

Seventh Annual Archbishop's Dinner

Hyatt Regency Hotel

30 October 2018

Archbishop Exner; Bishop Monroe; Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Sisters, Lay and Priestly People of the Archdiocese of Vancouver; Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

Once again tonight, we come together in a family spirit to celebrate the bountiful harvest the good Lord is reaping in our Archdiocese. And so let me begin by expressing my profound gratitude to every one of you – clergy, consecrated women and men, and lay faithful – for being joyful witnesses of the Gospel and for being engaged in so many initiatives of practical solidarity in the wider community of the Lower Mainland.

This seventh Annual Archbishop's Dinner is successful, I am convinced, only because of each one of you present tonight. However, let me single out for mention and thanks the principal on-the-ground organizers, Henrietta Lam and Chris Ufford, and the many volunteers who worked with them, especially Jason Costa of the Permanent Diaconate Office. It's also a pleasure to recognize and thank the Dinner's patrons and sponsors, who are listed in your program. Nor can I forget our delightful Masters of Ceremonies, Sharon Goh and Kevin Smith. Thank you for adding a classy and humorous touch to the evening. I'm truly appreciative to both of you!

Dark Days in the Church's Life

This evening I would like to begin my conversation with you by calling attention to the grave situation of clerical sexual abuse and coverup by bishops, which has recently come to light. My first responsibility is toward the victims of these horrific crimes, those who have been so severely harmed by members of the clergy. It has been an extraordinarily trying time for victims and their families, who have been forced yet again to revisit the injustices they have suffered.

As an Archdiocese we have addressed this evil in many ways; most notably by listening to those victimized and providing concrete practical help. Admittedly, making reparation is difficult, especially after the fact.

However, on the advice and prompting of some victims and survivors, as well as many others who search for justice, as a local Church we are undertaking several steps to address this scourge, which I would like to share with you.

First, two attorneys, together with our archdiocesan attorney, have generously volunteered their time and expertise to review our files dealing with historical cases of sexual abuse.

And second, this past Saturday a committee of twelve members, largely made up of lay women and men, some of whom are survivors themselves of clerical sexual abuse, met to begin discussion on these

findings and related matters on how to improve our protocols. There is a great deal to be done, with more meetings being planned. Once their review is concluded, a pastoral plan will be formulated and made public. I am very grateful for the generosity and courage of all those who have accepted this heavy but important responsibility of ensuring transparency and justice in all matters dealing with clerical sexual abuse that come to my attention.

Certainly these tragic events call us all to empathy, prayer and action. Like you, I have been deeply angered and saddened by these accounts. Moreover, as St. Paul reminds us, whenever one member of the body suffers, we all suffer, because altogether we form the one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-27).

Mission of Evangelization

Indeed, it is “altogether” as the Body of Christ that we carry out the mission of evangelization that the Lord has entrusted to us as an archdiocesan community.

Because of our Baptism, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, the Lord wants us – in fact, he commands each of us – to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to our families, parishes, movements, associations, and institutions that bear the name “Catholic.” This mandate flows from the priesthood of the faithful, which we all share, and not from that of the ordained.

It is my conviction – as I pray that it is yours – that our local Church, following the call of Pope Francis, must undergo a “missionary conversion.” This means that every person, through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, will embrace their identity as a son or daughter of God and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will be formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple.

Priorities and Goals

What have we been doing as a Church to get this missionary conversion off the ground?

As a starter, let me review for you the progress being made in meeting the Priorities and Goals we set for ourselves a couple of years ago.

Make Every Sunday Matter is at the top of the list because it relates to the Eucharist, the summit of our worship and the source from which all missionary activities flow. For most Catholics Sunday Mass is their principal point of contact with the Church. To make this celebration more beautiful and relevant to their lives, our priests and deacons have been taking training on preaching the Word of God more persuasively and understandably. More than ever, we clerics are aware that we need to preach so that people’s hearts are moved in practical ways to live as intentional disciples.

Regrettably, we have yet to implement an effective way to provide

feedback from parishioners on our preaching. That goal stills needs our attention.

At the same time, increased attention in our parishes has been given to hospitality and welcoming through workshops and making available a new digital platform, TILMA, now subscribed to by 29 parishes. Their inviting websites open doors of welcome to engaged and not-yet engaged parishioners alike.

