



## State of the Parish 2019

Fr. David Carter, Pastor and Rector

This past year (2018-2019) has truly been eventful and momentous in our parish. Moving back into our newly renovated sanctuary twice in a row was not easy to accomplish and required many people to go the extra mile. However, we transitioned both times very successfully and demonstrated that our parish has a certain amount of flexibility built into it as well as a great desire to do things right and to appreciate the beauty that we enjoy in our church building. I am grateful for all who participated in the planning, execution, transition, moving, cleanup, and sundry tasks that were associated with this major renovation in our parish. I especially want to thank Dcn. Hicks Armor, who has been my right hand through the transition and whose leadership is invaluable to me during this process. I pray that this renovation will be a testament for our love and joy of tradition for the next 100 years. At the same time, as our parish underwent the renovation, we also produced a strategic planning process to help guide us in the next five years. In it we establish our principles, express our mission statement, dreamt about our vision for the future, and set concrete goals and strategic priorities. I am especially grateful for Dr. Jimmy Turner for leading us through this process and for all those who served on the strategic planning committee:

Fr. Colin Blatchford, Dcn. Hicks Armor, Sister Imelda Quechol, Mitchell Beene, Terrance Jones, Ron & Shirley Lautigar, Guadalupe Morales, Angela Niemeyer, David Pennebaker, Joe Pricer, Maria Rist, Michael & Danielle Stradley

We have been trying to live out our mission, this year by fleshing out our strategic priorities in order to work towards our vision. I want to highlight first our strategic priority of **Active Marketing**. We have done lots of work to generate online content through our website, Facebook page, myParish app, SoundCloud audio files of homilies, as well as our new Flickr photo archive of parish events and our parishioner email service. In the future, we hope to expand our online presence by livestreaming of Masses, especially our larger feasts, weddings, and funerals. We also hope to get more visible signage for our historic church building by pursuing the historical markers, as seen on the interstate. We have also been successful in broadening the reach beyond the parish by a presentation on Black Catholic History, led by Mr. Christopher Gurley, and in a very important way, our Sacred Music apostolate outreach, via the 2019-2020 Sacred Music Concert series. As of the writing of this State of the Parish report, we just finished our Gloria Dei Schola benefit concert for Food for the Poor. I saw many non-parishioners and people in attendance, who otherwise would not come to our beautiful sanctuary, and got to enjoy the sacred music of our Catholic faith.

After Active Marketing, the second strategic priority that I would like to highlight is **Growth in Attendance and Participation**. As a strategic goal towards participation, we have established a program of 100% participation in stewardship of time, talent, but especially of treasure, using our Lord's exhortation: "Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." To this end, we have created a Stewardship Committee who will be helping us to pray, discern, and act on initiatives to achieve our goal. In addition, I have made great efforts to incorporate stewardship in my preaching and messaging to our parishioners. We have seen a very promising response to this message. This will continue to be a major part of this strategic priority.

We have also implemented two new recognition awards to highlight and exemplify this strategic priority of participation in our parish. The first award is titled "**The Joy of Tradition Award**". This award has been established to recognize members of our parish community 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

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various aspects of our faith, and for their enthusiasm in promoting the sacred traditions in liturgy, ministry, and service to our parish." The 2019 recipients of this award are Debbie Cliche and Delmar Ramírez Pérez.

The second of our two parish awards is "**The Servant of God, Fr. Patrick Ryan Award**". This 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. The 2019 recipients are Satoko Thel and Olegario Cardona.

The third strategic priority is one which will be an ongoing issue for us, namely, **Facility Preservation**. We have accomplished many major projects in our parish over the years. In 2011, we renovated Varallo Parish Hall. In 2013, we remodeled the first and second floor of the RE building. In 2015, we finished the rectory and office renovation. In 2016, we completed the nursery renovation. In 2017, we inspected and patched the roof, recovered the pews, upgraded our sound system, and had a Marian grotto installed on the campus. Finally, last year, we did the major renovation of our sanctuary, nave, and vestibule, upgrading the electrical system and lighting in the church, as well as our security and fire safety systems. All of these renovations have depleted our parish savings as a result of a conscious decision to invest in our infrastructure. But the reality is that we are far from being done. There are many capital improvements that are on hold, due to a lack of funding. Some are major needs: the air conditioning and heating of the church; the roof and gutter repairs; and providing sufficient space for the many groups and activities that meet on our campus. These will most likely be the subject of a future capital campaign, as was suggested by the Parish Pastoral Council this year, after a presentation by Ron Lautigar, the Chairman of FEMAC. I'm grateful for Ron and his team for helping me maintain these very old buildings that form the patrimony of our parish.

This venerable old church has one roof, but under that roof, many of God's children gather to worship and to be formed as disciples of Jesus Christ. I would like to develop this theme, "**Under One Roof**", in the years ahead, as we will have to learn about each other and work consciously towards collaboration and integration. Currently, I can identify three distinct communities that meet under our roof. One is the English speaking community that has formed the backbone of our parish since its beginning. The second community are the recent immigrants to our country, mostly from Guatemala, who share the Spanish language in common. Until recently, they had been distinct from the regular parish, only utilizing the church for Mass, but otherwise being separated. I have worked hard in my time as Pastor to integrate our Spanish-speaking community into the regular life of the parish of Sts. Peter and Paul. This has borne great fruit, especially in the increase in participation and attendance at our Spanish Mass, which now comes close to 50% of our parish. The third community that has been identified in our parish is the Latin Mass community, which has grown in recent years, as more and more young people and young families express to me their desire to worship utilizing the more ancient form of the Roman Rite, commonly called the Latin Mass.

We began the monthly sung Latin Mass, the *Missa Cantata*, on Christmas Day in 2014. There has been consistent support and participation in this Mass. Even just this year, I have had many young people come to me to express their desire for a weekly Latin Mass. Our parish-wide liturgical questionnaire taken earlier this year (see the results below) demonstrates to me that there is great support for a movement towards the Latin Mass being offered every week. It is something that we will have to discern as a parish, so as to best utilize our resources, both in scheduling and in priest availability. It is an opportunity for us to continue to express the Joy of Tradition that we seek to exemplify here at the Basilica – a joy that is expressed uniformly in the diversity of the communities that meet "**Under One Roof**."

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With the joy of the diversity of many communities meeting under one roof, there are also distinct challenges. In particular, an issue that faces us is the limitation of space. The analogy that I have discerned is that of a large family with only one bathroom. It is inconvenient, for sure, but if done right, can be sufficient. Being a

downtown parish with an already small campus, we do not have much room for expansion. One solace in the past has been the expansive resource of All Saints Academy. But we discerned that it is also an expensive resource, one that is beyond our parish's ability to upkeep – much less renovate – for safety and liability. Therefore, we had to make the very difficult decision to turn the building over to developers who could do something good with the building, as well as making the building a parish asset, rather than a drain on our budget and resources. I am happy to finally announce that we are under a contract with a developer to turn All Saints Academy into commercial office space, with monetary benefit to the parish, as well as the continued use of the parking lot on evenings and weekends. This will take pressure off our annual budget for the upkeep of that building, and will add to our revenue, according to the agreement. However, it does mean that we will lose a major space that has housed our Hispanic Ministry and Youth Group over the years. Going forward will mean that we will have to be creative with our space and understanding of our limitations.

One major development that we are currently working on to assist our Hispanic Ministry is the purchase of a building on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, that would function as an annex to our parish campus and will allow us to support the many activities of our very engaged Hispanic community. It also is a way for our parish to show solidarity with our immigrant brothers and sisters who many times are unable to provide for themselves, just like the Church did for our ancestors in faith here in Chattanooga when the Irish immigrants were poor and without many resources. The one caveat is that, in order to obtain this space, the parish will have to incur debt, something that has been very foreign to us as a parish for as long as I am aware. We believe that this debt is manageable and should not in any way impact the financial security of our parish in the future.

Beyond the physical infrastructure of the parish, one major area that has surfaced in my mind is that of the human infrastructure of the parish. In my years working with our Hispanic Ministry, I have been very impressed and edified by their organization, participation, commitment, and leadership. I see in them something that I would like to translate into our English-speaking community as a whole. This means building *culture*. But building culture is something that the Catholic Church does very well. At its root, culture comes from *cultus*, meaning, “to worship”. I have noticed hints of true authentic culture in the Latin Mass community, especially in the desire for fellowship and being together and working for one another, a sense of true family and camaraderie, and watching out for each other. I think it stems from the common culture that is expressed in the Latin Mass, binding people together, which is what our faith is supposed to do. However, I have noticed in the broader strokes of our English speaking community that we are running into a problem that is not unique to our parish: namely, the disintegration of Western culture; and the lack of focus due to many competing priorities in the lives of our parishioners. Indicators of this disintegration of community are found in the fact that we have had to cancel some events this past year that used to be treasured in our parish, such as the Seder Meal, due to a lack of volunteers, leaders, and other commitments.

