

WELCOME! A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

Dear friends in Christ,

"Peace be with you." It is with those words of Jesus from the Gospel of St. John, spoken on the evening of the first day of His resurrection, that I greet you, my friends. With great joy and thanksgiving to Almighty God, I am overjoyed to be your new pastor at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church. I am truly humbled to be in the midst of a historic and dynamic parish with such faith-filled people, and I look forward to serving you with a loving heart.

As I write this, I am knee-deep in boxes as I pack my things to move to the parish. And, as you read this, some 10 days later, it occurs to me that I will still be knee-deep in those boxes as I unpack! The process of moving is not a task that one generally looks forward to, except when the destination is a place where you are meant to be. I truly feel that it is Christ who has led me to you (with an assist to the Holy Spirit and Cardinal DiNardo, who made the appointment before his retirement!) at this time. There is no other place I'd rather be serving as a priest here at SVdP.

I've already received a few cards, emails, notes and calls welcoming me to the parish, and I thank you for that. The staff has been most helpful and welcoming and I look forward to working with them to serve you. Please introduce yourself to me after Mass in the coming weeks. I promise to do my best to learn your names, but please do not be offended if I ask you more than once who you are. There are a lot of you and just one of me! But I'll get it down, I promise. I look forward to visiting with the various councils and all the leadership groups, ministries, and apostolates in the coming months. I want to learn about it all.

A brief background about myself: I'm a native Houstonian and was baptized at Mount Carmel Church on the southeast end of town. I'm the youngest of five children of Frank and Erla Horrigan, both now deceased. I grew up in St. Luke the Evangelist parish, and attended J. Frank Dobie High School, and graduated from the University of Houston in 1988 with a degree in Journalism. I worked as a newspaper reporter and editor for, among others, the Dallas Morning News, U.S. News and World Report, Los Angeles Times, The Trentonian (N.J.), and the Corpus Christi Caller-Times, before discerning God's call to enter the seminary.

Following a year of post-graduate studies in Philosophy at the University of Dallas and Holy Trinity Seminary, I attended the University of St. Thomas and St. Mary's Seminary in Houston for my master's in Sacred Theology and was ordained a priest in 1998. My first assignment was for four years at St. Michael Church in the Galleria area, where I met a few of you who are now parishioners here at SVdP, followed by two years at St. John Vianney Church in west Houston.

On July 1, 2004, I was named pastor of Christ the Redeemer Church in northwest Houston (Cypress), and that has been my home for the past 21 years, to the day. CtR is one of the largest parishes in Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston with nearly 8,000 families (it was 3,200 families when I arrived), and my years there were filled with much joy. The people and the parish truly made me the man and the priest that I am today and I am forever grateful. I have a great love for Catholic education and founded CtR Catholic School during my time there, and it has grown to be a National Blue Ribbon School (like SVdP!).

I've served in various roles and ministries in the Archdiocese including the Presbyteral Council, Diocesan Savings and Loan Committee, Dean of the Northwest Deanery, and the Ongoing Formation of Priests Committee. I've also done consulting work with Catholic Leadership Institute in Philadelphia and presented management and pastoral leadership workshops and conferences for priests and bishops throughout the country.

But at the heart of it all, I'm a parish priest, born and raised in the bayou waters (literally, my childhood home flooded six times) of Houston. It's an honor to be at SVdP and to follow in the footsteps of so many wonderful priests who have served here over the years. Msgr. James Jamail was one of the first to welcome me to the priesthood when I was ordained (he was happy I was a native Houstonian serving where I grew up like himself) and we talked often when I was at St. Michael and he was here. God rest his soul. Likewise, Fr. John Weyer was my pastor at St. Luke the Evangelist while I was in high school, and I was an altar server for him at more masses than I can count. What a good and holy man he was and his impact on me was profound. (Here's a fun fact: my mother often played bridge with his mother, Rita.) Ironically, the only two masses I've ever attended at SVdP before today were the funeral masses for both Msgr. Jamail and Fr. Weyer.

A final word of thanks to Msgr. Bill Young who has been so kind to me in this time of transition. Since the announcement was first made, we've spoken several times (and shared a wonderful meal together) and he has been gracious in welcoming me and getting me up to speed on a number of items in the parish. Msgr. Bill and I are long-time friends and have served on various priests' committees over the years. I have great respect and admiration for his 55 years of faith-filled service to our Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, and like you, I wish him much health and happiness in his retirement. Likewise, I'm grateful to Fr. Houston Okonma for his help the past month, and I thank him for his wise stewardship in the month between Msgr.'s retirement and my arrival. I was hoping the Archdiocese would keep him here for a bit longer as our vicar, but I know he will do great things at St. Mary's in La Porte. He will be in our prayers!

Joining us as the new parochial vicar is Fr. Hai Dao, one of the newly ordained priests of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. I'm looking forward to serving with him, and I know his youthful energy and enthusiasm for the faith will be a blessing for the parish. SVdP has a long history (and a great reputation) of helping "baby priests" learn the ropes in their first assignments, and I'm sure we will be blessed by his ministry. And, of course, I'm thankful that Fr. Aneesh Philip, our vicar, and Fr. Romanus Muoneke, who is in residence and offers sacramental assistance, will continue in their roles. It's a reunion of sorts for Fr. Romanus and myself. We lived together for two summers back in the early '90s at St. Christopher Church while I was a seminarian and he was finishing his PhD. He's a good friend and I'm happy to be under the same roof again with him.

In the coming months weeks and months, we will have the opportunity to learn much about each other. I look forward to celebrating the Church's liturgy with you, breaking open God's word in the sacred scriptures, and moving forward in mission to serve God and neighbor as the body of Christ. In the meantime, I ask for your prayers and patience. I have much to learn about SVdP and I can't wait to begin.

On this 4th of July holiday weekend, I wish you and your families much health and happiness. May God bless our country, and may God bless St. Vincent de Paul Church now and forever.

Peace, Fr. Sean