



## State of the Parish 2022

### *The Temple of God is Holy, and You Are That Temple (1 Cor 3:16)*

Fr. David Carter, Pastor and Rector

My fellow parishioners, as we enter the fall and come closer to the end of the year, it has been my practice since becoming the Pastor here at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul to make a statement on the pastoral activity of the parish and highlight not only the things that have happened in this past year, but also to set out the vision for the next year. What follows is the State of the Parish in 2022.

There have been many major developments in the world and the Church universal throughout this past year. The most momentous thing on the moral sphere is the overturning of the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court, *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion in our land by judicial fiat. Now, 49 years later, basing itself on proper jurisprudence, the Supreme Court has struck down that ruling as lacking a basis in law. This is something that pro-life people have fought for, for many years, and so we rightly celebrate this return to sanity in the legal framework of our country. But at the same time, we as a Christian people know that this is only the beginning of our efforts to create a culture of life. Major efforts in this are our Pregnancy Help Centers, and our Adoption Services. On a local level, Adoption Services are a new development through Catholic Charities of East Tennessee, and we are happy to promote this effort in our parish.

It seems, for the most part, we have finally emerged from the coronavirus pandemic and are forging ahead as a world and society, post-COVID. However, the effects of that pandemic are still with us, as we have experienced very poignantly in our own capital improvement projects, which have been plagued by supply chain delays and increased costs. Everybody is feeling the pinch of inflation these days. On the level of the Church universal, we have engaged in and are continuing the process of consultation, building up to the Synod on Synodality announced by Pope Francis. This involved surveys and listening sessions here at the Basilica. These have born good fruit, especially in the preaching series, Clarity Is Charity. In our Hispanic community, we had a major transition of leadership, as our beloved Sister Imelda Quechol, MAG, was called back to her community to serve in a very important role as a Consultor for the Congregation. Taking up right after her is Sister Eloisa Torralba Aquino, MAG, who has taken up the reins and is shepherding that community now, alongside Sister Maria del Pilar. A lot has happened in the world and the Church this past year. But we're a parish that seeks to find a way through all that is happening, guided by the wisdom of our Catholic faith.

Through the years of my pastorate, I have utilized certain tools to help discern the needs of the parish. We have had town hall meetings and surveys, as well as the ongoing help of the Parish Pastoral Council. But in 2017, we envisioned a Strategic Plan that was set to bring us to 2023. This past year I have consulted with the Parish Pastoral Council to help me discern the next steps into the future. One major thing that we discerned, as our five-year strategic plan is coming to its end, is that we don't need a new strategic plan. We have a good one. We just need to continue living it into the future. With this in mind, our **Mission** and **Vision** statements bear repeating:

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### Our **Mission** statement:

*The Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Chattanooga, Tennessee, exists to proclaim Jesus Christ, the font of all Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and we continue His mission to form disciples from all peoples according to the tradition and patrimony of the Catholic Church.*

### Our **Vision** statement:

*The Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul will be a parish of actively engaged, invested, and committed followers of Christ living the fullness of the Catholic Faith.*

By living our Mission, we have accomplished our Vision. To live out the Mission, we named three Strategic Priorities, which have been the focus of the pastoral activity of the parish over these past four years. The first Strategic Priority was **Growth in Attendance and Participation**. In 2016, we averaged 1000 people a Sunday. By 2019, before the pandemic, attendance had peaked at 1400. Obviously, the pandemic took those numbers down, but I am very pleased to report that we are now averaging over 1500 people attending Mass each weekend, an increase seen in both our English- and Spanish-speaking congregations. We are registering an increasing number of families each year. In 2020 we added 56 new families; in 2021, 89 new families; and by the end of October this year, we have already added 94 new families, with two months still left to go. Chattanooga is growing, and people are flocking to our church, Catholics and converts alike!

