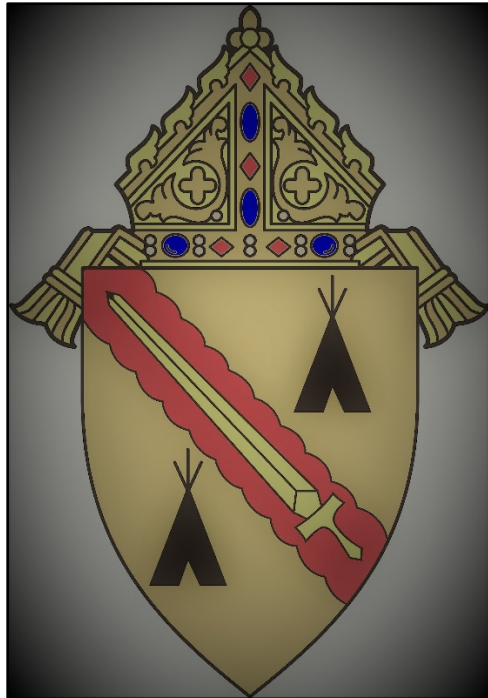


A Concise Handbook on

**PARISH STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE:
“A NEW EVANGELIZATION”**

Guide for Parish Self-Study



**Diocese of Yakima
Yakima, Washington**

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Final 2019 Version
English Edition

(October 30, 2019)

The Parish Standards of Excellence

Wonderful things are happening in all of our parishes across Central Washington! To discover these “best practices”, parishes of the diocese are divided into six groups. Each group takes on a standard and studies their parish in light of that standard for that year. In this way each parish will identify a couple of areas of excellence that could be shared as “best practices.” Each parish will also develop a couple of recommendations where the parish leadership would like to improve by studying the “best practices” of neighboring parishes.

Standards of excellence are shared values that all parishioners will uphold regardless of geography or language, in order to build up the Body of Christ that is His Church. Simply put, the standards of excellence are benchmarks of Christ-centered service that each parish strives to achieve, each in its own way, so as to build up a unified witness of the Church of Jesus Christ in this part of His vineyard.

The Standards of Excellence for Parishes in the Yakima Diocese are:

1. Liturgical Excellence
2. Excellence in Stewardship
3. Hospitality and Missionary Outreach
4. Excellence in Good Governance
5. Catechetical Excellence

This Concise Handbook serves as a guide that will help you – year by year – to undertake a rigorous inventory of how you are doing in the two-fold movement of forming disciples in your parish who can boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as well as reaching out and witnessing this life-changing message through your acts of charity – especially in your community outreach.

This Handbook is designed to guide each parish’s six-year plan so that one Standard and its key elements are touched each year. It’s why you’ll want to read this document together as parish leaders focusing only on one theme each of the five years and producing a Self-Study Final Report in the 6th Year. (There is also a Comprehensive Handbook containing additional reflections and explanations for your use.)

Please know of my gratitude for each and every one of you – for the assistance you are to the priests of our parish – for your assistance to me as bishop – for your willingness to assume lay leadership for the “New Evangelization” converting those around to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and inviting them to his unusual banquet:

“When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite wealth neighbors in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14)

Sincerely,

**Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson,
Bishop of Yakima**

Standard I: LITURGICAL EXCELLENCE

Because each of the Standards is "Christ-Centered" the first standard is Liturgical Excellence. It is at the Eucharist that we are fed and nurtured to become the very person God created us to be. It is when we are most like Christ that we are most ourselves. Liturgy helps us draw closer to God and thus become better humans. But if we are to live into this kind of response and relax into the beauty of the liturgy, a certain amount of planning needs to happen.

LITURGICAL EXCELLENCE is demonstrated when these questions are easily answered:

- Does parish leadership have a schedule of training for those who assist at liturgy?
- Is there a simple written lesson plan for teaching each of the parish ministries?
- Are there directions and reminders to ministers neatly typed and posted in the sacristy?
- What is the back-up plan when someone fails to show up?
- How are those that are consistently absent handled?
- Can the Pastor, the parish priest, and the deacon or coordinator describe the key elements in which their liturgical ministers are trained?
- Can they name a time when someone was not meeting the standard and describe how feedback was effectively given to the lector, musician, or other liturgical minister?

