

Blessed Sacrament Community

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Pastor



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My Dear Friends:

My journey to Blessed Sacrament started in the spring of 2002 when I received a letter from the Bishop of Springfield informing me of my diaconate assignment. The Bishop, then Bishop Dupre, assigned me to a parish in Holyoke by the name of Blessed Sacrament. I had never heard of the parish, I was completely unfamiliar with the round church, and equally unfamiliar with its pastor, Fr. Norman Bolton. Because I was so unfamiliar with both the parish and the pastor, I was apprehensive. While the round church does take some time getting comfortable with for most people, especially if one is an Italian who doesn't like people at his back, its unique design began to grow on me. Because of its design, no one was farther away than eight pews, and because it was round, you could see everyone.

Ominous sign, the day I came to move into the rectory I was wearing jeans and a t-shirt. I knocked on the side door of the rectory, the door closest to the church. A woman came to the door and told me she could not let me in that door, that I had to go to the other door on the Northampton Street side of the rectory. I remember thinking to myself, "Usually, it takes people some time before they figure out not to allow me into the house- this lady is pretty sharp". After several minutes of explanation, she did let me in the rectory!

My diaconate assignment went by very fast; it was a blur. Going to school during the week in Weston, I then traveled back to Holyoke on the weekends. As fast as the time seemed to slip by, the time was filled with some incredible experiences: my first homilies, first baptisms, first singing opportunities, etc. While each of my "firsts" presented challenges, this community was gracious and accepted me. This community has always held, and continues to hold a special place in my heart.

Upon my ordination to the priesthood, I was assigned to St. Thomas the Apostle in West Springfield where I was the parochial vicar, which in English translates into priest "not in charge". I enjoyed my stay at St. Thomas but after thirty- three months, I was asked if I would be willing to go back to Blessed Sacrament as Pastor? I asked the Vicar for Clergy if I could have the weekend to pray over this great responsibility. After spending three days praying and reflecting, I came to the conclusion this was where God wanted me.

God wanted me here because He knew this was a community that would welcome me. This community has taken on the characteristics of the building. It is a round church, it is continuous, no beginning or end. The church pews are not numerous, you can only sit eight pews back. Consequently no one gets lost in the back pews. It's a round church so when you are at Mass and look across the way you see someone looking back at you. You get to know those with whom you celebrate the Eucharist. This community finds no difference in those that are new to it and those who have been around for years. I find it amazing that this parish never loses track of anyone. If anyone is missing, someone seeks him/her out. This community comes to know one another and loves one another. Time and again, I am reminded of what Jesus means when he says "Love One Another" as I witness the care and concern of our parishioners. This is truly a Christ-like parish and I am blessed and grateful to be a part of it.

Yours In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. A. Gentile".

Rev. Fr. Robert Gentile