

Diocesan Fall Conference 2008  
Bishop Michael P. Driscoll

“To God be the glory, and the power, and honor ... now and forever. Amen!”

As we gather here for Fall Conference 2008, we do so as people of faith ... people committed to building up the kingdom of God in Idaho, not for our own power and glory, but for the glory of God.

Together, we proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Together, we offer our praise and worship of the God of all goodness who strengthens, sustains, and guides us. Together, we profess this living faith through our countless works of charity and justice. Together, we enrich our lives through the various devotional and spiritual practices our Church celebrates.

Such efforts cannot be taken lightly. They build the Church of God in Idaho and provide a daily reminder of who and what we are as Catholic Christians. All of this happens when each of us claims the “discipleship” that is ours ... discipleship as priest, as deacon, as vowed religious, as parents, as single men and women, as youth and young adults. Together, we are the Church of God in Idaho and we are proud to profess it in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Being shepherd to such a dynamic and diverse Church is truly an honor and a blessing. I never cease to thank God for the privilege of being and working with all of you. Being Bishop, however, is also a challenge, especially as we look at new and creative ways of moving our Church forward while always remaining faithful to the teaching and witness of our tradition. That is why I have sought and continue to seek your input and wisdom.

In June of 2007, I invited all Catholics throughout the diocese to work with me in creating a vision of Church where everybody would feel welcome, where everybody would feel respected, where everybody would accept their Gospel call to serve the poor and work for justice, where everybody would be empowered to share their unique gifts and talents in building up the Kingdom ... where “ALL” would have a place “At the Table.” A lot has happened since that initial invitation. Let me share this “Good News” with you now:

- Through personal surveys, I invited you to share with me what you perceived as Strengths, Weaknesses, Challenges, and Opportunities for the Church of God in Idaho. You responded in overwhelming numbers to this invitation. During the course of a few short months, I received over 20,000 comments from Catholics across the state. I read the data from these surveys. I heard your individual and collective voices at Convocation, at priest gatherings, during parish visits, and in a variety of diocesan meetings. Above all, I listened.

- In order to provide a structure to continue this communication and ongoing conversation, I reinstated Deanery Pastoral Councils and gave them the responsibility to work with and support local parishes. Through the Deanery Pastoral Council, I hear news of your successes, struggles, concerns and insights and am able to respond to these expressed needs and challenges. As a diocese that encompasses the entire state of Idaho, this continuous cycle of communication ... from individual to parish to deanery to

diocese and back again ... is vital as we actively listen to one another and support one another in building up God's Kingdom in this place and time.

- This past June I gathered with over 150 pastors and parochial vicars, deacons and vowed religious, parish and lay leaders to discern together the information which had been received through the "All At The Table" surveys.

Over the course of our Diocesan Convocation, several priorities emerged which were consistent across the state ... everything from developing multi-cultural unity to embracing stewardship as a way of life. Even though some of these goals need to be more clearly articulated and refined, one emerged as a clear priority: The need to more effectively welcome and engage youth and young adults in the life and mission of the Catholic Church.

- With this goal in mind, our Deanery Pastoral Councils have been working to develop strategies to help our young people feel more welcome, more prepared to know and live the Catholic faith, and more capable of being the powerful force for good they can be in our world and in our Church. Parish Pastoral Councils have been asked to carefully assess their formation and outreach to youth and young adults: What are we doing? What are we not doing? What are we going to do? Our Presbyteral and Diocesan Pastoral Councils have offered their ongoing advice and insights. Diocesan staff have been busy traveling the state offering support and direction, being a resource to both parishes and deanery councils in this important work.

Yes, a great deal of progress has been made during this past year and I thank all of you who have been part of this process. However, much more still needs to be done. We must continually increase our efforts toward excellence as we reach out to our youth and young adults and as we strive to personally witness Jesus Christ in our own daily lives and actions.

I cannot do this alone. I need your help, your wisdom, and your cooperation. Above all, I need you to continue to embrace your discipleship, each according to your own unique vocation and God-given talents.

