

Sixth Annual Archbishop's Dinner

Hyatt Regency Hotel

1 November 2017

Archbishop Exner; Bishop Monroe; Reverend Fathers, Deacons and Sisters; Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

Once again tonight, this year on the great Solemnity of All Saints, we come together as a family to celebrate who we are as a faith community and the good fruit God is harvesting in our Archdiocese. I want to begin by thanking each and every one of you – clergy, Religious and lay faithful – for being engaged and joyful witnesses of the faith in your parishes and in the life of our local Church. Your commitment is a constant source of inspiration and a reminder to me that divine Providence is mightily at work in our corner of the Vineyard here in the Lower Mainland.

It's a pleasure for me as well to recognize the patrons and sponsors of this Dinner, who are listed in your program, as well as to express my gratitude to all the staff and volunteers who have helped so generously to organize and prepare for this evening. Your kindness is always deeply appreciated.

Looking back over the past six years since the first Dinner, it seems to me that what I share with you falls into a now familiar pattern. First comes a recap of the major events of the past year, a kind of "report card" marked by successes and challenges, and then a specific, even

urgent appeal directed to our shared future.

I. The Report Card

Statistics

Let me begin, then, with some statistics. I do so because ever since I was a kid, I have loved numbers. The statisticians tell us that with more than 435,000 Catholics in our Archdiocese we are by far the largest single religious denomination in the Lower Mainland. That's good news. The shadow side is that only 87,000 are at Mass on Sunday morning.

Also, however, on the positive side, this year we have enrolled more than 16,000 students in our 40 elementary and 10 secondary schools; recorded significant growth in our two undergraduate institutions of higher learning, Corpus Christi College on the campus of the University of British Columbia and Catholic Pacific College at Trinity Western University. I am also happy to report that St. Mark's College, which offers graduate degrees, received its accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools last month – a significant achievement which will enhance our ability to deliver quality higher education in theology and related fields.

We ordained three men to the priesthood and five to the permanent diaconate, with two more diaconal ordinations planned before the end of the year. And we have 22 seminarians enrolled at the Seminary of Christ the King and the Archdiocesan Seminary *Redemptoris Mater*. This

September, Our Lady of Mercy Parish welcomed a new Religious community of women to the Archdiocese, the Daughters of the Queen of the Rosary.

We served nearly 100,000 meals, with the help of more than 19,000 volunteer hours, at the Door is Open in the Downtown Eastside. And Catholic Charities continues to provide accommodation for over 100 every night at our Men's Hostel at 150 Robson Street, though we hope soon to have a new location. 537 refugees sponsored by the Archdiocese arrived in Canada last year, and prison ministry continues to flourish, gaining volunteers in many parishes. Our social media presence has taken a substantial uptick with more than 128,000 monthly page views on our website, and 15,000 followers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. And my last stat – at least for now! – is the very good news for stewardship that our Annual Appeal, Project Advance, hit a record of \$7.7 million in 2016.

New Initiatives

I am also very happy to report at least some of the initiatives and projects that have taken root in the past year. Since the centre and focus of Catholic life must always be the parish family, it is a blessing that for the first time in 15 years a new parish has been erected: St. Agnes Kim, which is currently domiciled at St. Joseph's Parish in Port Moody, will serve the growing community of Catholic Koreans.

Last December, the very striking St. Clare of Assisi Church in Coquitlam was solemnly dedicated and earlier this month we blessed the ground for St. Paul's new church in Richmond, with a seating capacity of nearly 1000, and we also broke ground for the rebuild of St. Thomas Aquinas High School on the North Shore. Other new facilities are also being planned by several parishes, especially in light of the need to seismically upgrade our primary and secondary schools.

In South Surrey, a group of dynamic parents, who love Catholic education, have been working tirelessly to establish a long-awaited secondary school. Called St. John Paul II Academy, it will open its doors in 2018, and the school building itself should be ready within three years. It is being built on land from the Archdiocese, financed like one of the congregational schools, that is, without relying upon the taxing of feeder parishes, but it will be administered by the CISVA, which oversees our Catholic schools in such an outstanding way. This is a true innovation in how we have traditionally built and financed our secondary schools, but it just might lead us into a fresh way of thinking about future educational facilities.

