



strengthening our faith

by rebuilding our heritage

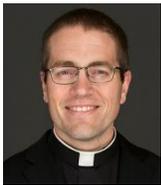
July 2019

My dear parishioners,

Please join me, Fr. Hurley, our deacons and the parish staff as we say a grateful farewell to two beloved priests—**Fr. Agustín López**, Parochial Vicar, and **Fr. Conrad Murphy**, the Director of the Office of Worship. Both have been with us for only two years. Effective July 10, Fr. López will begin missionary work with his community, the Neocatechumenal Way, in the Midwest. Fr Conrad already has begun his new assignment as the priest-secretary to **Archbishop Wilton Gregory**.



Thanks and Farewell. **Fr. Agustín** brought lots of life, passion, spiritual growth, knowledge, and experience to our parish and to the Hispanic community in particular. He shared many insights on our Social Justice Ministry and saw the weekly breakfast for the homeless grow in many ways. A major contribution was his catechesis for young married couples and other young adults, which enriched our Marriage Preparation program. His organizational skills helped our Hispanic community to grow and meet many needs in the parish. He also fostered more parish multicultural events and liturgies.



Fr. Conrad will be missed especially by our young adults, with whom he spent many Coffeeshouses. Those of us here at the rectory saw a young priest who knew how to mix his priestly duties with a balance of jogging, reading, and baking. He also loved helping out at George Washington University Newman Center and providing spiritual direction to our young adults.



Our thanks, prayers and best wishes go with Fr. Agustín and Fr. Conrad, who will always be in our thoughts and prayers, and **always welcome among us here at St. Matthew's**.

Welcoming our New Priests. With gratitude, we will welcome **Fr. John Benson** as our new Parochial Vicar, and **Fr. Martino Choi**, who will be in residence as he begins his new position as Director of the Archdiocesan Office of Worship and Chaplain to the students and faculty at George Washington University.



Fr. John Benson (27), grew up in Bethesda and was ordained by Archbishop Gregory last month. His family attends Our Lady of Lourdes Parish. Originally he had plans to study filmmaking. As a child he was a serious 'Star Wars' fan. His real ambition early on was to be a Jedi Padawan. During high school, he experienced a call to give his life to Christ, and spent two years discerning what that meant. Upon high school graduation in 2010, he realized that he was being called to be a missionary priest of the New Evangelization with the Neocatechumenal Way.

Fr. Martino Choi comes to us from St. Patrick's Church in Rockville. He attended Montgomery Blair High School Magnet Foundation, but decided against a career in Math, Science, or Computer Science. He attended the University of Maryland as a Government and Politics major, and there became involved with the Catholic Student Center. He experienced a personal encounter with Jesus, and found a trusted mentor in the chaplain, Fr. Bill Byrne. After college he enrolled at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg. He was ordained in 2015, just in time for Pope Francis' visit to Washington.



'Do you also want to leave?' 'To whom shall we go?' Last month we celebrated the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ. We remember that Jesus revealed himself as the Living Bread come down from heaven and promised to give his own flesh and blood for our food and drink.

He put his "hard saying" before his disciples, and watched many turn away to return to their former way of life. He then asked of the Twelve (as he asks of us) "Do you also want to leave?" As usual, Peter speaks up, **"Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!"**

Jesus' words may well hit us between the eyes in the wake of the Church scandals this past year—even as recently as the past few weeks.

Yes, like the Twelve, we have had a choice, and like the Twelve, we have a history: we have walked with Jesus, some of us for a long time; we have heard his word and felt his healing touch; we have feasted at this table and witnessed his wonders in our lives and in the lives of others. BUT—we have had to struggle with feelings of betrayal. We have been scandalized by—or worse, grown numb to—the actions and inactions of priests and bishops anointed to speak in his name.

'Where is Your Faith?' Remember when a great storm came out of nowhere as Jesus and the disciples were in the boat? "We're drowning!"—isn't that how we feel in the midst of the current tsunami? 'Lord, don't you see we are barely holding on?' 'How could this happen in your Church, Lord?' We need to ask those questions, especially as some struggle to keep their faith.

Some of our own parishioners have left the parish.

Others have said "not another cent to the Church."

Our attendance is down.

Our offertory collection is down and we project a large deficit for the coming year.

In terms of restoring confidence in the leaders of our Church, it is plain that they must be willing to make fundamental changes, courageous changes, changes that will let in fresh air. Only then will they regain the confidence of the people. But will this happen, and if so, how long will it take?