Best Practice #1 in Liturgical Excellence: TRAINING

Whether it is the ministry of lector, extraordinary minister of the Eucharist, pastoral musician, sacristan, altar server, usher or ministers of hospitality after Mass, **those engaged in Sunday ministry are trained.** Both the Training and the Formation is aligned to the Roman Rite especially the General Instructions.

Evidence of Best Practices in Training:

- The Word of God is clearly proclaimed and can be heard by all;
- Eucharist is reverently distributed;
- Music is rehearsed and tied to the liturgical year;
- Servers are well trained and know their part;
- Ushers know how to both greet people; and
- Ushers know how to handle emergencies (e.g., health crisis during the Mass)

Best Practice #2 in Liturgical Excellence: FORMATION

The Parish or the Group of Parishes offers on-going formation, such as a retreat day or a day of reflection that assists the ministers to deepen their love for the liturgy and appreciation for the ministry they have undertaken. These times also give parish ministers an opportunity to suggest ways to sustain excellence and improve the liturgy.

Evidence of Best Practices in **Formation**:

- Sample letter or flyer used to invite the various ministers to a day of reflection or retreat;
- Lesson plan or agenda for the day to show the event took place;
- Books and articles that the pastor or parish leader has suggested for use;
- Lector workbook used in forming and preparing themselves for the liturgy;
- Use of on-line resources to prepare (e.g., apps like “Word on Fire” on smart phones)
- Use of a liturgical planning guide from Liturgical Training Publications or other recognized company
- Evidence that parts of the General Instruction have been taught, studied, and reviewed
- Pastor’s evidence to the Bishop of ongoing reading & formation in preparing liturgy
- Use of on-line resources linking prayer life to priest’s preaching

Best Practice #3 in Liturgical Excellence: ASSEMBLY PARTICIPATION

"Full, active and conscious participation" is the phrase most often cited from the Second Vatican Council's document Sacrosanctum Concilium. Effective assembly participation is reflected in people who 1) actively respond to the Mass dialogue and 2) engage in sacred silence, allowing the Word of God & the words of prayers to sink more deeply inside each of them as we worship.

Evidence of Best Practice in **Assembly Participation**:

- A balance of word and sacred silence;
- Written evidence of full, active and conscious participation being encouraged as part of parish missions and communications;
- RCIA lessons incorporating liturgical participation;
- Homily texts and notes
- Other forms of encouragement to full participation.

Standard II: EXCELLENCE IN STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship is nothing less than placing all we have -- our time, our treasure and our talents -- at the service of Christ in order to advance the mission of His Church. Stewardship is about a way of life and manner of turning parishioners into ever better disciples of Jesus.

STEWARDSHIP EXCELLENCE is demonstrated when these questions are easily answered:

- Is there active and full parish participation in the fall for the Annual Catholic Appeal?
- Are there second collections taken up periodically?
- Does parish teaching and preaching include missionary service around the world and global stewardship, tied to second collections?
- How is the “Rice Bowl” encouraged and what are the results?
- Are there “time and talent” fairs or similar encouragement to share?
- What opportunities exist for people to learn about volunteer ministries in the parish in both Spanish and English?
- What evidence exists that every believer is engaged?

Best Practice #1 in Stewardship Excellence: PREACHING & TEACHING STEWARDSHIP

Meeting this standard means that in the homilies on Sunday, as well as in classrooms with both children and adults, stewardship as a way of life is taught, preached, and practiced. This includes robust programs of parish stewardship soliciting pledges for regular giving to support the parish mission. Parishes are expected to strive for deeper communion with their neighboring parishes, their bishop, and the global church as well.

Evidence of Best Practices in Preaching and Teaching Stewardship:

- There is a parish project tied to "overage" received from Annual Catholic Appeal;
- Notes or the text of a witness talk given by a parishioner tied to either the Annual Catholic Appeal or the local parish appeal;
- Parish statistical evidence of local participation in the Sunday collection;
- Flyers and posters for time and talent fair registration lists;
- Evidence that after someone registers or calls to volunteer there is follow through;
- Evidence that every believer, regardless of language or culture, is actively engaged in stewardship.

