

The Changing face at Our Lady of Grace



By Brock Weir

Joe Gorman grew up just over our boarder with Newmarket just like any other normal kid.

He came from a loving home with a mother, father, brother, and five sisters ? or six mothers in total, he says ? and he liked the same activities as any other boy would. He had many aspirations. He wanted to be a skier for one. Another was to be a professional hockey player. But the third may have been one thing to set him apart from the crowd; joining the priesthood.

While he wanted to be all three at the same time ? as kids do ? he says he realised his calling as a Grade 2 student, ?a grade I liked so much I did it twice!?

?It was then I had some sort of inclination,? Mr. Gorman tells The Auroran.

Mr. Gorman should properly be addressed as Father Joe, as he takes over the leadership of Aurora's Our Lady of Grace Church following the departure of Father Tim Hanley for the St. Ignatius Loyola Parish in Mississauga. Father Tim gave his last sermon at a packed service on Sunday.

Since being ordained just over five years ago ? his five year anniversary was marked just last Friday, May 10 ? he has been lucky to serve relatively close to his hometown, but the early days of his vocation also afforded him a stint at St. Ignatius. ?I was there for three years, so I warmed the place up for him!?

 he says with a laugh.

Growing up, he says he was influenced in his faith, and also re-affirmed in himself that this was his calling not just by his family but also the positive priests in his life, ones who exhibited ?compassion? and ?humility?.

?The biggest thing the positive priests showed me was they were joyful in their ministry and their ministry was very welcoming, bringing people in to enjoy the liturgy, to enjoy their faith, and to bring their faith fully alive,? he says. ?With a lot of people, their first question is often, ?how did you become a priest? My only response is I had positive people around me and when you get down to the gist of things, I had a lot of faith in my family.

?When I told people I wanted to be a priest, I don't think they were surprised, but they may have thought, ?Are there other ways he can serve?'

This is a question he took seriously through his academic career. While he played quarterback at York University, by the time he entered the seminary for their six year program, they were encouraged to question whether they were doing the right thing and if the priesthood was what they were truly called to do. Although he says he ?absolutely? reflected on it, he adds it never crossed his mind

that this might not be his true path.

“My experiences throughout my life, the people in my family, and the community that supported me, has given me a great road to lead,” he says.

For Father Joe, one of the most integral parts of the parish he is now about to lead, and a part which he would like to continue to foster, is indeed this very sense of community. His parishioners have never been ones to shy away from taking the pass and running with it.

Prime examples of this can be seen in their efforts towards outreach programs like the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Welcoming Arms, and Welcoming Table, which brings together all of Aurora's Christian churches to provide meals and a place of belonging for underprivileged members of the community.

This is also seen in their ongoing efforts as part of the ShareLife program with an ultimate goal of raising \$150,000 for the needy overseas. Just a few months left in their goal, they are almost there, having raised just over \$95,000 and it keeps rolling in.

“They just keep on giving,” he says of his parishioners. “If we need them for a service, they are there. If someone has tragically died, our community is there, but that goes for all of Aurora. The community of Aurora is a strong witness to helping our society be stronger.”

“The proof is in the pudding [with Welcoming Arms and Welcoming Table]. They are right there and church meetings are ecumenical.”

Church life does not, however, come without its own challenges. One of the key tasks for any priest taking on a new parish is ensuring that the church itself remains vibrant, healthy, and serves its purpose. He subscribes to the theory that essential to the health of a church are a good message, good liturgy and good music.

“It's all about community,” he says. “We have a great foundation and that foundation can only keep going through a good prayer life, a good community liturgy and, most importantly, to have a sense of belonging and continue to make people feel they have a belonging. Call each one by name.”

“I think Father Tim brought a sense of community, a sense of belonging. His organizational skills are also second to none. Maybe that is because of his accounting background, but also his understanding that when people understand their roles, they will succeed in their roles.”

In a nutshell, Father Joe sums his own role in three words: spirituality, social, and outreach.