



SSS Grapevine

An Internal Publication of the Province of Saint Ann,
Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for the
Eymardian Family

February 15, 2023 – 2023.3

Pastoral Visits Continue in Florida & San Antonio (February 8 – 13, 2023)



Pastoral Staff of Saint Vincent de Paul Parish in Holiday,
Florida

I flew down to the Tampa International Airport and the Diocese of Saint Petersburg on Wednesday night, February 8, to be warmly greeted by our Parochial Vicar at Saint Vincent de Paul Parish (SVDP), Holiday, Florida, Father Dominic Long SSS. He is one of our international priests on loan from Vietnam who has served for six years here, cultivating the bilingual Vietnamese and English community. Once at the house, Father William (Bill) Fickel, SSS,

my pastor from my childhood (!) and pastor for the last nine years here at SVDP, also was there to warmly greet me and share with me the joys of living in this great community of faith and the schedule for the following days.

I began my Thursday morning with a 7 am International Theological Commission Meeting (*via Roma and Zoom with SSS men in Kinshasa, Colombo, Madrid, Rome, Ho Chi Minh City, and me in Florida*). This was our 8th working meeting (7th on zoom), where we continue to work on the Eucharistic catechism for our Congregation, the 40th Anniversary of the *Rule of Life*, and the survey on exposition and prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. (*Don't forget to fill out this survey!*) This three-hour meeting began my day and got me into the mindset of the internationality of the Eucharist, the international living of our charism, and what each of us associated with the Eymardian Family are about in living the Eucharist in our day and time.

Later Thursday morning, I met with the SVDP Pastoral Staff, praying the Sunday scriptures with them and hearing how the parish has emerged from the pandemic. This community has taken seriously the call to share the outreach of the Eucharist and attends to the needs of the homeless in the area, has a weekly Thursday program for outreach with the food pantry, and is looking forward to a book study during the Lenten season. They had just had a successful parish mission with a Redemptorists team days before. The SVDP Society is quite active in the parish, taking the name and charism of their patron saint seriously. Many members, even Associates (*Aggregation*) of the Blessed Sacrament, serve weekly and proudly at their food pantry and wear their Aggregation crosses with their blue SVDP Society polo shirts.

I enjoyed hearing the stories of the history and current reality of the parish now, especially after a birthday luncheon for the staff members (*and Father Fickel's profession anniversary celebration*) and the Finance Council meeting. We were able to hear about the great work and finances of the parish and some statistics:



Associates of Holy Family, Florida praying over Father Lane

- The parish was founded in 1969
- Currently, 650 families;
- Many Vietnamese families are not registered, and guessed to be about 100 families in this part of the parish. The Mass in Vietnamese is usually the largest attended of the 5 Masses on the weekend.
- The parishioners are quite generous both for the parish and the outreach to those in need, making their budget each year and slowly paying off a long-term debt over 25 years old. Our Congregation came to the parish 20 years ago.
- 75–80 people come each Thursday to the SVDP Food Pantry – there are usually about 30 volunteers, many are lay associates, who help give food and talk about sharing God in their lives.
- SVDP is known as the friendly parish, and many parishioners are involved in the parish's life.
- Besides the two SSS priests who are full-time, there are two other full-time lay staff members (*Business Manager and Maintenance Supervisor*); the rest of the positions are part-time
- 4:00 pm Saturday Mass is live-streamed
- The Finance Council is planning significant capital improvements for their parking lots, roofs, and church HVAC, which all parishes face!



Fathers Matteo, Lane, Dominic and Fickel

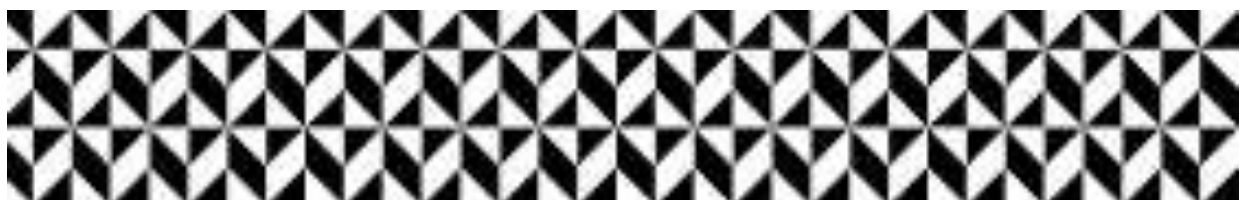
The goal of all my pastoral visits has been the same: meet with as many groups within the parish life, especially the associates. I share my gratitude for the local SSS and lay community living the charism of Eymard and their support of the Blessed Sacrament Community. Our lay associates and others are helping us live the *Rule of Life*. Additionally, I promoted the upcoming books (*Eucharistic Spirituality* by Jim Brown and Father Paul Bernier

SSS, *Dining in the Kingdom* by Father Eugene LaVerdiere SSS), the Eucharistic Congress (at the Provincialate August 4-6, 2023), and our Eymard Pilgrimage (November 2024).

