

From the Pastor—December 24, 2017

Family Plans My sister recently spoke to a woman who has two brothers who are both priests. Their sister told Mary that their family basically cannot hope that her priest-brothers will be able to join their family each Christmas. I have encountered the same situation, depending on what day of the week that Christmas falls. With my dad's hip fracture and recovery, I made clear to my family that I wanted the rest of them to join with Dad at the Good Samaritan for Christmas noon dinner, without me. And I am ok with that. I know that I will need to recuperate after back-to-back Holy Days, and that this time of quiet and rest will be quite beneficial for me. I am planning on going home a few days later during Christmas week. Mary said that we may try to get together for New Year's instead, which we have done in some years.

December 19 and 20 I observed a couple of meaningful days last week. December 19th was the six-month anniversary of my coming to you here at St. Mary's and St. Joseph's. Thank you for the kindnesses you continue to show! And December 20th was a historic day for me in 1989. I was finishing the fall semester of my junior year at UN-L. My heart was racing that day as I went to the Newman Center to talk to a priest. I knew that I had some areas of my life that needed God's help, and the dear Newman priest gave me his time and wisdom in a way that I remember to this day. That day was really the beginning of my growth in faith to the point of hearing and responding to the call from God to go to the seminary.

Train Horn My Husker heart has had a surge in school spirit in the recent weeks. The Husker volleyballers did so well in their run to the national championship. Wasn't that Penn State match an amazing competition? Several of my brother priests, and my bio brother, were at the Sprint Arena in KC in person...I am not too jealous! And the Husker football team has been grabbing headlines and momentum almost daily from the hiring of Wood River native, Scott Frost. These occurrences have made me notice the train whistle in Aurora in a special way. Is it just me, or does the train-whistle sound the perfect pitch for the opening trombones of the Husker fight song? Call me Husker-crazy, but this is seriously something that has caught my ear on a number of occasions recently. ☺

Welcome! Christmas is complex to plan for in terms of the number of people who will be in the congregation. Many families go elsewhere to be with other members of their family, and so they are not here at St. Mary's and St. Joseph's. Conversely, those of you parish members who are your family's gathering place will bring in people to our Christmas Masses who are usually at their own home parishes throughout the year. Whatever your situation, we welcome you with great joy to our parish communities here in Aurora and Giltner! I also have a close place in my heart for our college kids who return home for Christmas. These students so often live a life sort of "in between" two different lives. They are closely connected to their moms and dads but they are also etching out friends and relationships that are leading them to form their own personal Christmas traditions. So, I welcome all of you in-between'ers! I felt like you do, especially during my five years in the seminary

when neither my Mom and Dad's house, nor my seminary dorm room, really felt like home. Please know that our parishes of St. Mary's and St. Joseph's are always your home, no matter where your life may be leading you in the future.

Christmas Cards I don't send too many Christmas cards, but I did this week send four cards to Europe! Last summer, 2016, I went to Poland for World Youth Day. For almost a week, I and three other priests stayed with a Polish family. I mailed Antoni and Stanistawa my Christmas and New Year's greetings. The other three cards are heading for a destination in the Czech Republic. My family on my mother's side hails from the Bohemia section of Czechland. Mom and I visited these family members in 2008 in a trip of a lifetime. We were the first ones to go back and see where my great-grandpa had come from in 1901! And so, I sent those family members and new friends from the tiny village a Christmas card greeting, too. I could have e-mailed them, but overseas postage is actually reasonable (\$1.15 per envelope). And for them in Europe, and for us here too, it is pretty cool to have actual mail that you can open and touch and read. If they respond back to me, I will try to let you know!

St. Mary's Building Fund Last weekend, I gave an announcement from the pulpit about our current status of the building project at St. Mary's. Our beautiful add-on and re-design was dedicated by the Bishop in 2014. Here is what I said from the pulpit: "I want to give an update on our St. Mary's Building Project. This is as I understand it, based on the numbers I have studied in the six months since I arrived. The Entire Project came in at an expense of around \$1.4 million. Out of that total, \$131,000 remains to be paid in the form of a low-interest loan to the Diocese. So we owe less than 10% of the original total, which is great! In terms of your pledging to the campaign, \$703,000 was pledged by parishioners of which \$690,000 has been paid in. This is over 90% redemption of all pledges, which is great! The loan to the diocese comes with an interest expense of \$2,500-3,000/month. Now, as I understand it (and I can be corrected), the primary method of paying the debt right now is through general Sunday collections, since over 90% of the original pledges have been redeemed. This means that your generous regular offerings on the weekends are covering our current operational expenses as well paying off our debt and its interest expense. It could be that someone who feels especially grateful for the beautiful enhancement to our parish buildings may want to pay something additional to what was originally pledged. Or, there may among us parishioners who couldn't pledge back at the beginning but feel that they can give now. Or, you may be like me and be new in our community since the Building Project and you want to give a donation as your great witness to the glory we can give God through our updated facility. I am prayerfully considering what I wish to give toward this project pay-down because I am so grateful to you all for planning it and building it."

God Bless You!
Father Grell