Best Practice #2 in Stewardship Excellence: RECORDS, BUDGETING & FINANCIAL REVIEW

Special efforts are taken to make sure all parishioners, in their respective languages, clearly understand what a budget is and how it relates to the ministry of the parish. Parishes striving towards excellence in stewardship have budget numbers that can tell the story

of good stewardship by the parish. Attention is also given to properly documenting and reporting Sacraments at the Home Parish with appropriate back-up storage arrangements made off-site to preserve the historical integrity of that Sacrament.

Evidence of Best Practices in Records, Budgeting and Financial Review:

- Written plan documenting and storing Sacramental Records with copies to Diocesan archives;
- Written plan demonstrating parish stewardship;
- Minutes of meetings showing stewardship was discussed by parish leadership, especially the pastoral council;
- Budget documents driven by a pastoral decision;
- Published annual financial report(s) or statement(s) in Spanish and English provided to all members;
- Notes from parish leadership showing the financial and facility policies of the diocese have been used as tools for reaching excellence in stewardship.
- Completion of Agreed Upon Procedures audit, and, evidence of compliance with any findings requested. The parish will review these items during Year 4 – Stewardship focuses of the 6-year cycle.

Best Practice #3 in Stewardship Excellence: PARISH FACILITIES PLAN

A **long term plan has been established** and explained in both Spanish and English so every parishioner has clear access to the basic information regarding the parish plant.

Evidence of Best Practices in Parish Facilities Plan:

- A twenty-year plan for key facility needs (e.g., roof replacement, boiler replacement, HVAC upkeep, grounds, gardens, Church windows etc.);
- Meeting minutes indicating ongoing attention to the facility;
- Special parish committee(s) have been established to address facility needs;
- Written plan exists that addresses routine facility maintenance and replacement;
- Parish budget supports long term plan(s).
- Evidence of using available diocesan resources regarding facility conditions and maintenance when preparing or updating parish facilities plan

Best Practice #4 in Stewardship Excellence: PARISH SAFETY PLAN

A plan with regular monitoring ensuring the physical structure, and, safe environment for children and vulnerable adults is established in English and Spanish and is practiced by the Staff and Volunteers of the parish.

Evidence of Best Practices in Parish Safety Plan:

- All Staff, and, Volunteers who work with Children have completed VIRTUS Training, and, have received a background check through WSP (or equivalent) in the past 6 years. Authorization Forms and records are provided to Diocese for archive.
- A Report accounting locations for possible Asbestos and other hazardous materials is available at the Parish office, and, is regularly (annually) reviewed to identify any change in material status that may be detrimental to parishioner health.
- All maintenance staff will have training in proper handling of blood borne pathogens and other necessary safety training.
- Easily identifies location of up-to-date First Aid Kit, Fire Extinguisher, and, AED Device with proper training in operating the device. Procedure Consideration can be given to security of the building during gatherings and Masses. There is a log of who is assigned to specific duties during masses.

Standard III: EVANGELIZATION: HOSPITALITY AND OUTREACH

The parish effectively supports accessibility by successfully reaching and supporting the unique needs of Spanish and English speaking members and volunteers of all backgrounds and needs (e.g., choirs and catechists) in a meaningful manner.

HOSPITALITY AND EVANGELIZATION OUTREACH EXCELLENCE is demonstrated when these four questions are easily answered:

- Is all key information available bilingually, in both English and Spanish?
- Are parish priest(s) and staff easily accessible to all parishioners?
- Is teaching and preaching well-aimed to reach all parishioners?
- Are there physically accessible entrances, restrooms, parking, seating, etc.?

Best Practice #1 in Evangelization & Hospitality Excellence: BILINGUAL INFORMATION

Parish information is readily available in both Spanish and English across a wide variety of informational platforms.

Evidence of Best Practices in Bilingual Information:

- Accurate Mass times are prominently and consistently displayed outside the church building and on the church web site in both languages;
- Answering machine or answering service after hours is available to record messages;
- An emergency cell number is available for live 24/7 contact;
- Parish web site is maintained providing quick (few clicks) access to information
 - Helpful information in both Spanish and English
 - Times and locations along with a parish phone number on the home page
 - The home page is pointed towards NEW members and out-of-town visitors
 - Few clicks needed to get to key parish information
 - Key links are listed for Diocese of Yakima and other key church resources.

