



## STATEMENT OF CARDINAL ROBERT MCELROY ON THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS APPOINTMENT AS ARCHBISHOP OF WASHINGTON

Cardinal Gregory, it is an honor to be with you today, and to be able to offer gratitude for your lifetime of priestly and episcopal service which has so profoundly enriched the Church throughout our nation. With courage, a deeply pastoral heart and abiding faith in God and the dignity of the human person, you have made critically important contributions at crucial moments in order to bring the Gospel of Jesus to the heart and soul to the Catholic community here in Washington and to our country as a whole. This enduring legacy will long remain a treasure for us all.

I also want to thank Cardinal Wuerl for his unending love and service to this local church, and the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, for his service to the Holy Father in our nation. I gather joyfully with Bishop Campbell, Bishop Esposito and Bishop Menjivar, knowing the partnership and collaboration that will lie before us in the coming years.

I want to thank also the members of the Pastoral Center Staff who are truly missionaries of the Gospel on so many levels, and to thank the members of the media who are present today.

Most of all, I want to give thanks to God for the grace-filled life of this local Church and to Our Holy Father, Pope Francis who today makes me a member of that Church.

The process of synodality upon which our Church has embarked has embraced Catholics in every land and nation in forging a template for deepening communion and participation in the mission that God has entrusted to the Church. That mission consists of a journey, rooted overwhelmingly in a single event – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. “Every new step in the life of the Church is a return to the source. It is a renewed experience of the disciples’ encounter with the Risen One in the Upper Room on Easter evening.” In that journey we are called to build up a Church centered in the Eucharist and devoted to the Word of God and the sacraments which sustain us. Synodality calls us to create disciples who, in the light of their baptism, share co-responsibility with every believer for the task of evangelizing the Church, the culture, and the world in which we live. We are called to proclaim that everyone is welcomed on this journey, embraced in Christ’s love, called to conversion and change in our lives, and to reconciliation with God and one another. Synodality calls us to walk humbly as a Church, acknowledging our faults and sinfulness, and seeking forgiveness. It seeks the participation of every disciple in the Church’s journey in this earthly pilgrimage, and is oriented toward the building of unity in society rooted in God’s justice,

which cares especially for the unborn, the poor, the marginalized and the dispossessed. As the final synodal declaration put it succinctly, synodality is a journey of continuing renewal “that enables the church to be more participatory and missionary so that it can walk with every man and woman, radiating the light of Christ.”

For the past eighty-five years, the Catholic community has radiated the light of Christ throughout the District of Columbia and the five surrounding counties in Maryland. It has radiated Christ through the formation of rich parish communities of faith that make the Lord’s presence known in the Eucharist, the Word of God and the sacramental life of the Church. The light of Christ has radiated through the Catholic schools, universities and seminaries in the Archdiocese, as children, teens, and adults discern the meaning of the world and of God’s grace in it. The light of Christ has radiated in the struggles of the civil rights movement, and the Church’s efforts to mitigate the effects of our nation’s original sin. It guided the integration of the seeds of grace from the Second Vatican Council into the tapestry of this local church.

The light of Christ radiates in the sacrifices of priests, deacons and those women and men in consecrated life who have continually offered their lives mixed with fragility and glory to serve God’s people in every dimension. Similarly, the light of Christ has radiated the Archdiocese’s path-breaking development of lay ministries and apostolates, and the nurturing of lay leadership in the Church that is genuinely participative and inclusive. It radiates in the ministries of the African-American community, which is so foundational for the entire life of this local church, and the ministries to the multitude of peoples that seek and find God’s presence in this place – from Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean and South America; Europe, Asia and Africa.

The journey of this Catholic community has known mountain-top moments: the visits of Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis, and it has known moments of failure and shame – in the massive betrayal of the young to sexual abuse and the moral and financial reckoning for this betrayal which lie ahead for us. In this mixture of the mountain top and failure, we are no different from the first disciples of the Lord.

The light of Christ radiates in the Catholic community of the Archdiocese in all of these dimensions, but most powerfully, it radiates in the lives of the individual men and women who form the People of God, struggling in a world filled with turbulence, hardship and illusion, to follow the pathway of Jesus Christ – as wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, the rich and the powerful, the poor and the dispossessed, the addicted and the lost, the joyful and the disillusioned, all of us, as the Gospel testifies, called to be both dispensers and receivers of mercy and forgiveness. It is to this community on the journey of faith that the Holy Father has called me to be bishop and pastor.

My first call as your bishop is to show reverence for the grace of God which is already present in your midst and in the commitment to discipleship that underlies this local church. One of the beautiful symbolic identities of the Church which emerged from the Second Vatican Council is that the Church is a sacrament of Jesus Christ. The Catholic community in the District and the five counties is truly sacramental in the rich diversity of its traditions and perspectives on key issues in the life of the Church and the world, and I seek to manifest deep respect for that diversity in undertaking my new ministry. Secondly, I come as your bishop seeking to know and understand

this magnificent community of faith. Pope Francis has provided for us the beautiful language of “encounter” as a cornerstone for building relationships. In seeking encounter, one must truly be open to understanding the background, the experiences, the opinions, the dreams and the challenges of the other.

As your pastor, an essential element of my mission is to encounter the hearts and the souls of the disciples who form our local church. For this reason, during the coming months I will undertake a series of meetings, focusing on the priests of Archdiocese and the lay leadership of our parishes, which will be an initial step in my process of coming to know the Archdiocese.

It is vital that I come to know our priests, who are essential collaborators in virtually every element of my new ministry. And as their pastor in a particular way, I want to support them in the priesthood we all share, with all of its wonders and its hardships. In meeting in small groups with lay parish leaders, I want to understand their dreams, their hopes and their sadness about the Church at the parish, diocesan and universal levels. Through this pathway, I can become oriented to the life of the Archdiocese in all of its complexity.

When I first came to San Diego, several people asked me at meetings: What is your vision for the Diocese of San Diego? I answered: I don’t have one. I just felt that I could not possibly have a vision of where to lead the People of God without knowing them far more deeply. Thus, if I am asked in the weeks following my installation as Archbishop: what is my vision for the Archdiocese of Washington, I will have to answer: I don’t have one. But I know the elements that will be necessary for me to form one over time: The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Church; a pastoral perspective where truly love and truth can meet, a dedication to missionary discipleship, and a growing understanding of the real lives of the women and men and children and families, singles, priests and religious that form this vibrant community of faith. Forming a vision for the Archdiocese will have to be a truly collaborative effort if it is to guide us through the challenges we now face and help us to seize the opportunities for pastoral growth that lie within our midst. And it will have to be an effort continuously rooted in the Risen Lord who is our hope and our strength.

A final call to me as your new bishop is to be filled with gratitude for God’s graces in my life. I was graced to be born into a beautiful family of faith and love. From my earliest years I desired to be a priest. I have spent half my priestly life in parish ministry and half in diocesan leadership and pastoral administration. I am now being called to leave a Catholic community in San Diego that I have come to love very deeply, and there is much, much sadness in that reality.

But I have found throughout my priestly life that in each assignment, the sadness I felt at the transition was assuaged by the graces and love of the new ministry to which I was entering. The Archdiocese of Washington is a magnificent community of faith and service. I feel graced to be your bishop. And I thank God that your journey of faith and mission is my journey also from this day forward.