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Dear Parish Family,

Our Lord invited some of the bystanders in today's Gospel passage to follow him. Their initial reaction was one of intrigue. After all, this invitation to follow the Lord would mean a change from their ordinary way of life. It would mean a new adventure for them – a chance to meet new people, see new towns, take part in a different type of work, learn a different way of thinking and acting and experience a different way of life. All of this seems very exciting, that is, until the Lord instructed them that they are to follow him immediately and wholeheartedly. The dilemma arose because some had unfinished business to attend to at home, things that still occupied a central place in their hearts, like their families, before they could follow. The Lord told them plainly that what is behind you, must be left in order to follow Him. What a difficult challenge this was for them, and for us! As the Lord pointed out, the Kingdom of God is forward! His invitation was to a new, much larger, and universal family, united not by blood but by faith.

In our Cajun culture family is important. Along the bayou, it is not uncommon for an entire neighborhood or street to consist of relatives. Nor is it uncommon for parents to live right next door to their children. We tend to not move far from home. Our families are blessed to not only live in close proximity, but to also share in the common victories and struggles of our area which have united us more closely. Together, we have celebrated the achievements of our children and the milestones reached in our sacramental life. We have celebrated the lives lived well by our loved ones who have gone before us. Together, we have journeyed through a major pandemic, a devastating hurricane, and now a struggling economy. All of which have, and are, serving to strengthen our familial bonds even more.

I ask that you take this aspect of proximity in geography and shared experiences and apply it to our parish life. I opened this, my first letter to you, by intentionally addressing you as my parish family for indeed you are. We are truly ONE parish family united not only in our common way of life, but more so, in our shared faith around our Eucharistic Lord, the ultimate sign of unity. It is my desire that while the parishes of St. Hilary and St. Anthony exist as separate entities, each with a unique history and culture to celebrate, that we are the same united family as you share the same spiritual fathers in myself and Father Steven Castille. Father Steven comes to us to provide sacramental assistance and will make his introductions to us next weekend. I ask that you welcome Father Steven Castille as you have welcomed me so warmly two years ago when I arrived.

As I began in my new role as your shepherd, I want to honor the strong foundation that has been laid out for us by our previous pastors, while still encouraging us to advance the Kingdom of God together here in the Central Lafourche area. I challenge all of us to be more creative and daring in our dreams of what might seem outside our reach in hopes of growing our ministry opportunities. I look forward to our collaboration together in discerning the needs of our parishes. And I do mean, together, as I will need your help and prayers. It is my hope that our parishes become stronger places of centrality for our communities, not only through our liturgical worship, but also in celebrating the important moments of our lives together. We are more than the church buildings that we gather in because we are “living stones” which make up the Church. As Church, we must leave behind our comforts and familiar circles to go where we have not gone before— new territory, new people, with new ideas—to proclaim the Good News and invite others to leave behind the things of the world and follow Christ. Together, as one family, let us move forward!

Your parish priest,