

THE STILLWATER CATHOLIC

SERVING ST. FRANCIS XAVIER AND ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST PARISHES

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DECEMBER 2017

Joyfully Waiting on the Lord *Fr. Ken's Ongoing Priestly Journey*

"Truly, the LORD is waiting to be gracious to you, truly, he shall rise to show you mercy; For the LORD is a God of justice: happy are all who wait for him!" — Isaiah 30:18

There are many quotes that could be applied to the priesthood, the best one to describe longtime St. Francis Xavier pastor Fr. Ken Harder's own priestly journey is this passage from Isaiah. It serves to remind Fr. Ken to continually trust in God, waiting for His plans to unfold in His own perfect time.

Ironically, Fr. Ken never saw himself as a priest. Growing up in a dual-faith household, Catholicism to him was more about a list of "do's and don'ts," rather than a personal relationship with Christ. Although Fr. Ken attended church faithfully as a young man, it was more about adhering to the rules with which he had been raised, checking off his spiritual to-do list. This didn't change until Fr. Ken was pursuing a master's degree in mechanical engineering at Purdue University, where he had a dramatic retreat experience.



"I realized for the first time that religion could be an actual relationship with God," Fr. Ken says. "At that point, I began going to daily Mass and gradually studying more about the faith."

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Fr. Ken's Ongoing Priestly Journey

continued from front cover

Despite this conversion-like experience, the priesthood remained far from Fr. Ken's mind. With his career, serious girlfriend and sports car, Fr. Ken shares that he had his life "all planned out." Yet, God had other plans, which He made loud and clear with a growing insistency.

"Of course, I kept resisting, but the pull just kept getting stronger," Fr. Ken says. "I couldn't dismiss it as easily and it would come back quicker and quicker. Many people will ask, 'Why did you want to become a priest?' The truth is that it wasn't what I wanted. But I was increasingly being pulled by God. I came to realize that it was a calling and I finally consented to give it a try. Immediately after that a peace just washed over me."

Finally abandoning his Jonah-like stance, Fr. Ken entered the seminary in the fall of 1991 and was ordained to the priesthood with the Diocese of Tulsa in the spring of 1996. Twenty-one years later, Fr. Ken continues to experience the peace of doing God's will despite the highs and lows that inevitably come with life. He continues to be filled with joy during each celebration of the Mass and to remain in awe of his priestly office.

"I liken the priesthood to a marriage, filled with both its difficult experiences and its good ones," Fr. Ken says. "So for me, it's been all about embracing the journey and finding God in those moments. Throughout it all, the celebration of the Mass remains always such a gift. It's brand new almost every time. Even on the days when I'm tired and don't feel like getting up, it's always such a gift once I'm there. There is also the peace of that ongoing

relationship with God. That doesn't mean I'm perfect. A priest is like any other person and can still sin and make bad decisions. I'm a flawed individual person, but I'm also a representative of the Church. It's still something I can't fully wrap my mind around, but the office I hold is much bigger than me as a person."

The majority of Fr. Ken's priestly journey has been spent at St. Francis Xavier, where he has grown from a young priest to a seasoned pastor. He has seen us through major projects, has helped us grow into a thriving stewardship community, and has walked with parishioners through all different stages and experiences of life.

Come early January, it will be time for Fr. Ken to embark on a new stage of his priestly journey as he continues to wait on the Lord and to trust in His goodness. Leaving, Fr. Ken says, is a bittersweet experience, but it is also one filled with the joyful anticipation of new beginnings.

"My time here has been a very important part of my life, filled with both great joy and great difficulty," Fr. Ken says. "Being here, I've grown tremendously in my own spirituality and my understanding of the priesthood. I will miss the people here greatly. But I'm also at peace because I know that I've done what I can here. And basically, I believe in giving the church a wider horizon and new opportunities to grow. I've come to realize that this parish isn't mine. The church belongs to God and to his people, and I'm happy to have been part of building that up all those years."

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A Letter From Our Pastors

Reflections at the End of the Year

Dear Parishioners,

It seems as if we just finished Lent and Easter, and here we are at Advent and Christmas. To say this is a busy month for many is an understatement. Although December is a month of love, it can also be a difficult month for some. For those with families, it may be a month of travel as people rush to be united with loved ones, sometimes after a long period of separation.

There is no shortage of reminders as to what time of year this is. However, for us as Catholics, we may need to refocus to see where we are in our faith lives. Were you aware that for us, December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception? In that regard, we celebrate a Holy Day of Obligation on Friday, Dec. 8. Advent begins on Dec. 3, and you may notice that we begin to wear purple as a sign of Advent. That color changes to white or gold beginning at Christmas.

