

May 23-24, 2020

Thoughts from the pastor,

Many of you remember that a few months ago, before the pandemic hit, there were a lot of conversations about having a single pastor over more than one church and STM would be one of those churches. With all the things that had to be dealt with concerning Covid-19, those conversations disappeared. But now we will be back to working on that track. The official statement is as follows:

In consultation with his Priest Personnel Board and in discussions with the two pastors of St. Joan of Arc and St. Thomas More, Archbishop Lucas has made a decision to assign Fr. Jeff Lorig to be pastor of both parishes effective July 1st, 2020. Frs. Baumert and Benkowski will continue to serve in pastoral ministry in the parishes in collaboration with Fr. Lorig.

What that will mean is that I will become a Senior Associate for STM and Fr. Benkowski will be doing the same at St. Joan of Arc, but Fr. Lorig will be pastor. If you remember, all of this discussion was because we are looking down the road a few years, knowing that there will be a shortage of priests coming and it will hit our area. This will be the first step in building that process for that future reality. This first step will not create a whole lot of change, except you will hear homilies from more than me. It will also mean Fr. Lorig will be responsible for working with the groups and organizations at STM and SJA to plan for the future. What the next steps with entail are up to the Holy Spirit. That is partly why I am excited that this is being announced as we are getting ready to celebrate Pentecost.

Fr. Lorig is also excited. He wants you to know: "I'm extremely grateful not only for the Archbishop's confidence in me to pastor these two parishes in Midtown Omaha, but also very humbled by your pastors' willingness to take on a new role and work with me in doing something that really hasn't been done before. It's one thing to group two parishes together under one pastor, but it's never been done in our Archdiocese with parishes as large as these, nor has it been done with the previous pastors staying on to help. I have a sense that the Lord is really anointing this project and I'm very excited to see what He has in store for us all."

Fr. Jeff currently serves in the chancery of the Archdiocese of Omaha as Director of Pastoral Services. He works with the Pastoral offices (Evangelization, Stewardship, Family Life, Catholic Schools, and Planning) to implement the archdiocesan mission, vision, and priorities in parishes and schools in the 23-county archdiocese.

Ordained in 2004, Fr. Lorig has served in several parishes before his duties at the chancery. Prior to his current assignment, he was pastor of St. Ludger and St. Ignatius Church in rural Nebraska for five years. Fr. Lorig received his bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN, a bachelor's degree of Sacred Theology from the Gregorian University, and master's degree in Spirituality at the Angelicum, both in Rome, Italy. He is also a trained spiritual director with the Institute for Priestly Formation and a certified Gallup Strengths Coach.

His younger years consisted of a lot of moving around. Fr. Lorig is originally from Mt. Morris, Illinois. He moved from there to Omaha at age 11 after his mother died of cancer. Living with his dad in Omaha, he attended St. Thomas More Grade School from 5th - 8th grade. After graduating from St. Thomas More as "most likely to become a priest drummer" (as documented in the yearbook), his family moved to a farm just outside of Tekamah, NE. During his high school years, he attended Central Catholic (now Guardian

Angels Central Catholic) High School in West Point, NE. Even though he's never actually lived there, he claims St. Mary's in West Point as his home parish.

His main hobby these days have been finding any excuse to ride his motorcycle (only motorcyclists would get this) and opportunities to go motorcycle camping (it's a thing).

As you can see, Fr. Lorig already has some knowledge of STM. He will be living here at the STM rectory. As things develop over these next weeks, I will do my best to keep you all informed in a timely manner. In case you were wondering, this decision was finalized on May 14.

You should also have received an email from me concerning 1st Communion and Confirmation. The dates for those are 6/14 for 1st Communion and 6/28 for Confirmation. The first question that came up after I sent out that email is, "How many people can each family group include?" Because we are having special Masses for each Sacrament and there will be two Masses for each Sacrament, we should be able to handle everything well if each family group is ten or less including the one receiving the Sacrament. I'm sure I will be dealing with more questions about this before long. So as usual, stay tuned.

God bless you all,
Fr. Frank Baumert, pastor