

Fourth Annual Archbishop's Dinner

Hyatt Regency Hotel

29 October 2015

Brother Bishops; Reverend Fathers and Sisters; Deacons and
Seminarians; Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

It is now an annual late October tradition for us to be gathered here as an Archdiocesan family for this Dinner. I enjoy this evening because it gives me the opportunity to express my thanks to you for being such a vibrant Catholic community – a growing and engaged family, proud of its faith and one that goes out to the margins of society with initiatives of practical solidarity in one hand and the Good News of our salvation in Christ in the other.

Unfortunately, I am unable to thank each of you personally, because the numbers won't allow that. Nonetheless, I would like especially to express my gratitude to the patrons and sponsors of this Dinner listed in your program, as well as to all the staff and volunteers who have helped so generously to organize and prepare for this evening. Thank you all so very much.

Tonight's talk – some refer to it somewhat grandiosely as a “state of the Archdiocese address” – is divided into four sections: an overview of our Archdiocesan priorities set for the past three years and now coming to the point of final accountability; a look at where we are going next; some milestones of the present year; and finally, some words on

where the proceeds of this year's Dinner are being directed.

I. Report on Priorities and Goals

You know the saying, “If you know where you are going, you are more likely to get there.” Setting goals helps us focus our vision on some particular areas of importance; they allow a community to work together and they call for accountability.

One of the ancient images of the bishop is that he is the conductor of an orchestra, helping each player to contribute to an harmonious symphony. Our priorities and goals can be compared to the copies of the music shared by all the musicians in the orchestra. We depend completely on God – man proposes but God disposes – but I believe that God expects us to use our heads, to think things through and to act with vision and intentionality.

Of course, plans tell only a part of the story, and they must always give way, as Pope Francis reminds us, to the “God of surprises”: he is continually surprising us, opening our hearts and guiding us in unexpected ways.”¹

The first priority we set was to foster a culture of vocation among everyone, remembering that everyone has a “calling” to discern wisely and prayerfully the plan of God for their life. Later I will refer to the

¹ Francis, Homily, Closing Mass of the III Extraordinary Synod and Beatification of Paul VI (19 October 2014).

specific calling to ordained ministry, but many of our efforts focussed on marriage and the family. Even before the Pope called two meetings of the Synod of Bishops to deal with pastoral challenges facing today's families, we recognized the need to be more intentional in our efforts to support Catholic family life. Our single biggest achievement to date has been to revamp and strengthen our Archdiocesan marriage preparation program, by paying more attention to the need to evangelize many engaged couples, to the theology of the body and to natural family planning.

In light of Pope Francis's call to the whole Church to evangelize our families, communities and indeed the world, we have been working to offer and support more opportunities for the evangelization of our young people and adults. 50 of our 78 parishes now have youth ministry with intentional catechesis as a component of their programs. These programs are directed to both the heart and the head: to helping our young people come to know Jesus Christ personally, as well as to equip them to be able to explain and defend their Catholic faith in a world filled with so many questions, and sometimes even antagonisms. A catechesis which stops at Confirmation cannot withstand the pressures placed upon our young people today. And our parishes are working to help them with new resources placed at their disposal.

As far as adult faith formation is concerned, I'm happy to report

that 68 of our parishes now offer at least four such faith formation opportunities. Furthermore, many parishes have small groups, such as Project Timothy, which are directed to the primary evangelization of their members. It is also encouraging to note an increase in the number of men's groups across the Archdiocese.

Our third goal dealt with fostering stewardship as a way of life among parishioners, in line with Proposition 34 of the Archdiocesan Synod which concluded in 2006: "Adopt a 'time, talent, and treasure' stewardship program." New stewardship committees have been formed in many parishes and 2/3 of our parishes now regularly undertake stewardship activities and initiatives such as hosting a ministry fair, volunteer appreciation, new parishioner welcome programs, hospitality ministry and fostering awareness of stewardship through bulletin announcements and homilies.

A great deal of time and energy has also gone into plans for stewarding the Archdiocesan infrastructure in light of the need to upgrade it in the event of a seismic event. The goal set was that by November 30, all parishes are to have submitted either a Campus Master Plan, if they are anticipating a building project in the near future, or a Campus Needs Assessment, if renewal of their infrastructure is being planned on a more long-term horizon. Not all parishes will be ready for submission of their plans or assessment by the deadline, but I anticipate

that all will be completed by the Spring of next year.

While speaking of buildings, it is always a pleasure for me to break ground and to bless new facilities in the Archdiocese. They are signs of growth and parish engagement in a common project. In the past two years I have dedicated two new churches – St. James in Abbotsford and St. Mary’s in Gibsons, and last Sunday rededicated the completely renovated Blessed Sacrament Church. And I have also blessed St. Augustine’s new school and the new wing at Notre Dame Secondary School, the new parish pastoral centre at St. Nicholas in Langley, the John Paul II Pastoral Centre. I have also broken ground for a long-awaited parish centre at St. Luke’s in Maple Ridge and blessed three new houses of formation: the Redemptoris Mater Seminary for our seminarians; Little Flower Monastery in Deroche for the Carmelites and the house in Mission for the Congregation of St. John the Baptist.

