

Homily
Annual Legislative Mass
Iowa Catholic Conference

Tuesday, February 8th
St. Ambrose Cathedral, Des Moines

Archbishop Jerome Hanus
Bishop Walker Nickless
Bishop Martin Amos
Bishop Richard Pates, Presider & Homilist

INTRODUCTION

Good evening. I am Bishop Richard Pates, Bishop of Des Moines. Joining me this evening are Archbishop Jerome Hanus, Archbishop of Dubuque; Bishop Walker Nickless, Bishop of Sioux City; and Bishop Martin Amos, Bishop of Davenport. They are members of the Iowa Catholic Conference which is very ably served by Mr. Tom Chapman, its Executive Director.

Our gathering tonight is meant to express thanksgiving to God for your generous service as public servants of the community. We also pray that your service will enjoy abundant blessings in the current session. May all be guided by commitment to honoring and enhancing the life and dignity of every Iowan and thus achieve the common good.

We welcome all and invite your joining us in prayer this evening.

SPANISH
INTRODUCTION

Buenas noches. Bienvenidos a la Misa legislativa anual, presentada por la Conferencia Católica de Iowa. Hacemos oración en agradecimiento por el generoso servicio que ofrecen nuestros servidores públicos. Oramos especialmente para que se comprometan a respetar y mejorar la vida y la dignidad de todos los habitantes de Iowa y que de esa forma logren el bien común.

SPANISH HOMILY

La Diócesis de Des Moines está celebrando su Centésimo Aniversario en el 2011. Esta fecha especial nos da la oportunidad de reflexionar sobre el legado que nos han dejado tantos individuos y comunidades inspirados en Jesús y en el Espíritu de Dios.

Reconocemos que la fuente de esa visión que guió a aquellos que nos dejaron tan rico legado es al que los Redactores de la Declaración de Independencia llamaron: “Verdades Evidentes por Sí Mismas.” Esta se basa en respetar y mejorar la vida y la dignidad de cada persona humana y de ahí nos inspiramos en lograr el bien común.

Al hacer esto, hacemos nuestra la labor de Dios, las cuales describe Jesús maravillosamente:

“El Espíritu del Señor está sobre mí,
porque me ha consagrado por la unción. Él me envió a llevar la Buena
Noticia a los pobres.
a anunciar la liberación a los cautivos
y la vista a los ciegos,
a dar la libertad a los oprimidos,
y proclamar un año de gracia del Señor.”

Lucas 4:18-19

HOMILY

My fellow bishops, priests and deacons, esteemed legislators and members of the government, good friends all:

The Diocese of Des Moines constituting the twenty-three counties of Southwest Iowa, is celebrating its centennial this year. From every perspective we thank God for the abundant blessings that have been showered upon us.

In particular, we are grateful for those men and women who in God's providence rose to leadership. They enabled God's work to be accomplished accruing to the benefit of ever so many in their times and leaving an abundant legacy for later generations.

In their development and formation, these leaders absorbed the vision of a loving God as expressed in the words and actions of Jesus. The "pastoral plan" of Jesus reverberated in their very bones as they made his mission their own:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."

Luke 4:18-19

The effective Iowa leaders who embraced this mission in the best interests of the common good, were well aware that the Spirit which captivated Jesus was also present in all those who were open to receiving it. Thus, these leaders welcomed those who joined together in commitment to God's invitation to be agents of love and mercy in His name. The Book of Joel identifies those so energized by the Spirit. In words attributed to God it is stated:

"Then afterward I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
your young men will see visions;
even upon the servants and the handmaids,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit."

Joel 3: 1-2

Individuals and groups who manifested and gave witness to the presence of the Spirit in their lives fill the pages of Des Moines diocesan history.

Pre-dating the establishment of the Diocese was a woman, Dr. Mary Tinley, who as a Catholic physician opened her first office in Council Bluffs in 1895. When the great influenza epidemic swept through Council Bluffs in the fall of 1918, Mary was frequently seen carrying bread and broth as well as medicine to her patients. Mary, in the pioneering role of a woman doctor, sought to methodically open doors and thus expand professional opportunity for women.

