

1969 to 2009 Communio



The 40th Anniversary of the Diocese of Fort Worth marks a time for us to reflect on our communion as a local church and our wider communion with the universal Church

Planning for the diocese's celebration of the 40th Anniversary of its creation in 1969 has centered around the theme of *Communio*, the reality of our communion with one another in the Body of Christ, and our wider Communion with the Universal Church.

This special section focuses on a handful of the various ministries of the diocese, showing some of the ways in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ



gets passed from one generation to the next, how it is proclaimed to our people and our communities, and how it is lived out in the local church. To list, exhaustively, all the ministries and apostolates of the diocese and all of the ways the People of God in the Diocese of Fort Worth live their faith would have been impossible, and un-

doubtedly innumerable ministries and apostolates would have been left out.

Instead, this special section focuses primarily on a few of the ministries of the diocese that have contributed to the rapid increase in the number of seminarians pursuing their vocations to the ministerial priesthood. This Fall, that number will reach a record 31 seminarians, a fairly phenomenal number of men seeking to offer their lives in service to God and his Church.

Other ministries featured here have experienced, and are experiencing great changes in the emphasis the Diocese has placed on them as a result of the implementation of Bishop Vann's 2005 Pastoral Plan, itself reflecting priorities set in the first diocesan Synod.



DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE LORD,

One of the many signs of the maturing of a local, diocesan church is that it is calling forth enough priestly vocations to supply the sacramental needs of her own churches. Our diocese has been blessed over the past many years not only with our own diocesan clergy, but also with the continuing presence of the many religious men who minister as priests in our parishes and also the many women religious who offer their gift of ministry and service in many ways to our diocese and parishes. Now, at 40 years since its establishment, the Diocese of Fort Worth, through the grace and gift of the Holy Spirit, is approaching that goal.

Approaching that mark at the age of 40 is particularly appropriate, given the significance in Scripture of the number 40. It is often used symbolically to represent a time of fulfillment, a mark of a coming age. The diocesan church is, in the theology of the Catholic Church, intended to reflect the universal Church. As Vatican II states in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*: "The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their

own particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists" (23). This is why I have designated our Anniversary theme to be *communio*, so that we may mark this unique time by more deeply reflecting upon the meaning of our communion as a local church and our wider communion with the universal Church.

I have also asked that this 40th anniversary be celebrated in a spiritual fashion, with the *Why Catholic?* four-year program of adult formation and faith sharing as its centerpiece. This vital undertaking for adult catechetical and faith formation, which will be in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, has been very favorably received in many dioceses around the country. It hopes to meet an often-expressed need for adult formation and education. This is a time for the diocese to continue its growth toward mature discipleship.

In 1969, Bishop John J. Cassata, then an auxiliary bishop of the combined dioceses of Dallas-Fort Worth, was named the first bishop of Fort Worth. During Bishop Cassata's 14 years shepherding the

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

diocese, many of the ministries that now flourish, some under different names, came into being: the Diocesan Education Office directing the schools of the diocese; the Commission on Liturgy, Music, and Art; the Department of Religious Education; and the Vocations Office were among those set in place during the time Bishop Cassata led the new diocese.

Bishop Joseph P. Delaney continued the development of these offices, introduced others, and added a new dimension by bringing all these ministries and their staff members, dedicated to the support of the its parishes, scattered across its 28 counties, under one roof in one place, the Catholic Center, on the far western edge of Fort Worth. Under Bishop Delaney's leadership, there was tremendous growth in the number of Catholics living within the Diocese of Fort Worth's boundaries as corporate relocations from the Northeast and waves of immigration from Vietnam and the Pacific, and Mexico and Central America made the diocese larger, more complex, more diverse and richer both culturally and materially. Under Bishop Delaney ministry in languages other than English, but especially ministry in Spanish and Vietnamese, expanded exponentially.

That explosive growth in numbers and diversity and the continuing growth of the services provided by the diocese has continued since I was ordained the third bishop of Fort Worth four years ago. The growth of the Catholic population has continued at a rapid pace, leaping from 200,000 to close to 600,000.

In those four years, we in the diocese have dealt openly and directly with issues of integrity and the sacred trust placed in her ministers, especially the priesthood. During that same time, vocations to the priesthood have increased dramatically, a trend which is also found in other parts of our country, especially the South and Southwest.

Foundations have been laid for new catechetical, catechumenal, and Respect Life ministries. Support for campus ministries has been expanded; devotional practices such as perpetual adoration of the Holy Eucharist and public displays of the faith in Corpus

Christi and Christ the King processions have achieved more prominence in the life of the local church. The presence of these public witnesses of our Catholic faith mirror also what has been taking place in our country and around the world.

In just the last year the Diocesan Department of Catechesis has begun developing the Pope John Paul II Institute with its three branches: the School of Lay Ministry, about to begin its first two-year cycle of formation of parish ministers in the Fall in both English and Spanish; the School of Catechetical Ministry, which will concentrate on catechesis to enrich adults' understanding of Christ and his Church and their role in its mission; and the Catechumenal School, seeking full implementation of liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral aspects of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) and the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (RCIC). These also will be offered in English and Spanish.

We have added new staff to more effectively support Family Life, Natural Family Planning, and Respect Life efforts across the diocese, reflecting the great need in our day and age for added emphasis on the indispensable role of marriage and family as the vital cell of society and the domestic Church. We also as a people of life need to respond diligently to

the important life issues at this critical time when more assaults on human life at its very beginnings and at its end are in play more than any other time in human history. As Pope Benedict XVI stated in his most recently released encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, *Openness to human life is at the very center of true development.* (28) This was also a need expressed in the last Synod.

Many of these needs for increased ministry were surfaced in that first Diocesan Synod, completed in 2001 and then outlined in my 2005 Pastoral Plan which sought to implement the

outcomes of the Synod, that massive consultation in which thousands of you participated, offering your hopes and dreams for the future of our local church, emphasizing just these things, vocations to

the priesthood, passing the faith along to the next generation, increasing our efforts to combat the growing disrespect in our cul-ture for the sanctity of life. And all of these efforts, all of this concerted attention to concerns that would deepen our faith and strengthen the bonds of Communion that bind us together in the Body of Christ have contributed to an atmosphere in which vocations to the priesthood and religious life have flourished.