On the horizon are plans for rebuilding St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Patrick’s Secondary Schools. All of these initiatives take an enormous amount of planning, gathering of resources, and working together in implementing a vision to provide the facilities needed for worship, for parish activities and for educating our young people. They bear witness to the vitality within the Archdiocese and the good Lord’s blessing.

II. Future Steps

As we look ahead to future plans and goals, we are taking our cue from the priorities set forth in the teaching of Pope Francis, well aware that our local Archdiocese does not exist in isolation from the wider Church. We are but a portion of the Lord's vineyard, and we live as part of a greater reality, the Church throughout the world, under the shepherding of the Successor of Peter. For this reason, we shall concentrate on renewing our parishes and, once again, our families.

Pope Francis calls our parishes to be, in his words, "completely mission-oriented."² By this he means that we must "abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way.' I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities."³ Elsewhere he describes what a parish is to do: "In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers."⁴

Francis is convinced that all authentic renewal in the Church begins with our entering into a personal friendship with Jesus Christ. He wants to put Christ and friendship with him, at the center of parish

² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

³ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33.

⁴ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

life. It is the goal of our worship and the object of our preaching. And so, while we must begin by reaffirming this primary goal, we must also work more intentionally to help our parishioners be prepared to undertake their mission to bring the Gospel to others.

The Holy Father wants us to open the Church's doors to the world outside. A "self-referential Church keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not let him out."⁵ To drive his point home, he draws on an image from the Book of Revelation. Jesus is standing at the door and knocks; he knocks to be let into our heart (cf. Rev 3:20), just as in the famous pictures we know from our Bibles and catechisms. However, Francis then gives the traditional image a twist. "But, ask yourselves this question: how often is Jesus inside and knocking at the door to be let out, to come out? And we do not let him out because of our own need for security, because so often we are locked into ephemeral structures that serve solely to make us slaves and not free children of God."⁶

Our emphasis, then, will be on helping parishes engage their parishioners in assuming their responsibility for the Church's mission. Each parish needs to be a home of prayer, love, and service.

But we also need to reach out beyond those who are gathered in

⁵ Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Address before the Conclave (12 March 2013).

⁶ Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Movements, Vigil of Pentecost (18 May 2013).

the parish community, to reach out to the scattered. There are many in our community who have known the Catholic Church at one time or another and are no longer with us. Others have just lost touch with the Church, or have left because of a bitter experience of some kind. We need to welcome and embrace them.

As well as fostering active vibrant parishes which reach out, we shall also continue to emphasize the family as the first unit to be evangelized, so that, in turn, it can be an evangelizing community within the parish. If families are not healthy, neither is the parish.

The recently concluded Synod of Bishops in Rome reminded us of the need to give increasing importance to the institution of the family and of marriage between a man and a woman, based on a permanent covenant, and valuing it as the fundamental basis of society and human life.⁷

Among other things, this will mean helping parents understand their responsibility as the primary evangelizers and catechists of their children, reaching out to families in crisis, and finding effective ways, faithful to Christ's teaching, of ministering to the divorced. Above all, it means that parishes are communities of families. As goes the family, so goes the parish.

Beginning on December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate

⁷ Cf. Francis, Concluding Address at the Synod of Bishops (24 October 2015).

Conception and concluding next year on November 27, the Solemnity of Christ the King, the Archdiocese will join in celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. He speaks frequently and fervently about the Church as “a maternal womb of mercy.”⁸ She is like a mother who never gives up on her children, even when they go astray. “She is a merciful mother who understands, . . . she never closes the door to home. She . . . offers God’s forgiveness; she offers his love which invites even those of her children who have fallen into a deep abyss to continue on their way.”⁹ Like a mother, the universal Church must travel the path of mercy, and so must the Church in Vancouver.

To that end, of making Jesus’ face of mercy visible to the world, we will have several large archdiocesan wide events, including the opening and closing of the Holy Doors at Holy Rosary Cathedral and at Westminster Abbey, and a great celebration on Divine Mercy Sunday. We will also be promoting the spiritual and corporal works of mercy in our parishes and especially in our schools. Above all, we will be taking steps so that all people, particularly those who have not been to confession for a long time, will be invited, welcomed and prepared to celebrate the Sacrament of Mercy, Reconciliation, during the Holy Year.

III. Two Milestones of the Past Year

⁸ Francis, Address to the Bishops of Brazil (28 July 2013).

⁹ Francis, General Audience (18 September 2013), 2.

It's now my pleasure to mention, even if briefly, three of the milestones of the past year which are the source of legitimate pride.

First is your response to the refugee crisis provoked by the violence in the Middle East. The Archdiocese has been involved in refugee sponsorship for over thirty years now, and we are one of the 92 agreement holders in Canada that can privately sponsor refugees. We have extended our sponsorship agreement to include the Dioceses of Victoria, Prince George and Whitehorse and are working to bring Kamloops on board as well.