After a brief prayer walk in the neighborhood, I met Gloria Jung, leader of the Associates for the region, to hear the exciting details of their formation and activities. Later, at the beginning of the evening, I met the Stewardship Council, a representation of the ministry leaders in the parish. They evaluated the past month's activities, a lot since Christmas, and were finalizing the schedule for February and March. It's a chance for the leaders to check in and see each group's needs, representing the parish's cross-section. Twice during my visit, I visited briefly with members of the Vietnamese Council to hear their vision and hopes for the future: they count on a Vietnamese priest to serve them in the future.



Vietnamese Community in Holiday, Florida





Fr Lane, Bishop Parkes, Fr Fickel, Fr Dominic

Friday, Fathers Bill, Dominic, and I went to meet with the bishop of Saint Petersburg, Most Reverend Gregory Parkes. It was nice to meet with him and discuss the pastoral vision of the diocese for the region we are in, personnel issues, plan for the associates' approbation, and share the statistics that inform one another. After this meeting, we had a SSS lunch community meeting to discuss the plans of the SSS community and parish.



Associates in Orlando, Florida, with Father JT Lane SSS and Father George Dunne SSS

After this lunch, I drove to the Diocese of Orlando and the San Pedro retreat center in Winter Springs to celebrate Mass with our associates based at two parishes in the diocese. I was warmly greeted by Father George Dunne SSS, who was waiting for my arrival from the heavy traffic congestion (*it is a highlight of Florida life!*). It was a delight to meet so many associates who are so enthusiastic about living their Eucharistic vocation. Diana McGinty hosted a reception in her magnificent home to enjoy a delicious meal and the many desserts she created for us.



Elisheba House Staff with Fathers Lane and Fickel:
Laura Worhacz, Ivonne and Rick Hernandez

After that, I drove back to meet the publishing board of Elisheba House, serving the Aggregation of Florida. We discussed their approval by the bishop of Saint Petersburg and the excellent work they are doing with the associates of Florida and the Mothers of the Blessed Sacrament too.

It was a joy to celebrate Eucharist at the weekend Masses and preach with the SVDP congregation. Many of our associates and those in formation attended the 4:00 pm Mass. This was followed by a reception in the parish hall with a great meal created and served by the parish Chef Mark. I spent a little time with each associate from the three parishes in the area. They surprised me with a beautiful congratulatory cake, and we celebrated Father Fickel's anniversary of his profession.



Father John Thomas Lane celebrating Eucharist at St Vincent de Paul, Holiday, Florida

Continuing to be fed so well, the Vietnamese leaders took me to a new Vietnamese

restaurant to delight in the treasures of this cuisine and get ready for the Sunday night rest over some football game. 😊

On Monday, February 13, I flew to San Antonio to meet with our community of Father Norman Pelletier SSS, pastor of Saint Joseph Downtown, and Father Joseph Thai Minh Tran SSS, Parochial Vicar. We met for lunch to discuss the Province of Saint Ann financial picture in preparation for our commission meeting later in the week. Our province investor, John Ulrich, has an office in San Antonio.



Saint Joseph Downtown Church in San Antonio, Texas

Later on, I had a pastoral meeting and introduction with Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller of San Antonio to discuss the pastoral planning of the Archdiocese, especially

in light of the synodal process. Archbishop Gustavo has a long history with our community, having worked with us in his vicariate in Chicago when he was auxiliary bishop there. We traced our long history, and he shared his gratitude for our witness, but especially the growing witness of our Associates in the Archdiocese.





Father Joseph Thai Tran, Father Lane, Bishop Gustavo, and Father Norman Pelletier



Associates in San Antonio, Texas

After an SSS Community Dinner Meeting, I met with 32 of the Associates of San

Antonio and two from Laredo, Texas, who were formed online. Billy Stewart provided an excellent meal for us, secretly dropping it off but unable to stay due to his current respiratory health. We keep this leader of the associates in our prayers. Cesar Camacho led our gathering, where we heard a great talk written by Billy, edited by Cesar, and the state of the associates in this part of Texas. There are 422 in the area, from several parishes and 35 associates in formation. The big plan on their agenda, requested by Archbishop Gustavo, a procession with the Blessed Sacrament through the downtown area churches on the solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ on June 11, 2023.

Early Tuesday morning, Valentine's Day, I flew back to Ohio, marveling at the energy, enthusiasm, and excitement of our associates, pastoral staffs, and all associated with the mission of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in these three dioceses. I read the two books given to me by Laura Worhacz and Ivonne Hernandez, sharing their gifts from their love of Eymard, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, and the rosary. Our bonds of communion were strengthened, and more than ever, I was more appreciative of all who take the Eucharistic and Eymardian vocation seriously to set the world on fire with our Eucharistic Zeal. I cannot thank the good folks of Florida and San Antonio enough for their warm hospitality and kindness, a packed six days that whizzed by, empowering me for mission and leadership. I am grateful for their prayers and constant support and look forward to our next gathering with great joy.

I am so proud of the great work that Fathers Bill Fickel, Domonic Long, Norman Pelletier, and Joseph Thai Tran are doing to live our Eucharistic charism. I am amazed at their vigor and so grateful to them and our associates in the Eymardian family for making known the mysteries of the Eucharist in our worship and service wherever we serve. Thank you!