With the dawn of the Third Millennium of Christianity, a new life is upon us, a new life that calls us to a deeper reflection upon the face of Christ and the richness and beauty of our Catholic faith. Our beloved late Holy Father Pope John Paul II calls the Church of the Third Millennium to cast ourselves into the depths of the mystery of Christ so that we can become ourselves fishers of men and women in an age and culture in great need of the truth of Christ. Thus, this new life of Faith calls for us to respond as the Lord's faithful people of the New Evangelization in this Third Millennium of Christianity.

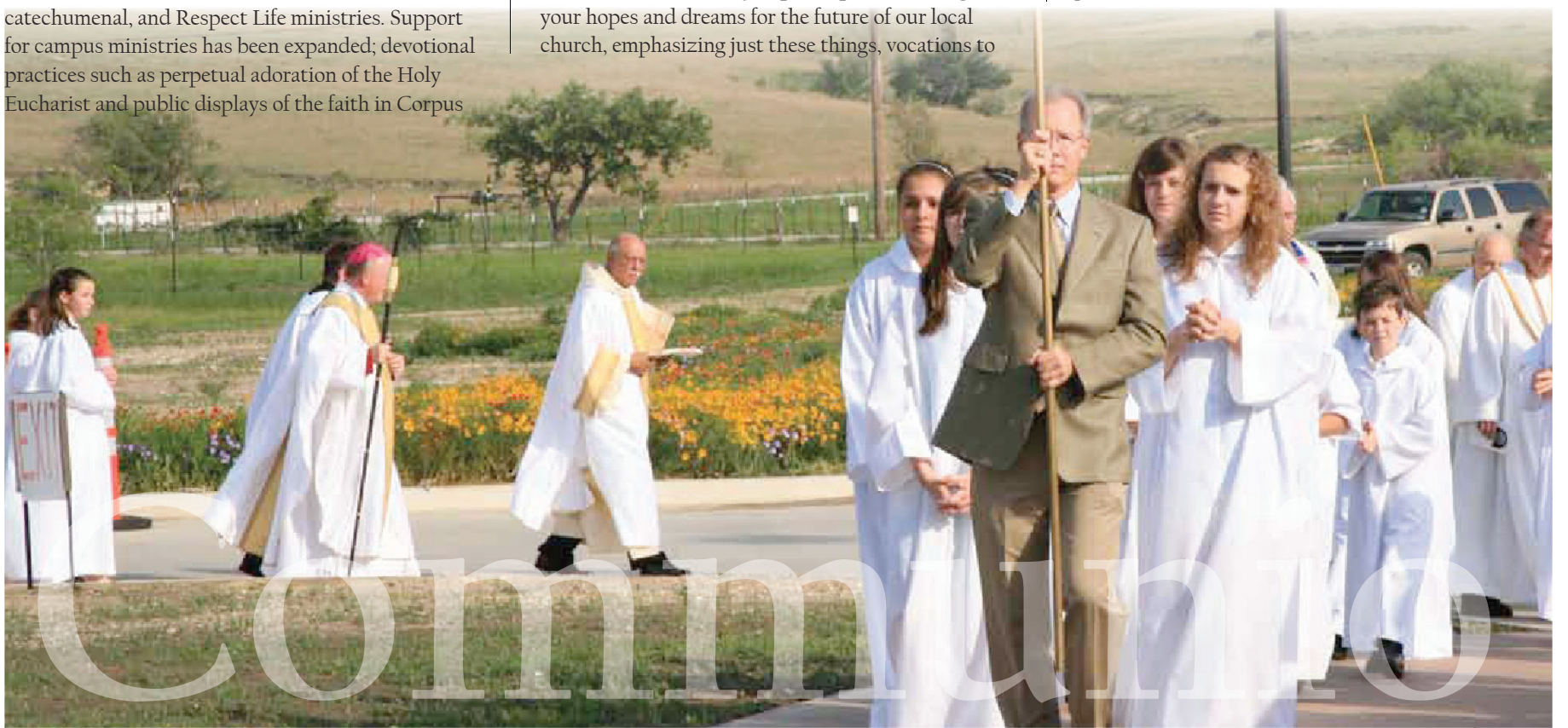
In this year that Pope Benedict XVI has declared as the Year of the Priest, we are seeing a renewed enthusiasm for the vocation of the ministerial priesthood, with 31 seminarians currently studying for the priesthood for our diocese, come the fall, an unprecedented number, by the way. This outburst of priestly vocations comes as the result of careful planting of seeds by caring and attentive parish priests, vitally involved parish leaders and ministers, and the extensive, far-reaching efforts of our Vocations Office, and the Serra Clubs of the diocese. All of us have worked together, diligently, in this team effort to surface and nurture these vocations to the priesthood, vocations nurtured for so long in the heart of their own families.

And we cannot forget the role of so many other ministries and apostolates that have offered the example of heroic Christian love, of so many of you offering yourselves, the substance of your very lives, through your own involvement and your invitation to the young to join you in service to God, his Church, and those in need of his love.

In a series of reflections entitled *Called to Communion*, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote on the Church as *Communion*, which is the theme of this year of Jubilee for us. In his conclusion, he writes:

We proclaim, not ourselves, but him. This requires our humility, the cross of discipleship. But it is precisely this that frees us, that enriches and enlarges our ministry. For when we proclaim ourselves, we remain ensconced in our miserable "I"

...I have designated our Anniversary theme to be **communio**, so that we may mark this unique time by more deeply reflecting upon the meaning of our communion as a local church and our wider communion with the universal Church.



and draw others in to share our billet. When we preach him, we become "coworkers of God" (1 Corinthians 3:9), and what could be more magnificent and more liberating than that?

Let us ask the Lord to give us a renewed perception of the joy of this mission. When he does, the word of the prophet will once again prove true in our midst as well. This is the word that is always fulfilled when Christ walks among the nations: The people who live in darkness have seen a great light. . . . We rejoice in your nearness, just as they rejoice at the harvest, as they shout for joy when they divide the spoils (Isaiah 9:1-2; cf. Matthew 4:16). Amen.

