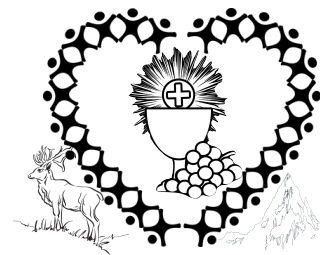


*Our Weekend Mass Schedule for the Elk Valley is:
Fernie on Saturday evening at 5pm,
Sparwood at 11am Sunday morning,
and Elkford at 4pm Sunday afternoon.*



This week there is no broadcast via Zoom (see below).

24th/25th June 2023

Dear All,

Greetings from the middle of nowhere. Again I am writing this very early in the week while I am journeying down from the Catholic Women's League's Provincial Convention in Prince George, and by the time you get this I should be in Victoria making a visit to the offices of the Victoria Diocese to do a bit of 'induction training' prior to starting working in that diocese in September.

Yesterday (Sunday) after our post-convention meeting, I left Prince George and got as far as Williams Lake where I found a remote spot; somewhere where I could stop for a day, collect myself, and just give myself a bit of time to think!

It is very cool, and again it is raining and very windy, and in my head I can hear my

sister saying to me, *"Suck it up; remember that you are moving to the very north of Vancouver Island."*! The good news is that at the end of the CWL Provincial Convention, as a way of thanking me for my last five years as their spiritual advisor, the ladies very kindly gave me a gift card so I could go and buy some really good waterproof gear! And after these few days I will remember to make sure that it not only keeps the rain out but that it will also keep me warm.

Change of Clergy – from Bishop Gary

The real point of this week's weekly e-mail is to include a letter from Bishop Gary Gordon, the bishop of the Diocese of Victoria. It is entitled *"A Reflection on Change for Parish Communities"* and I thought it really 'hit the nail on the head'. It is so positive; please do find time to read this as I think it will help many people in the parish. It is included after the "And Finally". Also, in case anyone missed it, after that I will again give the details of my new appointment on Vancouver Island.

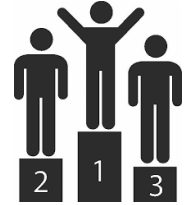


I write this on a cold, wet and windy day.

Sparwood Sunday Mass is now at 11am.

The Competition Answers

We have a few entries in the “Where am I going” competition I ran two weeks ago, and mostly correct answers. Prizes will be given out at the leaving parties.



We Welcome Fr. Marian for a Third Weekend

Again this weekend we have the pleasure of being joined by Fr. Marian. As mentioned above, this weekend I will be away, this time on Vancouver Island preparing for my new appointment.

