

## **Archdiocesan Priorities**

ONE Conference

15 February 2014

Reverend brothers and sisters; Ladies and Gentlemen:

### ***Introduction***

What a great joy it is to be with you this morning at the opening of our Archdiocesan ONE Conference. The success of this Conference is a tremendous testimony to the vitality and dynamism of our local Church, and I thank each and every one of you for your willingness to set aside a Saturday to express that we share one faith, that we are one body – that of Christ right here in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley – and that we have one mission. You are here – and I am here with you – as the publicity for the Conference stated: to cultivate, inspire and unite us in the mission entrusted to us by the Lord.

The tireless and dedicated coordinators of this event asked me to talk on “Charting the Church’s Direction.” And I am going to comply with their request of laying out for you our Archdiocesan priorities for mission in the next three years. But, before doing that, I would like to situate what we are now being called to do in light of the appeal made to us by our fascinating, engaging and often surprising Holy Father. Furthermore, we should, as faithful Catholics, take the Pope’s priorities seriously.

### ***The Pope’s Priorities***

While the media is giving Francis unprecedented coverage,

surpassing even that of Pope John Paul II in his golden years, the best place to get an unfiltered expression of where he wants to lead the Church is his recent apostolic exhortation called *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The Joy of the Gospel.” In many ways, the title says it all. We are being called to encounter and proclaim Jesus Christ, to “enter into this great stream of joy,”<sup>1</sup> which is the Church on a mission. Nonetheless, he spends some 217 pages to get his point across! Mercifully, I am on a more restricted schedule. Even so, I want to draw your attention to how, by reading the “signs of the times,” *he* sees the Church’s mission, a mission which I believe is embodied in our three Archdiocesan priorities.

Pope Francis wants the world to know that the Church isn’t here to condemn them. For him, that is a false image of the Church. Therefore, he wants to correct that view, reshaping how the Church is perceived, so that it can be seen by others for what it really is.

And what is that reality? One particularly striking images he uses to convey how he views the Church is this novel one: the Church is like a field hospital in time of warfare:

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 5.

I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. . . . And you have to start from the ground up.<sup>2</sup>

The physician, the Church, on the field of battle is to treat major wounds and try to stop the bleeding. What we find today, the Pope thinks, are many people who are gravely wounded spiritually. They are alienated from God, stuck in the no-man's land of moral relativism, and adrift in an abyss with no sense of direction or purpose. They need healing – and fast.<sup>3</sup> They need the consolation of knowing they are loved by God, and “the chance to live life on a higher plane.”<sup>4</sup> Sometimes they have already been baptized; other times not.

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<sup>2</sup> Francis, Interview with Antonio Spadaro.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Robert Barron, “The Church Is a Home for Everybody,” *Catholic Register* (13 October 2013), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 10.

Whatever the case, we are being called to proclaim the source of all liberation: Jesus Christ. Francis is calling us to be “missionary disciples,”<sup>5</sup> keenly aware that evangelization is “the first task of the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

To evangelize authentically and effectively demands both a personal and an ecclesial renewal. Here’s how the Holy Father has put what he expects of us:

I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Francis is inviting, or better yet, he is urging us here in the Archdiocese of Vancouver to undertake what he calls a “missionary conversion.”<sup>8</sup> First of all, this mean living the Gospel more faithfully ourselves. Accompanying this is our need to bring Christ to those who are still indifferent or unaware of its saving message.

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<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 30.

But Francis is a practical man, and he warns us against an attitude which so easily can stifle change:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to 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.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, in evangelizing we must not think that we need to be eloquent apologists, though that can be helpful. What do we say? What do we preach? As he wrote, “concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary . . . In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.”<sup>10</sup>

## **II. Charting a New Course: Our Priorities**

To live and spread our faith requires a great deal from us as individuals, communities, movements, parishes and as an Archdiocesan family. The needs are seemingly infinite and our resources – human and otherwise – are limited. That’s why, at the Archdiocesan level, we

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<sup>9</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 35, 36.

decided to set priorities for the next three years. These priorities are areas to which we should dedicate particular, though by no means not exclusive, attention. To arrive at these priorities 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 Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. After considerable, often spirited, discussion, we settled on three major priorities which will take centre stage in our planning and pastoral initiatives in the next three years.

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 the intention is to remind everyone that he or she has received from God the invitation to live life to the fullest in a particular way, whether as married, as single, 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."<sup>11</sup> It is up to each of us, with God's guidance, to discover our unique place in the Church's overall 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 (visiting over there with the Holy Father!), 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, in PREP and in other youth and young adult activities.

### ***1.1 Marriage***

Most people respond to God's call to holiness through the Sacrament of Marriage. To nurture this vocation, the Archdiocese will establish three new programs that support marriage and the family – the foundation of a holy Church and a vibrant social community. We realize that the Church's pastoral ministry must support family life throughout its journey.

We are introducing into our Marriage Preparation course an introduction to the theology of the body substantial enough that most

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<sup>11</sup> John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*.

couples will begin to understand the basis of the Church's teachings on both marriage and fertility. We are also integrating the learning of NFP into the program. Already we have increased the number of NFP teachers and we are now increasing the number of theology of the body teachers.

Recognizing the need for ongoing support of married couples, this coming Fall the Office of Life, Marriage and Family will begin to offer, in a familiar format such as "Marriage on Tap" a series of talks and discussions on both theological and relationship topics related to marriage.

