

Dear Parish Family,

Greetings in the Lord! It is my hope that this summer has been an opportunity for each of you to spend some time in relaxation and with people you love, enjoying the beauty around us in ways that can be difficult during other times of the year. I wanted to communicate with all of you on the occasion of my first anniversary as pastor of St Paul Church and just reflect with you on the past, present and future.

This past year has been an exciting (and at times exhausting) one for me. I am so grateful to each of you for your kindness and hospitality. I feel very welcome in Ramsey, and very much at home. I am grateful to God for my brother priests, for our terrific parish staff, and for the many beautiful people that make up our community. When I came I discovered a vibrant and loving community, and it has been a joy to become part of it all! In addition to the varied ministries present already at St. Paul, the past year has seen the establishment of a New Evangelization Committee, an Adult Faith Formation Board, a Communications Media Ministry, a Book Club, Lectio Divina Groups, a revamped Buildings and Grounds Committee, a Vocations Committee, a Young Adult Ministry, Theology of the Body Discussion Groups, and Children of Hope (Eucharistic Adoration for Children). In this next year we hope to see the establishment of a Ministry for Divorced and Separated, a Stewardship Committee, an Environmental Ministry, a new Ministry for Women, a Family Mass Ministry (with exciting new ideas to make the 9 a.m. Mass each Sunday as Family Friendly as possible), a Middle School Youth Ministry initiative, a renewed and expanded Children's Choir and a Schola Cantorum (along with other Music Ministry initiatives) and a renewal of our Bereavement Ministry and Women's Cornerstone. Particularly exciting will be an Adult Faith Formation Series we are planning called "*The 2018 Bishop Thomas Donato Lecture Series*" in honor of our beloved former pastor and Regional Bishop of Hudson County which we hope to open to the entire Archdiocese. This series will include lectures on faith and apologetics. We have many wonderful things on the horizon, and it is my hope that many members of our parish family will take part.

Last November, the Finance Council and I communicated with the parish regarding our financial health. We were facing some real challenges, and I wanted to be completely honest with all of you. The parish was faced with substantial debt and decreasing parish reserves. Staffing cuts and decreased spending were necessary to stabilize the parish. While we still have challenges ahead, I wanted to write this letter to thank all of you for your prayers and the sacrifices you have made that have set the parish on the road to a firm foundation and continued growth. I am delighted to tell you that this last fiscal year (from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017) the Sunday collections grew by 5.5% and both the Christmas and Easter collections received more than budgeted. This coupled with decreased spending in some areas has allowed us to meet all of our financial obligations over the past year, begin to pay down some of the past debt, and operate with a small surplus. Later this year our Finance Committee will furnish you with a Financial Statement. This is great news for our parish, and is no doubt due to your commitment to St. Paul Church and your willingness to share of your time, talent and treasure for the Lord and His Church. Even with a few unplanned expenses we were still able to operate in the black. This is indeed good news!

While we have made significant progress, we still need to deal with the remaining debt and are formulating a solid plan to eradicate that debt and begin once again to build the parish reserves. Monies pledged through the parish "*We Are Living Stones*" Campaign are still being disbursed to St. Paul as our parishioners continue fulfilling their pledges. This has allowed us to make some necessary repairs to the parish buildings. We will also have to replace the rectory roof (part of which caved in during this past year), tear down and replace the dangerous crumbling steps on the rear of the Parish Center, and we will have to deal with some roof and air conditioning issues in the Church (along with some other projects that will need our attention). But we face all of these things with hope and confidence that with God's grace (and the goodness of our parish family) we will be able to meet our challenges with faith.

It is my hope that spiritually our parish priority will include continued faith formation of our entire parish family, including a healthy Academy, Faith Formation Program, and Youth Ministry. We will continue formulating a plan to implement the New Evangelization here at St. Paul so that we may seek out and welcome back those Catholics who have fallen away from the practice of their faith. Our number one goal will be to continue to make the Sunday Liturgy a beautiful and profound experience- around the Lord's altar we are most what the Lord has called us to become. The celebration of Holy Mass is not just one thing among many that we do. Holy Mass is the central and most important thing we do, and every ministry needs to flow from that experience and flow back to it. We will continue to work with our liturgical ministers, our Music Ministry, and our Art and Environment group to make our shared prayer beautiful, and we priests pledge ourselves once again to proclaim the Word with joy and enthusiasm. We will begin addressing some of the physical needs of the Church structure that need repair and/or updating, but this process will take place slowly and in a well thought out way.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven begins with a small mustard seed that grows into a large bush. This reminds us that, as we build the Kingdom of Heaven here in Ramsey, we need everyone to take part: there is no offering, no sacrifice, no generosity that is too small. St. Teresa of Calcutta used to say: "*What I can do, you cannot; what you can do, I cannot; but together we can do something beautiful for God.*" I am grateful for all that you have done for your parish. I ask your continued support through generosity of your Time, Talent and Treasure so that we can continue to build the Kingdom here in our own small corner of the world. Remember: God is never outdone in generosity. What we do for Him, He pays back a hundred-fold, in this life and in the next. The goal is heaven! But we begin it here now on earth! May the Lord continue to bless us. May our Blessed Mother, in this 100th Anniversary year of the Apparitions of Fatima, continue to lead us to her Son! Mary, star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!

In Jesus and Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. John D. Gabriel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rev. John D. Gabriel, Pastor