



Claiming the Past with Gratitude;
Living the Present with Enthusiasm;
Looking to the Future with Hope.

DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN
2010 – 2015





Diocesan Pastoral Plan

Diocese of Victoria

*“Were not our hearts burning within us
while he was talking to us on the road....”*

(Luke 24:32)



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The words spoken by the Disciples on the road to Emmaus after they had encountered Our Lord at the Breaking of the Bread, were the only way they could describe how they felt when Jesus, as a stranger on the road, explained the meaning of the Scriptures to them. They are words which tell

how these followers of Jesus came to have Faith and fell in love again with the Risen Lord after their hearts had been wounded by the scandal of the Cross. Their hearts now burned with Faith, Hope and Love in contrast to the recent past when their hearts had been shattered and filled with sorrow.

Brothers and Sisters, the time has come to direct our thoughts and prayers toward the future that lies before us. But we can only do this if we allow the Scriptures to speak to us anew and to have our minds and hearts open to the mystery at the Eucharistic Table.

The story of the Road to Emmaus is not so much a story of covering a certain distance from Jerusalem to Emmaus, rather it is about the gradual and, at times, painful journey from the

head to the heart. It is the story of the coming to Faith of people whose hearts had been wounded and a returning to a proper relationship with that stranger on the road – Our Lord Jesus Christ.

This journey of renewed Faith, of starting afresh in Christ is what our Diocese is being called to do through a shared vision and a pastoral plan that all can participate in. It is with this in mind that I have entitled our Diocesan Pastoral Plan for the next five years:

Claiming the Past with Gratitude

Living the Present with Enthusiasm

Looking to the Future with Hope

It is significant that once the Disciples at Emmaus had listened to Jesus explain the Scriptures to them and had recognized him at the Breaking of the Bread, that he vanished from their sight. Why did he physically leave them? Was it not because Jesus desired to liberate them, “...you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32), by leading them to Faith, a Faith grounded in the Word of God, a Faith which reaches out to others and a Faith centered on the Eucharist. Jesus then, is preparing his Disciples for mission: “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). He desires to liberate us to do the same – to share in his mission.

The Pastoral Planning process which occurred over the past year in our Diocese, has given the People of God an opportunity to reflect on the pastoral needs of our community and to seek to understand what the Holy Spirit is telling our local Church. I am grateful to the Pastoral Planning Committee for the good work achieved over the past year in producing a com-

prehensive report necessary for our pastoral planning process, by identifying six pastoral planning priorities in consultation with the Diocesan faithful. A number of documents were also considered such as the Feasibility Study undertaken the previous year. The areas of pastoral priority which will be our focus over the next five years are listed alphabetically:

- **Liturgy, Sacraments, Prayer and the Word of God**
- **Marriage, Family Life and the Sanctity of Life**
- **Parish Outreach, Social Justice and Ecumenism**
- **Religious Education and Vocations**
- **Stewardship, Administration and Finance**
- **Youth and Young Adults**

As we embark upon this journey together, it is helpful to reflect on where we have been as a Diocese in times past. Our history as a local Church has witnessed tremendous examples of Faith where challenges were met, sufferings endured and God's blessings recognized with gratitude. We need also to acknowledge that the Body of Christ embraces sinners as well, and there were times when the Gospel did not shine forth as it was meant to: *"The Church, however, clasping sinners always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal."* (*Lumen Gentium* #8). As we **Claim our Past with Gratitude**, let us ask God for forgiveness for past failures and let us also thank our Heavenly Father for all the good that has been done.

At the same time we must acknowledge as well that we have been given a great treasure, even though held within frail human beings. This treasure is the gift of Faith, a message the world needs to hear: *"We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us."* (1 John 4:16). We are always to be ready to give witness to the cause of our joy and to **Live the Present with Enthusiasm**.