Before leaving the world of construction, it is worthwhile recalling that buildings serve as places of worship, education, community, and outreach. They are necessary structures for the accomplishment of our mission of evangelization. After all, even the Apostles on the day of

Pentecost were not in the open air but huddled in the upper room of a building from which they burst forth with the Good News.

Since the closing of Rosemary Heights the Archdiocese has been without a facility to host retreats and other meetings and gatherings of the faithful. As of yesterday, we have made an offer on a beautiful property in Abbotsford which will make an ideal setting for a new retreat centre, one which will serve our parishes, schools, movements and associations. While the deal is not yet final, every indication is that it will be successful.

On even surer footing is the needed seismic upgrading of Holy Rosary Cathedral. This will be a major project about which you will hear a lot in the coming years. It will involve not only structural changes but also considerable upgrading of the Cathedral's facilities, including the rectory and parish hall. How is this possible when we have no money? We are working with a developer, who will construct a tower on property behind the current building. This renovation has been long in the planning stages, and it looks as if we are finally moving ahead.

On another note, beginning this fall, I have a plan to visit every parish in the Archdiocese in the next five years, just as I promised I would in the written report prepared for the Holy See and submitted before I joined the Western Canadian Bishops in our *ad limina* visit to the Vatican and the Holy Father last spring. These parish visits, which

will usually last three days, are opportunities for me to meet with the Pastoral and Finance Councils, school staff, PREP teachers, Legion of Mary, CWL and Knights of Columbus, liturgical and music ministers, and as many other organizations and associations as possible in the time allotted. My first visit, which was to Corpus Christi Parish, overwhelmed me by the prayerfulness, desire to serve others and enthusiasm of the parishioners.

Our organized Archdiocesan initiatives with First Nations and Hispanic ministry continue to gain strength, and involvement in reconciliation with Indigenous peoples continues to be a priority. Our St. Kateri Tekakwitha Council promotes dialogue and keeps us focussed on the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Blanket exercises are now being held in our schools and parishes. This year we hosted an education workshop on colonization at the John Paul II Pastoral Centre, and supported the recent Walk for Reconciliation.

Under the leadership of the Scalabrini Fathers, with the help of scores of volunteers in at least eight parishes, ministry to the Spanish-speaking temporary farm workers is flourishing in the Valley. In addition to religious celebrations and the support of friendship, this ministry now includes programs of faith formation.

Two other ministries have recently been established to address and help co-ordinate unique pastoral needs, arising from our rich cultural

diversity. Chinese ministry has been active in sponsoring talks, study and celebratory events within the community. Filipino ministry, for its part, has sponsored leadership training, opportunities for spiritual growth and, above all, launched the Council for Filipino Catholic Associations, an initiative which is to facilitate cooperation among the many different groups which serve the community. Noteworthy is the ministry's coordination this past September of the largest marriage ceremony in the Archdiocese's history, when 30 couples received the Sacrament at one time!

From Vancouver's foundation in the 19th century, Religious Sisters have provided health care to the public from a faith-based perspective. While they were inspired by faith and had the Gospel as their guide, they always welcomed people from every religious background or none at all. Their legacy lives on. As you know from the media, Providence Health Care is working hard to put in place the new St. Paul's Hospital complex, where it will continue its mission of the healing ministry of Jesus. I am especially pleased with PHC's ongoing response to the opioid crisis, about which I issued a pastoral statement in February, with their developing relationship with the First Nations Health Authority, and with the principled moral stand they have taken in accompanying with compassion and truth those at the end of life and in encouraging greater access to palliative care.

In the face of the suffering and human need in the world, we cannot compartmentalize our compassion or draw lines between those we will care about and those we will not. Every human life is sacred from conception to its natural end. About this moral truth, there can be no compromise. Here I cannot fail to mention once again and publicly that the Supreme Court's decision to strike down the law against euthanasia was gravely wrong, and that the federal government's assisted suicide legislation has legalized the morally evil action of deliberately taking human life. Neither euthanasia nor helping someone to kill himself is morally acceptable, yet they are often presented as expressions of freedom of choice or as compassionate solutions to suffering.

Accompaniment by loved ones and the community and accessible and affordable palliative care are the solutions we must work to implement.

