

Celebrating Our First 10 Years

June 2019



St. John of the Cross Catholic Parish
Euclid, Ohio

Our Parish Mission

We are the Catholic Community of St. John of the Cross, established in 2009. Uniting the people of God as one family, we are rooted in, and empowered by, our sacramental life and Eucharistic celebrations. Living as disciples of Jesus Christ, we recognize our God-given potential and challenge one another to share our giftedness, embrace our diversity, and engage in social outreach, service and education. In doing so, we seek to extend the reign of God in Euclid and the wider community.



Deep Roots Nurture the Advent of a New Parish

Although St. John of the Cross has deep roots that go back to the mid-1800s, it is really a very young parish that has steadily established its vibrancy over its first decade.

Our formation as St. John of the Cross in 2009 was a result of three major challenges that were confronting the Diocese of Cleveland and its parishes by the early 21st century – population shifts in the region, financial hardship for many parishes, and fewer priests available for ministry throughout the United States and other parts of the world.

The Clustering Process

In 2007, Bishop Richard G. Lennon initiated a clustering and collaboration process in which 69 groups of parishes – known as “clusters” – were directed to carefully consider sharing resources to create a stronger, more vibrant presence in the eight counties of the Diocese. Approximately one-third of the clusters – including the one consisting of the six parishes then in Euclid – were instructed to propose how to reduce the number of parishes within the cluster.

For nearly two years, cluster teams that included equal representation from each parish within the cluster analyzed parish finances, attendance, education, sacramental and social ministries, trends and projected needs. The teams, which included clergy and laypersons, also sought input from parishioners and provided periodic updates.

In late 2008, the teams submitted their respective proposals to the Bishop, who presented them to a select committee for review and evaluation. Following that review, the Bishop and his staff further reviewed the proposed plans and the committee’s reviews of those plans.

Following this extensive review process, Bishop Lennon announced in March 2009 the details of a comprehensive reconfiguration plan for the diocese. In Euclid, he directed that the following be accomplished no later than June 30, 2010:

- † St. Paul and St. Felicitas merge and reopen as a new parish on the former St. Felicitas site.
- † St. Christine and Holy Cross merge and reopen as a new parish on the former Holy Cross site.
- † St. Robert and St. William merge and reopen as a new parish on the former St. William site.

Becoming One

While the diocese provided resources to help parishes through all aspects of the reconfiguration process, it was largely up to the clergy, staffs and parishioners of St. Paul and St. Felicitas to determine how best and how quickly to create their new parish.

Under the leadership of the two parishes' administrators – Fr. William Jerse of St. Paul and Fr. Sal Ruggeri of St. Felicitas – a cross-section of parishioners, many of them having already participated in the clustering process, came together to form the Merger Transition Team.

With the help of the respective parish pastoral councils, finance councils and other parishioners, the transition team set out to build on our collective strengths by exploring every aspect of what made St. Paul and St. Felicitas so special and what elements of each should become part of the new parish. Subcommittees were formed to provide in-depth study and consideration of nine key aspects of the merger:

- † Liturgy and Worship
- † Parish Life and Social Activities
- † Finance
- † Facilities
- † Parish Naming
- † Parish Ministries and Community Outreach
- † Education and Formation
- † Youth Ministry
- † Worship Space

Dozens of members of the two parishes were directly involved in the merger process, contributing indefatigable energy and immeasurable hours. By one estimate, the committees and subcommittees held almost 100 meetings between March and November of 2009 alone. In addition, all parishioners were invited to offer input and feedback throughout the process.

As a result of this tremendous collaborative effort, the framework of the new parish took shape quickly. Even though many details had yet to be worked out, the administrators and transition team were confident that the new parish would be ready to begin its life – not coincidentally – with the start of the Advent season. Accordingly, they proposed to the diocese that the new parish open on November 29, 2009, with closing masses held at St. Paul and St. Felicitas the weekend before.

Even before the final celebrations, however, opportunities had been created for parishioners of St. Paul and St. Felicitas to get to know one another. For example, St. Paul parishioners were invited to a special mass and reception at St. Felicitas, and likewise St. Felicitas parishioners were invited to a mass and get-together at St. Paul.

Naming the New Parish

Of course, one of the biggest questions on many parishioners' minds was, "What will our new parish be named?" That would be decided by Bishop Lennon, with input from the two parishes.