Get Closer to Jesus is our second priority; that is, we are making available opportunities for people to deepen their personal relationship with the Lord. Here, I daresay, we have made considerable progress. This past year 14 parishes, with more than 500 participants in 100 small groups, including those in the Spanish-speaking migrant community, took part in Discover Discipleship. This program was originally developed by Catholic Christian Outreach in their successful “Faith Studies” series. Through use of this resource, participants strengthen their relationship with Jesus, grow in fellowship with other parishioners and learn how to share the joy of their faith with others. To date, about 80 leaders have been trained to lead small groups in the future.

Many other parishes, as well as movements and associations, are also deepening their parishioners’ faith by using a form of small group interaction and sharing. I believe this is truly one of the “signs of the times”: people need and want spiritual formation; and a privileged place

for that is in groups where personal questions and struggles, joys and sorrows can be shared in light of the Gospel.

I am also very happy to report that this past year Alpha, now available as “Alpha in a Catholic Context,” was held in a dozen parishes. Not a catechetical program, it is a very effective instrument – with a meal, video presentation and small group discussion – for the initial proclamation of the Good News. Alpha for Youth has also been introduced into at least 5 parishes and is now an integral part of the curriculum for the grade 9 students in our Catholic schools.

The men’s and women’s annual retreats, each with well over 200 participants, have been a sell-out success, and the partnership with Life Restoration in sponsoring these weekends has been a Godsend. The retreats are a launch pad for men and women to deepen their faith as intentional disciples. Afterwards, many of the retreatants continue their journey, above all in the many groups meeting regularly in our parishes.

Since the closing of Rosemary Heights in 2015, we have been looking for land on which to construct a purpose-built retreat centre to meet the needs of the many retreats sponsored by different parish and archdiocesan groups, associations and organizations as well as by our elementary and secondary schools. I am happy to tell you that we have purchased a 40-acre property east of Abbotsford and currently have an application before the Agricultural Land Commission to build facilities

which would meet our needs. Do pray that we will receive the go-ahead to proceed along this path.

Our third priority, you will remember, is to *Strengthen Marriages and Families*. As St. John Paul II affirmed, “the future of society passes through the family.” That’s why we have to take steps to ensure its flourishing. This is no easy task when so many shadows are on the horizon: divorce, cohabitation, domestic abuse, and a slackening of interest in establishing family ties. At the root of this crisis are values which foster an unhealthy individualism, a misunderstanding of freedom which separates it from responsibility, and an entertainment and social media that ridicules the traditional family. Each of these factors, and many others, undermine the natural and divinely given design for marriage and the family.

What are we doing about it? There’s a lot of good news here.

Our revamped Marriage Preparation Program had nearly 1100 participants last year in 13 courses offered in 4 different locations. It met with an enthusiastic response by those who took part. Marriage Prep provides couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to begin life as a family on a solid foundation.

Four formats are now available for marriage preparation: evening sessions; Saturday sessions; a weekend session for cases of difficult scheduling; or participation in a Marriage Encounter Weekend.

Our Office for Life, Marriage and the Family is also aware of the need to provide pastoral accompaniment to couples, especially in the first years of marriage. Already in place are workshops for marriage enrichment such as the Couples Connect Workshop. Moreover, the Office has set up strategic partnerships with World Wide Marriage Encounter, which promotes weekend experiences for couples, and Retrouvaille, for those facing difficult challenges in their marriage.

In 2017, when 30 couples were married in one ceremony at St. Clare of Assisi Church, the Archdiocese began a new tradition. Co-ordinated by the Office of Filipino Ministry, “Mass Weddings” will now be an annual event. In August of this year another 30 couples celebrated the Sacrament of Matrimony at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church.

In May a special celebration designed to honour marriage was held at St. Matthew’s Church. 225 couples gathered for a Mass celebrating their “special” anniversaries – that is, those ending in a 0 or 5! It was inspiring to witness first-hand the faithfulness and love of so many couples and their families.

For strengthening marriage and family, plans are now being made to set up a network of experienced mentor couples who can accompany younger couples in meeting the challenges they inevitably face in establishing a family. Also being planned is the formation of a ministry focussed on the special interests and needs of grandparents, and another

on providing pastoral care for divorced Catholics.

