

March 2017

Dear Catholic Community:

I know that in the past couple of weeks Fr. Barkemeyer has held 2 Town Hall meetings to discuss the changes coming here to Fort Myer. I want to thank those who were able to attend and also Fr. John for leading those sessions. At our last Pastoral Council Meeting in February, Chaplain (MG) Hurley, Chief of Chaplains, talked to the Pastoral Council reference his philosophy for Army Catholic Chaplains and his vision for the future. Fr. Hurley laid out before us several issues: (1) we should recognize that the number of priests we now have will most likely be the standard and therefore cease talking about a priest shortage. Rather, the focus needs to be on how Active Duty Catholic Chaplains can offer Mass, Sacraments and spiritual guidance creatively with this new norm, without relying on Contract and Retire Recall priests. He painted the picture of a mission church responding with the resources it had a hand. (2) Catholic priests should be provided the same opportunities for advancement as other chaplains and therefore need to be Unit based. Although unit based, it was the responsibility of any priest to assist where needed, especially within a Garrison environment. He clearly stated that it is the responsibility of all priests, not just a priest assigned to a Garrison slot, to assist in ministry to a Catholic Community. For this reason, except for several much larger Army posts, service to Catholic Communities will be provided by priests in the area, rather than someone directly assigned to Garrison.

Shortly after I arrived at JBM-HH, I hired a Catholic Coordinator to help administrate the Catholic Community. Our CC is Pam Ortiz. With my departure, Pam will have an office in the chapel building and will be in that office throughout the week, some days in the morning and some in the afternoon. She will publish her schedule in the bulletin. Pam is who you will contact for assistance from the priest or for any other administrative/sacramental needs. Fr. John Barkemeyer will be the priest administrator and Pam will work directly with him. Fr. John's office is at Pentagon in the Chief of Chaplains Office. Chaplain (LTC) Tim Hubbs will be assisting also at the chapel. He will be assigned to Arlington National Cemetery with duties at the chapel, to include celebrating Daily Mass on

Wednesdays and Fridays, weddings, baptisms, funerals and some weekend Mass help. Fr. Majka, our contract priest, will continue for a while in this transition. He will celebrate Daily Mass on Mondays. Any further changes will come to you via the bulletin and electronic media.

In 1994, on New Year's Eve, I announced to the congregation at Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in Rock Springs, Wyoming, that come June of 1995, we would be combining both SCM and Our Lady of Sorrow Catholic Church to create one parish community. These were parishes each with 100 year histories. There were some very definite reasons for doing this, one of which was the new norm of working with fewer priests. I became the pastor of this new community. It was not an easy transition but we made it work and now, 22 years later, people have adjusted to this new norm and many have wondered why it didn't take place sooner.

Change is not easy, BUT it can be an opportunity to discover new possibilities. I absolutely believe that you, as a faith community, can help this plan to work well. Lay leadership is so essential in the church and we're blessed here with many capable and talented people. All of you who read this letter are part of that group. My prayer is that these changes bring you even closer together.

Please be assured of my thoughts and prayer and thank you for everything. It's been an awesome gift to be able to serve you here. Please keep me in prayer as I make my transition. I know that the Lord will continue to show us the way.

Blessings in Christ,

Fr. Fred