Keeping in mind guidelines established by the diocese, members of the Parish Naming subcommittee considered a wide range of saints and other names they thought might be appropriate. A lengthy list was eventually trimmed to 18 names that were presented to parishioners.

Over two weekends in July 2009, registered parishioners of St. Paul and St. Felicitas had the opportunity to indicate their first, second and third choices of names for the merged parish. A total of 924 ballots were validated.

When the subcommittee met to tabulate the ballots, the top choices were Divine Mercy, St. Timothy, St. John of the Cross and St. Padre Pio. These results were submitted to Bishop Lennon, who revealed his selection in letters dated August 14, 2009, to the respective parish administrators:

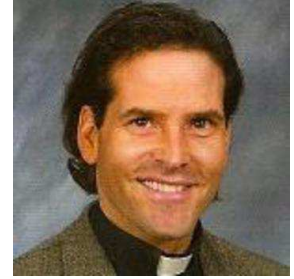
"Having considered the names submitted, the name of the new parish will be St. John of the Cross Parish."

Although the Bishop did not give a specific reason for choosing this name rather than any of the others, two facts are clear. St. John of the Cross is unique to the history of the Diocese of Cleveland, and it was one of the names submitted to him.



Our Founding Pastor

To begin the journey of leading the new parish, Bishop Lennon named Fr. Salvatore Ruggeri as its first pastor. “Fr. Sal,” as he became widely known, had served two years as administrator of St. Felicitas and played an active role in the clustering and transition process that shaped the formation of St. John of the Cross. He was formally installed as pastor of St. John of the Cross by Bishop Lennon on January 16, 2010.



Fr. Sal grew up in Mayfield Heights and attended Mayfield High School before studying at Indiana University in Bloomington, where he earned a B.S. in accounting. After college he worked for almost six years as a CPA in public accounting and as an accounting manager before entering the seminary in 1993. Fr. Sal was ordained on May 29, 1999, and spent his first five years as a priest at St. Hilary in Fairlawn. He then spent more than three years at St. Basil in Brecksville before being assigned to St. Felicitas as administrator in October 2007.

A St. John of the Cross Identity

A new era began on Sunday, November 29, 2009, the first Sunday of Advent. St. John of the Cross Parish was born. The church was filled, and no doubt parishioners’ hearts were filled with all sorts of emotions – excitement, anticipation, apprehension, sadness and more. Bishop Lennon was the chief celebrant.

Thanks to the tremendous planning that had taken place in the months leading up to the opening of the parish, St. John of the Cross was ready to hit the ground running, serving the pastoral needs of its parishioners and reaching out to the broader community – following the fine examples set by St. Paul and St. Felicitas.

Indeed, previous affiliations tended to blur over time and a true St. John of the Cross identity steadily emerged as parishioners came together to worship and to serve side-by-side on committees and in a wide range of ministries.

Many well-established ministries became even stronger, and others were formed to tap the abundant talents within the parish. Ministries included Social Justice, Caring Cooks, Respect Life, the Legion of Mary, the Men’s Prayer Group, Women in Faith, Prayer Shawl, St. Fiacre, Music and the Knights of Columbus. The volunteer-driven weekly bingo program also remained an important source of funding for the parish. Additional ministries emerged over time – including a partnership with a parish in Nicaragua and the Second Blessings ministry, whose large fall rummage sale not only raised funds for our parish but also served the wider community.

Numerous faith-formation and social programs also regularly brought together parishioners and others from the community, including the 11-week Alpha course, which explored the basics of the Christian faith; the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA); Parish School of Religion (PSR); and the annual Extravaganza fund-raiser.

Meanwhile, parishioners' sacramental needs were dutifully tended to over the years under the care of Fr. Sal and regular support from two beloved weekend assistants, Fr. Tim Buyansky and Fr. Ed Mehok.



Another Transition

As we celebrated Palm Sunday in late March 2018, St. John of the Cross parishioners learned that we would soon undergo another transition as a parish. At the conclusion of mass, Fr. Sal announced that on May 1 he would be leaving to assume the duties of pastor of Holy Angels parish in Bainbridge.

"It seemed like such bad timing, Palm Sunday, to have to stand before a community that I love so deeply and tell you that I will soon be leaving," Fr. Sal wrote in the following weekend's bulletin. "But what I realized later is that the timing, in many ways, could not have been better, for it was the beginning of the holiest of weeks in our Church, the week during which we celebrate, in a truly profound way, the love of God in our lives and the lengths to which Jesus will go to show us that love.