Finally, it has been said that "... *the person who has hope lives differently; the one who has hope has been granted the gift of new life.*" (*Spe Salvi* #2). The Holy Spirit is calling us to **Look to the Future with Hope**. It is time to move forward together with a shared vision and pastoral plan. It is time to "... *put out into the deep*" (*Lk 5:4*) as the Church has called us to do at the beginning of this millennium. It is a time not to relax or grow complacent in our commitment to the stranger who walks the road to Emmaus with us.

Our Diocesan Pastoral Plan is neither new nor original. It is based on the Scriptures and on our long and rich Catholic Tradition, which finds its summit in the Eucharistic Lord (*Lumen Gentium* #11). It must not be forgotten that all the pastoral planning in the world will come to nothing if we do not give Christ first place in all that we do and it is prayer that roots us in this truth (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* #38). Lastly, our pastoral planning must be connected to Holiness. This is surely the only reason to embark upon pastoral initiatives. In the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* #5, this matter of holiness was strongly stressed – holiness was described as an intrinsic and essential aspect of the life of the Church.

By putting Christ first in everything we do and by setting the quest for holiness as the goal of every pastoral initiative, we can better consider our six pastoral priorities. In the *Report of the Diocese of Victoria Pastoral Planning Committee* one can find: *Goals, Recommended Diocesan Actions and Suggested Parish Actions*. Copies of this Report will be distributed to parish pastoral planning groups and available "online" at: www.rcd victoria.org All of these *Goals, Recommended Actions and Suggestions* are worthy of our consideration. At the parish level the suggestions are not exhaustive and indeed, must be adapted to each community according to local circumstances. At the Diocesan level, the recommendations need to be translated into initiatives according to capacity, personnel and priorities.

For each of the *Priorities* below I will not refer in detail to every *Goal, Recommendation and Suggestion* found in the *Report*, but rather to certain important points of emphasis:

Liturgy, Sacraments, Prayer and the Word of God:



This *Priority* forms a large area of Catholic life from which everything else flows. The late Pope John Paul II once remarked that “...*the Christian life is distinguished above all by the art of prayer.*” Indeed our parish communities must become schools of **Prayer** where the meeting with Christ is expressed through the many different forms of prayer contained within our rich tradition. This is founded on the principle that

prayer is something to be learned. The Second Vatican Council stressed that the People of God be versed in Liturgical Prayer in its various forms, including the Divine Office. Eucharistic Adoration is highly recommended as a source of blessing for the whole community: “*The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church.*” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* #25)

Above all, reflection on the Emmaus Story, leads us to emphasize both the important place of the Word of God and the centrality of the Eucharist in our pastoral planning.

The growth of holiness and prayer cannot occur without a renewed knowledge and active listening to the **Word of God**. Today we must look at ourselves as Servants of the Word of

God both as a means of knowing Our Lord and in the work of evangelization. This is particularly urgent within the culture of materialism and secularism that prevails today, but also vital for the new re-evangelization where faith has grown cold or complacent. Christ must be presented to the world with confidence: “*Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel.*” (1 Cor 9:16)

In the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, the Second Vatican Council stated: “... no Christian community can be built up unless it has as its basis and center the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist” (#6). We are meant to be a Eucharistic People.

It is clear then, that a priority must be given to the **Eucharist** and the celebration of the **Liturgy**, the summit of the Church’s activity and the source of all our strength. The newly revised *Lectionary* and the new translation of the *Roman Missal* will be a means to experience anew the heart of this mystery of the Church. But the Sunday itself, with the celebration of the Eucharist at its center, needs to be taught as a special day of Faith, the day of the Risen Lord and the Gift of the Spirit (*John 20:19-23*). In the present climate of pluralism there is a great need to re-live and revive a theology of the Sunday.

The Sacrament of **Reconciliation** was also recognized in our pastoral planning. In today’s culture of a plurality of spiritualities and philosophies, one can speak, perhaps more than ever, of a “loss of a sense of sin”. A rediscovery of the compassionate heart of Christ who reconciles us to himself will breathe new life into our Faith community. Courage is required on the part of pastors in calling upon the flock to return to this Sacrament.

