A Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry

Introduction

The Diocese of Belleville has long been home for Hispanic peoples in several geographic areas. Through the years, our church has responded to that reality by offering pastoral care whenever possible and by a sharing of resources. Most Latinos are baptized Catholic and hold their Catholic faith as a precious gift in their lives. We are challenged to find ways, despite language and cultural differences, to be a warm and welcoming faith community for all who live among us. To receive and integrate the gifts of faith and culture of the Hispanic community into our parish families is, for the Church of southern Illinois, a true “moment of grace.”

Steps already taken:

1. A Spanish Policy was promulgated (from the Office of the Bishop of Belleville) in May 2001, requiring that all seminarians who enter studies for ordination to the priesthood in the Diocese of Belleville must become sufficiently fluent in Spanish to offer Mass and sacraments in that language.

2. On August 1, 2001, the Office of Hispanic Ministry was opened and a coordinator was hired to assist in fostering our commitment to be a welcoming church for Hispanics and to coordinate the pastoral ministry efforts to attain this vision.

3. Diocesan Hispanic Youth Days were held yearly since 2002. These days brought Hispanic youth from around the diocese to meet each other, to discuss common ideas and problems, and to share faith. The Diocesan Office of Youth Ministry has, at times, collaborated in preparing and participating in these events.

4. Sharing sessions have occurred since December 2002. These meetings have brought together Hispanic persons, committed laity, pastors and ministers among Hispanics, and diocesan personnel. In January 2016, a representative group from geographic areas was invited to participate in the process of revising this Hispanic Ministry Plan for our diocese. Their input was included in the 2016 revision.

5. The Hispanic Plan of 2004 listed the following goals as foundational for forming a diocesan plan. These goals were affirmed by the 2016 representative group (#4) with several additions:
Prioritized Goals: (as of 12/3/03) (additions-2016)

A. Development of Hispanic Leaders in our diocese
B. Establishment of welcoming committees (regional/parish) for visiting all newcomers of the area
C. Affirmation and challenging of Hispanic youth who straddle two cultures
D. Increasing Hispanic pastoral personnel when possible, especially bi-lingual priests
E. Advocating for justice for immigrants
F. Promoting educational opportunities for Hispanic adults and children
G. Ministering to seasonal migrant workers
H. Partnering Hispanic families with other parishioner families for support and mutual enrichment
I. Bringing an awareness of Latino communities to all parishes, including those with few immigrant parishioners.

A National Call

In December of 2002, the United States Bishops published a revised National Plan for Hispanic Ministry. They issued a call to all Catholics for conversion of heart, for building communion in mission, and for standing in solidarity with Hispanics. They urged each diocese to make an assessment of needs, establish priorities and develop local strategies for responding to the gift of the Hispanic presence in our church. This call from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has continued through the years. In 2014, the USCCB, through its Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, published “Best Practices for Shared Parishes.” This booklet offers insights for intercultural sensitivity and discusses the Catholic understanding of parish life and mission. It suggests a developmental process for ecclesial integration, inclusion, and stewardship in shared parishes. This booklet is available thru the USCCB online store http://store.usccb.org/best-practices-for-shared-parishes-p/7-389.htm or contact the Office of Hispanic Ministry at (618) 235-9601 x 1292.

A Diocesan Plan of Action

1. The diocese will make ongoing efforts to provide bi-lingual ministers in those regions where a large number of Catholics speak Spanish as their first and primary language, so that they may participate in the sacramental life of the church and feel ‘at home’.

2. Diocesan departments are asked to identify how each will be able to respond and contribute to answering the calls and the goals in this Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry. We encourage them to share their planning with appropriate persons in parishes, schools and other departments. These efforts may inspire and be of help throughout the diocese.
3. The **Office of Hispanic Ministry** will offer support and, when possible, materials and supplies for developing Hispanic lay leadership. These efforts will be done in consultation with the Department of Faith Formation, which shares the responsibility for lay leadership development.

4. Each **Vicariate**, through the leadership of the Vicar Forane, is asked to engage in serious reflection, at least twice a year, on the present practices of welcoming within its parishes and then plan and work together toward a renewed regional effort that is inclusive of all.

5. Each **parish** is asked to participate in the Vicariate effort described above. Furthermore, we ask that the parish staff identify the Latino Catholic youth and personally invite them to active participation in parish and diocesan youth programs for faith formation and social development. Catholic schools and parish schools of religion are asked to recognize and teach appreciation of cultural differences and the art of gracious welcoming.