She was a charter member of the Altura Club and honorary member and physical director of the Pottawattamie County 4-H Girls for many years. She was treasurer of the women's division of the Iowa State Medical Association. Today, because of the courage and foresight of leaders like Mary Tinley, women constitute the highest percentage of students in medical schools.

In the array of "genuine characters" that comprise the history of the Des Moines Diocese is Monsignor Luigi Ligutti.

Monsignor Ligutti was born in Italy and at the time of his ordination was the youngest priest in the United States. He was a very gifted individual, a veritable man of letters. But this did not stop him from what became his most significant contribution to humanity, his love of the land and the "people of the land."

This was first experienced in his rural assignment in western Iowa as pastor for the parishes in Woodbine, Magnolia and Logan. He could often be seen traveling by motorcycle with a side-car and his dog riding along. He fell in love with the people and became aware of their needs as farmers and the great contributions they made to the feeding of the country. He did all he could to support them.

Transferred to Granger, Iowa, Monsignor Ligutti took advantage of the National Recovery Act of 1933 which created a Homestead Act by which people could buy a piece of land at low cost to build a home and plant a garden for growing food for themselves. Fifty homes were built. These homes made it possible for the poor farming and mining families to have a piece of ground to call their own.

Monsignor Ligutti went to bat for the poor in the mining camps and the simple farmers most of whom were of Irish and Croatian descent. He backed up all his efforts with the social teachings of the Catholic Church regarding the dignity of the human person and the call for equal opportunity for people to provide for themselves.

Particularly, noteworthy as initiators of strong institutions which serve the educational, medical, and housing needs of Iowans are the religious sisters, the nuns, of many different congregations. They operated as teams allowing the Spirit of the Lord to multiply the effectiveness of their undertakings.

Nuns were devoted to Catholic education which has eventuated into a diocesan system serving over 6000 students providing a first class education incorporating values, strong

academics and respect for all. The Sisters also manifested a willingness to adjust their institutions to serve communities in evolving situations over the years. The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary demonstrated this characteristic in closing what was then their recently-updated St. Joseph Academy campus – no small sacrifice on their part – in order to collaborate with the establishment of the “new Dowling” in 1972. The Sisters’ response to changing times, even when it required great sacrifice, is an example which provides ongoing challenge for all of us.

In the last 25 years we have been blessed by the extraordinary leadership of the recently deceased Sister Stella Neal, a Mercy Sister. Motivated by the conviction that decent housing is a basic human right, Sister organized an array of community leaders to achieve the development of 220 housing units in Des Moines through an organization known as Anawim. Sister Stella brought together those who had the capacity for accomplishing something significant and enabled the Spirit to inspire them to work together to provide for the needs of their underprivileged neighbors.

As we reflect upon the remarkable legacy which the Diocese of Des Moines and the public have benefitted from by the dedication and leadership of those who embraced the Spirit given to them, we naturally pause to reflect on the legacy we wish to leave.

We know that we can be easily entangled – even embroiled in daily crises. People can be myopic, unreasonable, motivated by greed and self-interest. In political circles, partisan concerns oftentimes predominate, hindering cooperative efforts and genuine progress for the benefit of all.

Thus, an historical marker, such as the Centennial of the Diocese of Des Moines enables us to see with admittedly 20-20 hindsight that which is of lasting value, that which raises for tribute what is most meritorious of the human spirit.

The vision that emerges as perennially green is that which is planted in the human heart and is the source of “self-evident” truths cited by the writers of the Declaration of Independence. These truths hold in highest reverence the life and dignity of each human person which reverence gives rise to commitment to the common good.

In grounding our mission in this universal vision we will surely leave a rich legacy for succeeding generations of Iowans who come after us. God’s work as spoken by Jesus becomes our own:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

Luke 4:18-19