Parents:

- I need you to more fully embrace your responsibility as the "first and foremost teachers of your children in the ways of faith" and be the powerful models of faith, hope, and love you are called to be.

- I need you to actively talk to your children about faith and Catholic values ... about what it means to be Catholic in the world today.

- I need you to support our Catholic schools and parish Religious Education programs that provide quality formation and support to our young people throughout the state.

- I need you to realize that faith formation is not just for our youth, it is for all of us. As your bishop, I can tell you that I am still learning, still growing in faith, still in need of prayer, reconciliation and conversion. Growth in faith and holiness is nothing less than a life-long journey. Let us take this journey together!

- I need you to make your home a place of hospitality, formation, prayer, reconciliation, service, and love.

Priests and Parish Leaders:

- I need you to invite your parishioners to participate more fully in the mission of the Church and entrust them with their share of Christ's great commission.

- I need you to reach out to our youth and young adults and discern appropriate strategies for listening to and being supportive of their needs and concerns.

- I need you to cooperate fully with me in a spirit of obedience and collaboration as we make “All at the Table” a reality in our diocese.

- I need you to be attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit in your own personal life and in the life of your parish community. Continue to find strength and guidance from your personal prayer and celebration of the sacraments.

- I need you to work with your pastoral staff and parishioners to make your parish a place of hospitality, formation, prayer, and service for one and all.

Adults:

- I need you to be strong and visible models of faith to our youth, young adults, and to all you meet.

- I need you to put your faith into action each and every day in your families, in your places of work, and in your larger community ... showing and sharing Christ’s love through charity, justice, and prayer.

- I need you to discern how you can more fully share your time, talent, and treasure with your parish community. I need you ... your parish community needs you!

- I need you to participate regularly in the sacraments of the Church so that you can find the strength and courage to be agents of Christ in the world.

Youth and young adults:

- I need you to become more enthusiastic about being Catholic and get more fully involved in the life of your parish community. You are welcome!

- I need you to reject the materialism of the world and keep your hearts focused on the God who loves you unconditionally.

- I need you to listen to God and ask God in prayer whether you are being called to a life of vocation and service in the Church.

- I need you to ask God in prayer to guide you in the many difficult decisions and choices you make each and every day.

- I need you to use your energy and passion to be a positive force for change in your Church, in your community, and in your world. Don’t sit on the sidelines of life ... realize that you have tremendous energy, enthusiasm, and gifts to offer all of us. You are important and we need you!

And if we do this together ... people and priests united with me, your Bishop ... what will be our harvest?

Hopefully, the seeds we have sown this past year will make the Diocese of Boise a place of hope, a place of welcome, and a place of holiness not only for our youth and young adults ... but all of us. Hopefully, we will be better equipped and empowered to be living witnesses of Jesus Christ. Hopefully, the God of creation will use our human efforts to bring forth the Kingdom’s “new creation.”

Much work has been done; much work remains to be done. Yes, there will be setbacks. Yes, the progress may not be as fast as we would like. Yes, hard work will be required of all of us as we create a hospitality that brings everyone to the table and gives them a powerful sense of belonging and ownership. Yes, we will still face difficult challenges in recognizing the unique role and responsibility each of us plays in this garden of God. And yes, we will still need to be patient with one another and pray for one another. But together, I have no doubt that “All at the Table” can be a reality!

To all of you who took the time to share your thoughts through the “All at the Table” surveys ... to all of you who participated in the Diocesan Convocation ... to all of you who have continued to move our pastoral plan forward through Parish and Deanery pastoral council meetings ... to all of you who continue to faithfully advise me through the Presbyteral and Diocesan Pastoral Councils ... and to all of you who so generously, tirelessly, and in so many hidden ways make Jesus Christ alive and present in our diocese, I say “THANK YOU.”

Trusting in our ability to vision together ... enriched by our diversity ... guided by the Holy Spirit ... let us continue to manifest God’s kingdom here in Idaho through our prayer, service, and passionate witness to the God who gives everything and gives it abundantly!

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