Because challenges within marriage often involve parenting, within the past year the Ministries and Outreach Office partnered with parishes to offer 20 parenting talks and workshops, an increase from just 1 two years ago. Topics included “Making Sense of Anxiety in Children and Youth” and “The Art of Effective Communication – Tools and Techniques for Today’s Parents.”

On the archdiocesan website the list of registered professional counsellors, all of whom are Catholic or Christians from other traditions, continues to grow. The list now includes Spanish- and Tagalog counsellors.

To *Develop Parish Leadership and Support* is our fourth priority. More than ever, it is imperative that the lay faithful move ahead to become, as Benedict XVI put it, “co-responsible” for the Church’s mission. Let’s remember that we enter the Church through Baptism, not through priestly or episcopal ordination. It is Baptism that makes everyone a missionary disciple, the salt of the earth, and the light of the world.¹

Our Archdiocese has an enormous reservoir of lay people with generous hearts who already willingly put their energy, time and skills at

¹ Cf. Francis, Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity (18 June 2016).

the service of the Gospel. It is up to us as pastors to esteem and accompany them with affection as they “go forth” into the world.

Let me make Pope Francis’s words my own:

We need lay people who are formed well, animated by a clear and sincere faith, whose lives have been touched by a personal and merciful encounter with the love of Jesus Christ. We need lay people who take risks, who soil their hands, who are not afraid of making mistakes, who move forward. We need lay people with a vision of the future.²

I can report that with the help of various support services, both from within the Archdiocese and from consultants and others, steps are being taken in many parishes to engage the laity more directly in assuming leadership roles and to help them prepare for these responsibilities and ministries. It is my hope and prayer that resources will become available that will make possible more sustained initiatives of lay formation, perhaps through a joint endeavour of the Archdiocese and St. Mark’s College.

Educating and Forming Our Young People

Last Sunday the Synod of Bishops concluded its deliberations on

² Francis, Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity (18 June 2016).

“Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment,” bringing to the forefront of our concerns how we are forming our young people to face the great challenges – too numerous to mention here – that lie before them.

What are *we* doing to help our youth meet these challenges? As it turns out, quite a lot, though, in this day and age, it must also be admitted that we need to continue to find more effective ways to pass on our faith to our children and grandchildren.

Catholic Schools

Our 40 Catholic elementary and 11 secondary schools are a precious treasure, of which we are justly very proud. Together the 1500 teachers and educational assistants are educating over 16,000 students. Now under the dedicated leadership of Deacon Henk Luyten, the CISVA schools zealously pursue their priority of promoting “evangelizing school communities which foster a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in the family of the Church.” Here’s the follow-through: the Christian education curriculum has been revised; programs that involve parents in the human formation of their children are in place; the school’s Catholic mission is emphasized in the evaluation process; scholarships for leadership in Catholic education at St. Mark’s College have been awarded to 30 teachers. These, and other measures, all work to ensure that our schools are intentionally Catholic.

Among the milestones of this past year is the founding of the first

new high school in over 20 years. A project driven by parents and committed lay leadership, the Saint John Paul II Academy in South Surrey opened its doors to an eighth grade class this September in the former school at Star of the Sea community centre in White Rock. Governed by an independent society, and operated under CISVA management, it is looking to build its own campus in the near future. Also of note is the opening of the splendid new middle school at Vancouver College, which I dedicated last week; the seismic upgrading of Immaculate Conception School, Vancouver; the ongoing construction of the \$27 million rebuild of St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Secondary School, which will open its doors next fall; and the go-ahead given to Holy Cross Regional Secondary School to proceed with new classrooms and a field upgrade. Several other parishes, or groups of regional parishes, are planning new schools or renovations. And lastly, discussions have begun to grant formal recognition to Traditional Learning Academy as a Catholic school with associate membership with CISVA similar to our four congregational schools.

Higher Education

There is more good news in higher education. Marvellous developments in the field of higher education are taking place at St. Mark's and Corpus Christi Colleges. Their combined enrollment is over 500 students, a growth of an astounding 100% from just five years ago.

Moreover, the first-ever BA graduates from St. Mark's have completed their B.Ed programs at UBC and are now working in our schools.

Catechesis

For the 6,500 children not in Catholic schools, we have nearly 2,300 catechists engaged in PREP, which provides instruction from K to grade 7, including sacramental preparation at the appropriate levels.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a Montessori-based religious education program for young children, is growing rapidly in the Archdiocese, with 69 trained catechists in our parishes, and 29 in our Catholic schools. It is a blessed addition to how children are introduced to the faith.

