October 15, 2009

My dear brothers in Christ,

JOYOUS GREETINGS TO YOU IN THIS BLESSED YEAR, THE YEAR FOR PRIESTS!

Pope Benedict XVI inaugurated the Year for Priests on Friday, June 19, the solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The purpose for this year, he said, was “to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a more forceful and incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world.”

I am personally grateful to the Pope for declaring this year of renewal for priests because it provides me with another occasion to express my appreciation to you for your fraternal unity with me over the past 12 years. As I look forward to the next phase of my own priestly ministry, I want you to know how deeply grateful I am for your pastoral care and dedicated service to the people of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

In his announcement of the Year for Priests, Pope Benedict quoted St. John Mary Vianney, who said, “The priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.” I find in your ministry to the people of the local Church the sincerest expression of this love. Through your priestly ministry, you have made a gift of yourself in imitation of Christ, the high priest, who came into our midst “as one who serves.” Our vocation as priests is a great gift. It is a gift that expresses itself uniquely in the sharing of God’s Word and sacraments with the faithful. For parish priests, it also expresses itself in pastoral leadership of the faithful. In the Holy Father’s words, in order for priests to live out their vocations fully they must make a complete commitment “to be one with the Lord in their thoughts and their will, their sentiments and their style of life.”

“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

POPE PAUL VI
Each of us in our own lives has benefited from the example and inspiration of a priestly friend or mentor. Their devotion to the priesthood has deepened our own desire “to be one with the Lord” in every way. We also must acknowledge sadly that some of our clergy have failed in fidelity to this calling and given scandal that has caused some to reject the Gospel. For these reasons, the Year for Priests is a timely opportunity for each of us to reflect on the importance of our vocation to the life of the Church and to recommit ourselves to the vows we made at ordination. It is also an appropriate time to remember in prayer those priests who went before us and dedicated their lives to the service of God and others.

Cooperating with the laity, religious sisters

This year of reflection and renewal also gives us an opportunity to re-examine the call to cooperate more fully with the lay faithful and our religious communities of sisters as we carry out our pastoral duties. We are all one priestly people living and working together. Parish priests in particular have a responsibility to lead the people of God toward greater unity and charity in the one spirit of Christ. We cannot live our own vocation fully without a sincere appreciation for the unique vocation of the laity and our religious sisters in the mission of the Church. I suggest that we use this year to acknowledge their gifts and competence and open our own ministry more fully to their participation. In so doing, we fulfill an essential demand of our own vocation and give new life to the Church’s mission.

This year of sanctification also gives us a special opportunity to promote vocations to the priesthood, religious life and lay ecclesial ministry. By emphasizing the witness of priests, we can teach others who are seeking a deeper conversion and commitment to the Gospel the great joy and beauty of living in intimate union with God and striving in everything for God’s glory. As the Holy Father said quoting his predecessor, Pope Paul VI, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Despite the apathy, cynicism and antipathy toward the priesthood expressed by some in these challenging times, a priestly life lived well remains a beacon to all those searching for meaning and truth.

To promote this witness by good priests, the Holy Father has inaugurated this Year for Priests and asks each of us the pertinent questions: “Are we truly pervaded by the Word of God? Is that Word truly the nourishment we live by, even more than bread and the things of this world? Do we really know that Word? Do we love it?”

Pope Benedict XVI
truly the nourishment we live by, even more than bread and the things of this world? Do we really know that Word? Do we love it? Are we deeply engaged with this Word to the point that it really leaves a mark on our lives and shapes our thinking?” Pope Benedict has declared this the Year for Priests so that each of us may answer these questions with a resounding “Yes!”

As all of us await the Holy Father’s appointment of a new Archbishop for the Archdiocese of Seattle, we also must remind ourselves that our vocation as ordained ministers cannot be exercised except through the communion of priests with their bishop. At this juncture in the history of our Archdiocese and in our own ministry, it is important that we reflect on this communion between priests and bishop and recommit ourselves to the priestly fraternity without which there can be no true communion, no true unity within the local Church.

**JOURNEY TOWARD RENEWAL**

Therefore, it is with deep appreciation to Pope Benedict for this call to priestly renewal that I join you and the priests of the Archdiocese of Seattle to initiate formal activities to acknowledge the Year for Priests on Sunday, October 25. This date was chosen by a committee I established to assist me because the USA Council of Serra International sponsors Priesthood Sunday on that date. The activities outlined to date will include the publication of materials to draw attention to our journey toward “interior renewal” during this year and a “Presbyteral Day of Reflection.” Other events are scheduled to call attention to the unique and essential gift of priesthood in the life of the Church.

The specific activities currently in the planning stages include:

- **Sunday, October 25 Year for Priests Kick Off** with special prayer intentions offered at Masses throughout the Archdiocese of Seattle
- **Creation of a Year for Priests Web page** on the Archdiocesan Web site w(www.seattlearch.org)
- **Prayer card for priests** (order form available online)
- **Parish posters for Year for Priests**
- **“Priesthood Profiles” appearing in The Catholic Northwest Progress**
- **A Presbyteral Day of Reflection**, February 1, 2010 (Please mark your calendars!)
- **Parish celebrations focused on vocations including: National Vocation Awareness Week (January 10-16, 2010); World Day for Consecrated Life (February 7, 2010), and World Day of Prayer for Vocations (April 25, 2010)**

“A good shepherd, a pastor after God’s heart, is the greatest treasure which the good Lord can grant to a parish, and one of the most precious gifts of divine mercy.”

**ST. JOHN VIANNEY**
I am open to other ideas you may have for making this a year of grace for all the priests of our local Church. If you’d like to share your thoughts, please contact Leigh Stringfellow in the Office of the Vicar for Clergy, 206-382-4236.

I ask each of you to consider preaching on the “Year for Priests” on October 25. This kick-off Sunday is an opportunity to express your desire to serve the faithful as you should, and to acknowledge in humility the times you have failed and your need for prayers. It would also be an opportune time to ask your people to pray for all priests, for vocations to priesthood and religious life and to consider their own priestly ministry as the people of God.

Following as it does on the heels of the Year of St. Paul, this year of prayer, reflection and sanctification for priests has in the Apostle to the Gentiles an example par excellence. Just as St. Paul dedicated himself fully to the proclamation of the Gospel, we priests also are called, in the words of Pope Benedict, to make a commitment “to the ideal of complete self-oblation to Christ and the Church” and to become for the world “heralds of hope, reconciliation and peace.”

As we begin this year together, let me express again my sincere gratitude for the gifts you bring to the Archdiocese of Seattle. Your lives, vocations and ministry inspire my deepest admiration and fill me with hope and joy for the future of our local Church. May God bless you with renewed zeal for the sake of a more forceful witness to the Gospel.

With warmest personal regards and wishes, I remain Fraternally yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Alex J. Brunett
Archbishop of Seattle