



State of the Parish 2023

Growth and Goodness

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV, Pastor and Rector

The Tuesday before Thanksgiving in the fall of 2013, the Bishop called and told me that he needed me to come down to Sts. Peter and Paul to take on the responsibility of the Basilica parish, because Msgr. George Schmidt had become incapacitated and could no longer continue as pastor. I remember all the fears and anxieties I had, but also the hopes and dreams I had for this parish as I drove down here for the first time. Now, looking back over these ten years, it's amazing to see what God has allowed us to do together to glorify Him and to grow together as a parish. I won't rehash all the things that have taken place over these ten years. If you want to know more, you can always go back to our archives on the parish website and see previous state of the parish addresses as well as homilies and other resources. I gave my first state of the parish address in 2014. Already by then we had accomplished so much. This year is no different.

2023 has been a year of ups and downs. We are closing the year with yet more violence in the world, with the recent attacks in Israel and the conflict in the Gaza strip, and the continued war in Ukraine. Let us pray, as we come to the end of our liturgical year, that Christ the Prince of Peace might be enthroned as the King of all hearts, and that our world might be healed of the divisions that cause war.

At the heart of our Catholic Christian faith is the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ the King. As a result of the U. S. Bishops' desire to increase devotion to our Eucharistic Lord, we have embraced the Year of the Eucharist and emphasized various devotions, such as our First Friday Adoration, the use of the altar rail as a way of increasing piety, and, of course, our annual Corpus Christi procession. In addition, this year we have added the Seven Sisters Apostolate, which is centered around Eucharistic Adoration, specifically for priests. I am grateful for the women who pray for us priests. It truly undergirds our priestly ministry in ways that we will probably never fully know this side of heaven.

We have also grown in our Hispanic community, and the bishop saw fit to assign to us the newly ordained transitional Deacon Renzo Alvarado Suarez. He has begun helping in our Hispanic Ministry and continuing his formation to be ordained to the priesthood. We welcome Dcn. Renzo to our parish.

This past year, we brought in a new permanent deacon, Dcn. Joe Roy, as an official deacon assigned to the parish. Dcn. Joe and his wife Amanda have jumped into ministry here, especially in the area of Marriage Preparation, for which I am very grateful. Welcome, Dcn. Joe Roy. At the same time we gained Dcn. Joe Roy, Dcn. Joe Hartz retired from his active ministry, but he continues to serve with faculties as a deacon, most especially in his work at Memorial Hospital. Thank you, Dcn. Joe Hartz.

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Even as we have welcomed Dcn. Renzo and Dcn. Joe Roy, we've also had to say goodbye to a long-time staff member of the parish, Mr. John Mahoney. John served this parish for over 34 years as our Maintenance Supervisor and died August 27, one week before he was set to retire. It is a very poetic tribute to his dedication to our parish. He died with his boots on, and I think, in that way, he died with a smile on his face. May he rest in peace.

Lastly, this year we were finally able to realize a dream we have been dreaming for years, to have a Street Festival. A special shout-out to Debbie Cliche, who originally inspired the dream and who finally brought it to its completion. Thank you, Debbie, for all you do for our parish. But she didn't do the Street Festival alone. We had close to 100 volunteers putting time, talent, and treasure into making the event a success. Though we had to cancel our original date of May 20 due to storms, we were able to regroup on June 3rd to close off 8th Street and fill it with tables and chairs, music and fun, dancing, fellowship, and community, celebrating the fulfillment of our mission and the successful completion of our Under One Roof capital campaign. There truly is a lot to celebrate here at Sts. Peter and Paul.

In 2018, we discerned a Strategic Plan for our parish that included three Strategic Priorities: **Growth in Attendance and Participation, Facility Preservation, and Active Marketing**. This was meant to be a five-year plan, and we are in the fifth year of it. We have been successful in all three of the Strategic Priorities. Last year, the Parish Pastoral Council discerned that it was a viable plan even into the future, and so it continues to be a wonderful guide for us to maintain our Mission as a parish: **The Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Chattanooga, Tennessee, exists to proclaim Jesus Christ, the font of all Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and we continue His mission to form disciples from all peoples according to the tradition and patrimony of the Catholic Church.**

