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Archbishop John Nienstedt: Our purpose is to invest in the future

By John C. Nienstedt

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This coming weekend, at all Saturday and Sunday Masses, the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis will announce our plan for restructuring our 213 parishes, covering a 12-county area. We recognize that many of our Catholic faithful, as well as non-Catholics in this local community, are eagerly anticipating this news.

I can assure you in advance that great care, collaboration and consideration have been given, over a 20-month period, to ensure that these changes will be fair, thoughtful and necessary. The church is simply doing what it has done for centuries, which is to say we are adjusting to the signs of the times while remaining committed to the core truths of our faith.

The Gospel calls us to be responsible stewards of our resources. This restructuring is guided by our overall mission to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ as effectively as we are able. My hope is that it will enable the Archdiocese to serve local Catholics and the larger community in more effective and sustainable ways now and into the future.

As a Pioneer Press editorial some months ago noted, many of the challenges facing the local Catholic Church are not unique to us. Public and private institutions of all varieties are grappling with changes brought about by the dramatic shift in demographics over the past several decades. The

current prolonged economic crisis has made these challenges more visible and urgent to address.

We realized early on that we had a brick-and-mortar

infrastructure built for a population that has changed dramatically since those buildings were constructed. The question became how we refocus our resources so as to serve the pastoral needs of the present and the future, without the expense of maintaining buildings that have become outdated. Indeed, we have a duty to build on what we have inherited. But sometimes that means letting go of some of what we treasured in the past.

We chose to address our challenges strategically and holistically, rather than to do this in a patchwork fashion. The Strategic Plan lays the groundwork for a culture of continuing evaluation and adjustment so that we are better prepared to meet future challenges and take advantage of future opportunities.

As you prepare for this weekend's announcement, please be aware that the strategic planning process involved participation by thousands of people, including clergy, parish and school leaders and parishioners. This same spirit of consultation and collaboration will continue as we move forward in making the name of Jesus Christ known and loved. Our overall aim is to promote and proclaim the Gospel in word and deed through vibrant parish communities, quality Catholic education and continued ongoing outreach to the poor and marginalized. Our purpose, in short, is to invest our gifts in the future. I ask for your prayerful support as we attempt to do just that.

The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt was named archbishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis on May 2, 2008, by Pope Benedict XVI.



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