

Date: July 18, 2025
Subject: Sharing an affirmation

Dear Basilica Parishioner,

Some of the most useful tools used for discernment in the modern world are product reviews and comments sections. These often include critiques and negative impressions, which can definitely help organizations identify their weaknesses and shore up areas that need a lot of help. The same is true at the church. Sometimes when we hear from people, it is because they were motivated by some need that was unfulfilled or some lapse in service or letting us know that they were not satisfied with their experience. But every once in awhile, you get a positive review or word of affirmation that what we are doing is good. And that can be held up as a mirror for us to see how God is working through us, showing us that we are living our Vision. If you remember, we discerned a [Strategic Plan](#) back in 2018 that included a Vision statement of where we wanted to be after five years. Now we are seven years past the implementation and working through our Strategic Priorities. We just heard from a visitor to our parish who has affirmed that we in fact are reflecting to the world the **Vision** we had discerned:

The Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul will be a parish of actively engaged, invested, and committed followers of Christ living the fullness of the Catholic Faith.

Hebrews 13:2 (RSV-CE) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Our recent visitor, who is kind of like a messenger, gave us a glimpse of what our community looks like. I believe it's beautiful, and we need to affirm the beauty that was reflected back to us to encourage us to continue to live into this Vision.

*Greetings Reverend Father J. David Carter —
Pastor and Rector of the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul,*

My wife and I wish to share with you a bit of our splendid experience last Sunday (7/6/25) as we joined the 9:00 AM Mass (sung) celebration at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul. We were visiting Chattanooga for the first time in our long lives and staying at the Read House Hotel when we discovered the nearby Basilica.

By way of background, my lovely wife and I met nearly 50 years ago in Atlanta. We soon learned that among our many common interests / experiences, our belief in God and family and our commitment to our Catholic faith was of paramount importance. Soon after we joyfully married before family, friends, and God in a Catholic Church. In 1981 we relocated to L.A. (not Lower Alabama!) and have spent the last ~45 years in CA. God blessed us with five healthy, happy, and wonderful children and now eight grandchildren (and counting). After a few decades teaching in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the last 15 years in the Diocese of San Jose, my dear wife (Marylinn) has decided that being a full-time second grade teacher while being 70+ yrs old has reached the final chapter. We are now exploring areas of the USA that will locate us nearer to more of our children / grandchildren — hence a week+ traveling in and around TN including three days in Chattanooga.

As noted, the stated purpose of this email is to share our observations of the Basilica of St. Peter and Paul, especially the parishioners! To begin, the Church is absolutely beautiful. Further, on this day the Church was nearly full, a site we rarely see any more. The immediate impression we both had as Rev. Matthew Donahue processed down the center aisle towards the sanctuary/altar, was the enormous reverence expressed by nearly every soul in the Basilica. From the moment the center doors opened and continuing until Mass ended, the energy and enthusiasm of the assembled for the Mass was palpable. The reverence expressed by their attention to the Word, their body language, and even the dress of many parishioners, was exciting, motivational, and very unique in our experience.

We once calculated that we have attended Mass on more than 15,000 occasions (together and before we met) having both attended Catholic schools (K-12) and in my case Catholic colleges for undergraduate, graduate, and

law school. In all those many years and Churches - from the Vatican to our local Parish - we can barely recall (especially during this century) an assembly of humans that were so fervently engaged in their Catholic faith. It was truly inspirational.

However this has occurred (and is occurring) on E. 8th Street in Chattanooga, we are both thrilled to have participated and observed. We pray to God that He will continue to bless this Parish. We also hope that somehow / some way the members of the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish will engage in the awareness of the power of this unique Parish and its parishioners.

Thank you for your time and blessings to you and yours.

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Follow-up note:

After rereading the note I sent, I realized that I omitted an important observation about the splendid array of humanity worshipping that morning. The very first item we shared with each other was the wonderful sounds of youngsters / infants cascading throughout the Basilica during the entire Mass. We have only called two parishes "home" for more than 40 years and both chose to sequester young children and their family members in "quiet rooms" adjacent to the Church. As we have traveled to many other Parishes over time, we have noted use of the same protocol. Certainly the intention to allow participants in the celebration of the Word to concentrate on their relationship with God is a worthy and valid decision. Yet, hearing all the beautiful sounds of the newest members of our Catholic family echoing throughout the Basilica was certainly music to our ears. As noted, there were many young families (already started and some to begin soon) as well as families with teenagers and beyond in tow. We also noticed quite a few young adults (20's and beyond) actively engaged in the Mass - some with family, some alone. And of course, there were many of us "of a certain age" scattered about the Basilica hoping our prayers of thanks are loud enough to be heard by God Almighty.

The fact that so many of every age and description make time to gather with friends and neighbors at the Basilica to sing to the Lord (thank you to your wonderful choir) is a true blessing.

Again - thank you and God's blessings to all of you.

Regards,

Michael Fleming

We have a brick church that is beautiful, but you are the living bricks that make it more than just an art piece. This is a house where God is truly worshiped, and that is reflected in the way that we interact with one another, even the stranger in our midst. I hope that you receive this as positive affirmation of your commitment to faith here at Sts. Peter and Paul, and I invite you to allow it to inspire you to deepen and broaden those things that angels among us are affirming.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. David Carter, Pastor and Rector
The Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul
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