6. Advocacy for justice must be intensified, especially on behalf of immigrants, poor families, and those suffering from discrimination in society at large and in the workplace. Social ministry is a task for all of us. The Office of Hispanic Ministry will collaborate with Catholic Charities of Southern Illinois and other groups in educating about and promoting political legislative action on issues of justice affecting Hispanics, such as comprehensive immigration reform, human rights, and education.

*Specific strategies for responding to this Plan of Action for the Diocese of Belleville are offered in the appendix.*

**Conclusion:**

In order to strengthen the Unity of the Body of Christ in our diocese while honoring and celebrating the cultural diversity of our Church I, your bishop, make the following call to action.

- a. I call all Catholic people of the diocese and each parish community to renew and build up the spirit of Christ-like acceptance, hospitality, and welcoming.

- b. I invite all of our Hispanic brothers and sisters in Christ to full participation in the life of our Catholic parishes and diocesan church.

- c. I ask that Latinos share their gifts of culture and faith with the diocesan family and I call them to take up their role in the mission of the church as, **together**, we build the **one** Body of Christ.

- d. I recognize and support the urgent need for the training of Hispanics in ministry roles for lay leadership within the Catholic parishes and for their service on parish councils and diocesan boards.
e. I challenge all pastors and parish leaders to be especially sensitive and helpful to Latino children and youth, who straddle two cultures, experience dual ways of faith expression and family life, and who carry within them great potential and hope for the future of our Catholic Church.

The Priests, Deacons, Religious, the Christian Faithful and I are aware of the fact that the number of Hispanic Catholics in our Diocese continues to grow. Members of Hispanic communities are present in more and more of our parishes. These brothers and sisters in Christ bring to our Diocese unique histories and cultures from their country of origin as well as a long history of dedication to the Catholic Church. They are an example to us all of what it means to learn your faith, love your faith, and live your faith, even in the face of challenging circumstances. Our Hispanic neighbors remind each of us that the human family and the Catholic Church family are much larger and much richer than the family of our relatives, our friends, and our neighbors of many years. We are committed to welcoming and extending a hand of support to each individual and to each family that chooses to live, work, and pray in the various communities of southern Illinois. I am pleased to share with you this brief but important document, “All Are Welcome:” Hispanic Ministry in Southern Illinois, an Update to the 2004 Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

Let us pray and hope that these pages will inspire us in our ministry of welcome to all newcomers of different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds into our communities and into our family of faith.

FROM THE DIOCESAN CURIA, MARCH 5TH IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 2017, THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville

************************************
APPENDIX

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me, hungry and you fed me…”
Matt. 25: 35-41

Answering the Call
Suggested Strategies for Implementation

The strategies listed here were derived from suggestions given at various gatherings or through dialog and experience. The Office of Hispanic Ministry invites you to share additional ideas or practices that might serve to help others in implementing this Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry.

I. WELCOMING:

“The pastoral plan calls for trained mobile teams to go into the community to visit families and to invite them to become closer to the life of the Church, especially those families who feel distant and marginalized.”

Encuentro and Mission
-- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Suggested Strategies:
At the Vicariate Level:

The Vicar Forane of each of the five vicariates should make the process for “welcoming all newcomers” an important point of discussion at least twice a year at the pastoral leadership meetings of the Vicariate. This should lead to:

a. an assessment of population trends, and a recognition of the presence of Hispanics and other newcomers in the area, including the migrant laborers who live or work in the region seasonally;

b. a Vicariate study of the present practices and approaches to actively welcoming and including newcomers and immigrants of the area into a Catholic faith community;

c. training and commissioning representative parishioners to be a Vicariate team to serve in this ministry of welcoming and including on behalf of each parish;

d. identification of bi-lingual translators who can assist pastors, as needed, and be available to accompany representatives on pastoral visits with Hispanic families;

e. an assessment of the pastoral needs of Hispanics of the Vicariate and creative responses, including an outreach ministry to migrants, both churched and unchurched;
f. pastoral sharing of personnel and resources for this task as the parish partnerships of
THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING continue to develop
in our diocese.

(The Office of Hispanic Ministry will offer assistance to Vicariates or committees upon request.)

At the Parish Level:

Pastors and Parish Life Coordinators can take leadership by:

a. participating in Vicariate efforts, such as those listed above

b. reviewing this Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry with the parish council in order to
assess the specific parish responsibilities and needs and to plan appropriate follow-up;

c. adopting action steps to respond to pastoral needs and efforts for inclusion as they are
discovered by the parish representatives (example: the procedures to be followed for
children and adults who wish to receive Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony and other
sacraments);

d. calling all parishioners, through homilies and other teaching moments, to a
“conversion of heart” in facing the fears and attitudes, so prevalent in our society, of
racism, nativism* and hostility to the stranger.