"And as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus today, on this Easter Sunday, I cannot help but find great strength and hope. As I prepare myself to 'let go' of a community that has been such an important part of my life, I look to this day and realize and am assured that resurrection will come. I know that despite any feelings of sadness and loss that I am experiencing, resurrection and joy is right there for me, and for all of us."

Our New Leader

To maintain the day-to-day operations of the sacramental, spiritual and temporal works of our parish, Bishop Nelson Perez initially named Fr. John Betters to serve as administrator. Fr. Betters would also continue his responsibilities at nearby Ss. Robert & William parish, where he had been named the founding pastor by Bishop Lennon on January 3, 2010.



“As a big guy, I have a big heart, so I believe I have the ability to love two parish communities,” Fr. Betters assured us. “It is a bit overwhelming but I love a good challenge. I am sure I will stumble a few times as I navigate the reality of me having to be in two places but I am confident that with your help I can do it.”

Fr. Betters was ordained on May 17, 2003, by Bishop Anthony Pilla. His home parish at the time of ordination was St. Christopher in Rocky River. He grew up on Cleveland's West Side, spending the most time at St. Bernadette Parish (Westlake). Fr. Betters went to St. Ignatius High School, John Carroll University, Borromeo Seminary and St. Mary Seminary, and later served as Parochial Vicar at St. John Vianney (Mentor) and St. Mary (Hudson) before his assignment at Ss. Robert & William.

A Shared Pastorate

The transition continued throughout 2018, as parishioners would learn about the diocese's plans for a “Shared Pastorate” model at St. John of the Cross and Ss. Robert & William. Sr. Rita Mary Harwood, Secretary for Parish Life and Development, gave a presentation in early June that reviewed the history and demographics of the Catholic Church in Euclid since World War II. While St. John of the Cross is the smallest of the three remaining Catholic communities in Euclid, she emphasized that the goal of the diocese is not to close or merge parishes, but to share some of our resources.

So, for the first time, she said, the diocese was evaluating a “pastoral group” model to address the growing shortage of clergy and rapidly changing demographics – two of the factors that led to the creation of our parish almost a decade earlier. Going forward, the plan would be to install Fr. Betters as pastor of both parishes and to share two parochial vicars, Fr. Thom Kowatch and Fr. Tim Roth. The parishes would continue to operate separately with their own staffs and ministries.

Fr. Betters' appointment as pastor became effective November 1, 2018. Later that month, a concert and opening mass kicked off a full year of anniversary events, and on Sunday, December 9, parishioners and family members filled the church as Bishop Perez installed the parish's second pastor.

"As we celebrate our 10th anniversary, I believe we are called to focus on hope, joy and love," said Fr. Betters. "Amidst all the challenges we face today, we hear in our readings today to 'stand erect' and have 'no anxiety' as those who are faithful to Jesus will be saved. The hope, joy and love we can foster as a parish community is focused on the celebration of Mass and all that flows to and from Mass. The parish community stands as a light in the dark world to proclaim the saving power of Jesus' name."

Celebrating Our First 10 Years

As we reflect on what we have accomplished and as we continue to evolve, we know that we already have a lot to celebrate as a parish. That's why it will take us an entire year to celebrate our first 10 years!

Our Celebration Committee has worked hard to plan a series of events – some new ones, some we haven't done in a while, and an "anniversary spin" on great events that we run every year. The year-long celebration will culminate with a special mass by Bishop Perez on Saturday, November 16, 2019, followed by a reception to which all are invited.

"Since joining together, St. John of the Cross has come very far and done well to find its niche and identity," Fr. Betters reminds us. "It is an honor and privilege to serve as pastor at this time and to help build upon the strong foundation that has been established.

"Our parishioners' willingness to contribute their God-given talents has created a momentum that will serve the parish well into the future."

Our Roots

Established in tiny Euclid Township in 1860 by Bishop Amadeus Rappe, **St. Paul** became one of the earliest parishes in the Diocese of Cleveland, which had been formed only 13 years earlier. Property on Chardon Road was purchased for \$100, and construction of the first church began in the spring of 1861. At the outset, St. Paul's territory extended as far east as Painesville, though population growth and migration over the next century would result in numerous territorial "spinoffs" to serve the area's Catholics.

The original portion of the familiar church and school building that would serve generations of St. Paul parishioners was dedicated in 1931 by Bishop Joseph Schrembs. Auxiliary Bishop Floyd Begin dedicated a much remodeled church in 1960, and a major expansion in 1964 included a new marble main altar and tabernacle and distinctive stained glass windows that would later enhance the worship space of St. John of the Cross.

