

May 5, 2019
Third Sunday of Easter

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I was asked last December to serve on the faculty of The Saint Paul Seminary as Director of Pastoral Formation, I was filled with conflicting thoughts and emotions. Excitement at a new challenge: the formation of priests for the work of the New Evangelization – perhaps the most vital work in the Church today. But also sadness: at having to leave parish work and the good people of St. John's. And, perhaps selfishly, not wanting to leave a parish that is so vibrantly alive for the Lord Jesus. I prayed a lot. The Holy Spirit led me first of all to gratefully accept the assignment. Then, to request of the clergy assignment board, and ultimately Archbishop Hebda, to appoint Fr. Paul Shovelain as parochial administrator of St. John the Baptist Parish.

Replacing two priests in a parish at the same time can disrupt the life of that parish. When Fr. Magnuson and I came here to St. John's in 2006, it took a while for the shock to settle! So I asked that Fr. Paul *not* be moved at the same time as my move, so as to provide continuity and stability for the parish. As parochial administrator he could provide that stability and guide a new priest assigned to assist. When Archbishop Hebda came to our archdiocese as its chief shepherd, he instituted a plan where young priests beginning to lead a parish would not be named pastor right away, but rather serve a parish first as *parochial administrator* (PA). The PA would have a supervising pastor appointed by the Archbishop, and would be evaluated through a process that includes parish leaders. After a suitable amount of time, usually a year or two, if the priest is ready, he would be named pastor. If not, he would be given more time as parochial administrator or be assigned elsewhere. That is the plan for Fr. Paul. The Archbishop has appointed me as his supervising pastor, so Fr. Paul and I will meet regularly over the course of the next year. I will consult with parish leaders and make a recommendation to Archbishop Hebda next year.

I am confident that Fr. Paul is ready for this task. He is very relational which has strengthened our parish community and school. He has helped strengthen our parish's focus on Christ and bringing others into relationship with Christ. He's got some learning to do, and I've told him that! But one is never finished learning. I've been a pastor for 27 years, and I continue to learn better ways of being a shepherd to God's people. The key to success in any field is humility, and always to be open to learn how to serve better. Please join me in praying for Fr. Paul Shovelain daily, that he be a shepherd to St. John the Baptist Parish after Christ's own heart for years to come.

Fr. Michael Skluzacek

Gratitude fills my heart this day as I write to you with news about my new assignment as Parochial Administer of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and School in New Brighton. I am

grateful for the **gift** of the priesthood from Jesus Christ and his allowing me to share in his priesthood. I am not worthy of this great calling, yet the Lord in his mercy has called me here and I am thankful for his love. I am grateful to Archbishop Hebda and Fr. Skluzacek for their confidence in my pastoral capabilities. I am appreciative of you for allowing me to serve you here. As I have been praying about my new assignment, I reflect on our own patron, St. John the Baptist in this passage.

*“John answered and said, “No one can receive anything except what has been **given him** from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him... **He must increase; I must decrease.**” John 3:27-30*

Our attention must continue to be on Christ in this transition. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In him we have hope and salvation. He is the one that has brought us into existence and redeemed us. He allows us to share in his salvific work here on Earth. He calls each one of us to participate in his ministry. Yes, I have been given the **gift** of shepherding our parish, but each one of us plays a unique and important role of building up the Kingdom of God on Earth. I need you, Christ needs you to rise with me as we continue the great work of Christ at our parish and in our community.

Fr. Skluzacek has been a phenomenal mentor for me and has allowed me to develop my God given gifts. I appreciate his trust and his prayerful demeanor. He entrusts his ministry to the Lord and is a man of deep prayer. He understands the many dynamics of parish life and how to wade through all the demands with graciousness. His pastoral wisdom has guided me the last three years and he will continue to guide me as he will serve as my mentor pastor during my time as parochial administrator. Please keep Fr. Skluzacek and me in your prayers during this time of transition. Be assured of my prayers for you and your families. We have been called to St. John the Baptist Church and School at this wonderful time to build up the kingdom of God here in the northern suburbs. Bearing witness to Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life: GO. MAKE. TEACH.

As the Father loves me, so I also love you!

Father Paul Shovelain