

## **A Message from Fr. Don Farnan**

On this first Sunday of Advent we begin a new liturgical year. “Advent” means the coming and its first day points to a new beginning.

After the recent diocesan planning process that resulted in the closing of Saint Louis Parish and notification to Saint Therese that it has two years to show significant signs of viability and growth, I was assigned to be with them in our next chapter, as well as with Saint James that has, in recent decades, also been threatened with possible closure. I have some observations from my brief five months that may help us strengthen the Catholic presence in the heart of Kansas City.

First, and I believe foremost, is the legacy of Saint Louis Church. Members of that community are dealing with a gamut of emotions, especially sadness, though for many it is accompanied by anger, as the church closed its doors after more than a century of service. Some of them have found a home in another Catholic Church—some have left the church. Many are bringing their gifts and talents to Saint Francis Xavier or Saint Therese Little Flower with the same gusto and deep faith they always held. It is beautiful to witness because their relationship with Christ is paramount and they do not let earthly accidents dampen it. I praise their new beginning.

At Saint James, parishioners have weathered many ecclesial storms that hindered their relationship with the institutional church, but they never lost sight of their mission and purpose: to advance the mission of the Gospel and promote social justice ministries. They have played an important role in the revitalization that is happening along Troost Avenue and in our city’s core neighborhoods. Whether big issues like housing, racism, outreach to immigrants, or dignity to the impoverished, or small acts of kindness like the bus stop ministry outside their door, they are leaders in our church’s efforts to imitate Christ.

Little Flower Parish seeks to prove to critics and give evidence to the wider church that it plays a crucial role in our city’s and diocese’s future. Bishop Johnston is putting great faith in it by intending to open a new-old school on its property next year as part of the Bright Futures Program and encouraged by the successful Missouri Scholars initiative. Inspired by their patroness, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, they do little things for neighbors and others in need that make a big impact in their lives.

I don’t know what is coming—much as the world didn’t know what was coming from Bethlehem when Jesus was born. I don’t know what might come for our urban parishes and the positive impact they can make upon the larger community. Yet I have confidence that Advent can usher in something wonderful and point us to a new beginning. It starts with repairing buildings, increasing parish membership, sacraments, attendance, support of the diocesan annual appeal, and community engagement. Let this Advent be a time for us to bring something earthshaking to our city, as once happened in the City of David.