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Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle leaves the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall Oct. 6, 2023, after a morning session of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Archbishop Paul Etienne Feb. 3 released the final list of parish families as part of the Archdiocese of Seattle's Partners in the Gospel strategic planning initiative.

More than 170 parishes, missions and stations have been grouped into 60 parish families — two or more parishes under the leadership of one pastor. The families go into effect on July 1. Pastors and parochial vicars for parish families will be announced in April.

"This final list of families comes after a year of consultation with the archdiocese's Presbyteral Council, the Partners in the Gospel Oversight Committee, priests, deacons, parish and school staff, lay leaders and the public," the archdiocese said in a note accompanying the list.

In a letter to the Catholic community, Etienne expressed appreciation to all those who have participated in the effort.

"I am so grateful to the thousands of people who engaged in the consultation process by providing insights during the input phase, sharing new ideas and praying for this renewal effort," the archbishop said. "Your input made a significant impact on how the parish families were configured. … We spent hours in deep discussions and prayer while listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning our path for the future.

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These families "were developed based on parishes' size, geography, cultural and ethnic makeup, financial health and school presence," the archdiocese said, adding that some parishes are not being combined because they are operated by a religious order or serve a specific cultural community.

"My hope is that parish families will benefit from the shared gifts of people, time, finances, talents and more so that we, as partners in the Gospel, can truly renew

parish life," Etienne wrote. "Imagine more young people on fire with the faith, more people encountering Christ in the sacraments, more robust outreach ministries serving the marginalized, and churches that are full every Sunday and Holy Days to give praise and thanks to God. This is all possible, and I believe Partners in the Gospel is the key to making it happen."

A first draft of the families was released in September, and a three-week comment period opened for the public to offer input on the proposed groupings. More than 3,000 pages of feedback from 700 input sessions and 800 online responses were reviewed by archdiocese staff, and in November, the archbishop proposed changes based on that feedback. His new recommendations affected 78 parishes and missions in 25 parish families. A second round of consultation opened for affected parishes.

"The final step before promulgating these new parish families was to take the results of all the input once again to prayer," Etienne explained. "I made a retreat in early January keeping all of you in my heartfelt prayers, asking for the Lord's blessing and ongoing guidance in our efforts to carry out the mission of the Church more effectively today. I experienced a profound and sustained sense of consolation during this retreat, giving me the final confidence to make these decisions for implementation."

While hopeful, Etienne acknowledged that the process of each family becoming one canonical parish will be challenging.

"I know the road ahead will have its twists and turns, and may seem long and rugged at times, but the Lord will always be there as our companion and guide," he wrote.