

INTRODUCTORY HOMILY – St. Thomas the Apostle, Naperville – June 23/24, 2012

Greetings All! I am Fr. Don McLaughlin, your new pastor.....and I can't tell you how excited and thrilled I am to be assigned to serve as the 4th pastor in the history of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish!

Knowing that I would be transferred this June after serving as pastor of St. Michael Church in Wheaton the past 11 years, I anxiously awaited the list of pastor openings to be sent from the Priest Personnel Board. That letter arrived in late January while I was away participating in the four month Ministry to Ministers sabbatical program at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. Of the 6 parishes that pastor openings were announced, St. Thomas the Apostle was my first choice. I wanted to come to St. Thomas because of what I have heard from friends and partners in ministry that I have been associated with over the years and who have ministered at or belonged to St. Thomas...people like Fr. Richard Lundgren, Fr. Matt Pozen, Dr. Helen Manielli, and Fr. Mark Cote. The reputation you have as a spirit-filled, dynamic, active, welcoming, parish community that serves the poor, twins with a parish in Haiti, and has an incredible music ministry is something I wanted very much to be a part of!

Also, I have been a priest of the Joliet Diocese for 31 years and know all your former pastors...Fr. Jim Curtin, Fr. Donald Kenny, and Fr. Joel. I have admired their faithful implementation of the vision of Vatican II as they shepherded you into the wonderful parish family you are today. I share their vision and look forward to building upon what they have brought to fruition here at St. Thomas. My theology of church and pastoring can be summed up in just a few thoughts: On the morning of March 18, 2002, nine months after I was assigned pastor of St. Michael in Wheaton, fire destroyed the church. A television reporter asked: "Father, how do you feel about losing your church?" I responded: "We didn't lose the church we only lost the building where the church gathers – that the church was the people of St. Michael parish". Four years later when we dedicated the new St. Michael Church a reporter asked: "So father, what are you going to do now?" My response? "Continue to build church"!

My role as pastor is to foster greatness in others....to call forth the God given gifts and talents of you – the people of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish – to build up the Body of Christ right here in Naperville.

In empowering you, the laity, I am free to do the ministry to which I am called, namely: preside at the Eucharist, preach the word of God, model reconciliation, and travel with you - not as one who has all the answers, but one who like you, is sometimes weak, sinful, with faults and limited talents. One who with you gropes too through the darkness of the world into the light of God, who loves us, forgives us, and sends Himself in Jesus Christ and in the grace of the Holy Spirit. So you see, you must carry me just as I must carry you.

Now, to share a little personal information about myself: I was born on February 16, 1952 in Indianapolis, Indiana and was baptized at Christ the King parish where I also attended grammar school. My only claim to fame is that I graduated from the same high school as David Letterman! My parents, 2 step-mothers, and only sibling are all deceased. I have 3 nephews and a niece who live with their families through the country.

I graduated from Indiana State University in 1974 and moved to Chicagoland to take a job as Activity Director at the Bensenville Home Society. In August 1977 I entered Sacred Heart School of Theology in Hales Corners, WI under the sponsorship of the Diocese of Joliet. I was ordained a priest in 1981 and have served the parishes of: St. Alexander, Villa Park; St. Philip the Apostle, Addison; St. Walter, Roselle; St. Charles Borromeo, Bensenville; and St. Michael, Wheaton.

Some of my interests and hobbies include: photography; traveling - especially to Europe (every once in a while God whispers in my ear to go check and see if His Alps are still there!); I am a wine enthusiast and go to Sonoma County, California every year (a "business" trip to taste new altar wines!); I enjoy theatre (I have seen Phantom of the Opera over 30 times in its 25 years – friends tell me I could be an understudy for any role – I tell them I'm fat enough to be Carlotta!); concerts (Mozart and I are great friends - but so too are Diana Ross and the Motown/Disco era!); I appreciate both contemporary and cathedral pipe organ church music; I enjoy college sports (especially Notre Dame football); DA Bears (I was their chaplain for the '83 & '84 seasons). Unlike Fr. Joel, I'm not a very good cook, but love to eat! (I made a grilled cheese sandwich once and left the plastic wrap on the cheese!) So, I welcome dinner invites to your home or your favorite restaurant or I would be happy to introduce you to my favorite restaurant in Wheaton. And, I have a 9 year old Beagle-mix dog named Heidi, who is pathetic, suffers from separation anxiety, and wants to follow me everywhere! She is not happy locked in my office right now!

As I begin my pastorate at St. Thomas, I would appreciate your prayers. Transitions are always a challenge and an opportunity. Experience in my 19 years as a pastor has told me that some hope I make certain changes immediately and others hope that I change nothing at all. As I told our staff when I first met them on May 29th, I feel I need to live and experience the community of St. Thomas for at least a year before I get a sense of how my gifts and talents will best serve this parish community. I simply ask that you accept me for who I am, and I will do my best not to compare you and how things are done at St. Thomas with my previous parish. I also ask for your patience. It will take me a long time to put names and faces together. You only have one new name and face to get used to - I literally have hundreds!

Finally, being assigned to Naperville is like a home-coming for me. My ordained ministry began in this town. I was assigned in January 1981 to the newly founded St. Margaret Mary Parish for my deacon internship. It was from St. Margaret Mary that I was ordained a priest on October 10, 1981. Naperville has certainly grown in 31 years! God willing and by his grace, if I serve two 6 year terms as pastor of St. Thomas, I will retire in the same town where it all began!

I look forward to working with our dedicated staff and to meeting and serving you! The name Thomas has special meaning to me – it's the name of my late father and brother.

May God Bless Us – the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle!