

## ***From the Pastor's Desk***

*This week has been very busy for me. I have had much to do with regard to my ever-evolving relationship with the diocese (about which I will speak with you in greater detail at a later time, when I am able). I have had a lot going on with my academic interests and pursuits. I have been doing much work in terms of assuring the stability of life for our present and future parish (meetings with individuals and groups, updating policies, working with finances, both evaluating and planning projects, working on parish safety, recognition and attracting membership, etc.) Much to my joy, as always, I have been celebrating the Eucharist, and I have had the occasion also to celebrate reconciliation individually. I have been doing some counseling. I have been praying a lot – and I MEAN A LOT...for a number of things: unity of all of our relationships; peace, domestic and abroad; thanksgiving for all God has given to me and to us; for the good health of all (me included); for the victims of disaster (personal and natural); for a beautiful season of winter, a bit less challenging in terms of ice, snow, and cold; a better temperament under stress, to be more genuine and loving in all ways, at all times, and in all places: to enter more deeply into the mystery of God and my relationship with his son, Jesus Christ, for all of my brother priests in the diocese and for our bishop; for my mom and my family, most certainly for all of you my dear brothers and sisters of my Visitation Parish family, for a special intention (that I would ask you to remember with me before the Lord – I have been lighting the sanctuary candle for weeks now – this is very personal and very important to me); and for many other things I am sure that escape me just at the moment. I've been exercising and paying a bit closer attention to the needs of my body, trying to become a better steward of it. I am so blessed that God has chosen to try to work in and through me at this moment of time – I am filled with tears of joy and hope, that I can even attempt to be a wounded healer, a compassionate minister, a humble and unworthy man of God, exercising the priesthood of Jesus Christ.*

*This week, I encourage you to pause and reflect upon what you have been doing, what you have been thinking, what you have been desiring. You know the unreflective life is really not worth living. If we merely go from task to task each day, if we follow the exact same routine, if we don't reach out and engage the world we cannot really reach the full human flourishing that God wants for us. Reach out to God this week and ask: "Where are you my love, I am waiting for you." And tell the Lord where you are. If you do so the depths of your heart will be filled with love, a love that cannot be lost nor weakened because IT IS LOVE ITSELF – IT IS GOD PRESENT IN YOU! And remember, YOU ARE WORTH IT!!*

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***Beginning this February, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will occur both on Wednesday evenings following the 5:30 PM Mass (for one half hour) and Friday afternoons following the 12:05 PM Mass (for one full hour). Please consider joining us for one or both of these tremendous opportunities to just "be" with the Lord. During these times you can either open you heart to listen to God speaking to your***

heart or pour your heart to Jesus knowing that he desires only your good. Our worship of our Lord in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar will be our salvation – “our” referring to our personal salvation, the salvation of our neighbor, our enemy, our Church, our nation, our world, our environment, our most earnest desires, and our deepest hopes. I HOPE the Lord will see you there, at least for a while....once and a while. Think it over.

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I would like for everyone to join me in prayer for the special groups from the October Synod that are finishing up their work to make a final report to the pope in the coming months. If you recall, we prayed for the following special issues which were receiving additional attention after the synod: the Church’s demonstrable preferential option for the poor, the contours of the relationship between Catholics East and West, the implementation of the newly devised program of priestly formation that was to highlight authentic spiritual formation and combat every trace and vestige of clericalism, to discern the fullness of the ministry of bishops and to work on ways that assuring the laity had a voice in the selection of their bishops, to use modern technology and social media to promote the gospel, and several others (that are a bit more technical). We need to be especially concerned about our roles in the formation of priests and the appointment of bishops – they are real, if we are only willing to accept them. We would do well to tell the Church what we want of our priests and who we want for our bishops. After all we are the ones who are being served!! We should reach out to the poor for on the world stage, we are rich. We should be concerned about 21<sup>st</sup> century communication – it changes not only what we do but who we are and who we are becoming. **Just a few minutes of prayer about these important matters this week could make a difference beyond anything we could imagine.**

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**THE FOLLOWING IS THE CORRECTED SCHEDULE FOR MEETINGS OF THE PARISH COUNCILS:**

**\*PARISH FINANCE COUNCIL** – Thursday, Feb. 6, 2025 – 6:00 PM

**\*PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL** – Monday, Feb. 10, 2025 -6:00 PM

**\*COMBINED PARISH COUNCILS** – Monday, Feb. 17, 2025 – 6:00 PM

All of these meetings are important in terms of information sharing and future planning for both the **Jubilee Year** and the foreseeable future.. I am asking that members make every attempt to attend these meetings. If cannot attend your committee’s meeting for an important reason (and I underscore that it should be a serious reason or alternative commitment), please inform the parish office no later than Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> by the end of the business day. Thank you.

