

From the Desk of Fr. Donahue

May 13, 2026
Feast of Our Lady of Fatima

Dear Friends,

Peace to you from the Rectory! This past Tuesday, May 12, Bishop Burbidge released the list of new assignments for the priests of the Diocese of Arlington. As always, his list brought important news for our Diocese; this year, the list marks a significant transition for me and for our parish. You may know by now that my name is on that list – **I will be retiring as pastor of St. Philip and taking up residence in the St. Rose of Lima Priests' Retirement Villa in Annandale, VA starting June 25. The new pastor for St. Philip will be Fr. Jeb S. Donelan, a brother priest and friend whom I have known since his ordination in 2011.** I look forward to saying more about Fr. Jeb in my next bulletin letter. For more details on this change, and on all the new clergy appointments, please see the website for the Diocese of Arlington.

Since I have not spoken publicly about retiring, I hope you are not too shocked by the news. You may also be wondering “why now?”, or, perhaps thinking that retirement for me at this time may be a bit premature. How I discerned this big step is a long story, but the short version is that these last eighteen months have been unusually difficult for me, with a series of significant health challenges, including surgery, recurring infections, and mobility issues. For some of these ailments, the cure was sometimes worse than the problem. For others, there simply is no solution to the problem, given my compromised health situation. None of these problems, however, were a surprise to my doctors. They have cautioned me that I have entered a new season of life, a time when I can expect my body to be breaking down more frequently. Of course, this happens to everyone; it is just happening to me about twenty years earlier than it does for most priests my age.

In the midst of this experience – and with a lot of prayer – it has become increasingly clear that God is calling me to another type of priestly service, one that is less demanding than serving as pastor. When I discussed this with Bishop Burbidge, he was fully supportive of me continuing as a pastor, but was above all concerned for my welfare and respectful of my discernment. **His approval of my resignation as pastor has brought me a great sense of peace in the midst of a heart-breaking decision.**

Exactly what I will be doing next is not completely clear, but in my conversations with Bishop Burbidge and his staff, it has become clear that living at the Priest Retirement Villa would be ideal for me. Bishop Burbidge encouraged me to approach these first six months of my retirement as a time of retreat and discernment. As such, my short-term plans are to rest, get settled, attend to some pending health issues, and visit my elderly parents in Michigan, all the while discerning God's plan for the next step.

Along with the peace that only Christ can give, this time of decision has brought me an overwhelming sense of gratitude for my time at St. Philip. **This parish has meant so much to me, and you have blessed me greatly.** As I think over the past sixteen years, it is wonderful to behold the people helped, the Masses offered, the sins forgiven, the babies baptized, the classes taught, the weddings celebrated, the sick anointed, the feasts observed, the deceased prayed for, the counsel offered, the meetings held, the plans made, and the bills paid. What a blessing to have been with you these many years doing the work of God!

None of this would have been possible without your generous support. I think first of the priests who have served at St. Philip, both before and during my time here. Then my heart goes out to our parish staff – for some, we have been together since my first days here in 2010! Next, I give great thanks for the faithful volunteers who brought so many wonderful programs and events to life (you know who you are!). And finally, I think of all of you, the parishioners: During these years you have blessed me with your support, encouragement, and love. You have helped me be a priest of Jesus Christ. To all of you I say: “Thank you, thank you, and thank you – may God reward you for your goodness to me!”

For a milestone like this, we need to get together to celebrate and for me to say “thank you” to each of you in person. In order to do this, I invite you to a “Parish Night of Gratitude” on Saturday, June 20, at 6:30 pm, in Hayden Hall, and weather-permitting, on the front lawn of the convent. It will be great to gather around our St. Francis of Assisi statue during this special year in his honor to celebrate the wonderful work God has given us to do these last sixteen years.

St. Francis of Assisi – pray for us!

St. Philip the Apostle – pray for us!

St. Joseph – pray for us!

Mary, Mother of the Church – pray for us!

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Denis M. Donahue, Pastor