

My dear sisters and brothers

22 July 2021

Since my appointment as parochial vicar effective May 26, I have not had the chance to formally offer a note of gratitude for this opportunity to serve God among you in a more committed way. Sometime in the spring, I informed Fr Chris of my intention to devote more of my time to pastoral ministry as I transition from coursework to dissertation writing. Providentially, and unknown to me, the parish had recently advertised the position of Director of Faith Formation. Fr Chris invited me to look at the job posting and consider if I could and would like to take up the responsibility. After weeks of discernment and prayer, and a series of communication between us, we finally agreed that I could and would be happy to fill the position for the good of the parish. This also fitted well into my long-term plan of founding an institute for Church life in Nigeria whose focus would be the theological and liturgical formation of the laity.

It is now nearly two months since I took on responsibility for faith formation of our parish. In this time, I have been observing and listening, asking questions, meeting with different people, and praying as I work with you to put together a program of faith formation beginning this Fall. In thinking about faith formation, I think first about the mystery of our coming together in Christ to experience the love of God. This love is certainly connected to a deeper knowledge of and desire for God who is our origin and final destiny. To know God is not merely an intellectual or emotional experience. It is ultimately the fruit of an encounter and relationship with Christ who tells us that “no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal God” (Luke 10:12). In another place, Jesus tells his disciples, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). These expressions suggest that knowledge of God is a journey with, in, and towards Christ who leads us ultimately to eternal life in God (John 17:3).

Our vision of faith formation, therefore, consists in building an ongoing relationship with the Lord who has made himself accessible to us in the sacramental life of the Church. We enter into this relationship in union with one another as we come together to listen again and again to the teachings of Christ. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24), we welcome Christ who comes into our midst as the great teacher. Always surprised by the many new insights which emerge from this encounter, our disposition to formation must be characterized by trust and curiosity, as well as humility and faith – as St Anselm puts it, “faith seeking understanding.”

In the coming weeks, I will be sharing with you the specifics of the different aspects of our faith formation program. I am particularly excited to commit some time to a regular and robust program for adults. Many of those I spoke with have told me about your wonderful experience with programs like “Christ renews his parish.” Indeed, our goal is to recreate that experience in an ongoing way through regular and occasional programs of catechesis, retreats, and integration. I am truly excited for the opportunity to get to know many of you more closely with the hope of fostering a more intimate parish community. My vision of faith formation is to create avenues for encounter with the Christ who dwells among us. In coming together to pray, learn, and share the faith, we open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit who teaches us all things. Let us be present and open our hearts to God’s Spirit.

Finally, I thank all those who have for so long been working in different ways to build up our faith. I thank Father Chris for being a wonderful pastor and brother-priest. Greg Wulle, our former Director of Religious Education and all his collaborators deserve special mention and gratitude. I am also grateful to those who serve in different ministries and capacities in the parish. Special thanks to Carol at the Parish office who has been a wonderful support as always, and to Gary and Rich, together with other men, who have generously helped to prepare an office for me. To all of you, beloved members of St Joe family and worshippers here, you are all an essential part of this faith formation project. Truly, everyone counts!

Fr. Ken