

Second Annual Archbishop's Dinner

Hyatt Regency Hotel

30 October 2013

Brother Bishops and Reverend Fathers: Sisters and Brothers;

Distinguished Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

Before sharing some remarks, this evening I would especially like to recognize once again Bishop-elect Mark Hagemoen, President of Corpus Christi College and Principal of St. Mark's College, on his appointment as the sixth Bishop of McKenzie-Fort Smith, one of the most extensive dioceses in the world, with 1.5 million square kilometers and stretching to the North Pole. His dynamism, creativity and pastoral sense will be sorely missed. Father Mark is the fifth priest of our Archdiocese to be named bishop in the last eleven years, and the second this year, with Bishop Stephen Jensen now in Prince George. These appointments indicate the Holy Father's recognition of the strength of our presbyterate, for which we are all extremely grateful. As well, our congratulations go to Bishop Richard Gagnon of Victoria, one of our Vancouver priest-bishops, whom Pope Francis named two days ago as the new Archbishop of Winnipeg.

We are honoured this evening by the presence of Archbishop Paul-André Durocher, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. I am very grateful to all of you here tonight at this second

Annual Archbishop's Dinner. Our Archdiocese is blessed by the faith, your enthusiasm, your spirited participation in the life of your parishes and our local Church. All I can say is *Deo gratias*, thanks be to God for all of you and each one of you.

Especially deserving of our thanks, as well, are our patrons and sponsors listed in your program, and those unable to be with us who have made generous donations of support. And, of course, my gratitude goes to all the volunteers who helped to prepare for this evening.

My talk tonight is tripartite – a kind of triptych of what is going on in the Archdiocese. First, I would like to highlight several of the initiatives taken for our celebration of the Year of Faith. Second, I will outline our three major archdiocesan priorities that have been identified. And lastly, I will say something about the particular charity, the Door Is Open, which will benefit from the funds raised at this Dinner will be applied.

I. Initiatives of the Year of Faith

As well as commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the purpose of the Year of Faith we are now celebrating is “to open wide the door of faith”; “to undertake initiatives to communicate the beauty of the Catholic

faith so that it can be received with enthusiasm and joy.”¹

And what has been our archdiocesan response to throwing open these doors? How have we been showing enthusiasm for our faith?

Well, a couple of things come to mind. First, to make the faith better known, especially among younger Catholics, we promoted YOUCAT, a popular, accessible and very readable presentation of what the Church teaches. We distributed 15,000 copies to parishes and schools and also made available to them various tools to help people read and discuss it.

¹ BC Bishops, Pastoral Letter, *Stake Your Claim* (7 April 2013).

Our second initiative, and one you supported by your generosity at last year's Dinner, has been "Catholics Come Home." Vancouver was the first diocese in Canada to launch a media campaign inviting inactive Catholics to return to the pews. Over a period of several weeks last December and January, more than 1,700 TV spots were aired in English, Mandarin and Cantonese. Many parishes took up this call with great zeal. They devised and implemented new ways of ensuring that those practising the faith are energized, so as better to witness to Christ and his Gospel and to warmly welcome home those who, for many different reasons, have ceased to be active in the ecclesial community. Indeed, I have met a good number of persons who introduce themselves after Mass saying, "I'm a come-home Catholic."

Some stories deserve to be told; for example, that of Del Bailey, whose family left the Church shortly after she made her First Communion. Now in her 80s, she returned on her own after watching the "Catholics Come Home" spots and told us, "Since I've come home, I'm very happy and wish I did this years ago."

And listen to what Thomas Manns wrote in a thank you letter to the Archdiocese. It says it all: "Just wanted to take a moment of your time to thank you for the "Catholics Come Home" program and commercials. One of those commercials changed my life! Thank you! . . . Every day now I thank God for not giving up on me, even though I gave up on him

25 years ago! Thank you, for helping me come home!”

And we expect to see ever more fruits of these over time.

