

State of CTK Parish

January 2022

Things in general

In this first month of 2022, I would like to share with you my thoughts about the state of Christ the King Parish at this point in our history.

These are certainly not ordinary times. Living through an ongoing pandemic has affected every aspect of life and will no doubt be a touchstone in history for generations in the future. Each of us could identify various challenges we have faced and losses we have endured.

As a parish we experience these effects as well, and yet I can confidently say that the overall state of our parish is good. There are many aspects of life and faith at Christ the King that reveal positive responses to the work of God in our world. Of course, any assessment of life in a Catholic parish should start with the reality of a loving and unchanging God. It is our great privilege to have heard His call in our lives. It is our salvation to respond to His call and come to the sacraments. The grace of the sacraments at work in our lives is the primary good on which every other part of Catholic life is built.

With so many limitations in our lives these days it is important to emphasize that our God remains without limitations and offers us full access to the life of grace. Too often we take this for granted and focus on what seems to be going wrong, but the Lord is constantly seeking us out and calling for His lost sheep. We only need listen and turn to Him.

The offer of grace and our response is the reason we decided to articulate our mission by saying we are a parish: Alive in Christ. Sharing His Life and Love. At the heart of being Catholic is receiving from God so that we might give to others. When this dynamic plays out in our lives, we are fully alive. Despite the pandemic there are many who come to the Lord and then let themselves be sent. We have many examples of ordinary people living abundant lives.

Signs of life

While the number of people at Mass each weekend is roughly 70% of attendance before the pandemic, our weekly celebration of the Eucharist is filled with life and grace. It is powerful to experience our gathering for worship. I am moved each week to pray with this community. I sense the power of life in Christ as I hear voices raised and faces seeking salvation. Our music elevates our spirits. The word of God penetrates our hearts. Jesus comes to meet us and offer Himself to the Father. We are nourished with His Body and Blood. We stand shoulder to shoulder to be reconciled and sent forth. As I greet you headed for the doors I see families and individuals filled with the Holy Spirit and ready to share the Gospel. This is a reality and not merely wishful thinking. While imperfect and always in need of improvement, Sunday Mass remains the heart of our lived faith.

Expanded times for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also worth mentioning. Daily confessions that started during the Covid shutdown have continued because of the clear demand for those times. It is a great privilege as a priest to share in God's offer of mercy in such an intimate way. Know that you are an inspiration to your priests for your desire to grow in holiness.

Fueled by Sunday Mass there are many examples through the week of people gathering to serve, to learn and to pray. We have large groups such as Men of Faith and Walking with Purpose. We have smaller groups that study scripture and work to strengthen marriages. We have boots on the ground that support many, many community organizations in the practice of charity. In the back of church we have hope carts that make it easy to provide goods for people in need. We have dedicated staff and volunteers who guide and shape many works of faith and we should all be grateful. I give special thanks to our Knights of Columbus for their service. They are usually the first group people mention when looking for help in various ways.

Many of our efforts to serve the poor and meet needs in our community happen through our MOVE ministry. They are responding to a wide variety of people and serving as God leads them. One current effort is providing for an Afghani refugee family and helping them settle into a new life here in Little Rock. Ongoing needs, updates and celebrations can be found on the website for the constant work this ministry covers.

Financially we continue to tithe 10% of our collections to provide funds to 30 local charitable organizations. Your generosity to make this possible is appreciated. With parish collections we have been able to continue during the pandemic because of increased electronic giving and close attention to good stewardship with the resources we have. The great majority of donations come from a small percentage of parishioners so there is always the need to ask for more people to consider sharing their resources. As a parish we are committed to good stewardship with the generosity of everyone.

Next, I mention our ongoing ministry with children and teens. Our school has had to adapt in many ways through the challenges of the pandemic and continues to work hard to provide growth in faith and education. Many people dedicated to their work and to volunteers make this possible. Despite the challenges the children bring joy to our campus every day.

