

Dear Stillwater Catholic Community,

With great joy we embark together on a new adventure. With the dedication of a new parish church, Saint Francis Xavier, the Stillwater Catholic Community enters a new era. As your pastors, we are beyond excited and also humbled at the awesome task before us. We are in this together. We need everyone working together to make this transition a success. It has not been easy but with our faith, built on Christ and His Church, all will be well.

For the past seven years, and probably longer than that, discussions have been taking place about the future of the Catholic Community of Stillwater. The future we planned for seven years ago has arrived in the form a new parish church and a sharpening of focus for the Saint John Catholic Student Center.

We are calling this next stage "A New Parish. A New People. A New Evangelization." Let us explain.

A NEW PARISH

Beginning March 11, we will have a new parish church, St. Francis Xavier at N. Country Club and McElroy. The Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church defines a parish as "a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (Canon 515). Father O'Brien will be installed as the pastor of St. Francis Xavier at the dedication. This is intentional. While Father O'Brien has been a pastor for the last two months, he was not pastor of this new community, made up of Catholics from St. John the Evangelist, St. Francis Xavier, and all those who will join us in the future.

When the new parish is dedicated on March 11, we are asking everyone to register at St. Francis Xavier. Note our words. We are not asking anyone to "re-register." Everyone is new to the new parish. See the Frequently Asked Questions for more information.

A NEW PEOPLE

For years, we have been two parishes, geographically close (the closest in fact of any two parishes in the diocese) but not always on the same page. Many Stillwater Catholics have been involved at both churches while many have remained at one or the other. At times the two have worked well together and at other times not. This new era demands cooperation between the two. We need each other. As your pastors, we are committed to working well together (we meet weekly and are building a rectory where all the priests of Stillwater will live) for the good of the community.

As we go forward, St. Francis Xavier will be the parish church of the people of this part of Payne County. St. John the Evangelist will become a "particular parish" concentrating their evangelical efforts on the undergraduate and graduate student populations of Oklahoma State University.

A NEW EVANGELIZATION

The Church exists to go out. For these many years we have been focused, and rightly so, on many internal matters. As construction is completed and these internal issues get resolved, it is time to turn our attention outward. For every one person becoming Catholic in the United States, six are leaving. Only 30% of Catholics go to Mass on a regular basis. Statistics show the number of those professing atheism is on the rise. The so-called "Nones", those holding no beliefs, is at an all-time high, especially among young people. While Oklahoma is more religious than most states, roughly 50% of Oklahomans never go to church.

Through our evangelical efforts in Payne County, this can change. At both St. Francis Xavier and St. John the Evangelist, a new evangelization is needed. The beauty of the new church will certainly draw many visitors. We must seize this moment, welcome these visitors as our brothers and sisters, and invite them to come back over and over again.

Future plans for St. Francis Xavier include more adult faith formation, the hiring of a Director of Evangelization, Bible studies, a "Catholics Come Home" program focusing on those who have left the faith and wish to come back and much, much more.

At St. John's, Fr. Kerry, Fr. Lawrence, the FOCUS missionaries and the staff will be able to work with the OSU population to help them come to know Jesus Christ and His plan. This new focus will add new energy to an already growing and vibrant ministry.

We have a new parish. We are continually being called to be a new people. We are in desperate need of a new evangelization.

For the next month though, we are concentrating our efforts on the transition. For members of St. John, you will say goodbye to your pastor, associate pastor and parish as you knew it. For members of St. Francis Xavier you will say goodbye to your spiritual home for the last many decades. Both of these transitions will be difficult for many and we hold you in our prayers every day. We are planning some special liturgies over the next month to help us rely on Jesus and thank God for the gift of these parishes and buildings. See the Frequently Asked Questions for more information on what the transition committee has planned.

It's an exciting time to be a Catholic in Payne County!

In Christ,

Rev. Kerry Wakulich, Pastor

Rev. Brian O'Brien, Pastor