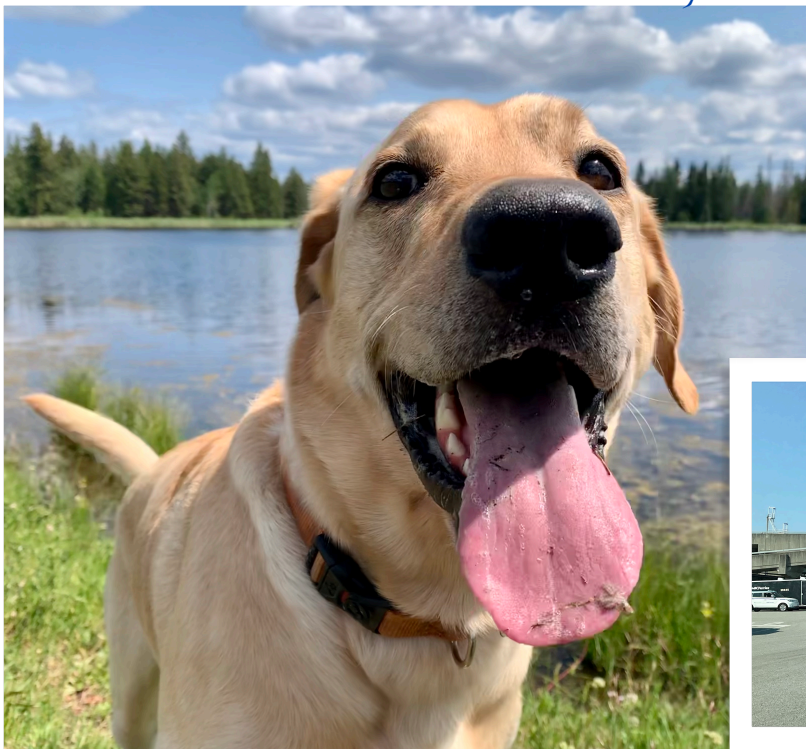
No Zoom Broadcasts

Again this weekend there will be no Zoom broadcasts. Next weekend we should be back to normal.

And Finally...

After his stay in the kennels in Prince George, Thumper was very tired. As soon as he got into the truck he just couldn't keep his eyes open (*right*). But later he found enough energy to go for a swim in a lake (*below*).

With prayers,
Fr. David @ Thumper



I send this as I await to board the ferry to Vancouver Island (below).



A Reflection on Change for Parish Communities

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”¹ And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.”²

The two narratives above are scenarios where Peter is speaking to Jesus, specifically about not wanting things to change. The first is a “mountain moment” that Peter didn’t want to lose; much like when communities are pleased with their priest and they say to the bishop, “you can’t move him; we want him to stay.” The second foretells of a “valley moment”, where Jesus says he will die and be resurrected; much like the mourning some communities go through with the loss of “their priest”, not recognizing the new priest as a potential for new life. Both narratives may serve as scriptural reflections when an announcement is made that their priest is moving to another community.

When all is going well, and the priest and community are in general harmony, where the work of the Holy Spirit is evident in faith practices and the Sacraments, when the support of the community for the priest is strong, and there is a sense of inclusion of all families, we act like Peter and say: “let’s keep this moment, change will take all of this away”. When there is a strong emotional bond to a pastor, communities feel that no one else can or should be their faith leader. However, when things are not working well within a community, often change is demanded from the bishop, and communities do not want to wait until the bishop makes changes across the Diocese. Both are self-centered thinking and create an environment resistant to change and growth.

Change can be a double-edged sword, but we must first see it as a positive life event for both the priest and the faith community. Change to some may mean there are losses, and the grieving of these losses. Separation caused by change leaves some in the community feeling like lost sheep, or spiritual orphans and widows. Losing a priestly father may bring with it feelings of anger, or a sense of unfair treatment. Communities must recognize change as normal and usually a healthy process that sparks reflection, facilitates new pastoral goals, and celebrates the universality of our faith and unity in our particular Diocese.

Priests are called to serve wherever they are needed. It is inherent in the priestly calling and their vocation. In that call and answer to serve God in communion with their bishop, is the uncertainty of change: where communities lose their current pastor and gain a new one. Change, in its simplest form, is a process of transformation that can be positively embraced. It is a normal part of a Catholic community’s life, and of a Catholic priest’s ministry. It is an opportunity for the community to see Christ through new encounters with someone who has not yet served them.

The following suggestions may be helpful in dealing with changes in pastoral leadership:

1. Recognize that it is also a time of celebration for the community with their outgoing pastor and the new incoming pastor as well. These should be celebrations of the successes of the past few years, and hope for the next few years.
2. Individuals who are experiencing loss and feelings of grief can spend time in prayer, in silence before the tabernacle, in meditation, or through relaxation exercises to allow the Holy Spirit to rise and heal the feelings and thoughts they are experiencing.

