

GOOD SHEPHERD: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

For 12 years from 1995 until 2007, I had served the Diocese of Fort Worth at smaller rural parishes in various pastoral roles. I then requested from Bishop Kevin Vann a transfer from the parish in Seymour to a parish that would be in closer proximity to our TOR Franciscan friars in the Diocese. This was my primary reason for desiring a new assignment. And, it was also the right time for me to accept a greater challenge in a larger parish by serving wherever I could best use my gifts. The Provincial of my Franciscan Order approved the offer of a new assignment at Good Shepherd Catholic Community. What I did not realize is all the exercise that I would soon be getting by just walking around the length and breadth of the sanctuary in a large church as compared to my former rural parishes. But I was quickly attracted to the welcoming parishioners of Good Shepherd, several of whom I had already met in my diocesan ministries prior to arriving here. With the mix of so many professional people at Good Shepherd, I felt that my background as clinical psychologist and university professor as well as my work in religious formation and pastoral experience could help me to adapt well here and we would complement each other. Moreover, since Sisters Theresa Khirallah and Dorothy Eggering were founders of the parish of Good Shepherd and also members of a religious community, I thought that my being a priest in a religious community could offer a smooth transition for this parish and for me. Being the first resident pastor of Good Shepherd had its own challenges as I had to learn to adapt my style of ministry to this particular parish in order to be the best possible priest that I can here. My ministry was and still is to teach, govern and sanctify the good people of Good Shepherd within the culture that is Colleyville, Southlake and the surrounding areas. My vocation remains to help in building upon the solid foundation of living stones already established through the hospitality of so many wonderful individuals and their vital commitment to Christ and the Church.

Bishop Joseph Delaney of the Diocese of Fort Worth had established this new parish in 1992. Upon my arrival at Good Shepherd in 2007, it was evident that one overarching need was to retire the debt of \$2.7 million in order for our parish family to move forward in faith toward future development. Having paid down this debt in 18 months, we have since become a full service parish and increased the fruits of our labor through more than 60 new ministries and by offering more in the way of the sacramental and liturgical life of our parish. We have also been able to expand our staff and grow our facilities to include more personnel, office space, a daily chapel and a music rehearsal room to meet our increasing needs. With the growth of parishioners now totaling 3,500 + households, we met our future with even greater expansion needed to accommodate the burgeoning staff, number of families, and all youth and adults in our Parish Faith Formation. Construction of a new friary was also necessary to provide room for our three Franciscan friars serving our parish. Most recently, construction has provided us with additional space for our youth and adult education as well as CRHP (Christ Renews His Parish) retreats to engage the men and women who are eager for greater spiritual growth and our Alpha programs for those on their journey of exploring Christian faith.

What will take us into our future? Our parish has made some conscious decisions. We have purchased a building offsite on the main street in the city of Colleyville to be more visible to our neighbors. At this location, we partner with Catholic Charities and house our Franciscan

Evangelization Center. The overarching intentional goal of our parish is Evangelization and Discipleship to deepen the spiritual life of all within our Catholic community and beyond our parish boundaries. This will take our parish well into the future as we steep ourselves in the Franciscan Heritage that we friars find in the lives of Saint Francis and Saint Clare of Assisi. In their day, they were ordinary people who responded to God's call to be faithful disciples of Jesus. They gave their lives to God in prayer and in the exercise of God's gifts. Today we take up their example through prayer and good stewardship of all God's gifts. Saint Francis embraced God's Love for the world through the self-giving Incarnation, Crucifixion and the Holy Eucharist of his beloved Son, Jesus. Through Continuing Conversion of our daily lives and personal prayer, we too are befriended by Christ Jesus and have an intimate relationship with Him. As we are formed by the Gospel, we become missionary disciples who reach out to evangelize others to Christ.

Good Shepherd is an exciting place for us to call our spiritual home because our parish is very alive and engaged in self-giving through our worship, education, service and fellowship. We provide a joyful environment to support growth in the Lord. Our liturgical celebrations and the living tradition of the Catholic Church call upon Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to lead us as his disciples in building up of the Kingdom of God in our midst. In living the Gospel and building the Kingdom, we, the Catholic Community of Good Shepherd, are God's family and members of the Body of Christ. "In welcoming all, we form disciples who know, love and serve God and neighbor." Our mission is to be an open and welcoming community reaching out to others in a caring and compassionate manner. We commit ourselves to our parish by embracing Generosity as a way of life, by sharing our time, talents and resources. And, we believe that our Catholic faith is best lived and enriched through worship, faith formation, evangelization and hospitality.

What will the years ahead bring? No doubt, there will be challenges ahead as God leads us into His plan for us. The Spirit of God is ever-present; are we open to His grace? The future belongs to God. Trust! Because I trust in God's continued blessings for all of us, I promise to continue to live out to the best of my ability the Bishop's exhortation given to me on the day of my ordination: "You must apply your energies to the duty of teaching in the name of Christ, the chief Teacher. Share with all peoples the Word of God you have received with joy. Meditate on the Law of God, believe what you read, teach what you believe, and put into practice what you teach.... Always remember the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be served but to serve, and to seek out and rescue those who were lost."

As St. Francis came to the end of his earthly life, he said to his followers:
"I have done what God has given me to do. May you now do what is yours."

Together in Christ let us remain faithful to the mission of Christ and our parish! Fr. Richard