

Annual Catholic Appeal Talk

April 25, 2019

Waiting for a tiny ferry to reach an Indian mission church, crossing the majestic Bridge of the Gods over the Columbia River for Sunday Mass in Stevenson, or processing over I-5 with the Blessed Sacrament between two small city parishes in Tacoma on the feast of Corpus Christi. In my five years of seminary, I have literally logged thousands of miles on the roads (and even some on the water) to visit about 140 parishes throughout our state.

Today I want to speak about the parish and the family – what we call the domestic church – because I have seen that these are the seedbed of vocations and the foundation of the universal Church. Almost all of us first received the faith in our family and supported by our parish and possibly a Catholic school. As a seminarian, I can also tell you that most vocations to the priesthood and religious life come from parish communities that are stable and thriving. But these families and parishes – small “churches” that are so vital to the life of our large Church – do not just grow on their own.

What strikes me most during these visits – especially to rural parishes – is the necessity of the support given by the archdiocese to sustain the lives of these small Catholic communities. Take for instance the village of Stevenson, out in the Columbia Gorge, or Cathlamet, a tiny harbor town near the coast. Both of these are the only Catholic presence in their entire county, and both are staffed and supported by larger parishes in the cities. While our number of rural communities is swiftly shrinking here in the archdiocese, we still have many parishes and schools challenged by poverty, population shifts, and priest shortages. Often the places most in need of a strong Catholic presence are the places least able to provide it on their own. My visits have been a strong reminder that parish communities are the building blocks of the archdiocese and the archdiocese is the master plan for the building blocks.

How is it that we are able to find Mass options when travelling around the area? How is it that we have opened new Catholic schools in recent years, some not even connected to a particular parish? How has Catholic Charities been able to serve over 125,000 people in Western Washington each year? A question closer to home for me: how does the Archdiocese support the formation of 19 men currently preparing for priesthood? I know the answer to that one: it is through the generosity of various parishes and pastors, who provide financial assistance for seminary education but also provide places for ministry work and share their own experiences

with seminarians. St. Louise is consistently one of those parishes, as are the tiny missions in Stevenson and Cathlamet that I mentioned earlier. I know personally that I have benefited from the richness of visiting so many parishes, each of which has left its mark in some way on my journey. All of this circles back to what I emphasized about the family and the parish: together, they are the building blocks of the Church. We recognize that most of the ministries which ensure our Church's future are only possible through generosity that goes beyond our immediate community. Ultimately, that presence and generosity are what it means to be a Catholic – in the sense of “universal” – Church.

Our support through the Annual Catholic Appeal is critical to the presence and outreach of the Catholic Church in Western Washington. Today I am asking everyone, if you have not done so already, to make a pledge or one-time gift to the Appeal. Our goal is about \$286,000. Please know that gifts of any amount are welcome. If you are not doing so already, please consider a gift of a dollar a day or \$365 or more. If you are able to give more, it is greatly appreciated as some are not able to give as much. No payment needs to be made today – we are simply asking for your pledge at this time. There are a variety of ways to fulfill your pledge: credit or debit card, electronic funds transfer, stock, charitable fund, and checks. You can also donate online through the web address or QR code on the materials.

I also ask for everyone's support in prayer. Let's thank God for the wonderful ways his Spirit is at work in our parishes, schools, and community services. Please keep all the leaders and the faithful of Western Washington in your prayers too. If you are unable to give financially, please still fill out an envelope and indicate that you are offering your prayers, as this will let us know you are participating. Thanks to your generosity, we have been able to educate countless children in Catholic schools, reach out to the poor and vulnerable, and form seminarians such as myself for the priesthood, among many other ministries. Fr. Gary and I thank you for your time and support. God bless you.