

Archbishop Nienstedt's Message – May 2010

Dear friends in Christ, I wish to speak to you about upcoming changes which will impact all corners of this great Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

But beyond the physical changes, I wish to speak to you about something which may require a change in our mindset.

I wish to speak to you about promoting and proclaiming a communion of faith, hope, and love in this local Church...this Archdiocese.

You recognize the phrase faith, hope and love from the letter that our patron Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He called on them to be a community of faith, hope and love. In fact, earlier in that same letter, Paul reminded them that although they are many members, they are, in fact, one body in Christ. Saint Paul's message to the Corinthians that they should be one body in Christ, a community of faith, hope, and love, is especially relevant to us in our time and place.

My dear brothers and sisters, our own vision of being Church, must be rooted in a communion of faith, hope, and love that we share as the universal Body of Christ in this Archdiocese. Of course, we should expect that communion will always be supported in our parish communities, but going forward, this may happen in ways that we have not previously experienced. More than likely, the upcoming changes will require new ways of thinking on the part of pastors and parishioners alike. They will require that weekly routines be altered and yes, even *lives* be adjusted. But our response to the mission of Christ must remain ever the same, one full of hope, knowing that we are united in our witness to the presence of Christ.

As many of you know, more than a year ago, the Archdiocese began an intense and highly consultative process of planning for the future health and growth of this local Church.

In February 2009, I convened the first meeting of the archdiocesan strategic planning task force, composed of clergy, religious and laity.

Since then, the task force has considered the input of literally thousands of parish and school leaders, parishioners, pastors and others.

In July of this year, the task force will make its recommendations to me and I will begin making difficult -- but very necessary -- decisions to ensure the health of our local Church for you and for generations to come.

Initial plans, affecting our parishes and schools, will be announced in October.

These plans will be guided by our overall mission and triggered by economic and demographic factors which cannot be ignored.

Allow me to remind you of some of those factors, factors that I am sure are affecting your own parish in some way.

First, there is the gift of a growing number of Catholics in the Archdiocese, coupled with the challenge of a declining number of priests.

Second, many parishes and schools are not located in areas where population growth is strongest. That does not mean, however, that we are lessening our commitment to the core cities or rural areas. On the contrary, we are firmly focused on strengthening ministry in the heart of the metro...and in rural communities

Finally, some parishes and schools are simply not sustainable. In fact -- right now -- more than a quarter of our parishes are being monitored because of serious budget or debt issues.

We all want to ensure that we establish and nourish communities which meet the sacramental needs of the Faithful, which offer formation opportunities to deepen our faith and which provide the pastoral care we rely on throughout our lives.

Just as our parents and grandparents sacrificed for the future of the faith, we are now being called to make sacrifices for our local Church to make sure it is present and as vital for our children and our grandchildren as it has been for us, and perhaps even stronger.

While the strategic planning process is focused on ways we can become better stewards of the gifts entrusted to us, it is not primarily about our becoming a more efficient local Church.

Instead, the main goal is to foster a revitalized and sustainable local Church, responsive to the pastoral needs of all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all called into *communio*...communion as Church ...so as to be sent forth in *missio*...on mission into the world.

We are called into a communion of faith, hope, and love which is the Church. This communion unites us as one body in Christ, a body for the glorified Christ to continue his saving presence and action in the world.

I recognize that changes in parish and school communities may be difficult; however we need to be careful that the proposed changes do not damage our communion or distract us from our mission.

This is very important now, as we near a critical stage when very real changes will be taking place.

As I mentioned, the details of the parish and school changes are being determined based upon the input of thousands of parish and school leaders and parishioners.

All decisions regarding upcoming changes will be informed by the seven principles which I laid out last year to guide this historic process:

One...full sacramental ministry *must* be available to every Catholic in each geographical area of the Archdiocese.

Two...*all* areas of the Archdiocese must have qualified pastoral leaders, and by that I mean competent and compassionate clergy, religious and lay leaders.

Three...special concern must be given to the needs of the poor, the marginalized and the immigrant.

Four...Catholic schools must be included in the planning process. We want to continue our support for our schools to the best of our ability, as they are so very important for our future as a Church.

Five...every parish will be involved in the planning process. And every parish will be impacted, to one degree or another. We are all members of this same local Church.

Six...every parish will be expected to evaluate its spiritual, sacramental, financial and faith formation resources. Every parish will need to make adjustments based on that evaluation.

Seven...the discussions surrounding this planning process should be ones of mutual respect, patience and honesty and marked by an ability to listen to all points of view.

Those seven principles have provided the framework for the planning process thus far and will continue to guide the decisions to come.

Some may not agree with all of the decisions which will be announced in October, but I would hope that all of us will understand and ultimately accept them from the perspective of this Archdiocese as a whole, which needs to make wise choices for our future.

I ask that you join me in taking these decisive and necessary steps forward together in the coming months and years.

United, we can move forward with changes that are based in a shared understanding of the realities we face, as well as rooted in the mission given to us by Christ to spread his Gospel of love and life.

United, we can promote and proclaim a communion of faith, hope, and love.

May God bless you.