To meet the needs of all these folks, and to fulfill the Strategic Priority of Growth in Attendance and Participation, the Parish Pastoral Council helped me discern that the parish is more than just the events coordinated by our parish staff. We recognize the limited capacities of our on-site facilities and paid staff. Our history has proven over and over that the more we try to create and run programs using the parish staff and facilities, we put a lot of effort, time, talent, and treasure, for not much return, and it can lead very easily to burning people out. We have discerned that we need to focus the official organs of the parish on the essentials, such as Liturgy, and certain Evangelization efforts, such as Religious Education and RCIA. But we have also discerned that we want to recognize and promote ministries that answer the many needs expressed by our parishioners. Many other ministries are thriving within our parish. We want to encourage the faithful that call the Basilica parish home to pursue initiatives on their own and in their own neighborhoods, and then tell us about what they are doing so that we can get the word out.

One of the good things we can do as a parish is to be a clearing house of information, a central hub of communication. We are now seeing a multiplication of things that people really want to do and are invested in, rather than preconceived programs that are poorly attended. We've identified one of our strengths as having built a robust communication effort that involves announcements at Mass, bulletins, myParish app, social media, a weekly email, and a website full of information. These are properly done by the staff and connect all the many spokes that radiate from the hub of our parish.

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To continue speaking metaphorically, I have been communicating with several individuals, couples, and families who are at the end of some of these spokes and have encouraged them in their initiatives, to form community-based local fellowship evangelization and formation opportunities. These all serve to complete the circle of parish life and meet the needs of people where they are. These opportunities need not be created as permanent institutions or stable structures, as they are meant to be flexible and mobile, and for that reason I use the metaphor of “pitching a tent”. We already have the stable structure of our parish church, but just like the Israelites in the desert had the tent of meeting in the middle, which became the center of their worship, the tribes pitched their tents around the Temple in the center. I very much want to encourage many more opportunities and initiatives such as this.

On our Strategic Priority of **Facility Preservation**, we have long been preparing for the last big push, to make our facilities viable for the foreseeable future. We started with basic infrastructure when I first came, renovating the dilapidated old rectory and creating functional parish offices in 2014-2015. We renovated the Nursery space in 2016. Of course, we made a major renovation of the Sanctuary in 2018, followed by the completion of our historic pipe organ in 2019. Now, we are approaching the end of the 2022 renovations funded by our Under One Roof campaign: the overhaul of the grossly outdated heating and air system and the installation of a new roof, gutters, and all the minor repairs to ensure that this church is protected from the elements, as well as the addition of meeting space dedicated under the name of our late Dcn. Tom McConnell, who championed our Facility Preservation as one of his final contributions.

One of the greatest achievements I think this parish should be proud of is that we have done all these renovations, from the rectory and offices, all the way to this latest roof project, without going into debt. This is a major accomplishment for any parish, and I am very humbled by the great generosity of the people of Sts. Peter and Paul and their dedication to the Mission of our parish. I want to express my gratitude for all who have contributed to either the HOME Campaign, the Under One Roof campaign, or the ongoing offertory stewardship that keeps our parish going from year to year. You are the reason for the success of this Strategic Priority of our parish. Just like all things, this effort continues, and we are renewing our challenge for 100% participation in the offertory of all who call the Basilica parish their home. Through our recent annual stewardship appeal, we have already seen many new families, who have previously not been giving, make a pledge to give in a recordable way, in support of our Mission. This is great news to celebrate.

Now, we do have so many projects waiting for us in the future, not least of which is the quandary of All Saints Academy, the old parish school building. As you recall, by 2019, we closed the facility because of major infrastructure issues and began to pursue the potential for development of the space. This, of course, necessitated the relocation of the many ministries that were housed there, most especially our Hispanic community. I have spoken about this in past addresses. But the major development this year is the sale of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Street building that was a temporary stopgap, and the purchase of the building off Rossville Blvd., by one of the groups affiliated with our parish. We as a

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parish have provided legal and professional support for our Hispanic parishioners to accomplish this, and we benefit by housing many of our ongoing ministries and retreats at that new site.

This still leaves us with the problem of what to do with the old school building. The Facilities, Engineering, and Maintenance Advisory Council (FEMAC) as well as the Finance Council have recently been discerning paths for us in this area, and I would invite you to stay tuned for future developments. I want to say a particular thanks to the FEMAC for the hard work they have put in, advising and guiding the latest capital improvements to our parish. It truly has been a labor of love, for which I am grateful.