For the first strategic priority, Growth in Attendance and Participation, we can definitely see success this past year and even more when looking over these past ten years. We now average over 1,750 people attending Mass each weekend. This was up from 1,500 last year, and under 1,000 ten years ago. This increase is seen in both our English and Spanish-speaking congregations. This past year has seen 108 new families register. To serve all these people, we have increased our ministries and resources, and this year we hosted some special events. We just recently hosted the relics of St. Padre Pio. Also, thank you to Dcn. Joe and Sherry Hartz for bringing us the Vatican International Exhibit of Eucharistic Miracles. Fr. Valentin led a Eucharistic procession on UTC's campus, with the FOCUS missionaries from the Catholic Center at UTC. And we look forward this next year to the National Eucharistic Procession, which will come through Chattanooga next June 24th and 25th. Besides the events that we host directly on our parish campus, we have discerned the need to disseminate information and opportunities as a hub of communication. We recognized that we cannot accommodate everything going on in this vibrant parish on our small campus. Our parishioners are planting the tent of fellowship all around Chattanooga, hosting potlucks, prayer groups, book studies, and so many more opportunities for people to gather as Catholic Christians devoted to one

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another in their faith, and we have been advertising these opportunities. We are also sharing resources for catechesis, engaged and married couples, difficult marriage situations, and bereavement. We have continued to share people's needs and prayer requests through our Pray for Us page and social media. Many of the parish ministries - that you can find listed on our website - are flourishing. In particular, our Downtown Youth Ministry has increased in size this past year. Since we do not have a lay Youth Minister in the parish, I have had the privilege of leading our monthly youth meetings for over a year now. And I am grateful for the recent addition of several volunteers who have said yes to my invitation to assist in its continued success.

In the priority of growing attendance and participation, we recognize our primary duty is to offer the Mass, the sacraments, and religious education, including RCIA. We surely can count these things as a great success. From November of last year to October of this year, we recorded 33 marriages, 132 baptisms, 110 Confirmations, 108 First Holy Communions, and 63 people received into full Communion of the Church. The future in this area is looking very bright also. In our RCIA and Mystagogia programs, we are already projecting larger numbers. There is a possibility that this year we may have over 120 people receiving Sacraments at the Easter Vigil and the Mystagogia cycles before that. We have 24 couples in marriage preparation. We have 320 children and teens enrolled in Religious Education classes, and I am pleased that many of our young people are electing to continue their catechesis after Confirmation. We have more inquiries coming in every week for our preparation programs. In the past year I have met with at least 81 people to discuss sacramental life (and the other priests and the deacons and staff are regularly helping more people, with calls coming in daily). We have helped at least 12 couples to convalidate their marriages this year, and we are helping other folks who have gone through divorce to move forward with a Tribunal process. Several more couples have been invited and are at different stages in the process of regularizing their marriages, a process that opens the door to new life and many sacramental graces.

Our Hispanic community continues to grow in attendance and participation. We have especially emphasized the model called "houses of prayer" that are familiar to our Guatemalan immigrants. This past year we worked hard to establish statutes to give them structure and stability. These two groups, Santa Cruz and Immaculate Conception, meet on Saturday nights from 7pm to 11pm for praise and worship music, Bible study, and fellowship. These prayer houses are the front-line resources that bring unchurched people in our neighborhoods to the sacramental life of our parish on Sunday. I am grateful for the leaders of the houses of prayer and for the work they do in animating our Hispanic community.

Of course, our Hispanic community benefits greatly from the presence of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart *ad gentes*. In particular, I mention Sister Eloisa Torralba Aquino, who has the role of Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry in the parish. Sister Eloisa works tirelessly to animate the community and facilitate so many different activities, including retreats, Adoration, sacramental preparation, and so much more. It should be noted that this December, Sister Eloisa will be celebrating her 25th anniversary of consecrated life as a professed religious. We are preparing to

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celebrate this great milestone with a party on December 3 after the 1:30pm Mass. Thank you, Sister Eloisa, for all that you do!

A part of Growth and Active Participation also includes Stewardship. You've heard me mention many times my challenge for 100% participation in our stewardship from all who call the Basilica their parish home. This year we are especially inviting all new parishioners to join us in the success of our parish. Having healthy finances allows us also to accomplish our second Strategic Priority, Facility Preservation. In the past ten years, we have been able to take seriously our Apostolate of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness by providing for this beautiful sanctuary and the Divine Liturgy that takes place here. Over the past decade, we completed a series of large capital projects to bring our facilities up to working order for the foreseeable future. We have a renovated sanctuary, a new roof, a new heating and air system, a renovated rectory for the clergy, new and improved office space, a remodeled nursery, and many smaller updates that have allowed us to accomplish our Mission with the preservation of our parish infrastructure. We have invested about four million dollars into the parish's facilities over the past ten years. Thanks to your support, we have done this debt-free! Despite all the challenges in the past decade, including a global pandemic, our regular parish offertory and expert financial oversight have kept us running in the black, able to keep the lights on and pay our employees a just wage. This is an incredible testament to the commitment of the people of Sts. Peter and Paul to our Mission. We are indeed fulfilling our Vision of becoming a parish of actively engaged, invested, and committed followers of Christ living the fullness of the Catholic faith.

