

Dearest Friends in Christ,

My family moved to Newnan, Georgia just before I entered into second grade, and I went off to college after twelfth grade. So I only lived for ten years of my childhood in that place that I call my dear home. Subsequently I have lived in Kentucky for seven years, Pennsylvania (off and on) for seven years, Italy for four years, and I have lived in Atlanta (and other parts of Georgia) off and on over the years. My point in this report is to give some comparison. I have never lived anywhere longer than I have lived in Jasper. I arrived in Jasper in January of 2009. I went through both Obama administrations, the Trump administration, and now I am nearly half a year into the Biden administration. That means I have spent over twelve years at OLM, and in that time, it has definitely become a home for me. I love this parish, and it has been such a joy to serve in this place.



That said, part of being a diocesan priest is showing a spirit of obedience towards our bishops. The archdiocese has recently contacted me to let me know that they will be moving me to another parish in the first week of July. It was somewhat tentative, but it has sense become certain, and soon will become official. This was, I suppose, an inevitable reality. It was never a matter of if, but only when. I will be excited to meet new challenges in the next assignment, but I am very sad to leave behind so many friends at this great parish. Not that they will cease to be friends, but only that as a pastor, I will no longer be their guardian and servant. In these twelve years I have seen so much change here, as a parish of retired people has become a parish filled with young families and children. This is a place of joy.

I am proud of what we have accomplished together as a parish. It is a special place, to say the least. Seminarians want to get summer assignments at OLM, and that says a lot about you good people. There are so many good people here. I often said “the minute they give me some deacons, the archdiocese will likely move me” and indeed, we have been assigned some excellent deacons. But even before they came, my ministry here has been supported by so many lay people in this parish, who love the Lord and who love their parish, and who work so hard to make it the wonderful place that it is. This is never because there has been a lot of money. It has always been, and will continue to be a labor of love. I thank all of those good people for your support and your wise counsel. I will deeply miss those who work in our great ministries here and who have so supported this parish, and who have worked with me for the common good.

I could not have accomplished anything without you. Sincerely, what hurts the most is to leave behind all our great kids at OLM. It has been such a joy to watch so many young people grow up here. I want to encourage all our altar servers and choristers to continue being the excellent Catholics you are today. The youth are our future.

I want to encourage you to pray for your next pastor. He will no doubt soon be announced. Priests work hard through transitions like these, and sometimes folks within our parishes reject their clergy (priests who give their lives in service). It doesn't make it easy to lead. Our Church can accomplish so much more when we really show charity and humility and unity, and so many of you excel in this, so be your best, and remain united. If you start to see old friends who left (because of me) welcome them home. If they ask, let them know I have missed them. Just know that while priests love and give, we are all just holding the place for our Lord, who is our ultimate pastor and priest. Priests come and go. The Lord, and his Church, are forever.

After twelve years, I will have to get busy for this upcoming move. I am tempted to pile everything up in the back yard and set it ablaze. It is a long time to be in one place, and I really hate moving, but I really, really love Our Lady of the Mountains parish. You will always be, for me, a home.

In faith,
Fr. Charles Byrd
Pastor