With stories like these and others, we can be confident that this massive effort to give our faith away has not only helped those who were inactive but has deepened the faith of regular church-goers. As Blessed John Paul II once reminded us, “Faith is strengthened when it’s given to others.”²

² Blessed John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

With such positive results we cannot, therefore, let this great initiative be just a flash in the pan – short-lived but without any enduring follow-through. For the Church, evangelization is not merely the flavour of the month.

As an Archdiocese, we remain committed to the urgent appeal of the new evangelization. Faith, of course, is a gift of God. However, as followers of Christ, we must demonstrate that we live our faith in a concrete way: through our love, harmony, joy, and patient suffering. This witness gives rise to questions: Why do you live that way? What hope urges you on? “These are questions which lead straight to the heart of evangelization, to the *witness* of faith and charity. What we especially need in these times – the Holy Father has said – are credible witnesses who make the Gospel visible by their lives as well as by their words, and who reawaken the attraction for Jesus Christ, for the beauty of God.”³

³ Francis, Address to the Plenary Assembling of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization (14 October 2013).

To continue this work of evangelization, we have just launched faith study groups in 17 parishes. They are part of an initiative called Project Timothy, which uses the strategy and resources of Catholic Christian Outreach, adapted for the parish context. There are now 56 committed leaders for this program, one which both evangelizes and forms evangelizers. Among others, 110 men, from the 1100 who attended the recent Men's Conference, have signed up to take part. This is a truly a marvellous beginning of an endeavour which I hope will extend to every parish as an integral part of its evangelizing mission.

II. Charting a New Course: Our Priorities

To live and spread the faith requires a great deal from us as individuals, communities, parishes and as an archdiocesan family. The needs are seemingly infinite and our resources – human and otherwise – are limited. At the archdiocesan level, last fall we engaged the Catholic Leadership Institute, which had previously mentored thirty priests through an 18-month program, “Good Leaders, Good Shepherds,” to help us set our priorities for the next three years, areas to which we should dedicate particular, though by no means not exclusive, attention. We invoked the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We consulted widely: with the staff at the John Paul II Pastoral Centre, with the Presbyteral Council, and with the now three-year old Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. After often spirited discussion, we decided upon three major priorities which will

take centre stage in our planning and pastoral initiatives in the next three, now two, years. Of course, they are not all we are doing; nonetheless, these priorities focus our attention on key pastoral concerns.

What are they? First, growing a culture of vocation; second, evangelizing the family; and third, stewarding God's gifts. Each of these priorities has two associated goals to be achieved within a definite time frame.

Now to say something about each one in turn.

1. Growing a Culture of Vocation

The first priority, growing a culture of vocation, is fundamental to all our initiatives. Note carefully that it does not say “growing a culture of vocations,” in the plural. It is purposely in the singular. Why? Because each person has a vocation, and we want everyone to become more aware that he or she has received from God the invitation to live life to the fullest in a particular way, whether as family, as a single person, whether as a consecrated man or woman in the Church, or as a priest. Blessed John Henry Newman beautifully expressed this notion of each individual’s specific vocation and mission, when he wrote: “God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another.”⁴ It is up to each of us, with God’s guidance, to discover our unique role in the Church’s mission. We will be working toward better preparing our young people to answer their call whether as married, ordained, consecrated or single. Father Bryan Duggan, our assistant Director of Vocations, is visiting schools to reinforce this message. We aim to ensure that this idea of “vocation” is appropriately inserted into the curriculum of our Catholic schools and in PREP and other youth and young adult activities.

Most people respond to God’s call to holiness through the Sacrament of Marriage. To nurture this vocation, the Archdiocese will be establishing three new programs that support marriage and the family –

⁴ John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*.

the foundation of a holy Church and a vibrant social community. These programs include revising our marriage preparation program by paying more attention to natural family planning and to the theology of the body. In the coming months, plans will be finalized about ways to assist parishes in providing resources to enrich married life and foster good parenting.

Unlike many regions in Canada and around the world, we are blessed that every parish in our Archdiocese has a resident priest. But if this grace is to continue to be ours, we must pray and work together so that young men will respond to God's call. For this reason, to meet the Church's needs, we have set the goal of increasing the number of seminarians to 25 by the year 2015. This year we have sixteen seminarians. Among the steps planned to reach our objective, and overseen by Father Joseph Nguyen, our Vicar General, is that of establishing in every parish a Vocations Committee composed of laity whose purpose is to encourage and pray for vocations.