As we continue along this road toward a deeper Communion with God and with one another, growing in our unity of faith, with our vision of a transformed

society, I would also like to offer to all of us these words of spiritual encouragement from St. Paul, whose special year ended just last month:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I pray that this celebration of our 40th Anniversary will be a time of great grace and joy in the Lord, as we together rejoice in this Communion of Faith, and journey into the future, keeping our eyes fixed on the Lord.

Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." — Ephesians 3:14-21

On a personal note, I want to say that I begin each day with a prayer of gratitude to God for my four years here. Years ago, in the seminary in St. Louis, one of our professors (a member of A.A.) taught us about the importance of daily prayer of gratitude to God. I have tried to live that reality each day, as St. Paul says, to "give thanks in all things." I truly am grateful that God's providence has brought me here, in this Faith-filled, dynamic local Church, and for the personal kindness and prayers and encouragement of so many of you.

I pray that this celebration of our 40th Anniversary will be a time of great grace and joy in the Lord, as we together rejoice in this Communion of Faith, and journey into the future, keeping our eyes fixed on the Lord.

God bless you always,

+ Kevin W. Vann

+ Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann

Why Catholic? will bring thousands new knowledge of their Faith and build small Christian community

By Kathy Cribari Hamer / Correspondent

When the Diocese of Fort Worth participated in the RENEW International program in 1990, participants little realized it would still be in their lives two decades later. But in many diocesan parishes, small groups from RENEW still exist, with members who in many senses have become like families.

Two examples are St. Bartholomew Parish, where 20 percent of the 1990s RENEW groups still maintain small communities, and Good Shepherd Parish in Colleyville, which has had 25 small Christian communities since its beginning in 1991.

This year, in celebration of the diocese's 40th anniversary, Bishop Kevin Vann has built on RENEW's success, choosing *Why Catholic?*, an adult catechesis program, as the cornerstone of a spiritual renewal effort.



The bishop, who chose the theme "Communio" for the jubilee year, wrote, in an introductory letter, "I hope our diocesan efforts will help not only deepen our personal communion and relationship with Christ, but also deepen and increase the communion of our diocesan family through one Lord, one Faith, and one Hope. (Ephesians 4:1-6)"

"The basis of *Why Catholic?* is the "Catechism of the Catholic Church," according to Father Carmen Mele, diocesan director of Hispanic Adult Catechesis, who describes the "Catechism" as "a mature description of our faith." He said *Why Catholic?* presents the "Catechism" clearly and concisely, divided into books for the next four years. "The books can be understood by anyone, and they have universal appeal for people in our society."

The books, each covering 12 sessions, making up

four consecutive years, include "The Profession of Faith: What we Believe," "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery: The Sacraments," "Life in Christ: Walking with God," and "Christian Prayer: Deepening My Experience of God."

"For many of us, the catechism is like an encyclopedia," said Linda Beckley, who coordinates *Why Catholic?* for Grapevine's St. Francis of Assisi Parish. "Especially for cradle Catholics, what we know of our faith is limited to what we learned in grade school, or through confirmation. As adults, we haven't learned much about our faith."

"Through *Why Catholic?*, we will learn apologetics. This will give us the words to explain why we do what we do."

"It is my hope," Bishop Vann wrote in his letter, "that through these sessions not only will our diocese grow in our knowledge and love of the Lord, but that our parishes will become more closely connected and that we may also grow in our understanding and appreciation of our communion and mission with the universal Church."

Sister Pat Thomas, OP, of RENEW International, said there are many gifts from *Why Catholic?*, citing a few of the testimonies: "It reaffirmed my belief in the Catholic Church," and "My prayer life is enriched. I have seen more actions I can do — not just go to church."

Why Catholic?, like RENEW, is comprised of small

groups who meet regularly in peoples' homes, and, as its predecessor, has the potential to enjoy a long existence in the diocese, and in peoples' lives.

"Through *Why Catholic?*," said Steve Landon, Small Christian Community coordinator at Good Shepherd, "more people in parishes will know each other on a personal basis, more than just learning about Catholicism."

"And people will also learn about the Catholic faith," he said. "It's hard to evangelize, if you don't know your own faith."

"It's a good process. We were in one small community for 13 years, and we just joined another one with no one we knew. We bonded, and we miss it when we can't see them," he said. "It's like the Sunday School of the Catholic Church."

Groups that form through RENEW and now *Why Catholic?* become familial, Landon said. "When one has a first Communion or a wedding, everyone is invited — they participate. If someone dies, they provide lots of support. It really does make a difference."

"I am very impressed by a little church, St. Thomas Aquinas, in Pilot Point," Fr. Mele said. "They are interested in both English and Spanish *Why Catholic?* and they are sending people to all the workshops, trying to involve everyone in this small country parish."

"I think this is the kind of involvement Bishop Vann is trying to provide," he said, "to know our faith more, so we can love Christ more dearly."

Respect Life Office offers support for those who work for life at all its stages and advocates for change

By **Kathy Cribari Hamer** / Correspondent

It was a politically charged year, so the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Fort Worth armed itself with 50,000 postcards, and got involved.

"We participated in the Fight FOCA Postcard Campaign by distributing cards to parishes and to others who came in requesting them," said Chanacee Ruth-Killgore, Respect Life director. The



campaign was designed to voice objections to Congress, regarding a bill which, according to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, was "The most radical and extreme abortion legislation ever considered in the United States."

"Sometimes I get e-mails that say 'I am not Catholic, but I am looking for something to do pro-life, and I found your Web site.' I tell them, 'Go to Austin. Fight FOCA.'"

"It's going to take constant vigilance," Ruth-Killgore said, "to see that abortion does not become a fundamental right."

Civic action is just a portion of diocesan Respect Life. The office participates in pro-life activities called for by the USCCB: public information and education; pastoral care; public policy; and prayer and worship. Pastorally, the diocese Respect Life Office has joined forces with Catholics Respect Life, long known for their pro-life work. The office provides Natural Family Planning information, supports abortion recovery, through Rachel Ministries, and provides Angels, through The Gabriel Project, for women in crisis pregnancies.