I would also like to let you know of the growth of our VANSPEC program which offers children and young adults with special needs the opportunity to learn about Jesus and to prepare for the Sacraments. Nearly 60 volunteers offer one-on-one catechesis in six centres across the Archdiocese, as well as Bible study to alumni students and a summer camp for participants in the program. For me, one of the highlights of celebrating Confirmation every year is with this group of earnest young people, together with the families and teachers.

Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Youth ministry for teenagers is active in 46 of our parishes, and Spirit Day, which celebrates our grade 7 boys and girls preparing for

Confirmation, continues to gather more than 2000 participants.

Young adult ministry is, as you might imagine, more challenging. Its milestone achievement for this year has been putting in place what we are calling the “Catholic Gap Year.” It is a program for young adults to serve with organizations and ministries such as CCO, Net Ministries, the Jesuit Volunteers, and Madonna House, while receiving excellent faith formation. 5 bursaries were made available to the applicants to help them with their expenses. It promises to be a program that addresses the questions of young adults, as they advertise on the website: “Looking for adventure? In need of a break from studies? Want to serve others? Looking to build solid friendships and relationships that last a lifetime? Looking to grow in your faith? Need a challenge? Want to do something amazing? Want to grow in holiness? Seeking answers to life?” With questions like this to answer, we could all use a gap year!

Vocations

Since the Synod on Youth also dealt with vocational discernment, here’s a quick update on our own situation. Our Prayer for Vocations is being answered! This year we have 27 seminarians. 6 of them are now doing a Spirituality Year at the Seminary of Christ the King, under the direction of Father Hien Nguyen. According to norms issued by the Holy See, all new Seminary candidates must complete such a year, which extends their formation before Ordination to the priesthood to a

minimum of seven to a maximum of nine years.

Again this year we have four young priests engaged in advanced studies: Father Bryan Duggan continues his doctoral program in psychology in Washington; Father Pablo Santa Maria is doing canon law in Pamplona, Spain; Father Paul Goo will be finishing his licentiate (like a Master's degree) in spirituality in Rome, where Father Davide Lanzani has joined him in residence at the Canadian College and studying at the Gregorian University, pursuing a licentiate in missiology.

On December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Deacon Guy Zidago will be ordained to the priesthood and, at the same ceremony, Felix Min will be ordained to the diaconate.

Two young women from the Archdiocese have entered Religious communities this year. And, in August, three Salesian Sisters established a convent at Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Healing Ministry of Jesus in Health Care

The Church's mission of evangelization must also highlight the healing ministry of Jesus that has been carried out in the Archdiocese for 125 years. Under the leadership of Fiona Dalton, the new CEO of Providence Health Care and Providence Residential and Community Care, plans are advancing for the new St. Paul's Hospital. This project is of vital importance for continuing health care inspired by Catholic values in our Province.

I am extraordinarily grateful to Providence for its mission-driven approach, especially its long-standing tradition, bequeathed to it by the founding Religious congregations, of care for the most vulnerable and marginalized, most recently those affected by the opioid crisis. Moreover, they generously provide clinical pastoral education for our seminarians and a modified program for our deacon candidates.

We are so blessed by Providence as well as by the Catholic Health Association of British Columbia and the Catholic Physicians Guild, both of which are working tirelessly to promote palliative care as an alternative to the tragedy of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Despite their legalization in Canada, we need to be clear that these actions are direct contradictions of the Christian belief in the value and beauty of life as a gift from God.

Here too I should mention the ongoing initiatives to foster a culture of life that engage so many of the faithful, including the annual March for Life, monthly prayer vigils, Rachel's Vineyard healing weekends for post-abortive women and men, the pro-life clubs in our high schools and the annual pro-life collection which supports over 20 organizations in the Lower Mainland – just to name a few.

“Going Forth” in Ministry

Because our mission entails “going forth” into the world, lest we become an involuted and self-referential community, I would like to

mention briefly just five of the dozens of ministries which give life to our parishes and contribute enormously to the common good of society.

For five years the Anti-Human Trafficking Committee has been raising awareness about the violation of the human rights of women caused by the legalization of prostitution. In the past year they screened Red Light Green Light in 15 parishes and schools, a film on how to prevent sexual exploitation; and they sponsored 17 billboards which were displayed across the Lower Mainland with the message that “Buying Sex Is A Crime.”