Here, I believe, is the best place to mention an exciting initiative that is being undertaken in our Archdiocese. During my visit to Rome last month, I met with the leadership of the Neocatechumenal Way to formalize the request that they set up a missionary seminary in Vancouver. If I had any doubts about the venture, they were definitively cleared up when, prior to this meeting, I had the opportunity to exchange a

few words with Pope Francis. I mentioned to him that I was in Rome to see about setting up a *Redemptoris Mater* seminary for the evangelization of China. He replied simply and directly with the words, “Che lo faccia!” “Go ahead and do it!”

As a result, we will be one of the now one hundred such *Redemptoris Mater* seminaries around the world, adding to the two currently in Canada, one in Toronto and another in Quebec City. Its purpose would be to prepare men for the evangelization of China and Asia. A rector has already been appointed, and six prospective seminarians will be arriving in the next few months to begin their studies at Christ the King Seminary. The presence of this seminary, whose students will be archdiocesan seminarians, will foster in our local Church an even deeper missionary spirit and commitment to preach the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:19).

I might also add that this same spirit has animated the formal agreement signed this year between our Archdiocese and the Diocese of Lang Son in Vietnam. We have pledged to cooperate closely with each other in various activities and to offer reciprocal assistance.

2. Evangelizing the Family

Our second priority focuses more specifically on *evangelizing* the family; that is, ensuring that its members are well formed to live their call to holiness, vocation and mission. Because the family is the “domestic Church,” it is obvious that much of our evangelizing activity in parishes should concentrate on this area. We are implementing a two-pronged approach to achieve this: emphasizing initiatives for young people, and fostering adult faith formation.

To reach out and support the next generation, we intend to establish youth ministry with catechesis in at least 60 of our parishes within two years. By encouraging this catechetical component, we hope to see to it that our young people will benefit from a sturdy formation in Catholic life that will enable them to live and proclaim the Gospel with conviction and joy.

A second goal in this priority is that of introducing at least four adult faith formation opportunities every year in every parish. These can be any number of activities: Bible study, men’s and women’s groups, adult discussion gatherings, special events and days, and so on. What is important is that the faithful have readily available opportunities to grow in their understanding of the faith, so that they can be salt and light in a society that has stripped itself of flavour and obscures the light of truth.

Right now leadership teams are interviewing and holding meetings

and focus groups with young people, pastors and catechists to come up with the best ways to meet these two goals.

3. Stewarding God's Gifts

Our third priority is stewarding God's gifts. Stewardship should be a way of life for every parishioner. Stewardship aims to help parishes become communities of those who are "co-responsible" for the life of the Church. In the next two years, the specific goal to be achieved is the establishment of stewardship committees in at least half of our parishes. Their task is to promote among parishioners a deeper appreciation that Baptism calls us to accept God's gifts gratefully, to care for them responsibly, to share them for the good of all, and to return them with increase to the Lord.

Besides setting up stewardship committees, a second goal is also included in this third priority. By the end of 2015, every parish is to have completed a comprehensive plan for dealing with the infrastructure needs of its school, church and hall, rectory, and for any future development of their sites. This goal is included under "stewarding God's gifts" because it draws attention to the legacy of which we are all beneficiaries in the buildings and institutions we received because of the sacrifices of previous generations. Everyone shares the fruits of this inherited generosity. Now it is the obligation of the present generation to show its gratitude by building on this legacy.

Last June, we completed a seismic risk assessment of our 391 major building blocks on ninety different sites. Approximately one-third of these were rated as “high risk,” some of them being our schools. They will require significant structural upgrading and, in some cases, reconstruction. As you can well imagine, the capital needs for such project runs into the tens and tens of millions. But there is good news here as well. In the past twenty years, the Archdiocese has spent more than \$200 million on construction. Together we can certainly do the same – and even more – in the next twenty years.

