



+April 10, 2021

Dear Parishioners of St. Therese, Seattle,

Peace be with each of you during this Easter season.

I am personally reaching out to inform you that your parish community will be part of the current Strategic Planning efforts across the archdiocese. Strategic Planning is a process that examines the needs of all Catholics, current parish structures, and our ability to carry out the mission of the Church.

Our hope is that St. Therese will be strengthened by these changes. Our Strategic Planning Committee believes that St. Therese parish can and should provide an invaluable ministry to Catholics living on the western shore of Lake Washington. We also believe that the ministry of St. Therese School is an essential part of our Archdiocesan mission of Catholic Education.

We wish to strengthen these ministries, and we hope that the changes affecting surrounding Catholic parishes will assist in fulfilling this goal for your parish. Let me explain a little more about the the nature of the broader changes.

Right now, our Catholic community faces challenging realities with fewer people actively practicing their Catholic faith. Between 1999 and 2018, the total population in Western Washington increased by 28.4% while weekend Mass attendance decreased by 15.5%. During the same time, infant baptisms decreased by 21.5% while total births in Western Washington increased by 17.2%. These are just a few of the trends that point to the stark reality that we must make changes so we can build thriving, sustainable Catholic communities to continue Christ's mission.

After studying the larger Catholic community, your pastors, pastoral coordinators, parish leaders, and the South Seattle deanery made recommendations to Archbishop Etienne for how to strengthen the larger Catholic community in the region. Please know these recommendations were not made lightly. They were made based on decades worth of ongoing research and planning work completed by parish leaders. Further study and review were conducted by the Strategic Planning Committee. These recommendations were put forth with the goal of providing the faithful with stronger pastoral support, more robust evangelization efforts, and excellent Catholic education. Inevitably, these recommendations will result in changes for you and your parish community. Based on these recommendations, the Strategic Planning team will begin working with the following parish communities in the Seattle area:

- Immaculate Conception, Seattle
- St. Mary, Seattle
- St. Patrick, Seattle
- St. Therese, Seattle

Our goal with these efforts is to become a more mission-oriented Church that continually draws people closer to Christ, regardless of where they are in their faith journey. We are one Catholic community, and we must act and think that way, even when it is difficult and feels very personal.

The changes affecting St. Therese are two-fold. First, St. Mary's parish will merge with St. Therese. Then, St. Therese will be reenvisioning itself as a parish to enhance its vitality and mission effectiveness, so that it can effectively minister to the broader needs of all Catholics living on the western shore of Lake Washington. This would require St. Therese to attract parishioners within its geographic boundaries by reenvisioning its parish ministry and identity according to the ideals set forth by our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Change can be challenging, and I want to recognize that and journey with you. At the same time, change provides us with new opportunities to share the joy that comes with living a faithfilled life. I ask the Holy Spirit to give us all grace and to guide our efforts as we begin this journey together. I also ask the Holy Spirit to give your parish a particular grace of openness, hope, and authentic hospitality to welcome this infusion of parishioners as a blessing and sign of hope for your future.

Your priest administrator will share the details of the recommended vision for your parish. I ask that you prayerfully consider this vision and actively participate in the planning process. Over the next few weeks, your pastoral coordinator and stakeholders from your parish – who have been asked to help lead these efforts – will invite you to a parish-wide educational meeting to share more details about this vision and how it impacts your parish community. While the vision may be set, how it comes to life is determined with the input from the people of God. We want you to be an active participant in shaping the future, and we will be here to support you.

I am truly grateful for the pastors, priest administrators, pastoral coordinators, and parish leaders who are helping lead these efforts and guiding the future of the Church in Western Washington. Please know of my continued prayers for you and for everyone involved in this journey.

With every best wish and an assurance of prayer, I remain,
Yours in Christ,

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Most Rev. Daniel H. Mueggenborg