The Gabriel Project was founded in 1997 in Corpus Christi, according to Debra Heron, of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish. Heron carries a phone 24 hours a day, because she is in charge of answering the Gabriel hotline. "The project started when a pastor heard the confession of a woman who said she had an abortion because she had no help. The priest immediately decided to be the one who would help. So he hung up



a sign."

"Our ministry can be to anyone in a crisis," Heron said. "If a woman decides against an abortion, we help them, but there are also other forms of difficulty in pregnancies, such as Trisomy 18." Also known as Edwards Syndrome, Trisomy 18 is a chromosomal defect, associated with life-threatening medical complications.

"Sometimes doctors encourage ending those pregnancies. But for mothers who choose to continue them, we walk with them spiritually and emotionally. Afterward, if they need rosaries or a funeral Mass, we take care of that too."

In the area of Community Action, the diocese also participates in Forty Days for Life, which this fall will take place Sept. 23 to Nov. 1. The effort consists of 40 days of prayer and fasting, peaceful vigil, and community outreach, all in front of the Planned Parenthood facility on Henderson St. near downtown Fort Worth.

Participating in last year's effort were students from Texas Christian University's Frogs for Life. Their president, Melinda Castro, said, "Even if I had doubts and didn't know why I was doing this, I could remind myself that I am representing a holocaust that is happening now. Some day we will look back and say, 'I can't believe, as human beings, we thought it was okay to murder our children.'"

The Diocese of Fort Worth participates in the pro-life movement through the ministry of such longtime activists as Chuck Pelletier, founder of Mother and Unborn Baby Care and Angela and Bob Walters, creators of Catholics Respect Life. Bishop Kevin Vann, in addition to annually leading a delegation from the diocese in the March for Life in Washington, D.C., also supports respect life efforts by regularly celebrating Mass for various pro-life groups in the diocese.

There are occasional victories in the fight for life, Ruth-Killgore believes. "For the first time today, praying at the abortion facility," she said, emotionally, "I got to witness someone who talked with our counselors, went into the building, then came out and drove away. She rolled down the window and said she had decided not to have an abortion."





Vocations are increasing in the Diocese of Fort Worth—rapidly

By **Kathy Cribari Hamer** / Correspondent

The numbers are strong.

Vocations from the Diocese of Fort Worth are on an upswing, with 2009 seminary enrollment at 31 — double the seminarians of 2005. And the diocese's first class of 16 "home-grown" permanent deacons this year marks the 20th anniversary of their 1989 ordination.

As attractive as the numbers are, the stories are better, describing men who provide quality, depth, and texture to the priesthood and the diaconate.

The new generation of priests has morphed from the 1960s post-high-school-aged candidates to seminarians who are post-college age and may have come from previous careers.

Recently ordained priests include a 23-year-veteran TCU police officer, John Pacheco, and an Aggie fraternity man, James Flynn, who went to the Army before the seminary.

There was also a self-proclaimed "gear-head," Jack McKone, who loved "anything with an internal combustion engine in it," and came to the priesthood by way of his work with missions. McKone volunteered to work on five donated school buses, and help get them to Honduras, to be given to Fort Worth's sister diocese in Juticalpa.

On the way to Honduras, McKone was dropped off in Guatemala, where he had previously worked with his parish. It was May 2001; he returned home in November 2002. Six years later he was ordained.

Before 1965 there were various types of vocation systems, according to Father Kyle Walterscheid, di-

ocesan Vocations director. "Some boys went to high school seminaries, and became priests. At that time there were 100 high school seminaries in the United States. Today there are two.

"Usually we like guys to have completed their degrees, but this year two 19-year-olds are coming in. Both have a rich tradition of altar serving and being active in their parishes. And they are very mature."

Father Hoa Nguyen, a diocesan priest ordained in 1998, was 16 when he left Vietnam, as one of the "boat people," of the 1970s.

"The boat was 36 feet long, carried 44 people, and the engine broke down 19 hours into the trip. We floated for a month until we were rescued by a US Navy ship that happened to go by."

The refugees survived by eating cockroaches, mice, jellyfish, and seaweed. "I love working with Vietnamese refugees," Fr. Hoa, has said.

The permanent diaconate began in Fort Worth in 1985, when Bishop Joseph Delaney started a diocesan formation program. Led by Ann Healey, Ph.D, the process takes more than six years, including the Light of Christ Institute, (now the "John Paul II Institute"), which is preparation for all lay ministries. Candidates and spouses study one weekend each month, nine months each year, in a bilingual program.

The fourth class of 31 new deacons is scheduled for ordination Sept. 26.

"There is awareness of vocations now," Fr. Walterscheid said. "In the diocese we need more men and women to consider the religious life, especially since two of our newer parishes — St. Joseph and Good



Shepherd — originally opened without pastors. I think by 2016 we will have a priest in every parish."

The diocesan Vocations Office concentrates on university ministries, provides a Vocation Awareness Program, and keeps in touch with potential candidates, Fr. Walterscheid said.

"Another thing we do is look at vocations over age 40. Of our 31 seminarians, seven are in that group."

Some dioceses would say no to them, Fr. Walterscheid said, but it was Bishop Delaney's tradition, and Bishop Kevin Vann continued it.

Coming to his vocation in a non-traditional way, the Vocations director is like his contemporary priests.

One of them, Father Richard Collins, with Protestant upbringing, took a required college history class — history of Judaism — and found religion, and eventually the priesthood.

Another, Father Steve Berg, former vice president of a nationally-known landscape company, and a concert pianist, found harmony in ministry.

And Fr. Kyle Walterscheid, a structural engineer, designed freeways with the Texas Department of Transportation. Then he went another way.

"I had been in a great youth and college ministry," Fr. Walterscheid said, "and I thought, 'Now what? What can I offer the Church?'"

"I had fallen in love with the Church, so I did what you do in a spousal relationship," he said. "I made a commitment.

"I did it — come what may."



