

Father Sylvester Peterka is sent forth

By Gaystella Armstead

The parishes of Immaculate Conception and St. Cecilia in Baltimore will soon say goodbye to their longtime pastor, leader, spiritual advisor and friend, Vincentian Father Sylvester Peterka.

Father Sy's ministry went beyond the boundaries of the Druid Hill and Walbrook Junction communities. His presence will be missed in many of our state facilities where he visited and proclaimed the Word of God through visits to prisons, hospitals and hospices, nursing homes and rehabilitative centers. Our local organizations such as BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development) and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance will also sense his absence. Baltimore City Hall rallies, various neighborhood peace walks, night watches and local prayer vigils will surely feel an incredible loss.

Over the years we have witnessed Father Sy's ministry and likened him to the character of Joshua in Scripture. Joshua was a faithful servant of God. He was a leader who feared God, believed God, obeyed God and glorified God. Joshua was fully committed to God's will and remained faithful. Likewise, Father Sy has a mighty spirit and accepts God's call to do his will.

Father's new assignment will take him to the Germantown section of Philadelphia, where his leadership ability will be needed in successfully merging four parishes into one. His obedience to God and his humble nature make him a perfect choice for this new assignment. He goes forth to Philadelphia with the mightiness of Joshua. This man of God will go forth with such passion and commitment to God that Philadelphia will wonder what took Sy so long to get there.

The call for dear Father Sy to move on is an indication to me that he has successfully completed his assignment here at our congregations. We have enjoyed his presence

for a total of 22 years. We have received the teachings of faith and Father Sy has given us God's word like no other servant of God could have delivered.

The measurement of growth is calculated differently these days. There was a time when we would measure growth in height, width and weight increments. Today our congregations' measurement of growth is done by our consistent trust in God in every situation. We embrace and accept that God makes no mistakes.

Father Sy has fed us spiritually with timely homilies but mostly by being a model of faith. Our church families are stronger and more faith filled due to the gifts and blessings over the years that God has sent our way.

We have grown tremendously as a parish. Personally, along with my family, I have benefited from Father Sy's presence and his ministry. Words could never describe adequately the journey of faith I presently enjoy due to Father Sy's encouragement and example of serving God.

Of course, my initial reaction when I heard the news of Father Sy's reassignment sent me through a season of many emotions, from cries of "why," to pleadings and prayers to Our Lord and Savior to let this trial pass but ending with what we are all familiar with, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). With the utmost confidence I pray this and I invite others to join with me in this prayer as Philadelphia welcomes its new pastor.

The excitement rises in me as I look forward to what our awesome and mighty God has in store for us. Many have learned the important spiritual wisdom from Father Sy regarding who we are but most importantly whose we are. We know the source of all good things comes from above and while we send forth our very best to Philadelphia, armed in much prayer laced with never-ending love and support, we look forward to welcoming our new priests. The sources which God uses to bless us are never ending as we have learned, "God is good all the time and all the time, God is good."

Gaystella Armstead is a parishioner of St. Cecilia Church in Baltimore.