



State of the Parish 2020

Resurrected Vision in the Midst of Life's Crucifixion Events

Fr. David Carter, Pastor and Rector

I was appointed as Administrator of this parish in November of 2013. Then on July 1st, 2014, I was named as Pastor and Rector for a term of six years, a term which concluded this past summer. Bishop Stika has seen fit to name me now in 2020 to another six-year term as Pastor and Rector. I am humbled and grateful for this appointment, continuing my time as Pastor of this wonderful community of faith that meets Under the One Roof of The Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul. I ask your prayer and support, that I might be the shepherd that God and the Bishop have called me to be for you.

20/20 is a euphemism for perfection, as in someone who has 20/20 vision. We sometimes joke that hindsight is 20/20. What a year, then, to be re-appointed to lead this community of faith! Whereas in the present moment, our vision is muddled, when we look back, we see things very clearly. This year 2020 has been anything but clear and perfect. In the present glance it appears to be a very confusing and chaotic year. However, we have the practice here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul of stopping in the fall and taking a look back. Despite the many complications of this year, I would propose that the hindsight of the year 2020 reveals God's providential hand where it was least expected. Just as the event of Jesus' crucifixion on Calvary must have seemed a total loss to His Apostles and disciples in the moment, after the Resurrection, they gained new insight and saw clearly God's plan of salvation through suffering. Though this has been one of the most challenging years in recent memory, I believe that it will set the stage for great things yet to come that would only be realized because of the chaos of this year. In order to see that hand of Providence and how God truly has been with us even in the crucified moments of this year, we have to put on our "Resurrected Vision" that comes to us in the Risen Christ and recall the many events that have shaped us throughout this last year.

In last year's State of the Parish address, I referred to Robert Cardinal Sarah's Book, *The Day is Now Far Spent*, in which he encouraged Christians not to doubt but to "**Hold fast to doctrine! Hold fast to prayer!**" I hope in this past year we have continued the exemplary tradition of the doctrinal presentation of the Catholic faith in our preaching, teaching, catechesis, and rites of initiation. But in addition, we have added numerous opportunities to pray and to shape the spiritual life of our parish and parishioners. In particular, we began chanting Vespers, that is, Evening Prayer, at 5pm every day, in the Latin language, as a way of centering ourselves on the praise of God. As a people saved by God's grace, our first duty is to render unto him praise and thanksgiving. This addition complements our already existing practice of praying Morning Prayer at 7:30 following the 7am Mass during the week. We also introduced the Hallow app that was recently developed, which teaches people how to pray and to sit with the Lord in His healing presence. If you have never been taught how to pray or to develop the Interior Life, this is a great tool and resource that I highly recommend. You can find the information on Hallow in the app store on any major device.

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On a personal note, I started this year on a sabbatical at the Monastery of Christ in the Desert, where I lived the life of a monk for more than two months. It truly is a place conducive to the Interior Life, free from the distractions of this frenetic world of ours. It enabled me to concentrate on “the better part” and to sit at the feet of the Master and Lover of our souls. Little did I know that upon coming back, a great global pandemic would make most of our lives akin to a monastic experience by the social distance isolation and quarantine. So many of the things that we took for granted as social creatures were stripped from us. But this is the first note of God’s Providence shining through. Now, with the lens of the Resurrection, we can see the crucifixion event of the recent shutdown as preparing the way for new and creative manners of connecting. In particular, we rapidly discerned the value and benefit of technology, especially live-streaming, to keep ourselves engaged in the Holy Mysteries. During the shutdown we live-streamed our daily Masses and our Liturgy of the Hours. We were also able to reach out to our parish via many Wednesday night events, starting with our quarantine time family entertainment, which included two piano concerts, an organ concert, a dad joke night, a virtual tour of the church, and the “Quarantine Quartet”. We have continued to offer virtual events, most recently with a Virtual Rosary hosted by our American Heritage Girls, and our Virtual Town Hall Meeting: Catholics and Elections. This trend continues with the present State of the Parish address. Whereas before, many people were unable to participate in events that we held at our parish for logistical reasons, we have noticed that having the virtual option has drastically increased participation in our parish offerings. In addition, we have made use of technology to provide online resources in our parish ministries such as RE, youth schola, RCIA, and even a virtual Vacation Bible School. We have also been able to make use of email to get timely updates to our parishioners and to interact with everyone. We also took the opportunity to invest in a new eCatholic website, thus making it easier to provide information to you quickly. In order to keep this content going and to improve this, we invested in a new live-stream camera and an upgrade to our Internet capabilities in the church. Our efforts have reached many thousands of people, many who might not have otherwise come to our parish. We are grateful also for a diocesan grant that has essentially covered a large part of this upgrade.

