



Holy Family Parish

AGE-OLD HOPE, FRESH NEW TONE

Pope Francis and the emerging Holy Family Parish

Shortly after the election of Pope Francis, one of the attendant tasks for Catholic institutions around the world was to replace portraits of his predecessor in various church and office spaces.

At the newly-forming Holy Family Parish, we decided not to simply order stock portraits from an outside vendor, but to do something more homespun. We asked a former daily Mass participant, a graduate art student in New York, to create his own portrayal of the new Pope, and the original and copies now hang throughout Holy Family Parish.

However, as the papacy of Pope Francis has unfolded over the last several months, an energizing possibility has emerged: how can we make a much more substantive application of his leadership? With the publication of the pope's remarkable interview to worldwide Jesuit publications Sept. 19, we sense the makings of a pastoral vision that we desire to emulate. Within and outside the Catholic Church, people are buoyed and rejuvenated by Pope Francis. The hope he has generated is something we can strive to make real in our particular circumstances in New Brunswick.

And with less than three months to go before the consolidation of Sacred Heart, St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus parishes becomes operational in Holy Family Parish, it is also timely to share some of the directions and hopes we have for our new community, both for our current parishioners and for those who may wish to join us.

After prayer, reflection and discussion with the parish pastoral team, three interweaving themes to which Pope Francis has given expression emerged as central to Holy Family Parish.

1. "The home of all" – Hospitality

In his September interview, Pope Francis said, "The church with which we should be thinking is the home of all, not a small chapel that can hold only a small group of people...I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess."

Over the decades, and in their own ways, Sacred Heart, St. Joseph and St. Ladislaus parishes have served as important points of welcome, often first ports of call to arriving immigrants from around the world. Now, as then, we want to meet parishioners where they are at, addressing the person as person, welcoming and deepening cultural ties, and truly being a servant church.

We want to be known as a community that not only opens the front door, but accompanies parishioners through the many doors of hope and suffering in their lives. We want to be seen as a community that accepts invitations as much as we make them. Our leaders will aspire to be good neighbors in our respective neighborhoods, and to make home visits as much as to make the church a home for all.

Pope Francis' image of a church that is mother and shepherdess inspires us to insure that compassion and nurturance guide our hospitality and our pilgrimage together. We want to be a

community where individual gifts are recognized and can flourish, in service of the Body of Christ.

We don't want to be a community that simply takes care of its own. As Pope Francis said, "Let us also try to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent." At this time, and in this spirit, we want to especially commit ourselves to new initiatives in inviting African-Americans, young adult Latinos, gang members, and those burdened by substance abuse. These are underserved groups on the margins of our parish and neighborhood, and now is the time to make an extra extension of ourselves in welcoming them.

Of course, we also are deeply committed to furthering the welcome of aspiring citizens in our parish, by our advocacy for comprehensive immigration reform along the lines marked out by Catholic social teaching.

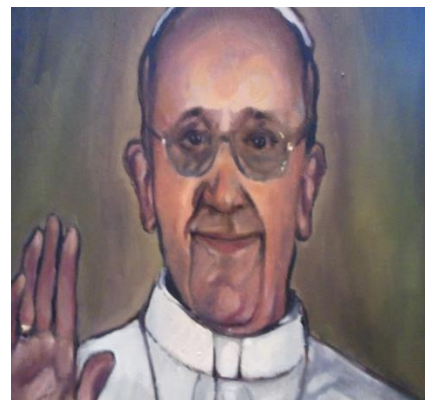
We know that hospitality doesn't just happen. Every Sunday, challenging and awakening homilies, good music and an open spirit need to inform our liturgies. In pastoral settings, a warm reception and kind words need to mark all our interactions. We all have to have the will and the want to be hospitable. In the long run, though, little by little, we can really build that "home of all."

2. "I am a sinner" – Humility

In his interview to Jesuit magazines, Pope Francis described himself as a "sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner...but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We feel that a humble community, a simple community, will offer an important and attractive counterbalance to many aspects of American – and New Jersey -- culture. We want to be a parish that carries itself lightly, blessedly free of the self-regard and self-promotion that characterizes too much of our society. Our boast can only be our trust in God's care, the only source of power and promise of this new parish.

The consolidation process in New Brunswick has been particularly difficult for some, who have attempted to retain the status quo, and have done so with vitriol and pride. The time for that is long over. "We must walk united with our own differences," said the pope. "There is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus."



As Pope Francis said more recently, on October 1, "When the people see this witness of humility, of meekness, of mildness, they feel the need that the Prophet Zechariah spoke of: 'We want to come with you.'"

In practice, we can demonstrate humility in varied ways. With our parish still in transition, there will still be differences and missteps. But we can assist by not placing ourselves above others, or feeling that our ministerial roles are indispensable. We can watch how many times we reference only ourselves or our parish of origin, a “me-first” attitude. Showing gratitude and kindness are always welcome indicators of a humble soul.

3. “A field hospital after battle” – Service in defense of life

“The thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle.”

Even without this encouragement from the pope, as the emerging Holy Family Parish, we have never seen ourselves as anything other than a field hospital. To relinquish the challenges of our fragile, low-income urban neighborhood would be a kind of betrayal of our Christian vocation.

Our discipleship in Christ and the treasure of Catholic social teaching fortify us as we seek to meet people’s needs, break the cycle of poverty and improve the life of our community. We can be salt and light to others by our service. The parishioners of Holy Family Church recognize the face of the Lord in every person and we believe in the incomparable value of all human life. We honor and protect the dignity of every human being from conception, through temporality on earth and until natural death. We live God's commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves by recognizing our responsibility for the lives of others.

We demonstrate our commitment to human life through unbiased service which includes personal witness, works of charity to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of others, and the generous gift of self to those in need. In addition, we engage in social and political activities that seek to reform people, institutions, laws and practices that disrespect life, cause death and suffering, and commodify life for technological and reproductive purposes.

As Holy Family takes shape, so too will the roles of two newly-created positions: a parish-based case manager and a city-wide community organizer. For sure, we will continue to take our lead from our partnership with the three official U.S. Catholic agencies most dedicated to charity and justice: Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul will continue to occupy a place of importance and vitality within the parish.

Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming a passage from the prophet Isaiah that linked him to a mission of bringing good news, liberty and freedom (Lk 4:16-21). As we embark on this new parish, we too want to measure ourselves by how we welcome and serve others, and how humbly and kindly we can do so. May God who has begun the good work in each of us bring it to fulfillment.

In Peace and Solidarity,

Msgr. Joseph J. Kerrigan

4 October 2013

Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, patron of Pope Francis