Of course, this is also the last month of the regular calendar year, which may add additional tasks to our own schedules as we finalize things for the end of the year. However, there are many opportunities for us during this month to share, to pray and to celebrate in a Christian way, and we would encourage you to make an effort to be part of these. Right here in our parishes, much is happen-

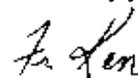
ing along those lines, and a careful reading of the bulletin will alert you to the “when, where and what” of these upcoming opportunities.

As we indicated earlier, this can also be a difficult time for some. In the midst of our own celebrations and joy, we need to be aware of that reality and of those living with it. This is a time to reach out, and it is a time to show love.

This December, let our minds be focused on Christ, Who will be born for us at Christmas, and for Whose coming we must always be prepared throughout the year. This is a time to thank God and to pray. It is a time to reach out to love and live peacefully with one another. We need to remember that life continues after December, in spite of everything we feel we need to get done.

Our prayers and blessings go out to each of you and your families. May God continue to watch over you. May the year 2017 end well for all of us!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Fr. Kenneth Harder and Fr. Kerry Wakulich
Pastors

Looking Back on the Historic Church Building

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the sun.”

By Lori Wiede



The current St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church



The 1959 interior of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church

It's a time of change for all of us here at St. Francis Xavier, as we prepare to leave our current building on the corner of West Street and Sixth Street for the new structure on the outskirts of town. While we excitedly look forward to moving into our beautiful new church in the Gothic style — with its soaring steeple and graceful arches — we also look back in thanksgiving for the rich history of our parish.

The first priest known to have served the Stillwater area was a traveling missionary from Sacred Heart, a Benedictine Monastery near Shawnee. In 1891, Bishop Theophile Meerschaert was appointed Vicar Apostolic, and he sent Fr. Felix de Grasse, a priest in residence in Guthrie, to carry out mission work here in Stillwater. Fr. de Grasse later became the abbot of the Sacred Heart Abbey, making only sporadic visits to Stillwater due to the rough conditions of travel.

In 1899, a permanent structure for the Catholic community in Stillwater was built for a total of \$645. The first St. Francis Xavier Church was only 40 feet long by 30 feet wide, with a non-plastered interior and rough wood planks for the pews. A.M. Greiner — grandfather to Fr. Jim Greiner and parishioner Carol Ann Powell — built the first altar from a packing box. At the time, little money was being raised and the income was barely enough to pay the visiting priests.

One year later, the bishop decided to assign a permanent pastor to either Pawnee or Stillwater, contingent on the community providing housing for the priest. Once again, A.M. Greiner stepped in to help, taking up a collection for the \$250 needed to add two rooms on to the back of the existing church, which would then house Stillwater's first resident priest, Fr. John Dupret.

Shortly after, the Catholic church in Payne County's West Point was dismantled, and its altar and some of its furnishings were moved to St. Francis Xavier. The church was officially dedicated on Dec. 3, 1901, and by 1904, Stillwater was home to a Catholic church complete with a steeple, a sacristy, the two-room rectory, a school, a small

The Rich Past of our Gains With Grateful Hearts

...er the heavens...a time to tear down, and a time to build.” — Eccles. 3:1,3

er, Parish Staff

house for resident nuns, and a half-block of land midway between the business district and Oklahoma A&M College.

A new, larger rectory was built in 1914, and the next year, the parish was officially incorporated under the title of St. Francis Xavier of Stillwater, Okla. A.M. Greiner and Anton Schroeder were the original directors, serving the church in an advisory role similar to that of today’s Parish Council. By 1919, there were 75 families and 24 students from Oklahoma A&M College worshipping at St. Francis Xavier.

While the Catholic community in Stillwater was making great gains in the 1910s, it was still facing animosity and prejudice from some quarters. In 1917, the Ku Klux Klan fanned the flames of anti-Catholic fanaticism with a parade on Sixth Street. The white-robed figures riding horseback and carrying fiery crosses through the center of town proved a chilling sight, and it is reported that St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church provided refuge to many during those troubled times.

The church structure that we recognize as our parish home today was built for \$161,000 and dedicated on March 25, 1951. Then-Pastor Fr. Beevers chose the Roman style of arches that reminded him of the architecture in his native England. He also selected the saints portrayed in the stained-glass windows under the rose window on the west side of the church, choosing St. Gregory the Great because he is one of the great doctors of the Latin Church; St. Benedict because the Benedictines had served the community faithfully in its earliest, most difficult days; St. Romuald as a holy monk known for his sanctity; and St. Bernard for his devotion to learning.

Today, the church stands unchanged from the day of its 1951 dedication. We now look back on its long, rich history with grateful hearts for the sacrifice and dedication that have made our parish the thriving faith community it is now, having grown from 75 families in 1917 to the 500-plus families who regularly worship with us in 2017. What a testament to the men and women who devoted themselves to bringing a Catholic community to Stillwater over a century ago! As we look forward to moving into our beautiful new home, we know that the history of our first church structure will always hold a special place in the hearts of our parishioners.