The shelter in place order came into effect April 2nd, just before Holy Week. That means that all our public events were canceled, including participation in the most holy liturgies essential to our Catholic faith. These liturgies did still go on, behind closed doors, and they were accessed only electronically by many of the faithful. However, we never completely closed our doors. During the day, we left the church open for prayer and Adoration. To the extent possible, with necessary safeguards and restrictions, we brought the Sacraments to people at their homes, especially through our “drive-by” Adoration and socially-distanced Confession.

As if the quarantine weren’t enough, on Easter Sunday night 2020, an F-3 tornado cut a path of nine miles long and 1500 yards wide through the East Brainerd area. Some of our parishioners lost everything in the tornado, and many more sustained damage – a crucifixion event, for sure, for those who lived through it. But looking back with our Resurrected Vision, we give thanks that – incredibly – very few died or were seriously injured from it. But we did see so many respond with great generosity to help pick up the pieces of people’s shattered lives and to begin the process of cleaning

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and rebuilding, a process that continues even today. I would like to highlight the organizational work of Mr. Adam Foster and the Knights of Columbus of the Chattanooga area. Their resourcefulness and readiness to help were a great consolation to those who had been affected by the tornadoes.

We also saw what turned out to be a good benefit from the quarantine, a completely empty and unused parish hall, which was turned into a depot for donated supplies to clothe and sustain families that had been affected. Many parishioners donated food, medicine, clothing and household goods, and other necessities, which were then distributed to the most needy in our community. Thanks to all who organized the donations and did all the logistical work to connect these goods with people in need. We also had the great benefit of our newly purchased Hispanic Ministry Building on 23rd Street in order to distribute food to those affected by the pandemic and the tornado. This is an effort that continues even today. Furthermore, we are grateful to have received several grants (totaling about \$50,000) from various agencies in the Church and in the community, which have enabled us to sustain families who have lost work or were sick during the pandemic and recent tornado.

As the restrictions surrounding the pandemic were eased and Bishop Stika invited parishes to resume public Masses, what had seemed a major crucifixion, that is, the lack of access to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Confession, became for us, when we look at it through resurrected eyes, an opportunity to address various needs and desires in our community. During the shelter-in-place, we virtually live-streamed one Mass each Sunday from each of the three communities that meet “Under One Roof” at the Basilica. We offered a Spanish-language Mass, an English-language Mass, and a Missa Cantata in Latin. When it came time to resume public Masses, our community discerned that now was the time to make changes to our Mass schedule to incorporate the changing realities of our parish. After long consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council and Bishop Stika, we decided to add a second Spanish Mass to our schedule at 7am, as well as change the format of the 11:30 Mass to become a weekly Missa Cantata in the Extraordinary Form. The additional Spanish Mass addresses the wonderful growth we have seen in our Hispanic community, and it especially allows those who work during our regular Mass times to attend Mass on Sunday. We have seen many people begin to make use of this early morning option. In addition, in answer to the many requests that we have had for a weekly Latin Mass, which I mentioned in last year’s State of the Parish address, we discerned that the time was right to offer a weekly Mass in the Extraordinary Form. After great deliberation of what that would look like, we settled upon changing the format of the 11:30 Mass from the Ordinary Form to the Extraordinary Form. We made that decision based on the results of the survey of last year and the reality that the 11:30 Mass was always less on fourth Sundays when people chose to go to the evening offering of the Latin Mass. It seems that this transition has been well received, in that besides the 1:30 Spanish Mass, it is the most well attended Mass at our parish. I want to thank everyone, especially our Parish Pastoral Council, for the wisdom and advice that helped us to discern this new path for our parish.

Along with the re-starting of our public liturgies came the question of initiation of the candidates and catechumens of RCIA, our First Communicants, and our Confirmandi, who had been preparing all year. With the guidance provided by Bishop Stika, we were able to host a delayed reception of the Sacraments of Initiation at the Vigil of Pentecost. While the great symbolism of the Easter Vigil and

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appropriateness of that moment for the reception of the Saving Sacraments is obvious, if one had to choose another date for these Saving Sacraments to be celebrated, I don't think any other date would have been as perfect as the Vigil of Pentecost. Again, we can see the hand of Providence and how God can work good even from bad situations. Providentially, our planned dates for First Communion and Confirmation were already scheduled for after the lifting of restrictions on public Masses, and so we were able to offer the Sacraments to our young people at the regularly scheduled times of Corpus Christi and our patronal feast day of Sts. Peter and Paul. God is good indeed!

In addition to the Sacraments of Initiation, the Sacrament of Vocation, that is, Marriage, is an important thing that is frequently celebrated here at the Basilica. Many couples choose to get married at the Basilica because of the beauty of our sanctuary. However, the shelter-in-place order and shutdown took place in the middle of "wedding season", requiring many couples to reschedule their nuptials. Despite these setbacks, we have been able to offer the Sacrament of Marriage with due restrictions and safeguards to virtually all whose weddings were delayed.

Now, luckily, in our parish, coronavirus has been mild in its manifestation. There has been no coronavirus outbreak at the church. In our English-speaking community, very few of our parishioners have gotten sick, and none have died. Thanks be to God! In our Hispanic community, about two thirds tested positive at one point, but the vast majority were asymptomatic, with only a few experiencing symptoms and even fewer having to be hospitalized. To my knowledge, no one died from the coronavirus in our parish. Very prudently, then, we delayed the resumption of public Masses for the Hispanic community by a month to allow for the containment of the spread of this disease. It seems to have been effective, in that the community is now mostly coronavirus-free.

In addition to delaying the Spanish Mass, and in order to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, at all our public Masses, we have instituted various safeguards and procedures in accordance with the decrees of Bishop Stika and local civic authorities. These include the wearing of masks, maintaining social distance, asking people to be aware of their health status, and making choices not to come if they are sick or vulnerable, as well as extensive cleaning of the church after every Mass and event.

This is also an area where we can highlight one of the successes of this past year. Last year at this time I was calling for an increase in participation in the area of cleanliness of our parish. We now have regular volunteers not only from our Hispanic community, but also from our English speaking community, doing a cleaning ministry. Cleanliness is next to godliness, and I am grateful for those who help us to offer the Divine Worship in a safe and clean environment.

In addition to the return of public Masses, some ministries have also found a way to continue their work either in-person or virtually. I'm grateful for our Religious Education program, which is meeting in-person for the sacramental preparation classes and virtually for the others; our RCIA, which is offering a virtual gathering on Zoom; our Catholic Motherhood group, who meets off campus; our Youth Group which has a mix of in-person and virtual meetings; as well as our American Heritage Girls, who do the same. The Jubilate Deo Youth Schola has offered its first level training in video format and posted them online. They also host in person classes, socially distanced as required. Our Knights of Columbus and "Catholic Chatt" Young Adults remain active. In addition,

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The Deacon's Table, a very popular offering on Sundays, has resumed meeting virtually, and are working to try an in-person option, hopefully very soon. We have resumed our Book Club in person, studying Dante's *Divine Comedy*, starting with the *Inferno*. We also have begun training new altar servers and sacristans, and we have newly re-formed our Altar Ministry under new leadership in Tia Yunker. I want to say a special word of thanks to Shirley Lautigar and all the ladies who have assisted in the Altar Guild in the past. Without their work behind the scenes, we would be hard-pressed to celebrate the Divine Mysteries so beautifully and so well.

In addition to those ministries that have already been going, we also have new offerings this year, including our new Married and Engaged Ministry, that has been successfully gathering virtually and networking throughout the whole time of the pandemic. We also have begun a new Men's Vespers Schola on Friday evenings in order to sing the praises of God. In addition, a new non-profit organization has been founded among our parishioners, called RISE UP, which teaches life skills to at-risk youth, a very wonderful and timely offering to our community. We also plan in the future to host the Walking with Moms in Need program, a pro-life ministry which is specifically designed to help mothers and fathers in need by providing them with support and training in life skills.

Last year, at the prompting of the Parish Pastoral Council, we instituted two Parish Awards to recognize members of our parish who exemplify the ideals we hold dear as a community. The first award is the Joy of Tradition Award, to recognize parishioners who have demonstrated by their life and participation in our parish the joy that our Catholic faith brings. It is a testimony to their exemplary service to various aspects of our faith, and for their enthusiasm in promoting the sacred traditions in liturgy, ministry, and service to our parish. This year's recipients are Amy Long and Wily Velasquez. The Servant of God Fr. Patrick Ryan Award is given each year to members of the parish who exemplify the theological virtue of charity in imitation of the heroic witness of Fr. Patrick Ryan. Inspired by his example to that same measure of charity toward all our brothers and sisters in need, the recipient of this award has been recognized for selfless service, especially towards the poor and needy. This year's award went to Guadalupe Morales and Adam Foster. Information on these recipients can be found on our website on the Parish Awards page.