The completion of a formal “Campus Master Plan” is the first mechanism by which a parish or regional high school can assess its needs, its course of action and the necessary fundraising strategies to be put in place. The archdiocesan Finance, Development and Project Management Offices are already working closely with parishes to assist them in planning for this major project.

Besides the larger infrastructure renewal whose planning is being called for, another mechanism has been put in place to enhance life safety, especially for school children, in the face of a seismic event. We recently mandated the installation of an Earthquake Early Warning System in all of our elementary and secondary schools. For parishes without a school, participation in this system is voluntary.

III. The Door Is Open

Before concluding, I would like to share with you how the funds raised at this year's Dinner will be allocated. At the beginning of the Year of Faith, the Holy Father asked us "to open wide the door of faith." There is one place where, for forty years, this message has been heard and practised: where the doors have been wide, wide open. That place is on Cordova Street: the Door is Open, run by Catholic Charities. And the door there remains open because of the faith of its staff, guests, benefactors and more than 200 adult and 300 student volunteers, largely from our parishes and Catholic schools.

The ministry at the Door Is Open began humbly, exactly forty years ago in 1973, in the living room of a small house occupied by four college students. They invited people in the neighbourhood into their home for food and conversation. In 1984, they moved into the building where it still operates today. On the average, it now feeds daily 400 people: more on weekends and more in cold winter months. While the majority of patrons are men, with the arrival of the Carmelite Sisters of Our Lady, the number of women visiting has trebled. About one-third identify as having a First Nations background. And, in recent years, the number of seniors has increased significantly.

Very soon, the Door Is Open will be moving to the former convent of the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, once the Dunley School, just around the corner. These new facilities, renovated at a cost of \$200,000,

will accommodate even more patrons, and a lot more comfortably. It has a full-service kitchen and will allow better quality food to be served. Moreover, this building has three classrooms that will enable the facility to be “a campus of learning.” The classrooms will host everything from ESL, GED and art classes for people in the neighbourhood, to skills training for volunteers and others. High school students and those from Corpus Christi College will be able to do service learning on site, thereby growing to appreciate how the Gospel and Church teaching are linked with service.

Yes, like so many other Church activities that serve the marginalized, including the archdiocesan hostel that houses over 100 men nightly, our very active prison ministry, outreach to migrant workers in the Fraser Valley and settling Iraqi refugees, all coordinated by the Office of Service and Justice, the Door Is Open is exactly what Pope Francis has in mind when he affirms so insistently that we must be “a Church for the poor.”⁵ “Go to the poor first of all: – he admonishes us – this is the priority. At the moment of the Last Judgement, . . . we shall all be judged on this.”⁶

Dear friends: I thank you for your volunteer commitments in your

⁵ Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Movements, Vigil of Pentecost (18 May 2013).

⁶ Francis, Address to the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome (17 June 2013).

parishes, in the Archdiocese, and in the wider community, and I would like to express special thanks for your generosity to the recent Syrian refugee collection which was, as was the case last year for the famine victims in East Africa, the highest of any other diocese in Canada. Nearly \$320,000 was offered for their support. But most of all I am grateful and inspired by your faith, a faith that is strong and robust, a faith that is rooted in adherence to the Lord and his Church, a faith in God that manifests itself in love of neighbour.

Conclusion

If there were more time – but I have taken time enough – I would speak about our marvellous school and health-care systems, the new degree programs in higher education at our Catholic Colleges, our growing number of movements, associations and professional guilds, our conferences for men and women, our ecumenical and interfaith initiatives, our work moving forward with First Nations in truth and reconciliation, our improved presence on the web, our new Pastoral Centre with apartments for our retired priests whose foundations are even now being poured, our 18 candidates in our first permanent diaconate class and 10 aspirants in the program, and our upcoming celebration at the PNE on April 27 to mark the canonization of the Blesseds John XXIII and John Paul II, and so on and on and on. But, God willing, there are other years to come, and other opportunities to come.

May Our Lady, Queen of the Holy Rosary, under whose maternal protection our Archdiocese has placed itself, and the good Lord himself in his tender mercy embrace and bless all of you.

Thank you so much for opening the doors of faith and the doors of your hearts in the service of the Lord and his Church!

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver