

Letter of March 17, 2002
by Fr. Brian Joyce
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Dear Parishioners,

In terms of anniversaries, this weekend holds particular significance for me. It was fourteen years ago on March 15th that I was assigned to Christ the King; March 16th marked my first full day here as new pastor. It was thirty-nine years ago on Saturday, March 16th that I was ordained and on Sunday, March 17th celebrated mass for the first time as a priest. The years, fourteen here and thirty-nine in the priesthood have been filled with promise, marked with pain and blessed with hope.

As for promise, our class of '63 was ordained in the midst of the Second Vatican Council and much of the dreams and visions of the of the Church were our visions and dreams as well. It was a time of great Spirit and energy that called for reform, a new vision of Church and immense promise. Our early years would be spent introducing a revision of liturgy with English, free standing altars, broad participation through music and ministry. Issues of civil rights, interfaith dialogue and development of a co-responsible Church through adult formation, extended parish staffs, school boards, parish councils, lay leadership and social justice committees were high on our agenda. Pope John XXIII had promised to open the windows of the Church and let in fresh air and the Spirit, as well as an occasional odd bird and ugly duckling.

As for pain, it has been both personal and institutional. On a personal level the loss of friends along the way takes its toll. Early on it was through the resignation of fellow priests and co-workers in ministry. More recently it has been through death with the loss of Bishop Mike Kenny, Msgr. Wade, Margo Schorno and Dale Gilson. Added to that has been the deaths of so many good parishioners and dear friends here at Christ the King. Institutionally the pain has come first in the form of polarization and more recently with a real retrenchment against the very reform and renewal called for by the Vatican Council and suffered for by so many dedicated people. Declining numbers and increasing age has lowered the energy level of us all. Silence has in many ways been the greatest source of pain. There has been the silencing of outspoken Church leaders and thinkers; there has been an insistence (fortunately ignored at least at some levels) on silence around topics like contraception, married clergy, ordination of women, communion for the divorced and remarried and reasonable pastoral solutions to pressing dilemmas of conscience. More devastating still, and proof positive that confidentiality and privacy have there place but silence and secrecy do not, has been Church denial and silence around the sexual abuse of minors by clergy and church

workers, and it's irresponsible handling by many dioceses across the country and in other counties as well. That certainly constitutes a very current example of pain.

But then there is hope, in fact, great hope. What gives me hope, as I have written before, is first of all the local parish where we actually experience what it is to be church; yes, you here at Christ the King. What give me hope is so many of you sharing gifts and talents generously, offering welcome and hospitality to one another, and the spiritual journey you allow me to be part of. What gives me hope are strong celebrations of liturgy, caring ministries and compassionate service. Your willingness to discuss hard issues - realistically and with common sense, even the "forbidden topics", gives us all hope. The vision of Vatican II which remains, after scripture, the highest authority in our Church continues to give me hope although I had never expected to minister under the rubric "Join the Resistance: Support Vatican II!" And I suppose most hopeful of all is that the same kind of promise, pain and hope is not mine alone, nor that of priests alone, but belong to all of us called together to be "a priestly people", to share leadership, ministry and in virtue of our baptism a common priesthood and co-responsibility for the Church, its gospel and its mission. May we continue to give each other more promises, less pain and greater hope.

Your Pastor,
Brian T. Joyce