

Fr. Jason's Wishful Thinking... St. Stephen Milestones

Dear Parishioners:

As I approach my 40th birthday in November and look back at the last ten years, I begin to realize what lots of people have told me from their life experience... the older you get, the more time flies. I don't know where the last ten years have gone, but as I walk around our two church campuses and other properties, lots of memories come to my head as I think of construction and renovation projects. I sit at my desk and look in my drawer and see lots of annulments that have been completed (well over 350 of them) and smile at the number of marriages that I have convalidated once someone finds their soulmate and an ideal marriage. Then I look in the mirror and see less hair on my head and more fat on my body. The last ten years have gone by faster than I ever thought that they would.

In July 2009, when I moved to this assignment, I called meetings at both parishes to discuss what you wanted to accomplish over the next six to twelve years. I want to thank the people who came to those gatherings, because their concerns and suggestions have shaped the last ten years. At St. Joseph, we still have some major things to accomplish when it comes to construction, but we are currently dotting our "I's" and crossing our "T's". I met with Mr. Wade Waguespack on Wednesday to go over the Head of Island chapel plans and get some quotes together on the slab and framing costs. I have a meeting scheduled with Mr. Milton Clouatre upon my return from Italy to get results of the LA State Marshal's Office on the bell tower structure, and we are waiting for the Diocesan Finance Council to approve the new rectory and how we will finance it. Like most things in the Catholic Church, it takes time before we see change.

Over at St. Stephen, we have a different reality: I have looked over my notes from the meeting ten years ago and we have done everything on the list: the outdoor pavilion was constructed, we renovated the interior of the church and added bathrooms, we have addressed drainage issues, paved our parking areas, renovated the parish hall (and replaced HVAC systems) and made improvements to some of our classrooms, and painted the inside of the rectory and installed some new flooring. We built a Marian grotto and yes, after several years of people asking, we recently landscaped the flower bed in the middle of the parking area.

I think that it is time to once again ask: "What would we like to see accomplished at St. Stephen? On the back of the bulletin article this week, I have left some space where our St. Stephen parishioners can jot down some ideas if they would like. We have some St. Joseph parishioners who attend Mass frequently at St. Stephen and may notice some maintenance issues that need to be addressed. This is not the time to discuss Mass times, etc. We've already asked parishioners to fill out a survey about Mass times (two years ago) and the majority voted to keep the Mass times as they are. So we did. However, it would be good to get some direction as to where St. Stephen goes next as we complete the back parking lot on Monday.

In other news, I wanted to share a letter that we received from Justin Cornett this week, and then make a few comments afterwards.

Dear Friends at St. Joseph and St. Stephen the Martyr:

I would like to first take the time to thank you so much for all of the prayers and support you have given me during my time in seminary. It means more to me than any words could describe on how you impacted my journey. With this being said, I will be stepping out from formation at seminary. This decision is made with peace and consideration of my discernment thus far. I will be taking this break in order to discern God's will for my life, and to consider other possible vocations and to see where He may lead me. Although it may seem this way as you read this, it is not 100% certain that priesthood is out of the question. It is only evident through prayer that God wants me to explore other options as well, and have me take some time away from seminary formation. I would again like to thank you for all your support in the past, and ask that you continue to pray for me as I will do the same for you. If you need to write back to this letter, please send it to my home address at 18346 Old Ferry Road, Maurepas, LA 70449. Thank you so much and God bless, Justin Cornett

I want to speak on behalf of ALL of us when I tell Justin “THANK YOU” for your openness and the courage needed to begin seminary formation. Many of you may not know this, but as soon as Justin was accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese of Baton Rouge in early summer 2018, a very popular band approached him with a job offer that was beyond Justin’s dreams as a self-taught saxophone player and gifted musician. He humbly turned it down so that he could focus clearly on a call to the priesthood. It was a temptation placed in his way and he calmly passed up the offer.

I also want to say that it takes an equal or greater amount of courage *to leave seminary formation today after making that initial leap of faith*. With the current shortage of priests and the extreme generosity of people who support our seminarians (so they can focus on their studies and do not have financial worries), our seminarians can feel extreme pressure to stay in the seminary, even when they might feel that God is not calling them to continue. They wonder if they are letting God down, or letting down the communities that they come from and in which they have served summer internships. However, I applaud Justin for realizing that something was not right, and he discerned that he needs a break. Our faithful God will tell Justin where he needs to go next. But I know that the seminary environment, his exposure to the Benedictine monastic lifestyle, and his academic studies have only given Justin a greater appreciation of his Catholic faith and will strengthen his desire to serve the Church in whatever path God leads him to take. Such has been the case with thousands of men who went to St. Joseph Seminary College and/or Notre Dame Seminary, discerned a different vocation, and now serve in prominent ministerial roles today as lectors, Eucharistic ministers, parish administrators, and PSR and Catholic school teachers. Justin will continue to be involved with our youth ministry adult team, the Knights of Columbus, and he is a commissioned Eucharistic minister. Justin, thank you again!

As you all know, I will be leaving early Monday morning to travel with a group of 32 parishioners to Rome, San Giovanni Rotundo, Loreto, Lanciano, Cascia, Assisi, Siena, and Orvieto/Bolsena to meditate on Eucharistic miracles and some of the lives of the saints. We will be back the night of October 11th. I have CONFIRMED that Fr. Brad Doyle will be with you the weekend of October 5th as we use the abbreviated Mass schedule (e.g. one Saturday vigil Mass at 4:00 pm at St. Joseph). We will be praying for all of you as we visit the tomb of St. Stephen the Martyr on October 10th in Rome. Our next international pilgrimage opportunity will be to Mexico City, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Pueblo (the city of ceramics) from April 25 - May 1, 2020. We will have an orientation meeting in either late October or early November, so if you are interested, please listen at Mass for the announcements, and watch the bulletin for more details, or call Magnificat Travel in Lafayette and they can send you an early registration packet: (337) 291-1933. Until October 12th, *Ciao!* Fr. Jason ☺

Fr. Jason: Here are my suggestions concerning St. Stephen the Martyr Parish as we move forward, past the original master plan developed in 2009.

Name (OPTIONAL, but if questions arise, Fr. Jason can call and clarify with a name) _____

Feel free to use your own paper if you need more space. This form is here for your convenience.

Please deposit suggestions in the church collection or give directly to Fr. Jason. Thank you!!