

PASTOR'S CORNER

A Wonderful Surprise

A few months ago, I was knee-deep in work at the seminary when my cell phone went off. I saw the name, "Archbishop Aymond." I answered the phone with great anticipation as to what the Archbishop might want. He spoke words I was not expecting to hear. "Joe, you've been at the seminary for almost 12 years. You have served well. I am asking you to go back to the parish and become a Pastor, while remaining a seminary spiritual director on a part-time basis." Was I ever excited! As I mentioned in last week's column, I left my law practice 29 years ago and entered seminary in order to become a parish priest. Not that I haven't enjoyed my years serving in Archdiocesan Offices and at the seminary, but the parish is my true love.

I did not know during that first conversation that St. Francis was the parish that the Archbishop had in mind. I was overjoyed when he later informed me that St. Francis was the parish. This parish is well-known as a place of faith, service, and community. To be honest, I had a simultaneous thought, "Fr. T is a legend at St. Francis. It won't be easy to succeed him." In prayer, the Lord calmed me down and assured me He wasn't asking me to be Fr. T, but myself. I said "yes" to the Archbishop with much enthusiasm.

Later, the Archbishop informed me that he was sending Fr. Thien to serve as Parochial Vicar. His assistance would enable me to go to the seminary two days a week for spiritual direction with seminarians. I was excited. I have known Fr. Thien throughout his time in seminary. He is a fine, prayerful man, hard-working and joyful. In the few months that have passed since the announcement, I have had many opportunities to be in the parish. I have had meetings with Fr. T, the deacons, parish and school staff, and leaders in several parish social events, and concelebrated Fr. T's fantastic Farewell Mass. This parish definitely knows how to party!

I will be installed formally as your Pastor by the Dean of the East Jefferson Deanery at the 10:00 A.M. Mass on Sunday, August 26. Please come if you are able. But my pastorate officially commences August 10. I will preach at all the Masses on August 11-12. Please pray for Fr. T, Fr. Thien and me during these days of transition. I will pray for you and look forward to serving you and being a part of the St. Francis family. God bless.

Fr. Joe