Best Practice #2 in Evangelization & Hospitality Excellence: PERSONAL AVAILABILITY

Parish priests, deacons and lay leaders are reasonably accessible for personal contact.

Evidence of Best Practices in Personal Availability:

- Parish phone is answered by a live person;
- Receptionist(s) has latest Sunday bulletin / parish calendar to answer basic questions;
- Receptionists – both staff & volunteer – are able to consistently assist callers in both Spanish and English;
- Parish plan exists to help people whose first language is not Spanish or English

- The 24/7, on-call number is prominently displayed in bulletins, web pages, outside Church;
- Person(s) are assigned to handle calls 24/7;
- Emergency management procedures are in place to answer these questions:
 - What happens when the priest is away or on another call?
 - What's the backup plan within the parish and with neighboring parishes?
 - Is there a parish schedule for who is available?
 - Is there evidence that vacation times among clergy in the parish and in the geographic area are coordinated?

Best Practice #3 in Evangelization & Hospitality Excellence: WELL-AIMED TEACHING & PREACHING

Parish preaching, worship, education and other programs reach a wide variety of believers.

Evidence of Best Practices in Well-Aimed Teaching & Preaching:

- Offerings are well aimed and accessible to a wide variety of believers;
- Parish leaders work effectively with conflicting agendas of parish members;
- Catechists assess who is before them and aim instruction so that both the high-practicing Catholic as well as one who has just come back after many years both find nourishment;
- Specific efforts welcome back those who have been away from the Church for many years;
- Sacraments are accessible;
- Parish leadership works together to uplift sacramental preparation as moments for teaching, evangelization and spiritual renewal;
- Parish leadership can readily identify successes and has learned from its failures;
- Parish can identify areas it finds difficult (e.g., sexual morality, social justice) and can show how they are addressed while upholding Church beliefs;
- Pastor and parish leadership work with parishioners who disagree with church teachings in the wider community or in their personal life.

Best Practice #4 in Evangelization & Hospitality Excellence: GOOD ACCESSIBILITY

Parish programs and facilities are accessible to a wide variety of parishioners and local community members, including those with special needs.

Evidence of Best Practices in Good Accessibility:

- Building grounds and facilities are physically accessible;
- Long-term plan exists to make the facility, esp. the bathrooms, handicapped accessible and serve the needs of elderly and disabled;
- Signs are in both Spanish and English;
- Provisions are made for the hearing impaired;
- Special printed materials are available for visually impaired (i.e. readings in large print);

- Clergy and parishioners make sacraments & spiritual life accessible to homebound;
- Sacraments are accessible to members with mental disabilities or educational challenges.
- Parish is represented in local community events, such as fairs, festivals, parades, etc.

Standard IV: GOOD GOVERNANCE

The parish successfully uses appropriate councils (i.e. pastoral, finance, school) to support, guide and advise the pastor in church life and related operations.

Best Practice #1 in Good Governance: PARISH COUNCILS

The parish has a pastoral council, finance council and where there is a school, a school commission that meets regularly with a regular rotation of members.

Evidence of Best Practices in Parish Councils:

- Dates of meetings are clearly communicated through a variety of ways (i.e. bulletin, webpage, e-mails);
- Meeting agendas & minutes are routinely posted on bulletin boards in the Church;
- Agenda items are carried over when necessary and topic is completed;
- Evidence shows good follow through on important matters;
- Pictures of pastoral council, finance council, school commission and other parish leadership groups are prominently displayed with contact information;
- Interviews with parish leaders confirm a sense of the effectiveness of meetings;
- Leaders regularly and systematically rotate.

Best Practice #2 in Good Governance: SPIRITUAL & ECCLESIAL FORMATION

All parish leaders receive ongoing spiritual and ecclesial formation on a regular basis.