Within the Diocese of Fort Worth, pastors, deacons, religious, and lay ministry leaders have worked tirelessly over the past 40 years to pass on their faith to teens and young adult Catholics. Youth and campus ministries in rural and urban areas within the diocese have continued to grow to meet the demands of an expanding Catholic population.

As parish communities strive to offer their own catechetical programs, as well as opportunities for youth-friendly prayer and worship, fellowship and service, they also participate in large group events such as the annual Diocesan Catholic Youth Conference, World Youth Day, YouthLeader Week, the Disciple Now junior high retreat, Camp Fort Worth service weeks, Youth 2000 eucharistic adoration retreats, the Diocesan Youth Council, and Youth for Life programming.



The Diocesan Young Adult Council likewise brings young people together for events such as weekend retreats, Theology on Tap, Habitat for Humanity builds, and other service projects, monthly community building nights, and regular young adult liturgies.

As a strong network of youth, young adult, and campus ministry leaders across the diocese works together on behalf of young Catholics between the ages of 12 and 35, the spirit of excitement around the “New Evangelization” promised by Pope John Paul II continues to build (Mission of the Redeemer, 3).

The following article offers a glimpse of one such network within the diocese, one among many that exist, creating vibrant communities of faith.

Youth and Campus Ministry are thriving in the Northwest Deanery as they collaborate

By **Juan Guajardo** / Correspondent

There is a growing sense of solidarity in the parishes farthest from the diocese’s see city of Fort Worth. Despite geographic difficulties and half-hour to hour-long drives from parish to parish, the Northwest Deanery is fortifying its youth ministry and campus ministry programs through deanery-wide networking among parishes.

“We share because we’re so spread out,” said Cheyenne Marrinan, part-time youth minister at Sacred Heart Parish in Seymour. “We’re also a tight little community,” she said, adding that they share events if any one parish doesn’t have enough participants to do them alone. “We have a great network.”

The networking among parishes started two years ago when Marrinan with the help of the pastors and other ministry leaders in the deanery introduced the idea of deanery-wide youth Masses to other youth ministers around the area and got them on board. Now, youth Masses are held at a different parish once a month during the school year. All 20 churches in the deanery participate, and the Masses average attendance of 150.

“The Masses are a pretty big deal,” said Bryan Webb, youth minister at Holy Family Parish in Vernon, St. Joseph in Crowell, and St. Mary in Quanah. “We support each other and try to help each other in the different diocesan events we do. We try to share buses and other resources and invite each other to our parishes’ programs.”

Marrinan and Webb agree that the networking has facilitated the faith and fellowship experience for the students — who are often separated by large distances and therefore have limited opportunities to meet and share with other Catholic students their age. Coordinating also allows youth groups to more easily attend retreats and diocesan events — which can require a two- to three-hour drive.

19-year-old Justin Conover, a parishioner from Holy Family who participated in the youth group under Webb’s guidance and will be entering St. Joseph Seminary in Covington, Louisiana, this fall, affirmed that the deanery-wide coordination — especially the Masses — benefit students.

“It reminds you of a bigger community of Catholics,” Conover said. “To be out here in Vernon, it kind of seems like you’re not connected as far as the diocese goes. You are way out here, and in school you might be a minority as a Catholic, but when you come to the deanery Masses you have something to look forward to; you have something that you can relate to.”



The Masses and other events provide a way for youth to make new Catholic friends but also to grow closer to God and their faith, Marrinan and Conover said.

“I think that’s a key thing kids gain from this. Kids gain a relationship with one another throughout the Body of Christ in our deanery,” Conover said. “To top it all off, I think they are growing in a relationship with Christ, gaining more and more knowledge and maybe getting a different perspective hearing another priest preaching.”

Conover considers the weekly rosary at Holy Family Parish as essential to his spiritual life. With other youth and young adults at Holy Family, Conover said he has prayed about 200,000 Hail Mary’s since the weekly prayer night started 10 years ago.

“I sometimes wonder what my Catholic faith would be like if I didn’t have such a good youth minister,” Conover said, pondering the possibility.

Involvement of young people is not restricted to just parishes. The Catholic Campus Center at Midwestern State University holds a deanery-wide confirmation retreat, Campus Minister Debbie Neely said. The high-school students are able to experience being with college-age Catholics and get to see them being active in their faith, Neely said.

“At the confirmation retreat they get the perspec-

tive of college students who also have been through what they’ve been through,” said Francisco Salas, an MSU graduate and student assistant at the Campus Center.

The campus ministry is also playing a role in the networking by providing volunteers for youth retreats and other events, Neely said.

“We have such a good relationship with our local churches,” Neely said. “We have some [college students] who have done catechism at the local churches. We help out a lot with the high school youth. We also get a lot of support from the local churches, and we try to help them out in any way that they need our help.”

Furthermore, the Catholic Campus Center has provided a bridge between high school and college spiritual life, Neely said.

“They say it’s their home away from home, and it’s like family,” Neely said. “It’s an environment where whether they are in a bad mood or a good mood they can come. They are accepted and welcomed. They just look out for each other. It’s definitely a bridge. My desire is to get those that were involved in youth ministry to come to campus ministry, and when they leave campus ministry to go on and be involved in young adult ministry at a church.”



Catholic schools change young peoples' lives, bring them to Jesus, while educating for a better life

By **Kathy Cribari Hamer** / Correspondent

If the diocesan superintendent of schools catches an eye-opening view of Catholic education, surely something significant just happened.

"There was a meeting at St. Rita's," Don Miller said, "and the principal took us into the hallway. A student's dad, Ahren Schwericke, was leaving for Iraq, and he was there with his son, Aiden. Together the two led the Pledge of Allegiance."

"Kids were lining the hall," explained Charlene Hymel, St. Rita Principal, recently named associ-

ate superintendent of diocesan schools. "Boy Scouts posted the colors, and after the Pledge of Allegiance, the children sang a blessing song, holding their arms over Aiden's father." Aiden's grandmother, Elan, teaches dance at Nolan High School.

The scene was emotional for Miller, who noted that along with their Catholic education, the children were learning: "love of country, and the value of who we are. I never saw anything like that little boy's face that morning," Miller recalled.

