To My Dear Parishioners,

My experience right now is that I didn't know how much I love this place until it is time for me to leave. And I don't mean the location, but the people—the people that I lead with, the people that I love and serve. I have certainly experienced your love, honor and respect for me. I am grateful to the Lord for allowing me to share in His love for you and the love and respect that you have for Him and His Church.

As I have been saying since I announced my new assignment, if I did not think it was the will of the Lord, I wouldn't leave; I’d die here. I have been so blessed by you in so many ways. I believe that you have helped me, by the Lord’s grace, to grow in Christian maturity and holiness, as His priest in His Church, and get a little closer to heaven. You have made my life rich in the most important things the Lord has given us in life, and I have been privileged to be a part of your lives. I will miss you deeply and will not forget you. You will always be in my heart.

I can’t think of any more words to express my love and gratitude to the Lord for you. I am sure that I will see you throughout our remaining days on this earth, as small as our Catholic world can be. In Christ, we will meet again in the life to come. I will leave you with a quote from St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians to express my prayer and desire for all of us:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. – Ephesians 3:14-21

Farewell and God bless you!

For just a little while longer, your pastor—

Fr. Peter Richards
Pastor
ONE BODY

TRADITIONS WITH A TWIST: UNPRECEDENTED SPRING SPARKS CREATIVE COMMUNITY-BUILDING

May is ordinarily a month of celebrations, especially for students who are transitioning to new grades and opportunities. This year, the coronavirus derailed most traditional rites of passage—forcing St. Michael Catholic School (StMCS) to get creative about saluting students and saying farewell.

“We have a number of traditions that we are doing our best to carry on this spring,” said StMCS Assistant Principal Heidi Gallus. “Even little things, like students getting a freezy on the last day of class—they remember that! We are also exploring ways to gather in the fall that help students transition from this year’s classes to their new grades and teachers.”

Preschool graduation was held June 3, with students dressing in tiny caps and gowns to parade in cars through the church parking lot. This gave children an opportunity to say goodbye to teachers and staff, receive special year-end gifts and look ahead to the “big school.”

A traditional eighth-grade graduation could not be held, so StMCS planned a Gear-Up Grad event in the church parking lot in late May. There, eighth-graders were surprised with their own caps and gowns—a first this year—that they could wear to Mass on June 2, where they were honored with a slide show narrated by staff.

“When students leave our school for any reason, it is traditional to send them off with the message, ‘St. Michael Catholic School will miss…’—and share specific things we will remember about them,” Gallus said. “We let them know that they are always welcome here.”

The school also typically recognizes alumni who are graduating seniors, inviting them back to attend the final Weekly Welcome and Worship to share memories and plans. This year, the seniors were invited to gather outside the church on June 2 to greet the new 8th-grade graduates. Afterward, they all stood along Frankfort Parkway to be cheered by parents and parishioners passing by in cars.

The school’s biggest annual fundraiser, Bids For Kids, also was completely rethought in light of the virus. The event chairs, Sarah and Tom Johnston and Angela and Spencer Beaulieu, essentially planned two different events: one in-person and one virtual. The online version won out; a week later, donations were nearing the $125,000 goal and were still coming in, bolstered by a generous match program from the St. Michael Catholic School Endowment.

Gallus is taking on additional leadership responsibilities as assistant principal beginning this month, having previously served as a fourth-grade teacher and dean of students. She praised her colleagues and StMCS volunteers for their hard work and flexibility in the face of so much change.

“This has been an unprecedented year-end,” she said, “but God continues to do great things here at St. Michael Catholic School.”
FISHERS OF MEN: MISSIONARY DISCIPLES ABOUND AT ST. MICHAEL

Each year, St. Paul-based NET Ministries sends scores of faith-filled missionaries across the country to draw teens into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church. NET, which stands for National Evangelization Teams, is one of several opportunities that Catholic young people have to be disciple-makers—and St. Michael Catholic Church is one of their most consistent suppliers.

“The St. Michael-St. Albert community is easily in the top 10 percent of parishes for providing missionaries to NET, and most likely in the top five percent,” said NET’s Program Director Dave Rinaldi. “Some parishes develop a discipleship culture. Instead of merely teaching people about Jesus, these parishes provide opportunities for members to encounter Jesus. Another way to say this is that these parishes go beyond catechizing young people; they evangelize them and form them into lifelong disciples. One of the fruits of disciple-making is that the disciples, in turn, are eager to fulfill the great commission. They desire to go out and share the Gospel with others.”

“NET missionaries aren’t expert apologists; they simply love Jesus and share that love with those they encounter. People who spend time with them are likely to ‘catch’ their faith.”

Dave Rinaldi
To date, at least 14 young adults from the parish have served a year or more with NET, and several others have served with FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), Totus Tuus and Damascus Catholic Youth Summer Camp. Additionally, in the past two decades, St. Michael has had numerous clergy and staff members who are NET alumni—including former pastor Fr. Michael Becker, current associate Fr. Joe Zabinski, our incoming pastor Fr. Brian Park and our incoming principal, Melissa Ginther.

Most NET teams travel by van throughout a region or across the country, but Ginther was a member of one of the first teams to be embedded in a parish, right here at St. Michael Catholic Church and School, in 2007-2008.

“When I was a junior, I had a really powerful encounter with Christ’s mercy on a mandatory NET retreat that we had to attend for Confirmation,” Ginther recalled. “I had a profound experience of God’s mercy in Confession. I knew from that moment on that I would find a way to spend a year on the road with NET.”

Fr. Park first learned about NET from a priest while attending Texas A&M University. He served on a traveling NET team in 2003-2004 and loved the experience so much, he moved to West St. Paul to join NET’s staff. He was appointed NET Ministries chaplain by Archbishop Bernard Hebda in 2018.

“I was planning on entering the seminary in the Fall of 2004 for my home diocese of Ft. Worth after my year with NET had ended, however, God had different plans,” he said. “I lived in the Twin Cities, got to know the area and got to know several priests in our Archdiocese...After a lot of prayer and discernment, I decided to become a seminarian for St. Paul and Minneapolis and join the Companions of Christ.”

Companions of Christ is a fraternity of archdiocesan priests including Fr. Peter Richards, Fr. Joe Zabinski, Fr. Nathan LaLiberte, Fr. Michael Becker and Bishop Andrew Cozzens, who is also a NET alumnus. More information is available at companionsofchrist.org.

What is it about NET and similar missionary organizations that transforms people and parishes? It’s the beauty of encountering authentic followers of Jesus who are living witnesses to the love and mercy of God in the real world of today.
and become faithful disciples. ... I never in my wildest dreams would have mapped my trajectory to the role of leading Catholic schools as a principal; however, in retrospect, the underlying call to lead as many young people to Christ while helping them live out the call to be fully alive has always been deeply embedded within my journey.

“NET really teaches you how to serve, how to give of yourself,” Fr. Park said. “You also experience the tremendous gift and blessing of being a full-time minister of the Gospel, and that inspires a lot of NETters to continue to serve the Church throughout their life.”

According to Rinaldi, a parish culture of missionary discipleship begins at the top. “These pastors prioritize youth ministry by ensuring parish resources are available for ministry,” he said. “They also take an active role in reaching out to the young people of the parish and encouraging them to live their baptismal call to evangelize.”

If that’s the case, our current leadership team bodes well for NET and other missionary organizations for years to come.

For more information:
• NET Ministries: netusa.org
• FOCUS: focus.org
• Totus Tuus: archspm.org/catholic-education-youth-formation/family-ministries/totus-tuus/
• Damascus Catholic Youth Summer Camps: damascus.net

If you are interested in supporting any of this year’s missionaries, contact communications manager Jim Thorp at 763-497-2745 ext. 245 or jthorp@stmcatholicchurch.org.

Fr. Brian Park left his homestate of Texas to serve with NET Ministries in 2003 and loved it so much he moved to Minnesota and joined the NET staff. Today he is an Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis priest who serve as chaplain for NET. Photo courtesy of Fr. Brian Park.
THE FOURTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY: THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS

With loud shouts, however, they persisted in calling for his crucifixion, and their voices prevailed. The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted. So he released the man who had been imprisoned for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked, and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished. As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. – Luke 23:23-26

The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery is the Carrying of the Cross, in which, severely weakened and in great pain, our Lord bears the instrument of His death through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. This solitary mystery is fleshed out when we pray the Stations of the Cross: we meditate on the agony of this long march, the times He stumbles and falls, the people He encounters, the great mystery of a God who loves us so much he would suffer and die that we might live. Along the way, Simon of Cyrene is pulled from the crowd and forced to help the condemned Christ carry the cross as His strength begins to fail. This is likely not an encounter Simon would have sought out and he probably protested: he was just visiting the city himself, preparing for the Sabbath, and being so intimately associated with a convicted and bloodied stranger not only would have made him ritually unclean but might have made him appear to be a disciple of the man or a criminal himself in the eyes of the people.

Each of the three synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—contain nearly identical instructions from our Lord about what it takes to be His disciple: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:34-35). Although initially Simon is forced, this close encounter with Jesus fundamentally changes him into a true disciple. How do we know? The gospel of Mark names Simon “the father of Alexander and Rufus,” and Catholic tradition holds that this mention by Mark, along with references to a disciple called Rufus in Paul’s Letter to the Romans, indicates that Simon’s sons where prominent in the early church. A chance encounter with the living God—and encounter that was probably resisted at first—led to conversion not only of the man Simon, but of his whole family. We should take tremendous hope from that!

THE ART OF WORSHIP

THE FOURTH SORROWFUL MYSTERY: THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS

Thank you for 11 years of faithful service to the parishioners of St. Michael. Thank you for bringing us Jesus. You have our prayers—we will miss you, and we love you.

St. Michael Catholic Church & School
READY WHEN YOU ARE

Our church reopened for limited public Masses and confessions at the end of May. The situation remains fluid, so please check our bulletin, Facebook page or stmcatholicchurch.org for the latest information.

If you are sick, caring for someone who is sick or do not feel safe attending Mass, please join us via livestream at youtube.com/c/StMichaelCatholicChurchStMichaelMN.

Your support of the parish and our ministries is still critically important. If you are able, please continue to donate online, via text or by dropping off your envelope at Mass or during parish office hours. For more information on any of these options, please call the parish office at 763-497-2745.

We are praying for you and hope to see you soon.

God bless you!