



St. Joseph Catholic Church

State of the Parish Letter
June 30, 2026
Father John M. Connell
Pastor

STATE OF THE PARISH

St Joseph Church, Conway

June 30, 2026

It is hard to believe that this is my 3rd “STATE OF THE PARISH” at St Joseph. Every section below is good news which reveals how blessed we are at St Joseph. The report is divided into the year ‘ending’ and the year ‘beginning.’ I am happy that as I release this report, my days of being ‘solo’ at St Joseph are coming to end.

THE YEAR ENDING

Reports

- *Financially:* The parish is very healthy. We will end this fiscal year with an estimated net income of \$125,000. Most of this excess income has been placed in savings to be used for future needs. I thank each of you for your generosity which is so essential to the life of our parish. We will share with you a complete financial report for this fiscal year in our Stewardship report at the end of September.
- *Parish Vision:* Our pastoral council will continue to review and update the three most important aspects of the vision plan: music, ministry to young families, and a welcoming environment.
- *St Joseph School Capital Campaign:* We are currently in the quiet phase of fundraising for our new elementary school, which I hope we can break ground on sometime next summer. I will give you a full update on where we stand this September in the second part of my article on the Capital Campaign.
- *Upgrading Projects:* There are only two projects ongoing presently. First, the new pavilion on the middle school playground. It should be completed by the time of our Bazaar this August. Secondly, we are doing a little bit of landscaping around the rectory and next year we are planning to plant new trees on the front lawn.

Staffing

There were less staff changes than last year, but there were two:

Denay Minett – our new Head Sacristan was hired last September and has been a wonderful addition to our staff. She is dedicated and the right person for the job. She works well with the ministries and the priests to make our church look great and our liturgies go smoothly.

Courtney Burmester – joined our staff in February as our new Director of Music. She hit the ground running, as she learns to navigate this new position. Her first big tests, to get the bilingual choir together for Holy week and to prepare for the diaconate ordination of De Josh Osborne, were a great success.

I am happy to have both these ladies on staff.

THE YEAR BEGINNING

Here is a little of what to expect in fiscal 2026-2027.

Financial

I am happy to report that the finance committee and pastoral Council approved our new budget. It projects a Net Income of \$125,000. We remain healthy only because of your generosity. There will be no big expense during this fiscal year.

Staffing

At present we have no open positions, and I am not expecting to hire any new staff members.

Changes

There will be only a couple small changes that I will be making this year. When the Thursday morning Mass returns on July 9th, the Mass will be at 9:00AM rather than 7:00AM. On that day, the evening Mass at 6:00PM will return to a Spanish only Mass. The Monday morning Mass will return on July 13th at 9:00AM.

Ministries

Hispanic Ministry

The Hispanic Ministry continues to advance through its Leadership Formation Program, established in response to parish listening sessions. As the program enters its second year, participants will engage in the study of Sacramental Theology as part of their continued formation. In the upcoming fiscal year, the ministry will introduce a youth group for ages 13–17 to promote active faith engagement, as well as a marriage enrichment group to support both engaged and married couples in their spiritual development. These initiatives reflect the Hispanic Ministry's commitment to fostering faith, leadership, and a strong sense of community. *Dcn. Ramon Argueta*

Youth Ministry

Opportunities & Needs: Opportunities to support the Youth Ministry here at St. Joseph are far and wide! From working directly with our youth to being extra eyes and ears, speakers, greeters, listeners, and, most importantly, mentors. There is a place for you with us! Small group mentors are active within the Youth Ministry, leading, guiding, and being a positive example through discussions and prayers.

This year, I have a small active Adult Core Team helping me revamp the 6th-8th grades JRCYM youth nights. They have been amazing in their support and giving me so many new ideas. Our Adult Core Team for SRCYM, our 9th-12th grade students, could use some more adults with open hearts and ears. Small groups are very powerful with this age group. Unfortunately, with only a couple adults, our small groups are not very small.

Although the Core Team groups require commitment, there are other opportunities throughout the year such as extra chaperones, substitutes, and speakers. Come share your talents with us. Teach us a new hobby. Share with us your experiences. I'd love to hear from you! *Amy Testone*

Youth Faith Formation

The Youth Faith Formation Department is continuing to grow. Last year, we had roughly 40 more students than the previous year, and we hope to have even more this year. To help encourage long-term learning and retention of material from Youth Faith classes, we will be starting a challenge at the end of the year to see which grade mastered their material the best. The winning class will have a pizza party (for Wednesday night classes) or donut party (for Sunday morning classes) on their last day of class, and will have a trophy that will remain with them the following year, until the next challenge takes place. We will also be starting a new Post-Confirmation program, allowing students to continue learning about the Faith past the normal Youth Faith Formation timeline. We will cover topics such as the Mass, the Eucharist, Salvation History, Apologetics, Virtue, and Prayer. I will teach some of the classes, and will try to bring some guest speakers in as well. These classes will meet before our normal Wednesday night classes, and will run from September to April. To register your child for Youth Faith Classes, Post-Confirmation Classes, 1st Reconciliation/1st Communion Prep Program, Confirmation Prep Program, or to find out how you can help support these programs, please contact me or visit the parish website for more information. Thanks, and God bless! *Elijah Bailey*

Adult Faith Formation

An Open door--Hello St. Joseph, I have been the Adult Faith Director for a little over a year now, and I want to say I am really proud of how vibrant we are as a parish. We have so many ways to get involved, from our small groups to initiatives that serve our larger community. That being said I am sure that someone in the parish has felt a calling to start something new. If God has placed a vision or a passion on your heart, I want to extend a personal invitation for you to stop by and talk with me in the parish office. Don't be afraid to take that next step—sometimes simply speaking an idea aloud is the first step toward making it a reality.

'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'" *Joshua 1:9*

God Bless! *Tyler Jones*

Music News

As we begin a new fiscal year at St. Joseph, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our parish as the new Music Director. Sacred music plays such an important role in the life of the Church. Through music, we pray together, celebrate together, and are drawn more deeply into the beauty of the Mass and the presence of Christ.

One of my hopes for this year is to continue growing and strengthening our music ministry, and we would love for more parishioners to become involved. In particular, we are in great need of additional accompanists for Masses and other liturgies. If you play piano — whether you read sheet music, play with only chords, or have experience with both — there is a place (and need) for you here! Please consider how you can offer your time and talent to our parish in this way. We are also always grateful for those willing to share their voices and musical talents in other ways.

Music ministry is not about performance, but about leading others in prayer and helping our parish worship together more fully. Whether you are an experienced musician or someone who has been considering getting involved for the first time, I would love to hear from you. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or interest in serving. My email address is cburmester@sjparish.org, or you can call me at the church office. I look forward to what God has in store for our music ministry this year! *Courtney Burmester*

Sacristan

Since joining the parish staff team, my focus has been learning what we are doing well and where we need additional support for the liturgy. We have recruited over 20 parishioners to various liturgical ministries and will continue to recruit and train more throughout the year. This year, I am seeking more help with weekday masses and enough coverage so that ministers don't have to serve every weekend. We are in special need of ushers, sacristans, and AV operators, but could use help with every liturgical ministry! If you are called to serve, please reach out.

I plan to assemble a team of volunteers to help with decorating and transitioning the sanctuary spaces during Holy Week and Easter in 2027. The goal is to celebrate this holy season with deepening reverence and excellence and build upon the changes we have already made.

I am also looking into ways to provide continued training and opportunities for growth in our liturgical ministries. I have been working behind the scenes this year to organize the church and liturgical implements. My overall goal is for our parish to be a welcoming and reverent space that draws visitors into the liturgy and sacraments. I will continue to work with our pastor and staff to improve the physical space towards that goal this year! *Denay Minett*

School News

In early August, our teachers will spend a day at Subiaco on retreat in preparation for the new school year. We have a great staff. Pray for our teachers and staff as they prepare for another school year. Father William Burmester will lead the retreat this year.

In early October our school will have its ANSAA accreditation review. Pray for our teachers and administration team during this time.

Church Renovation Committee and 150th Anniversary Committee

I am forming two committees and they will focus on the renovation of our church that I hope to start in 2027 and the celebration of our 150th anniversary as a parish in early 2029. Look for an update on the renovation committee in my Christmas letter this December.

Upcoming Events and delights

- Bazaar: Our annual parish Bazaar will be held on Friday, July 31, and Saturday, August 1. Make plans to attend this wonderful traditional event. We are always needing volunteers, as well.
- Endowment: Our Endowment Board will host their annual banquet on Wednesday, October 7th. If you have not already done so, especially if your children and/or grandchildren are or have been part of SJS, donate now to the endowment and your gift will last a lifetime!
- Stewardship Month: This will happen in the month of October as it has in the past. This year the theme will focus on our School Capital Campaign.
- Volunteer Dinner: We will once again host a Volunteer Banquet on Wednesday, November 4th. This is my way of saying thank you to everyone who volunteers at St Joseph. Please mark your calendars now!
- Christmas Decorations: You will see additional decorations this year inside and outside the church. I am still thinking about how to put a Nativity scene outside on the lawn and how to keep it secure. If anyone has ideas, please talk to me.
- Lenten Dinners: Like always our parish will host 3 Lenten dinners in 2027. Lent begins on Wednesday, February 10, 2027. The dinners will be held on Wednesday evenings from 5:00PM – 6:30PM

St Joseph is my home.

St Joseph is my home. I said the same thing last year. I really do look forward to my fourth year with you. I hope that I have been able to serve you well, to feed you spiritually, and to be with you in times of joy and sorrow. I can tell you that I am at peace at St Joseph, and even though I see myself coming and going with the many positions I hold, I am happy to be here.

Conclusion

As I complete my third fiscal year here with you all, I continue to make this promise: I am here for you, and I speak for my future associate, as well. There will always be changes as our parish moves forward on its journey of faith, but I remain committed as your pastor. I love this parish and what it stands for. I am not going anywhere. I believe our best days are ahead of us and I believe that our Lord is with us always.

I want to thank my wonderful staff at the parish and the school. I am truly blessed to have each one of you working for our parish. Thank you.

As your pastor, I realize that I am not in control of events or what will happen in the future; our Heavenly Father is. For that I am eternally grateful, because I am only His servant. I place our parish in His hands every night and pray for each one of you. Thank you for your support and may God bless our parish and our families. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

FATHER JOHN CONNELL