For our Faith Formation program Covid limitations created an opportunity to focus on whole family formation. We shifted to online work at home when we couldn't meet in person and have continued a version of that since. When we do meet in person now, it is to gather the whole family. This is crucial to our goal of lifelong formation because faith in the home must be the foundation for maturing into adult faith practice.

With CYM we can also celebrate much success and amazing fidelity from our teen leaders and adult support. They continue to adapt to reaching out and serving the youth of our parish despite the constantly changing demands. We can all find inspiration in the faith and commitment they live out every day.

These comments can't include details of each group in our parish, but examples like the Grief Ministry, Garden Angels and Vocations Committee continue to serve well and help our community live out the Catholic Faith. Hopefully there can be additional updates on more groups soon.

Finally, I want to highlight members of our parish to be ordained this year. In addition to Daniel Wendel carrying on the tradition of priestly vocations from our parish we have seven deacon candidates who will be ordained in June of this year. We pray for them and look forward to the many ways God will use them for the good of our parish and community.

Opportunities for growth

Because God's grace is without limit, we have room for growth. We can each respond better. We have needs that are not fully met. We have members who remain disconnected. We have sin that needs reconciling. One of the traditional practices of prayer is a daily examen. This is a chance to review each day and notice the ways God has been active, to consider my better and worse responses and to resolve a better response tomorrow. I invite each of you to take a little bit of time to examen your part in the life of Christ the King parish. Consider how God has worked in your life and give thanks. Be open to how God is calling you to more. Resolve to give priority to the work of grace in your life this year. I remind you of the recent reading at Mass from 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. The one Holy Spirit gives us varied gifts and calls us to share them for good.

There are many ways you can carry out your resolve and share your gifts. It may be directed to your family as your primary vocation. You may feel led by God to help start some new outreach. Take time in your prayer to hear how God's Spirit leads.

As your pastor, I want to identify some of the known needs in our parish at this time. I am asking for help in these specific areas and know that many would benefit from your response. Every parish depends on volunteers who are generous with their time and talent. Please consider if you can help with one of the following needs:

For our worship we need volunteers as:

Ushers

Lectors

Eucharistic ministers at Mass

For our ministries on campus we need:

Adorers in the chapel

Candle cleaning in chapel

CYM adult chaperones

Catechists to help teach children and families

Bookstore workers

Garden Angels (for landscaping work)
Media/Technology communications
Librarians (in ministry building)
Workers for annual events like Rexfest

For reaching out to our community we need:

Communion ministers to the sick
MOVE office support (communications, volunteer management, etc)
Sewing mission inventory management
Help managing/delivering hope cart items to charities
Settled Souls volunteers to move the homeless into homes

If you are able to help with any of these needs please contact the parish office by email at ctkchurch@ctklr.com or by phone at 501-225-6774. In a few weeks we will also have cards at Mass asking for volunteers as a reminder. Thank you for prayerfully considering how God is asking you to serve.

Final thoughts

Finally, I want to mention something I have been speaking about in various forms since I arrived at CTK. The greatest need we have as a parish is for each member to see themselves as witnesses and look for opportunities to share your faith. Evangelization is the great ongoing need because God asks each of us to play a part in spreading the Kingdom of God. This is needed in words as well as actions. Each of us knows people who have left the practice of faith or feels disconnected from our community. You are likely the only person with an opportunity to connect with certain people. Success in our parish depends on each of us being a bridge of faith for the people in our circles.

Pope Francis has launched an effort to hear from people around the world who are disconnected or marginalized. This is called the Synod on Synodality. The name is strange, but the idea is to consider how the Church hears from people of all backgrounds to live the faith in our time. We have been working on questions to help people share stories of both the good and the bad of their Catholic experience. I intend to speak about this at Mass this weekend and will follow that with another email next week. This will be a call for many people to share their stories and reach out to others. Please consider who you would like to invite to reconnect with faith and look for more information soon.

God bless each of you and thank you for your part in the family of Christ the King parish. I am grateful for the witness of faith that you give in ways that are seen and unseen. We pray this will be a year filled with grace for all of us.

In Christ,
Fr. Erik