In the 20th century – and especially after World War II – booming times in Euclid brought the need for more parishes to minister to the city's heavily Catholic population. That led to the establishment of Holy Cross (1924), St. Christine (1925), St. William (1946), St. Robert Bellarmine (1950) and St. Felicitas (1950).

St. Felicitas was established by Archbishop Edward F. Hoban on November 12, 1950. The first mass was attended by approximately 150 people in the Veterans Hall near Euclid Avenue. In 1951, masses were moved to what is now the Center for Pastoral Leadership in Wickliffe and continued at that location for three years. Due to the generosity of early parishioners, the growth of St. Felicitas was rapid. In the spring of 1952, ground was broken on Richmond Road for what became the permanent home of St. Felicitas and eventually St. John of the Cross. Subsequent years brought much growth to the parish community, including opening of the school in 1955, construction of the rectory in 1958 and completion of the convent in 1959. More recently, construction and renovations to the church were completed in 2007.

From the 1970s onward, both St. Paul and St. Felicitas were blessed with continuity of leadership. Fr. Francis Mulvanity served St. Paul for 27 years, initially as administrator before being named pastor in 1978. Following Fr. Mulvanity's retirement in 2004, Fr. William Jerse was named administrator, serving until the parish closed. Meanwhile, St. Felicitas was served for more than three decades by a pastoral team consisting of Fr. Richard Bober, Fr. John Kraker and Fr. Edward Mehok. After Fr. Bober's death in 2007, Fr. David Baugh served briefly as administrator before Fr. Salvatore Ruggeri was named to the position in October 2007, continuing as administrator until St. Felicitas closed.

St. John of the Cross Parish: Who We Are

We are a community of similarities and differences.

- † We come from near and far to worship together and to share our faith and all that our community has to offer.
- † We represent different generations and many ethnicities and cultures.
- † Many of our families were members of our founding parishes for generations, while others of us are relatively new to the community.
- † We treasure tradition yet understand that we must accept change over time.
- † We are united in our strength and faith, and we are celebrating our 10th anniversary together with a full year of special activities.

We are actively engaged in our parish and community.

- † We live our mission and serve a unique “niche” in the community.
- † We are hungry to experience more of God, to evangelize, to stretch our comfort zone and to serve Him even better.
- † We participate in more than two dozen active ministries – ranging from service and fellowship to human concerns and outreach, and from music to spirituality enrichment – which nourish us and allow us to help others in need.
- † We are very proud of our solid levels of attendance and participation in parish activities and events.
- † We embrace social media and have seen strong engagement via Facebook and our website.

We generously support our parish, its leadership and one another.

- † Our sustained level of monetary contributions has allowed our parish to become debt-free and live within its budget.
- † Our willingness to contribute our God-given talents has allowed us to create a momentum that will serve our parish well into the future.
- † We respond quickly and caringly to needs of those among us and those we may not know.

We love St. John of the Cross Parish and want it to continue to succeed.

- † We look forward to building upon the strong foundation that has been established over the past decade.

Our Patron Saint

St. John of the Cross

1541–1591

Juan de Yepes y Álvarez was born in Spain and entered the Carmelite Order as a young man. After a meeting with St. Teresa of Avila, he joined her attempts at reforming the order and pledged himself to a more stringently monastic and studious life than Carmelites then practiced. Arrested, imprisoned and tortured for his beliefs by his fellow monks, John underwent a spiritual awakening while captive that led to an outpouring of mystical poetry and writing, later collected in volumes such as *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Dark Night of the Soul*, and *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul* and the *Bridegroom of Christ*. He was canonized a saint in 1726.



St. John of the Cross is considered one of Spanish literature's most important poets, and his works have been translated many times since his death. In the 20th century, poets John Frederick Nims and Willis Barnstone translated the poetry of St. John of the Cross into English.

—*The Poetry Foundation*

Selected Sources

- † *We Remember the Church of St. Paul in Euclid, 1860-2000*, Deacon Louis Pecek, November 2000
- † St. Felicitas historical records
- † “*Bishop Lennon Informs Parishes of Plans for Collaboration, Consolidation*,” Catholic Diocese of Cleveland news release, March 14, 2009
- † The Poetry Foundation

Contributors

- † Gary Pratt
- † Pete and Linda McVoy

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