In the same vein, I have written to legislators and publicly opposed the fact that the consciences and careers of health-care professionals are being threatened with the prospect of professional dismissal or censure if they do not cooperate in ending human life. The Church has – and must always and continuously – speak out as a defender of the rights of conscience of individuals and of institutions – certainly faith-based ones – as well as of the rights of the vulnerable and the suffering who can all too easily be pressured into making immoral choices. A pastoral letter on this subject will be available this Sunday.

As an Archdiocese, we enthusiastically foster pro-life initiatives. Through funds from our annual Pro-Life Sunday collection, last year we awarded 22 grants, which support projects such as the March for Life in Victoria; eight different crisis pregnancy centres; and Signal Hill's Value Project, which prepares high school students to speak effectively about the value of human life. The Gospel of life is the core of God's beautiful plan of love for creation and is at the heart of the core teaching of our faith.

Recognizing that people of faith need to come together in friendship to share their joys and sorrows, defeats and victories, and to learn better how to live their faith in their professional lives, the Archdiocese sponsors and supports Legatus, for business professionals; the Catholic Physicians' Guild for health-care professionals with the White Mass; the St. Thomas More Guild for lawyers with the Red Mass; and, on the fifteenth of this month for the first time in Vancouver, the Gold Mass for scientists on the memorial of St. Albert the Great, the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas.

It can't be repeated often enough that, so go young people, so goes the Church. Ministry to youth is both among the most challenging and the most fulfilling. Our youth ministry programs have the mission of forming active and intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Pope Francis addressed, by means of

video message, the Canadian Youth Forum, a Salt & Light hosted initiative in which a group of young adults from Vancouver took part. Something he said struck me as exactly what our Archdiocesan and parish-based programs strive to accomplish: “I invite you – the Pope said to them – to flood the places where you live with the joy and enthusiasm typical of your youthful age, to irrigate the world and history with the joy that comes from the Gospel, from having met a Person: Jesus, who has enthralled you and has drawn you to be with Him.” It’s a call to mission, but a mission anchored in a personal encounter with Christ.

As of today, 46 of our 77 parishes have active, intentional youth ministry programming involving pre-teens and teenagers. Our Spirit Day annual rally for the grade 7 confirmands boasts over 2,100 participants and 150 volunteers who are usually former participants. It is the largest Catholic youth rally in Canada.

Leadership training and peer ministry are the principal focus of all programming. This year marked the 20th anniversary of Searching in the Spirit, a post-Confirmation week-long summer camp, and YouthLeader, a Christian leadership training institute. World Youth Day continues to be extremely popular among our young people. The parishes prepare them well, and last summer’s event in Krakow was attended by more than 500 young adults.

Young adult ministry is active in 20 parishes. Among its activities

is the annual University Mass with me at the Cathedral and Catholic After Hours. We are extraordinarily blessed to have, in addition to active chaplaincies, Catholic Christian Outreach on the campuses of UBC and SFU. These young missionaries are very successful in reaching out to their peers on campus with their small group discussions on the faith. Last Christmas more than 600 university students gathered here in Vancouver for the annual CCO conference, Rise Up!, and many of our young people took part in its worship and talks, all directed at no less an ambition than motivating leaders for the renewal of the world.

In preparation for the Synod of Bishops next year on “Young People: the Faith and Vocational Discernment,” the young people of the Archdiocese, as in every diocese around the world, were asked by the Vatican to answer a survey on questions about what young people want and expect from the Church. One reply I was shown lays down the gauntlet. In responding to the query about what young people are asking of the Church today, he or she wrote: “I need the Church to tell me that as a young Catholic, I matter. I want her to reach out to teens who are lost and disengaged and speak to them in a relatable, non-intimidating, vibrant way about why the Church is relevant today and why God should still matter. I want the Church to help youth discover the faith for themselves besides what their parents force them to do.” This tells me that we still have a lot more to do with our young people!

On the ecumenical and interfaith front I am pleased to report that considerable progress continues to be made. We remain engaged with the Vancouver Consultation, which promotes collaboration among Christians in identifying and serving the public good together, and the Multi-Faith Summit Council. In several conferences and liturgical ceremonies we recalled with our Lutheran brothers and sisters the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. While we can't change history, we can change how we relate to one another and in that way build ecumenical bridges. Conversations and forums with Evangelicals have happily increased, and at least four such initiatives were held in the past year. I was also happy to be invited to take part in a Selichot service and panel discussion marking the beginning of the high holy days at Temple Beth Israel.

