



State of the Parish 2018

Fr. David Carter, Pastor and Rector

2018 has been a full and active year here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul. From the ministry reports, it is clear that we are sustaining and maintaining many of the ministries and initiatives that have begun over the past few years, including our homeschool co-op, bilingual events, as well as expanding our offerings to include a Trail Life and American Heritage Girls troop. All of these ministries and services of the parish require commitment and dedication. I have seen many people step up into these roles, and for that I am very grateful for their contribution to our parish. However, a lack of participation and commitment within the ministries has been a source of consternation for not a few ministry leaders. It seems that our modern life is full of activities and other commitments, and one gets the impression that most of the things done around here are done by a few people doing multiple things. The future of the parish will be well served by attention to this aspect of parish life and increasing the participation of people in all of our ministries and inviting more people to join in rather than turning to the same few for everything. To this end, I have been working on developing a Volunteer Resource List that will be populated by names surfaced by ministry leaders and other parishioners so that I have someone to turn to when they ask for help. This is an ongoing list and suggestions are always welcome.

Among the many initiatives that we have begun here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul, none have been as momentous as the one that we are currently undertaking, that is, the sanctuary renovation of our beautiful Basilica church. This renovation was first conceived in the Town Hall meeting in the summer of 2014 when we were preparing for the HOME Campaign. Among many initiatives that have since been fulfilled, like the nursery renovation, the safety and security upgrades to the campus, the new sound system, and even the rectory renovation, the next big project that was on the hearts and minds of our parishioners was a much-needed renovation to our sanctuary. Specifically brought out in that town hall meeting was the desire to move the Tabernacle to the center of the sanctuary, to restore the altar rail, and to replace the carpeted flooring with something more durable. That durable surface was suggested to be marble. God laughed, and in the course of our preparations and doing the hard math of the budget, the marble changed to hardwood, with surprisingly pleasing results and a providential harmony with the art and architecture of the church, making it more of a restoration of the original intent of the architects.

Throughout 2015 and 2016, while the HOME Campaign was going on, we pursued the other initiatives mentioned above, but by early 2016 we had worked with James McCreary, the noted church architect who designed the new Cathedral in Knoxville. He drew up for us the plans for the sanctuary renovation that we had longed for. Throughout 2017 we attempted to prepare for the renovation by obtaining quotes and bids and sourcing materials. We made the conscious effort to hold off beginning the renovation until such time as we had secured our funding and would not have to incur debt. By the spring of 2018 we had arrived at that place, and with the permission of Bishop Stika and the Diocesan Finance Council, we began our renovation project by awarding our first contract to the woodworkers who have now produced our beautiful new altars. At the end of July this past summer, we made the arduous move down into the basement of Varallo Parish Hall and set up a temporary sanctuary that has served us for the duration of the renovation project. Many people came out to help us make that move, and even though we are in exile and in a temporary sanctuary, it is a beautiful place to offer the saving Sacrament.

While in Varallo Parish Hall, the work continued upstairs, the first step being the remediation of the asbestos underneath the carpet and vinyl tiles. After this work was complete, we made the first of several discoveries that has led to an even more beautiful restoration than we could have imagined. Underneath the carpet and vinyl tile and the thin-set layer of concrete, underneath both, we found the original heart pine floors laid in



1890. The decision was made to simply restore these floors to their original glory. In an irony that is not lost to those who value tradition, those things which were laid down as the least expensive at the time have now become a sought-after and valuable commodity that fits very well into the project we have here of rejoicing in Sacred Tradition.

We also noticed that those same floors continued into the vestibule and so we made a decision to extend our renovation into that area of welcome and greeting that is an essential part of our fellowship as Christians. While looking into this space, we made the second discovery that has brought great joy, namely the two alcoves with vaulted ceilings, that for eighty years had been hidden behind plaster and wood walls. They have been opened and refinished and painted and now add considerable space to our previously cramped vestibule and will no doubt be one of the more awe-inspiring parts of our already awesome renovation of the church.