Nationally, Catholic education may struggle, but it thrives in the Fort Worth Diocese, where The Bishop's Scholarship Fund has provided a three-year total of \$1.7 million to help educate some 2,000 students.

"We're breaking the cycle of poverty," Hymel said. "We had one mother who volunteered at St. Rita's, and while she was helping in classes, she listened, and learned how to read. Now she and her daughter read together."

Students are also making great strides at St. George School, where Principal Olga Ferris, Ed.D, was once a pupil, and now provides an innovative, up-to-date, thoroughly Catholic education.

"Many of our parents can pay a certain amount of money no matter how high tuition is," she said. "With the Bishop's fund, they pay the same, but we receive more money. The people are happy, as are we."

"If our parents demonstrate a real desire for Catholic education for their children, then lack of finances will not stand in the way," the St. George alumna-turned-principal vowed, determinedly redefining Catholic education's success in the diocese.

Most students at Our Mother of Mercy School are not Catholic, but regularly some ask about becoming Catholic. "Two years ago I asked two students if they were baptized, and they said 'no,'" said Principal Carolyn Yusuf, Ph.D. "All their family of 14 ended up being baptized at the next Easter Vigil."

"Clarece Reynolds, who died in 2004, was one of five first black students at Our Lady of Victory [School, on Fort Worth's South Side], after her older brother had attended OMM. He brought his family to church," Yusuf said, "and they all became Catholic."

"It's been happening all along. As Don Miller says, 'We don't do this because they are not Catholic, but because we are.'"

Three diocesan principals, Yusuf, Ferris, and Clarice Peninger, who recently retired from 24 years at St. Andrew School, were students at OLV High School in the same time period. "Back then God was forming us for what we are doing now in Fort Worth Texas."

"It's amazing," Yusuf concluded, "all things work together for good, for those who love Jesus — and we learned of Jesus at OLV."



Over the past several years, rich friendships have formed between a generation of Catholics in Latin America, Asia, and Africa and caring parishioners in the Diocese of Fort Worth. Large numbers of volunteers, from teens to senior citizens, have traveled from this diocese to share their faith and material resources in communities within Guatemala, Bolivia, Haiti, Mexico, Honduras, Vietnam, and on the continent of Africa. And on their return, they have consistently maintained that the spiritual blessings they have received through their mission work far outweigh the good they have done in helping to establish and support schools, medical clinics, hospitals, catechetical ministries, and churches in developing countries.



Bishop Kevin Vann actively supports this mission outreach and has traveled to Honduras, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Mexico himself over the past four years. He has praised his predecessor, Bishop Joseph Delaney, for his years of commitment to mission work.

“Our volunteers return from mission experiences with a deeper sense of the universal nature of the Church,” the bishop said in the Sept. 2007 issue of *Maryknoll Magazine*. “They also come back with a renewed and deeper appreciation of their own faith.”

The Diocese of Fort Worth annually sends more than \$2 million to the foreign missions. A 16-member Mission Council assists the diocesan Mission Outreach office in educating Catholic ministries about mission work and coordinating activities in which all faith communities can participate.

Mission efforts of the diocese and its parishes have shared the Gospel with others outside our borders

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen / Correspondent

Turning 40 is pivotal. Approaching middle age often forces a person to rethink priorities, contemplate a lifestyle change, or set new goals.

For Father Jack McKone, reaching mature adulthood kindled a desire for adventure and opportunity.

“Some people have a midlife crisis and buy a Corvette. I went on a mission trip,” quips the former car parts salesman who became a diocesan priest. “A crisis isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It helps you grow.”

The 1995 trip to Patzun, Guatemala, was hastily planned, remembers Colleen Cargile, McKone’s sister and travel companion. Their brother, Chuck, had just moved to the war-torn country to continue his mission work as a lay Franciscan. Raised in a family with 10 children, the McKones were taught to champion each sibling’s efforts.

“Jack and I wanted to support Chuck’s mission work — and we were ready for an adventure,” Cargile says, explaining that Guatemala’s ongoing civil war didn’t factor into their decision. “We had no clue what we were getting into. I think God was calling us in an unusual way.”

The weeklong experience was an eye-opener. During their visit, the brother/sister team met villagers who were literally “dirt poor” but happy.

“Their faith lives and family were so tightly connected,” Fr. McKone says, describing the resiliency he witnessed. “A deep spirituality helps them cope with adversity.”

One incident is especially memorable. While traveling through the mountainside villages, a family invited the three McKone siblings to spend the night in their home. To have visitors from “el Norte — the north where everything is good” is considered an honor.

“It was bitterly cold with no heat and we slept on a dirt floor,” Fr. McKone says, recalling the harsh living conditions.

His sister remembers the family’s “humility, generosity, and faith,” but also a very long, sleepless night. To keep their guests warm, the considerate hosts took blankets off the horses.

“Which was wonderful except for the insects,” Cargile recounts. “We took turns asking, ‘when is daylight coming?’”

When the morning sun rose, the three Americans thanked the family for their hospitality and walked out of the cold, bleak shelter — a reality that did not go unnoticed or unappreciated by the trio.



“We could leave those miserable sleeping conditions and return to the comfort of home, but they can’t,” Fr. McKone says with empathy. “That’s their life.”

The short, impromptu visit with their brother became a life changer for the North Texans.

“Our conscience was awakened to do something,” he explains. “The Holy Spirit called us to mission work.”

The ministry started with small things. On a return trip to Patzun, Fr. McKone brought a camera and took portraits of everyone in the village.

“People were shy at first but soon got used to it,” says the former Fort Worth St. Rita’s parishioner who provided families with treasured family photos.

With help from members of St. John the Apostle Parish in North Richland Hills, Fr. McKone and his sister also began ferrying vitamins and anti-parasite treatments to the villagers. As the involvement in mission work grew, so did the breadth of the projects. When the Diocese of Fort Worth formed a partnership with the Diocese of Juticalpa in Honduras, the car parts expert volunteered to help refurbish five buses packed with donations for the Central American country. He worked with Honduran mechanics for three weeks, stockpiled replacement air filters, tires, and brake pads, then rode in the convoy



of buses to Honduras.

His growing attraction to mission work finally led to a life-altering question.

