate to the Strategic Planning Process. Each of these areas was analyzed statistically as follows:



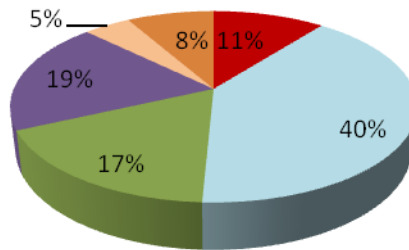
Major Accomplishments (478 Responses)

- Cathedral Renovation
- Evangelization/Formation
- Sense of unified diocese after Synod
- Diocesan-wide Youth Conference
- Cultural Integration



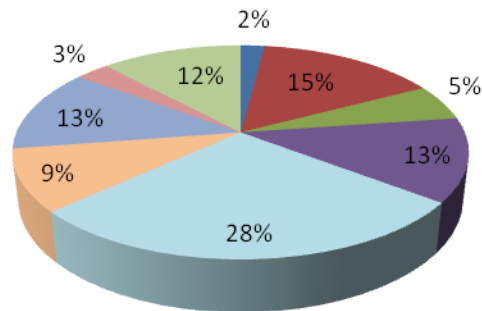
Strengths (471 Responses)

- Youth/Young adult ministry programs
- Faith Community/People of this diocese
- Cultural diversity
- Bishop Soto's Leadership
- Greater collaboration between Parish and Diocese
- Greater Lay Involvement



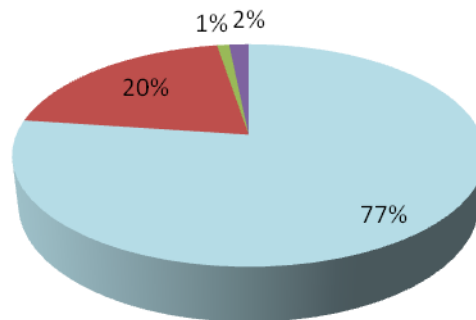
Challenges (492 Responses)

- Aging Priests
- Lack of local vocations
- Catholic Schools
- Economic resources
- Communication to/from Pastoral Center/Parishes
- Evangelization of young people
- Diversity (dual parishes/ministries)
- Financial disparity between urban/rural parishes
- Physical size of diocese



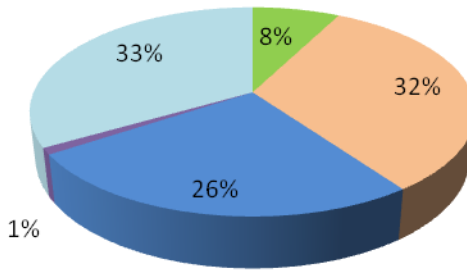
Right Vision (504 Responses)

- Yes
- Perhaps
- No
- Don't Know



Missing Elements (501 Responses)

■ Older Generation of adults ■ Social Justice
■ Faith Formation for ALL ages ■ Care for clergy/retired clergy
■ None



The graphs of these data points track closely to those from the personal interviews with a few notable exceptions. In citation of strengths, 19% of the listening session attendees listed Bishop Soto’s leadership, while 34% of interviewees listed his leadership. The largest divergent perceptions came in the category of challenges where 12% of session attendees listed the size of the diocese compared to only 1% of the interviewees. Finally, only 5% of session attendees see Catholic schools as a challenge compared to 24% of interviewees.

Discussion:

The facilitators’ impression of the discussions at the listening sessions focused on several major areas. Attendees generally think that the diocese has done a reasonably good job of increasing lay involvement. However, they keenly feel the impending changes that will be required to deal with a shrinking Presbyterate. In general, parish leaders see the need to decrease the pastors’ role in administration in order to free them for ministry across multiple parishes. Solutions suggested for this range from emphasis on lay parish administrators to an increased utilization of deacons to administer parishes and provide for basic ministry needs, while priests take on greater responsibility for larger ministry needs and sacramental duties across parish boundaries. In general, attendees feel that, while some things have been accomplished, much more work needs to be done in the area of youth ministry. Attendees are quick to point out that the diocese needs to broaden its focus and realize that in order to evangelize the youth, their parents must also be evangelized. This focus is also cited in relation to the issue of native vocations. Attendees see two major keys to increased vocations: 1) better modeling of fulfilled and satisfying ministry on the part of priests, and 2) evangelization of parents in order that they might better understand the importance of keeping vocations to the priesthood and religious life open as an option for their children. There were some marked differences between the



concerns of attendees in the rural deaneries and those close to Sacramento. In the urban areas, attendees tended to focus more on refinements to training options and structural matters in the delivery of services and ministry. In the rural areas facilitators encountered a higher level of satisfaction with the overall training programs provided by the diocese, but much more frustration with the obstacles of distance involved. As one attendee put it, “the diocese seems to think that a program in Redding satisfies the need to serve the North Country. We still have to drive 3 or 4 hours one way to get to Redding.” Facilitators also heard more concerns about over-rotation of pastors from the rural areas than from the urban communities.

Attendees typically cite problems with lay ministry and apostolate training and implementation as a shortfall over the past five years. While various reasons were offered, the consistent theme is that there is no uniform utilization of lay ministers in the diocese and that pastors diverge widely in their willingness and ability to work with laity and deacons. When the abuse scandal has been mentioned, the general tenor of conversation focuses on transparency. Attendees want a full accounting of what happened and a completely transparent accounting of all actions and activities moving forward. While there is anger and disappointment about what happened, there appears to be a much greater sentiment that if it is allowed to happen again, the laity won’t be as forgiving. In general, attendees are not focused on receiving less service from the Pastoral Center. They want the present services delivered in a more efficient manner. Cultural issues are often mentioned as a shortfall of the diocese over the past five years. While many parishes have made great advances, attendees often cite the creation of “dual” parishes that essentially function as separate faith communities. Other shortfalls include the closing of so many Catholic schools, lack of activity in the areas of social justice, lack of stability in parishes due to frequent pastoral turnover, and lack of development of local vocations.

When asked about the bishop’s vision and needed accomplishments over the coming five years, attendees generally feel that the vision is the right one. They want to see greater responsibility placed in the hands of the laity for administering their own parishes. However, this is frequently tempered by a call for better training for laity in such roles and greater accessibility for training. Youth ministry is always cited as both an accomplishment and a need. Attendees frequently comment on the focus on elementary youth while allowing high-school and college-age youth to “fall through the cracks.” Facilitators often heard what was mentioned in personal interviewees: the need for dual evangelization of youth AND their parents. Many mention the “lost generation” of Catholics who are now the parents of children whom we are struggling to reach. Attendees often see evangelization of young families, young adults, and older parents as the key to evangelizing the youth and encouraging vocations. Attendees also seek a greater sensitivity on the part of diocesan programs regarding cultural realities in the parishes with respect to location and ethnic diversity. Many feel that the diocesan staff has not yet come to full understanding of how to work in a multicultural church. Attendees also lament the same shortcomings on their own part and seek help from the diocese in moving forward in this area. Many attendees express concern over the future of Catholic education. They want tuition to be affordable while keeping quality high.



Frequently facilitators heard from attendees that if the diocese wants to be sincere about the future of Catholic schools, then no more schools must close.

Overall, the listening sessions were a tremendously positive experience for the facilitators and, we believe, for the attendees. Many attendees commented on the fact that they felt they were truly given the opportunity to speak and be heard. Their primary concern is that their voice makes a difference in planning. Attendees are generally very positive about the strategic planning process, but want to have some assurance that they will receive full communication regarding its progress and that there will be accountability built into the plan so that it does not fail to be implemented.

