

Message from Fr. Pete

Dear Friends,

Those of you who were here 9 years ago, when I arrived at St. Bavo's, will recall that I was sent to head off an emergency. In June of 2017, when Fr. Vincent was about to leave, Bishop Rhoades had no one to replace him. With very short notice, Bishop asked the Congregation of Holy Cross to loan him a priest to serve as an interim Administrator *for just one year*. I accepted that temporary assignment, thinking that I would leave the parish exactly as I found it, and most parishioners would scarcely remember that I had ever been here. Well, it soon became apparent to me that the people of St. Bavo's were hungry for spiritual nourishment and spiritual growth. They didn't want just an Administrator to pay the bills and say masses for them; they wanted a Pastor to shepherd and teach and accompany them. I knew that I had the skills and the experience to fill that role, and so did Bishop Rhoades. So, he was in no hurry to get rid of me after a year, two years, or even nine years! After renewing my one-year commitment twice, I was determined to leave in the summer of 2020, but then COVID hit. At the beginning of that crisis, my Superiors in Holy Cross asked me if I wanted to leave St. Bavo's for a new assignment, renew my commitment as Administrator for a fourth year, or take a 6-year term as your Pastor, through June of 2026. I opted for the 6-year term, because I felt that this community deserved some stability in their leadership during what looked to be a chaotic and turbulent time ahead. Looking back on that experience, I'm confident that I made the right choice.

I firmly believe that it was God, acting through my Holy Cross Superiors, who sent me to St. Bavo's. I say that because it seems that I was the kind of Pastor that you needed at the time, and you were the kind of community that I needed, as well. But now, I think you need someone else to lead you on the next phase of your journey as a parish community, and I need a different environment for the next phase of *my journey* as a priest and a religious of Holy Cross. I told my Superiors several months ago that when my term ends on June 30, I want to be assigned to a *Holy Cross* parish, not a diocesan parish. My vocation is to religious life in Holy Cross, not to diocesan priesthood. Shortly after Easter, they offered me a position, and I gladly accepted it. However, when religious communities move people into and out of parishes, Bishops sometimes ask us not to reveal those assignments publicly until they announce all the rest of their clergy assignments for the coming year. Bishop Rhoades has asked Holy Cross to wait until May 9, when his complete list will be published in *Today's Catholic*. That's when you will find out where I'm going next and who my successor at St. Bavo's will be.

As I was leading the St. Bavo community through the parish phase of the Diocesan Synod, I knew that I would not be around to see the fruits of that effort. The parishioners who participated identified areas of growth for the future, and they also nominated candidates for a new Pastoral Council. I will have just enough time to form that new Council and work with them to set some objectives for them to pursue. Then, it will be time for me to step away and for someone with fresh ideas and a different set of pastoral gifts to step in. I see that timing as providential and good for the parish. Drawing on my strengths, I have tried to lay a solid spiritual foundation for this community, deepening your understanding of the Scriptures and of the Catholic faith, and helping you to hear the Word of God more clearly as it speaks to your hearts and calls you to witness to the Gospel. The Synod process has revealed further challenges that you are facing and opportunities that you can explore, and I pray that your next Pastor will be better equipped than I am to help you in those endeavors.

I will always remember very fondly the good people of St. Bavo Parish, who welcomed me with open arms and helped me to become a better priest. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve you. Let us continue to pray for each other, especially during this time of transition. May God bless all of you.

Affectionately,

Fr. Pete