“I kept asking myself, what do I need to do?” Fr. McKone explains. “I knew God was calling me in some way to serve the Body of Christ.”

He hoped to find the answer in the highlands of Patzun. After selling his house and resigning from a 25-year career with the David McDavid auto dealership, Fr. McKone spent 18 months assisting a group of Carmelite sisters who provide religious education to Mayan villagers.

“We knew Jack had some kind of calling,” Cargile says of his decision. “Patzun was a great place to do

Hispanic Ministry efforts have grown as the diocese has moved to serve burgeoning Hispanic population

By Juan Guajardo / Correspondent

Andres Aranda, director of Hispanic Pastoral Services, remembers how 19 years ago the office of Hispanic Ministry was a diocese-wide operation run and promoted by only one person — himself.

Since then the office of Hispanic Ministry has changed dramatically as it has expanded, gained more staff, and worked to provide more services and Masses for Spanish speakers.

The past couple of decades have seen the diocese and the Office of Hispanic Ministry initiate Spanish Masses in several more churches and encourage the ordination of more bilingual priests in order to meet the needs of the Hispanic community. Of the 90 parishes in the diocese, a majority now provides Spanish Masses.

“Presently, more than 50 parishes are offering services in Spanish,” Aranda said. “We are working closely with vocations, and there are more and more bilingual seminarians.”

Some of the most recent to adopt Spanish Masses are St. Michael’s in Bedford and Holy Redeemer in Aledo, Aranda said.

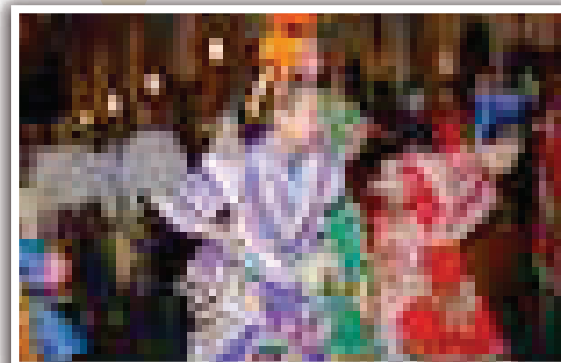
In the counties making up the diocese, the Hispanic population has increased dramatically. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were more than 285,000 Hispanics in Tarrant County alone. That number was estimated to have grown to more than 411,000 by 2007, according to the Census Bureau’s estimate.

“There has been a lot of growth,” Aranda said. “There is a Hispanic presence in all the parishes and several Spanish Masses have been initiated,” he said, in places where he had not thought they would be 15 years ago.

Aranda said that 19 years ago, the diocese had two offices doing all the work that was needed for ministry to Hispanics, a massive amount of work for the small staff to accomplish in translating and adapting materials and programs and actually providing the programming. But over the years the diocese has responded to the rapid increase in the number of Spanish speakers, expanding Spanish-language ministries by hiring Spanish-speaking staff in the areas of Vida Familiar (Family Life), Pastoral Juvenil Hispana (Young Adult Ministry), Catequesis para Adultos Hispanos (Adult Catechesis) as well as providing multiple other programs and classes in

Spanish. Hispanic ministry also accomplishes a great deal through collaboration with several other offices and departments in the diocese.

Sister Elvira Mata, MCDP, associate director of Pastoral Juvenil Hispana, the Spanish equivalent of young adult ministry, says she has seen her ministry grow since she was hired in 2002. When she came in, the department did not have a pastoral council, she said. She figured that a good way to involve more youth was to let them directly oversee each program under the department, so she started a council made up of young adults. The effort resulted in better organization, more interest from young adults, and the formation of more groups under Pastoral Juvenil Hispana. The groups under Pastoral Juvenil are specialized to promote everything from vocations and evangelization, to solidarity and formation.



“We’ve organized ourselves much better. Now we have a pastoral council that organizes, looks at the needs of the program, and responds to those needs, keeps a calendar, and places priorities for the year,” Sr. Elvira said.

The Pastoral Juvenil has been making an influence in the community, said Yasmin Cortina, coordinator of the pastoral council. Pastoral Juvenil has offered more retreats, started new events, and has helped foster new young adult groups at different parishes as well as forming the newly opened “Grupo de Discernimiento,” which helps young adults discern their



vocations, Sr. Elvira said.

“I believe [Pastoral Juvenil] helps a lot because each year we grow a little bit more,” Cortina said. “With the different things the diocese offers, it’s helping build up the young adult toward service and toward knowing God. It’s very difficult at our age, from 18 to 30. It’s as if some young adults don’t even come near the church. It has helped me a lot,” Cortina said, “but I see that in other young adults as well, because every six months there are new [parish] groups and the Pastoral is there supporting them, so that group can grow and stay healthy.”

About 68 percent of Hispanics in the United States identify themselves as Catholic, according to a Pew Hispanic Center 2007 study. The study also shows that two-thirds of Hispanics attend worship services in Spanish. With Hispanics making up more and more of the diocese’s population, one of the challenges facing Hispanic Ministry is the need for more bilingual priests, Aranda said.

“It’s our biggest challenge,” Aranda said. “Nevertheless we are working; we collaborate and the good thing is that we have plenty of laypeople involved in our churches. But as always,” Aranda said, with the vast numbers of Hispanics coming into the diocese, needing ministry at the parish level, “we need more bilingual or Spanish-speaking priests.”



a year of discernment. It allowed him to step out of this world and gain perspective.”

The faith life of the Guatemalan people and the example set by the Carmelites figured largely in his decision to enter the seminary. Fr. McKone calls the experience a time of personal conversion.

“Up until that point I took my faith for granted,” says the cradle Catholic. “Down there I heard stories from the mother superior about people dying for their faith, and that made me take it more seriously.”

While studying for the priesthood, Fr. McKone maintained strong ties to Patzun by returning to help with Holy Week services. At one Easter Vigil liturgy — called Saturday of Glory by the natives — the seminarian and a fellow student watched as villagers carried lit candles up the side of the mountain

toward a large bonfire.

“It was an incredible sight,” Fr. McKone says, remembering the primitive but beautiful Easter celebration.

