



Feast of St. Michael – September 29, 2012

To the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Toronto:

On this feast of St. Michael, protector of the faithful and patron saint of our Archdiocese, I wish to give you an update on pastoral planning that is underway to help us as an archdiocesan community of faith to respond more effectively to Our Lord's command to His disciples: "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Mathew 28: 19-20).

As the whole Church enters into the Year of Faith, and as the Pope convenes a Synod of Bishops to plan ways to address the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel in our modern world, it is appropriate that we explore more deeply through a pastoral plan how we can best fulfil the mission of the Church in our own particular situation in the Archdiocese of Toronto. This letter provides you with an overview of some of the principles underlying the plan which is being developed, in advance of more specific information that will be available in the New Year.

What is a Pastoral Plan?

A pastoral plan serves as a roadmap for our journey as a Catholic Christian community, identifying key priorities and goals on the path ahead. It is rooted in prayerful reflection upon the Bible and our living tradition of faith. It also involves a thorough, accurate and honest assessment of our current pastoral situation, both the challenges and the opportunities before us.

As I regularly travel throughout the archdiocese, I am inspired by all the pastoral and apostolic activities I observe, and by the creative zeal and dedication of the laity, religious, and clergy I meet. In so many ways, we are already earnestly engaged in addressing the various matters that are central to the mission of a Christian community. It is always wise, however, to step back and consider what our key priorities as an archdiocese should be at this time, so that we can more effectively work together, and focus our efforts, and have a way of assessing how we are doing. This is what a pastoral plan allows us to do; it also helps us both to discover the tools we need to fulfil our mission, and to use our resources more wisely.

Although our faith does not change, the circumstances in which we live our faith do change, constantly. For that reason, a pastoral plan will always be a work in progress, since we regularly need to take a look at where we are, and where at the moment we should particularly direct our energies.

Faithful Stewards of our Many Gifts

The Gospel encourages us to be faithful stewards of all that has been entrusted to us, and so we should ask ourselves how we are currently sharing our time, talent and treasure, in order to serve others and to give thanks to God. In the parable of the talents, each servant is called to give an account of his stewardship; each of us is responsible for fruitfully using the gifts we have received from God. A pastoral plan should help us to do that better, both individually and as an archdiocesan community.

Apostolic and Pastoral, rooted in Prayer

It occurs to me that we can gain insight into some of the key elements of a wise pastoral plan by considering the design of the new cardinal's ring.

First, there is an image of St. Peter, to whom Jesus entrusted His flock. We should be attentive to all of the spiritual needs of those who are already gathered together in our parishes. Looking to Christ the Good Shepherd, we should be attentive as well to those who have drifted away from the faith.

Then there is an image of St. Paul, the great apostle who tirelessly proclaimed the faith throughout the often hostile world of his day. He reminds us that we need to reach out zealously and creatively to those who are scattered: not only to those who have left the faith, but also to those who have not yet really heard the Good News of Jesus. This is a particular challenge in our secularized society.

Above the images of the great pastor and the great apostle is a star, representing Our Lady, who prayerfully listened to God, and humbly did His will. Our diligent efforts, pastoral or apostolic, will only be fruitful if they are rooted in prayer, for "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

A pastoral plan, rooted in prayer, should nurture our community of faith, but also reach out beyond it.

Where Have We Been? Where Are We Going?

Over the past 18 months a broad cross-section of our Catholic community has been consulted in the pastoral planning process: clergy, religious, staff, volunteers and parishioners. We have asked them what our spiritual roadmap should look like: Where should we be heading? Where have we gone off course? We have asked for practical suggestions and goals to help us move forward. We are grateful to all those who have contributed to this dialogue, one that will continue in the months ahead.

In early 2013, as the present form of the archdiocesan pastoral plan is completed, you will hear about the specific priorities and goals that are part of it. I hope this letter will help to prepare the way for further discussion around this vision and the key directions contained in the plan.

Meanwhile, especially as we enter into the Year of Faith, I invite each of us to deepen our own personal commitment to our faith in Christ, and to consider how our whole Catholic community can be more effective in witnessing to our faith in this society in which we live.

It is increasingly difficult to be a faithful Christian in our society, which is so often shaped by a vision that is contrary to that of the Gospel. While putting together a wise pastoral plan for our archdiocese is obviously a sensible thing to do, it will only be fruitful if each of us is personally attentive to our own engagement as a disciple of Jesus, and to that of our parish community.

I look forward to sharing our Pastoral Plan with you in the New Year. Be assured of my ongoing prayers for you in your life of Christian discipleship. Saint Michael the Archangel, pray for us.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto