

Our daily readings for the past couple of weeks have focused on the story of the Israelites being freed from slavery in Egypt. Earlier this week we heard the story of Moses being told by God that he would see the promised land, but he would not enter it. Joshua would take Moses' place as the leader of the Israelites. And then on Friday we hear Joshua tell the Israelites all that the Lord had done for them. He recounted for them how God chose Abraham and made of him a great nation. He recounted for them how through wonders and signs he set them free from the Pharaoh in Egypt. He talked about leading them through the Red Sea, water from the rock, and manna in the desert.

Joshua recounted for them their history...and then, **and only then** did he set before them the vision of who they would be as a nation.

Joshua did that because he wanted them to know.... beyond any doubt.... that God was with them. He wanted them to know they stood on the shoulders of Giants and that is why they were occupying the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

My friends, we too stand on the shoulders of giants.

In the late 1840's a group of local farmers, some Irish but most Germans, began to see a need for a Catholic Parish in Western Clark County. With names like Renn and Graf, Conroy, Poff and Popp, they petitioned the bishop of Vincennes for permission to erect a new parish on a beautiful hill in their vicinity. The bishop said yes, and through their vision, their sweat and their hard work, a log cabin Church was built and given over to the patronage of St. Joseph.

Within a few decades they quickly outgrew the log cabin Church, and in 1881, once again with the grace of God and the vision of the people, the new St. Joe Hill Church was built, and along with it a school.

We stand today on the shoulders of those giants who had a vision for the practice of their faith, and worked to achieve that vision.

100 years after all that began, in the 1940's a group of local businessmen in the town of Sellersburg, had a vision for a new parish. The town of Sellersburg, now part of the diocese of Indianapolis, needed a place for Catholics to call home.

Fr. Paul Gootee began building support for this new parish by preaching on the street corners. In 1949, the parish of St. Paul was born. And from an overgrown garden, a Church and school appeared, strategically placed on US 31.

We stand on the shoulders of those giants of St. Paul Parish, those charter members, some of whom are still living today.

For the next 50 years God blessed growth in both parishes. St. Paul added the new Church in 1974. St. Joe Hill a new parish hall around the same time. And then in 2004, the Archdiocese announced a program for the future staffing of parishes. This new plan called for St. Joe Hill and St. Paul Parishes to eventually share one priest.

Rather than wait for the Archdiocese to determine how this might look, In 2006, a committee comprised of members of both parishes presented a new vision for the Catholic Church in Western Clark County. This new vision, called Vision 2020, was adopted by the parishes and then ratified by Archbishop Daniel. It called for a single parish in one location with an elementary school serving grades pre-school through 8.

We stand on the shoulders of those giants today.

In 2014, these two parishes which served their respective communities so well merged into one.

I am pleased to announce today that our parish council and finance council have approved our moving forward with a \$5.5 million Capital Campaign to build a new Church building for St. John Paul II Parish.

The campaign will begin this fall and run through the remainder of this calendar year and into the first part of 2018.

Most of you have heard me joke that as we begin this campaign

I have good news and bad news.

The good news is we have all the money we need to build the Church,

The bad news is that it is in your pockets.

It's a cute joke, but it has a serious point too!

We worship a God of abundance...

We worship a God who has not once, not once abandoned the people

God chooses to call his own.

I am convinced that if we stay faithful

to the plan that God has placed in our hearts,

a plan that we have discussed for 13 years,

a plan that we have prayed about for at least the last four years,

I am convinced that God will bless our efforts.

Can we raise 5.5 million dollars?

I know we can because we worship a God who is not a stingy God.

We worship a God of abundance who has called us to a new vision
of how we are to be Church.

I've heard it said that we don't need a new Church...

Let me address that sentiment

We currently have four masses in two Church buildings

St. Paul seats roughly 400. St. Joe about 300.

In 2014 our weekend Mass Attendance averaged 1102.

In 2015 it averaged 1141, and in 2016 it averaged 1175.

In 2015, we registered 50 new families and had a net gain of 35 families,

In 2016, we registered 62 new families and a net gain of 30 families.

Currently we are 1199 families, and just a smidge under 3000 members.

The diocesan policy is that all priest work toward three masses on the

weekend...If we did that right now, and if all those Masses were at the St. Paul
location, the bigger of the two Churches, we would be at 98% capacity.

We have great things happening in our parish.

People are excited about their faith and their discipleship walk.

New houses are being built in this area on an almost daily basis.

If we don't provide a place for people to worship,

they will surely go someplace else.

And here's another piece of the puzzle.

In our Archdiocese, we currently have 144 diocesan priests serving 133 parishes.

In the next 5 years, 29 of those priests will reach the retirement age of 70.

At that same time, we have only 7 men currently in seminary that could be ordained at that time.

Minimally, that is a net loss of 22 men.

For the first time in our recent history we will have more parishes than priests.

I see the day coming where the pastor of St. John Paul II might also be called to pastor another parish along with it.

I say all this not to be a doomsday prophet, but to say we have an opportunity here...an opportunity to align our vision with God's vision.

I've said it before and I'll say it again...

We are not building this Church only for ourselves,
not even primarily for ourselves;

We are building it for your grandchildren and your great grandchildren.

For the last 164 years, we have stood on the shoulders of giants.

Men and women who had a vision...and worked and sacrificed
and prayed that God would allow them to bring that vision to completion.

We have worshipped in Churches that most of us did not build...

We have sat in the shade of trees we did not plant,

And now it is our turn...

It's our turn to be the giants...on whose shoulders God will build His Church.