



+ March 8, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

I wish each of you a blessed Lenten journey. During Lent we are in a time of renewal. It is a time for us to focus on the cross where God's love is revealed and where the gift of salvation is won for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Much like Christ's death and resurrection, our Archdiocese of Seattle is going through its own journey of change as we engage in the strategic planning process to renew the Church in Western Washington. As I mentioned before, our efforts are focused on creating vibrant parishes with faith-filled communities.

Thank you for your continued efforts and for taking time to pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance, courage and strength as you continue to bring together your communities. I was very encouraged by our recent meeting. Listening to everyone's feedback, questions, personal stories and desires for the future was incredibly helpful and a beautiful demonstration of a community accompanying each other. You are all witnesses of Christ and together acting as the Body of Christ. This gives me such great hope for the future.

During our time together you asked specific questions, upon which I have reflected and provided answers in the accompanying document. We have already shared my opening comments from that meeting and I hope the rest of your community has been able to read them. I want people to understand that as a shepherd, I am providing a vision for the future. This is not my vision. After much prayer and discernment, I know God has a better future in store for us.

Please know that we are in this journey together. I am with you. My team is with you. Your parish leaders are with you. You are with each other. Together, let us work to build the kingdom of God and share Christ's message with the world. As always, I remain,

In the heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul D. Etienne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

Q&A Responses for Tacoma

- 1. One concern is that the new “state of the art” Catholic school will be so concerned about high numbers for enrollment, that the focus will lean towards compromising our Catholic teachings and attempt to incorporate popular trends to attract non-Catholic families. Can you guarantee this will not be the case?***

Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Seattle have a long tradition of academic excellence that is firmly rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This Catholic identity is woven into the fabric of all our schools and will always be a cornerstone of our Catholic Schools.

The Visitation STEM Academy upholds these Catholic values and was founded “so that every member of our community could form a relationship with Christ. Visitation is guided by the virtues of Mary and the Catholic faith. In partnership with families and the parish, we inspire a diverse community of learners to follow Christ, pursue understanding, and transform the world, in a STEM-integrated, project-based environment.” While the school may be in a new location, the essence of its teachings will not change, and its Catholic identity will not be compromised.

- 2. There is concern over the ELF Grant. This \$1 million grant has a “red flag” written into the compliance guidelines that states the recipient has to “Become or maintain good standing in the Early Achievers Program.” (p.25 Compliance and Monitoring) The Early Achievers Program states that “Funds may not be used for any religious purpose or activity, including worship or instruction.” (p.49. Restrictions, see link below www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/ea/OperatingGuidelines.pdf) Is the ELF Grant still being considered for funding? And if so, how do we address their compliance guidelines?***

We have 8 other archdiocese schools that are participating in good standing with the Early Achievers program.

In 2020, Visitation successfully completed WCEA (Western States Catholic Association) accreditation and Early Achievers accreditation in the same year, which means both the Catholic identity and the Early Achievers certification were observed and certified by educational experts from outside the school and given the highest evaluation. This Fund grant has been submitted and we are waiting on the response. In applying for this grant the requirements were carefully reviewed to ensure we could meet them. The preliminary response back was positive.

The funding we could potentially receive by being a part of the Early Achievers program are called Quality Improvement Awards (5K-9K). Quality Improvement is about meeting agreed upon goals for the program by a Department of Children Youth and Families staff and our individual program director. The dollars can be used for things like Professional Development (College Credits in Early Learning, Early Learning In-Service), Technology, Wage Enhancements, ect. These dollars cannot be used for religious purpose or activity (i.e. – we can't use them to purchase Catholic Coloring Books for the kids or send a donation to the church.)

3. Outreach for Visitation's community/neighborhood: -- Our current ministry works well here, but the ministry of St. Ann parish works well for their community. There is contention on how to combine the two. What advice/direction can you give so that neither community has disruption of services to their needy?

