

**We've  
Come  
This Far  
by  
Faith**

*A statement compiled  
by the Process Task Force  
from responses presented by the  
Diocesan Pastoral and Priest Councils,  
the Chancery staff  
and Diocesan parishes, schools,  
campus ministries,  
retreat centers and commissions.*

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**The Catholic Diocese of Richmond**

*November 2002  
Revised and Updated  
March 2005*

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# We've Come This Far by Faith

They said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" Luke 24:32

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## Prologue

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As two disciples proceeded to Emmaus, St. Luke recounts, their sorrow was turned into joy at the words of Jesus, the Risen Lord whom they came to recognize in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:35). In this spirit we considered our history, offered praise and thanksgiving for all wonders and graces that the Father has lavished on the Body of Christ alive in this Diocese through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We recognize and appreciate that our many and diverse gifts begin in the same God, and that the voice of the Holy Spirit can be heard in people whom the world finds unlikely, makes unwelcome or leaves unappreciated. For these reasons and others, the statement that follows is welcome evidence that "there is cause for rejoicing here."

Shaped by the Holy Eucharist we celebrate, it remains our prayer that we continue to become:

- a people who give thanks to God as did Christ, our Passover
- ready to proclaim the Good News, as did Christ, the Living Word
- people prepared to sacrifice themselves "for the cause of truth and to defend the right" (Psalm 45:4), as did Christ our Redeemer

We take modest pride in all that the Holy Spirit has compelled us to do, whether this be in the shaping of our values, the facing of our challenges or in the discerning of the needs implicit in the signs of our times.

We are not so bold as to imply that we have done *all* things well, but in faith, hope and love we are ready to embrace the tasks that God sets before us as individuals and as a living sacrament, that is, as the Church. And so, we echo the words of the apostle Paul with humble trust and confident hearts: By the grace of God, we are who we are. For we've come this far by faith.

# Bishop's Letter

Dear People of God in the Diocese of Richmond:

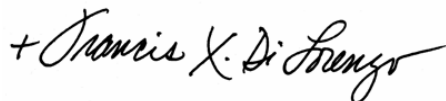
With this printing of *We've Come This Far By Faith* we bring to completion our review of the 2002 document and celebrate the acceptance of its revised contents.

As I stated when I met with parish leadership throughout the diocese, I see this document, *We've Come This Far By Faith*, as the basis of our vision for parish life, which is to become more “welcoming.”

I am invoking a Process Task Force to use the information in this document *We've Come This Far By Faith* as a rationale for developing our goals for this diocese. Eventually the outcome of this effort will become a model for organizing parish life.

The people of the diocese have stated that **based on our collective experience we clearly value**: *Community, Worship, Word, and Service*—these are the characteristics that form a welcoming community. These are our goals as we move forward into the future!

Sincerely yours in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis X. DiLorenzo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo

## INTRODUCTION

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In the Year 2000, when the Diocese of Richmond celebrated the great year of jubilee with Catholics worldwide, Bishop Walter F. Sullivan appointed a diocesan task force consisting of members from the Chancery staff, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the Presbyteral Council to reflect on the state of the Diocese. This group, which became known as the Process Task Force, recognized with Bishop Sullivan that an opportune time had presented itself, a time in which to examine the challenges faced by the Church in southern Virginia, to clarify its values and vision, and (with an eye to Bishop Sullivan's mandatory retirement) to begin building a bridge for the Diocese into a new millennium and an era of new leadership.

As a first step, the Task Force decided to ask the aforementioned leadership groups to respond to the same questions:

- What do we as a Diocese value?
- What are the “signs of the times” that affect us as a Diocese?
- What do we as a Diocese do well?
- What challenges do we face as a Diocese?

Early in 2001, the three groups of leaders presented their responses to the Process Task Force. At Bishop Sullivan's request, the synthesis of those responses was then forwarded to Diocesan parishes, schools, campus ministries and commissions for comments, reactions, and clarifications. Bishop Sullivan published the subsequent reification of the original synthesis in November 2002 as the “diocesan statement,” *We've Come This Far by Faith*.

When Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo was installed as 12<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Richmond, he took the opportunity during his homily to make reference to the statement, which he referred to as a kind of “mini-synod,” and asked, “Is this statement still relevant and, if so, how is it being implemented?” In January 2005, he asked members of parish councils, etc., to revisit *We've Come This Far by Faith*, asking for comments as to the continued value of its contents. On February 14, 2005, the Process Task Force re-gathered to collate the results and to revise the statement as might be necessary.

The responses received were both encouraging and provocative. The things we valued as a Diocese three years ago continue in importance for those who wrote; however, some felt there were “signs of the times” which could have been given greater emphasis in the original document and the import of which has only increased, e.g., the influence of the media. The reactions of some compel the Process Task Force to acknowledge a few presumptions with which we began the original work and which remain operative:

1. The document was written with the assumption that its writers (and readers!) were standing *within* the Church, rooted in its traditions, its councils, magisterium, liturgy and faith. That tacit assumption appears to have required some explicit acknowledgement, hence, its recognition here;

2. It was also understood that the purpose of the statement was to address the concerns of the Diocese as a whole. The Process Task Force believed, then and now, that a program viable in a very large parish may be inappropriate (indeed, impossible) in a smaller one; therefore, it was more important to site the scope and intent of a *kind* of ministry exercised throughout the Diocese without mentioning by name specific applications.
3. There were a few who wished the original document had included more citations of the magisterium. The Task Force wishes to recall that the intention of the document was to marshal the beliefs, impressions and aspirations of God's faithful people in the Diocese. It was never intended to be an academic treatise, nor was it thought that the absence of quotations in anyway diminished its usefulness as a summation of the consensus of the faithful. In the end, the Task Force elected to cite documents only when specific quotations were referenced by *several* writers or where said quotations best summarized the reflections of a very large number of those who responded.

These things being said, those familiar with the 2002 version will discover changes in wording, in the location of some information, in the expansion or refinement of the earlier work. To that end, members of the Process Task Force can only be grateful to Bishop DiLorenzo and all who have helped make this "diocesan statement" a more complete and useful 'roadmap' on our shared journey of faith.

## ***What We Value***

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*Based on our collective experience, the Diocese of Richmond clearly values:*

### **Worship and liturgy**

As Catholics, we believe that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium, 10*). We are a people of faith. At the heart of Catholicism is our belief in God and our salvation through Jesus Christ. We hold our worship of God and the celebration of Eucharist and liturgy in the highest regard. Attributes we experience and value are: reverence, participation, preaching that calls us to authentic discipleship, music that complements the celebration and sacramental life. We form strong communities of prayer that foster faith and celebrate the “Universal Call to Holiness” (*Lumen Gentium, 39*).

### **Transmitting our faith tradition to the next generation**

Because our faith is so important to us, we give our children the opportunity to share that same faith. We recognize that parents are the primary teachers of their children in the ways of faith. We value Catholic education in our schools, in parish programs of Christian formation and in the home. We support continued growth in faith through youth, campus and young adult ministry.

### **Action for justice & peace in the larger society**

We value the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching. As a result, we build up the Body of Christ and make manifest the Reign of God at both the parish and diocesan levels. We are called to be “Sowers of Justice,” living out the Church’s preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. At the parish level, we assist those in need through food pantries and prison ministry. We seek justice in the United States by promoting sustainable economic development in Appalachia and supporting the rights of migrant workers. We show our solidarity with world neighbors through such programs as parish twinning with Haiti and refugee resettlement.

### **A style of ministry that is both creative and collaborative**

Parishes and diocesan staffs enjoy the freedom to discuss and formulate ministries appropriate to local conditions: e.g., our diversity in music, in programs of religious education and in service programs to the homeless or the poor. We respect and trust ministers to act professionally and in the best interests of the church. We appreciate religious leaders who provide vision, especially our priests.

