St. James Cathedral

August 24, 2025

Dear Friends,

It has been about seven weeks now since I began my new ministry as your pastor and pastor of Immaculate Conception and Christ Our Hope. Your warm welcome has made this transition so comfortable for me. Thank you!

During this time of transition, it has been such a blessing for me and for all of us to have Father Ryan here over these past weeks celebrating Masses, presiding at weddings and funerals, providing pastoral care at the hospitals, and visiting with guests at the Cathedral Kitchen. In addition, Father Ryan has been generous with his time with me, and we have had several good conversations.

As you know, Father Ryan will be leaving at the end of the month for a sabbatical. And while I, and we, will miss him, I am grateful that he will have some well-deserved time away. I know he will carry all of us in his heart and in his prayers. And we will do the same!

As we look forward to the fall, it is also good for us to look back and reflect on this first year of living into Partners in The Gospel, and our community building with Christ Our Hope and Immaculate Conception Parishes. Last week's Bulletin provided an in-depth summary of where we have been together over this past year as we have spent time getting to know each other and forming some leadership teams to help guide the process toward becoming one parish.

As part of that process, each parish reflected on the questions of "Who are we? What are our strengths and weaknesses?" Here is a summary of the responses we received at each parish:

St. James Cathedral

- *Strengths*: The diversity of the community, the parish's extensive outreach to the poor, beautiful liturgies, atmosphere of welcome and acceptance, and the leadership of Father Ryan and staff were the common answers. In many responses, parishioners recognized that it was the combination of all of these factors that made the Cathedral special.
- *Places to grow*: Common themes were youth and young adults, the geographic dispersion of the parishioners, preventing them from gathering outside of Sunday Mass; some mentioned a desire for more diverse offerings from the music program. Shortage of parking and the shortage of priests were also mentioned repeatedly.

Immaculate Conception

- *Strengths*: Cultural diversity and inclusion which creates a rich multicultural community. Welcoming and supportive community, friendly parishioners, family atmosphere and strong fellowship. Commitment to social justice demonstrated by active engagement in social justice, equity and community service. Prayerful Mass, engaging homilies and adherence to Catholic liturgy.
- *Places to grow*: Leadership and succession planning; youth engagement and attracting and involving young people and neighbors. Over-reliance on volunteers and limited staff resources; financial and building maintenance; better communication, signage and public outreach.

Christ Our Hope

- *Strengths*: Inclusive atmosphere and sense of community. Our large and growing Spanish-speaking community, along with a culturally diverse congregation, adds a beautiful richness that reflects the diversity of the People of God. Active outreach social justice initiatives that are tied to the specific location in downtown Seattle and the Josephinum: COH values our lay leadership, including both staff and volunteers, and seeks to empower parishioners to be actively involved in ministries. The downtown location makes COH a convenient location not only for parishioners, but for visitors, tourists, downtown workers, and the unhoused and people on the street.
- *Places to grow*: A small staff (only one full-time staff role), the challenges of COVID-19, and limited funding put strain on leadership and volunteers. Leadership transitions over the past few years have been difficult. A subset of committed super-volunteers fill many key parish roles, and more parishioners need to be encouraged to participate more deeply. Attracting more and younger parishioners and expanding opportunities for faith formation are desired. Our downtown location poses challenges for parishioners trying to find parking.

This summary of strengths and opportunities for growth is a good starting point for me as I assume the responsibility for helping to guide us through this process of reimagining who we can be together as a new parish. There is such a blessing in these voices from our parishes. It is clear that we are well-matched! Our shared values around good liturgy, outreach and justice, and our shared desire to improve our outreach to youth and young adults provides exciting common ground that we can build on in the years ahead.

I would like to continue this conversation in person with as many of you as I can. We have scheduled three listening sessions over the next few weeks so I can hear from you personally about who we are as a parish. At these listening sessions I'm going to ask you to reflect on one of your best memories from our parish and one hope you have for our parish.

Below are the dates and times of these listening sessions. There is one at each of our three parishes, and you are welcome to attend the session that is most convenient for you:

- **Christ Our Hope: Wednesday, September 3 at 7:00pm**
- **Immaculate Conception: Sunday, September 7 after 11:00am Mass**
- **St. James Cathedral: Tuesday, September 9 at 7:00pm**

I hope you can work one of these into your schedule as I would very much like to see and hear from as many parishioners as possible.

Thank you for all you do to make this such an amazing parish!

Wishing you God's peace and abundant blessings!



Fr. Gary Lazzeroni
Pastor