



+July 1, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you!

Today marks a milestone in the history of the Archdiocese of Seattle as we begin the implementation phase of our Partners in the Gospel strategic pastoral planning effort. This effort was designed to reorganize the structure of our parishes so that we can make more effective use of our resources — the people, the infrastructure, the finances, and more — to better achieve our Catholic mission. Imagine a Catholic Church that is thriving, welcoming young people, reaching out to those on the margins, caring for our environment and coming together as God's people for faith-filled worship centered on the celebration of the Eucharist. That is the vision of our local Church.

I've traveled around the Archdiocese of Seattle these past five years, and many people ask about the mission of the Church, which is truly at the heart of this effort. As Catholics, our mission is to help people encounter Jesus Christ, to accompany others on this journey of faith and to witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Giving priority to Christ, growing in intimacy and association with Christ, we become his disciples. In baptism, Christ shares his life and mission with us. The end goal of Partners in the Gospel is to live our faith and continue Christ's mission in the world. This is why the Catholic Church exists around the world and why we have embarked on Partners in the Gospel here in Western Washington.

As Pope Francis said, we must recognize the signs of the times and adjust. We no longer live in a time when people walk to Mass. We no longer live in a time when the local parish is the hub of all community gatherings. Seminaries are no longer bursting at the seams producing large ordination classes each year. While we have many thriving parishes and highly engaged communities, we've also seen a slow decline in all aspects of parish life, including many of our youth falling away from the practice of faith and families are not attending Mass like they once did.

As I've mentioned before, the status quo is not going to set the world on fire with the love of Jesus Christ. We need to be brave. We need to be bold. We need to take action — but not on our own. Everything we do has to be rooted in the Lord Jesus, guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and in fulfillment of the Father's will.

We've focused on Partners in the Gospel planning for two years, with the past year and a half in consultation with you. Your participation was crucial to this effort, and again I thank you for your sincere insights and thoughtful advice. Because of your feedback, and the feedback of many throughout the archdiocese, we made many adjustments to the parish families. The parish families that are starting today reflect that feedback, which I believe put us on the best path forward — a path that was forged by consultation, prayer and discernment.

And, we must continue to listen. Listening these days is very challenging as we are bombarded with information, caught in a tug-of-war for our attention and swept up in the whirlwind of day-to-day

life. Despite this, we must make time to prayerfully listen to each other, and together, to where the Holy Spirit is calling us. We must make time for silence, reflecting upon the Word of God. Developing our own personal relationship with Jesus Christ is a cornerstone of this effort. Without a lively and ongoing personal relationship with him, how can we lead others to him?

Listening also involves expanding the number of people involved in parish life and decision-making processes. We are living in the age of the laity. This is the time to recognize the many gifts of the Holy Spirit present in each member of the Church and to call forth and empower each member to use those gifts for building up the Body of Christ, the Church.

The life of the Church is to always reflect the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Like the death and resurrection of our Lord, Partners in the Gospel, and our new parish families, represent a dying and rising that can bring great hope for a better future as we root ourselves ever more fully in the life of the Risen Lord.

Brothers and sisters, it is a privilege to be embarking with you this new chapter in the Archdiocese of Seattle. This chapter is full of hope and the possibility of great creativity. It will be a time for navigating new beginnings and for welcoming our brothers and sisters into a new way of being Church. There is no “my parish and your parish,” but instead “our parish family.” This is a time for us to embrace our call to co-responsibility and to care for the Church we love. Together we can take real action and build our future as the Catholic Church here in Western Washington.

Thank you for participating in this historic, mission-focused effort of Partners in the Gospel. Please continue to pray that the seeds we plant today grow into a strong faith-filled future for the people of God in the Archdiocese of Seattle. Please be assured of my continued prayers for you, and I ask you to please pray for me. As always, I remain,

In the heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Paul D. Etienne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "E".

Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Seattle