### **Lay participation in the mission of the church**

We desire collaboration between the clergy and the laity so that all can work together for the good of the church and its mission in the world. We believe in nurturing lay leadership through formation programs. The Diocese seeks the active involvement of lay leaders at every level of church life. We also seek to equip the laity for their mission to be leaven in the world.

## **Inclusion of all people in the church**

We value the universal nature of the church and seek to support and encourage people of all backgrounds to become actively involved in our mission. Our Diocese ranges from the mountains to the Piedmont to the sea. We are urban, suburban and rural. Our church is blessed with the enthusiasm of youth and the wisdom of age. We are all enriched by a variety of races, ethnicities and cultures that shape local traditions.

## **Community**

By this, parishioners mean a sense of family or community in our parishes where we experience intimacy, fellowship, and warmth. Hospitality is marked by inclusive openness and social activities that encourage togetherness and acceptance.

## ***Signs of the Times***

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*The Catholic community in our Diocese finds the following "signs of the times" to be critical for the church of southern Virginia in this new millennium:*

### **The frantic pace of life**

We live in a world with many opportunities, distractions and demands. We have competing priorities and become overly active. There is simply not enough time in the day for all we feel we need to do. This frantic pace directly impacts the quality of life of families and communities that no longer spend time with one another. Yet, "rest is something sacred, because it is man's way of withdrawing from the sometimes excessively demanding cycle of earthly tasks in order to renew his awareness that everything is the work of God." (*Dies Domini*, 65)

### **A decline in the number of clergy along with a sharp increase in the Catholic population**

We have experienced a decline in the number of men pursuing a vocation to the priesthood and a drop in the number of ordinations. The average age of the clergy is rising. At the same time, the average age of lay staff people and leaders has risen. There is an increased need to draw in younger leaders and to use new forms of leadership within our church to serve our growing population.

### **The tension between the values of our faith and of the secular culture**

There is a growing secularization of society and a disregard for moral values. This leads to conflict between the values of the church and of society. The values of the church are increasingly seen as outdated, which presents a special challenge to ministry with our young people. This is exacerbated by inaccurate information and negative images of the church presented in the media. We are living in what Pope John Paul II has called "a culture of death." There is a marked need for transforming the basic structures of our society and an increasing call to stand for the value of life in all its manifestations.

### **Tensions within the church**

There is an undercurrent of apprehension both within the Diocese and the wider Church. In part this can be credited to a media culture that highlights extremes of theological opinion. Despite the many consultative bodies in the Church, many persons still feel their voices are not heard. The blessings of active lay participation in the life of the church have sometimes resulted in conflicts in parishes and diocesan committees. Differences in liturgical style, language and music can be a source of tension at times. In addition, following the revelations of child sexual abuse, there has emerged a crisis of trust in our hierarchical and clerical church structures.

### **The diversity of our population**

Southern Virginia, along with the rest of the United States, continues to experience an influx of immigrants from around the world. In different parts of the Diocese, liturgies are offered in many languages. People bring different customs and different expectations for the church. This brings a new emphasis on ministers who can respond across cultures and parishes where all cultures are appreciated. Beside this ethnic and cultural diversity, intergenerational issues seem to heighten the challenge for communities and ministers.

### **The challenge of new communication technologies**

Technology changes rapidly. Many ministers are not trained in the use of information systems. Every organization struggles to assess new technologies as they become available and to determine how best to use the new capabilities. The church is also faced with determining how to take advantage of these new possibilities – especially the Internet and e-mail – in pursuing its mission of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

### **Terrorism, war & violence**

The fear and dread brought on by the September 11 terrorist attacks and the escalation of warfare and violence internationally and domestically pervades the news and affects the psyche. The dark side of the new technologies is the proliferation of new weaponry, the division between those who have access and those who don't, and all the moral dilemmas which technology creates.

