

Christ Our Light Bulletin Note Oct 1, 2023

Dear Christ Our Light Parishioner,

Our new name, Christ Our Light family of parishes, was formally christened and celebrated with evening prayer Sunday, September 17th at St. Augustine Church. It was a joyful and spirit filled celebration of music and ritual with choir members and parishioners across our family that lifted our hearts and voices in praise to God, hearkening Christ Our Light, and ending with the fire alarm sounding. One parishioner suggested the Church, the people of God, were set on fire. It was a perfect night for a bonfire, with amazing chili and great company radiating the light of Christ to all.

From the beginning of creation “let there be light” (Gn 1:3), light has been central to salvation history. The Psalms, the prophet Isaiah and the gospel writers have hearkened the light. Jesus himself proclaims in John’s gospel, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not live in darkness but have the light of life.” (John 8: 12) We pray in our Creed that our God is light from light, true God from true God, in him there is no darkness. Our Church is full of symbolism to light from our Baptism where a candle is lit, to the Easter Vigil where our Lord’s resurrection is symbolized in the lighting of a Paschal candle. It represents God’s redemptive sacrifice, that He is the Alpha and Omega, the true presence and our spiritual strength.

Christ Our Light is a fitting name for our family of parishes reminding us that Christ is our focus. With 40% of the total votes across all 8 parishes, it is name that resonates with many of our parishioners and reflects our call to radiate the light of Christ to others.

We are considering two possible feast days for our Christ Our Light family of parishes. The feast of the Epiphany on January 6th celebrates the revelation of God’s light to the nations. The Prophet Isaiah speaks to the exiles a vision for the future: “Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart will throb and overflow.” (Is 60:1,5) Imagine the hearts of all our parishioners radiant with the light of Christ, throbbing and overflowing with joy. The Epiphany celebrates our belief that salvation is not meant for a mere chosen few but for the whole world.

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2nd is another possible feast day removed from the Christmas season. Simeon and Anna had long been awaiting the savior of the world when that light finally dawns. Simeon’s canticle of praise hearkens to the light: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” (Lk 2:29-32) Christ Our Light is a vivid reminder to be light for all people, those near and far off.

It is important to clarify that the names of our individual churches will not change. We will now be Christ Our Light Family of Parishes along with the designation of each church such as St. Joseph of the Christ Our Light Family of Parishes or Nativity of the Christ Our Light Family of Parishes.

Some have asked about the “save our steeples” FB posts and meetings in our local area. This was created by and is being driven by a couple from one of our parishes opposed to the Beacons of Light focus on becoming one canonical parish. While there may be helpful information shared from the Archdiocese and website on possible modifications to parishes, I am concerned by the methods being used by the organizers and some of the suggestions being made.

What concerns me is that fear tactics are being used to stir people. This is from a FB post in June: “Can you imagine St. Augustine no longer existing despite a storied 150-year history? It’s not just St. Augustine.... All of our local parishes!” Do people really believe St. Augustine church will no longer exist? The name chosen for the FB link seems intended to convey more fear “save our steeples” as if we or someone is out there to destroy them. I am concerned about things that may be undermining the collaborative and consultative efforts so many have been putting into forming Christ Our Light family of parishes. I was recently told that choir members were advised to boycott the September 17th Evening prayer to protest Christ Our Light. I am also concerned that timing is being used to heighten worry and angst. It was suggested that “we have a small window of opportunity to act.” The Beacons of Light process is “geared toward the unification of the Family by June 30, 2027.” I have not received further indication from the Archdiocese that there is some pressing requirement or need to be addressing modification of parishes at this time. The other struggle for me is the time, energy and commitment it is taking to deal with things arising from this issue and how it is being handled. I have spent nearly half my time in recent weeks responding to things on this one issue limiting my time and ability to provide the sacraments and serve the pastoral needs of our parishioners. Ironic that something aimed at saving our steeples is sacrificing our priests and their ministries in the process.

My sense is that parishioners generally feel positive and hopeful about Christ Our Light family of parishes. Many have been involved in the process of coming together, feel that their voices have been heard and respected, have experienced wonderful celebrations, have developed new relationships worshipping and working together and many have a genuine and profound sense of hope for our family. Far different than fear. There is always some anxiety with change, but there also seems to be significant examples and experiences within our family where things are moving forward in a good, hopeful and respectful way, reaffirming the uniqueness of our parishes, and working well together on many collaborative efforts. Please view FB pages in our family of parishes to learn more about the other good and hopeful things already happening in Christ Our Light family of parishes.

Our focus and intention is that we approach the question of possible modification of parishes the same way we have with everything else in forming Christ Our Light family of parishes. We will take our time and work collaboratively and consultatively, to understand, assess and discern the pros and cons of whatever options there may be in the future and having hope and trust that together, with the people of God, we will make the best decision for our Christ Our Light family of parishes.

My hope and prayer is that we focus our efforts on Christ Our light and use our time, energy and resources radiating the Light of Christ to all.
Blessings and prayers, Fr. Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S., Pastor, Christ Our Light Family of Parishes