Finally, there is an emphasis in this *Priority* to build up the **Christian Community** through hospitality, caring, and welcoming. It is useful to remember here that we must begin all our pastoral initiatives with Christ and be mindful of the spiritual principle that all such community stems from the dynamic of the existing

bond between love of God and love of neighbour. It would be worthwhile to reflect on the description of a *Spirituality of Communion in the Apostolic Letter: Novo Millennio Ineunte #43.*

Marriage, Family Life and the Sanctity of Human Life:



This Pastoral *Priority* is vitally important to the Church and for the wellbeing of the wider community. **Marriage and Family** are profoundly connected to the meaning and imagery of much of Sacred Scripture. Emphasis must be given to teaching the Christian view of marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman – a unique and indissoluble bond that is part of God’s original plan for human beings. The theology of Mar-

riage as a Sacrament which expresses the mystical love of Christ for his Church (*Eph 5:32*) must be taught with courage during these times when marriage and family are under great stress.

Our Pastoral Plan reflects the need to find ways to assist and to reach out pastorally to families and help them with their needs. This will require structures, careful planning and the engagement of volunteers, and perhaps even professionals, in order to assist families in practical ways. Above all, a great service to family life will be the hope given to families that marriage can indeed be lived according to God’s plan for Christian Marriage where the good of the human person, the spouses and the children are respected. The encouragement of, and education in, **Natural Family Planning** throughout the Diocese must not be neglected.

The **Sanctity of Human Life** from conception to natural death must be proclaimed and supported through practical initiatives. There is a great need to coordinate the various Pro-Life efforts in the Diocese and to engage people with good and effective education on the issues surrounding the sanctity of human life. In the rapidly developing area of biotechnology it is important that a special effort be made to explain properly the Church's position so that important fundamental ethical principles are understood. Indeed, the defense of life is part of the Church's mission of charity, and compassion for those involved in the tragedy of abortion should be of particular concern.

Parish Outreach, Social Justice and Ecumenism:



Just as holiness is a fundamental principle in relation to all pastoral planning initiatives, so too is Christian love, and it is love which should be the foundation of all **Parish Outreach and Social Justice** efforts. In

Deus Caritas Est, Pope Benedict XVI reminded the Church that such initiatives involve more than just practical assistance to those in need: *"Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities. I can give them the look of love which they crave."* (#1)

The primacy of charity must be our goal in this *Priority*. If we come to an acknowledgement of Christ as did those Disciples on the road to Emmaus, then we must learn to see him in the faces of those with whom he wished to be identified: *"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me..."* (Matthew 25:35-36). This Pastoral *Priority* stresses the various areas of concern relative to Parish Outreach and it would

be helpful once again to emphasize what has been said above about the *Spirituality of Communion*, in order to make charity central to such outreach.

It is also time to reconsider the rich teaching that the Church offers us on Social Justice. More education is required in this increasingly important field. There is a need to interpret the social realities of our day in the light of the Gospel. In advocating Social Justice we should be encouraged to support the *Canadian Organization for Development and Peace* as it works to enact the Church's preferential option for the poor: "*The Christian message does not inhibit men and women from building up the world, or make them disinterested in the welfare of their fellow human beings: on the contrary it obliges them to do these very things.*" (*Gaudium et Spes* #34)

With regard to **Ecumenism**, it must be admitted that, at times, one senses a certain relaxation in recent years. There is a need to begin afresh in Christ with this important work in response to Our Lord's prayer that they all be one (*John 17:21*). First and foremost, we must realize that unity among God's People is a gift: "*As his Body, in the unity which is the gift of the Spirit, she is indivisible. The reality of division among the Church's children appears at the level of history, as the result of human weakness in the way we accept the gift which flows endlessly from Christ the Head...*" (*Tertio Millennio Ineunte* #48). But the prayer of Jesus for unity has in it a requirement for his Disciples. In other words, it is a gift to be received and developed. It is on Jesus' prayer, however, that we base our hope, not on our own strength.

