



Our Lady of the Assumption Church
435 Berkeley Avenue
Claremont, California 91711
909-626-3596 www.olaclaremont.org

October 2008

My Brother Priest,

Thank you for your interest in Our Lady of the Assumption Parish. I have enjoyed my past fifteen years of service here, and am pleased and grateful to share with you something of what makes this diverse and mission-oriented parish unique. As is evident from the profile, OLA includes an excellent double classroom K-8 school, and well-organized and integrated Vietnamese and Spanish-speaking communities as well.

One of the principles that has guided me throughout most of my priesthood is a paraphrase of St. Augustine's message to his community: "With you, I am a Christian; for you I am a priest." I deeply believe that the effectiveness of my ministry as priest/pastor is founded on my oneness with the people of the parish as a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ. Ordination builds upon that foundation; it does not negate or substitute for it. As soon as I arrived in 1994, I registered as a parishioner, and started receiving and using the Sunday offering envelopes, and was eager to start participating in every aspect of parish life, learning from the people of the parish as I did so.

I remember a conversation with my predecessor, Bill Barry, who, when he arrived at OLA as the new pastor in 1962, experienced the same transition problems we all face. He followed the much-loved Fr. Don Strange, who had built the parish from humble and very difficult beginnings. "The people don't seem to accept me," Bill asked Don. "What can I do?" Don said simply, "Bill, just love your people, ***and tell them that you love them.*** Everything else will flow from that." Bill did just that, and left giant footsteps for me to try not to fall into. I too found those words life-giving – and life-saving.

The variety of gifts and interests you would bring as pastor will be welcomed and affirmed by a loving community in a spirit of collaboration with a well-organized and highly gifted pastoral team, and a parish leadership structure which really forms the fabric of parish life and ministry.

Beginning in 1999, the parish staff and leaders in various ministries and organizations joined me in a major pastoral strategic planning effort, bringing forth a well-focused plan which set the direction for parish priorities and began to be implemented in the Jubilee Year of 2000. The major goal of the plan was to revive an effective and collaborative parish pastoral council, which had been dormant since before I came to the parish.

In 2001, after looking carefully and extensively for assistance, we decided that the *Parish Assessment and Renewal* (PAR) process with Tom Sweetser, SJ, and Peg Bishop, OSF, would best suit our needs. They guided us as we built the leadership structure and administrative/ministerial team that continues to collaborate effectively in the "running of the parish. The leadership structure is described in greater detail elsewhere in this parish profile, but if you can get a good idea of the overall vision that is guiding us in Tom Sweetser's new book, *Keeping the Covenant: Taking the Parish to the Next Level*. (Our own experience was part of the input for this book, and our unique "administrative team" approach is described in the first paragraph on page 47.)

In my experience, collaboration takes time and trust, an appreciation of consensus in decision making, readiness to share my own talents as well as affirm the different gifts of others, experience and expertise, and willingness to listen and look at every issue from other perspectives. Co-responsibility and mutual accountability are essential components of collaboration.

Our parish leadership structure is not an end in itself, but an effective tool for enabling people in the various aspects of parish life and ministry to relate to one another and work together as the Body of Christ. The covenant commitment which is the basis of the structure, as well as practices such as co-

leadership and discernment at various levels in the structure, are important tools in promoting effective communication and collaboration.

In 2005, the pastoral council re-examined the 2000 strategic plan, and saw that it was no longer up-to-date. Major goals had been accomplished, others needed to be modified or were seen as no longer applicable. A new planning process, stimulated also by the Archdiocesan Synod, produced a new 2006 strategic plan, which highlighted both the need for a major upgrade of our parish facilities and a process to facilitate the transition of pastors which would happen in 2009.

The single biggest need expressed by a majority of parishioners in the strategic plan is for a new and larger church, as well as a pastoral center with adequate office and meeting space. In developing a comprehensive facilities master plan, we kept running into the challenge of the small size of our property, and the unavailability of suitable additional land. We finally reached a master plan that actually could work on our existing land, and be flexible enough to allow for future needs and opportunities. However, a feasibility study revealed that, while there is good potential for support in this community, the unfavorable economic climate would make a successful capital campaign at this moment exceedingly difficult if not impossible. Our leadership committees, including the pastoral council and finance council, and I all agreed to a decision not to abandon the plan but to defer it, and in the meantime to concentrate on needed upgrades and maintenance projects to spruce up what we have.

This means that the new pastor will have to face the likelihood of a building program, as well as help guide the ultimate form it will take. But do not worry. While the pastor's involvement and leadership will be essential, there is a great team of collaborators with many gifts and skills to work together in carrying the project forward.

The parish profile you are holding in your hand is one part of another major goal I mentioned above. I was granted a three-year extension to my term as pastor specifically to help guide the leadership development of the parish, in accord with goals of the Synod, so that a well-organized, effective, and stable structure would be in place to prepare for a healthy transition of pastors. I believe that the members of the "new pastor committee" have done their job well, and they look forward to working with the new pastor to help him get oriented to the way Our Lady of the Assumption parish lives and works.

Lay leadership and ongoing ministry training and development are at the heart of several goals. We have an annual day-long leadership training workshop, in addition to the many opportunities for ministry formation provided by the Archdiocese and other sources. There is a regular program of discernment of gifts, as well an annual, multi-faceted "Parish Life Expo" after Sunday Masses. Parish staff members, together with many other leaders stay current with the theology and practice of pastoral ministry through reading and discussion of a wide variety of journals and authors.

I have tried to share with you some of my own perspectives that may help you decide if OLA presents an opportunity for pastoral ministry in accord with your talents and interests. If you are interested in applying for this parish, I would urge to come and visit with us. You are most welcome to join our Leadership Night / Pastoral Council Meeting at 7:00 pm on the third Thursday of every month, to visit our offices and chat with the staff of both parish and school, and to come to any parish activity, especially Sunday Masses, and talk to parishioners. Please visit our website at www.olaclaremont.org, especially to read past issues of the parish bulletin which give a comprehensive picture of parish life and ministry. We seek to make this transition as open and welcoming a process as possible for you and for us. Members of our new pastor transition team and all our staff stand ready to help you in this time of discernment and decision.

Thank you so much for your interest. Please do not hesitate to call on me if I can be of any further assistance. The best way to reach me is either by email (twelbers@olaclaremont.org) or on my cell phone, 909-367-4592. God bless you always.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

(Rev. Msgr.) Thomas Welbers