



December 22, 2005

Dear friends in Christ,

On the first anniversary of my installation as the Bishop of Helena, I announced that the beginning of formal pastoral planning was within reach. That journey began with my sure knowledge that a collaborative process of looking at the needs of the diocese was a pressing necessity. The appointment of the Director of Pastoral Planning, Sister Rita McGinnis in June and, in late summer, the naming of the members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council began to give form to this vision. The process will now seek the input of the whole diocese for the formulation of a Pastoral Plan for the Diocese of Helena that will shape our next five years. The Diocesan Pastoral Council is a great gift to this diocese and has been meeting faithfully for these last months, preparing for the planning process to move into the parishes and vicariates.

I have strong trust in the *sensus fidelium*, the wisdom of God's faithful people. There is every indication that as the Parish Preparation Process and Vicariate Listening Sessions move forward through the parishes and the vicariates, we will begin to harvest the best thinking and imagination of our people to bend toward a future full of hope.

This is a graced moment in the life of our diocese and one that we need to be especially attentive to if the opportunity we have been given is not to be lost. I write to urge you to pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit to bless our efforts to be open to the directions and priorities that need to be our focus these next five years. I write to urge you *to be present* at the Parish Preparation Process that will be hosted in your parish and to bring your best insights and dreams for the future. Those of you who are chosen from your parishes to be delegates, to carry the work of the parish to the vicariate level, are commissioned to be the voices of your parish and to listen thoughtfully to the wonderful variety of thought within your region. Our vision must be the broad vision of Jesus who calls us to this work of building up His body, the Church, and whose mission must be our own.

There is much to be done, much to be hopeful for and I count on your good prayers and cooperation, along with the leadership of your pastors, to continue the journey with me.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Leo Thomas".

Most Reverend George Leo Thomas  
Bishop of Helena