The other day I was back in my hometown to celebrate Mass: Fr. Ren was on vacation and needed help covering a Mass and so I agreed to do it. I must admit there is always a special joy to be in my home church of Saint Michael’s in Hudson, MA. It brings back memories of going to church there and all that it has meant to my life. The vocation I have was in a large part influenced by that community of faith. It was never any one particular priest who I looked up to and thought, ‘that’s who I want to be like.’ Rather, all the priests who served my parish were good men who I believe, each in his own way, contributed to my hearing the call. I can name the many priests who came through that community and helped me by simply how they lived out their priesthood. But even with the great example they set, I can honestly say that I experienced Christ more powerfully through the community itself.

While I was growing up, my parish was truly an active community. We had two schools and great diversity through the large Portuguese population in our town. I remember that our Holy Thursday service was usually bi-lingual. We had many different social events and, of course, many Portuguese religious festivals. Mass for me was always a positive experience because of the great lectors and music ministry we had. I personally served as altar server, lector, and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, as well as playing guitar and singing in our folk group. I also ministered with many wonderful people in our faith formation program where I taught for six years. Our Religious Education directors were women of great faith who shared their talents and time. Their commitment to the community and Christ was great evidence of what it means to live a life centered in serving Christ. I was on the Parish Council for two years, and the people I worked with on this committee were dedicated to helping our community come closer together. For too long, we had been like two different churches using the same facilities. What I mean is that the English- and Portuguese-speaking communities were completely separate, and so Fr. Viera, our pastor, decided that needed to change. We needed to become one community working towards the same goals. He therefore disbanded one parish council to create a new one that would represent the whole parish. I witnessed over those two years people who believed in that vision and worked hard to bring it to fruition.

I will admit that over the years many things influenced my ability to hear God’s call in my life. The biggest, of course, will always be my family, particularly my parents. But the community of faith that was the center of my life growing up also had a huge influence. I am sure many of those people at Saint Michael’s will never realize what they did for me. And, I can also say—much like the priests—it was not so much any one person or any one thing that helped me. Rather, it was the people who made the daily commitment to simply live out their faith. It was the combined witness of faith through difficult moments and changes and the equally good times that we celebrated together. Every community faces ups and downs but, if united as one in faith, comes through stronger in the end. My home parish will always be a place of genuine fond memories for me.

And so, as I celebrated Mass at St. Michael’s, all the feelings and thoughts of what it was like to grow up there came flooding into my mind. As I drove home and since, I have mulled over how that community helped me get to where I am. How fortunate I feel that I am now pastor in these two great communities of faith in Chelmsford. It is clear to me that what I experienced as a child is alive and well in these communities of faith.

We have so many people in our Chelmsford Collaborative who have chosen to give their time and talents to help us center our lives in Christ. I look at our staff and then at the many parishioners who step up every day to bring Christ into the world. It is easy to see, through the many varied programs and activities happening each and every day, that we have many people dedicated to helping us grow as a community. It is not simply about what the priests and deacons are doing, but also about what are parishioners are doing. Our faith is alive and well and has so much potential to impact the greater community when each and every one of us choose daily to live out our faith in Christ.

The faith that was encountered in my youth continues to impact me today. Again, it was not about what a particular person did, but rather, the aggregate of a community where each person made the choice to participate and make
their faith real, and not simply something they talked about. And, it was in the small and the large ways this occurred.

Let each and every one of us recognize that our faith is a tremendous gift, and let us decide each day to simply share it through the choices we make. You will never fully realize the seeds you may be planting, but it could make all the difference in the world to someone in the community.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian