

## Pastor's Column

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### Welcome, Fr. Rich Lewandowski!

This weekend we welcome Fr. Rich Lewandowski to our Parish. Fr. Rich will be “covering” for me while I am leading a pilgrimage to the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

Fr. Rich will also be leading our Parish in a New Year Retreat which begins this week on Monday evening, January 4. His series of talks will deal with affirmation, self-acceptance, forgiveness, healing, and creating for oneself a “spirituality of imperfection.” There is no one more qualified to speak on the topic of imperfection than Fr. Rich. (HA!) (Don’t tell him that I said so!!) Please check the bulletin for more details regarding topics, places, and times.

It will be a great way to kick off the New Year, and I would encourage you to take advantage of Fr. Rich’s time with us.

Fr. Rich and I have been friends for the past 43 years. We met at St. Mary’s College in Orchard Lake, Michigan in 1967. After graduation he went to Ss. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake and was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts in 1974. I went on to St. John’s Provincial Seminary in Plymouth, Michigan and was ordained for the Archdiocese of Detroit in 1975.

Presently, Fr. Rich is retired after serving 33 years in a number of parochial assignments including Pastor of St. Camillus Parish in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and Catholic Chaplain at Fitchburg State College.

He now resides in Leominster, Massachusetts, and is kept busy assisting in weekend parish ministry, and in weekday ministry to the elderly. He also conducts retreats and counsels first responders and combat veterans dealing with post traumatic stress disorder.

Over the years we have shared a few vacations together, but our friendship has survived thanks to the telephone, and in recent years, the internet. Over the years, we would, on a regular basis, check in with each other to see how each other is doing. We both provided each other with a listening ear that has helped both of us in our ministry.

Around the time that we were ordained, we made a pact that if either of us were thinking about leaving the active ministry we would have to first talk to each other, and each of us would attempt to strengthen one another and help each other get through whatever it was we were going through. This commitment to each other was the foundation and the basis for a life-time friendship that continues to this day and has seen both of us through over 35 years of ministry.

Fr. Rich preached at my first Mass and is remembered fondly because of the word “genuine.” Ask him about it!

The last time Fr. Rich visited California was in January 2000 when he was here for my twenty-fifth anniversary of ordination celebration.

I know that you will welcome Fr. Rich to our Parish, and that in the evident hospitality here at St. Thomas More you will make him feel right at home!

Fr. Mike