

Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.
Father Steve Sallis
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The refrain for the responsorial psalm for the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time was “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you” (Psalm 92:2). Reflecting on my ministry in the past few weeks, this refrain seems to summarize how I feel. I indeed know how good it is to give thanks to God for the opportunities and grace that I have experienced in serving in the Church.

45 years ago next month I took a leap of faith as I entered St. Benedict Abbey in Atchison, Kansas, as a candidate for the monastery. Several times over these past 45 years, I have trusted the Lord to lead me where he wanted me to go. 38 years ago that journey led me to be ordained a priest. And 32 years ago the Lord led me here to the Archdiocese of Seattle, where I did not know anyone and began a new chapter: to serve in pastoral ministry. “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”

As I reflect on my 32 years of pastoral ministry in Western Washington, there is a “**B**” connection: I served in **B**ellingham (at Sacred Heart and Assumption parishes and in campus ministry at Western Washington University for 7 years), in **B**othell (at Saint **B**rendan parish for 8 years), at St. **B**enedict Parish (in Seattle for 10 years), and finally here in **B**ellevue (at Sacred Heart for 6 years). There was a short assignment of a few months in St. Joseph in Lynden and St. Peter in Deming between St. **B**rendan and St. **B**enedict, so I look at that assignment as between ‘**B**’s.” Each one of these assignments was a gift for me, and only for one assignment did I ask to be assigned there; all the others were simply what God wanted me to do. “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”

One of my favorite gifts that I received when I was ordained was a painting by a friend in Burlington, Iowa. The painting depicts a restful forest scene with a line from Psalm 46: “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). I have treasured this gift, and it has always hung on a wall wherever I have lived. This line reminds me to remember why I am so blessed as a child of God and a disciple of a loving and generous God. It also has helped me to be still when necessary: when visiting someone in the hospital when no words need to be spoken, when comforting those who have lost a loved one who died, or when discerning where God is calling me today. Several people have asked me how do I keep going on after long hours or after a particularly challenging day. I know that I have to say that it is not me, but as St. Paul says, Christ working within me, that gives me the grace to persevere. In the midst of all the moves, relationships, ministry moments, and blessings these past 45 years, I have always tried to keep focused on Jesus Christ, the most important person in my life. “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”

I also want to acknowledge one of the most important ways that I have experienced support during my time in ministry here in the archdiocese and that is my Jesus Caritas priest group. Jesus Caritas was inspired by Saint Charles Foucauld who believed in the power of prayer and community. I have been a part of Jesus Caritas for almost 30 years; Father Jim Lee and I have been in our group since the beginning and there are four other priests who are in our group: Fathers Scott Connelly, Gary Lazzaroni, Woody McCallister, and John Madigan (yes the same Father John Madigan who will come to Sacred Heart next week to serve as Parish Priest so I am sure I will hear about Sacred Heart from Father John as we move forward). We have laughed and cried together, seen each other through the deaths of family members and close friends, and made a commitment to be there for each other whenever needed. I know that in

moving forward my Jesus Caritas brothers will be a support. “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”

I want to share with you what these past six years at Sacred Heart have meant for me. First, there are some statistics I would like to share with you. During my time here at Sacred Heart we have celebrated 214 Infant baptisms; we have baptized 22 Adults and older children; 432 children and adults received Communion for the first time; we have celebrated 312 Confirmations; there have been 175 funerals; and we have rejoiced with 38 couples who were married at Sacred Heart. But these sacramental moments are more than numbers. Our parish mission statement says that we are “a Roman Catholic community which welcomes all and inspires our faith in God through prayer, sacraments and service.” Our parish inspires all people to experience God through our prayer and sacraments. I can’t tell you how many parishioners and visitors over these past six years have shared with me how powerful and uplifting an experience they have had while praying in and with our community. “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”

When I arrived at Sacred Heart, six years ago, I was welcomed by many of you and the Parish Staff. During my time as pastor, I have been humbled by the dedication of those who serve our parish as lay ecclesial ministers and others who support the pastoral ministry of our parish. Since we are a large parish with a large staff, we have had many people come and go from our parish staff—some because they were called to the vocation of marriage which led them to other parts of the country, some retired after many years of faithful service here in our parish, and others discerned a call to serve differently somewhere else. But the common thread of all of those who have served and are currently serving on our parish staff is a real commitment to being a missionary disciple who witnesses to all of us their vocation to be a disciple who serves rather than being served as Christ invites us to do. Our parish is lucky to have those who serve on our parish staff, and I will miss sharing in pastoral ministry with them. “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”

I will treasure these six years at Sacred Heart for many reasons. I am grateful that you have allowed me to enter into your lives as a spiritual guide and pastor. I have been blessed by so many who have shared with me how meaningful a homily touched them, or how I brought them comfort during their dying process, or how I was able to bring joy into a situation that seemed bleak or hopeless. That being said, we all know that there have been challenging times as well. That is also a part of being a pastoral minister and servant leader in our Church today. But even in those times, after prayer and reflection, I was able to be grateful for the learning that I gained from those experiences. Thank you for being a part of my life and ministry. “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”

So as I prepare to leave Sacred Heart, I find myself once again trusting in God’s direction in my life. With the recent diagnosis for my sister-in-law and my older brother’s declining health, I made the decision to seek senior status (old priests never retire since we are priests forever). Having taken care of and been responsible for so many people in my 45 years of ministry, I felt at this time a need to focus on my family and their needs. I am grateful to Archbishop Sartain for his kindness in allowing me this privilege to be with family. I will keep my home in Bellevue and travel back and forth to Arkansas to help take care of my brother and his wife. This too will be a graced moment for me as I have the first opportunity in almost 50 years to spend such quality time with family. I will keep all of you in my prayers and ask that you keep me, and my family, in yours. Indeed, “Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.”