



+ October 9, 2020

Dear Brothers,

Blessings on each of you!

As many of you know, this October our Holy Father's prayer intention is for the increased role of the laity in our Church – especially for women in roles of leadership. I was inspired by this prayer intention and appreciated his reminder that “we have all been baptized as lay people.”

The role of laity is a topic of great interest for many Catholics and one that often puts the Church on the defensive. While there is room for improvement, I am proud of how this archdiocese has embraced lay leaders, including women, at all levels.

In my sincere desire to help educate our faithful about the realities of lay participation in our archdiocese and to express my gratitude to the laity who serve our mission, I have written a short article. The article, below, will be published online on NWCatholic.org and my blog early next week. I ask that you read it and consider how you may share it with your parishioners. I also encourage each of you to take a moment to recognize the lay leaders in your parish community. How have they contributed to the mission of our Church? Would you consider sending a message of gratitude to them? We would not be as strong as we are without their leadership.

I also want to thank you for your dedication to the Church, especially during this demanding and unprecedented time. I am so frustrated that I have been unable to travel to all of our parishes and join in the Eucharistic celebration with our faithful. But I trust the Holy Spirit, and I will continue to pray for our people and for you. As always, I remain,

In the Heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads '+ Paul D. Etienne'.

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL  
Archbishop of Seattle

## **The essential role of the laity in the Church**

October 12, 2020

By Archbishop Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL

Did you know the Holy Father has a special prayer intention each month? Each member of the Church is asked to pray for his intentions, especially at Mass each day. I thought it would be helpful to talk about the Holy Father's intention for this month of October:

*That by the virtue of baptism, the laity, especially women, may participate more in areas of responsibility in the Church.*

The Church has several "layers" – universal, national, diocesan, parish, household, individual – and people's experiences and impressions can vary greatly. I'm glad to share with you that in the Archdiocese of Seattle, we have many faith-filled, qualified lay leaders active at every level. That is not to say we are perfect and cannot do any better, but I want people to hear that lay leaders, including women, are very involved in ministry and decision-making.

For instance, our Leadership Team that I work closely with in making many day-do-day decisions in the archdiocese has 10 members: three bishops, one priest, three women and three other men. One of those women holds the key office of chancellor, the highest diocesan position open to laypeople. We have a very collaborative decision-making model, and the voices of the laity are equal and much appreciated.

The archdiocese is supported by several lay-led consultative bodies like our recently commissioned Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. This inspiring group of ethnically diverse men and women is filled with faith and inspires me every time we meet! The primary task of the group is to help draft a new pastoral plan for the archdiocese, but in early October we spent a Saturday morning discussing the present challenges of COVID, racial justice, divisiveness in our Church and society, and possible constructive ways to address them from our faith perspective.

The Archdiocesan Review Board is another significant group of lay leaders. Since 1986, the Archdiocese of Seattle has sought the aid of qualified professionals to develop policies for the protection of youth and the prevention of abuse, and to aid in the review of accusations of sexual abuse. This board operates as an independent, confidential, consultative body that advises me on issues related to the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and assists me in assessing allegations and fitness for ministry. Most of the board members are women.

Our Archdiocesan Finance Council is another dedicated, professional, consultative body – again, made up primarily of lay men and women. There are other such groups, but you are beginning to see how many lay men and women are highly engaged in Church leadership.

Of course, our local Church has many lay leaders beyond the chancery. We have dedicated lay leaders with tremendous responsibilities serving at our parishes throughout the archdiocese – as

employees, volunteers, and members of pastoral and finance councils. It is because of their faith and dedication that our parishes are able to carry out the mission of Church.

It goes without saying that the Church does not just exist at the archdiocesan and parish offices! We have so many dedicated Catholic men and women who generously serve the mission of the Church in Catholic health care, Catholic schools, Catholic Community Services/Catholic Housing Services, Catholic cemeteries and ministries all across Western Washington.

Indeed, the laity play an essential role in the life of the Church, and, as Pope Francis notes this month, we want to continue to facilitate their important and rightful place of leadership and decision-making. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the lay leaders who serve our Church and help people grow closer to Christ!