In addition to the new altars and the flooring, we also wanted to improve the lighting situation in the church. This led us to the third great discovery, that the power that had been coming to the church was antiquated and even potentially dangerous in the way it had been retrofitted in the early part of the 20th century. While it was an added expense, it was also an opportunity for us to bring fresh, clean power in new wires and conduits to the whole church, replacing outdated circuitry and panels, and bringing the Basilica into the 21st century, at least from an electrical point of view.

The centerpiece of our sanctuary renovation is, of course, the new Altar of Sacrifice. This altar was handsomely carved from white oak according to the architect's specifications and is a noble and beautiful representation of Christ Himself. Atop the wood of the altar is placed the altar stone. The choice of stone for the altar top was the result of many hours of deliberation and discussion about the diversity of options. We could have gone to far-flung places and obtained marble like in many a church in Italy. The cost and the lead time necessary for choosing that path was undesirable, in particular because the suggestion was that we not get the full slab of stone, in order to save cost, but instead use thinner pieces arranged to make it look like it was thicker. This inauthentic construction for appearance sake did not appeal to my heart, that longed for integrity, especially in the altar of the Holy Sacrifice. Furthermore, I had on my heart a desire that the very mountains that surround us and show forth the glory and majesty of God should produce for us an adequate and even elegant stone, made worthy for the sacrifice by the Bishop's consecration. We found such a stone in the Cumberland Mountains to the north and west, within the bounds of the Diocese of Knoxville, and even in the most impoverished of counties, Morgan County, north of Rockwood, Tennessee: a beautiful blue stone that will be raised to the dignity of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Just as Our Lady said, "He has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly," so, too, this humble stone from our surrounding mountains will lead us to the Holy Mountain of Zion in the New Jerusalem.

All told, this sanctuary renovation project has been a fitting expression of our Joy of Tradition. We have been able to do something new that at the same time restores the original vision and grandeur of this beautiful church, now bearing the title, Minor Basilica. It is my hope that this momentous renovation, in succession to the previous renovations, will allow this building to continue its mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ to future generations by its Beauty, the Truth proclaimed from her pulpits, and the Goodness of the parishioners who enjoy it.

It is our hope to be back in the newly renovated sanctuary sometime during Advent. Bishop Stika is scheduled to consecrate the new altar on December 23rd at 10 am, the Fourth Sunday of Advent, so that we might welcome the Christ Child at Christmas in a fully restored and consecrated church and altar. Another thing to note will be that Bishop Stika will consecrate this new altar using the newly issued *Rite of Dedication of an Altar*, making our altar the first that he will have dedicated using it.



Following the return to our sanctuary, our organ will be dismantled to remove debris that has blown in through the open bell tower over the years, a cleaning it needs to keep functioning. It will require us to do without the organ during Lent. At Easter we will again have the joy of hearing our historic pipe organ, completed with 122 new pipes that were part of its original design, a project made possible through your generosity this past year, when the opportunity arose.

In reflecting on this past year's ministry and our sanctuary renovation, the theme that comes out most clearly is discipleship, and the great example of this theme, given to us by our Hispanic Community. They have grown in size and organization to form now half of our parish numbers in both Mass attendance and weekly events. In fact, in this latter, oftentimes they surpass the English speaking community in the amount of activities that are held on a weekly basis. Furthermore, whenever a call goes out for volunteers, it is wonderful to see those who have not much to give in financial ways give so much by way of time and talent and hard work. Just a few examples can highlight this reality; namely, the great showing of support when we were removing the old flooring in the church, when we had to move the pews to All Saints Academy, and the weekly cleaning of Varallo Parish Hall after all of the Masses. These and many other times, the organization and zeal of our Hispanic brothers and sisters have greatly benefitted our parish.

We continue the process and the attempt to integrate both communities, and we know it is a long and arduous road. I in particular would like to highlight the event that happened on the weekend of Nov. 3rd and 4th. With the coming of President Donald Trump to a rally five blocks from the parish, and the worries about traffic on Sunday afternoon, as well as the more obvious fear that many of our Hispanic community feels, giving that they are in this country without documentation, we decided to cancel the 1:30 pm Spanish Mass and move it to Saturday night at 8:30 pm at the House of Prayer, the Immaculate Conception, on Rossville Blvd. Six hundred people showed up to that cramped space with the garage doors open wide, even though it was cold outside, and celebrated with joy the saving Sacrifice of our merciful Lord. Their sense of community and family was even more exemplified by the sharing of a meal and fellowship afterwards, even later into the night.

This event moved me to recognize that these brothers and sisters of ours can teach us so much about the living out the Christian faith, and I pray that it becomes more of an inspiration for our parish to embrace those who are our neighbors and who share the common bond with us of the Catholic faith, even if we don't share the same language and ethnicity. This is one of the reasons why we have begun a greater emphasis on our bilingual Mass. Though it is tedious and at times discomfoting, it is an attempt at doing the Catholic thing of bringing from the diversities of nations and tongues a unity of praise and worship. We have the unique ability in our Catholic faith to be united in our liturgy through the use of the Latin language, which is ironically the thing that unites us even though very few are familiar with it. However, here at Sts. Peter and Paul, we recognize that there is a great heritage of faith that has oftentimes been overlooked and under-utilized in unifying all those touched by Western civilization, and we rejoice in the opportunity that it provides for unity in a time of great division in our society.

As I have presented the wonderful things happening in this past year at our parish, it is also important for us to look forward to the years to come. To that end, we have also been in the process, in the last half of this year, of developing a five-year strategic plan. I am grateful for Dr. Jimmy Turner for his gift of time and talent in leading us through this process, which included interviews of people outside of our parish, inside of our parish, staff and volunteers alike, and which had a select group meet on two Saturdays to compile the data and discern the statements that will guide us in the future. The following statements are the product of that labor. These statements will guide the Parish Pastoral Council in the months to come to produce a strategic plan.



THE BASILICA OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

We Believe – Guiding Principles

- All people need to be reconciled to God; Our Tradition is rooted in God's gift of His Son to the world to accomplish that reconciliation.
- The Catholic Church exercises this ministry of reconciliation through the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith.
- We believe that the Truth, Beauty, and Goodness of the traditional liturgical expressions and practices handed down to us by the universal church naturally lead people to these sacraments and thereby reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.
- The work of our parish follows in the footsteps of the apostles, doing on a local level what is morally and objectively good for all humanity.
- Coming from diverse languages and backgrounds, united by our Roman (Latin) Rite heritage, we are called to be one community of faith grounded in the Eucharist.
- As a parish enjoying the title of 'Minor Basilica,' we accept the gift of the sacred art and architecture of our parish church. We acknowledge the responsibility to steward these gifts and share them with the greater Chattanooga community as an apostolate of beauty.

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.

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.



At a general priest meeting last year, when discussing the role of the parish in the life of the Church, a phrase was used that I think is very applicable. The parish was described as a “school for saints.” How very apt. As you know, we have opened a Cause for Sainthood for a member of this parish, in fact, her pastor from 1872-1878, the Servant of God, Fr. Patrick Ryan. I’m sure by now you’ve heard his story and of his heroic sacrifice during the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 and how he offered his life in service to his flock, knowing full well the danger. His cause continues to progress with the diocesan phase, and we hope soon to welcome his body into the church building in a tomb that will be prepared for him inside the Basilica church. But this reminder of a Servant of God in our midst should inspire all of us to put our lives in the service of God and our fellow man.

Discipleship is the theme that I would like to highlight this coming year. We exist as a parish to continue the mission of Jesus Christ to form followers after His example. We have many resources at our disposal to accomplish this mission, from our beautiful church building and our dedicated and generous parishioners, but the greatest resource of all is the sacramental presence that our God gives to us in the Eucharist. My hope is that as we move the Blessed Sacrament to the center of our sanctuary that the Eucharistic Lord might become also the center of our lives and the life of this parish. With Jesus Christ at the center of our parish, we will be able to accomplish the mission of discipleship in Chattanooga and be the parish that He desires us to be to the glory of God the Father.

Humbly Submitted by:
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Pastor and Rector