In addition to these major improvements, we have also been able to provide for our Hispanic Ministry, assisting groups within that community to purchase and maintain buildings to house the many activities that animate them.

In this priority of preserving our facilities, we know we have to be vigilant. Old buildings take a lot of care and attention. Even as we lost Mr. John Mahoney, God provided a member of our parish to be raised up to take his place. We have hired Mr. Angel Alicea, who is the son-in-law of the late Dcn. Tom McConnell. Angel has very providentially come on board at just the right time.

Looking into the future, we are busy discerning the many opportunities that lie ahead. Our Facilities Advisory Council (FAC) continues to give me input about things like All Saints Academy and its parking lot, the third floor of the St. Dominic Building, the repair of the façade, and the regular continued maintenance of the parish facilities. When all is told, we have been very successful in meeting this second Strategic Priority as a parish.

The third Strategic Priority of Active Marketing is one we have continued to pursue, especially by our online presence. Our website and social media have allowed us to reach many people, and there are mountains of resources available, including past homilies, marriage resources, the FORMED app, and so much more. We continually get calls at the parish office from people who have found us through the online media and it has led them to join our parish, return to their faith, or inquire more into the

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Catholic faith. In addition to our online presence, we also open up our church for various artistic opportunities every year. We just recently hosted the Veteran's Day concert with the Jericho Brass, and we will soon host the Vienna Lights Orchestra. These events allow people to experience the Beauty of our Basilica, who otherwise would not have the opportunity.

One of the greatest ways that we have engaged in active marketing, not only for our parish but for the Catholic faith in general, is through the Cause of Sainthood of the Servant of God, Fr. Patrick Ryan. This past year saw a major milestone in that Cause, with the official conclusion of the Diocesan Inquiry on September 28. I'm grateful to Archbishop Joseph Kurtz for presiding over that momentous day. Thank you to Dcn. Gaspar DeGaetano, who delivered with me the Acts of the Inquiry to the Dicastery for Saints in Rome at the beginning of October. All these events made the news, but we also had the great pleasure of a movie that premiered this year to tell the story of Father Ryan to a wider audience. On April 15, we celebrated the red-carpet premiere of *Father Ryan: A Higher Call* at Notre Dame Catholic High School, and since then we have had numerous screenings throughout the Diocese. It has premiered on EWTN and now is available on YouTube as well as a DVD. The movie has won several awards, including the Best Feature Documentary and Best Director of a Feature Documentary awards at the Cannes World Art Festival. I want to sincerely thank Veronica DiPippo and Marc Aramian for putting their professional skills to the service of the Cause of Father Patrick Ryan.

Now that we have discussed the successes we have had in implementing our Strategic Priorities, I want to thank all who make our parish thrive, and then to introduce to you my theme for the new year. First, I have to give thanks to my Parochial Vicar, Fr. Valentin Iurochkin, who has been such a wonderful presence here at Sts. Peter and Paul and has been able to do so much of the pastoral ministry while I am occupied with Diocesan responsibilities as Vice Chancellor and Judicial Vicar of the Diocese. I am grateful for the many hospital calls and pastoral visits that he covers for our parish in a very fruitful way. I am grateful also for Fr. Nick Tran, who is in residence with us here. Besides his own Vietnamese community, which he ably administers, he also helps us out with confessions, Masses, and hospital calls. Thank you, Fr. Tran, for your presence. We have four permanent deacons on our roster. I already mentioned two at the beginning of this talk, but I would be remiss if I didn't also say a word of thanks to Dcn. Gaspar DeGaetano and Dcn. Hicks Armor for the many ways they serve the parish. Besides the clergy, there are many dedicated lay faithful who staff our parish or give me valuable counsel, namely, Maria, Marina, Cathy, Angel, Florence, Andrea, Christine, Aracely, Karina, Rachel, Stephanie, Dan, and Tyler, as well as the members of the Parish Pastoral Council, the Finance Council, and the Facilities Advisory Council. There are also many dozens of volunteers. That would be too many to name in this talk, but I want you to know that I am grateful for each and every one of you.

