

Cathedral of the Streets: a new way of being church in Kansas City

A message to parishioners and friends of Saint Francis Xavier (SFX), Saint James-midtown, and Saint Therese Little Flower (STLF) Catholic Parishes

March 1, 2026

Father Don Farnan

I am grateful to Bishop Johnston who has permitted me to hire a *Director of Operations* for the three urban parishes that I serve. This will help me and our communities immensely in the years ahead. During this time of implementing synodality in concert with the universal church, it will also allow us to usher in a new style for Catholics who promote the role of all baptized people and carry out the social justice Gospel handed to us by Jesus. It will take a commitment on the part of parishioners to work with me and trust the process. It is my intent to retire as pastor in the next five years but to continue as the priest-in-service to our three faith communities as long as I am able.

I am delighted to announce that **John Kraus**, Director of Morning Glory Ministries, has accepted the director's position beginning later in March. John's vast experience as an educator and administrator in Catholic communities from Texas to Colorado, Oklahoma, and Kansas give him a wide knowledge of church and good insight into people of faith. And his big heart for the poor, especially in urban centers, as well as his experience within our diocese, makes him an ideal servant-leader for us and with us. He and I will work in concert to direct the parishes; he will handle the business operations while I focus on the spiritual and sacramental sides of community life.

In the past half century, inner city churches have floundered as Catholics moved away from urban centers to suburban places. Yet people today want to remain close to the heart of their faith so that they can sense and develop their relationship with civic activity at the core. Troost Avenue has often been viewed as an historic line of division in KC but, in recent times, has become a symbol of unity for many who live, learn, work, or worship here. Two of the parishes I serve are on Troost while the other is the only remaining Catholic Church east of the Avenue (all the way to the Truman Sports complex, south of 17th Street and north of I-435). It is a huge region where over twelve Catholic Churches have closed in the past fifty years. Like many, I believe that we need to provide a sacramental presence there to support residents and work in conjunction with social agencies that provide foundational needs; for where the need is the greatest, our response should be strongest.

Saint James Church (39th and Harrison) was built from materials originally intended for a bridge over river waters near downtown Kansas City. As "*The Bridge Church*" it continues to connect people and span diverse existences. It also helps our diocese unify faith with

action to improve lives among many who suffer because they lack food and nutrition, homes, jobs, support systems, and/or basic services. Saint Francis Xavier (52nd and Troost) has, for over a century, been guided by the Jesuit community that offers a unique spirituality to faith-seekers through what is sometimes called “The Ignatian Way.” Though the Jesuits no longer oversee the parish, their spirituality still influences its members. Saint Therese Little Flower (58th and Euclid) carries forth the “*little ways*” of our patroness while incorporating a Gospel style of worship and activity. As Little Flower offers ***Cathedral of the Streets*** a component where the “*vibe is alive,*” SFX presents an Ignatian style to accompany others as Christ accompanied those He encountered, and Saint James-midtown constructs a spiritual bridge to connect us with those we’re called to serve.

Cathedral of the Streets, then, is a concept to enliven the church’s sacramental presence and activity in the heart of the city, honoring various neighborhoods and traditions while strengthening parishes and social agencies by working together as one—the very essence of synodality. In addition to hiring a Director of Operations, we will also employ a *Director of Stewardship and Development*. While the former oversees the daily operations of the communities within a larger community, the latter will help us secure and stabilize the finances and commitment of stakeholders while also clarifying our mission, vision, and core values. While the mission defines what we are, the vision portrays what we want to become, and the core values illustrate what we hold dear as we proceed.

Jennifer Harris has already begun working in this position in February and is quickly becoming familiar with the three parishes. Having worked on several parish staffs in Missouri and Kansas, as well as with a large national church fundraising organization, CCS, she is well-versed in parish life and well-respected in the philanthropic community. I worked with Jennifer at both Saint Thomas More and Saint Charles Borromeo Parishes and can attest to her success in helping parishes reach mission and vision goals.

Though I’d rather not add this paragraph, I do it because sometimes parishioners and outsiders are suspicious, threatened, or fearful of embarking on new territory or doing church differently. I want to be clear that there is no intent on merging the three parishes into one—not by the bishop, not by me, not by any staff member. Each of the faith communities is unique and can become stronger because of the others by sharing resources and building relationships. There are numerous examples across the country and globe where parishes working together in a similar fashion strengthen all of them.

Writing particularly to the community of Saint Francis Xavier, I acknowledge that we have been accustomed to having one or two fulltime priests for most of our history. Many parishioners think that our current situation of sharing a priest is temporary. Though that might be the case (it is possible that another religious order would take over, or our diocese

may gain a plethora of vocations to the priesthood), realistically, I don't think it could happen in the foreseeable future; and so, we ought to operate and proceed accordingly. I don't view this as a negative factor but a very positive one: we have been given an opportunity to be the kind of synodal church that Pope Francis envisioned. We can develop our mission as a lay-led, justice-minded, Ignatian-spirited community that benefits our diocese, city, and especially those who have been influenced by Jesuit education here.

Specifically, to the community of Saint James, I will note that as the *Bridge-Church*, we have a tremendous opportunity to help people cross over to ministry along Troost and other places of need. Our unique location—next to the city's busiest bus exchange, sharing land with Troost-39, The Oglesby Hotel, and The Bishop Sullivan Center, and existing in close proximity to numerous partner social agencies—makes us fertile ground to plant seeds of synodality and growth in solidarity with others who want to advance Jesus' Gospel of accompaniment. As we support the strategic planning process of The Bishop Sullivan Center this year, and participate with our neighbors and friends, we will gain clearer understanding of the ways we are called to build sacred bridges within our community.

And distinctly to the community of the Little Flower that recently reached and celebrated our centennial mark as a parish, we will continue to build upon the legacy of those who have walked this way before us. At 58th and Euclid, where the vibe is alive, we have great hope for bringing the message of Christ in our Catholic tradition to hungry, poor, and marginalized members of our society, and enriching the religious experience of those who visit us. As our patroness sends reminders to us, like flowers from heaven, we can also remind friends and neighbors of the hope we hold. Operating as a lay-led church is not new to us at STLF, but now we can proceed with greater support and encouragement.

Finally, and to all, I am excited about the ventures ahead for each parish as well as the many ways we can collaborate with one another. Together we can become a **Cathedral of the Streets** where people of different generations, ethnicities, and religious viewpoints walk forward together as one. I look forward to you getting to know John and Jennifer as they help guide us in our church's important mission at the heart of Kansas City.