

Dear Parishioners of NW8 Family of Parishes,

I have been asked by any number of parishioners throughout the Northwest 8 family of parishes, how's it going? How are things going in the new family of parishes? I will often turn the question back and ask them the same, "well how do you think it's going?" Most seem to think that things are going well. They like the variety of priests and deacons celebrating at Mass, although it is harder to get to know one another when we are only at each parish once a month. The people generally seem to feel that things are going well in their own parish, many of the familiar things continue to happen, they have opportunities for attending Mass and receiving the sacraments and they feel that the parish is helping them grow in their lives of faith. They have also appreciated the larger celebrations like the installation of pastor and commitment of the clergy and people of God to Northwest 8 at the end of September. It was especially moving and joyful to hear and see nearly 120 choir members and many parishioners from all 8 parishes fill St. Augustine Church. Many folks appreciated the October 21st anointing of the sick Mass at St. Augustine's and are looking forward to the next one, November 29th, at Precious Blood including lunch and fellowship.

From my perspective, I would concur that things seem to be going well. There has been a lot of cooperation and genuine concern from all the staff and parishioners of Northwest 8. Our clergy and staff, finance, marriage and baptismal preparation folks have been working well together and coordinating efforts. All 8 parish councils met this past week beginning in a large gathering, learning more about the Beacons of Light process, plans for a unified parish council and naming our family, then breaking into individual parish councils to handle their usual duties.

If I were to identify the greatest blessing of Northwest 8 so far, I would have to say the cooperation, trust and support of the staff and the people of God. Part of this comes from parishes in the Marion and Minster clusters having been together for over 30 years and having good working relationships, but it is just as much a blessing that Holy Redeemer has been so willing and open to also jump into this new reality of family of parishes and work together with the other parishes as if they had been clustered and working with other parishes for many years as well.

What has been the greatest challenge? Probably just trying to get a handle on the enormity and complexity of working with 8 parishes and trying to do so in a way that is spiritual, pastoral and personal. A snap shot of the parishes I have served may help bring this into focus. My first assignment was the Minster cluster in 1990 with about 1,200 families, two priests and two churches. We were able to minister to the needs of the people and I was able to play basketball with the guys on Sunday nights, do other activities with the youth and visit families in their homes. I then became pastor of Nativity Parish in Longwood Florida in 1995 with 2,500 families, over 1,000 children and youth in religious education, three priests and one church that sat 1,200 people. We were able to minister to the needs of the people and I was able to do some things with the youth and visit some families in their homes. My last assignment since 2010 in the Celina Cluster consisted of 1,800 families, two priests, three churches and a Catholic School. We were able to minister to

most of the needs of the people, but not all, I got to a few youth gatherings and was able to visit a couple families in their homes. Now in the Northwest 8 family of parishes, there are over 3,100 families or 9,600 parishioners, over 2,000 students in religious education, 4,600 attending weekend Masses, 4 priests, 5 deacons and 8 parishes. We are gradually trying to figure out how to minister to the needs of the people, but I am so involved with administering the family and providing sacramental needs, that I have little time for much else. We are beginning to look at staffing that can help manage the administrative duties so that the priests can get back to being priests.

One of the positions we are looking at is a Pastoral Associate/Director of Worship & Sacraments for the Northwest 8 family of parishes. Initially, this position would help respond to the many needs and requests that come to the pastor each day. Even with long and late hours, it can take me days, sometimes weeks to respond to requests that come in, usually prioritizing those that are more urgent and/or timely. This position will also help manage staff and other things that need pastoral guidance. Please be assured that our current NW8 staff are already handling many of the day to day requests and needs that come into our parish offices, scheduling and coordinating many things, but just the complexity and enormity of all the working parts of NW8 requires additional help beyond the pastor and current staff.

We are looking to hire Nick Wilker as full-time Pastoral Associate/Director of Worship & Sacraments for the Northwest 8 Family of parishes beginning August 1, 2023, but with the hope that he will be able to assist with some things earlier. Nick is currently the Director of Liturgy and Music for Holy Redeemer Parish and Elementary Principal at Marion Local Schools. Having given 10 years of service to Marion Local Schools, Nick is committed to finishing the 2022-23 school year and assisting with the principal transition at Marion Local Schools. Once that is complete, he will serve as Pastoral Associate/Director of Worship & Sacraments with the Northwest 8 family of parishes and continue his part time role at Holy Redeemer. Anyone who has known Nick as an educator and principal at Marion Local Schools, knows that his commitment and dedication has been exemplary, but just as strong and now deepening is his commitment and dedication to our Catholic faith and our local church. We are grateful for Nick's commitment and yes to the Northwest 8 Family of Parishes and will continue our efforts to build a team that will help us serve the needs of Northwest 8 into the future.

In the interim, we are looking at other ways and resources to help respond to the administrative and pastoral needs of our Northwest 8 family of parishes. Be assured that we will keep you informed of other staffing positions as they are developed.

Blessings and prayers, Fr. Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S., Pastor