Since the publication of Decree on non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* (1965) the Church continues to be concerned with inter-religious dialogue. We, too, must keep a focus on dialogue and cooperation with other religions within our society.

The pastoral outreach to **First Nations**, although developing in a parallel manner to this Pastoral Plan, must be seen as an inte-

gral part of parish pastoral initiatives. The Diocese of Victoria is committed to supporting both pastoral outreach to First Nations Peoples as well as workshops to assist with reconciliation and healing. Parish and school communities must be open and welcoming to the First Nation Peoples in their respective areas and assist them particularly in their spiritual needs.

There are many challenges facing humanity today which require examination from a Social Justice perspective. These include problems surrounding the absence of peace, the reality of war and terrorism, disregard for human rights and the issue of poverty and corruption relative to the economic structures of societies. It is also important to include in our consideration of a Pastoral Plan, the problems affecting humanity due to the destruction of portions of the **Environment**.

The Christian vision of nature recognizes the ... *“wonderful result of God’s creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs...while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God’s creation.”* (Caritas in Veritate #48).

Religious Education and Vocations:

In his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict stresses that: *“Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but our encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”*(#1) With these words in mind, and with the story of the disciples encountering Christ on the road to Emmaus, we must recognize that all religious education should have as its goal, an encounter with the Resurrected Lord. There needs to be a journey from the head to the heart and then to the feet.



Our pastoral planning then, must emphasize the importance of **Christian Initiation** as the basic model for both adult and youth catechesis. This model stresses a pedagogical process by which both the intellect and the heart are engaged in coming to know the Lord. A two year process for children receiving the Sacraments of Initiation has been developing in the Diocese which is designed to involve parents as well. Once the *National Syllabus for Catechesis* is

completed in Canada, we will incorporate its content into our program. Our pastoral emphasis here will be for a uniformity of programs throughout the Diocese.

An important area of catechesis concerns the **Christian Formation of Adults**; there is need for more development than what is presently occurring, and a structure must be put in place to assist this effort. Parishes too, need to do as much as they can to provide educational and formational opportunities for adults: *"The discourse of faith with adults must take serious account of their experience, of their conditioning and of the challenges which they have encountered in life. (General Directory for Catechesis #172)*

In reference to our **Island Catholic Schools**, which form a dynamic and important component of our Diocese, I wish to encourage all concerned to find effective ways to connect with this Diocesan Pastoral Plan. The *Report of the Pastoral Planning Committee* points out areas where there are links with the yearly educational planning in our schools. We must also note that Strategic Planning for our schools will continue in parallel with

our Pastoral Plan. Catholic Schools are to be promoted as they are “...in partnership with the family and the parish, the Catholic school shares in the saving mission of the Church by teaching Christian truth.” (Philosophy statement for Catholic Schools in B.C. – Bishops of British Columbia)



Vocations are also included as a *Priority*. There are good recommendations and suggestions in the Report to assist the Diocese, as well as parishes. The Pastoral Plan recognizes the need to be proactive in keeping a focus on vocations more public within the community. There is also a need to develop a vocations plan with the cooperation of the parish communities in order to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The need for

whole communities to pray to “...the Lord of the Harvest to send labourers into his Harvest...” (Matthew 9:38) cannot be too strongly emphasized. Connected with this community prayer for vocations we must also remember that the centrality of the Eucharist, both in the priests’ ministry and in the life of the community is vital in the promotion of vocations. (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* #31)

In addition to the subject of religious vocations, one cannot neglect the responsibility to educate on marriage as a vocation as well as the single vocation in its various expressions. An awareness of each baptized person’s call to be active in the life of the Church and to play a role for the betterment of the whole Body of Christ, fosters a culture of vocations within the community.

