

A Farewell to Father Daniel

From the Pastor's Desk

There is a photograph on my bookshelf in my office of me and 9 other priests. What we all have in common is that we are all priests of the Diocese of Little Rock and that I mentored each of these young men at the beginning of their priesthood. Eight of the nine were mentored only at St Raphael in Springdale. The last in that string of nine priests is Father Daniel. As most of you know, he spent one year with me in Springdale before we both came to Conway in 2023.

Each of these young priests spent different amounts of time with me over the years before receiving their first assignment. Two of them spent only one year with me, three spent two years with me, three others spent three years, and Father Daniel spent the most time with me, almost four years, 45 months to be exact.

I have never written a farewell letter to one of my associates as they were preparing to leave the parish. I just said a few words at their final Mass. However, I am doing something different with Father Daniel. This Easter Sunday, the 10:30AM Mass will be Father Daniel's last Mass as associate pastor at St. Joseph, allowing him to say goodbye. The words below are my farewell to him, and I share them with you.

If one word could describe the many attributes of Father Daniel, that word would be passionate. Of all my associates, his passion is so easily on display for all to see.

Four years ago, Father Daniel arrived in Springdale a young, green, and nervous priest. My heart felt for him because I knew he was so scared, and St Raphael would be overwhelming for him if I did not take him under my wing. I did exactly that. However, even in the anxious moments of his early priesthood at St Raphael, I saw a young man who had a passion for ministry and for living. This passion to do his share of work was evident in his willingness to do things and step out of his comfort zone. For example, he offered a class in Spanish, a second language that he was still learning because of his passion to live the life of a priest. He had a passion for ministry in general such as working with our CYM group with a desire to get more Latino kids to take part. He also organized a weekend conference for married couples because he wanted them to embrace married life even more.

Once we moved to Conway, I saw another passion of Father Daniel begin to appear. His involvement in our school was unprecedented and was driven by his love for Catholic education. Father Daniel was a product of Catholic schools and his appreciation for our school was evident in the amount of time he spent walking the hallways of our school buildings, playing on the playground with our students, or visiting the classrooms. His passion was on display for all to

see. An example of this is when he spoke so eloquently about Catholic Education at our Endowment banquet last October.

This passion continued with his uncanny ability to learn all our students' names. I am not sure he could do the same with their parents, but amazing, nonetheless. He wanted to know all our kids by name because it was important for him to make that connection. Father Daniel enjoyed spending time with families. This love of family was something I noticed from the early days of his priesthood.

Father Daniel from day one had a passion for celebrating the sacraments, the core of who we are as priests. Although I have only heard a few of Father Daniel's homilies, I know he has a passion for sharing in his homilies the love for the Word, a love for Christ, and a love for the Church. He could also prepare his homilies a lot quicker than me. He was passionate about hearing confessions and loved celebrating baptisms and weddings.

Another passion of Father Daniel was his competitiveness. Whether it was kickball with our students in the fall or spring, watching or listening to the Razorbacks, or his favorite team, the St Louis Blues, his love of the game was obvious. His loud yells when something good happened or his screams when something bad happened revealed a true passion for competition. I always told him he was too competitive, but this is coming from a priest with no competitive spirit. He hated and never believed the line I often said, "It's just a game."

The final two passions that I have seen in Father Daniel reveal fundamentally who he is as a priest and a man. Father Daniel loves his family. He comes from a very Catholic family that nurtured his faith and promoted his vocation to the priesthood. Father Daniel loves to spend time with his parents and siblings and especially his nieces and nephews. Passion for his family is at the core of Father Daniel. This helps him to be connected to that which gave him a love for life, family, and priesthood.

Finally, Father Daniel has a true passion for the priesthood and his identity as a priest. Even as the scared young man that I met 4 years ago, he displayed a love for his priesthood that was always the strongest part of who he was. He is a more spiritual and prayerful priest than I. The passion for his priesthood runs deep. This passion is evident in his ministry, his love of school and family, his care for the people of God, and in celebrating the Sacraments.

To be honest, Father Daniel is a man with many talents. In so many ways he has outshined his mentor, which is exactly what I wanted of this nervous and anxious young man. For me to step aside and for him to shine has always been my goal. Nothing brings me more joy than hearing how loved he is at St Joseph and what an amazing priest he is. This means he has grown in his priesthood and my job is complete.

The photo of my 9 associates whom I have mentored is a reminder to me to pray for these guys every day. As Father Daniel goes forth from us, he now joins the other 8 as a former associate. I do pray for him and the others more than you know.

(Father) Daniel came to me as young, green, and nervous priest. I did take him under my care, but now it is time to allow him to grow as an administrator, then pastor, at St Mark in Monticello. I am proud of him, and I am filled with pride in the priest he has become after 4 years. I know he will do remarkable things as a pastor and priest in our diocese in the years ahead. I am going to miss him very much. For me, he was what I needed as an old mentor and especially with the other responsibilities I have taken on these last 3 years here at St Joseph and the diocese. He has been instrumental in allowing me to wear so many hats.

Father Daniel is #9 in a string of associates at St Raphael who just happened to get the chance to come with me to Conway and become my first associate here at St Joseph. I am happy that he was able to come to St Joseph and show everyone his passion for priesthood and ministry and be 'Father Daniel' to all of us. He may have been my 9th new priest, but he will always be #1 in my book and in my heart.

We love you, Father Daniel. Thank you for sharing yourself with us these past few years. We will miss you and we will remember how much of an impact you had on our lives. We will not forget you! The people of St Mark and its missions are blessed to be getting you as their administrator. As they say, "Our loss is their gain!"

God bless you always!

Father John