

Father Art reflects on his years as pastor of St. Mary

June 2005



As Father Art Heinze prepared to take his new assignment as pastor of St. James in Lannon (near Menomonee Falls), he reflected on his years of service to our parish. In his tenure as our pastor, Father Art says that he has seen the parish become much more conscious in its commitment to live the Gospel. "There is a real commitment to outreach," he says. "The commitment to the people of Haiti is phenomenal. This isn't a token relationship." He also cites the leadership taken by adults of the parish to involve youth in outreach, such as the inclusion in the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and the annual trip to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

He notes how both he and the parish have changed since 1993, the year he joined St. Mary after serving as vice rector of St. Francis Seminary. Upon leaving St. Mary, Father Leonard Barbian, who preceded Father Art as pastor, had expressed a hope that the parish would grow to a new spiritual level. Father Art clearly embraced that vision and helped

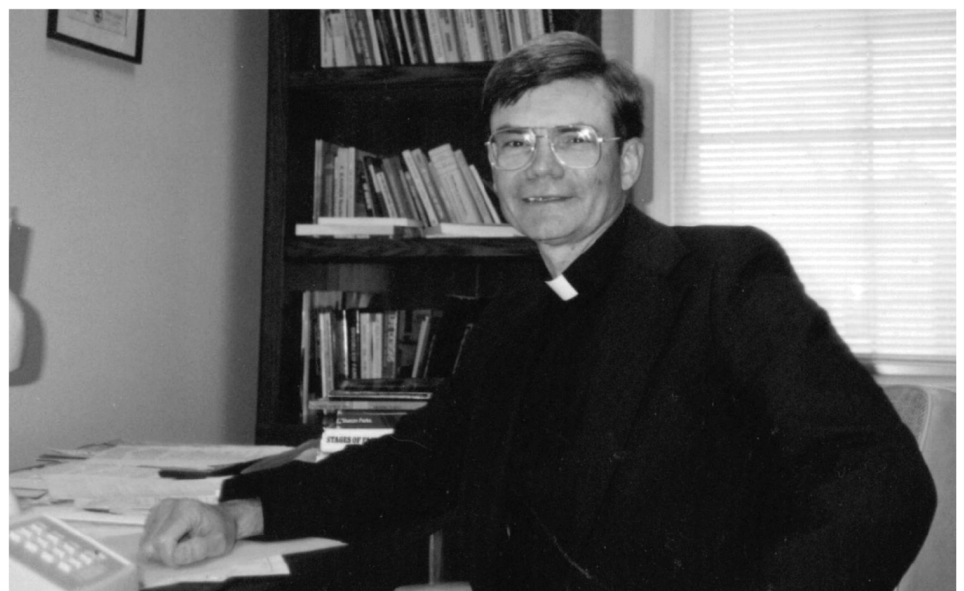
us on that journey. "When I arrived, I immediately felt there was a strong sense of community here. That was a wonderful foundation to move to a new level spiritually." In the ensuing years, Father Art says he has seen the quality of our prayer as a community deepen. "There is a profound vitality to our liturgies," he says. "A real sense of prayer — that's the work of the Spirit," he says, recalling the special liturgy for the dedication of our new church as the culmination of our growth as a community that prays well.

For himself personally, his years at St. Mary were like being part of a family. "In the role of pastor," he says, "you have the opportunity to bond with people through various stages of their life. That's real powerful," he says. The celebrations of First Eucharist in late April and early May exemplified this point as he delighted in seeing first communicants whom he had

baptized and parents at whose weddings he had presided.

When asked what our descendants might read about the Rev. Art Heinze era in our parish history book 100 years from now, Father Art comes back to the parish's "clearer sense of community and how to pray." Our ability to reach out to those in need, such as our involvement with Repairers of the Breach, demonstrates that we are now part of a larger community. He also holds up the new church and campus improvements as examples of coming together as community. "So many people dedicated countless hours to bring our building project from concept to reality. It was rewarding and exciting to see people selflessly work together for this common goal."

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The parish school is also a source of pride for Father Art. "The school is a tremendous asset and has a bright future. The increasing enrollment and the caliber of our graduates are testimony to the quality of our school. I'm impressed with how our young people honor their responsibility to the Gospel."

The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and the priest sex abuse scandals added unique challenges during Father Art's years as pastor here. "We were in the midst of planning for the future of this parish," he says. "It was important to keep our mission in front of us, as we balanced the concerns of the community in the context of the unprecedented changes taking place around us."

It's often said that your biggest liability also can be your biggest asset, and Father Art agrees. He believes that the parish size — to some it could be a liability — is its biggest asset because of the richness of the gifts and talents that come with the diversity within the parish. "The sense of true welcoming and hospitality is incredible here. Match that to our ability to pray together and you have a great parish."

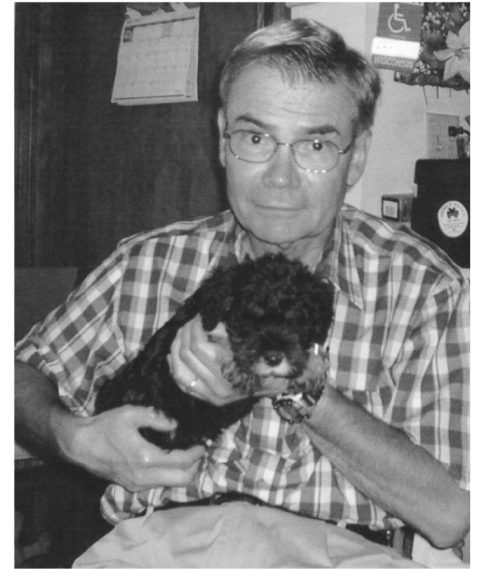


As he passes on the leadership role, Father Art's hope for the parish is that it achieves an ever-deepening sense of community. He cites the New Beginnings program as an excellent example of learning how to live the Gospel. Growing in ecclesial maturity is important, he says.

Father Art is confident that our new pastor, Father Chuck Schramm, is well suited to follow him. He has excellent parish leadership experience and a deep sense of social justice. Father Art offers a simple thought to Father Chuck: "Open yourself to the community and you'll be embraced as warmly as I was." And to parishioners, he says, "Make Chuck feel welcome, as you have with every priest that has gone before."

Father Art will be remembered as the pastor who:

- called our little children "punkins,"
- donned T-shirt and jeans and picked up litter during the parish festival,
- remained a faithful Brewers fan through thick and thin,
- spontaneously rehearsed his homilies with anyone who would listen,
- helped us pray as a community,



- deepened our love and understanding of the sacraments,
- shared our times of unthinkable grief and incredible joy,
- became a lifetime member of the family of St. Mary.

As he packs his St. Mary's mementos — including the framed portrait where he's on the pitcher's mound at Milwaukee County Stadium throwing out the first pitch at a game on May 20, 1998, as a fundraiser for the school — Father Art says the greatest gift he has received from us is "the love of the community."

He can be assured that he takes our love with him to his new assignment. The St. Mary Catholic Faith Community has indeed been blessed by the presence of Father Art.

