

Archbishop Etienne Meets with Pierce Deanery Parishes

January 13, 2022

On Thursday evening Archbishop Paul D. Etienne came to St. Ann parish in Tacoma to meet with the key leaders and stakeholder representatives from all the parishes involved in the current merging process. During the two-hour meeting, Archbishop shared his vision and role as Shepherd leading, accompanying, and ensuring no member of the flock gets lost. Pre-selected representatives from each parish, sub-committee, and regional council then shared their own perspectives, feelings, questions and overall progress with Archbishop and the strategic planning team.

The Archdiocesan team is collecting all the comments and questions presented at the meeting, as well as others that have come in. They will then prepare answers to these questions, which will be shared with all the parishes in the next few weeks.

Below please read key excerpts from Archbishop Etienne:

Archbishop Etienne's Opening

(Please note some of this has been paraphrased.)

Thank all of you for the hard work you've engaged in already. Many meetings and committees formed. I want to acknowledge that work and thank Fr. Tuan for taking on this great challenge. Thank Leigh and Deacon Sam – I know they've been deeply engaged in this process for months and Bishop Elizondo who took the reins after Bishop Mueggenborg was transferred.

I want you to hear from me WHY we have the need for this strategic planning and consolidation of parishes. I visited each of the priests in 10 deaneries. The one common theme that I heard in those meetings was the need of consolidation. They said, "We as priest are spread way too thin. The issue is not that we have too few priests - the issue is that we have too many parishes." That may seem harsh but that's where the priests are. When we presented the commitment to do this strategic planning to build vibrant parishes, they embraced it wholeheartedly...

The other reality is tied to Pope Francis's first encyclical Joy of the Gospel. He talks about the need to reinvision how we are being church and carrying out the mission of the church today. He encourages us to pay attention to the signs of the times. This reminds me of a passage in St Paul's letter to Philippians that shares how we are partners for the Gospel. It tells us that we are all in this together. We are partners with Jesus. We are partners for the sake of his Gospel and that's how we reinvision being Church today. That's how we will reinvision the structures of the church today.

I know many of you are asking why NOW?

I think I've laid the groundwork for the answer to that. The other thing that is important to hear is that the entire archdiocese will go through the process. You all are ahead of the curve. You are leading the way.

But hear me clearly: This is not about closing parishes. It's about creating vibrant parishes. That's what we are needing to do! We are creating faith-filled vibrant and vital parish faith communities. That does

require us all to really understand that we are partners for Christ, with Christ, and partners for his Gospel!

We are in the same boat together. This is a painful process. We have been so attached to our present structures. It is where we live our faith. Our parents and grandparents helped build those churches and schools. It's where we were baptized and married. That is a history that is rich and wonderful – but we have to look at what is present today.

There isn't a soul in this room that would say their parish looks the same as it did 20 years ago. How are we going to be Church today and make the best of the resources we have? Friends we can't circle the wagons and be content with the status quo. Everyone in the room right now knows that status quo means a diminishing Church.

My role is to be a shepherd. A shepherd leads. A shepherd provides a vision towards a brighter future. It's not my vision - I'm trying to figure out what the Lord is asking of us. In the Book of Exodus, people were happy to leave slavery behind, but Moses had to drag them to the Holy Land. God had something far better for them. They doubted and they griped, and they complained, and God said, "Moses keep leading!"

My friends I hear the pain, I hear the griping and I hear the complaining. But God has a better future in store for us. I am determined to lead us there. (jokes: *Don't make me drag you!*) Let's go together.

The other role as shepherd is to accompany and be in the midst of the flock. That why I'm here with you tonight. I want to make sure that no one is lost or left behind. To be the last one in the group once and awhile. I don't want to lose anyone in this journey.

We all know that Pope Francis has called for a universal synod. We are listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit. It's a journey that we are to make together moving in the same direction. That's a very important piece of this: we need to all move in the same direction. Not one of us in this room isn't aware that our world is splintered right now and pulling us apart. If we're not careful, it will be same in the Church. We need to come together around the Lord Jesus.

The formula is in the synodal church. This is the process that God makes his will known, through the work and power and prompting of the Holy Spirit so that the flesh of Jesus will be formed. The Church is the body of Christ. We make up that mystical body of Christ. That same process seeks to be expressed and received and embodied at every age of the Church and this is what's going to lead all of us forward.

We are to give flesh to the mystical body in a concrete way today, which will lead to vibrant parishes and schools. This is the promised land for us. This is what we seek: nothing less than the face of God. That's the primary ask I have of all of you. It does mean leaving behind known familiar comfortable spaces and places and stories. But I think it's a necessary journey.

I don't want to preside over the death of the Church. I want a Church that seeks new life. I want to see how to bring that life to creation and to birth. You already know the concrete realities of what that means to create the new parish here. My ask is to keep this process going.

The school is another part of that equation. What I propose for the school is that we do not sink money into the current structure just to facilitate the move. What I propose is building a brand-new school and the Archdiocese will be a part of this process *if you all want that*. I already broached this idea with

foundations, and they would be excited to participate in the project. This is a lot of hard work but very doable.

We are moving forward in this process. What I am asking of you is a leap of faith. A leap of faith that allows something new to come to life. Every miracle Jesus worked in the gospels is because people came to him in faith.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? (Attendees responded: YES!)

Do you believe he has need for us and our faith? (Attendees responded: YES!)

My friends, I need you. We are in this together. Thank you.

During his speech Archbishop read from and reflected upon several Scripture passages: Acts 2: 42-47, John 17: 20-26, and references to Philippians 1:5 and 1 Cor 12:26. As a follow-up Archbishop Etienne wishes to share the following passage from Sirach 2: 1-18:

“My child, when you come to serve the Lord,
Prepare yourself for trials.
Be sincere of heart and steadfast,
And do not be impetuous in time of adversity.
Cling to him, do not leave him,
That you may prosper in your last days.
Accept whatever happens to you;
In periods of humiliation be patient.
For in fire gold is tested,
And the chosen, in the crucible of humiliation.
Trust in God, and he will help you;
Make your ways straight and hope in him.
You that fear the Lord, wait for his mercy,
Do not stray lest you fall.
You that fear the Lord, trust in him,
And your reward will not be lost.
You that fear the Lord,
Hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy.