

From the Pastor—May 30, 2021

My Memory Lane (2017 - present) I have taken you, dear reader, on a trip down memory lane. Last week's bulletin spoke of my serving as pastor of Plattsmouth, Church of the Holy Spirit and St. John the Baptist School. This week's note will highlight the years with you, my current flock, who are dear to me. *** The Bishop called me to appoint me to you at St. Mary, Aurora, and St. Joseph, Giltner, while I was driving between Lincoln and Plattsmouth. I was so surprised. Bishop said, "Don't go off the road!" He said that he was appointing me as pastor of Aurora and Giltner. His Excellency explained that Father Dhanrej Marneni was heading back to India, as per the arrangement between his bishop and ours. We as priests promise respect and obedience to our bishop on the day of ordination, so we never quite know for sure where we will serve next. So when the bishop looks at the needs of the entire diocese, from a broad, universal perspective, we priests must obediently and humbly follow what the path is as laid out for us. It is truly a pilgrimage in this regard. While for all of us, our lives for the vast majority of time are normal and very pedestrian, we all have had in our lives many twists and turns come upon us over which we have no control. NONE of my assignments from the Bishop these 25 years have been where I expected to go; they have each and every one surprised me. *** I rolled into Aurora on June 19, 2017, and was met by a group of people willing to help carry a U-Haul truck of my stuff into the rectory. A couple of other people from Plattsmouth had driven my car while I drove the truck. Father Marneni and a few of his priest-friends from India were here when I arrived. Father was very moving to me in his demeanor; I sensed the special nature of his relationship with you, and that he was at the same time happy to be heading home. My first week here was immediately, I think, that very day, the week for Totus Tuus; this was a great introduction into the youth and young families of our parishes. The families, also, who hosted us for dinner during Totus Tuus were a great way to get me into people's homes and feel welcomed. *** After only several months, you all experienced with me the sudden illness and death of my sister's husband. Oh my, that was a difficult time! I remember many details of that span of time, as I drove back and forth to Lincoln to be with my family and you all kept things going here in the parishes. I remember a Rosary offered by the CCD students for Bob, my brother-in-law. So many of you lifted up Bob and our family in prayer. I thank you now as I did then. *** Our family, my sister and 14-year-old nephew especially, was still reeling when my father suffered a fall on our family farm a month after Bob's death, on Dad's exact 90th birthday. I happened to be home at the time, and I wasn't very far away when the fall occurred. You go through the thoughts of "if I would have just been there to help him, it wouldn't have happened." Dad had surgery a couple days later to repair his broken hip, where they set a pin to re-connect what had broken. The rehab period was difficult, seeing Dad suffer physical pain, and the emotional pain involved with his dementia not allowing him to understand what was exactly going on. Again, you all helped our family persevere through a difficult Thanksgiving and Christmas of 2017. I feel in many ways that these parishes did not see the best "me" that I had to offer. Yet, as a priest helps his people through dark times, you understood my dark times and helped me. Thank you. *** I learned a lot about this area these past years. I have enjoyed getting to know the other towns in the parish boundaries: Hampton, Phillips, Marquette, Murphy, with some interaction with Hordville,

Stockham, and Henderson over these years. *** Understanding the unique placement of these parishes has been a great learning experience. Aurora is only 20 miles from the Archdiocese of Omaha (Central City) and only 20 miles from Grand Island Diocese. Our close placement to these other dioceses and their bishops has given, and continues to give, our parishes a diverse and fruitful experience on our faith journeys. Giltner, while not placed so close to the Archdiocese, has its own unique interactions with the Grand Island Diocese and the Hastings/Doniphan/Trumbull/Harvard areas. *** I have been impressed with your faith. I am pleased to have shared faith with you and learned from you. *** Several converts to the Catholic faith have happened under my watch. Several marriage preps have given me an opportunity for close relationships to form with new married couples. *** Sadness has at times struck our communities, as part of the twists and turns mentioned above. We have prayed our way through it all. *** Please continue to care for the beautiful farm and pastureland around here. The Platte River so nearby provides many an opportunity to be close to nature. Many in our parishes are in the fields of education, health care, law enforcement, and other service careers. If our parishes had to write a resume of themselves, many honorific and beautiful qualities would fill the pages. *** I may voice this again in the coming days, but I feel as if my first 25 years of priesthood have prepared me well for my next 25. Pray God, I can remain healthy and able to serve the Church in active ministry. Right now, the thought of retirement, which priests can begin around age 75, does not really cross my mind. I enjoy doing what I do, so I guess that's a good thing! *** My next chapter of the priesthood continues in southern Gage County at the parishes in Wymore, Odell, and Barneston. From afar, remember me and all priests who have served here in your prayers. We, I, truly love you good folks here and want you to know the wonderful way that we acknowledge your support for your priests as we all strive to promote the kingdom of God in our Hamilton County parishes.

My Actual Anniversary Day I was tremendously blessed to offer Holy Mass in my Dad's room at the Good Samaritan Home in Beatrice, with Mother sitting beside him. This private Mass on May 25 was beautiful to me. A special Mass can be celebrated by a priest on the day of his anniversary, and this is what I celebrated. I was also blessed to stop by St. Joseph Church in Beatrice, where I was baptized, and to pray there where my Christian journey began. I put a note on my personal Facebook page and received many well-wishes.

Priest Mother's funeral Father John Birkel's mother passed away recently. I attended the funeral for 89-year-old Evelyn Birkel at St. Mary, David City, last week.

Will My nephew, Will Huggenberger, graduated from Pius last Sunday. It was great to see him walk across the stage at Pinnacle Bank Arena and receive his diploma from Bishop Conley. High school was tough for him, so our family is very grateful.

God Bless You!!!

Father Grell