

January 11, 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This weekend we conclude the Christmas season with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. It isn't just a key moment in the life of Christ as he begins his public ministry and the work of our salvation, but it is also the means by which he saves us. Where he goes, we follow after, and through our own baptism we are incorporated into the life of Jesus Christ. This also means that his mission must become our own. As we continue our Partners in the Gospel journey, we ask the Lord to lead us and guide us in this new year, as we carry out this work of our salvation united in our Catholic faith. I write today to share an important staffing update, as well as some updates on the first half of the year.

The staff are my greatest collaborators, and I am so grateful for those who dedicate their life to share the faith, and their talents, in building up our communities and continuing the work of Jesus Christ. We have had a considerable amount of staff transitions over the last year and a half, with over 70% of positions impacted by departures, replacements or shifts in structure, not including the shift from three pastors to one assisted by a vicar. Managing through this has not been easy, on the other staff, as well as on the parish communities. As these transitions have happened, I have tried to discern both present need as well as building towards our future, thinking of the individual parish as well as our community as a whole, with an eye towards stability and sustainability, and what our financial means allow.

The key leadership role for staff is the Pastoral Assistant for Administration, sometimes called a Director of Parish Operations. It is a role that takes a broad skill set, and because of their overall leadership and filling in gaps, have been a great aid to me and the community during this transition as I as a pastor of three parishes am not able to be as present in each as before, and rely even more than before on our incredible staffs. Tom Walker has been the PAA at St. Joseph these last seven years, and also started assisting in this role at Our Lady of Sorrows a year ago. Just before Christmas he informed me of his intention to retire from this leadership role.

This first 18 months of Partners in the Gospel has already seen us sharing some ministries, while still continuing to operate as individual parishes. As we look at how we can better serve this wider Catholic community of our three parishes, and to becoming one parish in a few years time – we discern what that will look like for our community. With Tom's departure, the question is how best to move forward with this role – as at present, or in a new form.

I have discerned that with this opening it is time to move away from an individual parish leadership model. It is something that some other Parish Families have already transitioned to, as well. Just as all three parishes now share one pastor, we will be opening up a new position for all three to now share a single Director of Operations, who will oversee human and financial resources, lead the admin staff, and oversee various elements of parish programming. We will also be creating a new position for a single Director of Facilities to serve all three parishes, who will oversee small and large projects, manage contracts, ensure scheduled maintenance and servicing is being completed, and oversee the custodial and maintenance staff of each parish who assist with daily needs. These will serve St. Joseph School, as well, which is a part of St. Joseph Parish. They will also be key to my success and ability to pastor, as I entrust them with important leadership in our communities to further our mission.

We will therefore not be replacing the individual PAA role at St. Joseph and Our Lady of Sorrows. This shift will also require eliminating the equivalent position of Director of Parish Operations at Mary, Queen of Peace. Beth Kim has been working at MQP for just over three years. While many are familiar with

some of her more active roles this last year in tending to our many facilities needs, with boiler replacements, repairs to the air handler system, parking lot reseal, leaking valves and failing water pumps, a roof replacement and repairs, resealing the building, and more, she also helped manage through a number of staff transitions and long absences this last year. Most don't know it is she who opened and closed when we were without a maintenance staff member, she who manually turned on the heat each morning last winter and this winter while we wait for delayed new parts, and she who is out early in the morning salting to prepare for the JDP preschoolers, Mass goers and Skyline HS students. She has tended to many needs, great and small, visible and invisible. While I am confident that this is the right model for us moving ahead, getting there is not easy. Let us keep Beth in our prayers in her future endeavors, for every grace and blessing. We will have an opportunity to thank Beth and Tom for their work in our parishes sometime in the next month.

As we open these new positions, we are also still looking for a new Youth Minister for MQP and SJ, and have some applicants we are interviewing for Bookkeeping at OLOS as we keep our finances separate. We will be dropping the position for Liturgy and Pastoral Care as we continue to manage through the impacts of this transition, and what is stable and sustainable financially.

Looking back at the first six months of the fiscal year, we had over 65 people who reached out to us about becoming Catholic through the OCIA process this year from all three parishes, with new people reaching out each month to inquire about a deeper life with Christ. It is a joy to join with them on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for prayer and formation, as we have four separate groups – two for adults, and two for our younger and older children, and a new one starting for new inquirers. We have 60 youth seeking the Sacrament of Confirmation, as well as about 10 adults, that the Holy Spirit may burn brightly through them. We have even more than this seeking God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and communion with him in the Holy Eucharist. And we continue marriage preparation for 17 couples, including some previously civilly married who now desire to celebrate the covenant and sacrament of marriage within the Church, after celebrating several weddings this summer and fall.

Our Lady of Sorrows collections are up 18% over last year for the first six months of the new fiscal year after finishing down 1.5% during the first year of this transition. St. Joseph's collections are almost flat for the first six months of the new fiscal year after a 14% drop last year, likely owing to the loss of a Mass and corresponding change in Mass attendance. Mary, Queen of Peace's collections are down 11% for the first half of the year, after finishing just 1% down the first year.

On a typical weekend (if there is such a thing), we have about 2,054 people attend one of our eight Sunday Masses. This is pretty consistent across the last few years, although of course St. Joseph experienced a decline after the loss of a Mass in July 2024, while Mary, Queen of Peace and Our Lady of Sorrows have both increased. For Christmas this year, we welcomed 4,474 people – up from 3,858 last year. There is a lot of hunger for the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. That is why our parishes exist. This is the mission given to us by Jesus Christ – to help all know him, and share more fully in his life.

More to come soon, as we begin reflecting more formally on the blessings of our communities, and begin to look at our hopes for the future together. Thank you for your ongoing patience and grace throughout this Partners journey, and the ways you continue to help others come to know and follow Jesus Christ.

In Christ,
Fr. Matthew Oakland