

May 16, 2024

Dear St. John's Parish Community,

The Pastoral Council met with Rev. James D. Proffitt, the Vicar for Clergy, and the Parish Revitalization team from the Archdiocese of Baltimore to discuss the concerns that many of you have shared with us and with the Archdiocese regarding the transfers of Fr. Gerry, Fr. Ambrose, and Padre Hilario. We appreciate their quick action to meet and for their commitment to assist our parish community through this transition.

To begin the meeting, they assured us that our parish is not being "punished" for doing something wrong and they are not trying to "fix" our parish. In fact, the Archdiocesan Parish Revitalization team and Fr. Proffitt highlighted their awareness of the welcoming nature and the diversity of St. John's, as well as our strong active commitment to work for social justice, and to actively care for all God's creation. They especially noted the active, committed lay leaders who populate our ministries. In fact, it was these aspects of our faith community that were among the main considerations in the selection of new clergy to serve our parish. St. John's has been and will continue to be, an important, large, vibrant faith community in the Archdiocese.

During our pastoral planning process a few years ago, our parish recognized the importance and need for us to evangelize by inviting and welcoming our neighbors. As noted in the information provided by Fr. Gerry, the Missionhursts are a religious community that goes out in their communities to preach the Good News. The Missionhursts seek to listen, gain knowledge about and to understand the communities they serve. They work to empower the laity to be active disciples. The Missionhursts seek to respond to situations of injustice, misery, and oppression. As you look around our parish, you will see that our many ministries and programs are run by the lay men and women of our parish. Our parish continues its long-standing commitment to actively work for social justice and care for those who are marginalized. Based on the above observations, it appears that the Missionhursts will be a good fit for our parish. There are several religious orders currently serving in parishes throughout the Archdiocese, and we can learn from those parishes how they transitioned to religious orders.

To acknowledge and affirm the great diversity of our parish community, our new Pastor, Fr. Mel and Associate Pastor, Fr. Sonny, are multi-lingual, and both speak Spanish fluently. This is a critical need in our parish, as our community continues to grow and presents a welcomed opportunity for our diverse communities to grow closer together. If additional clergy support is needed, the preference of the order will be for the Missionhursts to meet this need. This does not mean that Archdiocesan priests cannot say Masses at our parish, and they may be asked to fill in from time to time.

Another question we are hearing is "Why are all of our clergy being re-assigned?" Fr. Proffitt shared a couple of reasons. As you know, Archbishop Lori appointed Fr. Gerry to serve as the Director for the Care of Senior and Retired Priests of the Archdiocese of Baltimore following the request for retirement by Fr. Bill Foley. This request by Fr. Foley set into motion the need to

replace Fr. Gerry. The Missionhursts had approached the Archdiocese about possible affiliation in the last year or so and communities throughout the Archdiocese were being considered. In this evaluation and with the pending change to replace Fr. Gerry, St. John's was determined to be a good fit for this new pastoral relationship. As a religious order, the Missionhursts life in community is vital. They live, work, pray and grow together in community and the archdiocese is honoring their call to live and work in community. Our new clergy will be able to serve the spiritual needs of our entire, diverse community. There are also critical needs in the Archdiocese that Padre Hilario and Fr. Ambrose are being asked to use their gifts and talents to help address. Fr. Gerry will be leaving our parish on July 1<sup>st</sup>, but Fr. Ambrose will remain with us until August 1<sup>st</sup> to assist with the transition, as we await the arrival of our new Associate Pastor. Fr. Ambrose has been assigned to Sacred Heart in Glyndon as of August 1<sup>st</sup>. The timing of Padre Hilario's reassignment is still yet to be determined and it appears, at this moment, that he will be reassigned sometime this Fall. The Archdiocese is keenly aware of the need to provide our parish with a date for Padre Hilario's departure.

We know that you have many other questions and will have more as we move through this transition. As your Pastoral Council, we are committed to doing our best to ensure that you have an opportunity to express your concerns and ask questions. Members of the Pastoral Council and our staff, as well as members from the Archdiocesan Parish Renewal team, are coordinating times to be available at both WL and OM as soon as possible to listen to you, to provide you the answers to your questions, and to walk with our entire parish community during this transition.

There are also plans under consideration that will allow our parish to meet Fr. Mel before July 1<sup>st</sup>. We ask for your understanding and patience as we all work together through this transition.

We believe the Vicar for Clergy and the Archdiocese Parish Renewal team kept our parish needs in mind when making the tough decisions surrounding the replacement of Fr. Gerry. After learning more about the history and charism of the Missionhursts, we believe there will be great opportunities for our parish to thrive as we transition. Along with staff and parish leadership, we commit that we will welcome and work closely with Fr. Mel, upon his arrival, to share with him our history, and the work we do in the parish and in the community. We cherish our uniqueness, and we will continue our work and relationships with the other faith congregations at both OM and WL.

We ask you to join us during this transition to pray for, and welcome Fr. Mel and Fr. Sonny to our parish, with the love and generosity of spirit that is St. John's. Also, we ask you to join your prayer with ours for happiness and health for Frs. Gerry, Ambrose, and Hilario. As a parish, we will continue to spread the Good News inspired by the Holy Spirit seeking social justice, caring for creation, helping our neighbors in need, and providing support to our neighbors in countries throughout the world.

St. John's Pastoral Council