## ***What We Do Well***

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*In reflecting on our recent history, we believe that the following are strengths of the Diocese:*

### **Social outreach to those who are poor and marginalized in society**

We reach out to our brothers and sisters in need in many ways. Through Refugee and Immigration Services, the Diocese and parishes assist immigrants and refugees who are fleeing violence and persecution in their native lands. Through Catholic Charities agencies, we help families facing crises and children in need of foster care or adoption. Through adult care centers, we help older adults and let them know they have not been forgotten. Through parish outreach and emergency assistance, food pantries and clothing closets, we help those who require basic support to survive. Through legislative advocacy, parishioners across the Diocese seek to promote human life and protect creation by shaping public policy.

### **A strong and vibrant spirit of ecumenism and interfaith cooperation**

The Diocese maintains good relations with other denominations and joins in common prayer services with them. The Diocesan Ecumenical Commission is in dialog with equivalent bodies from other faiths. We gather as Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics through the annual LARC Conference. The Diocese promotes better understanding and greater respect for all people of faith through its involvement in the Virginia Council of Churches and interfaith efforts. On the parish level, we enter into creative partnerships with other congregations to meet basic local needs and share spiritual growth.

### **Strong pastoral presence throughout the geographic area of the Diocese**

Under the leadership and example of our bishop, our priests and pastoral ministers practice a service of presence. By being with the people of God, especially in times of crisis, they reflect God's presence. Our pastoral leaders are perceived as approachable and available to the people.

### **Lay participation in the life of the church**

Our Diocese is blessed with a large variety of effective ministries in our parishes and institutions. This would not be possible without the devotion of many lay people who willingly contribute much of their time and energy. The variety of ministries is a sign that our people use the talents God has given them for the service of the church and the world.

### **Formation of strong faith communities united in worship**

We worship not alone, but in communities that gather to share our common faith. We value the quality of our liturgical celebrations for all our sacraments. Our parishes are rural, urban and suburban, ranging from 20 to 4,500 families. The bonds we form in these parishes put a face on the love that God has for us, and make concrete the reality of the one family of God. Our Diocese encourages the formation of diverse faith communities and the unity of these communities with the universal church.

## **Effective Programs of Christian formation**

There is a thirst to know and understand the Catholic faith that is met through many different Christian formation programs. In particular, our Diocese has had great success in using the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA/CICCA) to help people come to an appreciation of Catholicism and become integrated into the community of the church. Gratitude is cited for the education/faith formation programs that serve the needs of the people at every age level.

## ***Challenges***

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*In reflecting on the “signs of the times,” those responding identify the following challenges for the Diocese of Richmond in this new millennium:*

### **Resources for Liturgy and Worship**

Because we value our experience of worship and liturgy, we recognize the need for a diocesan Office of Worship to resource parishes and all ministries as they plan meaningful liturgies, implement guidelines and provide answers regarding sacramental questions.

### **More effective collaboration in developing plans for the future**

There have been several momentous events in the Diocese during the last thirty years. These events were marked by enormous planning efforts to build a vision and make it real. They were most successful and sustained not only when parishes and schools participated, but when diocesan leadership – the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council and the Chancery staff – collaborated with each other and with the Bishop in naming the dream and planning for its realization. Energy, imagination and solidarity were multiplied when the talents and unique insights of each group were combined. The challenges below can be met most effectively if diocesan leadership is expected to plan collaboratively.

### **Vocation to ministry**

The Diocese is gifted with many creative and energetic priests, religious and lay ministers. Yet we face the reality of limited personnel resources with rapidly growing needs. By our prayer and action we should encourage vocations to the priesthood, religious life and lay ministry within the church. We must also call forth, train and mentor volunteers to work in close collaboration with our staff people.

### **Keeping our current leadership people healthy**

As personnel decrease and the Catholic population increases, there is a tendency to stretch the resources to try to maintain a pastoral presence. This can aggravate the situation by overworking our limited pastoral staffs. As the average age of priests and lay staff continues to rise, there will be increasing health problems. Since personnel are such a precious resource, care must be taken to maintain the health and well being of our church ministers. Important elements of this formation process are attention to the well being of body, mind and spirit.