In 2017 more than 300 refugees from Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, and Syria were sponsored by 8 parishes and 2 missions in the Archdiocese. Due to government regulations, the number of sponsorships in 2018 will, unfortunately, be reduced.

Prison ministry now involves more than 200 dedicated volunteers, with more waiting for their training. Some of them visit the incarcerated in our federal and provincial prisons, listening to them, studying with them, comforting them, praying with them – and, by their own account, receiving from the prisoners far more than they give. Others are involved in Circles of Support and Accountability, walking with those recently released from prison, helping them to reintegrate into society.

Our Men’s Hostel, which we hope and pray will soon be moving to a new location with improved facilities, leaving behind the third floor of

the former Pastoral Centre at 150 Robson, received 2,000 unique guests last year, with over 40,000 total stays. It offers 90-day stays for guests, provides case management for the men to connect with other social services and focuses especially on finding long-term housing solutions.

At the Door Is Open more than 600 volunteers from parishes, schools, civic groups and organizations are involved. It served a staggering 100,000 meals in the past year. Some time, in the not-too-distant future we hope that our facilities in the Downtown Eastside will be renewed, so that they can address the needs of the distressed people in the neighbourhood.

And, speaking of renewed facilities in the Downtown, I can say that our plans for the seismic upgrading of Holy Rosary Cathedral are proceeding well. We are working with a well-known local developer on a commercial tower project which will raise funds for the upgrade and new hall, offices and rectory for the Cathedral.

A New Initiative: Parish Visits

As many of you now know, I have embarked on a multi-year program of visiting every parish in our Archdiocese. Last year I completed 6 of them, and this year I have already visited 3, with 8 more to go by June. A typical visit lasts from Thursday evening until after Mass on Sunday morning, during which time I visit with nearly every group in the parish, celebrate Mass, and visit the school.

These visits have inspired me in ways I never expected. Above all it is the strong devotional life, the desire for ongoing opportunities for formation, the deep commitment to ministries of every kind – often hundreds are involved – and, where there is one, the important role played by the school within the parish.

One general concern comes to mind, however. This the need to be more intentional about what can be called “succession planning for ministry.” Everyone engaged in a ministry, especially if they have been for many years, should ask: Who will take my place? Who can I mentor among the younger generation to carry on what I am doing? But this is a minor point in light of so much good that is being accomplished in our parish families.

Permanent Diaconate Program

Tonight we are honouring the contribution made by our permanent deacons and their families to the life and ministry of our Archdiocese and asking for your support of the Permanent Diaconate Program.

Since the program was established in 2011, following upon the recommendation of the Archdiocesan Synod, it has been an extraordinary blessing to our local Church. Since December 2015, I have ordained 22 men as servants of the Word, of the liturgy and of charity and justice. After four or five years of human, spiritual and theological preparation offered through St. Mark`s College and other programs by

the Permanent Diaconate Office, deacons are appointed to a wide variety of ministries: in our parishes, hospitals, prisons, ports and cemeteries; with refugees; and in First Nations, Filipino, Hispanic ministry and Eritrean ministry.

A third cohort of ten is currently preparing for Ordination in a few years. I believe that the Holy Spirit is continuing to call men to the permanent diaconate. The number of those expressing interest is encouraging – perhaps some of you are here this evening? – and it is likely that there will be enough applicants for a fourth cohort to begin next Fall. Indeed, our pastors and people express their desire for this ministry for their parishes, while the Archdiocese needs them to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.

To help potential deacons and their wives discern this vocation, the Permanent Diaconate Office, under the very capable direction of Monsignor Gregory Smith, to whom we all owe an enormous debt of gratitude for taking this responsibility so aptly in hand, will sponsor weekend information sessions in both Langley and Vancouver in April and May.

We are now going to watch a video that highlights the great gift that the permanent diaconate program is to the vitality of our Archdiocese. After this presentation, Brett Powell, Delegate for Ministries and Outreach, will ask for your support for the program of

formation for this ministry, so that it can continue its service to our local Church.

Conclusion

Thank you all for your kind attention, but I am especially grateful for your prayers and support as we work together to fulfill the mission of evangelization entrusted by the Lord himself to all those whom he has created anew in Baptism and commissioned to bear fruit for his Kingdom.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver