

Sabbatical

I was ordained July 1, 2005, and I have been going strong ever since! This next summer will mark my fifteenth anniversary of ordination. It will also mark a new phase in the life of the diocese, as July 1, 2020, is the date slated for the official beginning of the Tribunal of the Diocese of Knoxville. Bishop Stika has tasked me with setting up this Tribunal and beginning it, which is a monumental task, requiring a lot of my time and energy. For that reason, I have asked for and received permission to prepare myself by means of a short sabbatical. Though my exact departure and return date have not been finalized, I will be gone at least during the months of January and February 2020, living at the Monastery of Christ in the Desert near Abiquiu, New Mexico. It is a Benedictine monastery of the Subiaco-Cassinense congregation of Benedictines. It is located in the high deserts of northern New Mexico and is completely off the grid. Their electricity is solar powered and there are no fixed lines or cables running out to the monastery—a perfect place for silence and contemplation. During my absence, Fr. Blatchford will be administrating the parish with the assistance of Fr. Tran. Some daily Masses and activities may be interrupted, and of course I will be unavailable during that time. Some may ask what I will be doing during those months, and the answer is simple: I will simply be living the life of a Benedictine monk. The *orarium* begins at 3:45 am with Matins (in the Office of Readings) and ends with Compline at 7:30 pm— with lots more prayer and work in between. Besides the chanting of the Psalms (The Divine Office) and the daily Mass, there is also manual labor. There are regular chores of cooking and cleaning and caring for the facilities, and the monastery also runs a small farm of not only plants but also animals. In particular, they have sheep and horses that they use to sustain themselves. Though it is a desert, it is at 6,000 feet elevation and will be cold— something that I'm already looking forward to from the heat of East Tennessee. If you want to learn more about the monastery, their website is www.christdesert.org, where you can see pictures and content describing the monastery. I would ask for your support and prayers during this necessary time for rest and renewal in my ministry as Pastor of our parish.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)

For a year, we have been running a Level One Atrium (for ages 3-5) using Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a program developed originally in Italy and brought to us by way of the Dominican Sisters in Nashville. This program is built upon many of the principles of the Montessori model of education of children and involves hands-on lessons, which the child works through at his or her own pace. The Atrium has been well-received by the parents and children, and it is beautiful to see the children working quietly but diligently, learning the beautiful lessons of faith that will ground them in the saving message of the Gospel. In discussion with those running the CGS, and our Religious Education leadership, we are discerning a path to a Level Two Atrium (for ages 6-9) that will be the Religious Education program for all children up to the classes preparing them for Confirmation. Our plan is for the children from age 10 until they are confirmed to learn based on the tried and true Baltimore Catechism, leading them into the Confirmation sacramental preparation. Following Confirmation, we offer a Religious Education class that focuses on apologetics and questions that young people face on a daily basis. As an extension of our Religious Education for middle and high school, we also are heavily emphasizing our Youth Group program, which meets on Sunday evenings. A special thank you to all of our Religious Education and Youth Group volunteers and leaders, who give of their time and talent to help form our young people in the beauty and joy of our Catholic faith. Thank you!

Stewardship

This weekend we are announcing our Annual Stewardship Appeal, and it takes place as part of our ongoing push for 100% stewardship of parishioners here at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. If you have not already received your pledge envelope in the mail, there will be one provided next week, so that you may make a commitment to our parish in the form of your tithe or offertory. We would like to receive a commitment pledge from every household that calls the Basilica parish home. We remember that this is not just about keeping the lights on and the roof fixed, though we have these ongoing needs. It is more about responding to the Lord's call to put our treasure in heaven and to heed His wisdom, when He says that it's better to give than to receive. No gift is too small, and everyone is called by a Gospel imperative to participate!

