



April 28, 2016

Dear Brother Priests and Deacons, and Pastoral Coordinators,

As you know, for the past several years I have experienced back and neck problems, resulting in two surgeries last year. The surgery on my lower back was successful to a point, but after several months I began to lose the progress that had been made.

Since the new year began, I have undergone numerous tests to determine the current state of my spine, and in the past few weeks, it has become clear that further surgery is necessary. Although there are several factors at play (stenosis, disc deterioration, etc.), the main source of my difficulty is scoliosis. I have known for 20 years that I had "mild" scoliosis which caused no difficulty or limitations, but in the past 5-6 years the scoliosis has worsened considerably to the point that it is causing pain, limitations of various kinds and danger to my spinal cord.

It is the unanimous opinion of the spine surgeons who have examined me that I am in need of extensive lumbar spine surgery with multiple levels of fusion with rods and screws. I will undergo surgery on July 11 at The Spine Hospital/New York-Presbyterian/Allen in New York City with a medical team that specializes in spinal deformities. The surgeons are confident that they can straighten my spine to a great extent and prevent further deterioration.

Recuperation will take 6 months to a year, although after about 4 months I will be able to take up limited office hours. I will not be able to accept any events on my schedule, except Advent and Christmas liturgies at the Cathedral, for the second half of this year.

Surgery and preparation for it will entail extensive changes in my calendar, and I apologize that I will not be able to attend any events to which I am committed from July 1 through the end of the calendar year. I've been advised by the doctors to cut back on my liturgical schedule between now and surgery, and I'm very grateful to Bishop Joseph Tyson (Yakima) and Bishop Peter Smith (auxiliary, Portland) for offering to take most of my Confirmations for the remainder of the Easter season. I truly regret not being able to do them myself, because I love the sacrament of Confirmation. Bishop Edward Burns will also be here from Juneau to take some Confirmations, as he has done for the past several years. And as always, I am deeply indebted to Bishop Elizondo for his great generosity and indefatigable spirit - he is a true brother to me. The Liturgy Office will be in touch with parishes for which I am scheduled for Confirmation to let you know whether I or another bishop will celebrate the Sacrament. I will still celebrate Ordinations, and I will be present for Priest Days. Moreover, I will do everything I can to ensure that I will be available to make decisions that might emerge from our pastoral planning process.

As you might imagine, I have done extensive study and consultation on the possibility of undergoing this serious surgery and believe that the Lord has clearly led me to move forward with it. I am at peace and believe that by God's Providence I have the best surgeons in the world. Although I will have some permanent limitations after surgery (back stiffness, etc.), I have every confidence that after recuperation I will be "good to go" for the remainder of my years of active ministry and beyond. As always, I truly appreciate your kindness, prayers and your understanding of my situation, which will affect our Archdiocese and a number of you personally.

With every best wish and prayer, I am

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Rev. J. Peter Sartain
Archbishop of Seattle