

**ROOTED IN CHRIST:
Vision for the Diocese of Saskatoon**

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1. Introduction

A philosopher once said, “Without a vision, the people die.” However, with a vision there is direction, energy and enthusiasm, faith and a mutual commitment one to another. With a vision there is both hope for the future and a way to plan and measure the steps towards that future as steps taken together.

For the Church, the Body of Christ, the People of God, our vision is of course that of being rooted in all things in Jesus Christ, in his desire to bring God’s love to all people. Christ’s vision is to unite all people to the life of that communion of love that is God, Father, Son and Spirit and to unite all people in a communion of love for one another, as a sharing in that divine love. That then is the vision of the whole Church and so must be the vision of the Diocese of Saskatoon.

However the challenge for the Church of any age is to read the signs of the time, to discern the particular challenges, possibilities and difficulties of sharing the love of God amongst all people here and now.

The Diocese of Saskatoon has periodically taken up the task of discerning together, lay people, religious and priests together, the vision for the Diocese in the coming years. This happened in a major way through the Diocesan Synod held in the 1990’s. It has also happened more recently as the parishes were invited to take up the Parish Vitality Reflection as a way of understanding in a deeper way how we all share by our baptism in the prophetic, kingly/shepherding and priestly mission or work of Christ. This was to lead to a discussion in the parishes on how they could initiate or improve one or two ways of living out as parishes this three-fold mission more fully.

Having experienced this Parish Vitality Reflection in varying ways and to varying degrees in our parishes, it seems to me that now is the time to once again speak to our vision and especially to set some priorities, some concrete ways of living out this vision here and now in our parishes for the next five years.

At the annual Diocesan Congress held in November 2007, the ordained and lay leadership of the diocese, the priests, members of our Diocesan Pastoral Council and staff of the Diocesan Pastoral Centre were asked to answer a first question, “To be faithful to the mission of Christ, the Diocese of Saskatoon would be a place where ...”. They were to indicate in this way what they would want as the elements of the vision for the diocese. There were a multitude of ideas, hopes and dreams that came forward touching all the aspects of the church’s life and mission. A second question led to a more concrete consideration, “What would need to change in our parishes and in our diocese to bring about this vision?” Again there was a host of ideas.

In the year following this effort the Diocesan Pastoral Council took up all these ideas and brought forward six priorities that were essential to a whole vision for the diocese. These six priorities for our Church's life and mission are:

1. Evangelization,
2. Ongoing Faith Formation,
3. Liturgy and Worship,
4. Building and Sustaining Community,
5. Justice and Peace and
6. Strengthening the Unity of our Diocese.

Following this effort, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Council of Priests and the staff of the Diocesan Pastoral Centre each worked on bringing forth concrete suggestions to further the vision that was being developed. I would now like to set out for each of these six priorities of the total vision, both the general thrust and some concrete suggestions for its realization. These priorities are not listed in the order of importance; indeed, efforts in any one area will strengthen and foster efforts in any of the others. Further, each parish, deanery and community that takes up responding to this vision will respond to different priorities in different ways. It is my hope that reflection on these priorities would be a part of your journey into the future, firmly rooted in Christ.

2. Intended Audience and Purpose

This is addressed to all of the faithful of the diocese so as to foster a common vision and rally prayer and effort around the priorities outlined in the vision. This is also addressed, in particular, to the Pastors and Parish Councils of all the parishes as an invitation to reflect upon the vision and these priorities and to see what ways it can lead the parish in its life in the coming five years. In our parishes much is already happening and all aspects of Church life must continue to be seen to. This vision and these priorities are not to be a further imposition, rather they are to serve as an invitation to focus in a particular way on essential aspects of our Church's life here and now. In short, this vision is to be like a checklist of what is most important now if we are to fulfill the mission of Christ in our Church and in our world at this time.

3. Priorities

A. Our first priority will be evangelization.

Jesus Christ's last words to his apostles and disciples as given in the Gospel of Matthew are, "Go out to the whole world and baptize all people in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Our vision for the diocese in the area of evangelization must be, "We desire to bring all people to Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church." We desire a fuller understanding of the person of Jesus and of the gift of the Church's teaching and life which will move us gently into dialogue with the hungers and questions of our world today and which will inspire us to lead lives which witness God's love for all people.

This aspect of our diocesan vision recognizes that we live in a world that hungers for God, for love, for solidarity and yet many seek happiness and success in other directions. Many do not know the Gospel message, many have drifted away from the Church, many question and search for truth and love in all sorts of ways.

Our diocesan vision must be about reaching out to all. We must reach out in a way that is a genuine, loving invitation to encounter the risen Christ. As disciples, our lives bear witness to the life and teaching of the Church as the road to Christ, who is the fullness of God's love shared with all humanity.

In concrete terms this would entail as a priority engaging our parishes in efforts to reach out and invite to dialogue and faith through such things as:

1. A parish mission that reaches out to all parish households, especially if there has not been such a mission in the last years,
2. Retreats and events which reach out to all youth, and
3. Any and all faith sharing events (Alpha, Theology on Tap, Foundations sessions, bible studies) with the express effort of inviting people from beyond our parishes.

B. Our second priority will be ongoing faith formation.

Ongoing faith formation follows many moments of evangelization and conversion through education, formation and the deepening of our spiritual life. Our vision in this area is that “We desire to participate in the work of the Spirit by responding to God’s invitation to conversion, transformation and growth in Christ.”

This aspect of our vision recognizes that by baptism, confirmation and eucharist we are called to a life-long journey of growth in understanding our faith and living it out in holiness so as to be true witnesses to Christ. It is through ongoing faith formation opportunities that we discern our vocation – God’s call to witness and serve for our whole lives.

In concrete terms this would entail as a priority engaging our parishes in ongoing faith formation through such things as:

1. Strong experiences of sacramental preparation (RCIA and RCIC, Baptism of Infants, Confirmation and Eucharist, Marriage) and especially deliberate efforts of follow-up to strengthen the growth in faith through participation in the parish,
2. Programs and resources for family life as a place of faith development linked to the parish, and
3. Actively foster lay education and formation (through retreat opportunities, small Christian communities, the Lay Formation Program, Catechist Formation, Foundations sessions and other educational opportunities) and call upon people who have experienced these opportunities to take a leadership role in the area of faith formation.

This focus on ongoing faith formation over the next five years will call for an evaluation of current parish and diocesan programs. We must ensure that programs are made more visible and accessible and that in these five years we evaluate if and how well these programs are meeting the faith formation needs of the faithful.

C. Our third priority will be liturgy and worship.

Our vision in this area is that “We will continue to be a People of God building up the Body of Christ through our full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy as we worship and praise God.”

This aspect of our vision recognizes that the liturgy as source and summit of all our Church’s life and mission must be understood by all the faithful as the encounter of God and his people whereby we are transformed through God’s sacramental grace and through our participation in the liturgy.

In concrete terms this would entail as a priority engaging our parishes in liturgical education, formation and participation through such things as:

1. Renewed efforts to explain the different elements of the liturgical action, particularly the eucharist and this especially as the new General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the new translation of the Sacramentary or mass texts are introduced,
2. Renewed education and formation around homilies (and homiletic reflections) so as to more strongly link the Word of God, the life and culture of our times and the proclamation of the mystery of our faith in Jesus Christ crucified and risen, and
3. Formation of the faithful in liturgical ministries and liturgical planning.

D. Our fourth priority is building and sustaining community with one another.

It is by being consciously and in a multitude of very concrete ways a real community of love, of mutual support and service that we live out our identity as the People of God, as the Body of Christ. Our vision for the diocese as community will be: “We will be a community that strives to be welcoming to all in everything we do and to be encouraging all to discover and use their gifts for the building up of community.”

In concrete terms this would entail engaging our parishes in such priorities as:

1. Identifying and reaching out to newcomers to our parishes,
2. A particular effort to engage the Aboriginal community and newly arrived immigrants,
3. Providing experiences of gathering and sharing of all sorts,
4. Pursuing programs and activities that call upon the gifts and participation of all, especially of young adults and young families,
5. Increasing the communication at diocesan and parish levels regarding programs and activities, events and special needs in a way that calls upon their input and participation,
6. Seeking creative ways to include those not able to fully participate in the sacramental life of the Church, and
7. Continuing to expand ecumenical (and inter-faith) initiatives.

E. Our fifth priority will be justice and peace.

For our witness to the Gospel to be authentic and prophetic our Church must be actively involved in efforts to establish right relationship between all people and with all creation. Our vision as a diocese will be: “We strive to be the People of God who reach out to all others with preference for the marginalized whereby each person’s dignity is valued through charity, justice, stewardship and corporal works of mercy.”

In concrete terms this would entail engaging our parishes in such initiatives as:

1. Identifying and responding to a minimum of one new unmet need of justice and peace in the community. This recognizes that each parish community has its particular situation (e.g. hunger, affordable housing, rural challenges, environmental issues, immigrants and refugees, restorative justice for those in jail). *The parish’s response needs to aim at both bringing help to those in need and to advocating for deeper social changes that can truly impact the situation.*
2. Finding creative ways to be a part of the evolving relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in our society. This could include participation in such initiatives as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission efforts and all other areas of growing in mutual understanding and respect.

F. Our sixth priority will be strengthening the unity of our diocese.

Our vision is that: “We are a Church that in a continuing way celebrates, grows spiritually and visions together through the service of our lay and ordained leaders.” This recognizes that only by dialogue and collaboration can we build up a unified leadership that has the potential to truly be faithful to the Spirit’s call today and harness the good will and participation of all. This is to be built upon what is already strong in our diocese but with a deep desire to further strengthen this shared leadership of our parishes.

In concrete terms this would involve the diocese as a whole in such priorities as:

1. Ongoing formation of parish councils so as to be fully pastoral in their outlook and initiatives,
2. Greater support for clergy to allow for better cooperation with laity,
3. Fostering opportunities for shared worship, formation, consultation and planning at deanery and diocesan levels (including large diocesan-wide gatherings periodically), and
4. Support for international priests in parishes receiving them, (specifically parish councils), support that is personal, cultural and professional.

This focus on strengthening the unity of the diocese will call for a greater attention to the unity between the pastoral leadership of parishes with one another and with the Bishop, so that our many communities of faith may share a common vision and identity, following our shepherd, together rooted in Christ.