

June 16, 2009

My Dear Brother Priests:

This Friday, June 19, 2009, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, marks the opening of the Year for Priests. Our Holy Father has designated this important year to coincide with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St. Jean Marie Vianney, “Cure of Ars” and Patron Saint of Parish Priests. How significant that the Church initiates this special time of attention to her priestly ministers on this great feast of love! The charism for the priest is a pastoral charity which reflects the love and warmth of a heart on fire with the divine love of Jesus’ own heart.

I write to you, my brother priests, as my close collaborators in serving the people entrusted to our care in the particular Church of the Diocese of Stockton. As a diocese we are “a section of the People of God.... in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active.” (Christus Dominus, II 1.11) With you as my friends and co-workers, we labor daily to build up the body of Christ.

During this year I hope that together we can take a fresh look at what best will provide for your spiritual, intellectual and material welfare. As bishop and priests we want to live holy lives in the service of God, diligently preaching the Word of God, faithfully presiding over the celebration of the Church’s liturgy, and devoting ourselves as good shepherds in the care of our people. We are sent to heal those who suffer and are hurting; to reconcile those who have distanced themselves from God and from one another in the Church; to bring the peace of the gospel to a troubled world; to strengthen the poor; to offer a helping hand to the oppressed; and to be prophets within a Church which is called to be a sign and instrument for the unity of the human family. In our spiritual leadership we are witnesses to the dignity of every human person and are guardians of the precious jewel of life created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. As priests we build bridges of communion with one another in Christ.

Thank you for accepting the call of God to serve as a priest in our diocese. May the Holy Spirit strengthen you and sustain you in these challenging times. May God’s Spirit enlighten you with the wisdom necessary to inspire all our faithful people to exercise their rights and duties as members of the Church in serving the Kingdom of God. May the Spirit of the Lord Jesus be a source of consolation and joy in your daily life as a devoted priest of Jesus Christ. I ask each of you to embrace with new fervor the vision set forth for all our people in the Diocesan Synod: “Full, active, conscious participation in the mission and life of our Church.”

On the last Sunday in October, under the leadership of the Serra Club and Worldwide Marriage Encounter, our parishes will celebrate Priesthood Sunday – a special celebration in the Year for Priests. Information will soon be coming your way.

Page 2  
My Brother Priests  
June 16, 2009

In July or August, 2010, we anticipate a visit from Bishop Guy Bagnard, of the Diocese of Belley-Ars. He will bring with him the relic of the Incompact "heart" of St. John Vianney. Several days of devotion are being planned.

Lastly, I invite all of you, my brother priests, to attend the blessing of the St. John Vianney House of Formation located in the Newman House at the University of the Pacific. The blessing will take place at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 23, 2009, followed by a barbeque reception. Only the priests and Serra Club members are being invited due to space limitations. Father David Dutra has been appointed as Director of the House.

My prayer for you, dear brothers, is that this year will be a fruitful and joyful one for you, giving new zeal to your priestly commitment, and deepening your love for our great High Priest Jesus Christ.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire  
Roman Catholic Bishop of Stockton

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