

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM FR. JACK WALMSLEY

My last Christmas with you brings fond memories of our years together.

These past few months have brought me face to face with many last experiences with you as the parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In September, as I watched the children arrive for school with their fresh uniforms, I remember thinking to myself, "these eighth graders were not even born when I arrived to your parish. Last month we celebrated Thanksgiving and I was flooded with gratitude for my years as your pastor. Now, it is Christmas, our last one together. Thank you for making room for me these past 17 years.

On July 1, my status will change from pastor to senior priest. What happens to senior priests when they give up being a pastor? To be honest, I don't know, but I have been exploring some new possibilities.

Three years ago, I attended a workshop on retirement entitled, " Encore ". During this workshop, we were invited to look back and review how our years of ministry have worked out for us. With OLG as my longest pastoral assignment, I was aware of how suited I have been to enjoy the ministry of priest and pastor. I knew I enjoyed pastoral ministry right from the beginning. The workshop leader challenged us with the question, " Is there something you thought would happen when you went to seminary but didn't happen. Were there other ministries, besides being pastor, you would like to have had the opportunity to participate in? Several thoughts came to mind as the question was presented.

When I went to the seminary, I dreamed of having more direct contact with the poor of our city. I do of course, through the ministries of all the parishes in which I have served, but the role of pastor has not provided as much opportunity as I would have liked. One of my goals for retirement is to involve myself more as a member of St. Vincent de Paul. I live in Kent and with the poor being pushed out of Seattle, I am increasingly surrounded by people in poverty. I am hoping to be involved there in my city of residence.

Spiritual Direction:

One of God's gifts to me has been the experience of the Forty Day Ignatian retreat. I have referenced this experience many times during homilies and in speaking individually to parishioners. This spirituality has been the foundation of my preaching and prayer for many years. I am hoping that in retirement I will have the opportunity to develop this spirituality, in order to offer myself as a spiritual director. I will be seeking out further formation for doing this ministry.

Helping Other Parishes:

I love leading OLG in prayer through our Sunday worship, I will continue to lead prayer and preach in parishes throughout the Archdiocese as a fill in priest on weekends. I love doing funerals, I have offered funeral homes my availability to help families who may not have their own minister or priest. I hope that in some way my gifts may be developed and used in new ways.

My years as your pastor came as an unexpected gift for me. Who would have thought that I would love this parish so much and be here for so long? I am so grateful for the way you have worked with me and one another in building our parish. The people in any parish are the most important part of a parish. Thank you for the Christmas gift you are, a gift that has lasted 17 years. When people ask me why I am a priest today, I point to you who have made my ministry with you, something for which I will always be grateful.

Merry Christmas and let's enjoy our final six months of prayer, service and commitment to being the light that shines like our beautiful tree outside on 35th avenue.

Fr. jack