A third prong of this initiative is piloting a program designed to help parents in passing on the Faith to their children.

### ***1.2 Priesthood***

The second "vocation" we shall emphasize is that of the priesthood. 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 is to continue, we must pray and work together so that an increasing number young men will respond to God's call to serve him as a priest. Among the steps planned to foster priestly vocations is that overseen by the Vocations Office: to establish in every parish a a group or a committee composed of lay faithful whose purpose is to pray



fervently for vocations to the priesthood and to assist the pastor in encouraging them.

An exciting new initiative that is directly related to our mission of evangelizing is the opening of a new seminary in the Archdiocese, one whose purpose is the evangelization of China and Asia. This seminary is sponsored by the Neocatechumenal Way. When they complete their formation, the seminarians will be ordained for the Archdiocese of Vancouver. However, it is understood that, for long periods of time, they will be “on mission” in the Far East and absent from the Archdiocese, though always remaining part of our presbyterate. The first three men have already arrived and are taking courses at the Seminary of Christ the King. 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).

## ***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, their particular vocation and their mission as baptized Catholics. 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.

We chose this priority, I might add, before Pope Francis called an extraordinary synod to meet in Rome this Fall, to be followed by an ordinary synod of bishops in 2015. Many of you participated in the lengthy questionnaire that was sent to every diocese in the world to take the pulse of the state of marriage in today's Church and the challenges it faces.

### ***2.1 Youth Ministry with Catechetical Component***

To reach out and support an effective evangelization of the next generation, we intend to expand youth and young adult ministry with a catechetical component in our parishes. 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 encounter Christ and proclaim the Gospel message with conviction and joy.

Youth ministry is the Church's response to the particular needs of young people, drawing them into responsible participation in the life, mission and ministry of the Church.

Youth and young adult ministry continues to grow in our Archdiocese. For young adult ministry, we have established a Commission for Young Adult Ministry that is helping us develop a

service plan for young adult ministry, while also planning events and gatherings. To support this ministry in parishes, the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry offers young people opportunities for leadership development, catechesis, and evangelization, including Spirit Day, with over 2,100 participants, making it the biggest annual Catholic youth gathering in Canada.

While over half of parishes presently offer youth ministry, there is a definite need to focus on a renewed emphasis on a catechetical approach. In June, 40 people from across the Archdiocese gathered for a series of three “listening sessions.” Now the Office is engaged in developing an overall strategic plan to strengthen youth ministry in the Archdiocese.

## ***2.2 Adult Faith Formation***

A second goal in evangelizing the family is that of increasing 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, special events and days. What is important is that the faithful have available to them 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.

Project Timothy is one such initiative that is being fostered using proven materials and methods of Catholic Christian Outreach. Faith

formation cannot be effective if people are not first evangelized through a renewed proclamation of the Gospel. At the same time, we need to develop more people who can do the work of evangelization; and develop them through a system that will outlast any one person. Project Timothy aims to do these very things. And as a result, Project Timothy can build the capacity of parishes to do more adult faith formation in the long run.

### ***3. Stewarding God's Gifts***

Our third Archdiocesan priority is stewarding God's gifts. Stewardship should be a way of life for every parishioner. It encourages an attitude of prayerfully giving thanks for our gifts and talents, and reflecting on how we can give back to the Lord for all that he has given us. Good stewards evaluate the way in which they are using all that they have received.

#### ***3.1 Parish-Based Committees***

Stewardship aims to help parishes become communities of those who are "co-responsible" for the life of the Church. In the next three years, we are encouraging the establishment of stewardship committees or groups of interested laity in 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.

Developing a culture of stewardship involves acknowledging that everything we have and everything we are comes from God. All he asks in return is that we follow him, trust him and carry out his plan for us. When we live Christ-centered lives instead of self-centered lives, we experience an overwhelming sense of generosity. In using our talents and gifts to serve others, we are naturally inclined to give thanks always and everywhere.

Building strong and committed stewardship committees will help to ensure that every parishioner has the opportunity to experience a conversion of heart and personal relationship with Jesus born out of unconditional gratitude. Intentional stewardship initiatives empower us to be effective in our mission of service and evangelization in our parishes and in the community.

What we hope to achieve is making gratitude a way of life in all our parishes through education and formation. Going forward, plans include development of gifts and talents through programs such as “Living Our Strengths” and “Called and Gifted” and other opportunities for education on stewardship as a way of life.

### ***3.2 Infrastructure Renewal***

Besides promoting stewardship as a way of life, a second goal is also included in this third priority. By the end of 2015, every parish is to have completed a needs assessment or a campus master 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 beneficiaries in our buildings and institutions received from the generosity of previous generations. Everyone shares these gifts, and 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 391 major buildings 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.

### ***Conclusion***

Dear brothers and sisters: achieving our Archdiocesan priorities for the coming years is not, of course, an end in itself. Setting priorities for our evangelizing mission, however, does provide a communal roadmap for all our parishes to join together as Spirit-filled missionary disciples.

At Pentecost, the Spirit made the apostles go forth from themselves and turned them into heralds of God's wondrous deeds, capable of speaking to each person in his or her own language. The Holy Spirit also grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (*parrhesía*) in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition. Let us call upon him today, firmly rooted in prayer, for without prayer all our activity risks being fruitless and our message empty. Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence.<sup>12</sup>

May it be so!

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 259.