Stewardship, Administration and Finance:



This *Priority* is primarily based on the principle of gratitude. It is the gratitude to Almighty God for all the blessings of our lives that impels us to structure our Diocese in such a way that the resources are rightly used and that good stewardship is enacted at all levels in a spirit of genuine generosity.

The first phase of **Stewardship** will be the structuring of an annual financial appeal which will enable the Diocese to enact its Pastoral Plan and ensure a sound foundation for future growth.

In this *Priority*, covering not only the proper care of the gifts that God has given us, whether they be our Time, Talents or Treasure, we also acknowledge that our Diocese itself needs to be structured in such a way that communion among the faithful is enhanced. The structures advocated by the Second Vatican Council and developed in post-synodal documents need to be the prism by which we see our current Diocesan operation. Special emphasis needs to be placed on developing effective Christian leadership and on the structures envisioned by Canon Law such as the Financial Councils and Pastoral Councils. The education in ecclesial theology which sees the Church not in the frame of modern corporate structures but in terms of *spirituality of communion*, yet at the same time, hierarchical as established by Christ, is important if this is to be achieved. The proper role of each of the Baptized within the framework of collaboration and dialogue is to be sought within our Pastoral Plan: “Let us listen to what all the Faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes.” (St. Paulinus of Nola)

Youth and Young Adults:



The youth of our Diocese have been a special gift for our whole community and much has been achieved at the local level in promoting and providing opportunities for our youth to both practice and learn about their faith. This must continue: *“What is needed today is a Church which knows how to respond to the expectations of youth. Jesus wants to enter into dialogue with them and through his Body, which is the Church, to propose the possibility of a choice, which will require a commitment of their lives.*

As Jesus with the Disciples of Emmaus, so the Church must become the travelling companion of young people...” (John Paul II – World Youth Day in Philippines, 1995)

Yet, more can be done by putting into place a structure at the Diocesan level to assist with the coordination and advancement of a **Ministry to Youth**. This will also provide for a more uniform application of the Comprehensive Youth Ministry model advocated by our Diocese.

Ministry to **Young Adults** and their engagement in the life of the Diocese needs to be studied so as to determine what sort of structures would be appropriate to connect young adults in the Diocese with programs and opportunities being developed by the University Chaplaincy as well as individual parish initiatives. It must always be remembered that the youth of our Diocese are the future guardians of our inheritance of Faith.

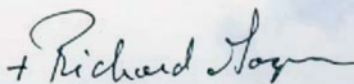
Conclusion:

I have incorporated the motif of the Emmaus journey as a vehicle in composing this Pastoral Letter on our Diocesan Pastoral Plan. It is my hope that in each parish community there will be a gradual unfolding of pastoral *Priorities, Actions and Suggestions* motivated by our Pastoral Plan. It would be helpful as well to find ways of evaluating pastoral initiatives as we move through the next five years.

In the Road to Emmaus story, one can see the sufferings of the Disciples as a universal “type” for the Christian life in general as one struggles to follow God’s will in the world. The Disciples only begin to change from despair to Hope after they had been enlightened by Jesus on the road. And that enlightenment taught them that God can use the experiences of sinfulness and suffering as the means by which his purpose is accomplished: *“The Cross, then, is something far greater and more mysterious than it at first appears. It is indeed an instrument of torture, suffering and defeat, but at the same time it expresses the complete transformation, the definitive reversal of these evils; that is what makes it the most eloquent symbol of Hope that the world has ever seen.”* (Pope Benedict XVI – homily in Cyprus, 2010).

Christ is at work even today and is walking with us on the road – let us start anew with him in new pastoral endeavours – let us: **Claim the Past with Gratitude, Live the Present with Enthusiasm and Look to the Future with Hope!**

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend Richard Gagnon
Bishop of Victoria

Credits (cover photo):

Sr. Marie Paul, O.S.B.; © Monastère des Bénédictines du Mont des Oliviers and Editions CHOISIR, Genève, reprinted with permission of the Printery House, exclusive agent in North America.

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