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## Bishop Vasa letter: plea for understanding

by Thomas C. Fox

Bishop Robert F. Vasa, who has headed the Baker, Ore., diocese for the past 11 years, wrote a plaintive parting letter to members of his diocese last month after receiving word the Vatican had asked him to move to Santa Rosa, Calif., to become coadjutor of that diocese.

The Vatican appointed retired Spokane, Ore., Bishop William S. Skylstad to be apostolic administrator of the Baker diocese pending the appointment of a permanent bishop.

"I am ... painfully aware that some have found me too difficult and I can assure you that I have often carried them with me to the chapel in prayer and at Mass," wrote Vasa. "I can only pray that no one has been given true cause to abandon Christ because of me. I am sure that I have not been all that you hoped I could be for you and I ask that you pray that I do better in the future. Please do not judge me too harshly."

Appearing to admit that not all had gone as well as he had hoped, Vasa explained in his letter that his time in the diocese has been filled with challenges from the beginning. Among those he noted were the following:

- The difficulty of personal communication in the diocese's expansive territory -- "Simply traveling to the parishes of the diocese on a quasi-regular basis is wearing";
- The "nearly insurmountable obstacles" to maintaining contact with and between young Catholics in the diocese;
- The small number of Catholics and the subsequent large number of small, distant rural parishes, making "the establishment of faith-supportive or faith-enriching groups something desirable but difficult to sustain";
- The lack of priestly vocations and the great number of missionary priests, who "are a blessing but

their presence demands an ongoing turnover because their true homes are elsewhere.?

**For an *NCR* editorial mentioning Bishop Vasa, see: [Competing claims on a bishop's energies](#)**

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