



January 14, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Happy New Year!

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the numerous blessings in my life and in the life of our local Church. Together, we accomplished many things – launching new ministries, welcoming people to our communities, starting parish families, embracing synodality and much more.

This past year has also had its challenges – especially as the world around us faces war, pain and suffering. Knowing that our Lord is always walking with us – and working through us – brings me comfort and helps me face difficulties with more strength. While we are not immune from our own challenges and difficulties that test our faith, we cannot forget that he is with us always on this journey, continually calling us to conversion and holiness.

Partners in the Gospel

The focus of the past year was on the beginning of our Partners in the Gospel journey. After nearly a year of consultation with priests, staff and parishioners, we announced the final configurations of the parish families, which resulted in 60 parish families, including eight standalone parishes. This was not a simple task. It took months of planning and many staff and volunteers to accomplish it. Catholics shared their hopes and fears for this process as well as their specific feedback, which not only brought synodality to life in our local Church but also gave us the input we needed to finalize the plan. It is because of this direct input and feedback that we were able to configure the final plan in such a way that reflects the voice of parishioners and local realities. I am so grateful for the engagement of Catholics across the entire Archdiocese in this process, and my hope is that this level of engagement continues and expands as parish families start working together.

After the announcement of the parish families, we then turned our attention to the priest and parish leadership placements. It is no secret that we do not have as many priests as we would like to serve here. To ensure pastoral care throughout the region, we asked priests who are ready to retire to consider postponing retirement, we asked younger priests to take on much larger assignments and we continue to rely on priests from other countries. Thanks to the incredible, prayerful and discerning work of our Priest Personnel Board, by the grace of God, we were able to provide the pastoral coverage needed. And while I am so grateful for the incredible planning and leadership of our Priest Personnel Board, for the generous “Yes!” from so many of our priests and the sharing spirit of many other religious orders, I am also concerned. I am aware as well of the toll this reorganization is taking on our priests and other pastoral leaders.

Additionally, several of our priests became ill this past year and sadly, one of our active pastors passed away. This is an area that truly keeps me up at night, and like you, I must remind myself that the Lord is with us. What gives me great hope and inspiration is that our vocations program has seen an uptick in this past year. We had six applications to the seminary and are hopeful 10 other men will apply this spring! Let

us all pray for them as well as our current priests and religious who are so selflessly serving this archdiocese.

Co-responsibility and Discernment

I also have great hope in our future because of the renewed focus on co-responsibility of all the baptized. While Jesus continues to provide shepherds for the Church by calling some to be priests and bishops, all the baptized are called to follow Jesus and to responsibility for the mission of the Church. Jesus told his disciples to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

This means that *every* baptized person plays a significant role in the Church. Jesus gave all of us the responsibility to carry out the mission of the Church by living a life in Christ. It also means that the future of our Church doesn't just sit on the shoulders of clergy but with all baptized people who are called by Jesus to serve. Co-responsibility is the cornerstone of Partners in the Gospel because it asks everyone to participate and be engaged in parish life – in the life of the Church. To achieve our vision of renewed parish life, we need everyone to make our parish communities vibrant, welcoming and faith filled. I hope this vision and truth give you great hope and inspiration for the future. How is God calling you to serve?

In July 2024, the parish families officially formed, many of which were under new pastoral leadership. During the following months, we witnessed beautiful welcoming gatherings, pastor installations, staff retreats and many “getting to know you” events among staff and parishioners in parish families. The focus of these first months was really to take quality time to get to know each other. There is no need to rush – especially because we seek the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit, which requires discernment that is grounded in prayer and consultation.

Communal discernment is another cornerstone of our Partners in the Gospel process. Discernment is the prayerful process that reveals the amazing work of the Holy Spirit demonstrating that we have a Church that is very much alive and eager to share the love and joy of Christ with others. Thus, the process of prayerful discernment requires the engagement of all the baptized in prayerful conversations and consultation. During this next year, you will be invited to communal listening and discernment opportunities to help shape how your parish family – or your standalone parish – will reinvision itself. The success of Partners in the Gospel comes from God's grace and our cooperation with it.

Attorney General

While our focus was on Partners in the Gospel, we also spent a significant amount of energy and focus working with the state Attorney General's office. In 2023, his team subpoenaed all our records under the Charitable Trust Act to gain access to our clergy files. I am not willing to give up our First Amendment rights because it has such grave repercussions for the future for all religions in the State of Washington.

