



March 2018

My dear friends in Christ,

Tempus fugit, so the saying goes. It is hard for me to believe that it has been nearly two years since I became pastor of the two wonderful parishes of St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist. I am so grateful for the warm reception I have received and continue to be inspired by your faith and commitment to living out your vocations as disciples of Jesus Christ.

I'd like to take a moment to reflect on where we have been in the last year and a half and where we are going as a collaborative. A "collaborative" is a unique entity. Our parishes remain distinct, with their own cultures, histories and traditions. The parishes also remain independent of each other financially. What do we share? Our collaborative has a shared leadership team, led by me as pastor along with Fr. Robert Blaney, our parochial vicar and a talented and dedicated group of professionals serving us in pastoral care, religious education, youth ministry, music and administration. We are currently exploring how we can leverage the strengths of each parish to pursue ministries together.

The Collaborative Pastoral Council (CPC) is made up of five members each from our two parishes. The CPC is developing a vision of what our collaborative will look like in the coming years. I know well from my experience in my parishes in Wayland that these things cannot be rushed. So in this initial stage, we have sought opportunities for the people of our parishes *simply to get to know each other*. To that end, we have hosted two Collaborative Forums, one last June on the topic of Adult Faith Enrichment and the second last November on the subject of Christian Service. These topics were chosen because they represent natural areas for collaboration. On both occasions, we gathered close to one hundred parishioners with nearly equal representation from each parish. The excitement in the room was palpable as parishioners engaged on subjects central to the practice of our faith. They came to realize how much they have in common in their desire to live more fully their Catholic faith. Following from these experiences, we have seen a naturally evolving inter-parish participation. The Women's Nights at St. John's have attracted many women from St. Paul's and is growing into a collaborative ministry. This year's spectacular Christmas Concert at St. Paul's boasted the highest attendance in recent memory with a large representation of St. John's parishioners. There have been truly inspirational liturgies with the combined musical talents of high school students from both parishes. As a result, the religious education and youth ministry staff have been exploring how we can work together in a collaborative effort to engage our young people more fully in the life of the Church. We envision more collaborative social events and are planning a Mass followed by a barbecue at an outdoor venue this coming fall. Exciting things are happening. The Holy Spirit is at work among us.

Beginning in September, the CPC, in consultation with staff and volunteer leadership, will engage in a formal process of developing a pastoral plan for the collaborative for the next several years. The parish forums have given parishioners an opportunity to give input on what is important to them in areas essential to the practice of our faith. The data collected from the parish forums will provide some of the foundational material for the development of a pastoral plan. We want and need your input as the plan is developed and will continue to find ways to solicit that input. In the meantime, you can always feel free to speak to any CPC member to share your ideas or concerns. While the planning process is being undertaken, the many wonderful ministries within our parishes will continue to thrive. I am grateful to all those who serve our parishes with such dedication.

Where are we going as a collaborative? As we ask this question, let's keep in mind the dialogue between Jesus and the apostle Thomas.

Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14: 5-6)

As we explore paths of collaboration, may we never lose sight of our ultimate objective: to follow more closely the One who is the way and the truth and the life.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Laughlin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Reverend James J. Laughlin
Pastor

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