

Father's Notes

September 29, 2024

Last week, in this Father's Note column, I cited four primary reasons the Archdiocese is undergoing this task of restructuring (*Partners in the Gospel*): 1) fewer practicing Catholics; 2) fewer people to work in the parishes; 3) shifts in population density over time; and 4) fewer active priests.

Another point that I believe is also helpful for understanding, is to consider the layout of the Archdiocese of Seattle. So many of our parishioners at St. Thomas and St. Philomena were born in other countries, and perhaps have some knowledge of how missionaries brought the Catholic faith to their country of birth.

Though different, the Pacific Northwest is also mission territory (and arguably remains so!). The Catholic faith came here less than 200 years ago. Missionaries from French Canada were the first to formally serve the sparse Catholic population, as well as intending to share the faith with the more numerous, native population. It was in 1850 that we became a diocese (originally called Nesqually and later, Seattle).

To give you a sense of the expansive territory of the Archdiocese of Seattle, it extends northward to the Canadian border, southward to the Oregon state line, and includes everything west of the Cascades. This vast tract of land is interrupted by a large body of water (the Puget Sound), home to several islands (San Juan Islands, Whidbey, Bainbridge, Vashon); mountains (both the Cascades and the Olympics); and significant portions of forested land. To give some perspective about how large this is, in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee (where I went to seminary), has a similar population of Catholics. One can drive from one end to another in roughly an hour. In contrast, in the Archdiocese of Seattle, driving from Vancouver to Forks would likely take six hours.

In our Archdiocese there are a few different settings in which are parishes are located. For example, one setting includes rural or outlying areas, where the parishes tend to be small, but also spread out from one another. Another setting is what we see in Seattle and Tacoma. In those areas, we have more numerous parishes that are closer together, and as populations have shifted to other areas in recent decades, there's no longer a sufficient population of Catholics to fill all the parishes. But another setting I would identify is areas where the population has increased substantially in recent decades, where there are not as many parishes (e.g. Bellevue, Redmond, Kirkland, Issaquah, Sammamish, etc.).

In this one Archdiocese are these very different realities, to which one uniform approach is being applied: that is, creating "families" of parishes. I'll explain a couple more points in the coming weeks, to set the scene for this effort and how it effects (and potentially would effect) us.



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