¹ Mark 9:5

² Matthew 16:22

A Reflection on Change for Parish Communities

3. When times of community doubt or turmoil arise, it is important for communities to create opportunities to share their feelings. Here lies an opportunity for lay leaders and the Parish Pastoral Council to organize time for the community to express their feelings, to dialogue, and to seek comfort and peace with accepting the change. The focus should be planning for the arrival of the new priest.
4. Take time to discuss what is working well now, and identify areas to address when the new priest arrives; not to direct the new pastor, but to inform him from a community-wide perspective rather than an individual or special interest-group perspective.
5. Take time to prepare for the departure of the current priest, and express appreciation for their service to the faith community. Celebrate their time with you, and the gifts they brought, and brought out, during their time with the community. If there is a mutual desire to maintain contact, establish the means this could take.

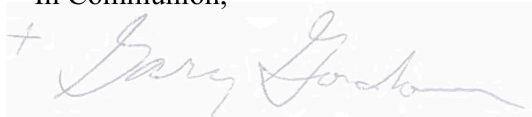
Embracing change without judgement, with a sense of moving towards a new encounter with Christ through the new pastor and your community, is the bedrock on which to continue building a community's house of faith. Change allows for a time to reflect on what a community believes its gifts are, and to consider how these will be offered to God, in communion with the new priest. Perhaps there will be different and creative ideas that will grow under the servant leadership of the new priest. Be open to new perspectives, different homilies, and developing new ways to grow as a Catholic faith-community.

Accepting and embracing change positively allows for hearts, minds, and spirits to be touched by others. Being open to the experience of another priest will help to build the Body of Christ within your community through current members, perhaps new catechumens, those who have become complacent in their faith, and those who, having left the church, may be seeking to reconnect with God.

*"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*³

Take Jesus' words into your heart, and reach out with a spirit of love to greet the new priest. Try not to let opinions of others influence how you will welcome the next priest. Let the mutual love in which Jesus calls his disciples, be the starting point to build together. The role of a priest is to be "In persona Christi", to be a Servant Leader animated by the Holy Spirit, and to use the gifts of the Father in the world; to bring about His Kingdom here and now. Your role is to be faithful and to persevere in striving to do God's will, under the guidance of a new shepherd of souls that will be part of your community, until the next change you will be asked to accept and embrace.

In Communion,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gary Gordon", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria

³ John 13:34-35

My New Assignment

On 1st September I will be serving in the North Island Mission area up at the top of Vancouver Island. There is no priest there at the moment, but there are four church communities that regularly gather for Sunday liturgies:

- **Port Hardy** – a port known for fishing, logging and mining and the last significant town at the northern end of Vancouver Island; it is the biggest town in the area I will be covering with a population around the 4,000 mark;
- **Port McNeill** – about half the size of Port Hardy, another logging port – *about 43km south-east of Port Hardy* – the priest's house is located in Port McNeill;
- **Port Alice** – a small community of about 700 people which is inland from Port Hardy and Port McNeill – *about 52km south of Port McNeill* – and is built around its pulp and paper mill which is situated on one of this area's *very long sea inlets*.
- **Alert Bay** – this is the name of a village on Cormorant Island, just off the north coast of Vancouver Island east of Port McNeill and accessible by a 45 minute ferry from Port McNeill. About a thousand people live on this island.

The next parish to the south and east is Campbell River which I believe also looks after the communities in Gold River, Tahsis and Sayward. Anything above the Campbell River parish then falls under the North Island Mission Area.

The North Island Mission Area is on the territories and traditional lands of the Kwakwaka'wakw Peoples, and I hope I will be working with the local First Nations communities and that many of the indigenous peoples will be part of the parishes.

Climate

If one thinks of Vancouver Island one might think mild winters and spring coming early, which may be true, but this region of Vancouver Island has its own micro-climate. The weather of the whole area is influenced by the Pacific which means summers are very cool for the latitude and winters are mild. But the dominant feature is the rain! Port Alice receives 3.4m (130in) of rain each year; which compares with Fernie that gets about 0.9m (35in). This figure is one third *more* than even Prince Rupert which is often referred to as the wet spot of B.C., and three times what Vancouver gets, which is thought to be a rainy place to live. Thank goodness Thumper is happy to get wet.