Now I would like to update you on two – not all four! – of the Archdiocese's priorities and goals.

II. Get Closer to Jesus

Even though “Get closer to Jesus” is listed as the second priority chosen to focus our pastoral efforts and mission, I believe that it really should enjoy pride of place. This allows me a homiletic moment. We all need to draw closer to Jesus, either truly personally for the very first time, or more deeply in our path of discipleship.

The final words that Jesus spoke to his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:20), he is still speaking to us today:

“Bring all men and women to discover the love that you have found!” Be a missionary, but first be a disciple. All the initiatives described above would be only humanitarian rather than works of love, if they were not grounded in a close personal relationship with the Lord.

We must first recognize that we are beneficiaries of God’s love before we can share that love with others. That’s why, for example, we have been sponsoring very successful men’s and women’s retreat in collaboration with Life Restoration ministry and encourage chapels for Eucharistic adoration. Both are ways to create spaces where people can truly encounter the Lord and take hold of their discipleship.

Two other great instruments are also being actively promoted throughout our local Church to help people come into or deepen their friendship with God: Alpha and Discover Discipleship or Discovery. Alpha, which aims at initial Christian evangelization, the presentation of the core message of the Gospel, is now being held in 13 of our parishes. In our secondary schools, the grade 9 curriculum explicitly provides for opportunities for students not just to know about Jesus but to know him in a relationship. Alpha Youth is being used to help the students come to this personal knowledge.

Discover Discipleship is a Vancouver-initiated program which uses the Faith Studies series of Catholic Christian Outreach. This initiative is being adapted in at least nine parishes, and a good number of volunteer

leaders are being formed to lead such studies.

If we get closer to Jesus, we will experience that renewal of joy which Pope Francis believes is essential for a deepening of Catholic vitality.

III. Strengthening Marriage and the Family

So many blessings – too many to enumerate – and I have highlighted only a selection from so many! Certainly I don't now want to spoil the picture I have painted. Even so, I do want to share with you one particular challenge that lies before us and one that we have targeted as an Archdiocesan priority: “strengthen marriages and families.”

Though they have always evolved, marriage and family patterns today seem to be changing more rapidly than ever before. We all know that the rates of cohabitation, common law marriages, marital breakdown, and divorce have risen exponentially in our life-time, but only recently has it been clear that an ever-growing proportion of people of marriageable age will never even attempt marriage. Contemporary young men and women are less certain about the meaning of marriage, less sold on its desirability, and less capable of sustaining it – and families based on it – than any previous culture or society.

As Pope Francis pointed out in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*: “In many places . . . the practice of living together before marriage is widespread, as well as a type of cohabitation which totally

excludes any intention to marry ... legislation facilitates a growing variety of alternatives ... Many countries are witnessing a legal deconstruction of the family, tending to adopt models based almost exclusively on the autonomy of the individual will” (n. 53).

As our culture gets more and more muddled about the meaning of the human person, of life and love, of marriage and family, inevitably there will be more confusion affecting child-rearing. We can expect pressures to push people in unhealthy directions; children will be encouraged to embrace gender fluidity and unconventional relationships of various sorts; and many young people will grow up without the aspiration or confidence to marry and be parents themselves.

Not being an alarmist but a realist, I think we have to be open-eyed about the consequences which follow from a culture that exalts narcissistic individualism, promotes freedom disengaged from responsibility and the common good, supports ideologies that directly attack the family, and uses technology in ways opposed to the dignity of human life. Each of these factors undermine the natural and divinely given design for marriage and the family.

But, as the Pope reminds us, even though no family is perfect, many “live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way” (AL, n. 57). For this reason, we should not waste our energy in endless laments, but rather seek creative

responses to problems by offering words of truth and hope. We cannot forget that marriage and family correspond to a yearning that is deeply rooted in the human heart, and we should do all we can to unearth that yearning.

With this hope, we have revamped our marriage preparation program, making changes not only to content but to availability, with programs offered on a single weekend. In 2016, there were more than 1,000 participants in 13 courses at 11 different locations. Moreover, for the third year in a row the number of marriages increased, reversing the steady decline of the past decade.