The original church altar built by A.M. Greiner, photo from 1904



The original St. Francis Xavier Church structure, date unknown

An Update on



Photo 1, Nov. 10, crate of recently received ceiling ribs, by Larry Hoberock.



Photo 2, Nov. 9, stored reredos items in Parish Hall, by Mark Pruitt.

This is the 60th issue of this newsletter and the 60th update on our building project. The light at the end of the tunnel is still bright, but we have experienced another delay, again due to problems in receiving GFRG (graphite fiber-reinforced gypsum) ceiling ribs from the supplier. However, after a second visit to the Dallas manufacturer of these ribs by our contractor, Nabholz Construction, accompanied by our Director of Formation and Operations Vic Schutte, we believe the problems have been resolved. Reports from our visiting team are that this supplier is professional and competent, with sufficient fabrication facilities and staff to deliver what was designed by our architects. As in the past, the problem has been numerous iterations between this supplier and our architects to get the shop drawings exactly right, such that the molds can be correctly made. The crucial problem has been the areas atop columns where multiple ribs join together. As confirmation of problem resolution, the first of these ribs were delivered during the second week of November (Photo 1). To grasp the magnitude of GFRG architectural detail in the nave, consider that there are 2340 different GFRG pieces, requiring approximately 215 different molds! Nabholz will install the ceiling ribs in three phases as they are received, with the first phase covering the sanctuary and transepts. Nevertheless, it now appears that our certificate of occupancy will be delayed to late February 2018. With Lent schedules, the schedule of Bishop Konderla, and various move-in aspects requiring coordination, a dedication date has not yet been set, but it is virtually certain that this will not take place before the start of Lent 2018.



Photo 3, Nov. 9, hand-carved and painted rendering of The Last Supper on front of main altar, by Mark Pruitt.

Our Church Project

Happily, the first shipment of our reredos and associated statuary has been delivered and is stored in our new Parish Hall, Photo 2. As we expected, the craftsmanship appears excellent, although we have not unpacked all of the shipment. Photo 3 shows the painted carving of the Last Supper on the front of the altar. After the sanctuary ceiling ribs have been installed and the flooring and painting has been completed in this area, Nabholz plans to install the reredos.

Interior progress has been reasonable, excepting delays caused by the ceiling rib problem. Photo 4 shows interior progress in the nave, with GFRG friezes just above the gothic arches along the column line. Figure 5 shows one of two small shrines at the rear of the nave in front of confessionals, and Figure 6 shows basketball and volleyball floor lines in the gym.

The west drive concrete work at the Country Club Road entrance is finished (Photo 7), and work has begun on the south drive (Photo 8) this week (second week in November). Progress continues on the final phase of masonry work on the east and west towers (Photo 9). Concrete walks and washed stone concrete has begun on the south plaza areas of the Parish Hall (Photo 10).

We appreciate your patience as we complete this complex project. As always, please continue with your prayers and financial support of this fantastic and demanding project.

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Photo 4, Nov. 9, progress in nave, looking north, by Mark Pruitt. Note detail of GFRG frieze covering air conditioning supply vents, upper right and left.



Photo 5, Nov. 9, small shrine at rear of nave, looking south, by Mark Pruitt.



Photo 6, Nov. 10, basketball and volleyball floor markings and boundaries in gym, looking east, by Larry Hoberock.

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF STILLWATER

St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church

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St. Francis Xavier

Sunday Mass

Saturday Vigil, 5 p.m.

Sunday, 8 a.m., 10 a.m., 1 p.m. (Español)

Daily Mass

Tuesday - Thursday, 8 a.m., Friday, 12:10 p.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Wednesday, 5:45 - 7 p.m.

Saturday, 3 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

St. John the Evangelist

Sunday Mass

Sunday, 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 5 p.m. during semester

Daily Mass

Mondays at 12:10 p.m.

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, 5:10 p.m.

Wednesday, 12:10 p.m. & 9 p.m. during semester

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Saturday, 4:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Change Service Requested



Photo 7, Nov. 9, concrete drive at entrance from Country Club Road, looking northeast, by Mark Pruitt.



Photo 8, Nov. 9, curb and gutter progress on south drive, looking west, by Mark Pruitt.

An Update on Our Church Project

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Photo 9, Nov. 9, masonry progress on two towers, looking northwest, by Mark Pruitt.



Photo 10, Nov. 9, sidewalk and plaza at entrance to Parish Hall, showing washed gravel and regular concrete mix, looking northeast, by Mark Pruitt.