

## Pastor's Pen:

### My Pastoral Goals for the New Liturgical Year

With the first Sunday of Advent, a new liturgical year begins. This new liturgical year begins as we must weigh several changes in the diocese which will affect us. We will have to do this while pandemic rages. By this time next year, we at SS Peter and Paul and St. Joseph will be under a new stewardship model and re-aligned with other parishes. More will be asked for in terms of personnel, time, energy, and resources. My goals, though, transcend these issues. This parish, as is the Church as a whole, is first and foremost about the salvation of souls. This will always be my first priority.

As a pastor, I am well aware that the word 'pastor' comes from the Latin word for shepherd. As a shepherd, I am aware that the flock entrusted to me does not belong to me; you belong first to Christ. My task is to shepherd the flock as Jesus the Good Shepherd guides His flock. It is not my job to deviate at all from the Good Shepherd. To try to do so would be tantamount to me trying to steal sheep from Christ's flock. My goals are in union with the threefold role of the Good Shepherd: to feed, protect, and guide. One way or another, I will have to hand off the care of this flock to another eventually, so I wish to make good use of the time I have to effectively shepherd while that time is still here to be had.

**FEED:** My first priority is always going to be getting all of my flock to Mass every weekend. This is a daunting task under the specter of a pandemic. Yet, it will always be my primary goal. Why? Because Jesus says Himself, "If you do not eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life within you." (John 6) and I want you to have the life of Christ in you now and for eternity. Because Jesus Christ IS truly and really present in the Eucharist, you are offered something greater in it than anything else the world can possibly offer. I realize that 50+ years of poor catechesis have greatly diminished both this core belief and practice of this belief.

I am convinced this is the major culprit behind every single issue and scandal within the Church and why parishes are merging, re-aligning, and closing. I believe that this is why we have nowhere near the amount of priests we need. I will continue to pester, cajole, beg, and plead with each member of my parish to get to Mass, especially when the dispensation is lifted. I want you to have the life of Christ in you. You need it. To this end, I will continue to be sure that the catechetical materials we offer are of the greatest orthodoxy and quality.

**PROTECT:** The Good Shepherd stands in the breach between His flock and that which would prey of His flock. If I am to effectively pastor, then I must be right next to Him in that breach. This means every day I pray for you and your good. I do this through Mass, the Divine Office, my devotional prayer life, and the time I take to pray for the particular things my parishioners are up against. In it, I ask for God's will to be made known and followed.

I do this because I believe in the concept of spiritual warfare. I believe that were the devil to have his way, he would snatch every single one of you into hell. I believe he sows confusion, despair, grudges, ignorance, and anything else of use to separate us from God and one another. Hence, in the interest of

protecting, I make a commitment to teach the truth and only the truth of the Gospel and its call to repentance and union under Jesus Christ. I pay attention to what programs and books we use for our various education endeavors. I do this knowing that people might well get mad at me. Better you get mad at me and have a change of heart than I say whatever people want to hear and leave us all open to the deceits of the devil. I can only do this through union with Christ; hence His Gospel is the only one preached. His Gospel is the only one that can afford us the protection we need.

**GUIDE:** A shepherd has the task of guiding his flock where they will find safety and abundant food. A careful shepherd makes sure his entire flock is with him. As with protection, the only place worth guiding a flock that already belongs to Christ is that place where Christ is. Hence my guidance will always have the sacramental life of the Church as part of the core, a call to selfless service and stewardship, and a focus on the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (aka evangelization). I do not feel the freedom to deviate from this core in the slightest. My guidance can have only one true end: the Kingdom of Heaven.

This will be why I beg you to go to Mass and Confession day in and day out. This is why I will plead with you to find some way in which to engage this parish, this community, and our faith through the stewardship of time, energy, and resources. This is why I will continue to provoke you to dig deeper into the faith, to learn more of what we believe as opposed to what I believe. This is why I will not cease to look for and nurture priestly and religious vocations. This is why I will use every opportunity to call people back to the faith. I want you and your family forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. I will do what it takes, even if it is initially hated, to point in the correct direction.

**SHARED RESPONSIBILITY:** As a pastor, I cannot do any of this on my own. I simply lack the ability. Our bishop has pushed the idea of co-responsibility of the clergy and the laity. This prevents a cult of personality forming in which parishes rise and fall based on the personality of the pastor. This gives a consistent message and helps build up a parish to what God calls it to be. My pastorate of this parish will eventually end. I am never certain when, only that it will end. Pastors come and go; in the end, the parish is yours. It rises and falls, succeeds and fails, produces a harvest or goes fallow over the years based on the investment of time, energy, and resources given it. In saying the parish is yours, I say it with the caveat that it belongs to Jesus Christ first...and no more than it would be appropriate for me to lead the flock away from Christ is it appropriate for anyone to do so.

As we enter into the dual changes of a new stewardship program and a re-alignment of our parish's assignment partner, it will require a shift in thought and a break with a status quo which has clearly not served us well. Over the remainder of my pastorate my message will be clear: We cannot change the past; we can only change the present and hence change the trajectory of the future. The positive and hopeful future we aim for addresses stewardship, evangelization, and vocations. My end goal is that long after my pastorate is done and my time in this life is done, that the choices and priorities we set now will bear an abundant harvest in which the priest shortage and all other things that have forced us into the present moment may be nothing more than memories well in the past. Here is to a bright and hopeful future.