Many people are overcommitted already in their various extra-parochial activities, with the result being that Church and parish community oftentimes take a back seat. We also have the phenomenon of fewer and fewer people taking on more and more responsibility, and the great plague of burnout is looming over many. Addressing this problem will be a critical part of our progress in the future. We have begun some initiative to alleviate it, in particular our Volunteer Resource List, and it is my hope that the Stewardship Committee will be able to identify potential leaders within our community. However, I also think that the Hispanic Community can give us a hint of “the way to do it”. They offer many opportunities for leadership development through retreats and specific programs for developing leaders in their community. This will be

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difficult to translate into our English speaking American culture that is very individualistic and, ironically, overcommitted. In the future I hope to offer retreats and/or day-long leadership formation sessions to activate members of our community to take on leadership in building Catholic culture here in our parish.

One thing that I have identified as an issue in this whole transformation is the need to break out of the consumerist model of religion, and move into a participatory/family model instead. Many times I see people approaching religion as a product and a service, rather than a way of life and a belonging. There is a reason for this. We all live in a culture dominated by individualism and affluence. With the means at our disposal, we are able to buy and pay for services to even the most basic things of life, like child care, education, sanitation, and even food being cooked for us at restaurants and events. But one can't buy community. Jesus asks us to look at the poor as a model of Christian living: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." I see in the Hispanic community a great model for us of a participatory culture in which the basic things, like scrubbing toilets, cooking food, and taking the trash out are seen as part of an event that the parish community participates in, rather than a service to be outsourced and paid for, merely by writing a check. To highlight this, one of the ministries in the Hispanic community focuses on cleaning the bathrooms after Mass. This should give us pause in the English speaking community. Can we imagine ourselves doing that, instead of just paying for janitorial services like we are used to? But every family knows what it is like to clean the bathroom. And that's what I mean by changing from a consumerist mentality to a family model of religion. We need to take ownership of all aspects of parish life, even cleaning the bathroom.

At this point I turn toward some important themes that I have discerned in this coming year. We are living at a time of great crisis, where there are many confusing and difficult things happening in our society and in our church. Many people have come to me, expressing their concerns and worries, which, many times, I share. How am I, as a pastor, to answer and respond? The Lord Himself has provided a way of understanding it. It comes by way of a Cardinal of the Church, Robert Cardinal Sarah. In the introduction to his book, *The Day Is Now Far Spent*, he laid out a simple proposal that I would like to emphasize during these troubled times. He says, "Christians are trembling, wavering, doubting. I want this book to be for them. To tell them: do not doubt! **Hold fast to doctrine! Hold fast to prayer!**"

Doctrine and prayer are great foundations to see us through any age, especially the present. I think that clear **doctrine** can alleviate much of the stress that people are feeling these days, and so I commit myself to preaching and teaching the established and firm dogmas and doctrines of the Catholic faith as a light in the darkness to lead and guide us over the troubled waters of modern society.

But doctrine is only half of the equation. The other must be the first and primary response to any crisis: **prayer**. We must emphasize the primacy of the spiritual. Our life of prayer as a community, but especially as individuals, must be fed, nurtured, and nourished, so that God can accomplish His purpose in us. One of the greatest ills of our own day is the resurgence of the pelagian heresy, expressed in the emphasis in activism and *doing*, over and above *being* and *relationship*, exemplified by a community of prayer. There are many places where you can find outlets for social action. But the Church is unique in being a place focused on prayer and the development of the spiritual life. Without the spiritual life, activism falls flat, and in the end, proves itself empty and meaningless.

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 their 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. I want to be the first one to exemplify this, and so I have taken the bold initiative of asking for a

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sabbatical from my priestly service. I was ordained in 2004 as a deacon, and in 2005 as a priest. Since my ordination, I have been working in the Kingdom, but after fifteen years of ministry, I felt it was imperative that I take our Lord's example to go off into the desert and pray. Literally. I will be going to the Monastery of Christ in the Desert in Abiquiu, New Mexico. For two months, beginning right after Christmas. There I will live the monastic life of interiority, focusing on the interior apostolate of my soul, so as to come back better equipped for the next fifteen years of active priestly ministry. I know that my time away will cause complications in the life of the parish, but I entrust Fr. Colin Blatchford, the Parochial Vicar of the parish, with the responsibility of leading the many communities that meet under one roof here at Sts. Peter and Paul. I know with God's grace he will shepherd the community rightly.

I am forever grateful for the many people who make parish life happen. In the whole history of the Church, the laity have always been an essential part of the life of any parish. The priest stands in the person of Christ the Head - *in persona Christi capitis*. But what is a head without hands and feet, and heart and lungs? And so I want to express my gratitude for the hearts and lungs and hands and feet and all the members of the Body of Christ, without which we would not be able to be a parish of actively, engaged, invested, and committed followers of Jesus Christ, living the fullness of the Catholic faith.

Humbly Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rev. J. David Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL  
Pastor and Rector