

The Journey of Bishop John W. Yanta in the Diocese of Amarillo

In this exclusive interview with the West Texas Catholic, Bishop Yanta reflects upon the many ways God has prepared His faithful servant to do His work in the Diocese of Amarillo

Whatever God does will endure forever; there is no adding to it, or taking from it. Thus has God done that he may be revered. – Ecclesiastes 3:14

By Rita Diller

WTC Editor-in-Chief

WTC: Bishop Yanta, what are your thoughts, plans and desires as you enter this new season of your life, retiring from your mission as the seventh Bishop of Amarillo and looking toward the future?

Bishop Yanta: I have been full speed ahead since my ordination 52 years ago.

You know you are on a journey, day by day, and you must discern the will of God on a daily basis as you go through life. At this point I must discern the will of God on a daily basis – how I can strive to be faithful – and offer myself in service to the Church, as the Lord will point out through bishops and others.

I am looking forward to taking time out to assess and take stock. I must make adjustments for my age and health impairments. I want to be fully engaged wherever the Lord places me.

Abraham knew he had to go on a long trip. The Lord enlightened him on a daily basis.

I have always been a very active person, looking for new opportunities, challenges. At the same time I like solitude. I will now have more time to pray, to read the beautiful documents of the Church. It is more important to be than to do. The short route to holiness is doing the will of God.

WTC: What blessings stand out the most in your mind, that you have seen accomplished during your ministry and during your tenure as Bishop of Amarillo?

Bishop Yanta: When John Paul II became pope there was a decided change in my life. I was



One of Bishop Yanta's great loves is Catholic education. Here he is pictured surrounded by students at Holy Cross Catholic Academy on the Feast of St. Nicholas, in this WTC file photo.

WTC File Photo

inspired by his leadership. It was obvious the Lord had really prepared him for the papacy. He brought us back to the focal point: Christ – the same today, yesterday and forever.

The Lord has called me to many projects. Each of them was a calling from the Lord.

Pro-Life Movement

The Lord is always preparing us for the future. I had a Johnny-come-lately start with the pro-life movement during the early nineties, while I was a parish priest in San Antonio.

That led to my arrest at New Women's Center on the 20th anniversary of Roe v Wade, Jan. 22, 1993. That was a turning point for me and many collaborators.

When I arrived in Amarillo, I could not believe there were 19 Planned Parenthood Centers in the geographical boundaries of our diocese.

I was already convinced that the greatest power on earth is prayer and I knew this must be given over to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The rosary would be the solution.

So we had groups of people begin praying the rosary on the sidewalk

outside these facilities. And it happened so quickly that these facilities shut down with only one remaining open today – you have to attribute that to the Holy Spirit's power.

Natural Family Planning

I also look on the establishment of our diocese as an NFP diocese as one of the great blessings the Lord has given us.

We are one of only seven dioceses in the U.S. that require a full course in Natural Family Planning – and one of only four at the time the requirement was initiated.

Natural Family Planning attacks sterilization, contraception, and abortion. NFP produces better marriages, better and bigger families, and restores family life to its position that the Church has always proposed it should be.

Missionary work

I always wanted to be a missionary priest when I was young, and the Lord was preparing me to be bishop of this missionary diocese.

I had always wanted to be a part of the work of Catholic Relief Service and my involvement with them has been the icing on the cake for me.

Serving immigrants and refugees

Early in my life as a bishop I was on the Immigration and Refugee Services Committee of the USCCB. I had a chance to go into the fields where the migrants were working, and had a chance to be with them there and minister to them. I found it very rewarding, because God had prepared me for this moment.

God made me just as comfortable with the poor as the rich; the rural and the urban. Over one-half of our parishes in the Diocese of Amarillo have one hundred families or less. Over half of the parishes have Spanish Masses. It is beautiful how God prepared me to be bishop of this diocese.

I am very proud of the fact that the Lord arranged that my first Mass as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese on Jan. 4 was at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish in Turkey. It is a very small, poor parish of people from Mexico.

Our seminarians

One of the greatest blessings for me has been the large number of seminarians we have been blessed with. My Christmas card this year featured the seminarians of our diocese.

Many bishops have contacted me after receiving my card, saying, "How in the world did you get so many seminarians?"

Fr. Michael Colwell has done a fantastic job with our Pope John Paul II Discernment House and attracting and forming men for vocations to the priesthood.

Seminarian formation is a very expensive undertaking that we must meet on a yearly basis, very much like a parent sending a child to Notre Dame or Harvard. But raising this money is a very good problem to have.

These seminarians that we now have in formation are local men from local families and parishes. That's the mind of the Church. When a diocese matures, it has a great availability of local vocations. We may be entering a new era where we have a Culture of Vocations. We already have a Culture of Life and of NFP in our diocese.

Priests, religious and diocesan staff

God has blessed us with a very fine diocesan staff to serve our pastors and parishes.

I am very grateful for all of the priests of the diocese and for their