

January, 2016

Dear friends in Christ,

We owe an enormous debt to the Catholic clergy, religious and laypeople who established our local church 165 years ago, and to all those who succeeded them in faith and service. Often with few resources, the Church has grown over the years in a way that the native peoples and settlers of the territory could have scarcely imagined.

We now have 174 parishes and missions serving more than 600,000 Catholic people. With growth has come the need for planning: planning for parishes and missions where the Eucharist will continue to be celebrated, the faith will be passed on and the poor loved. Our planning must include the need for vocations to the priesthood, Catholic schools and pastoral ministries that will serve the diverse needs of our people now and in the future.

Populations shift, needs change and vocations must always be encouraged and nurtured. As a result, each succeeding generation of Catholics in Western Washington has engaged in some form of planning. All of us have benefited from their foresight, and especially from their trust in the Lord. We not only stand on their shoulders, we literally worship in the churches they built, learn in the schools they established, find healing in the hospitals they opened and on and on and on. Now it is our time to plan for the future of this archdiocese with the same faith, hope and trust in the Lord that marked our earliest years.


Like the good stewards about whom Jesus spoke in his parables, we are called now to look at the mission of the Church — our mission — and along with it, the current and projected population trends in Western Washington. As a result, we are undertaking a pastoral planning process and beginning to ask questions about the needs of our people and parishes: Where do our people live, and where will they live in the next 50 years? Do we have adequate parishes, missions and facilities to serve them and to give them a place to live their call as baptized Catholics? Considering the shortage of priests, how can we best ensure that Masses will be available to all without having to travel many miles?

In the days and months ahead, we will be asking Catholic parishioners to participate in pastoral planning. We will look at the current situation of our clergy, and how they would be best distributed. We also will look at ways we can join together as an archdiocese to create a spiritual culture where vocations are naturally and enthusiastically prayed for and encouraged — especially vocations to the priesthood and religious life. We also are strengthening our Deacon Formation Program and the way we form the laity for the important ministry they undertake.

Those who went before us planned well and handed on to us a Church that is strong and filled with faith and love. We also must exercise stewardship to bless future generations. As this process goes forward, I will keep you informed.

The most important thing to remember is that we will trust in the providence of God. God in his goodness will lead us precisely where he wants us to be, just as he has always done.

Sincerely in Christ,

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J. Peter Sartain