



THE DIOCESE OF YAKIMA • PASTORAL OFFICE
LA DIÓCESIS DE YAKIMA • CENTRO PASTORAL

October 2013

Dear Fathers:

Attached you will find the draft of a pastoral letter address to our parish leadership across the Diocese of Yakima. This grows from a suggestion raised last year about the possibility of a pastoral letter from me at the close of the “Year of Faith.”

The “Year of Faith” as you will recall from our late Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI was not meant to be a one-year stand-alone event. Rather the “Year of Faith” was meant to launch a multi-year effort on the “New Evangelization.” The “New Evangelization” centers on three areas:

First, deepening the communion of faith with those who participate in the life of our parishes. Second, to draw new membership who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus Christ inviting them to our home which is the Church. Third, to invite those who’ve left the Church or absented themselves from the regular life of the Church to return with a sense of welcome and heartfelt hospitality.

In October 2012 at last year’s Yakima Priest Convocation, we opened the “Year of Faith” by looking at the “Standards of Excellence” tied to our diocesan Catholic schools’ accreditation process. I asked the question: “What would “standards of excellence” look like for parishes?” This document not only attempts to give an answer to that question but it also lays out across a six year cycle how each parish would work on key “standards of excellence” that would guide us on the local level in our pursuit of the “New Evangelization.”

In offering these standards in a draft format for your consideration I would note the following points:

First, good things are occurring in all of our parishes and all of our schools all across the Diocese of Yakima. My first year I was able to visit each of the 41 parishes and missions and this last year I was able to get into each of the schools here in the Diocese of Yakima. This is why I can say with such confidence that good things are happening and Gospel-centered ministry is occurring everywhere.

The challenge is that often we are working so hard in our local parish we hardly have time to notice what might be occurring in the parish next door. This visitation

process will give us a chance to see the best practices across the diocese and determine which best practices of our neighbors we might want to adopt for ourselves as parish leaders. Thus, the visitation is meant to highlight best practices.

Second, in any given parish there are more things to accomplish than can be done in any given year. This is why many of the key elements for which we are already responsible as a parish are broken up across the six years. Each of the five standards of excellence – liturgical excellence, excellence in stewardship, excellence in hospitality and missionary outreach, excellence in governance and catechetical excellence – are meant to help you and your parish leadership to focus on one area per year. The sixth year is meant as

a review year of what you believe would be your one best practice in each of the five areas that you could share with other parishes; and; one practice in each of the five areas where you'd like to improve in the coming six-year cycle.

Third, the six-year review may include some on-site audits tied to objective standards. One example would be an on-site visit to see how – on the local level – you are implementing the “Safe Environment Policies” tied to the Dallas Charter. This is a recommendation from our last on-site visit. If there has not been a financial review due to a pastor or principal change, then the on-site “year six” visit may include a financial review.

Fourth, there are two kinds of teams that I will need your help developing. One team is the “visiting team” that will visit with me six parishes per year. That team will look at the five standards of excellence “commending” the parish in their best practices in those five areas. The visiting team will also affirm the five “recommendations” tied to those same standards where the parish would like to improve. We'll need clergy and laity volunteering to be trained and to serve on the visiting team. I also anticipate that the visiting team will form the next diocesan pastoral council providing me with feedback and recommendations based on our visits.

Besides the “visiting team” I also want to put together at least five “resource teams” tied to the five standards of excellence. The first resource team, the liturgy resource team, has already been functioning on an ad-hoc basis coming up with the draft of our diocesan liturgy policies. They can become a resource to parishes looking carefully at the “liturgical excellence” standard and reviewing their best practices as well as their one area where they'd like to improve. We also are developing a resource team tied to the Sacrament of Matrimony as well as the marriage preparation policies tied in with our Sacrament and Liturgy policies. Thus, there actually may develop more than one resource team for each of the standards of excellence. All the more reason that we will need clergy and laity of volunteer to be on “resource teams” for each of the five areas of excellence.

Besides the pastoral letter for your parish leadership you will also find a draft of the actually break down of which parishes get visited which years. The first parishes to be visited are those that I am confident will do well in the visitation process. The rest of the parishes were selected somewhat randomly. However, I did keep parishes who share a pastor together in the same group for the sake of administrative clarity and ease.

In closing, you have often heard me say, “You're the best!” This visitation process will allow you and your parishioners to showcase “the best” and share your area of expertise with other parishes as well. This process will give us a pathway whereby we can deepen the faith of those we serve as well as open our door to those needing our welcome. In advance I thank you for your careful consideration of this proposal.

With every best wish and blessing,

Fraternally Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson
Bishop of Yakima