

Message to the St. Barnabas Parish as we start the Lenten session

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We started the holy season of Lent marked by a humble sign: ashes. We heard the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

For us, as the community of St. Barnabas, these words resonate this year with a special depth. We have lived through a season of "letting go", seeing how certain structures and buildings - which were glorious in their time - have been left behind. We have transitioned from managing the separate histories of three parishes with seventeen buildings to becoming a single family. Ashes are what remains when the fire has purified everything; we are removing the superfluous so that the essential may shine. The message of the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, for this Lent 2026, titled *"To Listen and to Fast"*, gives us the key to understanding our own journey: we are stripping away what is extra so that the core of our faith can shine.

1. Lent as a Time for LISTENING. Pope Leo XIV tells us that every journey of conversion begins when we allow ourselves to be reached by the Word. At St. Barnabas, we have made a courageous decision: to move "from maintenance to mission". This is a profound act of listening. We stopped listening to the noise of "brick-and-mortar" administration to start listening to the living voice of God and the cry of our community here in West Allis.

- **Listening to those in need:** The Pope asks us to recognize the voice that cries out from suffering. We have responded through our various ministries: Earth Angels, St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwich ministry, the sleeping bag ministry, and the Food Pantry. By shifting our focus away from "maintaining buildings", we have unleashed the energy to serve the neediest in our neighborhood. Volunteers from our three legacy communities now serve side-by-side.
- **Listening to the Spirit:** Through our various formation and prayer initiatives, we are creating spaces to hear God. We are moving from being mere "churchgoers" to becoming true disciples.

2. Lent as a Time of FASTING and the Disarming of Language. The Pope makes a challenging invitation for 2026 that touches us directly as a community in transition: to fast from words that hurt and wound our neighbor. He calls us to "disarm our language" and set aside hurtful words.

Brothers and sisters, mergers are not easy. Change breeds uncertainty. The temptation is to complain or compare everything to the past - "In my old parish, we did it this way" - or to pass quick judgment on new decisions. I propose a communal fast for St. Barnabas: Let us fast from negativity, from gossip, and from words that divide. May our voices not tear down the bridges we are building between St. Rita, St. Augustine, and Holy Assumption. May our words be the cement that binds, not the hammer that strikes.

3. TOGETHER: A New Center of Gravity. Finally, the Pope mentions the prophet Nehemiah, recalling how the people gathered together to rebuild and to renew their covenant. We, too, are rebuilding. Our Renovation Committee is working to find our "center of gravity"—a place where all our energy focuses on evangelization.

But a physical building will be useless if we do not first build the spiritual edifice. We are no longer three separate entities managing a decline. We are a missionary people on the rise! We have integrated our choirs, our councils, and our ministries. This "synergy" is the work of the Holy Spirit.

We received the ashes that reminded us: everything material—buildings, plans, structures—will pass away. But the love with which we serve, the faith with which we pray, and the unity we forge among ourselves will remain forever. May this Lent help us to listen more to the voice of God than to the noise of our fears. May this Lent help us to be one single family on a mission.

Fr. Guards Louca