Evidence of Best Practices in Spiritual & Ecclesial Formation:

- Leaders gather regularly with the pastor for days of prayer and reflection;
- Parish leaders know and practice the Diocesan Norms for Parish Finance Councils, the Church Process Through Consultative Leadership document (proposed), Guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils, Guidelines for Parish Stewardship Committees, as well as any other guidelines for pastoral and finance councils;
- Parish leaders regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their meetings;
- Members are practicing Catholics (i.e. attend Mass regularly, involved in the life of the parish especially its key liturgical and social events, embody in their personal lives the standards of excellence expected by the parish, read the policies of the diocese that pertain to their area)
- Members are committed, competent leaders (i.e. are aware of the wider Church literature that relates to their particular leadership role, refrain from gossip and negative comments)

about their pastor and other key leaders, know how to give hard feedback respectfully and charitably);

- Parish leaders participate in formation activities.

Best Practice #3 in Good Governance: PARISH HAS A PASTORAL PLAN

All parishes have a documented and in-depth pastoral plan.

Evidence of Best Practices in Pastoral Plans:

- Parishioners know and understand the strengths of the parish when reviewing the Standards of Excellence [i.e. Where is the parish excelling in its 1) Liturgical Excellence, 2) Stewardship, 3) Hospitality and Evangelization Outreach, 4) Governance and 5) Catechetical Excellence];
- Parishioners know and understand where the parish needs to grow and are aware of plans for addressing needed growth;
- Accomplishments are celebrated and commended;
- Parish leadership has a written plan for improvement and meeting Minutes documenting the development and monitoring of the improvement plan;
- Plans are monitored and all stakeholders, from the pastor to the youngest parish volunteer, hold each other accountable for living out their particular part in the parish mission.

Standard V: CATECHETICAL EXCELLENCE

The standard of "Catechetical Excellence" is rooted in the six tasks of catechesis from the **Congregation of Clergy's 2001 document, the "General Directory on Catechesis"**. (See the Comprehensive Handbook for quotes and references from the GDC). These six tasks are: *1) Promoting knowledge of the faith; 2) Liturgical education; 3) Moral formation; 4) Teaching to pray; 5) Education for community life; and 6) Missionary initiation.*

A GOOD LESSON PLAN ALWAYS CONTAINS ALL SIX TASKS OF CATECHESIS

CATECHETICAL EXCELLENCE is demonstrated when these questions are easily answered about every catechetical presentation:

- What part of the lesson included some solid content about the faith and beliefs of the Church as well as its relation to Sacred Scripture?
- How did my catechesis lead those I taught towards the liturgy, especially the Eucharist?
- How did my lesson touch on moral formation and living the life of Christ?
- Did I teach and model prayer for those I was teaching at some point in my presentation?
- Did what I teach and how I taught build up the community that is the Church?
- Did my teaching or lesson give some indication of how this could be lived when they left Church and classroom that day, of being sent forth as missionaries into the world?
- Did my lesson plan contain all six tasks of catechesis?

Best Practice #1 in Catechetical Excellence: KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH

The Diocese of Yakima has a **core religion curriculum with selected publishers that the diocese can support with training and catechetical services**. The first task, knowledge of the faith, relates to curriculum support for **Catechetical Instruction and Formation**.

Evidence of Best Practices in Knowledge of the Faith:

- Selected websites or smart phone apps provide learners of all ages knowledge about Sacred Tradition (the teachings of the Church), and about Sacred Scripture (Bible);
- Pastor & parish catechists make available on at Sunday Masses samples of text books;
- Parish has flyers advertising a parish mission or other adult education opportunity with a guest speaker;
- Catechists have talks that were given at a retreat or parish gathering that uplifted the content of the faith;
- Pastor has notes of a talk or homily text which highlighted certain aspects of the faith;

- Catechists have a calendar with dates and times offered for children as well as adults.

Best Practice #2 in Catechetical Excellence: LITURGICAL CATECHESIS

Liturgical catechesis means that in our role as teachers of the faith we help our people connect Sunday worship with daily belief. The parish provides evidence that the liturgy is taught in such a way that beliefs of the Church connect with prayer and worship of the Church.

Evidence of Best Practice in Liturgical Catechesis:

- Training schedule for liturgical ministers are developed (Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors, Servers and Pastoral Musicians);
- Lesson plans and notes indicate that people are trained not only in what to do, but in "liturgical catechesis," assisting those serving in worship to draw connections between actions of liturgy and basic beliefs of the Church;
- Schedule of parish guest speakers is shared with and approved by the diocese;
- Calendar of pastoral drop-in visits to school and religious education classrooms;
- Volunteers are connected to knowledge of the faith including liturgical education.

Best Practice #3 in Catechetical Excellence: SOLID MORAL FORMATION

All catechetical formation programs for children and adults in the Diocese of Yakima are tied directly to the Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church in such a way that all Church teachings, especially those in areas of sexual morality and social justice, are presented not as rules that limit our freedom but as tools for human excellence, freeing the learner for happiness in this life and the next.

Evidence of Best Practice in Solid Moral Formation

- Notes from homilies, lesson plans and talks on moral formation issues
- Interviews with youth and parents show a satisfactory level of assimilation
- Parish uplifts the uniqueness of marriage between one man and one woman
- Parish supports new couples, long-term couples and those who've faced a failure through divorce or separation
- Parish offers a robust moral catechesis that uplifts, inspires, avoiding condemnatory language
- Charitable acts of service include times of reflection and prayer
- Opportunities for those engaged in charitable work are anchored in reflection and strongly connected to their personal relationship with Jesus Christ

Best Practice #4 in Catechetical Excellence: TEACHING TO PRAY

Jesus taught his disciples to pray in an intimate and close way. The various ways we pray – especially our prayers of petition or the more free-flowing charismatic prayer – can leave the impression that prayer starts with us as though we are trying to get God’s attention. But God is already there. **"Teaching to Pray" is about more than memorizing prayers. It's an attitude of prayer and contemplation.** Parishes provide regular opportunities for members and the surrounding community to assimilate an attitude of prayer and learn the rich centuries-old Church traditions of prayer, where all draw into deeper communion with Christ.

Evidence of Best Practice in Teaching to Pray:

- Lesson plans from catechists showing prayer is incorporated into the presentation;
- Flyer or poster promoting days of reflection and prayer for key volunteers;
- Outline for a prayer retreat held in the parish;
- Advertising that invites people to join a parish prayer group;
- Information about a parish mission;
- Minutes of a prayer group meeting;
- Sample of a rosary event or Marian devotion celebrated in the parish;
- Samples of Sunday General Intercessions;
- Writing samples from adults and children of some prayers they have written;
- Interviews with those involved in the prayer ministry of the parish.

Best Practice #5 in Catechetical Excellence: COMMUNITY BUILDING AND OUTREACH

The parish demonstrates a capacity of building community, uplifting the gifts of time, treasure and talent, and at the same time has evidential examples of how hard and divisive conflicts have been well-handled according to the demands of Christian charity.

Evidence of Best Practice in Community Building and Outreach

- Digital photos of parish events
- Flyers advertising parish festivals that open up as invitations to the larger community
- Outlines and worship aids from parish anniversaries and events
- Appreciation dinners and other special events (for example, "Cultural Competencies Workshop," Sausage Festival, etc.)
- Evidence of participation of the parish in local activities which build community
- Encouragement in bulletins or through hand-outs for members to participate in ecumenical and community events

Best Practice #6 in Catechetical Excellence: MISSIONARY INITIATIVE

The parish initiates its members into the Church's mission with robust opportunities that assist the parishioners in both learning about the missionary reach of the Catholic Church both globally and locally through their catechesis as well as their stewardship.

Evidence of Best Practice in **Missionary Initiative**

- National special collections are announced and strongly connected to web links and other materials provided to the parish;
- Homilists and catechists draw connections to the demand of the Gospel that we are each called to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth as missionaries of Jesus Christ;
- Second collections are taught as part of religious education;
- People are engaged in learning about the "mission" of the Church they are funding;
- Local "missions" connect to the community;
- Sister parish(es) overseas have been established;
- Days of reflection for parish members promoting personal reflection on their vocation and mission in life;
- Lesson plans for classes include a clear mission component;
- Notes from a homily on missions or a lesson plan including the mission initiative growing from a Gospel;
- Flyers or bulletin inserts uplifting local or global mission efforts;
- Digital photos of a sister parish posted on the parish Facebook or web page.



St. Joseph's Mission on the Ahtanum

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All for the Glory of our Loving God