

Dear Christ King Parishioners,

I am writing to Saint Bernard and Christ King parishioners about an important journey we will soon undertake to strengthen the Catholic Church's Gospel mission in our area.

As we embark, I direct us to the Catholic Church's core responsibilities: worship God, evangelize, and serve the poor. At every stage of the Church's history, at its best, we'll find Catholics focused on these responsibilities. Our two parishes are now being challenged to accomplish these goals much more effectively.

Catholic Landscape in our Local Area

The Catholic Church in the United States has long been concerned about the spiritual and financial struggles of underutilized Catholic buildings and schools. This is especially concerning in the East and the Midwest, where immigrant populations and their descendants once necessitated building Catholic churches and schools in close proximity to one another.

Our area is a case study of this dynamic. Wauwatosa has five Catholic parishes, with six additional parishes nearby. For years, these parishes were full and expanding. However, beginning in the 1970s, sacramental practice began to wane, and people started having fewer children. Consequently, our area parishes—as a group—have been operating far below their intended capacity for several decades.

Looking Ahead

The moment to choose to change our trajectory is now. After prayer and discussion with the leadership of Saint Bernard and Christ King Parishes, we have asked the Archbishop to unite as one parish, and permission has been granted. Additionally, the Archbishop has approved our request to utilize one building rather than two. Our new parish will use the present Christ King location as our physical campus. The name Christ King will be used, as Christological titles are considered more inclusive than Marian or saintly titles when naming ecclesiastical entities.

After considering many options and for various reasons, the difficult decision to sell the Saint Bernard property was reached. We engaged with several developers who would purchase our land for a new purpose. We chose one developer to move forward with this plan. If the transaction is completed, the sale proceeds leave our new parish with resources for mission purposes. Future options include investing in endowment funds for Catholic education and stabilizing the facilities of one campus. I also want to ensure that appropriate recognition of Saint Bernard's historical presence and stewardship will be on the new site.

The leadership of both parishes took extended time before making these requests. During the nine years I have served as the pastor of both parishes, I have taken time to carefully understand the past and future potential of our parishes together.

Because the two parishes already have a strong formation, liturgical, and outreach bond, the formal unification of Saint Bernard and Christ King will create a robust, vibrant, centralized environment

to foster worship, community, formation, and leadership. This is a purposeful strategy to direct our energy and resources to be more faithful to the Church's responsibilities: worship God, evangelize, and serve the poor.

This plan will not be executed tomorrow. The developer will submit plans to the city for approval, which will take six to nine months. The Saint Bernard campus will remain in use during that time. If plans are approved, we can determine when to set moments of remembrance and celebration as we pledge ourselves to a renewed future. I am informing you about this now so we all have time to prepare for a strong transition.

What is Needed from You?

This will affect Christ King and Saint Bernard parishioners, and the journey will initially take a lot of work. I am grateful to parishioners at both parishes who sacrifice their time and resources when the parishes need them at any point. I hold exceptionally high esteem for Saint Bernard parishioners at this moment who are courageously making a sacrifice for the good of the Catholic Church in our area. Their humble and selfless love of the Church is an example for us.

Everyone's continued support is essential. Operating a parish is more complex than we often appreciate. Over the years, Saint Bernard parishioners have generously helped us do so much more than we could have done alone. Moving forward, rather than lessening, our sacrifice must increase. As one parish, the road ahead will always encourage us to find joy in making sacrifices for Jesus' Church. I sincerely ask Christ King and Saint Bernard parishioners to undertake this journey humbly and optimistically.

I am confident about our future. I challenge us to become larger and more robust than our two parishes within the next few years. I am eager for days when we can enjoy living as Jesus' disciples, engage with secular culture more effectively, and execute the Church's core tasks as one parish more easily. I am also excited about us making new friends.

God placed us in this moment to create something new and exciting. The Holy Spirit will guide us. As your pastor, I ask you not to take this opportunity for granted or with any sense of complacency. I believe that our enlarged faith community's fervor and impact will be even more effective in the following decades through our personal witness to the rich life of Christian discipleship.

Once again, the goals of the Church at its best are worshipping God, evangelizing, and serving the poor. These were our goals in the past and will be our goals until we enjoy life forever in our true home, the heavenly Jerusalem, towards which we eagerly hasten.

See you at Mass,

Fr. Phillip