My commitment to victim survivors and all those impacted by clergy abuse remains steadfast. Healing from the pain endured and its aftermath is the reason we launched a Healing Ministry in 2024. This Healing Ministry is the next step in our journey, which started decades ago to address the sin and tragedy of sexual abuse. We have an [entire website](#) dedicated to transparency around this topic, including our list of credibly accused clergy, charts that show the financial impacts of abuse and how since our Safe Environment program was implemented, instances of alleged sexual abuse sharply dropped in the 1980s. In fact, 99% of all incidences of sexual abuse by clergy occurred before 1990 in our archdiocese.

It frustrates me and many Catholics that people think some of our priests are currently abusing minors and vulnerable adults. This is simply not true. This misinformation is demoralizing for our current priests and pastoral leaders who are diligent about our safe environment protocols and are dedicated to healing. It also saddens us that this has caused so many to turn away from the Church. I pray that we can all find healing from this tragedy of abuse.

Global Efforts

As archbishop, I have had the opportunity to participate in several efforts beyond our archdiocese. We are part of the Partnership for a World Without Nuclear Weapons, which began after my pilgrimage of peace to Japan in 2023. I, along with Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, Archbishop Peter Nakamura of Nagasaki, Bishop Alexis Shirahama of Hiroshima and Archbishop Emeritus Joseph Takami of Nagasaki, formed this global partnership to work toward a world without nuclear weapons. The focus of this effort is to work for peace and educate people about the threat to all of creation that nuclear weapons pose, while walking in solidarity with the people already affected by these weapons of mass destruction. You can learn more about it [here](#).

Additionally, I was given the great honor as one of the 23 delegates from the United States to participate in the global synod. Last October, I spent the month in Rome sitting at tables with people from all over the world discerning how the Holy Spirit is animating the life of the Church today for spiritual renewal and structural reform. This was a powerful experience that resulted in the publication of the [final document](#) shortly after the synod concluded. Here is a link to my [video summary](#) of this experience and the key elements of the final document.

Looking Ahead

There are many wonderful things to look forward to this next year. First, we are blessed to be celebrating the [175th anniversary](#) of the Archdiocese of Seattle. There will be several special Masses across the archdiocese to mark this historic moment in our local Church, and I hope you will join me for one of them:

- January 25: Proto-Cathedral of St. James the Greater in Vancouver
- February 22: Our Lady Star of the Sea in Bremerton
- March 1: Immaculate Conception in Mount Vernon
- May 31: St. James Cathedral in Seattle

To honor the past and pioneers like Mother Joseph who planted the seeds that have grown into the Church we are today, Catholics are invited to participate in the [Season of Service](#). Our goal is to reach 175,000 hours of serving others while we reflect Jesus Christ in the world. I hope you will join the effort and invite others to do the same.

In addition to our own 175th anniversary, the universal Church is celebrating Jubilee 2025, called "Pilgrims of Hope." This is a time for people to make a pilgrimage. Many priests will be leading pilgrimages abroad, including myself. We will also offer five local pilgrimage sites across the archdiocese so that everyone has the opportunity to participate. You can learn more about Jubilee 2025, the year's prayer intentions, how to obtain an indulgence and our local pilgrimage sites on our [Jubilee 2025 webpage](#).

This year we will also continue to grow together as parish families on our Partners in the Gospel journey – a journey that relies on the co-responsibility of everyone and relies on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which we will seek through our communal discernment sessions. This next year parish families will form new leadership teams and begin the One Parish Planning process to help set the vision for your new parish.

I am also looking forward to the expansion of our Care for Creation ministry that is grounded in our Catholic social teaching, which calls us to care for God's creation and the most vulnerable in it. Efforts to care for creation are directly tied to our Catholic faith, and I am excited about engaging young people who are passionate about this topic over the next year. This is just one of many ministries that I am eager to see flourish.

This next year I will travel to Japan to mark the 80th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bombs. This gives us a great moment to call for peace – not just related to nuclear war but related to peace in our world, on our streets, in our communities and in our own hearts.

As your archbishop, I seek to fulfill my call of being your pastoral leader while also providing leadership for this corner of the Universal Catholic Church. While the ministry is challenging at times, it is also rewarding, and I could not do it without the dedication and selfless service of our priests and religious brothers and sisters, the leadership and wisdom of our lay staff, the generous stewardship of our volunteers and the faith and action from the whole People of God.

In closing, I wish to express my deep gratitude and encouragement for all those who continue to preach the Word, celebrate the sacraments and exercise any and every kind of charity in the name of Jesus Christ! 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 "E".

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