

A letter to our OLL Parish family & friends

March 16th, 2018

Putting into words the thoughts I now carry on my heart seems beyond impossible. How can you translate such tremendous gratitude, combined with an awareness of genuine loss, comforted by a trust in God's Provident care? There is no way, and words can only fail. I was first assigned to Our Lady of Lourdes for what was supposed to be a 6-month period, assisting Fr Basil as Fr Frank returned from the hospital, and discerning my path ahead towards the Archdiocese. I was welcomed with such an overwhelming embrace by the entire parish and by the Slidell Community—an embrace which has left an indelible impression on my heart! Thank you for that unforgettable gift.

Now, more than three full years later (this will be my 4th Easter at OLL !!), you have become my family, many of you my close friends, and not a few of you an inspiration for me. Listing by name those who have touched me would take longer than even my longest homily (which, just for the record, remained under 20 minutes...). I am ever grateful to Fr Frank and Fr Basil, who welcomed me into their home and mentored me during my first few months of parish life. Fr Frank was like a grandfather and I will always remember our late nights in the kitchen as he shared his love for the parishioners, the altar servers, hunting, fishing, and food. Fr Paysse assumed his role as pastor, and has presided over all of us in these years characterized by transition and growth. I am and will remain deeply in debt to his fraternal kindness, his respect, and his openness towards me as a coworker and a brother priest. Even his own family has shown me warm appreciation. Our many hours working together have taught me a great deal about parish management. As I prepare to leave, I know that God is keeping this community in the dutiful hands of a tender-hearted shepherd.

I thank Marcia and the parish staff. Words again fall short here, other than to express my awe at their devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes parish. This parish has been their home, and they give their all to OLL on a daily basis. They see everything, they put-up with everything, and they give themselves in everything. In days of ups & downs in parish storms, they have remained a stable rudder to keep things moving on course.

I want to thank the school faculty & administration for allowing me to work with them in our efforts towards the Christian formation of the students and the involvement of their families. Whether interrupting classes, discussing religion, quizzing for lollipops, or celebrating "extended" liturgies, I am ever so appreciative of my time spent with those men & women, and the students of OLL. I thank those who worked in campus ministry. I am grateful to our altar servers and student lectors—you are an honor to this school! I saw the footprint of the Holy Spirit as I observed and learned from our teachers' devotion to our children and grandchildren -- in the good times and in the challenges of our OLL students or their families. The school has been for me a daily source of joy and appreciation every time I was blessed to walk on that campus.

I particularly want to reach out and apologize to anyone whom I may have offended during my time here. There were those who benefitted less from my counsel. There were times when my zeal for the needs of the many inadvertently led me to neglect the needs of the one; and I humbly ask your forgiveness for those hurtful memories I may have caused. Thank you...for your patience with me.

Lastly, for those whom I cannot name. There are a number of individuals and families, volunteers and close friends young and old at OLL, who have so affirmed me as a person and as a priest. I was allowed to see God's face through your lives, in your greatest joys or in your deepest sorrows. Whether at weddings, baptisms, or funerals; whether volunteering alongside you in a particular ministry; whether being simply in your presence in my office, around your dining room table, or at your hospital bed, you were a companion and an inspiration to me. I have been greatly blessed to share in your journey, and deeply touched by your friendship.

To all of you, to whom I have been privileged to minister during my brief years at Our Lady of Lourdes parish in Slidell, I humbly express my most profound gratitude. I pray that you will remain engaged in the daily fight that God is waging for you, driven as He is by the love He has for your soul and for your loved ones. Get to know the Truth that has been revealed for you. Own it, defend it, and transmit it to those entrusted to you. Nurtured by the Spirit through prayer and the Sacraments, may you come to better appreciate your own glory and mission, most truly reflected in that gaze of Truth Himself as He delights in you. Embracing your weaknesses and your smallness, may you discover that Hidden Strength—that intimate Friend whose devotion to you and to me surpasses all of our failures and the shame of our sins. Thank you again for everything you have given to this grateful priest. May God bless you, and may his Blessed Mother gently lift you ever closer to her Son.

Your friend in Christ,