

Dear Friends in Christ,

On the day of ordination, the man to be ordained folds his hands and places them inside the hands of the bishop, who asks, “Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?” This powerful moment is not unlike the vows pronounced by a husband and wife on the day of marriage. Even as one understands the implications of these vows (“in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health”) one cannot predict at the beginning the concrete circumstances in which they will be lived out. So it is as a priest: we promise respect and obedience, without knowing where exactly that will lead, but trusting that the ultimate goal of the destination – as it is for every Christian – will be union with the Blessed Trinity.

As for married couples, on some days, the full implications of these promises are felt more strongly than on others. Today is one of those days for me.

This afternoon, I met with Archbishop Nelson Perez who appointed me pastor of Saint Mary Magdalene Parish in Media, Delaware County. To say that the news was bittersweet is an understatement. On the one hand, I am happy to return to Delaware County where I ministered for two years. At the same time, of course, I am filled with sorrow at the thought of departing this beloved community of Saint Francis de Sales, where I have served for the last four years, which have been years of such grace and joy in my life – and, I pray, in yours as well.

I am pleased to say that Archbishop Perez has assigned Father Ryan Nguyen, currently parochial vicar of Saint Bede the Venerable Parish in Holland, Bucks County, as the new parochial administrator of Saint Francis de Sales. Father Nguyen is a native of Vietnam who came to the United States when he was a child. He worked for a number of years as a pharmacist before entering Saint Charles Seminary. He is quite familiar with our neighborhood and is excited to begin ministering here. These changes take effect along with all priest assignments on June 17th. I am confident that Father Ryan will continue the growth and momentum our parish has experienced in recent years.

I should say that there are several parishes – some larger than our own and in

suburban areas – whose pastors are retiring or being transferred and are not being replaced. In those cases, a nearby pastor will be providing pastoral care in a temporary way until a solution can be found. This is a result of the dwindling number of clergy relative to the number of parishes in our Archdiocese. I note this unfortunate reality to highlight the fact that DeSales is receiving a full-time priest, which is a sign of the Archbishop's commitment to urban ministry in general and his pastoral solicitude for this community in West Philadelphia in particular.

There will be more to say this weekend and when I return from the Marian pilgrimage which begins on Monday. But for now, I will say two things. First, when I was appointed here, Father Matt Guckin said to me while we were driving around the parish, "Eric, you're going to make a lot of friends here." He was absolutely right, and that doesn't change just because I will be a few miles away. The second thing I will say is this: after the ordinand says "I do" to the bishop's question, the bishop responds, "May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment." Indeed, God has begun great work here – he began it long before I got here and will continue it long after I depart. And that fills me with great hope.

May God be Blessed!

--Father Eric Banecker

