



+ January 14, 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Like many of you, I take time at the start of the new year to reflect on the previous year and pray about priorities for the future — not just for myself as your archbishop, but for the archdiocese as well. I take my ministry as your archbishop very seriously. While it can be challenging at times, I am grateful and honored to serve God and you in this way.

This past year has been full — full of grace, of joy, of stress, of hardship, of laughter and many other emotions. I remain incredibly grateful to our priests, deacons and women religious, our staff, lay leaders and volunteers who selflessly serve the people of God. Our Church is not one of buildings and historic artifacts — rather, together we make up the mystical Body of Christ, living our faith in the world each day.

There are clear signs that God is blessing our efforts of proclaiming Christ and forming more disciples to serve in his name. Here is an overview of a few major initiatives from this past year.

Year in Review

- **Jubilee year:** Pope Francis called the universal Church to a special year of prayer with the theme Pilgrims of Hope. People around the world traveled on pilgrimages to grow deeper in their faith. Locally, five locations were designated as pilgrimage sites for people to participate in the Jubilee. Additionally, I led a group on a pilgrimage to visit the shrines of France. We experienced many graces, and I am sure the pilgrimage will bear good fruit for the whole Archdiocese. I also felt renewed in my own episcopal ministry and strengthened in my personal spiritual journey.
- **175th anniversary and Season of Service:** This year we celebrated the 175th anniversary of the Archdiocese of Seattle, which gave us the opportunity to honor the intrepid men and women who built this archdiocese. From the traveling bishops and early chapels to the first hospitals, orphanages and schools set up by Mother Joseph to the parishes and many ministries we have today, we are blessed with flourishing ministries and deep faith here in Western Washington.

As part of this anniversary celebration, we hosted a Season of Service with an audacious goal of serving others for 175,000 hours. We quickly surpassed that goal with more than 317,000 hours of service! What a blessing to see our vibrant Church in action caring for others and for our common home.

- **New branding:** As we celebrate the past, we also look to the future. It is no secret that faith is lived at the local level, and many people do not realize how much ministry and service we support at much broader levels. Through research, we learned that many people are unaware of the Archdiocese of Seattle and what we do. People do not understand our shared Catholic mission or associate many of our ministries with the Archdiocese of Seattle. To help address this, we launched a new brand anchored on the idea that we reflect Christ's radical love through our daily work advancing the care and concern for all God's children and creation. This is a renewed focus for us working in the Archdiocese of Seattle in how we live our faith in this "workplace" and how we interact with others.
- **Partners in the Gospel:** As Archdiocesan staff, pastors, pastoral leaders and parishioners collaborate together, we continue the hard work of renewing our local Church and planning for our future. The Holy Spirit is active and alive guiding our efforts. Parish families marked one year and began One Parish Planning, setting up Parish Family Leadership Teams and Advisory Councils responsible for shepherding the Partners in the Gospel process.

This Partners in the Gospel process is our highest priority this year. Creating a strong faith community in the new parish family, celebrating the sacraments, proclaiming God's Word and practicing charity in all its forms — this is what we are called to do amid today's world and realities. The world changes, but Christ and his Church are always one and the same through the ages. But in every age, we must be sensitive to how the Holy Spirit seeks to form us into the Body of Christ in specific places and concrete situations — and those are the changing realities we are facing.

I encourage everyone to participate in the parish family consultation sessions that will take place over the next few years. Conversations may be difficult, but respectful, prayerful listening and dialogue provide the opportunity to rethink this present moment – to think about the larger Catholic community and the capacity of our resources, human and spiritual. We will need to let go of some of our own desires and comforts to courageously embrace a new way of fulfilling the Church's mission. In the coming year, we will be asked to set aside our personal desires and listen attentively to the voice of the Holy Spirit. In the process, we will discover God's dream for us and make that dream our new reality!

- **Leadership changes:** This year, we lost our beloved Pope Francis. His ministry was very influential for me, and I am grateful for his poignant encyclicals and his constant reminder to remember the poor, the vulnerable and to care for our common home. I am also so grateful for Pope Leo and his YES to this leadership role. Having an American pope that speaks English (and several other languages!), celebrates public Mass regularly and is healthy enough to travel the world and engage directly with others — from foreign leaders to youth groups — is exciting. He is breathing new life into the papacy and giving hope and healing to many.