While we face these realities, my friends, we also must listen for the calming words of Jesus, **"Quiet! Be still, where is your faith?"** **Regardless of the tumult in our Church and our world, we can hear Jesus' words and allow his deep peace to take hold within us.** This is the power of prayer, of drawing upon the personal relationship with Christ that each of us is offered. It is this peace that draws us back to **the Body of Christ, the Church.** Where do we find our identities, our eternal destinies, if not in the Church—the holy yet sinful Church, the Church Jesus entrusted to people like Peter who could be hot one moment and cold the next, brave yet cowardly, faithful yet faithless?

This is not to let anyone off the hook—especially those who are guilty of abuse, coverup or corruption. We pray for those who have suffered and those who have turned away in response to these revelations. **But for those of us who still find Jesus in his bruised and battered Body, may we relentlessly push and pray for its reform.**

Jesus is among us. **Jesus is here at St. Matthew's** in his Word and in the Eucharist; he is here in the poor, the vulnerable, and the immigrant; his Spirit is alive in our Social Justice Ministries; he is here in those who proclaim the Word and those who minister the Eucharist. And Jesus also is present in our new Archbishop, who has been sent to begin with us a new chapter in the Archdiocese.

I make no judgment about those who left. I say simply, I understand—but now come back. We want you to be with us. Together we can move forward in hope. It all starts with the Eucharist. May we all find reassurance in Peter's response to Jesus, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Dealing with the Deficit. The scandals have led some parishioners to stop supporting the offertory collection. Others have chosen to channel their giving to donations that stay with the parish. Such gifts, labelled “donation,” are not taxed by the diocese. Just the other day, Pam Erwin, our parish Business Manager, was doing another draft of the budget as we all focused on how to reduce our deficit. Our collections have REALLY been down, as shown below.

Collections	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019 (11.5 months)
Offertory	\$ 1,094,972	\$ 941,061
Building Fund	\$ 79,260	\$ 70,529
Christmas	\$ 55,100	\$ 43,502
Christmas Friends	\$ 56,838	\$ 37,063
Easter	\$ 44,167	\$ 40,763

After making initial budget submissions for the 2019 - 2020 year, the staff made a round of cuts, including these:

- some staff hours were reduced
- Schola Cantorum cut the number of rehearsals
- hiatus period of choirs extended
- one staff assistant position cut
- extern priests’ Masses decreased
- Hispanic Faith Formation cut the number of speakers
- rectory food bill reduced
- no travel expenditures by staff
- no paid workshops for staff

With these changes we still have a deficit of \$91,562! The problem is income—we need more help from our parishioners. We have approximately 2,450 registered households, but only approximately 1,000 give at least one cent to the parish. We do have a number who are very generous. And I am so grateful to them.

Just think about all St. Matthew’s offers our parishioners and visitors: [29 regular Masses each week](#), [3 choirs](#) (4 Masses), cantor and organ at 2 Masses, [RCIA](#) and [other faith formation programs](#) (English and [Spanish](#)), [Baptisms](#), funerals, [weddings](#) (90 here and in total 120 couples receiving marriage preparation in the last fiscal year), spiritual direction and counselling, a huge [Social Justice and Community Service program](#), and [warm welcomes and smiling faces!](#) And much more!

And then there are those items we can’t do without—here are a few from our latest budget:

Expense	2019 - 2020 Budget
Sanctuary candles	\$ 27,000
Hosts and wine	\$ 4,900
Extra clergy (for Masses)	\$ 25,000
Clergy benefits (set by the archdiocese)	\$ 88,884
Security (Cathedral)	\$ 20,000
Maintenance contracts	\$ 51,500
Utilities	\$ 141,000
Property insurance	\$ 85,536
Loan payment – Rectory and parish	\$ 280,595

We are still working on the budget, which as I noted, shows a \$91,562 deficit! Hopefully, we will find a few more items to cut OR we will see a real increase in our offertory and donations. **As of this writing, our various collections are down \$212,737 from last year!!** You can see why we are having budget problems.

Another little statistic—only 3% of the parish are my age or older; 38% of registered parishioners are in the 30 – 44 age range, and 15% are in the 18 – 29 age range.



Faith Direct. The generosity of **Faith Direct** participants has helped tremendously, but this past year we did lose a considerable number. Some of the reasons are obvious, but this is a new day. With the Lord Jesus by our side we can move on to a better day. All of us, bishops, priests, lay leaders and parishioners, must work together to put an end to sexual abuse and cover ups, create and maintain a safe environment, and foster a healthier culture and greater transparency.

I ask you today to determine what you can afford to donate and sign up for Faith Direct. Visit www.faithdirect.net (Church code DC284), or call Pam Erwin at 202-587-5150. All things are possible with God, working through great people like you.

Please know that **I am so grateful** to you. You are great parishioners. Together, with your generosity, we will make this new budget work. God bless you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Rev. Msgr. W. Ronald Jameson
Rector

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