In our third Strategic Priority, **Active Marketing**, we have not seen as many big initiatives, but they have still brought great fruit to our parish. Obviously, our communication apostolate has done much to get the word out about the Basilica. Many people tell us that our website and social media presence are some of the first ways they came into contact with our parish, especially the many who have moved in to Chattanooga over the past couple of years. When researching where to go, they have found our online presence and have been drawn to our community. This has truly been a fruitful labor to stay on top of, but well worth it, as it fulfills this Strategic Priority. In addition, we have hopefully begun a new tradition: This past year, we fielded a booth at the largest Christian-themed music festival in the region, Jfest. A dedicated team of parishioners planned and executed this feat and manned the booth throughout the day, even braving thunderstorms. Many *Catholic Answers* booklets were handed out. The smell of incense wafted through the crowd, and lots of conversations were had with passersby, intrigued by the Catholic faith.

One of the prerogatives we enjoy as a minor Basilica is the promotion of cultural events in the community. In the past, we have hosted the Chattanooga Symphony, the Chattanooga Bach Choir, the Roueché Chorale, as well as numerous organ concerts. This Friday, November 11, we will be hosting the Jericho Brass Band for a Veterans Day concert that is being offered free to the public. What a great way to honor those who have served our country to defend the freedoms we enjoy, as well as to open our doors, so that people can enjoy the beauty that forms a part of our apostolate.

In addition to the Strategic Priorities that spring from our Strategic Plan, this past year, we had a unique opportunity to participate in a global Synod on Synodality. This experience bore the surprising fruit of hearing how well we have been living out our Mission, but also calling us back to the basics. This evolved into my preaching series, Clarity is Charity, which I hope has served to ground the faithful of our parish in the Catholic faith, to give them a firm foundation for being committed followers of Jesus Christ, living the fullness of the Catholic faith.

One particular fruit of this recent preaching series involved clarity on the Sacrament of Matrimony, that has led to many people coming to live a fuller sacramental life by convalidating or regularizing their marriage situations, or making steps to live in accord with the truth about marriage, taught by our Savior, Jesus Christ. This can only serve to increase the spiritual life and holiness of our parishioners. In the past year alone, I have met with at least 61 people to discuss Sacramental life, and the other priests, deacons and staff are helping many others. As of the latest tally this year, we've

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administered 126 Baptisms, 78 Confirmations, including 54 people received into full communion with the Catholic Church. We have been working with at least 18 couples to bring their irregular marriage situation in accord with the Gospel teaching, as a direct result of the Clarity Is Charity preaching effort - as well as helping folks who have gone through a divorce to move forward with a Tribunal process. Several more couples are at different stages in the process, a process that opens the door to new life and many sacramental graces. We acknowledge that the process can often take time, and that results are not instantaneous. However, conversion of heart is always possible – at any moment; and with God, there is always a way to his Sacred Heart. It just may not be the way we prefer or want. With humility, we can experience here and now the love of God, no matter where we are on the journey.

Especially regarding the subject matter of the Synod on Synodality and the emphasis on reaching out to those on the margins or in irregular situations, people oftentimes ask, “Will I be welcome in the Church?” This is a question loaded with expectations and equivocations. The reality is that all of us are sinners and fall short of the grace of God, and it is only by God’s gracious invitation that we have access to the Father’s house. The better answer to this question is not, you’ll be welcome, or you’ll be unwelcome, but rather, **“You will be loved.”** We who ourselves have been invited to the Father’s house also extend the invitation to all peoples. It is our parish’s Mission to invite all and teach them the Gospel, show them the path for living in accord with it – a path we try to walk ourselves, and make a commitment to accompany all who would walk this path with us.

In this effort, we have the example of the saints, who exemplify the Christian life and also intercede for us as we walk this path in the valley of tears. We are very blessed and enriched to have our own cause exemplar of the Christian life, in the case of the Servant of God, Father Patrick Ryan. His Cause for Canonization opened in 2016, and we are expecting the diocesan phase to conclude in this next year. We will be sending the results to the Holy Father in Rome, with the hope that at the end of the Roman phase, we will be able to call Father Patrick Ryan venerable. I invite you to pray for the success of this Cause, as I truly believe it to be very timely, in an age where the priesthood has been maligned from within by the bad acting of so many priests and bishops. With this Cause, we can hold up a sure example of priestly sanctity as the ideal proposed by the Church.

Speaking of the priesthood, I want to take the opportunity to thank my brother priests, especially Fr. Valentin, the Associate Pastor, who does so much to help me and this parish while I take on the added duties of diocesan assignments, as well as Father Nick Tran, Chaplain of the Vietnamese community here in town, who so graciously volunteers to offer Masses and confessions, as well as hospital calls, for our parish. In addition, we are blessed with a group of deacons who truly cooperate in the building up of the parish. Of course, Dcn. Hicks Armor, while still assigned to our parish, is involved as much as he can be, now that he has even more diocesan assignments than I do. We are also blessed with the ministry of Dcn. Gaspar DeGaetano, who helps with our Outreach, our Homebound ministry, and the Fr. Patrick Ryan Cause for Canonization. We also are grateful for the first full year of service of Dcn. Joe Hartz, who along with his wife Sherry, have brought their talents and gifts to bear here at our parish. We also want to acknowledge Dcn. Joe Roy and his wife Amanda,

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who, while not officially assigned to our parish, are helping in our Marriage Preparation ministry that has grown so much this year. Besides the clergy of the parish, our official staff are of the highest quality and caliber. Without them, our parish would fall apart. I want to name especially Cathy Oliver, Maria Rist, and Marina Delaney, who make the parish hum. In addition, I am very grateful for John Mahoney, the long-time Maintenance Supervisor, Florence Porter, our DRE, who works tirelessly behind the scenes in many ways, Dan Pacitti, Tyler Ross, Andrea Tierney, Christine Palisoc, Araceli Villanueva, and Rachel Collins, who all keep the parish going in their respective positions. I am grateful also for the many leaders and volunteers who give of themselves in teaching our young people, those who serve the liturgy in many capacities, as well as all the many consultative bodies such as the members of the Parish Pastoral Council, the Finance Council, and the FEMAC. We have dozens of other ministries that are active in our parish – look on our website under Parish Ministries to get an idea of all the good things that are happening. There are too many volunteers to name, but I want you all to know how grateful I am for you.

As I conclude this State of the Parish address, it is my custom to present a theme for the new year. The theme that has been speaking to my heart is **that of the interior life**. Very providentially, today, we celebrate the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica. The Office of Readings provides a famous sermon by St. Caesarius of Arles, in which he says: “My fellow Christians, today is the birthday of this church, an occasion for celebration and rejoicing. We, however, ought to be the true and living Temple of God....After our Baptism, we merited the privilege of being temples of Christ. And if we think more carefully about the meaning of our salvation, we shall realize that we are indeed living and true Temples of God. God does not dwell only in structures fashioned by human hands, in homes of wood and stone, but rather He dwells principally in the soul, made according to His own image, and fashioned by His own hand. Therefore, the Apostle Paul says, ‘The Temple of God is holy, and you are that temple.’” This theme will involve diving into the rich interior life proposed by the Gospel and the encounter with the living God, who wishes to establish His kingdom in the hearts of all believers. I would like to flesh out this essential component of Christian life throughout the next year in my preaching, as well as in initiatives to encourage and sustain the life of prayer among the faithful. The heart and soul of the Church’s existence is to cooperate with God’s grace to create the new Temple, not made by human hands, but built by God’s grace in the hearts of believers, and then to nourish that interior life through the Sacraments and the life of prayer, and thereby sustain it unto eternal life. All the other things that we do as a church must serve this primary spiritual mission, to create new life in the soul, to nourish it, and to sustain it unto eternal life. Hence, my theme: *The Temple of God is Holy, and You are That Temple. (1 Cor 3:16)* With that I will conclude this State of the Parish Address 2022 and ask the Lord to bless our parish, yet again in this upcoming new year.

Humbly submitted by

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Pastor and Rector