



In Joy and Hope

by

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Catch the wind and fire

One of the great joys of faith we profess and celebrate is the liturgical year which captures the mystery of salvation history. Each year, the church invites us to celebrate this incredible story of God's love for the human race. It begins each Advent and culminates in the feast of Christ the King in late November.

The liturgy invites us to the crib at Bethlehem. During Lent we journey with the catechumens and candidates to prepare to relive the mystery of Christ's passion, death and resurrection in the Triduum. The Easter season focuses on the risen Christ as we celebrate the gift of life that Christ offers and the promise of the Holy Spirit. However, it is the feast of Pentecost which celebrates the birth of the church and the coming of God's Holy Spirit.

For me, the feast of Pentecost has always been an exciting feast that speaks to the imagination and the heart. The images of Pentecost are wind and fire which awakened the followers of Jesus in the upper room centuries ago. They had been hiding out for fear of their lives. Jesus had ascended to heaven and the disciples wondered what the future held. But a strong wind came through Jerusalem that first Pentecost and tongues of fire appeared over the heads of the followers of Jesus. The world would never be the same again. The Holy Spirit came among us.

A new Pentecost

For the last three years, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council has engaged in a process to propose goals and priorities for our local church for the next five years. They studied, prayed, discerned, discussed and met with thousands of people in Western Washington to hear their dreams and hopes. The result is the publication of a vision statement entitled "A New Wind and Fire."

This vision statement articulates in a powerful and poetic fashion two priorities for our local church that will be the basis for programming and services that the archdiocese will offer during the coming five years. It is our hope that parishes and individuals will likewise find ways to respond in practical ways to these priorities. We need to allow a new wind and fire to touch our lives in order to create a new Pentecost.

Spirituality

If there is one cry among the people in the Church in Western Washington that was heard loudly and dearly, it is the cry for a spirituality that touches people's lives. To develop a spirituality that responds to this need is the first priority in the vision statement. Young and old, married and single, men and women are anxious about the questions that give meaning to their lives, especially as members of families. There is a yearning within the human spirit for God's presence in people's lives. There is a hunger for the Eucharist and a search for a reverence and respect to who we are as people of faith.

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In recognizing spirituality as a priority for our church today, there is the need to acknowledge the different expressions of spirituality within the many multicultural communities that comprise the Church in Western Washington. It is appreciating different expressions of prayer that recognizes the importance of eucharistic adoration, Mary, the saints, processions and devotional practices. It is an openness to the rich legacy we have as people of faith.

Acknowledging gifts of ministry

The second priority calls people to an awareness of the gifts they possess that need to be shared with others to build up the Kingdom of God. It is the vocation to ministry as a result of our baptism. This priority recognizes the differences in the distinct ministries present within the church today in accord with church teaching.

Encouraging people to use their gifts on behalf of the church also asks us to support the volunteers, lay ministers, religious, deacons and priests who presently serve us. There is the ongoing challenge to encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life. We recognize especially the need for ongoing formation and education of all ministers in the church today, especially the many volunteers who share their gifts of time, effort and energy on behalf of our parish communities.

Will the vision statement make a difference?

On three previous occasions, an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council finished its task and presented priorities for the Church in Western Washington. As a result, RENEW, the Career Ministers Policy Project, an emphasis on multicultural ministry, the Catholic Schools Study, and other programs and goals became part of our lives. Hopefully, over the next five years, the archdiocese itself, our parish and faith communities and each individual will reflect on the priorities in "A New Wind and Fire." This vision statement will make a difference in our local church if we dare to allow the Holy Spirit to unleash a wind and fire that will renew the face of the earth today.

It is definitely a challenge. However, if we accept this challenge, we will enter a new millennium with a renewed commitment to be disciples of Jesus. May we be open to the wind and fire of the Holy Spirit. May God's gifts of grace and peace be yours.