Locally, I appointed Jilma Meneses as the new president and chief executive officer of Catholic Community Services. She brings a wealth of experience from her time as the secretary for the WA Department of Social and Health Services and her previous role as CEO

of Catholic Charities of San Francisco. She will oversee CCS, which is the state's largest provider of social services, directly assisting more than 100,000 local individuals and families in our region. I am grateful for her leadership and have great confidence in her role as a leader.

- **Attorney general:** Last year, we had two different issues in play with the state's attorney general — one of which was resolved and one that is still active.
 - *Active issue:* In 2023, the Attorney General subpoenaed records under the Charitable Trust Act. Our stance is that while we remain committed to accountability and healing for victim survivors, the AG's request for more than 80 years of receipts from all our parishes and schools as a way to protect children in the future is unreasonable. A King County Superior Court judge ruled that the attorney general did not have legal authority for this subpoena. The attorney general appealed this decision, and both sides in September presented their arguments. We are currently waiting for the judges' response, which we expect sometime this spring.
 - *Resolved issue:* The bishops of the state sued Washington state over an unconstitutional clergy reporting law that was set to take effect in late July. The federal court ruled in favor of the bishops, finding that the law was unconstitutional. The end result is that the State cannot compel Catholic priests to violate the sacred seal of confession, thus preserving First Amendment rights for all religious organizations. We support the desire to protect children and vulnerable people, and Catholic priests are already required to report abuse — with the very narrow exemption to protect the sacrament of confession. You can read the [news release here](#).

Other things to note:

When writing a year-in-review, it's impossible to capture everything. Here are just a few other items of note:

- The bishops of Washington state launched an in-depth Native American Boarding Schools and Cemeteries Research Study of all the archival records related to Catholic boarding schools and their cemeteries in the region and shared the results directly with all the tribes in our state, continuing the journey of healing. You can read more about the research and the [findings here](#).
- Our Immigrant and Refugee ministry worked overtime helping parishes, schools and immigrants navigate the changing landscape. The team quickly pivoted efforts to offer tools, training and guidance for immigrants and their families.
- Our Pastoral Care and Outreach team launched a new First Responders Ministry, and our Mental Health Ministry continues to train peer mentors in our suicide prevention program.
- Each of our more than 60 ministries continues to serve and bring the love of Christ to others.

Looking Ahead: It's all about love

Psalm 31 says quite simply: "Let me rejoice and be glad in your love."

Love is the singular definition of God, and it is the manner in which Jesus summarized the commandments: "Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself." This is my greatest hope for us this year, that our encounter with Jesus will draw us deeper into his love and quicken our hearts with greater love for him in return.

In his inaugural homily, Pope Leo XIV declared that the Church's true authority is rooted in charity, not power or propaganda. He emphasized that Christians must love as Jesus loved — through self-giving and service rather than domination. He quoted St. Vincent de Paul: "Let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows."

This means love must be embodied in concrete actions, especially toward the poor and marginalized.

This is how we are called to reflect Christ's radical love.

My vision

My vision for this next year is for all of us to focus on our personal relationship with Jesus. How do we open ourselves up to the love that he is pouring out for us — so that we can then share his love with others? How can we ensure we are all a reflection of Christ's radical love in the world today? What are we doing to share his love with the poor, the vulnerable, those who are different from us, those who have fallen away from the Church, those in our family with whom we don't see eye to eye?

In June, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the United States Conference of Bishops will consecrate the country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an opportunity for many to learn about this beautiful devotion and see how it can transform our lives. His divine heart was so passionate with love for us that it was unable to contain the flames of its burning charity. Let us ask for the grace to no longer remain indifferent to this ineffable love. Rather, may the love of Christ conquer us and impel all that we do.

My prayer for you

This is my prayer for you: that you slow down to pause and reflect; that you see the beauty of your life and feel immense gratitude for the gifts God has bestowed on you; and that you find meaningful ways to reflect Christ's radical love in the world today. That is my hope and prayer for you.

Thank you for living out your faith and for helping others encounter Christ through their interactions with you. Please know of my continued prayers for you and I humbly ask for your prayers as well. As always, I remain,

In the Heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Paul D. Etienne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "E".

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