Ordained on January 5, 2008, the new priest continues to serve on the Diocesan Mission Council along with his sister, Colleen, who is director of social ministry at St. John the Apostle. The hasty adventure that led to a keen interest in foreign missions was no accident, they both say.

“The Holy Spirit is always working and sometimes surprises us,” says Fr. McKone, who encourages others to get involved. “Sometimes you have to take a risk. Don’t worry about worms, the lack of hot water or not speaking Spanish. Mission work is no more dangerous than Six Flags, and the spiritual benefits far outweigh any unpleasantness.”

Safe environment programs train massive numbers to protect our most valuable resource—our children

By Nicki Prevou / Editorial Assistant

As the Diocese of Fort Worth marks 40 years as a community of faith, it is appropriate for its members to reflect upon the Catholic Church's greatest priority, according to Bishop Kevin Vann. "We cherish our young people," he says simply. "We yearn to nurture them, to pass our faith on to the next generation, and we are constantly striving to live up to the grave responsibility of keeping them safe in their homes and in our parish communities and Catholic schools."

Since long before the national Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People was adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in June 2002, the diocese has been committed to the goals of protecting children and seeking to assist in the healing of the victims/survivors of abuse, says Ruth Smith, director of Child and Youth Protection for the Diocese of Fort Worth.

Everyone is aware of the great pain caused by abuse of minors in the diocese and across the country that spurred the creation of the Charter. Bishop Vann has expressed his personal sorrow and anger over this abuse, as matters related to local problems have arisen, but Smith points out these problems occurred despite the efforts of the diocese.

She says that the diocese's first policies to address sexual misconduct by clergy, religious, or lay leaders, were adopted in 1993, indicative of those early efforts to protect children and young people. "These policies were further updated in later years to fully comply with the requirements of the Charter and to create the diocesan program, 'Keeping Children and Youth Safe.'"

Since 2002, the diocese has also worked closely with the USCCB's Office of Child and Youth Protection through regular participation in a national independent audit process, adds Judy Locke, who serves as the diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator. "We have participated in five national audits since 2002," explains Locke. "Each audit is conducted by the

Massachusetts-based Gavin Group, and each year, our diocese has been found to be in full compliance with the provisions and expectations of the Charter."

It is satisfying to know that after going through extensive screening and safe environment training, approximately 25,000 Catholics of all ages, representing 92 parishes and 18 schools within the diocese, annually sign the diocesan Code of Conduct, says Smith. "The Code includes the guidelines on how we, as volunteers and employees in every parish, every school, and every ministry setting within the diocese, are to appropriately conduct ourselves," she explains.

Safe environment programs, offered in partnership with Praesidium, Inc., a national abuse prevention organization, are conducted across the diocese in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. An important aspect of the training is an emphasis upon recognizing personal boundary violations and reporting suspicious behavior, and Christy Schiller, director of Religious Accreditation for Praesidium, says that the Diocese of Fort Worth is, "as usual, ahead of the

game," in this area, especially through the diocese's most recent work to design and offer age-appropriate training to teen leaders who serve as volunteers in parishes and schools.

The sessions, offered through the diocesan office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministry, focus upon teens' responsibility for the safety of the children in their care and also how to protect themselves from potential abuse, harassment, or exploitation.

"Bishop Vann and his excellent staff — Ruth Smith, Mark Simeroth, Judy Locke, and Kevin Prevou — are all to be commended for their hard work and their creative collaboration with ministry leaders across the diocese," says Schiller. "I'm always impressed with the dedication and commitment to youth protection that I see within the Diocese of Fort Worth, which is very much on the cutting edge in terms of promoting a culture of safety. I have seen how this goal to protect young people has become integrated into everything that the diocese does. It's impressive."



Communications Office expands outreach to Catholics and the community through Web, NTC

By Nicki Prevou / Editorial Assistant

Margaret Beaman, parish manager for St. Mary Church in Windthorst and for neighboring St. Boniface Church in Scotland, was pleased to see a photo of her pastor — Father David Kraeger, TOR — accompanied by three beaming teen St. Mary's parishioners in the June 26 issue of the diocesan newspaper.

"It was wonderful to see our young people in the North Texas Catholic," said Beaman. "These are graduating senior high school students who have faithfully served our parish as altar servers since the fifth grade. It is so nice for them, as members of a small, rural church, to receive that recognition."

Pat Svacina, director of Communications for the Diocese of Fort Worth, says that parishioners from faith communities all over the diocese can look forward to reading many more such stories in the North Texas Catholic and on a new diocesan Web site in the near future.

"Bishop Vann is very aware of how diverse our diocese is, culturally and in terms of geography, and what a challenge it is to keep everyone informed and

connected," said Svacina. "Many of our young people are more likely to access information online than through print media. And yet, a significant number of people still want to get their news in a traditional format." As the diocese prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary, it is fitting, said Svacina, that the bishop has announced significant developments in the existing diocesan communications ministry.

"In order to reach out to all the members of our diocese, the bishop has asked that, as of this July, all registered Catholic households receive each published issue of the *North Texas Catholic*," explained Svacina. "Also, a new diocesan Web site will offer the opportunity for expanded content that is not possible, due to space limitations, in the print edition of the paper. More stories and information from all of our parishes will be represented on the new site."

The site, scheduled to launch around Aug. 1, will also allow diocesan ministry departments to make use of technologies such as video streaming, podcasts, blogging, connections to social networking sites, and, eventually, an online payment system

that will allow parishes to register electronically for diocesan events.

Visitors to the new Web site will also be able to find information more easily through the use of several new user-friendly options, said diocesan Web site coordinator Chris Kastner. "In the past few years, we've been using Facebook and Twitter technologies to keep Catholic young adults informed about special Masses, meetings, service opportunities, social gatherings, and educational events, such as Theology on Tap," he added. "The response has been great. Young adults are comfortable with this way of staying connected, so we will continue to expand this type of evangelizing outreach."

Margaret Beaman welcomes the new developments. "By expanding our communications through the Internet," she says, "there can be more sharing between the rural parishes and the city parishes. By seeing what is happening all over the diocese," she reflected, "we can all continue to learn from each other."