

**In the Heartland**  
**The Blessings of a Strong Diocesan Staff**

**By Bishop Richard Pates**  
**Bishop of Des Moines**

The Diocese of Des Moines and, in turn, myself are blessed with a very able and dedicated staff. They keep focused on our mission as a diocesan Catholic Church and expend robust energy in doing so.

The primary departments that directly impact the person in the pew are:

Vocation Discernment and Formation Department: The vocation director seeks to develop a culture wherein religious vocations might flourish. This includes creating an environment in which vocations are nurtured – especially through a commitment to prayer, events and contacts whereby potential candidates are able to explore the possibility of giving one’s life in generous service to the Church.

The role also involves coordination and support for those in seminaries and the formation program for the permanent diaconate. Currently, there are 18 seminarians and 17 permanent diaconate candidates for the Diocese of Des Moines.

The Catholic Schools Department coordinates the 17 educational institutions in the diocese. Its tasks involve student recruitment efforts for our schools. The enrollment of our schools over the last 10 years has remained stable hovering around 6,300 students. The department also guides the staffing for the schools’ administrators and then serves in a mentor capacity for these leaders in school operations. The department provides direction on Catholic identity, curriculum, educational policy, etc.

The Catholic Schools' department, in coordination with our schools and parishes, will soon launch a major study to position our schools for success in the next decade.

The Faith Journey department is designed to provide formation for our schools' teachers in order that they might be fully equipped to personally contribute to the Catholic character of our schools both individually and as a faculty. While religion classes are significant, Pope Paul VI wisely noted: "The faith is caught not necessarily taught." Thus, what is emphasized is personal witness, faith sharing and prayer.

Faith Journey Catechetical Institute, is a two-year enrichment program which is open to catechists at the parish level, diaconal candidates and engaged Catholics wanting to deepen their knowledge of the faith. It is a four-semester program based on the four pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: The Creed, The Sacraments, Moral Life in Christ and Prayer in Christ.

The Department of Evangelization and Catechesis coordinates the extensive outreach to our parishes, their catechetical leaders and catechists. There are some 12,000 students under catechetical instruction in the diocese. The department especially concentrates on sacramental preparation – Baptism, Reconciliation and Eucharist, and Confirmation. The development of first rate programs in these areas are critical as we fulfill our responsibility to "hand-on" the precious gift of faith.

Of special focus of this department is its programming for senior high youth, juniors and seniors, collegiates and young adults. These are transition years that benefit from companionship in the faith. They are a defining time in the identification of these young members with the Catholic community.

Department of Marriage and Family Life. The activity of this department is to provide solid, extensive preparation for young couples being married in the Catholic Church. It also develops guidance and support for those in the first five years of marriage – a critical period for survival. Part of its mandate is to work with couples living together without the benefit of sacramental marriage, encouraging such couples to pursue the path of matrimony.

An allied department is the Tribunal, the purpose of which is to determine the validity of a broken marriage from a Catholic, sacramental perspective. Pope Francis has made efforts to streamline this process. Once entered upon, those who pursue this process frequently experience closure to a difficult period in their lives and a healthy openness to move on.

The diocese also sponsors a program entitled, *Surviving Divorce*. Its goal is to bring healing to the lives of those who have undergone stress in the divorce process.

The Hispanic Ministry Department is designed to serve the significant waves of Hispanics who have come to the Des Moines diocesan area especially in the last 20 years. Programs are initiated to respond to the pastoral needs of these newcomers. There are now 11 sites that offer Spanish liturgy each weekend.

A certificate of lay leadership among the Hispanics has been established and has been met with enthusiastic response. Thus far, two cohorts with a total of 60 participants have completed this 18-month program.

In diocesan Hispanic outreach, particular attention is devoted to youth and young adults who straddle the American experience with that of their parents' heritage.

The Worship Department organizes our diocesan liturgies and coordinates the liturgical outreach of various diocesan departments. It also is active in the formation and education in the liturgy in our parishes. Worship is situated at the very core of who we are in the Catholic faith.

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Support offices, the so-called “engine rooms” facilitate the operation of the foregoing departments and especially the relationships with our parishes and institutions— namely the office of the chancellor, development, administration, communication, finance, technology, and human

resources. All engaged at the diocesan level – the staffs of which are lean - are highly capable and make a significant difference in the life of the Diocese of Des Moines.

Besides the foregoing, the diocese is also blessed with Catholic Charities, the Catholic Foundation of Southwest Iowa and other entities that assist us so capably with our outreach to those in particular need especially the poor and those with disabilities.

The total diocesan staff fulfills responsibilities with strong talent and generous dedication. They merit genuine gratitude. There are two principal characteristics that I utilize to describe our diocesan staff and allied organizations:

- 1) Their purpose is to serve – to serve the needs of our parishes and institutions.
- 2) Their root identity is evangelization: “To make Jesus Christ known and loved in our time by choosing to live on the basis of the Gospel at every moment.”