Another innovation this year has been the setting up of the Parenting Ministry, which has verified 12 registered professional counsellors in the Lower Mainland, who can be relied upon to support clients seeking help who want to adhere to the Church's teaching on marriage and family life. Furthermore, last year 16 workshops were held across the Archdiocese to help parents hone their parenting skills. I like the catchy titles of some of these workshops: "Making Sense of Anxiety" or, even better, "Your Brain on Twitter: Helping Children in an Age of Distraction."

The health of individuals, societies and the Church depends to a great extent upon the health of marriages and marriage-based families. Christians cannot stop advocating marriage simply to avoid being

unpopular or because we feel helpless; that would be to deprive the world of values we can and must offer, because “The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church” (AL 87).

IV. Post-Seminary and Ongoing Formation of Priests

Before concluding this admittedly long-winded talk, I would like to say a word about what the funds raised by tonight’s Dinner will be supporting.

Education of the lay faithful has long been a priority of the Archdiocese, above all through its network of primary and secondary schools supported by your sacrifice and generosity. Without doubt, it is a superb accomplishment and the increasing emphasis being placed on their specifically Catholic identity within the Church’s wider mission of evangelization is truly welcome. In the last twenty years, with the founding of Corpus Christi College and Catholic Pacific College, a new and very necessary development in providing Catholic higher education has been taking place. It is the laity’s responsibility to imbue society with Gospel values. But it’s the job of priests to give them the requisite tools to think and act as disciples of Jesus Christ. They can’t do that unless they are well formed.

To do this effectively, priests need good formation, spiritually, humanly, pastorally, and intellectually. I know that they receive that at both of our seminaries. But such a formation cannot stop with ordination.

No doubt because a large portion of my own life has been dedicated to the apostolate of education, I am convinced of the urgent need to foster the post-seminary and professional development of our priests.

The world in which they preach and serve is itself increasingly educated and needs the guidance of clergy who are ready to encourage but also to enlighten the faithful in their journey. As well as being diligent, faithful and consumed by a love for God and their people, priests need ongoing education – what is often called “professional development” – to be even better preachers and more capable of engaging with contemporary issues. The confidence that comes from such post- seminary educational experiences enables priests to be more mindful of Pope Benedict’s saying that lay people “must no longer be viewed as ‘collaborators’ of the clergy, but truly recognized as ‘co-responsible’ for the Church’s being and action.”

Priests willing to be an unpopular but creative minority, who will be leaders on fire for Jesus Christ and who aren’t afraid to preach the truth of the Catholic faith benefit personally from specialized post-seminary education, but its fruits flow into the life of the parish and wider community.

Priests today and in the years ahead need help in understanding and developing the inherent leadership capacities that God gave them. The formation of those practical, human skills starts in our seminaries but

must continue throughout their priestly life. Programs are available to help them in this regard, but, of course, they come at some cost, as did the “Good Leaders, Good Shepherd” initiative of several years ago.

Since my appointment as Archbishop, six priests have completed graduate studies in Rome, and one is finishing next month. Right now we have a record number of young priests, four of them, who are pursuing advanced education. Father Paul Goo is in Rome at the Gregorian University, my own *alma mater*, studying spiritual theology. Father Nick Meisl is also in the Eternal City, completing his studies in sacred Scripture with the Jesuits at the Biblicum. Father Bryan Duggan is in his second year in Washington at Divine Mercy University and pursuing a doctorate in psychology, while Father Pablo Santa Maria is beginning his degree in canon law at the Opus Dei University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain.

Admittedly it is a great sacrifice, as well as a financial burden, to have young priests absent from the Archdiocese during their studies, but they return equipped to teach at the Seminary of Christ the King, our Catholic colleges and permanent diaconate program, as well as to build up, so to speak, the educational capital of our local Church of the future.

Before closing, I want to thank you most sincerely for your continued commitment to the Lord and to his Church. I am humbled and inspired by who you are and by what you are doing for the Kingdom.

May God bless you and keep you close to him always!

We are now going to watch a video that illustrates the need for the post-seminary education of our priests as we find ourselves encountering new pastoral challenges in our increasingly secular society. Also, you will hear first hand from the experiences of two of the four priests that are currently studying full-time. Enjoy the video and think about how you can help them succeed.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver