

A Process to lead us to a Pastoral Plan 2020-2025

A Proposal

In 2015, the Archdiocese engaged in a process that led to the formulation and adoption of a five-year pastoral plan. This was pegged for the years 2015 to 2020. Over those years, many of us scrutinized and examined this plan, expanded upon it, and broke it down into several iterations for the various levels of diocesan life: parishes, deaneries, and the archdiocese as a whole.

At our last APC meeting, of May 11th, 2019, we reflected on the Pastoral Plan 2015-2020, with a view to determining which of its goals were still most pressing, and otherwise evaluating its actions against what we now perceive are needs in the archdiocese. Let me share with you some of the notes I took at that meeting:

- build the kingdom of God
- healing and reconciliation
- Catechism for cradle Catholics
- conversion of hearts
- connection between faith and lived experience
- listen to the Gospel on Sunday; take it to the world on Monday
- why do we have to go to church; we have to find convincing answers to this. - Fear about not knowing the answer to this, especially for our children. I pray at home; why go to Mass?
- do things for those who are coming; for their faith
- reach out to those who are isolated
- bishop [should] increase contact with parishes and deaneries; bishop and VG to visit parishes and give report, accountability
- too much expected of the archdiocese; more has to happen in parishes

In short, I think we could say that we see progress in certain areas; other actions seemed more challenging.

We are approaching the end of the term for this plan. However, I still believe in the integrity of its goals. For this reason, while we look ahead to the next five years, I do not want us to lose sight of the last five years' Plan. You will see some of the goals reiterated in what I propose below. This is not to say that the goals identified below are less completed than other goals in the 2015-2020 Plan. It is just that I see these as becoming more urgent with time.

The question that I begin with is: What are our real pastoral needs? The "our" in this question must be understood as an inclusive term. Many will see this in terms of their own parish, and that is legitimate. But we must never

lose sight of the deaneries, or the archdiocese as a whole. A pervasive but illegitimate understanding of the “Church” is one’s parish, distinct from the diocese or its deaneries. As our canon lawyer put it recently, the parish is not a franchise of the parent corporation. The basic unit in the Roman Catholic Church is the diocese; its relationship to its parishes is familial and intimate.

What are our pastoral needs? What I present here are my own thoughts, the fruit of my reading, reflection and prayer over the past several months. I do not present this as “the plan”, but rather some indicators of what may indeed give substance and shape to the plan. I believe we need to discuss a great deal in several groups, and allow insights to find their way to the APC table. After all, it is you, the APC, that “owns” the pastoral plan.

Foremost in our pastoral plan must be the very mission of the Church. This is found in what is called the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:19-20: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” What we must always see as the goal of our pastoral plan is to make disciples, dare I say “intentional disciples”, who will know and love Jesus Christ and Christ’s Church, which we refer to as “his Body”. We should always try to see whatever we do in this light: to lead others to Jesus Christ and the good news of the Gospel, so that they can be counted among His intentional disciples.

In many ways, discipleship grows out of a personal relationship of faith in Jesus Christ. From a sociological point of view, we can speak of “cultural Catholics” – a way of thinking and acting, speaking and relating to one another that comes from a family tree and an upbringing that is Catholic. But that does not mean that our life is caught up in the life of Jesus Christ. St. Paul says it well, “... *it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” (Gal 2:20) This is indeed the substance of the Christian life: to live in Jesus, and to have Him live in you. Not everyone attains this, of course. There are many Catholics who are nominally so. And for most Catholics, even the most convicted of us, there is usually a time in our life when we did not take it so seriously, so personally. But this is the goal of conversion and salvation. In a radio broadcast in 1969, then Father Joseph Ratzinger, theologian and professor, had this to say: “*The future of the Church can and will issue from those whose roots are deep and who live from the pure fullness of their faith. /.../ The future of the Church, once again as always, will be reshaped by saints, by [people], that is, whose minds probe deeper than the*

slogans of the day, who see more than others see, because their lives embrace a wider reality. /.../ If today we are scarcely able any longer to become aware of God, that is because we find it so easy to evade ourselves, to flee from the depths of our being by means of the narcotic of some pleasure or other. Thus, our own interior depths remain closed to us. If it is true that a man can see only with his heart, then how blind we are!

Our ministry is about making disciples for Jesus Christ.

How do we go about this? I want to suggest for our consideration what we – not I or you or any one of us alone, but we as a Christian community – can do to bring people to Jesus Christ.

Outreach

I have an umbrella term for what I believe our parish communities must try to implement, and that word is “outreach”. This is a challenge for us Catholics. We feel that going out is not a “Catholic” thing to do – it’s what sects or Evangelicals do. They go out in search of disciples; we sit home in our churches and rectories and wait for others to come to us. And when they do come, we’re just a little bit unsure what to do with them.

Alpha

Some of you may have experienced Alpha. The Rev. Nicky Gumbel, an Anglican and Charismatic priest in London England, produced this program as a first introduction for non-believers about Jesus Christ and the Gospel message. At its best, Alpha happens around a meal, because people are relaxed and talkative around a dinner table. Nicky has produced a video for each of 10 weekly sessions, plus a weekend retreat. Although this is intended as a first introduction to Christianity for non-believers, I find it interesting how many committed Christians find inspiration in these gatherings.

RCIA

The standard way for adults to be baptized and received into the Church is what we call the catechumenate, or the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, (RCIA). Bear in mind that in this context, the Church considers anyone over 7 years of age to be an adult. We should not be baptizing young people 7 and over as if they were infants. For infant baptism, we prepare their parents; for anyone over 7, we prepare that person we are going to baptize, whether they are 7 or 77.

I am presently working with Fathers Cyril Joseph, Feroz Fernandes and Remi Hebert in putting together a workshop for our priests on the RCIA – yet another workshop. Because every parish worthy of the name should have the catechumenate. If we encounter someone who is touched by the gift of faith,

we should be able to lead them into the Catholic Church in our parish, and this is done by a praying and studying basic community called the RCIA team.

Even though the RCIA is properly meant for the unbaptized to grow toward baptism, this process usually also includes persons who have already been baptized in another Christian Church, but who wish to be received into the Catholic Church.

Catholics Coming Home

There are other programs that are structured in such a way that they are for persons who are already Catholic, who have not practiced their faith in many years, but who wish to come back to their faith and its practice. One of these, which the parish in Grande Prairie uses each year during the weeks of Lent, is called Catholics Coming Home. There are other similar programs. Anyone who has been away from the church for several years will rightly need and want a refresher. If we are truly reaching out to our brothers and sisters, the ones who are lost, we must have a warm and welcoming way to reintroduce them to the Church and to our parish.

Cursillo

This diocese has benefitted for several decades from the Cursillo Movement. Cursillo is a diocesan-wide movement; it doesn't exist in parishes, but only in dioceses. We have seen many conversions and miracles due to this Movement. In the past couple of years, we have been going through a renewal of this movement, with the goal of becoming better aligned with the Movement as originally conceived by Eduardo Bonnín in Mallorca, and as still practiced around the world. This renewal in the movement is not easy on all fronts, but I can see that it will allow us to make Cursillo in other centres in our archdiocese, and not just Grande Prairie.

Pastoral Visiting

All the priests, and many of our faithful, have heard me speak often about the need for pastoral visiting. The way I present it is daunting, I know. I strongly suggest that, especially when a priest is new to the parish, a parishioner take the priest around to the houses of the parish to introduce him to his people, in their homes. Any such encounter need last only two or three minutes. I suggest that this be done especially for those Catholics who seem no longer to go to Mass. Such a brief encounter may be a moment of divine grace, which can make a deep impression on the person being visited.

After suggesting this for the 12 years I've been a bishop, I know of very few instances where it has actually happened. I am told that even if the priest is willing to do this, he cannot find a parishioner willing take him around. But I don't suggest – I don't even want – the priest to do this alone. While I

encourage this particular manner of outreach, it gets little attention, but I still say it to every new priest in our diocese.

So let me suggest a different twist to this. Rather than knocking on doors, what if parishioners invited the priest to other sorts of gatherings in the community, and assured that he meet people? This may feel less invasive, while producing similar effects. In short, the goal is to reach out, to have the priest meet our people, and let his smile and encouraging words invite a response from our people.

Encourage generous gifts (EGGS)

While I am trying to keep this reflection positive in tone, I fear that I have to raise an issue that has recently come to my attention. Let me assure you: I do not believe that what I am going to read reflects every parish in our diocese. However, I have been around parishes enough to recognize that what I am going to read, can well be true in more parishes than the one these two women tell me. I got this email this past week. I am going to read only a few lines, but I believe you will all recognize this cry for help:

[Your Grace, one] would never think that we would be writing to you to express our concerns about the situation as we see it in our local parish. It is [our hope that] sharing with you will help to improve the health and culture of our parish.

/.../

... these are the issues that are of concern to us, and not listed in any particular order:

*-Personality conflicts, turf protection and authoritarian control
-Rudeness at meetings to each other and also to the Priest [...]
-Relationship between CWL and Parish Council is strained. /.../
[...]*

-Concerns arise over lack of finances for support and daily living expenses incurred by the Priest. Negative attitudes, instead of support, have been displayed when Father expresses his needs, which are justified.

-Lack of respect displayed by some individuals after other members are assigned duties and accept responsibilities for their completion. This shows total lack of regard for another persons' abilities resulting in discouragement and frustration.

/.../

-Repeatedly, the parishioners comment about the quality of the music and its content, as they would like to have more uplifting music. There have been other talented and qualified people who would be willing to play and sing the music to compliment Mass but not allowed.

-We have plenty of children in our Catholic school, and at school celebrations in the church, however it is disheartening to see the lack of encouragement for their participation. [...]

We, as a Parish, have to ask ourselves a few questions:

- How does one stop the attitude of control and turf –protection?*
- How does one allow new ideas and suggestions to come forward to benefit the parish instead of always repeating History?*
- Why are some very capable parishioners not participating in church committees, music, choir, etc.?*
- Why is it so difficult to convince parish members to join council?*
- Why do parish members not stay on council?*
- How can we draw our youth into our church as they will be our future parishioners?*
- In the future how can we encourage our Parish Priest to [be] more visible in the school, the hospital and the community?*
- How do we draw our “fallen away” parishioners back to our church that have gone to other churches which they say is because the music is more uplifting and as a result they feel inspires involvement and gives them a more hopeful message?*
- How do we make sure our communication between our Priest, parishioners and students is clear and understood?*
- How do we encourage parishioners to be more giving?*

Specialized Ministries

In our archdiocese, we have one basic ministry for all our priests: parish priest, or pastor. Now please, don't get me wrong: In no way do I want to minimize the value and treasure of a good parish priest. He is the one who celebrates the Church's sacraments with us, he preaches, he attends the sick and dying, he visits the children in our schools, he encourages the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Women's League, he presides over parish meetings of all sorts. He is my presence in our many parishes and missions. I have limitless esteem for the parish priest who lives his priesthood with dedication and piety. I am conscious that almost all of them in this diocese have their family on the other side of the world.

But there are other needs in our archdiocese, which call for a specialized ministry. I'll be honest in saying that I look for priests to satisfy these other ministries, but these can also be filled by lay men and women. When we do hire laypeople for these posts, however, we must bear in mind the added cost, as well as a more limited flexibility if they are married with children.

Canon Law

Many may not appreciate the need for a canon lawyer in a diocese, but a good one is truly valuable. As bishop, I have always felt the lack of such expertise in the chancery. When the opportunity arose due to our north-south partnership with the Archdiocese of Toronto, I jumped at the chance. This was not on our list of pastoral priorities for 2015-2020, but I am grateful that we

took the opportunity to send Father Michael Uso-Ereyi to Ottawa for two years. He comes back with a licence in canon law, and I already feel the benefit. A good lawyer can save you many headaches. This is a specialized ministry.

Pastoral Care

What is identified as “pastoral care” includes the care needed by persons confined to institutions. This can be either medical facilities and nursing homes, or correctional facilities. Those who find themselves in such situations are in need of a specialized care, as their spiritual needs are usually more accentuated than in the general population. Most dioceses have trained persons to undertake and promote this ministry. To date in this archdiocese, we do not.

Despite the many setbacks that have plagued the new regional hospital and cancer clinic in Grande Prairie, it is expected to open in the next year. Further to this, discussions are ongoing for a seniors’ housing facility in Grande Prairie operated by Covenant Health, which is the Alberta Catholic Health Corporation. Throughout the archdiocese, we have local hospitals and health centres, such as in Beaverlodge, Valleyview, Spirit River, Fairview, Manning, High Level, Fort Vermilion, Grimshaw, Peace River, McLennan, High Prairie, Slave Lake and Wabasca, not to mention many of the First Nations Reserves. Many of you will recall that a few years ago, all bishops in Alberta signed an “access agreement” with Alberta Health Services, which allows our priests and volunteers to go into these facilities and provide spiritual ministry for the residents. I should not neglect that we also have one correctional institution in the diocese, at the former St. Augustine Mission south of Peace River.

What I propose is tooling a priest to work full time in this ministry. But this could also be a lay man or woman. Because Grande Prairie is the regional centre for such service, I see him having this as his base, but I would want his training to benefit all other such centres in the archdiocese, especially in terms of providing workshops and other assistance to our priests and parish volunteers in these other sites.

University chaplaincy

Grande Prairie Regional College is poised to receive the status of a university. This is a unique and promising development for northern Alberta. Many more of our young people from across the diocese will be able to get their post-graduate education closer to home. At present, a group of Catholic students at GPRC meets once a month – this group calls itself Wolf Pax. But there is no “Catholic campus ministry” as such. As I look ahead to this change at GPRC, I see a unique opportunity to offer campus ministry there. Central to this would be a campus minister, who could reach out as an identifiable

Catholic minister on campus. If this is a priest, he could celebrate Mass and reconciliation for the Catholic community. If this person was also on faculty, teaching a course or two, this would also provide its own natural access to the other faculty and his own students.

Indigenous Ministry

I feel the need to review the ministry that we provide in our First Nations and Métis Settlements. Over the years we have made an effort to assure that there is always a priest assigned to these communities, because this seemed the best way to meet the spiritual needs of Catholics, and this is indeed what some of the people identified. We have attempted other initiatives as well. For a few years, we had a Native Pastoral Council that met in two sections: one for the High Level region, and the other for the peoples around Lesser Slave Lake. More recently, we have tried to reintroduce Native languages, especially Cree, back into the Masses on reserves. This is meeting with limited success.

I am beginning to feel the need for another conversation with representatives from our Indigenous communities. We need to hear what they would say about their real spiritual and pastoral needs, and how they feel they might share in satisfying these.

Funerals. Recently there was a death on a distant reserve while almost all of the priests were on retreat. The only and best solution seemed to be to have an elder from that community conduct a funeral service. He couldn't say a Funeral Mass, of course, but I trust that the readings he used and his reflection on Christ's death and resurrection, in the Cree language, was of great comfort to the people. Is there a place here for a greater role for Native "leaders of funeral prayers"? Even if the priest is present and offering a funeral Mass, a Native-speaker with some background in funerals and in the Christian teachings on death and resurrection may give such ceremonies a richer meaning for the people.

Catechists. Father Cyril Joseph has spoken to me of the possibility of having "catechists" in our Indigenous communities: local people who, with some training, may be able to catechize the children and prepare them to receive sacraments. I think there are many other ways in which Indigenous elders and leaders may be able to use their gifts and charisms for the betterment of their community.

These are some reflections that come to me, as I think of a pastoral plan for 2020-2025. This has something of a personal edge to it as well. In 2025, I will reach the age of 75, retirement age for bishops. As I ponder this eventuality, I ask myself what I would want this archdiocese to look like as I ride off into the sunset. These are my reflections, which may give some impetus to a Pastoral Plan 2020-2025. I have not spent a lot of time on some

obvious elements that I am sure are on your minds, such as youth ministry, and seminarians (a next generation of priests for this Archdiocese).

Finances

To make all this happen takes money. But this is an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council not a Finance Council. We do have an Archdiocesan Finance Council, which met this past Wednesday. We also have an ad-hoc committee on fundraising, which also met this week. Our financial needs are urgent, especially if we want to accomplish some of what is in our eventual Pastoral Plan. I don't want to throw this Council off by focusing too much on finances, but the need is there, and most of us know that the money will be there, if the commitment is there.

On that note, I end this reflection with a prayer directed to our patron saint, St. Martin of Tours, for the spiritual and material welfare of our archdiocese:

Saint Martin of Tours,
patron of our archdiocese,
you showed yourself open to the needs of the poor.
You cut in half what you had, your soldier's mantle,
and shared it with a needy beggar.
We ask your intercession for our local Church,
that we may be brave as you were brave
in reaching out to others.
Give us the spiritual insight
to see that the many gifts that are given to us
are not for us alone, but for the good of all.
Watch over us as we share our treasures with others,
especially the treasures that are our faith, hope and love.
Open our hearts to others' needs;
give us the generosity of true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and lead us to the fullness of life
that is the inheritance of the pure of heart. Amen