



+April 30, 2021

Dear Parishioners of St. Rita of Cascia Parish,

Peace be with each of you during this Easter season.

I am writing to you on behalf of Archbishop Etienne who received your petition with signatures earlier this month. It is clear your community is upset with the vision for the region. This is understandable since changes to any faith community can be sad and challenging. We must give people time to process and grieve in their own way. My hope is that my response today will help clarify information for you about the strategic planning process and its overall goals – and will encourage you to participate in the development of a new parish community.

The goal of strategic planning is to create a vibrant, sustainable Catholic community in Tacoma so that we can better achieve the mission of the Church. The parishes in the Pierce deanery, the Strategic Planning team, and the Archbishop reviewed several factors about the deanery as a whole and about each individual parish. It would be incorrect to assume St. Rita's is part of this process simply due to "a lack of a priest," but rather due to multiple factors such as sacramental trends, parish households, finances, outreach ministries, and too many neighboring parishes.

Following the canonical rules around boundaries, it was clear the options for St. Rita's were to merge into the new parish or with St. Leo's. Many have asked about St. Charles Borromeo, but since its geographic boundaries are not contiguous with St. Rita's, it too is not an option. While St. Leo's is contiguous, it is no longer an option after the discussions with the Jesuit Province, which currently operates St. Leo's. Provincial Father Scott Santarosa, wrote, "As Provincial, I would ask that you do not pursue the merger of St. Rita with St. Leo Parish."

Regarding priest coverage, I ask that you refrain from seeking your own priest, which does not follow the proper canonical process. My apologies if I gave you that impression previously. Priest placement is a process handled by the Priest Personnel Board and the Archbishop. The Archdiocese of Seattle has an agreement with the Society of Christ, who sent priests to staff Ss. Peter and Paul in Tacoma and St. Margaret in Seattle. In a similar manner, the Archdiocese entered into dialogue with the leadership of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter who sent a pastor for the North American Martyrs Parish some years ago. This process starts with the leadership of the Archdiocese and the religious order starting a dialogue. It can be initiated by the superior of either entity. While there are many considerations to take into account, the pastoral care of the parishioners is always the primary concern, however the parishioners are not the ones who direct the process.

Your letter expressed concern over financial transparency, while acknowledging that St. Rita has a deficit. We will be sure the latest financial figures are shared with you again so you have a full understanding of the current accounting.

We are so grateful for the outreach ministry that St. Rita's has brought to the Hilltop area of Tacoma. These outreach ministry efforts should continue since the new parish will be responsible for caring for the community within its boundaries. This means you have the opportunity to continue this great work and have it strengthened with more people and more resources. I encourage you to actively participate in the planning process for the new parish so that you can share your expertise and knowledge about the Hilltop community and their pastoral needs. I invite you to join one of the multiple sub-committees working to form a vibrant new parish community. As a member of the planning committee you have the opportunity to shape the future!

I am truly grateful for the pastors, pastoral coordinators, parish priests, and parish leaders who are helping lead these efforts and guiding the future of the Church in Western Washington. Please know of my continued prayers for you and for everyone involved in this journey.

With every best wish and an assurance of prayer, I remain,
Yours in Christ,

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Most Rev. Daniel H. Mueggenborg