

Introduction to Diocese of Des Moines
Bishop Richard Pates
Ninth Bishop of Des Moines
Appointed April 10, 2008
By Pope Benedict XVI

I am ever so grateful to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI for appointing me as the ninth bishop of Des Moines. It is a welcome privilege to be called to serve such a vibrant, spirited community in the heartland of America. I look forward to our life together.

Coming from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, I join an interchange of leadership between the two dioceses. It began when the first bishop of Des Moines, Austin Dowling, in 1919 was appointed as Archbishop of St. Paul succeeding the legendary John Ireland. The direction was reversed in 1987 and 1993 when two friends of mine, Auxiliary Bishops of St. Paul and Minneapolis William Bullock and Joseph Charron, were appointed seventh and eighth bishops of Des Moines respectively.

I feel particularly honored to succeed Bishop Charron. As bishop, he is highly respected; as shepherd, he has been remarkably effective; as friend and brother, he is unfailingly supportive. Bishop Charron, thank you for the leadership you have rendered the Des Moines Diocese for 13 years. You have left a rich legacy and the task before me particularly inviting.

As I undertake the role of bishop of Des Moines, my initial priority will be coming to know this community. I look forward to visiting the 82 parishes and the numerous institutions in the 23 counties in southwestern Iowa. I hope to do so on an introductory basis before Christmas.

The early days will also be a time to establish relationships with the 100 or so priests, the diocesan staff, the religious women and men, the permanent deacons and the seminarians preparing to serve the diocese. With eager anticipation I look forward to meeting the tens of thousands of you who constitute that wonderful reality – the Church. Be assured I embrace all with a shepherd's heart.

In pursuit of the common good, I pledge to work cooperatively and energetically with our ecumenical and interfaith brothers and sisters, our government officials, leaders from the agricultural, educational, business, industrial, labor and social service sectors of society.

It might reasonably be asked, do I have any themes or priorities that I anticipate will characterize my ministry in Des Moines? Naturally, the first is commitment to my role as pastor – maintaining an openness to situations and needs of the moment.

One experience that I have benefited from in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis under Archbishop Harry Flynn is the development of a Vocation Culture. From what I know about this community, I believe all of the elements of such a culture are present to coalesce. Among the elements are:

- An energized, committed faith community
- Life-giving and widespread Eucharistic devotion
- Support, encouragement and engagement of youth and young adults in Church life
- Prayerful and positive opportunities for young people to listen to and discern God's call to:
 - Priesthood
 - Life as a vowed woman or man religious
 - Permanent diaconate
 - Lay ecclesial ministry

Such a vocation culture, I am convinced, is reflective of a diocesan community's realization of mission and thus symptomatic of its health.

During my time as bishop, I have become strongly committed to evangelization. Pope John Paul II coined the phrase: New Evangelization. Quite simply in Western society it means a conscious effort by us believers to recognize our call to make the Gospel known in place – that is, where we live, on the ground so to speak. It is a consciousness that is exercised explicitly in the Church through Catechesis, liturgy, RCIA and other opportunities. Implicitly, it is exercised in our dialogue with the culture, in communication provided through the opportunities of modern technology, through advocacy of social justice, our tireless care for the sick, the suffering, the vulnerable and the tsunami soon to swamp us – the seniors and aged.

An additional priority for me will be ministry to our youth and young adults. In every setting that I have been, I have been vitalized by their partnership in the life of the Church. They are important. As a part of this first day, I very much look forward to visiting with youth representatives at Dowling Catholic School.

As I prepare to come to Des Moines, I express profound gratitude for the great joy and opportunity of ministering for most of my priesthood at home in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. I have been blessed in my association with its outstanding priests and religious, with its remarkably dedicated faithful and for the cherished friendships that have sustained me over the years. In particular, I am grateful to Archbishop Harry Flynn. He has been a mentor without peer – one who preaches the Gospel in season and out of season with a heart which, like that of Jesus, has room for all. I am indebted to him and to Coadjutor Archbishop John Nienstedt for their friendship and support.

I want to express a word of commendation and heartfelt appreciation to Monsignor Steve Orr, who has served as administrator of the diocese this past year and to the competent diocesan staff who assist him. They have kept the ship on course. I very much look forward to collaborating with them.

The date for my installation as ninth bishop of Des Moines has been set for Thursday, May 29th. I invite all who are able, especially youth and young adults, to join Archbishop Pietro Sambi, representative of Pope Benedict XVI in the United States, Archbishop

Jerome Hanus of Dubuque, me and all of our other guests as we begin our time together. All are most welcome!

Next week, Pope Benedict XVI will make his first pastoral visit as Pope to the United States. This occasion recalls the historic moment in 1979 when Pope John Paul II visited Living History Farms and cast the Diocese of Des Moines into the national spotlight. This prominence was not accidental. For Iowa, Des Moines, the rich fertile land and farming culture have earned the well deserved designation – America’s heartland. With such people and environment – so natural and wholesome, this community of faith has unlimited potential. It is indeed a rare privilege for me to join you on your journey of faith. May God bless our pilgrimage together.