

Year in Review

Recently we had our annual St. Nicholas Dinner, which was a privileged time to get together for social time to enjoy one another's company, in the context of our community of faith. I took the opportunity then to address the parish to review our past year and to commission you for the coming year.

This fall marked my sixth anniversary at the parish, and it has definitely been an eventful six years. Since I've come, we've had major **renovation of the rectory and office space**, upgrades to our **security** and safety on campus, the **remodeled nursery**, new **sound system**, and the **sanctuary renovations**. We have also seen a huge growth in our parish over these six years, **growing at least 20%**, initiating **many new Catholics**, and we have also **integrated our Hispanic community** more as full members of our parish and seen great growth in that ministry. We have initiated and carried through a **Catholic homeschool co-op** since 2016, and so much more.

In particular, I would like to highlight the many things that have happened in our parish this past year: We began implementing our new **Strategic Plan**. We made a decision to **open the church** during the day for people to make visits. We heard from the parishioners through a **liturgical questionnaire** that is helping to shape our planning for the future. Our Knights of Columbus began offering the traditional **Fish Fry** on Fridays of Lent. We highlighted our **relic collection**. We hosted our first Forty Hours devotion. We **completed the organ** with the addition of the last two ranks of pipes. We made **corrections to the floors** in our sanctuary. We celebrated **Sister Imelda's 25th anniversary** to religious life and hosted a **vocations day** in the Hispanic community. We introduced two new parish awards: The **Joy of Tradition Award** and the **Fr. Patrick Ryan Award**, to highlight members of the community who live our parish's vision. We have continued our daily celebration of the **Liturgy of the Hours**, now including **Evening Prayer**. We have begun a major effort to highlight **stewardship** of time, talent, and treasure with an audacious **goal of 100% of all parishioners** participating in the support of the parish. We are preparing for our 130th anniversary, starting with a **commemorative parish directory**. Lastly, we successfully negotiated a long-term **lease of the old All Saints Academy** building and have finalized a purchase of a **new building for our Hispanic Community** on East 23rd Street.

We continue to **open our doors to all peoples**. We had several **sacred music concerts** with notable groups in the community as well as our own choir making beautiful music, to which the public was invited. In June we held our sixth annual **Corpus Christi procession**. On December 11, we hosted our fifth annual **Our Lady of Guadalupe procession** on Wednesday, with close to 800 people in attendance, followed by the **Roueché Chorale** that Thursday and Friday night, which welcomed close to 1,000 people each night. We welcomed about 2000 people at our **Christmas Masses** last week. In all of these events, we have been fulfilling our **mission to proclaim Jesus Christ, the font of all Truth, Beauty, and Goodness**, and accomplishing our strategic priorities of Growth in Attendance and Participation, by getting people into the pews of Sts. Peter and Paul to hear the message.

As you can see, the parish has been incredibly busy! As you are also aware, by the time this is printed, I will have left for a two month sabbatical, after fifteen years in ministry and in anticipation of many more years to come. This sabbatical is also a time for me to refocus on the interior life and prayer before I take on the added burden of the Tribunal of the Diocese of Knoxville at the request of Bishop Stika. I will be doing that service to the diocese while remaining as pastor here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul.

The Year Ahead

In this next year, I would like us to focus on the reality that our parish is very diverse, and yet we are united in our Catholic faith "**Under One Roof**". Our English-speaking community, our Spanish-speaking community, and the Latin Mass community all bring a richness to our community and our wonderful expressions of our Catholic faith.

In order to facilitate all of the things that happen in our parish, one thing I have noticed is a need to develop much more leadership among the faithful, to continue the great work that has been done at our parish. **Instead of a few doing a lot, wouldn't it be wonderful if a lot were doing even more?**

I would like us also to focus on the life of prayer. **I want Sts. Peter and Paul to be a school of the interior life**, where people truly encounter the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, invite Him to dwell in our hearts, and where they can turn in times of strife and difficulty; a place where they can find themselves close to our suffering God, hidden in the wounds of his Sacred Heart; a place where we can find the strength and courage to take up our cross, to die to self, and to live for God and our neighbor.

With the primacy of the spiritual at the forefront, the Church can be the true light of the world and salt of the earth that we were called by Jesus to be. As we celebrate the birth of Our Savior, let us rejoice in all the many blessings He gives to us through our parish and seek to share them with as many people as possible.

Fr. Blatchford, as Parochial Vicar, will be administrating the parish during my absence, and therefore all pastoral responsibility while I am away, will fall to him, so I encourage you to speak to him about pastoral matters that cannot wait until I return. Fr. Valentin Iurochkin, whom I introduced on December 8th, will be here to help Fr. Blatchford for the duration of my sabbatical. Be assured that I will keep the parishioners of Sts. Peter and Paul close to my heart in my time in the desert, and I pray that you will do the same for me.

Rev. Fr. David Carter