One of the major outreaches the Basilica enjoys is the Apostolate of Beauty, heavily emphasizing music and the fine arts. This past winter, before the coronavirus, we were able to host the 20th Annual Roueché Chorale Service of Lessons and Carols, welcoming thousands of visitors from our community to witness the story of Christ through music. The Chattanooga Bach Choir gave a full orchestra performance at the Basilica in February. This was one of the last live music events in our community before the pandemic hit. Since the shutdown, there have hardly been any live performances of music anywhere in town. However, the Chattanooga Symphony Orchestra has approached us about a partnership to provide a large socially distanced venue for them to resume offering orchestra concerts, during this time when even the Tivoli Theater is not available. Mark your calendars for Dec. 3, 4, and 5: They will be offering the music of Holst, Haydn, and Jolivet at the Basilica!

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In addition to all the things happening in the Hispanic community that I mentioned before, we are seeing great gains and life among that portion of our parish. In particular, we have seen a strong desire for the return of the public Masses. Of all of our Masses, the Spanish Masses are the most well attended. In addition, the two houses of prayer, that many of our Spanish speaking parishioners belong to, have resumed their offerings on Saturday nights and are animating the community with prayer, catechesis, and an opportunity for Christian fellowship. One sad note we received was notice of the death of the long-time servant of our Hispanic Community in Chattanooga, Sister Celia Sanchez. It was discovered that she had advanced cancer and the illness took her quickly, but she was able to return to her community in Mexico to be surrounded by her sisters and to die in God's good graces. May she rest in peace. We also have had tragedy in the community even before the pandemic, with several young people dying suddenly, as well as others who experienced great tragedy and loss in their family. May they and all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. These sorrowful events we attend just like Our Lady at the foot of the Cross, but we do so always with hope in the Resurrection.

Even with these tragic events, there are still more beautiful life-giving events happening in our community. We have been assigned a new priest, Fr. Moises Moreno, who will serve our Hispanic community. It seems that the Hispanic community was strengthened through the adversity that they have had to endure, and we are grateful for their witness of faith.

As you know, there were several priest assignment changes this year. Fr. Colin Blatchford, long-time associate pastor, was assigned to a very important apostolate in the Church as its Associate Director. He is now living and working out of Bridgeport, Connecticut, with the COURAGE Apostolate, ministering to those who experience same-sex attractions. Our loss is their gain, and I pray that his ministry may be fruitful. But even as we lost Fr. Blatchford, we gained in a more permanent way Fr. Valentin. Fr. Valentin Iurochkin comes to us from Russia by way of just about every country in the world. He is a member of a religious order but is discerning diocesan priesthood. We had the benefit of his coming originally to cover my absence during the sabbatical this winter. Now the Bishop has assigned him as a full-time Parochial Vicar and as Chaplain to the Campus Ministry at UTC. We also enjoy the presence of Fr. Nick Tran, who is the Chaplain to the Vietnamese Community in Chattanooga, which hopes one day to be a parish. And now with Fr. Moises Moreno on board, we have a truly International House Of Priests: IHOP :-). This was a cause for another of the Resurrection realizations. In the midst of the pandemic crucifixion we found the strength of our priestly community in the rectory. We were able to pray together and form a closer community that I pray will bear fruit in the parish.

In addition to my role as Pastor of the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul, I have also been named as the Judicial Vicar of the Tribunal of the Diocese of Knoxville. Bishop Stika has seen fit to locate the Tribunal on our campus. It is an honor that a Diocesan office is located here in Chattanooga and hosted by our very parish. In this way we serve the common good of the diocese and fulfill the ministry of justice, but it has also posed unique challenges to us, as we are short on space. We have made do, to the best of our ability, and I am grateful for the new members of the Tribunal assisting me in this very important ministry for the diocese.

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Another great thing happening in our parish is the Cause for Sainthood of a Pastor of our own parish, Fr. Patrick Ryan, who died ministering to the victims of the yellow fever epidemic of 1878. Again we see the theme of Resurrected Vision in the midst of our own crucifixion event. What seemed like utter tragedy in 1878, with the death of so many in our city, revealed the fruit of Christian charity in the person of Fr. Ryan, who gave his life in witness to this great virtue. Who would have known that we as a community would have suffered a like pandemic, now in our own day? How providential, then, it is, that we have this witness of Fr. Ryan before our eyes to encourage us! Very appropriately, the Historical Commission, which has been diligently researching his life since we began the Cause in 2016, has now concluded their report. I want to thank the members of that Commission for their hard work. In particular, I would like to especially remember Barbara DeGaetano, who died before the Report was concluded. May she rest in peace and may her contributions to the Cause bear much fruit. On Sept. 28th, the 142nd anniversary of the death of Fr. Ryan, we celebrated the First Session of the Inquiry concerning the Cause. We pray one day he may be raised to the dignity of the altar as a saint.

All the things mentioned above we do in fulfillment of our mission here at Sts. Peter and Paul to proclaim Jesus Christ, the font of all Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and we continue His mission to form disciples from all peoples according to the tradition and patrimony of the Catholic Church. In order to fulfill this mission, a certain amount of the goods of this world are required. Last year we began a major stewardship effort in accord with our strategic priority of Growth in Attendance and Participation. We had noticed that only 50% of our registered parishioners were giving in a recordable way. We set ourselves an audacious goal of 100% participation. After our stewardship efforts last year, I am happy to report that we are now at 88% participation! That's an awesome increase! But as you are aware, the need continues. The coronavirus has made us more attentive to the needs of our parish and has required us to evaluate our stewardship of the resources we have. This requires everyone's participation. In addition to our ongoing operational needs, we also have several capital needs and improvements that we have been discerning for several years. The reality is that our greatest asset, this venerable old church building, is also the source of our greatest need. We have discerned as one of our strategic priorities the **Preservation of Our Facilities**. But that means ongoing projects to ensure that the next generation will be able to enjoy the beauty and tradition that we enjoy today. We have some major roof issues as well as heating and air that need to be addressed soon. Both have been delayed longer than they should have. In addition, we also have the good problem of a lack of space for our growing community and activities. To address those needs, in coordination with the Finance Council and the Parish Pastoral Council, we are studying the possibility of a major fundraising event. In these next few weeks, we will be contacting you for your input and collaboration in planning for this fundraising. When you receive this request (by mail, email, or phone), please respond and give us your thoughts to help us make this a success.

In order to address the many facility issues that we have, a committee called the Facilities Engineering Maintenance Advisory Council was formed under the leadership of Ron Lautigar. He has since moved with his wife to Alexian Village in their retirement and has passed the torch on to the next generation. I want to thank Ron for his years of service to the facilities of our parish. I am very grateful for all that he has done. Now, I have asked Mr. Rod Barteel, the husband of our Youth

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Minister, Kalista, to head up this committee, especially as we approach these upcoming capital projects. I am grateful for him and all who assist the parish in these matters.

As 2020 is coming to a close, we look back and we see the providential hand of God, even in the midst of great tragedies and crucifixion events. But there is still more work to be done. Our society has experienced so much turmoil and chaos. And in this past year of crisis, there has been so much division and hatred coming to the surface. Many people are divided about the best way to face the realities of this global pandemic. Political divides have arisen, and racial tensions have resurfaced. The political season that we have been enduring has been very damaging to our nation, to our Church, and to our community. People have drawn lines and have made enemies. Regular and social media have served as fuel for the flame of hatred and division. We just had a national election that was one of the most contentious of my life and is not yet resolved. It is not a stretch to assume that the divisions will continue, even as the contest eventually is resolved. We must ask ourselves, in these times, as Christian people who are called to be salt and light and leaven in society, what our response should be.

I would like to propose a *Ministry of Reconciliation* along the lines of St. Paul when he spoke to the Corinthians in his Second Letter. After the crucifixion that our country has endured in this political season and social unrest, I would like to encourage us to fulfill our role to be ministers of reconciliation to this broken world. I recall the words of St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, 14-21: St. Paul said it this way:

- 14 For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died, that whoever is in Christ is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, new things have come.
- 15 He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.
- 16 Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer.
- 17 So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.
- 18 And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation,
- 19 namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
- 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.
- 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

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This year, I would like for us to focus on **reconciliation** with our brothers and sisters. Whether it be the ones who have wounded us, or the ones that we have wounded by our sins, let us be the first to reach out and ask for forgiveness when we are at fault. Let us forgive from our hearts those who have wronged us, even if they do not ask. Let us do an honest examination of conscience about our online presence, the comments we have made in posts or comment threads, the conversations we have had behind closed doors, the anger and resentment we have held and harbored in our hearts. Let us repent of the times when we have assumed the worst, and let us be ready to see the good in others. Let us put on the **Resurrected Vision** that sees how God can take even the worst of sinners and turn them into the most glorious and exalted of saints by His grace. Let us never lose hope when the cross and the crucifixion events happen in our life. Let us be a people who knows the Good News of the Resurrection, and empowered with this awesome vision, let us be reconciled to God and to our neighbor, and become the light, salt, and leaven that this world so desperately needs.

May Jesus Christ be praised now and forever!

Humbly submitted by

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