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**BLESSING OF THROATS:** Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> is the feast of Saint Blaise and the traditional day for the blessing of throats with candles that have been blessed during the liturgy of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. This is a wonderful tradition as long as



we remember the blessing of throats is in fact, a “blessing, i.e., a liturgical act that asks God to protect or sanctify a person, an object, a place or an undertaking. This year, throats will be blessed three times. There will be a short prayer service at **5:30 PM on Sunday** with the blessing of throats as we celebrate the vigil of Saint Blaise. Throats will also be blessed on **Monday** following the **12:05 PM Mass** and at **5:30 PM** during a short prayer service. All are welcome to attend any of these liturgical celebrations.

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**FYI:** In a Note on the relationship between artificial intelligence and human intelligence, the Dicastries for the Doctrine of the Faith and for Culture and Education highlight the potential and the challenges of artificial intelligence in the areas of education, the economy, labor, health, human and international relations, and war. Clearly, the Pope’s warnings about Artificial Intelligence in recent years provide the outline for this document entitled “Antiqua et Nova,” which can be accessed on the Vatican Website at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/01/28/0083/01166.html#ing>. **NB:** The new document is addressed especially to “those entrusted with transmitting the faith,” but also to “those who share the conviction that scientific and technological advances should be directed toward serving the human person and the common good” [5]. I find it most telling that in a final section, the Note warns against the risk of humanity becoming “enslaved to its own work” [105]. Artificial intelligence, “Antiqua et Nova” insists, “should be used only as a tool to complement human intelligence rather than replace its richness” [112]. Again, we would do well to remember this advice as our government begins to work on legislation that will attempt to keep the work of AI within acceptable ethical boundaries.

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You may have noticed that Last week the current Vice President was harshly critical of the USCCB, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops regarding their position on immigration. In so doing, he implicitly accused the Bishops of holding that position for financial gain rather than as a matter of justice. Regardless of your feelings regarding immigration, the current administration, or your political affiliation, facts must remain relevant and the facts are that the contribution of the American government toward Catholic immigration services does not even approach the amount spent by the USCCB, nor have they expressed any disappointment with the generosity of the US government. The fact sheet that appears on the back of this page is meant to clarify the process and partnership. **THIS STATEMENT EXPRESSES NEITHER APPROVAL NOR DISAPPROVAL OF THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION. IT IS MERELY A CLARIFICATION OF FACTS.** Neither I, nor the Church, endorse any political candidate or party. AGAIN, the statement from the USCCB is merely a statement of fact. My greatest concern is that we all live a life of discipleship rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ – which, with the Church’s guidance, is a matter of personal discovery and conversion.



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JANUARY 26, 2025

## The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and the Catholic Church

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### What is the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program?

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) was established when Congress passed the bipartisan Refugee Act of 1980. Prior to this, refugees were resettled in the United States on a largely informal and ad hoc basis,<sup>1</sup> and the reception of refugees by American communities was almost entirely coordinated by faith-based groups, including the Catholic Church.

USRAP is the formal process by which people are legally resettled in the United States as refugees. Resettlement through USRAP is distinct from the U.S. asylum process. Any person resettled through USRAP is first screened, vetted, and approved by the U.S. government while outside of the United States. They also receive medical evaluations, a cultural orientation, and other services that maximize their ability to integrate successfully into, and contribute productively to, American communities.

### Who is resettled through USRAP?

Only two groups are resettled through USRAP. The first consists of those who qualify for refugee status under U.S. law,<sup>2</sup> which requires a person to be outside of the United States and: (1) of special humanitarian concern to the United States; (2) have been persecuted, or have a well-founded fear persecution, due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group; (3) not “firmly resettled” in another country; and (4) legally admissible to the United States. The second group resettled through USRAP consists of Iraqi and Afghan nationals approved for a special immigrant visa because they assisted the U.S. missions in Iraq or Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup>

### What is the Catholic Church’s role in USRAP and why?

Given its historical role assisting immigrants and refugees in the United States, the Catholic Church began partnering with the federal government on USRAP when it was created. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops serves as one of ten national resettlement agencies. Through this public-private partnership, resettlement agencies work with local, community-based organizations to receive those approved for resettlement through USRAP, helping them to begin their new lives in the United States.

The Catholic Church’s accompaniment of refugees dates back to the earliest days of Christianity, long preceding the creation of USRAP. In 1948, when the reception of refugees was almost entirely undertaken by faith-based groups, 105 out of 119 Catholic dioceses in the United States at the time had a resettlement director appointed by the local bishop. Today, Catholic ministries across the world provide pastoral and temporal care to vulnerable families, regardless of creed or nationality, in response to Christ’s mandate in Matthew’s Gospel to care for the “least of these” (Mt. 25:31-46).

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<sup>1</sup> See U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Refugee Timeline*, <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/stories-from-the-archives/refugee-timeline> (last updated Jan. 24, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> See 8 U.S.C. 1157.

<sup>3</sup> See ANDORRA BRUNO, CONG. RSCH. SERV., R43725, IRAQI AND AFGHAN SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAMS, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43725> (last updated Jan. 15, 2025).