Since 2007, our local Church has sponsored over 3,000 refugees, making us one of the largest sponsors in the country. Currently, there are 28 parishes in the Archdiocese in the process of sponsorship and another 15 which want to move forward. Our Office of Service and Justice has almost 650 refugees overseas who have been identified as wanting to come to Vancouver and are waiting on processing and approval by Immigration Canada. On their behalf, I thank all of you for your generous support of those seeking a refuge in our land.

We should all be grateful to God that he has enabled us to act effectively and practically to serve refugees in justice and love.

A second area of pride for me is our Catholic school system. We have 40 primary schools and 10 high schools, 4 of which are congregational, including the Junior Seminary at Westminster Abbey.

This year their combined enrollment was over 16,200 – the highest ever.

We are blessed to have these independent schools which receive provincial support and which we are freely allowed to govern according to the tenets of our faith. And recently there have been an increasing number of initiatives and programs aimed at strengthening their Catholic identity, including the ongoing faith formation of teachers, faith development days, and teacher discussions with school pastors.

In CISVA's recently approved strategic plan, the Board, with input from all stakeholders, gave evangelization pride of place. Its first strategic priority states that our Catholic schools are “to be evangelizing school communities which foster a personal relationship with Jesus in the family of the Church.” It is very gratifying that our schools, so closely linked to the parishes of which they form an essential part, are working hard to implement this goal.

I should also like to report that our four institutions of higher learning in the Archdiocese – yes, we have four! – are also flourishing: St. Mark's College and Corpus Christi College on the campus of UBC; Catholic Pacific College in Langley, and the Seminary of Christ the King in Mission. They play, and will increasingly play, a vital role in preparing lay people and clergy for the mission in society and the Church.

We need attorneys, healthcare workers, business people – in fact,

all Catholic adults – to witness to the Good News of Jesus in our society so often caught up in a sterile secular vision in which people are treated as things, not as persons, and in which individualism is privileged over a loving community. We already are familiar with the tragedy of abortion, and the havoc it causes. Now the dark shadow extends further, with the Supreme Court’s decision that, unless another solution is found, would allow physicians to kill individuals at the later stages of their life’s journey. It is vital to offer alternatives: just as encouragement of adoption protects the little ones at the beginning of life, so the encouragement of palliative care protects those near the end of their earthly journey.

IV. Seminarians as Beneficiaries of Tonight’s Dinner

Dear friends: your generosity to the needs of your parishes, of the Archdiocese and of the wider Church is truly inspiring. Thousands of you are engaged in offering your time and talents in the volunteer service you give to your parishes and schools, to our local Church and to the community. Such generosity manifests a true ecclesial spirit rooted in gratitude for what the good Lord has given you and which you return to him in gratitude.

As you know, and as you will shortly hear more, the proceeds of this evening’s Dinner are going to support the formation of our seminarians. I am delighted beyond words that in the last five years we

have doubled the number of men studying for the priesthood in the Archdiocese. At present there are 28 of them! And they are wonderful and inspiring men. Two of them will shortly be ordained priests, and two more on the Vigil of Pentecost next May – a grace for them, and for us.

To have this number of seminarians is truly a great, great blessing for the Archdiocese, and I am truly thankful to their families, to Father Bryan and the Vocations Committee, to their formators at the Seminary of Christ the King and our Archdiocesan Seminary *Redemptoris Mater*, and to you, the faithful of our local Church, for all the support you give them and the many prayers you offer on their behalf. I urge you to continue along this path.

Among my primary responsibilities as bishop is to do all in my power, with the Lord's grace, to ensure that no parish is without a shepherd who can offer the Eucharist and celebrate the Sacraments for the people. The simple fact is that there is no Church without the Eucharist, and no Eucharist without the priest. And there is no priest without a long period – from six to eight years – of human, spiritual, theological, and pastoral formation. Theirs is a long and costly journey of preparation, so necessary if they are to serve you as holy priests who will lead you to the Lord. Continue to accompany them on their path to the altar.

While tonight we are focussing on seminarians, I also want to mention an historic occasion that will take place at Holy Rosary Cathedral this December 8. It will be the largest Ordination class in the history of the Archdiocese, when 17 men will be ordained as permanent deacons to serve in our parishes and various ministries in the Archdiocese. Do keep these men and their families in your prayers as they prepare for the Sacrament of Orders.

Conclusion

I hope that my remarks have inspired you to thank the good Lord for all that he is doing in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. He has blessed us with faithful priests and consecrated men and women; he has raised up a laity which is fervent and open-hearted; and he has enabled so many initiatives to flourish. I, too, thank him for the unmerited grace of allowing me to be your shepherd. Together let us ask our patroness, the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we honour as Queen of the Holy Rosary, to enfold us in her mantle and intercede for us before the merciful throne of God.

Thank you all for your kind attention, but especially thank you so very much for being a people of faith in love with the Lord Jesus and faithful members of his Church.

It is now my pleasure to introduce to you Father Bryan Duggan, the energetic and very effective Director of Vocations of the Archdiocese who will lead you through the next steps of the program – in fact, its highlight.

✝ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver