

**MORE**

# GOOD NEWS

## Younger perspective

Father Dennis Walker  
and Father Scott VanDerveer  
offer their views  
on the changing priesthood

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## PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

# Priest represents Christ and people he serves

Through so many generations and times passed, the Catholic priesthood has served the people of God — the faithful, the Church — in essentially two ways.

The most significant of these is for the priest to represent Christ in the grace and blessings that flow from our sacramental life. The priest stands for Christ in consecrating and making present the Risen Lord in the Blessed Sacrament (Eucharist). This the source and summit of our Catholic life in the spirit. Priests, deacons and lay people involved in ministries hope and pray that all the sacraments sustain and encourage the faithful.

The second way our priests nurture and nourish the faith in the parish and wider community is to be present in pastoral moments and situations, as well as in friendship and nearness. Though priests are fragile vessels and sometimes even broken, they carry the character of Jesus in every season.

The parish priest especially has been called, will be called, to be pastor and spiritual “fa-



FATHER JIM CESTA

ther” — to appreciate parishioners as almost a spousal relationship that hopefully be lifegiving, wholesome and efficacious.

As to the future shape and style of Catholic priesthood, what is a blessing is that the Spirit has provided the changes and adaptations needed to meet the challenges and times. Some ways that would seem to us now to be not be possible might happen led by that same Spirit.

The church is a living and pulsing body, the Body of Christ, and so is the priesthood.

**T**he parish priest especially has been called, will be called, to be pastor and spiritual “father” — to appreciate parishioners as almost a spousal relationship that hopefully be lifegiving, wholesome and efficacious.

## CELEBRATING THE SAINTS

### St. Blaise

#### Feast Day Jan. 3

We know more about the devotion to St. Blaise by Christians around the world than we know about the saint himself.

His feast is observed as a holy day in some Eastern Churches.

In 1222, the Council of Oxford prohibited servile labor in England on Blaise’s feast day. The Germans and Slavs hold him in special honor, and for decades many United States Catholics have sought the annual St. Blaise blessing for their throats.

We know that Bishop Blaise was martyred in his episcopal city of Sebastea, Armenia, in 316. The legendary “Acts of St. Blaise” were written 400 years later. According to them, Blaise was a good bishop, working hard to encourage the spiritual and physical health of his people. Although the Edict of Toleration (311), granting freedom of worship in the Roman Empire, was 5 years old, persecution still raged in Armenia.



Blaise was forced to flee to the back country. There he lived as a hermit in solitude and prayer, but he made friends with the wild animals. One day, a group of hunters seeking wild animals for the amphitheater stumbled upon Blaise’s cave. They were first surprised and then frightened. The bishop was kneeling in prayer surrounded by patiently waiting wolves, lions and bears.

The legend has it that as the hunters hauled Blaise off to prison, a mother came with her young son who had a fish bone lodged in his throat. At Blaise’s command the child was able to cough up the bone.

Agricolaus, governor of Cappadocia, tried to persuade Blaise to sacrifice to pagan idols. The first time Blaise refused, he was beaten. The next time, he was suspended from a tree and his flesh torn with iron combs or rakes. Finally, he was beheaded.

Source: [www.franciscanmedia.org/](http://www.franciscanmedia.org/)

## PARISH WEBSITE

Visit [www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com](http://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com) for the latest parish news and announcements. There’s even a mobile version for your smart phone. You can donate online and check out our social media sites and more.

## PHOTO GALLERIES



## BULLETIN



### St. Mary of Mount Carmel Blessed Sacrament Parish

[www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com](http://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com) and [www.facebook.com/mountcarmelblessedsacrament](https://www.facebook.com/mountcarmelblessedsacrament)

**ABOUT THE PARISH**  
 Address: 648 Jay St., Utica, NY 13501.  
 Telephone: 315-735-5482; fax: 315-735-9806.  
 Office hours: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday.  
 Closed on Friday and national holidays.  
 Faith Formation and Sacramental Center: 315-724-3950.  
 Email: [comparish@verizon.net](mailto:comparish@verizon.net)  
 Hearing impaired: Listening devices available in the sacristy.

**MASS SCHEDULES**  
**Weekend**  
 Saturday: 4:30 p.m. (livestream on parish YouTube channel)  
 Sunday: 8 and 10:30 a.m.  
**Weekday**  
 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 8:30 a.m.  
 Rosary for the Urban and Divine Mercy Chaplet: Thursday after Mass.  
**Holy Days**  
 Consult the bulletin and website.  
**RECONCILIATION**  
 Saturday: 3:45 p.m.  
**MARRIAGE**  
 Couples must make arrangements six months in advance.

**BAPTISM**  
 Call the parish office to arrange. Parents must attend a preparation class prior to the baptism of their child.  
**RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS**  
 Adults or children, 7 or older who have never been baptized or confirmed or received the Eucharist, are invited to call the parish office for information about this process.

**NEW PARISHIONERS**  
 Welcome to our parish family. We invite you to become an active participant of our parish community. Please be sure to register by calling the parish office.

**PARISH STAFF**  
 Pastor: Rev. Jim Cesta  
 In Residence: Rev. Luis Olguin  
 Trustees: Marco Accari Sr. and Bill Tibbault  
 Faith Formation K-6: Terri Piazza-Panuccio  
 Faith Formation 7-10: Anna Carlone Elacqua  
 Buildings and grounds: Fran D'Amersio  
 Music director: Peter Elacqua  
 Website manager, bulletin, publicity: Fran Ferritano



## ... and more

- Weekly prayers, reflections and videos and more to enrich your faith.
- Father Jim’s “Wise and Otherwise”
- Father Jim’s video homilies
- Wedding, funeral guides.
- History of the parish
- Parish history video series
- Lector and minister schedules
- Mass schedules
- Parish news
- Ministries
- Event calendar
- Reflection on Sunday’s readings
- “More Good News” articles
- Links to Facebook and YouTube.

## COVER STORY

# Younger priests face challenges, changes

## It's a different world from their predecessors

By FRAN PERRITANO

Becoming a priest wasn't a priority early on for Scott VanDerveer and Dennis Walker.

Both graduated from college with degrees not necessarily associated with the priesthood. Neither had any inclination they eventually would become priests.

"No, no I did not, not in the early days," said Father Scott. "I always had a very strong relationship with God, but I never liked going to Mass. My relationship with God was very strong in that I kind of talked to God like an imaginary friend. I was always speaking to God, and I would say, 'What a beautiful day it is,' 'I wonder what I want to eat later,' 'Why are caterpillars fuzzy?' I would say all of those things to God and have an ongoing dialogue with God during the day."

Father Dennis never gave the priesthood a second thought early in life.

"I didn't really have any great desire to be a priest when I was younger," he said. "I really respected and revered priests in general, especially the ones I knew. But I never really considered priesthood until I was out of college."

Father Scott, 46, and Father Dennis, 33, are among a younger generation of priests. They face challenges and cope with changes in the priesthood that their predecessors did not have to deal with.

The men describe how they eventually were drawn to the vocation, what obstacles they face with the dwindling number and aging priests, and how they view their calling.

### Resisting the call

Father Scott, who was a parishioner at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament for several years, graduated from college with a degree in journalism.

"I thought I was called to be a journalist and I was attracted to that because I always wanted to be the one to inform people of what was happening; let me be the one that informs them the way Walter Cronkite did at the time of President Kennedy's assassination," he said. "But then I realized informing people is not my calling — it's related to my calling, but my calling is more precise. I am not called to inform people. I am called to inspire people."

He held several jobs, including a school bus driver and teacher, and even toured the world with the singing organization "Up with People."

Still, Father Scott felt the priesthood was not right for him.



**Father Scott VanDerveer, a former parishioner, is pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Glens Falls. "I do think it's interesting that Jesus said in the scriptures that the church would always find a way to survive, that the church would always prevail. I think that's beautiful, and I think it means that we need to be open and trusting that we will find our way."**

"I didn't want to be a priest even though I knew it was my calling because I thought it was too extreme of life. I thought it was too odd. I thought it required way too much having to twist myself into a mold that didn't fit me — you know taking vows of obedience and chastity, celibacy and living a simple life, being told where to live, where to go, what your life would be having to take the entire role on, not just the parts you like but all of it, which is so all-encompassing. So, I fought being a priest for 20 years. ... I wanted to put it off, put it off, put it off, but eventually after 20 years I gave in. I was too tired to keep running and I became a priest."

He was ordained in June 2013.

Father Dennis, who spoke at our parish's Communion Brunch in October, thought his calling was in the business world. He earned a master's degree in business administration and set off on that path.

"About a year after I graduated college, while I was working as an auditor, I felt a sense I might be called to serve the Lord as a priest," he said. "At my home parish of St. James in Syracuse, we were blessed to have three seminarians studying for our diocese. They were all around my age, they were all happy and they all had a sense of purpose and hopefulness as

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### The Rev. Scott VanDerveer

**Age:** 46.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in journalism from St. Bonaventure University, master's degree in education from Boston College; master's in divinity from Pope St. John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Mass.

**Ordained:** June 8, 2013.

**Parish:** Pastor of St. Mary's in Glen's Falls, which also has a grammar school.

### The Rev. Dennis Walker

**Age:** 33.

**Education:** Bishop Ludden High School, Le Moyne College for undergrad and MBA, St. Mary's Seminary and University.

**Ordained:** June 5, 2021.

**Parishes you serve:** St. Rose of Lima Church, North Syracuse; and St. Margaret's Church, Mattydale.

### More online

Read the complete interviews with Father Scott and Father Dennis by visiting this story on the parish website at [www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com](http://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com). You also can watch a video of Father Scott answering the interview questions.

## PARISH VOLUNTEERS

# Scalzos get the job done

## Couple offers its services in many areas

*“More Good News” begins a series of stories on volunteers, who are the lifeblood of our parish. This issue features Mario and Carmelann Scalzo, who have served Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament in many capacities. They answered our questions together.*

**In December, you received the Immaculata Award from the Syracuse diocese given to people who volunteer and make an impact in their parishes. What does this award mean to you?**

It was a heartwarming experience to know that what we unselfishly do for our parish community was recognized.

**In what capacities do you volunteer in our parish?**

Our capacities within our parish are what we like to refer to as “Jack of All Trades” — in other words, where we feel there is an opportunity to perform duties that can enrich our parishioners and bring us together as a family. As co-chairs of our Social Committee, we enjoy planning a variety of activities for all age groups and parish membership. Besides our most popular events, we continuously look to our parishioners to offer ideas for new events. We also are one of three couples serving on our Marriage Team that hosts the annual Engaged Couples Day and perform the wedding rehearsals.

During our annual festival to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we assist in preparing the food (we previously co-managed the food tent for 12 years before “retiring”) and our mushroom stew has become our “trademark.” We are also members of the Mount Carmel Society and St. Anne Society and assist in planning events such as the annual Communion Breakfast. Carmelann also taught in the Faith Formation program where she taught first and second grades and the Penance and First Communion program. At the present, Carmelann is a Eucharistic minister and Mario enjoys singing in our choir. Mario also was the Cubmaster for the Cub Scout pack previously sponsored by our church.

**As members of the Marriage Team you get to instruct couples and guide them along the marriage path. Please explain what you do.**

When a couple gets engaged, we are notified by the Parish Office and the initial contact is made to introduce ourselves and offer any assistance in answering any questions they have regarding our parish guidelines for weddings. Once a year we host an Engaged Couples Day where we invite all the engaged couples being married that year to an informal get-together where Father Cesta blesses the couples and welcomes them, and the team offers insight to the rehearsal and the wedding process. Within a day or two of their wedding, we schedule their rehearsal and actually perform a run-through of the wedding process for the next day. We re-



**Mario and Carmelann Scalzo believe socialization is an important part of parish life. “In all of our planned events, we strive to ‘feed the bellies’ as well as to ‘feed the soul.’ We are committed to keeping our parishioners as a united family and hosting these social events for all ages.”**

### Mario and Carmelann Scalzo

**Ages:** Mario 74, Carmelann 75.

**Married:** Sept. 30, 1972.

**Family:** Son Mario III and wife Carrie and their daughter Elizabeth; daughter Andrea Scalzo-Willson (husband Robert deceased) and children Bianca and Robert; daughter Maryangela Scalzo Scaramuzzino and husband Stephen Scaramuzzino and children Tressa, Natalie and Sophia.

**Mario’s occupation:** Retired vice president of Bank of New York Mellon.

**Carmelann’s occupation:** Retired administrative assistant at Microfoam Corp.

solve any procedural issues that may arise and offer solutions.

**Why did you choose to volunteer in this ministry?**

At the time, it was a new endeavor by Father Salerno and evolved and eventually Father Rose asked us to formalize the process to take the couples from their engagement through to the wedding rehearsal.

**What advice do you give to couples?**

We ask that they actively communicate with each other and to always keep God in their lives and activities.

**You also are very involved in the Social Committee. How important is socialization for parishioners?**

In all of our planned events, we strive to “feed the bellies” as well as to “feed the soul.” We are committed to keeping our parishioners as a united family and hosting these social events for all ages.

**How important are volunteers to parish life?**

Volunteers are the heartbeat of our church and parish. If we are to survive as a healthy church, then we need to continue to act as a communal body — and to accomplish this, you need volunteers. Our belief is that there are never enough volunteers.

**What is rewarding about volunteering?**

The camaraderie between young and old coupled with the prospect of meeting new friends. Our parish is exceptional in the fact that when the Social Committee (or any organization) calls for volunteers, the line immediately forms.

**What advice would you give to those who might be considering volunteering in some capacity but are hesitant because of time concerns?**

Not every society, committee or event requires a lot of time. We always appreciate the amount of time a volunteer gives, whether it’s minutes, hours or sometimes days. It’s the socialization and being with friends to come together for a common goal that’s rewarding.

**Do you have any final words of wisdom?**

Step up and volunteer. Our community is very vibrant in whatever endeavor we take on, but it cannot be done without the active involvement of our parishioners.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

# Vito is making the most of what life throws at him

*Vito Valenzi, 24, was featured in the 2013 winter edition of "More Good News" when he was 15 years old. He's learned over the last decade that life doesn't always go according to plan, but you make the best of the hand you're dealt.*

**How has your life evolved over the past nine years?**

Throughout life we go through many changes; our life experiences take us down new paths and broaden our horizons. What we envisioned our future to be at an early age evolves as we mature, and we are then able to fine tune our strengths. For me, music production was always my passion. I have found an avenue where my love of music is weaved within my video production and photography field.

**Back then you said your passion was music and singing, and you wanted to pursue a career in the music industry. Whatever became of that or have your interests changed?**

Growing up I had a great love for singing; it was my go-to talent at all family events. I am sure my family heard each song a million times, but they were always the greatest audience! At that time, I also was interested in news media and commercial advertising. I decided to find a way to merge the two areas of interest, which brought me to my major in college of communications arts and digital filmmaking, the best of both worlds.

**You have a degree in communication arts, work as a photo editor at Meyda Lighting, are the main videographer for our parish livestream and have produced video content for our parish YouTube channel. What is it about this business you like?**

The ability to bring content to the masses in a creative and impactful way gives me an extremely accomplished feeling; keeping people informed and engaged is essential in this field. When you present a story, product or advertisement that is captivating, you hope it inspires conversation and interest in your piece. It is all about communicating your message and invoking action.

**Our parish means a great deal to you. You have been a parishioner since birth and received all your sacraments here. Why does this parish mean so much to you?**

St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish is steeped in tradition. For me, a place of worship is where you derive your morals and values, and it shapes you as an individual. I find working on events and projects in your faith community is a meaningful part of life; serving and helping others is part of God's plan. My parish has given me the necessary tools to navigate life through faith, hope and the love of others. These are gifts we are all born with; however, they must continue to be



**Vito Nicolino Valenzi**

**Age:** 24.

**Employment:** Photo editor at Meyda Tiffany Lighting.

**Education:** Graduate of Herkimer County Community College with a degree in communications arts with a concentration in digital filmmaking.

**Family:** Mother Jamie DeBella Valenzi and father Vaughn Valenzi

**Career goal:** Work in commercial advertising/content creation.

**Things I like to do:** Photography, golf, physical fitness, antiques and a member of Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute.

nurtured throughout life for them to be effective in your daily life.

**Back in 2013 you said, "My faith has given me my moral compass in life." You and your family have been faced with difficult challenges over the years. How has faith helped you to cope with them?**

Yes, challenging it has been. My family has endured much loss in the past few years, as well as my dad losing a great part of his vision, which has been extraordinarily difficult. My faith gives me hope that each family member that has passed has found peace in the promise of eternal life. I find that when faced with difficult challenges in my family, my role as a son changes. I try to be the best support I can be — compassion and caring are such important parts of healing the soul. Without faith we are without hope. As for my dad, each day is a struggle, but I watch him persevere with great hope there will be a silver lining for him. That for me is faith.

**You also said, "My mom has always been a great influence in my life." What have you learned over the past nine years that helps you appreciate your mom even more?**

It is hard to put into words how grateful I am to have my mother. She is my favorite person and my best friend. Throughout these nine years I have gone through some difficulties in my life, and my mom is always ready with words of encouragement and wisdom. I found out how strong and compassionate my mother is no matter what situation is presented to her. I have learned how empathetic and understanding she is toward people, going above and beyond just to make someone feel extra special when they feel like they're not.

Her devotion to her faith and church has never wavered since she was a young girl in Catholic school and she inspires me every day to strengthen my relationship in God. Even when I feel discouraged or disheartened, she is always there to tell me, "God has a plan," and somehow that always makes me feel better. I would be remiss to mention how she has sacrificed so much in her life for me to be successful and guide me down the right path in life. I would not be who I am today without the love and support from my mother and for that I will always be grateful.

**Tradition seems to be very important to you. Why, and how do you hope to add to that tradition?**

Both my parents grew up surrounded by family traditions. Tradition as defined in the dictionary are customs or beliefs handed down from generation to generation. The family unit thrived on celebrating life in its many forms years ago. Memories allow us to share those happy times with the next generation, and we learn that the greatest possession the generation before had was the gift of family. I find it my responsibility to learn from them to be able share this extraordinary history with my children someday. Traditions create a very warm and loving environment, and it certainly is one of the greatest gifts in my family.

**When you were 15, your goal was being part of the music industry. Now at age 24, what do you hope the future holds for you?**

It is my hope to have a wife and children someday to share all that life offers, as well as a career in content creation that will allow me to leave an impact on the world.

# Boaz a compassionate man

## Old Testament figure protected women

*Chapter 2 in a series on our parish history and its artwork. Today, meet Booz (aka Boaz).*

Continuing our series on our parish history and art, we return to the arch over the altar of sacrifice.

In Chapter 1 in the last issue of “More Good News,” we learned about the first of the two characters on the left of the arch. In this chapter we will delve into the story of Booz, who is beside Isaiah.

Of course, to our ears, Booz may conjure up a notion of something liquid and entirely different from what the Italian fathers of our church intended. To alleviate that image, we will refer to that character by the English version of his name, Boaz.

Boaz comes to us in the Book of Ruth of the Old Testament. To get to him, we must go back before his introduction. In Book 1 of the story, a man called Elimelech brings his wife Naomi and his two sons to dwell in Moab because of a famine afflicting Judah. During the 10 years of their residence there, the boys marry Moabite women and Elimelech dies. For a while the sons take care of their wives and dear mother, but tragically both sons die, and the women are left to care for each other as they can.



A.J. VALENTINI

The daughters-in-law have local families to whom they can turn for support, but Naomi, who has no kinsman there decides to return to Judah. Ruth, one of the daughters-in-law, is so fond of Naomi that she accompanies her to care for her.

When they return to Bethlehem in Judah, the women are reduced to poverty. Boaz is a relative of Naomi. She asks Ruth to go to Boaz’s fields to glean for corn after the harvest as was allowed by Jewish law. Ruth agrees, goes to the field and encounters Boaz. She asks Boaz permission to glean and, pleased by her devotion to Naomi, he agrees and allows her to continue after the workday and even offers her water that his men have taken from the well. He also commands his workers not to touch her.

Naomi realizes that Ruth could continue to enjoy the protection of Boaz and tells her to attend the harvest celebration. At its conclusion she instructs Ruth to lie at the feet of Boaz when he falls asleep. During the night Boaz awakens to find the girl and asks what she is doing there. She requests that Boaz cover her with the skirt of his clothing as a “near relative.” In those days, it was the obligation of the



**Boaz acted always as a compassionate man of honor. He always showed respect toward Ruth. He not only became Ruth’s “kinsman redeemer,” he eventually married her.**



nearest blood relative to care for a widow or destitute kinsman.

This pleases Boaz because Ruth could have gone to someone younger, richer or more attractive, but she came to him because of his previous generosity. He also knows that he is not her closest relative and promises, out of protocol, to go to that person on her behalf. If

that person refuses, then he will help. In the meantime, he sends Ruth away with enough grain to provide for her and her mother-in-law.

So, the next day Boaz goes to the relative saying that Ruth has property she is willing to sell and wonders if the relative is interested. The relative jumps at the opportunity but Boaz has a caveat. If the relative takes the property he also must assume care of Ruth. The deal sours and the relative says he would be stretched too thin to assume that burden. Therefore, in front of many witnesses Boaz says he will be Ruth’s “kinsman redeemer.”

Boaz acted always as a compassionate man of honor. He always showed respect toward Ruth. He followed the rules of protocol. When others would not step up to the plate, he resolved the situation himself. He not only became Ruth’s “kinsman redeemer,” he eventually married her.

The Bible says that in redeeming Ruth, Boaz enabled Ruth to redeem Naomi better than seven sons (Ruth 4:13-21). Boaz and Ruth became the great-grandparents of David.

Boaz became a forebearer of Jesus and thus deserves to be a witness to his sacrament at every Mass said below on our altar of sacrifice.

*Adapted by A.J. Valentini from Williams, M. L. (n.d.). “Boaz in the Bible: Character Profile. What Christians Want to Know,” [www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/boaz-in-the-bible-character-profile/](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/boaz-in-the-bible-character-profile/)*

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they studied to become priests. I saw what they were doing and thought to myself, ‘Maybe I should at least consider the priesthood or perhaps apply to the seminary.

“It took a couple years of prayer and discernment before I applied and got accepted into seminary studies,” Father Dennis said. “But it also took a few years of study and discernment in the seminary to determine that this was what I believed the Lord was truly calling me to.”

He was ordained in June 2021.

### Shrinking numbers a challenge

Both men now are fully invested in their vocation. Father Scott is pastor of St. Mary’s in Glens Falls, which also has a pre-K through eighth-grade school. Father Dennis serves two parishes in the Syracuse area — St. Rose of Lima and St. Margaret’s in Mattydale.

Father Scott and Father Dennis acknowledge the priests’ workload is much more than previous generations of clergy because of the lack of new priests.

In 1980 in the Syracuse diocese, there were 515 priests, according to catholic-hierarchy.org. In 2021, there were 206, many of whom are getting older and retiring. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, in 1980 there were 58,398 ordained priests in the United States. In 2020, that number was 35,513.

Nowadays, many priests and pastors serve two, three or more parishes.

“That is the biggest challenge — to have too many parishes, too much work, too many tasks and having the feeling of being stretched too thin,” Father Scott said. “My big struggle right now is that I always feel overworked, and the people of God have a right and legitimately often feel undernourished.

“I have so much work to do, so much correspondence, it’s a real challenge, and I’d be lying if I didn’t say it was a burden. What makes that sad is I’m working as hard as I can so people ought to be very, very happy — and they are. People are very grateful and loving, but they cannot hide the fact that they’re used to a higher level of connection with the priest than can be given when you have multiple parishes.”

Father Dennis said the current situation resembles the church’s beginnings in the country. “The early days of the church in the United States are somewhat reminiscent of where we are today in the Northeast,” he said. “Before the church was really established, priests would ride from church to church on horseback to say Mass. They were very much missionaries. ... Priests are really not meant to stay at one church for very long and that necessitates that they be adaptable.

“In terms of multiple parish situations, it is not ideal to serve more than one church, but our call as priests requires us to follow the example of the first apostles to cast into the deep waters. Personally, I have very much liked serving the two parishes I am assigned to. Both parishes are grateful to have a priest and I feel fulfilled by being able to serve these people.”

### Modern-day evangelizing

The changing dynamic of the priesthood has



The Rev. Dennis Walker is one of the diocese’s newest priests. He was ordained in June 2021.

necessitated change in evangelization.

“The focus of our evangelization efforts in our present time is to bring people into a personal relationship with Jesus,” Father Dennis said. “That has been the goal for a few decades now because merely following a set of rules does not make you a disciple. Now the focus is helping the faithful realize their need for a personal relationship with Jesus and the goodness that flows from this. If someone develops a genuine love of God, they will better understand the church teachings and the beauty and wisdom behind them.”

Father Scott said there is a fine line between the “mission” of caring for his flock and the “maintenance” of running a parish.

“I think we often have to choose. Are we going to focus on mission or maintenance, and I don’t think that’s an all-in or all-out endeavor,” he said. “I think every day I need to devote a lot of my time to mission and a lot of my time to maintenance.”

### The changing priesthood

With all the changes and responsibilities, the question arises: Do younger priests approach their vocation differently from previous generations?

“The priest of today focuses heavily on evangelizing,” Father Dennis said. “Evangelizing isn’t merely preaching to those who aren’t Catholic or Christian, but it is more on educating and enlightening the people who already believe and help them come to a deeper faith and a closer relationship with Jesus. ... The priest is the representative of the church and sometimes, just by his presence alone, he can make a difference. The importance of presence cannot be understated.

“Priests of the past didn’t face as much of a challenge of reaching people, since faith was assumed,” he added. “In past times, people took the priest’s word as ‘gospel truth.’ They had inherent authority in the public realm by virtue of their office. That is not the case anymore, just because we live in different times. Therefore, I think there was less of a need for priests to win over hearts as there is now.”

Father Scott sees a trend of younger priests yearning pre-Vatican II traditions.

“The priests that I were around when I was being raised in the 1980s and ’90s were very

much into social action, starting ministries, raising people’s consciousness to issues going on in the world, wanting people to take an active part in ending poverty, feeding hungry people, responding to climate change, things like that,” he said. “Today’s priests, my colleagues, are much more interested in people being consecrated for holiness and to live obedient and pious and virtuous lives.”

Father Scott said the reason for that is the situations in which they grew up.

“The younger priests tend to be very traditional, and there’s a lot of studies that show that’s likely to be because many of them were raised during a time when single-parent households were just as common as two-parent households, when both parents were all working and there was a lot of flux in the home situation, which causes them to hunger subconsciously for order. And the way of the church before Vatican II appeals to them because there was so much order. ... Many people would say that today’s young priests are more old-fashioned than the older priests.

“I think the priests in the days of old — meaning the ’80s and the ’90s not so long ago — they were quick to say people’s sins are understandable. All of us struggle. Sin is not the most important thing to speak about. Justice is more important than focusing on people’s sins. Younger priests would say it all begins with sin, so encourage people to be very humble and self-effacing and contrite for their sins and then they will be all of justice will flow from that. It’s a different approach, and I can understand why either approach taken to an extreme is dangerous for balance.”

### Predicting the future

With fewer priests and a changing dynamic in the church, what does the future hold?

“I see the priesthood in the future being similar what it is today,” Father Dennis said. “We may have fewer priests in the future, but I am hopeful and confident that God continues to call men to serve at the altar *in persona Christi*. In light of the current culture, which can be overly self-oriented, the call to the priesthood is a radical way of life that still attracts men who find a deeper meaning to life.”

Father Scott said the future is “unknowable.”

“I do think it’s interesting that Jesus said in the scriptures that the church would always find a way to survive, that the church would always prevail,” he said. “I think that’s beautiful, and I think it means that we need to be open and trusting that we will find our way.

“You know one of the things I love ... is that life is an awful lot like a train. The engineer of the train may think that he or she is driving it, but the rails are actually what determine the direction of the train. No engineer can say, ‘Oh, that looks nice over there, let’s go that way.’ You’re going to go the way the rails go. Your job is not to choose where to go, it’s to stay on the rails, to not derail. And I think the church — we can all think that we’re going to have a role in deciding where the church is going — I think the church is going to go where the Holy Spirit leads the church to go. We are not driving; we’re the engineers responsible for responding to the conditions so that we don’t derail, but the church is going to go where the rails take her.”



# *The spirit of Christmas*

Though we weren't yet back to the normal we all long for, our parish celebrated the season with the return of 'A Jazz Nativity' and the birth of Jesus

