

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is with great joy and humility that I share these few words with you as I begin my pastoral ministry among you here at St. Patrick's, St. Joseph's and St. Paul's. I thank God and the Diocese of Antigonish for giving me this opportunity to share the gifts of life and faith with you. I also thank each of you for your warm welcome and hospitality. In Mark's gospel chapter 3:31-35, we read that Jesus responding to the crowd who told him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside looking for you", Jesus replied, "... whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister and mother". In the above passage, Jesus was in no way rejecting his mother – the Blessed Virgin Mary – for she was the first to do the will of God (Luke 1: 38). Rather with that statement, Jesus teaches that he has come to establish a universal human family based not on biological or blood affinity but on faith in God and in doing His will.

It is this faith in God and our desire to do His will that has brought us together and made us one family in Christ irrespective of our race, culture, colour or gender. It is based on this same faith that you have welcomed me into your community with love and open arms. Although I am from India, the Lord in His divine providence has brought me into your lives to share our faith and our life experiences – our joys, pains and sorrows. Therefore, like Jesus, I too consider you to be my father, mother, brothers, sisters and friends. And as St. John Vianney would say, "I am here because of you and I am among you as one who serves."

In my ministry as a priest, my prayer whenever I am sent to any mission or parish has always been, "Dear Lord, help me to do Your Will for the kingdom of God". As a new person in a area or new friends, we need some time to build our relationship. Therefore I request that we be mutually patient and not walk away from each other no matter what. Most importantly, it is possible that coming from a different culture, I may not meet all your expectations but I will try my possible best to learn and to adapt to the new environment and I cannot do this without your help. So I count on each one of you.

As we strive to build a dynamic and healthy Christian community, it is important to understand that we are all in this together and that it is not always easy to respond to the challenges of the Gospel. But we do not journey alone for the Lord is with us and He never abandons those who put their trust in Him. I learned from so many people in the Diocese that this is a beautiful parish with wonderful and dedicated parishioners. I pray that we continue with that same spirit. Each of us is unique with different gifts and talents. May we continue to use them in building up the kingdom of God here at St. Patrick's, St. Joseph's and St. Paul's and make our parish an ideal community of faith where love, peace, unity and joy in the Spirit can be experienced by all who worship with us. May God bless you and your families.

Father Lazarus Guria.

Pastor