



+ January 24, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace of our Lord be with you! As we begin a new year, I give thanks for the blessings and joys that are ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord. In the face of the challenges and pains of the world today, we must always remember his great love and powerful, faithful presence with us today.

I would like to share a few manifestations of the Lord's presence and grace at work. This past year began with a gathering of nearly 1,000 local Church leaders – clergy and lay – to prayerfully begin Partners in the Gospel. This historic planning process is focused on restructuring and renewing parish life so that we can better live out our mission of inviting others to Christ. During the next 11 months, we engaged in significant consultation with clergy, staff, schools, lay leaders and parishioners on the parish family structure – and even added a second round of public input to ensure we heard directly from the people of God. I am discerning the parish families now and will announce them in early February. Thank you to everyone who shared their insights and participated in the process of prayerfully experiencing our true partnership in the Gospel to become more fully the living Body of Christ.

While Partners in the Gospel was a significant focus in 2023, there were several other noteworthy moments for us to reflect upon.

The first is our continued proactive call for unity and peace. We join Pope Francis in his call for peace in Ukraine, the Middle East, Sudan and many other parts of the world. This urgent need for peace is also necessary in our own streets, where we are witnessing an increase in gun violence and many are homeless and drug addicted. In addition, we are missing basic human dignity in so many parts of our world today. We must continue to pray for peace, healing and that human dignity might once again be rediscovered and restored.

Acknowledging that the Archdiocese of Seattle is home to the largest nuclear weapons arsenal, I joined fellow bishops in issuing a joint letter urging G7 leaders to take steps toward nuclear disarmament. This was followed by a Pilgrimage of Peace to Japan in August with a small delegation of pilgrims from here and from the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Archbishop Wester and I met with our brother bishops in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to discuss ways our dioceses can partner in continuing to call for nuclear disarmament and peace.

After meeting with people who survived the atomic bomb and witnessing the devastation firsthand, I am convinced that we must not let the topic of nuclear disarmament fade into the background. Our Catholic social teaching on life and justice – and our responsibility to care for our common home – compel us to act. Because of this, we have a new Director of Integral Human

Development who will be responsible for bringing these issues to the forefront and catalyzing Catholics to take action around unity, peace, and care for our common home.

In July, a group of us from the Archdiocese of Seattle were blessed to hear Cardinal Wilton Gregory, Archbishop of Washington D.C. – our nation’s first Black Catholic cardinal – speak at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Black Catholic Congress in Maryland. The focus of the Congress was on encounter, formation and action – all to energize people in their faith in Jesus Christ. It was a joyful, educational and thought-provoking event for me to learn more and honor the experience of our Black Catholics. I will be a better pastor for having spent time learning with members of our Black Catholic Advisory Circle at this Congress.

Last year, I was also pleased to continue building relationships with our local Native communities. Throughout history, Native people have had a complex and varied experience with the Archdiocese of Seattle. Some experiences were very positive, while others were not. In light of our sincere desire to understand our history and help local Natives better understand their own Catholic history, our Archives team convened a meeting with members from nearly two dozen local tribes. The goal was to share the types of records we have and partner with them on developing a records policy that both provides access to records, while also protecting the privacy of the ancestors appearing in the records. This is an ongoing partnership, and I look forward to our continued dialogue.

The other significant event from 2023 was the global synod. Not only was everyone in our Archdiocese of Seattle invited to participate, but I was also humbled and honored to spend the month of October in Rome with Church leaders – both men and women – in true synodal listening. We were listening to each other, and together listening to what the Holy Spirit is speaking to the Church today. These “conversations in the Spirit” were not only significant moments of discernment for the worldwide Church but also serve as a model for us as a local Church to prayerfully listen well to each other, to discern how the Spirit is animating us as the Catholic Church in Western Washington to embody Christ and proclaim his gospel more fully.

Synodality is not just a one-time event or a way to listen. It is that and much more. Synodality is a way of being Church envisioned by the Second Vatican Council. Synodality calls all of us to rediscover and live the dignity of our baptism – as lay men and women, religious, deacons, priests and bishops – and to co-responsibility for the life of the Church. Each and every one of us is invited by Jesus Christ into a vibrant relationship, to accompany one another on the journey of faith, and to share the joy of the Gospel with others, especially those who live on the margins.

This next year, we will all hear more about synodality and how we can bring it to fruition in our parishes, our communities and our families.

### **Looking ahead in 2024**

As I look ahead this year, I am both encouraged by and hopeful for the changes that will come with Partners in the Gospel. While there is great potential for a true revitalization of our parishes, those impacts will not be felt immediately. In fact, the first few years will be trying and will require us to roll up our sleeves and do the hard work of restructuring and re-envisioning together. This will no doubt be a challenge for many and will require grace and patience from all of us. However, if we remain focused on Jesus and his call for us to be his missionary disciples, he will show us the way.

Another hope for this year is that we help Catholics recognize the strong connection between caring for the environment and our Catholic faith. There is an urgent need to address the climate crisis as we reach alarming rates of ocean acidification, sea-level rise, greenhouse gases, loss of species and biodiversity, and much more. We must join Catholics around the world in advocating for climate action, which includes not only the environment but also the poorest communities around the world who are affected by climate change. We will be hosting a Climate Action Summit in partnership with Seattle University next year to gather leaders and discuss ways we can work together on climate solutions. I hope you will join us.

Lastly, I am looking forward to seeing many more of you this coming year. This past year, we restructured the Chancery so that I can spend more time out in the community. The two auxiliary bishops are now regional bishops providing support to the priests and parishes in their regions. I have a Chief Operating Officer and a Vicar General who together oversee the Chancery, allowing me more time to spend with you. I have thoroughly enjoyed celebrating Mass with you, and I look forward to meeting more of you this year.

Thank you for your continued prayers for me. Please know of my continued prayers for you and for the Archdiocese of Seattle. Through the intercession of the Blessed Mother, I pray this year brings each of us love, joy and peace. Happy New Year!

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 style with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

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