* “Nativism is an attitude that assumes there is just one image of a ‘real American’ and
that immigrants cannot live up to it or willfully refuse to do so. This attitude can also be
present in the church when established members insist there is just one way to worship,
one set of hymns, one language, one way to organize, and that immigrants must adapt. In
holding to this attitude, we forget our own ancestors whose legacy developed from
encounters between differing traditions within the Church.”

Welcoming the Stranger Among Us—USCCB

e. providing continued education on cultural differences and cultural gifts;

f. including the “ministry of welcoming and including” on parish pastoral council
   agendas to show its importance for parish development;

g. identifying, by name and age, the Hispanic youth who attend public and private
   schools in the community and finding ways to include them in the life of the parish
   and in other youth activities (perhaps through development of peer teen mentors at the
   parish or geographic level);
h. welcoming Hispanic families as full members of the Catholic parish by including them in the parish register and in all communications. Where possible, introducing these families to the larger parish community and establishing a ‘family-to-family’ relationship between a parish member and the new family;

i. Providing liturgical material in Spanish for those who wish to follow the Mass in the language of their heart;

j. Where appropriate, post information and signage in Spanish.

“So that the liturgy may be the summit and source of Christian life, the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, must foster a feeling of ‘being at home’.”

Encuentro and Mission--USCCB

II. Development of Hispanic Leaders:
Bridge Building for a Culturally Diverse Church

“An evangelizing catechesis and a solid formation are more necessary today than ever. Such formation is about the acquisition of wisdom, understood as truth in love.”

“...Small ecclesial communities...are a prophetic challenge for the renewal of the church...and can serve to stem the loss of Hispanic Catholics to other faith traditions.”

Encuentro and Mission ---USCCB

Suggested Strategies:

a. Each vicariate should make an effort to bring together potential Hispanic leaders for a listening session regarding the needs of the Hispanic community in their geographic area. Through this dialog and expression of willingness to serve, the beginnings of a faith renewal program and adult catechesis may take shape. Hispanic Readers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should also be trained for service and inclusion.

b. Where it is not possible to have Mass in Spanish and where Hispanics attend Mass in English, pastors are encouraged to consider a bi-lingual approach that incorporates Spanish in song and in the proclamation of the Word. Hispanic parishioners who are trained Readers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion can use their gifts for the whole parish at these times as witness to the Unity of the Body of Christ, even as we recognize and celebrate diversity.

c. Some of our diocesan clergy should learn how to celebrate the Mass and to proclaim the Gospel in Spanish. Further assistance and training can be provided for those clergy who express their willingness to respond to this need in our diocese. This added training would help to assure both the readiness of the celebrant, and introduce him to the cultural customs and practices that accompany worship in Hispanic communities.
d. If a bi-lingual priest is not available for sacramental outreach, such as Baptism and First Communion, pastors and deacons can purchase bi-lingual texts for these celebrations, in order to accommodate family members who are not able to understand English. Active parishioners who are bi-lingual and who have participated in theological renewal or catechesis training can be especially helpful to pastors, administrators, parish life coordinators, deacons and families on these occasions.

The Office of Hispanic Ministry will provide assistance to the Vicars Forane and parish leaders as they invite Hispanics to renewal and leadership in the church.

III. **Sharing Culture, Faith Practices and Celebrations:**

“Hispanics have emerged from the blending of different races and cultures, which has resulted in a new people. Even though Hispanics find their ancestors in many different countries, most share a common faith and language, as well as a culture rooted in the Catholic faith. These elements...are even more important for Hispanics in the United States as they struggle to define their own identity in a culturally diverse context and under pressure to assimilate.”

*Encuentro and Mission--USCCB*

**Suggested Strategies:**

a. Pastors, Parish Life Coordinators and other parish leaders can engage others in healthy dialog about diversity and race and can encourage a “conversion of heart.” Parish groups should invite persons of another culture to share with them about their country of origin, their faith practices, and their celebrations.

b. Libraries in your parish and school should be checked to make sure that there are good books and publications for broadening understanding of various cultures and appreciating the gift of diversity. Principals and Directors of the Parish School of Religion should be encouraged to use the online Diocesan Library [http://diocesebelleville.mysurpass.net/](http://diocesebelleville.mysurpass.net/) of the Department of Faith Formation for visual helps for teachers on this topic.

c. Pastoral leaders, principals of schools and parents should carefully listen for teachable moments that occur in daily life in regard to “others” and their differences. They should remind those who make negative comments about people of other cultures that an attitude of “them and us” has no place in the life of the Catholic Church. They should repeat the Good News that all persons are made in the image of God and that we are one in the Body of Christ.
IV. Affirmation and Challenge to Hispanic Youth

“Make the formation of young Hispanics, especially young adult Hispanics, an urgent priority. Support young Hispanics on their educational attainment efforts, catechetical formation, and human and leadership development.”

Encuentro and Mission--USCCB

“We ask that special attention be given to migrant and immigrant children and youth as they straddle two cultures, especially to give them opportunities for leadership and service in the community and to encourage vocations among them.”

Strangers No Longer --Pastoral Letter by U.S. and Mexican Bishops, 2003

Suggested Strategies:

a. Each parish should compile a list of the names of Hispanic youth and present these to the youth leaders. A parish representative should also call the Office of Hispanic Ministry for a copy of their list of Latino youth in their town. The Vicariate should then plan events to bring the cultures together by compiling a Vicariate list of Hispanic youth. This list should also be shared with the Office of Hispanic Ministry and with the Office of Youth Ministry so that Latino youth are included in invitations to various diocesan events.

b. Parishes, schools or vicariates should invite the Office of Youth Ministry (and perhaps a staff person from the Office of Hispanic Ministry) to lead groups of culturally diverse youth in a discussion about diversity. This experience would allow young people to explore both feelings and stereotypes. These conversations would also develop greater awareness of cultural differences and gifts, and lead to mutual understanding.

c. The Department of Faith Formation should enter into dialog with diocesan Catholic school officials about focused efforts that could be made to recruit and enroll Hispanic Catholic youth into their schools. Such discussion would need to include the potential of tuition assistance and/or locating resources for tuition assistance for these Catholic families. This recommendation is made, recognizing that Hispanics account for the largest percent of growth in the Catholic Church, and studies show that more than 55% of all U.S. Catholics under the age of 30 are Hispanic. (See also the Boston College Report of 2016, “Catholic Schools in an Increasingly Hispanic Church” by Hosffman Ospino and Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill.)

d. Strategies should be developed for including Hispanic youth in diocesan sponsored events throughout the diocese (Camp Ondessonk, Diocesan Youth Conference, etc.…).

e. Faith formation for Hispanic youth of all ages is vital to the future of the Church. If Hispanic youth are not in the Catholic schools of the area, special outreach efforts should be initiated to receive these young people in the Parish School of Religion. Latino youth might be more likely to accept an invitation and continue to attend if they were partnered with an Anglo friend.
V. Advocacy

“A commitment to social justice is one of the pillars of Hispanic ministry. This commitment should involve ongoing formation on Catholic social teaching and collaboration on advocacy and public policy issues.”

Encuentro and Mission—USCCB

Suggested Strategies:

a. A Parish Pastoral Council representative or a committee member for social concerns should be added to the Advocacy Network, used by the Office of Hispanic Ministry, to disseminate key information (especially from USCCB Justice for Immigrants Committee) on pending legislation regarding immigrants. While it is difficult to fully understand the plight of the migrant worker, the fears experienced by the undocumented, border issues, family reunification needs, etc., there are times when there is clarity and when “action on behalf of justice” can be taken by all of us. (To be added to this e-mail network, call 618-235-9601 ext. 1292.)

b. English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are available in some areas. Tutoring help is often needed beyond such classes. Among us are senior citizens, retired teachers or potential friends who might be willing to partner with a Latino family in their learning efforts. (Parishes should begin by having a sign-up opportunity for “language mentors”.) Taking Latino family members who are learning English on a mini-field trip to grocery stores, gas stations, schools, etc., for simple language practice could be an exciting experience and an act of Christian charity.

Evaluation of the Diocesan Plan:

“Knowledge, attitudes, and skills in intercultural and interracial relations are indispensable requirements for engaging in the Church’s evangelizing mission to preach, teach and witness to the Gospel”. (Evangelii Nuntiandi no. 20)

a. In order to assure that this Diocesan Plan for Hispanic Ministry is a document that energizes all pastoral leaders to action that is inclusive of diverse cultures, and especially the Hispanics among us, leaders are invited to inform the Office of Hispanic Ministry about their efforts in this regard. Gathering such information in a central location will benefit others who are involved in the mission of the Catholic church here in southern Illinois.
b. Pastors and leaders are asked to reread and reflect on this document annually and to encourage members of the Parish Pastoral Council and other key parish leaders to do the same.

c. At least once a year, the Parish Pastoral Council is encouraged to include on their agenda an evaluation of efforts made and actions taken to welcome and integrate Hispanics into the life of the parish.

Office of Hispanic Ministry
Catholic Diocese of Belleville
2620 Lebanon Avenue
Belleville, IL 62221
(618) 235-9601 x 1292