

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY TESTIMONY

First of all, allow me to thank, Fr. Mark Watson and you all for inviting me to participate in this wonderful occasion. I am so grateful. I am so happy to be here.

What a wonderful and dedicated pastor he is. How comforting and reassuring it is to know that what was planted is being so well attended to and growing in maturity and grace. And God bless Msgr. Moore for the rock of fidelity he has been to the parish. As the founding pastor, I have so much to be grateful for and so much to share with you but there is little time and I need to be brief.

I love the mission statement that you gave in January 1993. In it you stated: “Gathered as a prayerful people, strengthened by our diversity, and sharing in the enthusiasm of our founders, we, the members of Jesus the Good Shepherd Parish.....Let me stop here!

Let me tell you a little bit about that enthusiasm.

I was enthusiastic about the town of Monroe, when I first visited it in 1952, as a seminarian on a visit with a class mate, Sam D’Anna. I was enthusiastic when I received my first assignment as an assistant pastor of St. Matthew Church, under the pastorate of Msgr. John C. Marsh. I especially knew and loved the people of the north side of town.

I was certainly enthusiastic when on June 20, 1958, Bishop Greco called me during my summer vacation to tell me that a decision was made to start a new parish on the north side of town and asked me if I would accept the task of being the founding pastor. I said yes, indeed. I said: “Thank you, Bishop and all those involved in coming to that decision. I immediately ended my vacation and came to Monroe and started to work. I came indeed with great enthusiasm and expectations. I contacted Msgr. John C. Marsh and asked if I could take up residence at St. Matthew’s rectory and he said yes. He did not give us any money but he was of such great help and encouragement. What a blessing, it was so easy.

But, it wasn’t easy for all. Over night some 180 families on the north side of town found that they were cut off from their mother church of St. Matthew’s, with nothing but a new assigned young (29) priest with a lot of enthusiasm. But, it didn’t take me long to instill that same enthusiasm in the parishioners of these families. I opened a bank account, putting the first \$5.00 in with my own money. It did not take us long to get organized and find our new identity. First of all we were given the privilege of choosing the name of the new parish. Since we had churches in Monroe named for the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph and an apostle, I decided we needed a name or title of Our Lord. Fr. Roy Decaigny, an assistant at St. Matthew suggested he always like the name of Good Shepherd. Msgr. John Marsh agreed. I insisted that we include the Holy Name of Jesus in the title, namely Jesus, the Good Shepherd. After much discussion, all agreed. Bishop Greco approved the new name. What a blessing that Name has been to me and to all!

With the help of our attorney, Tom Hayes Jr., we drew up articles of incorporation and began to assemble for Sunday Mass in the Knights of Columbus Hall. I mailed out the weekly bulletins to each parishioner's home and got everyone involved. We organized quickly a finance committee, a building committee and so forth. We all wanted to do a first class work for the Lord. Nothing but the best would do!

Within two years, we bought ten acres of land, financed and built a Church, school, rectory and convent. We raised \$35,000 quickly. We borrowed \$40,000 from St. Matthew Cemetery fund at 3% interest, bought the land and mortgaged the land for a \$250,000 loan to build the buildings. It was a miracle of Divine Grace, boldness, vision, and confident faith in God and one another. None of this could have been accomplished without the enthusiasm and cooperation of all families involved. I have never known of another parish in the diocese that did so much, with so little, so quickly. Naturally we were proud but to God be the Glory.

It was only by God's special grace that we were able to acquire ten acres of prime land off of Loop Road. This land was a cotton field, tied up in the Cole Estate, involving over eighteen heirs, some minor heirs. No one was able to get them all to agree on selling any portion of that land. But after nine month of trying they agreed to sell it to us. We had claimed the land earlier and told our architect, Mr. Herbert Land, Jr. to proceed with his plans and designs as if we had the land. The day we acquired it, I went to the field and knelt down, cried and praised and thanked the Lord for an extended period of time. Later with the help of Ed Pohlman & Sons, we put in the roads and named the entrance road, Good Shepherd Lane.

Within less than eight years we added a gymnasium, library and kindergarten. Within ten years we had land and facilities worth close to a million dollars. What a tribute to the enthusiastic sacrifice and dedication of the parishioners and friends of Jesus, the Good Shepherd parish. With help of four Daughter of the Cross nuns and Fr. Bill Provosty, our assistant, we had a thriving school and church going by 1960. Fr. Ed. Moore came aboard in 1963. In 1967, after reducing our debt to almost nothing, we built the addition of our gym, library and kindergarten. In 1968, with the help of our Parish photographer, Mr. Tony D'Anna, we printed a tenth anniversary pictorial directory featuring over 400 families. The gross value of our parish plant was estimated well over a million dollars. Yes, God indeed blessed us!

Jesus, the Good Shepherd has certainly blessed me! He was indeed a Good Shepherd to me in my weakness. As the second reading proclaimed today from 1 Peter 2: 24-25: He Himself bore my sins in His body upon the cross...for I had gone astray like a sheep, but I have now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of my soul. Yes, He lovingly took me up and laid me on His shoulders and brought me Home! He gave me two saints for wives to keep me on tract. My first wife, Myrt died of cancer May, 16, 1995. And then, God blessed me doubly with Mary Darrell, my beautiful, saintly second wife. Would you please stand, Darrell. Thank you, Darrell. Yes, I have been blessed in so many ways.

Again, allow me to tell how happy I am to be here with you on this occasion of the 50th anniversary celebration of Jesus the Good Shepherd Sunday. Again, I want to thank Fr. Mark and all of you for inviting me. It means so much to me.

And above all remember, dearly beloved, that should you ever stray from the path, Jesus, the Good Shepherd will always lovingly pick you up and lead you home, like He did me!

God bless you all! I am so proud of you! And yes, I want to say to you: "I love you!" Thank you so much!

Dave P. Dabria +

(Given in Jesus, the Good Shepherd Church after Communion, on "Good Shepherd Sunday," April 13, 2008).

Mission Statement of Jan. 3, 1993:

GATHERED AS A PRAYERFUL PEOPLE,
STRENGTHENED BY OUR DIVERSITY,
AND **SHARING THE ENTHUSIAM OF OUR FOUNDERS,**
WE, THE MEMBERS OF JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD PARISH
ARE CALLED TO BE A LOVING, NURTURING FAMILY IN FAITH,
TO AFFIRM THE VARIED GIFTS OF EACH MEMBER,
TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS AND TO PROCLAIM GOD'S
LIBERATING AND HEALING PRESENCE THROUGH
WORD, WORSHIP, AND SERVICE.
EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT,
WE WILLINGLY ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE TO REFLECT,
TO SHARE AND TO PROMOTE
THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

Msgr. John C. Marsh, + May 29, 1975

Fr. William B. Provosty, + April 3, 1997.

Fr. Roy Decaigny + Nov. 20, 1959 (Oak Grove or Rayville)

Msgr. George Martinez, + June 23, 1997

Msgr. William Kwaaitaal + Jan. 16, 1996