

# WHITE PAPER ON GOALS OF THE PASTORAL PLAN

## An Exercise in Preparation for the Church Alive! Congress 2015

In the process of trying to develop a five year pastoral plan for the archdiocese, the Congress Planning Committee and I have tried in a number of ways to get a snapshot of the nature of our local diocese. We have reflected on the survey questionnaire that was made available in late 2013 and early 2014, which a sufficient but small number of parishioners filled in and returned. We held a meeting with 19 parishioners from across a broad spectrum of the archdiocese, to look at drawing up a Mission Statement and a Vision Statement for our archdiocese. As we have reflected on all of these indicators, we have identified six areas that we feel should encompass the goals of our pastoral plan. In this paper, I offer my personal reflections on these areas, and invite your input and comment on these. More important, however, we ask for your suggestions as to actions or strategies you think would help us make progress in the next five years. In the month of November 2014, members of the Congress Planning Committee will be meeting with clergy and parishioners of the five deaneries, to get your reactions to these reflections, and to gather your suggestions for strategies to move us forward.

### **Good Liturgy.**

The one regular occasion that draws us together is the Sunday Eucharist. This is usually what we think of first whenever we use the term “church”. Due to many factors, the experience of Sunday Mass varies greatly around the diocese. One concern that many parishioners express is the non-attendance of many in the community at Sunday Mass. Neighbours and family members who used to go faithfully, just don’t any more. This concern is difficult to address, since those who we would like to hear from on the matter are not there to hear our questions and to offer their answers. Aside from this, however, there are two expectations that even very faithful Catholics have concerning Sunday Mass: preaching and music.

We expect the preaching to be well-prepared, based on the scriptures of the Mass or the feast, relevant to our lives. We expect to be able to understand the priest, despite in many cases their foreign accent. In survey results, there is a mixed appreciation concerning preaching. Some parishes are delighted with the quality of preaching; in other parishes, the evaluation is not so positive.

Music is another major issue for us. A small minority of parishioners do not like music at all; they look for a very silent Mass that entails no music whatever. Much more common are comments about music. Again, the spectrum is wide. Some find that the music in their parish is lively, beautiful and appropriate. In others, there is obviously much yet to do. Many people feel that the poor quality of their music keeps people away from Sunday Mass, especially the youth. They feel that we should have music like some of our evangelical counterparts use, of the “praise and worship” variety. Others feel the music should be more solemn and classical. In some parishes, there would seem to be a lack of musicians, or of confident leaders of song or choir.

### **Question**

1. What strategies over the next five years would you offer as we try to make progress in this goal?

### **Good Teaching**

Teaching can happen in a variety of ways. On some occasions, Father’s homily on Sunday can be a teaching moment. What we read in the Sunday bulletin may provide us with an inspiring message. There are several pre-packaged faith-formation programs available: ALPHA, Catholicism, Cursillo, etc. Catholic newspapers and magazines can provide us with an update on not only what the Church teaches, but how to apply that teaching to real-life situations in our life and our society. Many people speak of a hunger that they have for Bible study, or moral teachings, or instruction on the many beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. It has been my own experience that when such programs are offered, it is the same tight group of keeners who attend.

### **Question**

2. What strategies over the next five years would you offer as we try to make progress in this goal?

### **Community**

Christianity is not an individualistic religion. We cannot believe in the Triune God or in Jesus Christ in isolation – our faith always puts us in relation to one another. Community is found in a number of ways; Christian community is always founded on Jesus Christ and our common relationship with Him. There are people, especially those who are new to our parish or this part of Alberta who find it difficult to “break in” to the community. But we all look for it. We don’t want the presence and care of others to be too close or

smothering, yet we also don't expect it to be cold and indifferent. Warm and respectful might characterize how we want our experience of community to feel.

The manner in which we express community is an indication of our faith. Our care for others, especially those in any need or distress, reflects how we experience our unity in Christ. While there is a level of comfort in dealing with those persons we have known for many years, there is a strong call to reach out to others, to welcome them, to include them in our faith family. Our archdiocese is historically made up of many ethnic groups: Native peoples and Metis, German, French, Polish, Ukrainian. More recently, newcomers arrive from more distant parts: Africans, Hispanics, Filipinos.

### **Question**

3. What strategies over the next five years would you offer as we try to make progress in this goal?

### **Ministry**

The term "ministry" covers a wide range of activity in the Church. It includes the celebration of Sacraments, care for the sick and dying, teaching and chaplaincy in our schools, outreach to the homeless and the needy, and attention to people's spiritual and physical needs – what we used to call the spiritual and temporal works of mercy. Some ministries belong by definition to certain persons in the Church. Certain sacraments are reserved to the ordained deacons, priests or bishop. Other ministries are open to Church members by virtue of their baptism.

Every baptized member of the Church is called to holiness and to service of the human family and the Christian community. As one priest I heard of would say to newcomers to his parish, "We expect everyone to do a service in this parish; we have no spiritual voyeurs, who only want to sit back and watch others." Our membership with Jesus Christ is a compelling reason to exercise ministry of some sort in the Church, be it at the level of parish, deanery or diocese. As St. Teresa of Avila is quoted as saying, "Christ has no body now but yours – no feet or hands with which to reach out to others, except yours. Christ has no body now but yours."

### **Question**

4. What strategies over the next five years would you offer as we try to make progress in this goal?

### **Communication**

Our diocese is huge in territory. It takes in more than one-third of the land mass of Alberta, but our diocese has fewer people on that land than any diocese in the province. We are spread out in many small pockets, with the result that many of us are not in close touch with others or the points of interest in the diocese. Many of us may feel that we are “out of the loop”, that we don’t know what’s happening.

Over the years, we have made great strides in communicating what’s happening in the Archdiocese. In my monthly letter and my calendar, I share what is happening in my own ministry as bishop, as well as other significant events among us. Our web-page provides access to anyone plugged into the Internet, those both near and far away. The ArchGM News goes out every Wednesday to the parish secretaries and those who prepare your bulletin, of events taking place across the Archdiocese, so that these may be made known to everyone. Despite these efforts, we often people say “I never heard about that!” Communications experts point out that any piece of information must be repeated at least seven times before most people hear it.

### **Question**

5. What strategies over the next five years would you offer as we try to make progress in this goal?

### **Accountability**

In the climate of modern society, there are expectations that leaders and the organizations they represent will be accountable. We have seen in recent times a loss of credibility and respect for authority figures and those who lead us. Yet this is really not new: the Old Testament prophets and Jesus Himself called to task those who did not shepherd their flock with the concern and attention that is expected of them. For our archdiocese to grow in a spirit of unity, there must be the confidence that every one of us is doing our best in humility and simplicity to support our particular Church at all levels: the parishes, the deaneries and the archdiocese.

The comment is often made that there have been many changes over the past several years. Depending on one’s own disposition, we may welcome or resent change. As we see this region of north-western Alberta grow and develop, we also who are the Catholic Church in the area will have to grow and develop.

### **Question**

6. What strategies over the next five years would you offer as we try to make progress in this goal?