

A LETTER FROM FATHER

Introducing *Partners in the Gospel*



Dear friends,

This weekend the archdiocese of Seattle begins the public launch of *Partners in the Gospel*. Archbishop Etienne, in consultation with lay & clergy leadership at every level of governance, is inviting us to take part in a three-year process of discernment, reflection, and renewal.

Before going into the details of what this means, let us consider both the history and current state of our archdiocese. It had its beginnings with the first priests who arrived in the Pacific Northwest in 1838. Starting as the diocese of Walla Walla, it became the diocese of Nesqually, then of Vancouver, before finally becoming the diocese of Seattle in 1907 - elevated to an archdiocese in 1951. From the beginning, we have adapted to the needs of the times!

The 1950s and 1960s were arguably a peak in the history of our archdiocese, as the Catholic Church grew by leaps and bounds around the world. The port of Seattle attracted peoples from a wide swath of cultures, languages, and backgrounds - and the archdiocese responded by building many churches, most with multiple priests serving within them.

We enjoy many fruits of the efforts of those Catholics who came before us. We are rightly proud of the many ministries that continue in our archdiocese and here at Saint Mark parish. The work of our school, the outreach of our Saint Vincent de Paul conference, the beauty of our facilities, the reverence of our celebrations of Masses & liturgies, the dedication of the faithful who gather here each week - all of this is a testament to the faith that continues from the border of Canada to that of Oregon, from the Cascade mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

And yet, we are also struggling. This is clearly visible in our pews - not only in the ratio of full and empty, but in the generational gap of who is (and isn't) here. Our five bedroom rectory holds one priest - and he counts himself fortunate to be serving only one community (as opposed to the nine he served prior). Though our facilities are in great shape, our finances are suffering greatly. Moreover, a lethargy currently grips our community, making it difficult for us to find help even to simply pass the basket on Sunday, much less re-start former programs or launch new ones.

I would hasten to say, by the way, that we are not alone in these struggles, which are manifesting themselves in a variety of ways in every parish across the archdiocese.

Mindful of our history and our current circumstances, the archbishop is launching *Partners in the Gospel*. The focus is both profound and simple: to engage anew in living and proclaiming the Gospel. It is not enough to look at what once was - whether in our own lives, the life of Saint Mark, or in the archdiocese. We must also look forward to where it is Christ is calling us.

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Partners in the Gospel has several milestones - the next is in the fall when we will be invited to provide feedback on parish families - the grouping of two or more parishes as a temporary step to becoming one parish. In early 2024 parish families will be announced, going into effect under one pastor in July of 2024. Parish families will then work together to become one parish by 2027.

As we enter this process, we recognize this moment **as a call to personal and communal conversion**. More than material goals or changes, we are being challenged to entrust ourselves to the care of the Lord. This will involve death and resurrection - death of self, new life in Christ.

I also want to emphasize a point you will hear repeated often from the archbishop: **there are no predetermined outcomes**. This is a consultative process: parishioners, pastors, and archdiocesan leadership, in union with the archbishop, discerning God's will together.

At the same time, we must acknowledge and open ourselves to change. **Our archdiocese - and Saint Mark parish - will not stay the same**. We face this reality with confidence, because Jesus will guide and accompany our efforts as we discern His call. Surrendering what is familiar and comfortable will allow us to receive the surprises and joys He is preparing for us.

What the future holds for us is not yet revealed, but I can tell you that **this is worth doing**. If we allow it, this process can transform us, building something new and exciting, enabling us to draw closer to Christ and each other as beloved sons & daughters of our heavenly father.

Rest assured that I will offer as much support and communication as I can. You are in my prayers daily, most particularly in the rosary. Remember also that every Sunday we offer our first Mass *pro populo*, that is, for the people of the parish. Let us more consciously, actively, and fully enter into prayer for ourselves and our community. Above all, let us place our trust in Christ, upon whose love & friendship we can rely.

yours in Christ,

Father Jacob Maurer

P.S. I encourage you to take the time to **read the included overview of *Partners in the Gospel*** from the archdiocese, which describes its purpose, needs, process, and timeline. I also encourage you to watch [the *Partners in the Gospel* launch video](#) and bookmark [our *Partners in the Gospel* webpage](#).

P.P.S. **Pray!** If there was ever a time to renew your prayer life, this is it. Jesus won't let you down.