Merging together is a challenging process that takes time, patience and grace. It is important to keep in mind that you will be joining together to form one new community. There will be no "our neighborhood" vs. "their neighborhood." The reality is that your parish will be responsible for serving all the people within its new boundaries. While

this is a larger territory than each individual parish is familiar with, the people and resources will join – along with partner groups like St. Vincent de Paul or Catholic Community Services – to provide outreach to the people in your boundary.

Fr. Tuan created a new Outreach Commission to honor the current efforts, determine how best to work together and to enhance the ministry moving forward.

A few key actions that they are consider taking:

An audit of all the outreach ministries. What are they? Where are they? Who are they serving? How many volunteers are needed to run them? What financial resources are required? What logistical or operational requirements are involved?

➤ **Exploring the needs:** What are the needs of the people in your area? Are there services that we offer that are offered by other groups? Are there needs that are not being met? What other outreach services are there in your area and what do they provide?

➤ **Prioritize:** Based on your collective resources of time, talent and treasure, and the needs of those in your community, prioritize your efforts and seek partnerships with other local groups for services that the parish cannot offer. Reach out to the archdiocesan ministry team for support with ministries like Immigrant and Refugee, Prison ministry, etc.

4. You use the phrase of wanting to create a “New and vibrant community”. What does this mean? What does a vibrant community look like to you? Does a Vibrant parish mean it is solvent? Does that mean all churches in poor communities will be closed because their parishioners are too poor to maintain the bills?

Vibrancy of a parish is not tied to its fiscal status. While we cannot ignore the realities that resources (people, time, treasure, facilities, etc.) are required to carry out our mission, the idea that poor communities will be targeted because they cannot pay bills is inaccurate.

As Archbishop stated, we are responding to Pope Francis's call in *The Joy of the Gospel* to re-envision how we are being Church by paying attention to the signs of the times. Currently, our signs are pointing to a dwindling, unengaged Catholic population. By sticking with the status quo, these downwards trends will continue. Instead, we must make changes to create vibrant parishes with engaged parishioners who are eager to live out their faith.

While there isn't one formula for a vibrant parish, since each must reflect the needs makeup of its community, a vibrant parish is one that is the cornerstone for Catholic life, welcomes new people, fully celebrates the sacraments, provides ongoing faith formation, reaches out to the poor, engages young people, and much more. It is the living, thriving Body of Christ.

5. You mentioned on Thursday night that the priests are overwhelmed with duties, and that the problem is not too few priests, but too many churches. However, the neighborhoods need us. How do we reach these neighborhoods when the churches are gone? Perhaps there should be a written account of how the priests spend their days. It is hard to believe that closing churches will decrease these responsibilities to the people in those neighborhoods. Will closing churches be excluding those neighborhood's needs

Throughout this process, no neighborhoods or people will be forgotten. As parishes merge or close, the boundary changes to include the previous church's territory. Everyone will live in the territory of a parish that will have responsibility for caring for people in those neighborhoods.

6. I was hoping that when we (St. John of the Woods) converted to mission status there would be a document provided to us outlining the structure of the new mission parish and the parish it is a mission of. It seems this document does not exist, but it would be greatly helpful.

In the Archdiocese of Seattle, a mission is described as “a community of Christian faithful established in a particular church that is not a parish or quasi-parish, where the Sacraments are celebrated regularly, and whose pastoral care is entrusted to the pastor of the territorial parish, within whose geographical boundaries the mission is located...”

This means that St. John of the Woods would be attached to the new church with the leadership of the pastor, staff and lay leaders from both the parish and mission. Sunday Mass and celebration of other Sacraments would continue. As a mission, St. John of the Woods will not have a separate finance or pastoral council. Instead, as a mission, will have representation on the new parish councils.

Missions are also encouraged to be part of the other parish ministry commissions and committees. Additionally, Missions may have commissions and committees in various ministries that are specific to only the Mission. Fr. Tuan is providing consultive leadership training on Saturday, March 5th from 10:00 – 12:00 noon in-person for Pastoral & Finance Councils, commissions and committees to attend with your various teams. He continues to further develop lay leadership and will set up an additional consultative training offering. Please stay tuned for more info about upcoming trainings.

7. Our problem and concern is not about moving the school, students, and teachers over — it is about the cost that we worry we cannot raise or cover.

Raising funds is a large undertaking, but a necessary part of this merging process. The Archbishop has said he will personally help support these fundraising efforts by reaching out to donors. Additionally, initial conversations with foundations were promising, which indicates getting funding for this important work is possible. In addition, once the new merged parish is formed it will own all the assets of the existing parishes. The leadership may choose to sell or lease some of these assets to help with these fundraising efforts. The Archdiocese will continue to support and partner

with the parish leaders leading the fundraising efforts to provide support and guidance.

- 8. *St Rita stakeholder — There is the problem of limited representation, with things such as a different pastor at St Rita's than the rest of the parishes . . . A major help in the transition process would be a clear, direct timeline of what to expect for parishioners, so they can know how things are going, and direct effort to help St Rita parishioners become part of the process to move to the new parish and school life.***

Archbishop directed Fr. Tuan and Fr. David Mulholland to work together to determine the best path forward, along with the corresponding timeline. They have submitted their timeline recommendation, which is currently being vetted.

- 9. *Is there going to be guidance about limiting services again, integrating information related to omicron, and ways to make sure we can be careful moving forward as we make this transition? I am concerned about whether there will be guidance on numbers or participation being cut down.***

The Archdiocesan COVID-19 Task Force continues to meet regularly to discuss the latest data and science around the virus, spread levels and mitigation strategies – and how these apply to parish and school life. Right now, we anticipate continued relaxing of restrictions, but these are always fluid based on the community spread of the virus and the government regulations in place. Starting on March 12th, masks will be optional in the Archdiocese of Seattle.

- 10. *Seeing the concerns of Visitation parish and fragility of Visitation parish . . . the school has been a great lifeblood to the parish. The question is, how did the parishes become so weakened when the school is going so strong?***

There isn't one single answer to this question. Similar to many American dioceses,

the Church in Western Washington faces an ever-changing landscape that has affected parish communities. The traditional neighborhood parish serving local Catholic families has struggled to survive amid changing demographics, urbanization and other factors. While changing demographics have led to significant increases in Hispanic, Vietnamese and Korean Catholic participation, total Catholic population in the Archdiocese of Seattle is down. Additionally, there has been a decrease in Mass attendance, celebration of sacraments and new Catholic converts, resulting in a surplus of parishes across the archdiocese without enough priests to serve them.

11. I also think we need some timeline for when we can release the parish but keep the school there as long as we need to.

Fr. Tuan listened to the consultative leadership of the parishes, including the Joint Stakeholders who restructured this ad-hoc team into a Joint “Advisory Team” focusing their efforts towards supporting the development of the new parish. This team will discern the timeline and the workplan.

12. How can we at Visitation continue to operate effectively as a parish before we merge? It would be good to hear from Archbishop what the plan is to guarantee that as these parishes enter into this project together as partners, they are not saddled with an undue burden in supporting the school.

As the parishes merge together, they will become one community with a school, which is a vital ministry of the new parish. Through this merger process all the assets and debts of each parish will become part of the new parish and it will be up to the parish leadership to determine how to effectively allocate funds across all its ministries.

13. Will more transparency be offered for what is planned for the facilities at Visitation, St. Rita, etc.? Whether this is CCS, sold to investors, or whatever, people deserve the transparency to allow them to know what is happening to their church buildings.

Yes. The goal is to be as transparent as possible when the leadership team begins discussions around these assets. Right now, no decisions have been made about the facilities.

As part of the initial planning process, the Archdiocese provided general facility audits, which include information about the age, status, maintenance requirements, needed work and potential worth of the various properties associated with each parish. This information is in the hands of Fr. Tuan and the building sub-committee for review and to use as a guide for making future decisions about these assets.

Additionally, the Archdiocese offered an initial set of ideas for Fr. Tuan and team to consider, which include options like working with Catholic Community Services or St. Vincent de Paul. The Archdiocesan Building and Construction team will continue to support Fr. Tuan and his team as they explore their options. Ultimately, the decision for the future of these assets is up to the leadership of the new parish with input from parishioners.