

Dear Parishioners of Saint Mary's:

As many of you may have already heard, after 16 years of serving as the pastor of Saint Mary's parish, I have received a new assignment. Effective June 14, your new pastor will be Father Joseph Walsh.

I wish to take this opportunity to express to you the gratitude I hold in my heart that God has allowed me to share these last 16 years with you. It has been a privilege celebrating the liturgies with you, providing absolution in the confessional to you, and working beside you. I have had the honor and sad duty of burying patriarchs and matriarchs of the parish that it was once impossible to imagine Saint Mary's Parish being without; I have gotten to officiate at dozens of weddings, including of former students from our elementary school; and there are a few families whom I have had the unique joy of celebrating your weddings, baptizing your children, and even giving them their first communion. I've watched families grow and take over entire pews; I've watched families shrink as the children left the nest. You've been the ones I've spent my Christmases and Easters with, and I could not imagine being anywhere else; you've been my friends and my family. I could have asked for none better.

As would be the case with any pastor, I know I haven't been everybody's "cup of tea." If any parishioners who have distanced themselves from Saint Mary's are reading this, I hope you take this "changing of the guard" as an invitation to come back. To those of you whom I have let down through either my actions or inactions, I hope you will forgive me for my failings in serving you. If ever I was not attentive enough, kind enough, or understanding enough, please know that my faults were from my own personal weaknesses, and not from any malice towards anyone here.

As I leave Saint Mary's, I'm trying to focus not on the time I won't now be having with you, and more on the wonderful time that I had. These 16 years could have been spent anywhere. I was blessed that I got to spend them with all of you here at Saint Mary's.

Don't be expecting any big farewells. It will be difficult enough for me to walk out the doors at the end of that last Mass. I decided I would not torture myself by trying to choke out some final words of good-bye, either during the homily or at the end of Mass. Instead, I'm just going to enjoy to the fullest that which has given me the greatest joy and energized me the most during my years here: celebrating the Sunday liturgy with you. Saint Mary's already had a special place in my heart, being the parish where I first learned the faith and entered the church. Now it will be forever my longest assignment as a priest (I only have 15 years left until retirement, so I shouldn't top my 16 years here). And it will not be the beautiful stained glass windows or those obtrusive pillars that will come to mind: it will be the people, all of you, that really made it so special.

Thank you for these years. May God bless all of you abundantly in the years and decades to come.

Fr. Douglas Dietrich

MORE FROM FATHER DIETRICH:

THANK YOU to Saint Mary's Altar Society and Knights of Columbus Council for the wonderful celebration you provided for my Silver Jubilee. It was a fantastic gathering, not only acknowledging my 25 years as a priest, but having the parish come together, rejoicing in the priesthood itself and the Mass, and spending time together as a parish family. Special thanks to Bernice Polivka, Ron Grose, and Father Steve Cooney for their (too kind?) words, to Anne Schmidt for MC'ing, to Barb Janssen, Sally Williamsen, and Bill and Margaret Scheideler, who put in many hours getting things set up, and for all those who provided and prepared food. And thank you to all the choir members, past and present, for showing up to provide such beautiful music during the Mass (it felt just like old times). It was a great evening for me, and I believe as well for the parish, as we emerge from a year of "pandemic-mode." Another special moment from Saint Mary's for me to file away in my "memory bank."

Speaking of thank you's...thank you for the many cards and expressions of appreciation offered that night. I intent to get acknowledgments out for all the gifts but probably not until I get settled in at Cortland. The sand is flying pretty quickly through the hourglass right now for me.

And finally:

Father Dietrich's "Rules for Leaving"

1. When I leave, I leave.

The first year is an important time for a new pastor: he has names to learn, routines to familiarize himself with. Having the previous pastor return for weddings, funerals, and parish events impedes the new pastor from forming bonds with his flock and sharing in important moments in their lives. My policy: stay away for the first year. Know that if I'm made aware of weddings and funerals at Saint Mary's, you will be in my personal prayers that day, and that your health and personal concerns will continue to be held in prayer as well. But as far as coming back ... it is best that I be with you only in spirit for a while.

2. It is okay to call and visit, but...

Even if I don't come back to Saint Mary's, it's okay to stay in touch. My only requirement: if we meet up, it has to commensurate with your time spent with your new pastor. Dinner with me would be great; but take Father Walsh out to dinner first.

3. Be as welcoming as you can to your new pastor.

Remember that you're adjusting to one new guy; he's adjusting to a new environment and to all new people. You are very blessed in getting Father Joseph Walsh as a pastor; enjoy your years with him as much as you can, and from the very start.