



April 29, 2019

Dear People of the Archdiocese of Seattle,

Today we welcome the happy news that Pope Francis has appointed Archbishop Paul Etienne, currently Archbishop of Anchorage, to be Coadjutor Archbishop of Seattle.

We look forward to celebrating the “Rite of Reception” with him in St. James Cathedral on June 7, in the presence of our Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Christophe Pierre. To say that I am delighted by the Holy Father’s choice would be an understatement. Archbishop Etienne is a wonderful shepherd whose love for the Lord is expressed through a deep life of prayer and devotion to the sacraments, as well as contagious enthusiasm for the proclamation of the Gospel and service to those in need in the name of Jesus.

I thought it would be helpful for me to offer some background on the reason for Archbishop Etienne’s appointment. As you know, over the past 7 years I have had a succession of spinal issues which led to three surgeries, the most extensive of which took place in the summer of 2016. That surgery was urgently necessary to arrest rapidly worsening scoliosis. The surgery was completely successful, and I am deeply grateful to the Lord and to my excellent surgeons.

At the same time, as I recuperated from the 2016 surgery, I began to realize that although the successful surgery would keep me from developing disabling complications, I simply did not have the energy and stamina I had before, and certain typical activities continue to cause pain. That realization led me to adjust my schedule to accommodate a “new normal.” With the help of our wonderful staff and our auxiliary bishops, that is what I did. However, despite my great affection for this archdiocese and my ministry here, I began to realize that I no longer have the necessary strength and stamina to continue serving as Archbishop of this extraordinary and dynamic archdiocese.

About eighteen months ago, I began praying for the Lord’s guidance regarding the possibility of asking the Holy Father to appoint a Coadjutor Archbishop. Over time, the Lord helped me gain insight and brought clarity to understand his will. Thus, in late September, 2018, I wrote to Pope Francis and requested the appointment of a Coadjutor Archbishop, with a view toward retiring much sooner than typical, because of my health. Pope Francis graciously responded positively to my request, and Archbishop Christophe Pierre has been kind and helpful in guiding the process that led to the appointment of Archbishop Paul Etienne, announced today.

Archbishop Etienne and I will finalize the date later this year on which he will formally succeed me as Archbishop of Seattle. In the meantime, we both look forward to working together to serve the Lord and you, the great people of the Archdiocese. It is a humbling privilege to serve as your archbishop. Since my appointment here almost 9 years ago, you have been consistently kind in your prayerful support and powerful in the depth and inspiration of your Catholic faith and your love for the Lord Jesus. I will always be grateful for your faithful witness.

With every best wish and prayer, I am

Sincerely in Christ,



J. Peter Sartain

Archbishop of Seattle