

From the Pastor's Desk

This week and last week I have been spending much time praying and thinking about our parish family...our history, our present, and our future. In terms of our past, it is indeed my past. As most of you know, I was born and raised here at Visitation Parish. I was fully initiated here, baptized as an infant, celebrated first reconciliation and first Eucharist in the second grade, I was confirmed when I was in the seventh grade. In addition to celebrating those sacraments, I received my entire elementary education here, grades one (1) through eight (8) and was the co- valedictorian with two other classmates. I went on to the once Bishop McCort High School and continued to be an active member in the parish with my family. Most importantly, I received my love for Catholicism here and I certainly saw a vocation to priesthood fostered here...here in the domestic Church (my home), here in the educational community with the Sisters of Charity and dedicated lay teachers, here in the worshipping community.

When I was a member here, from birth through young adulthood, we were a very strong parish. We had a membership of well over 500 families, a very diverse group consisting of many professional families, but working middle class, and even those who had to struggle financially at times, yet all the while we were a family. We prayed well together. Our liturgies were beautiful, both respectful and dynamic. Our music was powerful with wonderful cantors and a city renowned choir. When I was transitioning from high school to university, we had an emerging group of lay ministers. We had wonderful presiders and preachers who loved the Eucharist. We had an assembly that prayed and sang very well.

We worked hard together. I remember volunteering as a youth with a faithful band of workers who staffed the parish summer festivals. Many parishioners came out in numbers to work various fundraisers. And of course, there was the faithful crew that worked the parish bingos that were a great support to Catholic education.

While at college, when I returned home, I prayed with my parents, and I always felt welcome at our parish. I was not as involved in parish life for I worked to help with my college education and as any person coming of age, I was somewhat narcissistic but thank God my faithful and loving parents kept that in check. Late in my junior year in college, I truly discovered my vocation and decided that I was going to attend the seminary with the hope of being ordained a priest.

During three of my four years of seminary, I continued to have some relationship with Visitation Parish since I had not yet been assigned formally to a parish for a pastoral year. Usually, I came home during the holidays and functioned liturgically as a reader or an acolyte at Christmas and Easter. During these years, I enjoyed the hospitality of Fr. McCamley and the warm welcome of all the parishioners, many of whom I had had a relationship with during my youth.

Once I was ordained a priest, I had many assignments ranging from parochial vicar, high school chaplain and vice principal, college chaplain, campus minister, and associate professor of theology, pastor, seminary formator, seminary professor and resident priest at the Cathedral (I was teaching full-time at Saint Francis and working for the diocese as Director of Ongoing Formation of Clergy). I lived in Altoona, Johnstown, Duncansville, Washington, DC and Altoona once again. All this time my relationship with Visitation Parish was somewhat vicarious (I lived it through my parents who remained active members). From what I knew, Visitation had evolved, as all parishes do, and its membership was still proud, hard working and full of faith.

And then, the time of true blessing came. Bishop Mark Bartchak named me pastor of Visitation Parish. I was (and am) truly blessed to return home, to shepherd the parish of my embryonic faith. As I have said on many occasions (just last Sunday in fact), I am so very proud of our parish family. We are strong liturgically – we pray well together, and we pray often. We are committed to justice – we love our neighbor – in all his and her glorious varieties – in many ways. We are generous. We are hospitable. We are responsible stewards of time and talent. We are a community that works hard to remain independent. We value our identity as Church. We show our love for Jesus Christ sacramentally, that is we make Christ alive in us.

By the same token, we are not as viable as we once were, and no one person is to blame. Many years ago, we lost many younger families because of an obscured vision of the future and the difficulties associated with subsidizing Catholic education, uncertain what our future responsibilities might be. Also, naturally, our population has matured, and those who have worked so hard at sustaining our life as a parish cannot be asked to meet expectations beyond that which is objectively just. COVID hit us hard, and a notable number of parishioners decided to remain “safe” at home, and as a result our attendance at Sunday Eucharist has decreased significantly. Also, the cost of living has resulted in choices being made that have affected parish income, causing us to tighten our belts so as to remain alive and independent – WHICH WE ARE!!!

As a result, we need to take a look at several things, one of the foremost being membership. To be very direct, we need to look at who we are and who we want to become in order to attract those Catholic individuals and families who are new to our area, who have not yet found a place to call home liturgically and socially, or those who are dissatisfied with their current experience of Church and still want to celebrate their Catholic identity. In order to do that we need to look at ourselves and determine what makes us who we are: What is good...maybe great about ourselves, and where can we do better. In order to facilitate this process, I am asking all parishioners (individuals and families) to fill out the simple questionnaire below. It is very simple; it is important; it is anonymous; and it is essential that we all participate. It is intended to provide me with information to assist with programming (and perhaps restructuring) in the future that can help to solidify our identity for the future. And so, in advance, I thank you for your participation. PLEASE FILL OUT THE FORM BELOW AND RETURN IN THE SECOND COLLECTION NEXT WEEKEND (2/23/2025)

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*1. What is the greatest area of strength of Visitation Parish?
Please explain in some detail.*

*2. What is the greatest area for growth at Visitation Parish?
Please explain in some detail.*

(examples for either may include aspects of liturgy, activities, leadership, environment, etc.)

Do you see what I SEA? It's a Lenten Fish Fry on the

Horizon: It is difficult to believe; however, the Season of Lent is fast approaching and with it the Annual Lenten Fish Fries. We will be providing full details regarding the Fish Fry in next week's bulletin, but for now, we are seeking volunteers to work them. The schedule for the Fish Fries is Ash Wednesday and every Friday during Lent with the exception of Good Friday. In addition, Thursdays are preparation days for the event. There is a sign-up sheet in the main vestibule of the Church. Please consider assisting with this event which proves to be the largest active fundraiser for the year. We know we will see many familiar faces this year; however, we are always seeking new recruits. We are encouraging especially those families who benefit from the Church's generosity for their children's Catholic education to come out to assist us with these events, knowing the responsibility that they have to our parish. If you ask anyone who has volunteered for the Fish Fries in the past, they will tell you that working at these events is actually great fun! Thank you in advance for your help.

This Week's Meeting Schedules

Monday, February 17th – Parish Pastoral Council: This is a closed meeting. All members are encouraged and expected to attend. If you are unable to attend the meeting for a serious reason, please contact the parish office on Monday morning,

Thursday, February 20th - Combined Council Meeting: This is a closed meeting. All members of both councils (Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Council) are encouraged and expected to attend. If you are unable to attend the meeting for a serious reason, please contact the parish office on Monday morning. ***THIS MEETING IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. WE WILL BE DISCUSSING MEMBERSHIP, COMMITTEE STRUCTURES, "THE STATE OF THE PARISH," SIGNIFICANT PARISH NEEDS, AND OTHER FUNDAMENTAL PARISH ISSUES.***

**Please note that both Meetings are scheduled for 6:00 PM and will be held in the Elizabethan Suite (formerly the rectory meeting room).*

**Also, please note that those individuals who have missed two or more meetings in a row, by virtue of diocesan regulations, have forfeited their membership. If you have questions about your membership status, please contact the rectory.*

This week know that a small act of kindness will be its own reward.