### **Promote diversity in diocesan leadership**

It should always be the intention of our Diocese to invite young adults, women and people of different cultural backgrounds into the ministries and leadership of the church, and seek their full participation in its life. Immigration continues to diversify the population and the leadership of the church needs to reflect these demographic trends. As the present leadership of the Diocese ages, we must train new leaders and allow the voice of young adults to become an integral part of decision-making.

### **Seeking balance between independence & consistency in ministry**

While our Diocese values a broad degree of local independence in setting the tone for ministry, there is also a need for some level of consistency throughout the Diocese. These two desires create a tension that is a continuing challenge. Both of these legitimate needs must be balanced carefully and creatively.

### **Adult formation (particularly preparation for their ministry in the world)**

While we have devoted much attention to the religious training of our children, we have not always offered educational religious programs for our adult population. The universal church challenges us to critically examine the emphasis and resources dedicated to adult formation. Of particular concern is the lack of preparation for adult Catholics to be a “light to the world” in their vocation as spouse, parent, worker and citizen. The church calls us to be global citizens committed to personal acts of charity as well as social action for systemic change.

### **Catholic Schools**

For generations our Catholic schools have been communities of faith, where vocations to the religious life were fostered and future Catholic leaders were shaped. Shifting demographics, aging buildings, and stagnant or uneven financial support from our parishes and diocese have placed our schools beyond the reach of many of our families and of those whom they would serve. The challenge to make our schools accessible and affordable begs to be addressed by the whole Church.

### **More effective use of communication technology within the Diocese**

In a Diocese as vast as ours communication has always been a challenge. However, many new communication technologies are becoming available to aid us in drawing closer together, but any new technology is only useful when effectively and efficiently utilized. Our Diocese, as any large organization, is faced with evaluating new technologies and determining how best they can be harnessed to further our mission and the glory of God. Finally, the Diocese needs to utilize its personnel, organizational structures and communications technology in new and creative ways.

### **Stewardship**

Our Diocese has always practiced fiscal responsibility and has a sound financial management structure. However, the many challenges facing us (e.g., just wages for employees) require a renewed focus on Christian stewardship. Our God has gifted us with time, talent and treasure and calls each of us to be generous and just in the use of these resources.

### **The large number of ecumenical and interfaith marriages in our parishes**

Catholics in Southern Virginia are a small minority. With a diverse mix of faiths, less than half of all marriages in our parishes are between two Catholics. This is a significant challenge for maintaining our uniquely Catholic identity, as well as an opportunity to build bridges of understanding in ecumenical and interfaith relationships.

### **Building and maintaining a Catholic presence in our community**

As faith communities grow they face the challenge of welcoming and integrating the newcomer. This is complicated by the ever-increasing need for larger worship and program space. Many of these parishioners are members of the new immigrant population, which presents the opportunity to learn ways of becoming culturally diverse at all community gatherings including liturgy. As mentioned before the complexity of this challenge is heightened when the planning groups consider the needs of all generations including the elderly population.

## EPILOGUE

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“For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven,” reads a familiar verse from Ecclesiastes (3:1). In the five years since the Process Task Force was formed, the Church has passed through many seasons: of peace and war, of security and domestic terrorism, of widespread lay ministry and—lamentably—incidents of clerical disgrace. God’s purposes in such times are not always easily discerned, and each season prompts us to examine again our need for renewal in holiness through God’s gift of grace.

Yet even in the most troubled of these times, the declarations received from parishes, schools, campus ministries, societies of Christ’s faithful and institutions of service offer a continued prospect for hope. Where challenges remain, they’ve failed to dim the confidence that is ours in Jesus Christ. The desire for justice, the commitment to common worship, the quest for oneness and diversity remain common themes in Catholic communities of every sort throughout the portion of the Commonwealth that is our Diocese of Richmond.

As committed Christians, we are not blind to our foibles and failings. “What we value” is not always visible in what we do, nor can we say that “what we do well” could not be done better. It remains for every diocesan entity to incarnate more fully the life that is ours in Christ. When this reflection in due season intimates how far we have yet to travel, it offers, too, a welcome vision of how far we’ve come by faith.