

May 04, 2025

Dearest Whatcom County Parishioners,

I want to provide some context for Fr. Thumbi's move and the Claretians priests we are receiving on July 01. These are two originally independent events that just so happen to coincide.

### **Fr. Thumbi's Illness**

Around September or October, Fr. Thumbi began to feel terrible back and gut pain that was eventually diagnosed in December as Stage 4 Prostate Cancer that had spread to his backbone. Since beginning treatment, his pain has significantly reduced, but his energy levels have significantly diminished and he has been unable to carry a full load of parishioner meetings or events. Shortly after the diagnosis, he realized that he would likely need to request a move to Seattle in order to be closer to the major cancer treatments there.

Having spoken with Fr. Thumbi a few times about this, I can tell you that his heart very much remains in Whatcom County. According to him, one of the great ironies of his priesthood is how much he loves rural ministry and desires to be a simply country priest, and how many times he has been assigned to a major city instead. Once again, he is living this great irony by moving from Lynden to Seattle. Please honor and celebrate him as best as you can leading up to his move, according to his wishes.

### **Approaching the Claretians**

Independently, about a year ago Fr. Art Gramaje, CMF, put on my radar that the Claretian Order of Priests ([Wikipedia](#), [Provincial Page](#)) were consolidating their missions and opening a new outpost just north of us in Vancouver, BC. Fr. Art was a high school friend of my uncle and had spent the last four years in the Archdiocese of Seattle taking care of his ailing mother until she passed. He continues to be invested in the success of our Archdiocese and our relationship to his order, which is why he encouraged me to reach out to the Vancouver Claretians to see if they would consider expanding their mission south of the border into Whatcom County. Months of bureaucracy later, Archbishop Etienne sent the formal request to the Claretians in mid-January and the Claretians responded with openness in mid-March. After meeting with me and some key parishioners on a quick visit, the Claretians agreed to a one-year probationary period of ministry starting July 01, that we all hope will solidify into a decades-long partnership.

### **What Will be Different?**

The Claretian priests will not be a direct replacement for Fr. Thumbi's responsibilities here in Whatcom County. Religious Orders all have *charisms* – the type of and approach to ministry that makes them unique. One of the stipulations for bringing the Claretians into Whatcom County was that they would be empowered to live their specific charism, rather than just being additional sacramental ministers. You can see [on their webpage](#) that the Claretians are particularly dedicated to Hispanic ministry and ministry to immigrants and refugees, so we need to reorganize priestly responsibilities in the county to better allow them that focus.

Functionally, this means that I will no longer be engaging in Spanish-speaking ministry, instead redoubling my focus on our English-speaking communities, while continuing my special focus

on the school and Lummi communities; Fr. Tyler will remain focused on the university population; and Fr. Stephan will continue to assist me with the general parish population.

One thing I would especially like to do is use this as an opportunity to convert us into a 3-week Mass rotation, rather than a four-week Mass rotation, allowing me to see each of our English-speaking Masses every three weeks. That is a *complicated* move, requiring quite a few Mass time changes, so I have prepared an extensive document that will allow us to discern these changes together. It is not *quite* ready for publication, but will be soon.

Finally, we are getting **TWO** Claretian priests, so won't that help with priest availability? Kind of... Fr. Gerardo Rodriguez, CMF is being assigned to us as a Parochial Vicar, so he will be working full-time in our parishes, focusing especially on Spanish-speaking ministry and living at one of our houses in Lynden. However, a key component of Religious Orders is living in community, so he will be accompanied by Fr. Manuel Villalobos, CMF, who will be living in our other house in Lynden. Fr. Manuel has advanced degrees in Scripture and helps run the Claretian Biblical Institute of America ([home page](#), [English explanation](#)), which offers online Bible courses in Spanish, currently attended by thousands of people. Fr. Manuel will be a "priest in residence", meaning he will continue to focus on his primary ministry (the Biblical Institute) but will carry out minimal parish responsibilities to cover the cost of his housing.

#### **Final Note**

I would ask you to please pray for Fr. Thumbi, Fr. Gerardo, and Fr. Manuel in their time of transition, and to pray for our parishes as we undertake and try to implement this change. It is an exciting opportunity for us to work with the Claretian Order and I have high hopes! But I also know another big change is not what anybody was expecting after a difficult year. This is the Lord's Church, and He will always provide for us.

Blessings in Christ,  
*Fr. Moore*