Each year at this State of the Parish address, I usually get around to proposing a theme that I have discerned for the next year. Last year, I proposed as my theme, The Interior Life, and remembering that we are the Temple of God and that we need to cultivate the Interior Life. I hope and pray that

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this past year has allowed you to deepen your relationship with the Lord in the interior of the soul. This year, the Lord has put on my heart the theme of Goodness. You have heard me mention in the past the three transcendentals that shape my vision for the parish: Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. For sure, Sts. Peter and Paul stands as a beacon for the Truth of the Catholic Christian faith, passed on to us through Apostolic Tradition and Sacred Scripture, and is the font of inspiration that animates all that we do here. It also leads us into the next transcendental good of Beauty, which we are blessed with in our art and architecture, our divine worship, liturgies, and music. But I would also like to highlight that Sts. Peter and Paul is a source for great Good in our community. The Goodness of our Catholic faith should radiate into our community and bless many people around us. Just like with fellowship opportunities and events, where we discerned that we could not do everything directed from our parish office, with our limited resources, so, too, with the works of charity and goodness. In our efforts to help people with their material and social needs, we are learning the humbling lesson that we cannot singlehandedly provide every service. But we are discovering there are many resources that already exist in the community that can help people, some within our parish and diocese, and some in the civic society. We recognize the Basilica's role in the ideal of Goodness to be a hub of communication, joining people together, rather than trying to reproduce the infrastructure of the works of charity. So we have partnered with the organizations in our Diocese and our community that can minister to our people, and direct them to the help they need.

Some of the charitable causes that we are partnered with are the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Ladies of Charity, the Community Kitchen – now called the Chatt Foundation, and Catholic Charities of East Tennessee. Our parish directly serves our parishioners through the Blessed Virgin Mary Visitation Guild, bringing Communion to the home- and hospital-bound. We directly help those bereaving a loved one through our Bereavement ministry, and especially remembering the dead as we just did with the Luminary Lighting service on November 2. But we also encourage particular apostolates of our parishioners, such as the home repair apostolate, now appropriately named the Father Patrick Ryan Catholic Apostolate. Their latest project was to build a bridge and handicap ramp in Sequatchie County. We also host a Buy Nothing group on Facebook, where parishioners are encouraged to join and post items or services they are offering to give away or looking to receive for free. We partner with Courage International as an apostolate that helps men and women who experience same-sex attractions to strive for chastity. We also support the RiseUP Cooperative, which works to engage teens and young adults by providing life and leadership workshops. We coordinate with CHI Memorial to provide mobile mammography services to those in need. We offer an annual Stroke Scan Plus service for early detection of diseases. We collaborated with the Pregnancy Help Center to put on a Baby Shower and Baby Bottle drive for the cause of life. There are many more partnerships. I encourage you to visit our website under the title “Ways to Give and Receive Help”.

It is proper to the clergy of the Church to preach and teach the truths of the faith. It is also a joint effort to take these truths and transform them into beautiful liturgy, as can be seen in the coordination of music and servers and sacristans, etc. But the ideal of Goodness, as it is translated into works of charity, belongs primarily to the lay faithful, who are called by virtue of their baptism

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to love God and neighbor, and use the means at their disposal for the building up of the Body of Christ. In particular this year, I would like to emphasize individual responsibility in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy that form the foundation of the ideal of Goodness here at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. When I was a Boy Scout, we had a motto, “to do a good turn daily”. Perhaps we can adapt that for our own purposes here as parishioners of Saints Peter and Paul. If each person who calls Sts. Peter and Paul their parish home were to conscientiously and intentionally seek to fulfill at least one of the corporal or spiritual works of mercy every day for the next year, imagine how much goodness would radiate from our community!

The traditional enumeration of the corporal works of mercy is as follows:

To feed the hungry;
To give drink to the thirsty;
To clothe the naked;
To harbour the harbourless;
To visit the sick;
To ransom the captive;
To bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are:

To instruct the ignorant;
To counsel the doubtful;
To admonish sinners;
To bear wrongs patiently;
To forgive offences willingly;
To comfort the afflicted;
To pray for the living and the dead.

We live in a very dark world, and at the beginning of this talk I highlighted the wars and the violence going on. We are all aware of the strife that is happening. If we were to focus only on those things beyond our control, we might be led to despair. But I would like to focus on the things which are within our power to change, so that we might find serenity and peace. If we live out Goodness in our daily lives, I believe that we have the power to change the world.

Humbly submitted by

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Rev. J. David Carter".

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV
Pastor and Rector