



Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria

Office of the Bishop

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May 16, 2019

Our Lady of the Rosary Parish
789 Goldstream Avenue
Langford BC V9B 2X6

Dear friends in Christ,


While many acknowledge change as being a natural process in life and inevitable, change is not always received or managed well. This energy hurts the Body of Christ, and the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Joy. Time soothes, and is required to process and manage the change in our communities and in our personal lives.

The process of 'change management' provides opportunities for reflection, growth, and renewal as it relies on the Pastor's mature leadership, the gifts of the community at Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, and the Grace of the Holy Spirit that leads and guides communities through change.

To help your parish through the changes in pastoral leadership, please find attached a document entitled "*A Reflection on Change for Parish Communities*" that may serve as a useful tool to help you move through the process of change.

Fr. Dean Henderson, in addition to serving as Pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Sooke, is also appointed Pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary Parish in Langford. I am confident that as a community, Our Lady of the Rosary Parish will work together to support each other through this change.

In Communion,

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Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria

Attachment
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A Reflection on Change for Parish Communities

Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'¹ "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.'²

The two narratives above are scenarios where Peter is speaking to Jesus, specifically about not wanting things to change. The first is a “mountain moment” that Peter didn’t want to lose; much like when communities are pleased with their priest and they say to the bishop, “you can’t move him; we want him to stay.” The second foretells of a “valley moment”, where Jesus says he will die and be resurrected; much like the mourning some communities go through with the loss of “their priest,” not recognizing the new priest as a potential for new life. Both narratives may serve as scriptural reflections when an announcement is made that their priest is moving to another community.

When all is going well, and the priest and community are in general harmony, where the work of the Holy Spirit is evident in faith practices and the Sacraments, when the support of the community for the priest is strong, and there is a sense of inclusion of all families, we act like Peter and say: “let’s keep this moment, change will take all of this away”. When there is a strong emotional bond to a pastor, communities feel that no one else can or should be their faith leader. However, when things are not working well within a community, often change is demanded from the bishop, and communities do not want to wait until the bishop makes changes across the Diocese. Both are self-centered thinking and create an environment resistant to change and growth.

Change can be a double-edged sword, but we must first see it as a positive life event for both the priest and the faith community. Change to some may mean there are losses, and the grieving of these losses. Separation caused by change leaves some in the community feeling like lost sheep, or spiritual orphans and widows. Losing a priestly father may bring with it feelings of anger, or a sense of unfair treatment. Communities must recognize change as normal and usually a healthy process that sparks reflection, facilitates new pastoral goals, and celebrates the universality of our faith and unity in our particular Diocese.

Priests are called to serve wherever they are needed. It is inherent in the priestly calling and their vocation. In that call and answer to serve God in communion with their bishop, is the uncertainty of change: where communities lose their current pastor and gain a new one. Change, in its simplest form, is a process of transformation that can be positively embraced. It is a normal part of a Catholic community’s life, and of a Catholic priest’s ministry. It is an opportunity for the community to see Christ through new encounters with someone who has not yet served them.

The following suggestions may be helpful in dealing with changes in pastoral leadership:

1. Recognize that it is also a time of celebration for the community with their outgoing pastor and the new incoming pastor as well. These should be celebrations of the successes of the past few years, and hope for the next few years.
2. Individuals who are experiencing loss and feelings of grief can spend time in prayer, in silence before the tabernacle, in meditation, or through relaxation exercises to allow the Holy Spirit to rise and heal the feelings and thoughts they are experiencing.

¹ Mark 9:5

² Matthew 16:22

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3. When times of community doubt or turmoil arise, it is important for communities to create opportunities to share their feelings. Here lies an opportunity for lay leaders and the Parish Pastoral Council to organize time for the community to express their feelings, to dialogue, and to seek comfort and peace with accepting the change. The focus should be planning for the arrival of the new priest.
4. Take time to discuss what is working well now, and identify areas to address when the new priest arrives; not to direct the new pastor, but to inform him from a community-wide perspective rather than an individual or special interest-group perspective.
5. Take time to prepare for the departure of the current priest, and express appreciation for their service to the faith community. Celebrate their time with you, and the gifts they brought, and brought out, during their time with the community. If there is a mutual desire to maintain contact, establish the means this could take.

Embracing change without judgement, with a sense of moving towards a new encounter with Christ through the new pastor and your community, is the bedrock on which to continue building a community's house of faith. Change allows for a time to reflect on what a community believes its gifts are, and to consider how these will be offered to God, in communion with the new priest. Perhaps there will be different and creative ideas that will grow under the servant leadership of the new priest. Be open to new perspectives, different homilies, and developing new ways to grow as a Catholic faith-community.

Accepting and embracing change positively allows for hearts, minds, and spirits to be touched by others. Being open to the experience of another priest will help to build the Body of Christ within your community through current members, perhaps new catechumens, those who have become complacent in their faith, and those who, having left the church, may be seeking to reconnect with God.

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."³

Take Jesus' words into your heart, and reach out with a spirit of love to greet the new priest. Try not to let opinions of others influence how you will welcome the next priest. Let the mutual love in which Jesus calls his disciples, be the starting point to build together. The role of a priest is to be "In persona Christi", to be a Servant Leader animated by the Holy Spirit, and to use the gifts of the Father in the world; to bring about His Kingdom here and now. Your role is to be faithful and to persevere in striving to do God's will, under the guidance of a new shepherd of souls that will be part of your community, until the next change you will be asked to accept and embrace.

³ John 13:34-35