

Dear Parish Family of Saint Francis Xavier,

I thank you that many of you have already welcomed me as your new parish priest. Some of us have met during the last few weeks while I was in and out, getting the lay of the land. A few of us have also had the opportunity to talk briefly since the time I received notice from Cardinal Dolan that he was assigning me as Pastor. I look forward to meeting all of you.

As some of you also know, I am not a stranger to this area. My mother and father moved to Hawley around 1970. From that point on, I have been visiting there and also Honesdale. I would go to the Perpetual Adoration Chapel often. My mother and I enjoyed eating there, like at the Alpine House. My father died there at Wayne County Hospital (on my ordination day!). Sometimes we would come over to Beach Lake or Narrowsburg, just for a drive. For over a dozen years, I have been going to Dr. Lorraine Spinard in Shohola as my Chiropractor and Nutritionist, either driving up Rt 97 through Hawks Nest or Rt 434, many times stopping at Kurt's Barber Shop while I was there. Since ordination, I have spent most of my days off in Hawley and then Lords Valley since mom died in 2006. Now, I am glad to be here with you.

Thankful to God, just three months ago, on May 16<sup>th</sup>, I celebrated my 23rd anniversary as a priest. I have loved these years, which I might say belong to the second half of my life. I was not ordained until I was 43. I suppose this makes me what many would call a "geezer priest!" Thankfully, I think I still have a good bit of life left in me, which will now help me to serve you.

Over the years, most people simply have called me Father Dennis, so you can too. That's how I am mainly known; but, if you choose to call me by my surname Dinan (pronounced "dye"-nan"), that's OK too, although I'm not used to that. Formally many times, I like to use my middle name, Michael, although many times I abbreviate it. Having grown up without a middle name, I chose this at Confirmation and really like it. So, there are also some who call me Father Dennis Michael!

I am what we have normally called an Irish-American (as if you could not guess!). My grandparents, except for one, came from the "old country." We go back to the counties of Cavan, Leitrim, Mayo, and the Dinans come from the Cork area. The "Dinan" name, though common in Cork and elsewhere, in fact comes from a small officially-preserved, medieval fortified & charmed town in the northwest Brittany part of France. It is about 400 kilometers (250 miles), or 4 hours west of Paris. It is about 2½ hours west of Lisieux, the home of Saint Thérèse. Having been to Lisieux twice, but never to Dinan, it always leaves an open excuse to travel to Europe one last time! Every 2 years in June, they hold the *Fête des Remparts*, one of the oldest regularly-held, medieval-themed events in the world (Google it!). If I ever get there, I also want to visit Mont Saint-Michel, called a "Wonder of the Western World" (and could possibly make a nice parish trip). Legend claims that the famous Abbey began at the request of the Archangel Michael and a local Bishop built and consecrated a small church there in 709. Pope John Paul II made a retreat there when he was preparing to write the encyclical on

Mary, *Mother of the Redeemer*, in 1987. He focused his retreat on Saint Louis de Monfort's *True Devotion to Mary*, the source of the Holy Father's *Totus Tuus* devotion. Saint Louis was no stranger to the area. He mentions it in many of his works. I also found the town of Dinan mentioned in a number of his works. He preached Missions there. Obviously, they were in need of repentance! So, Dinan, Michael, and even Dennis, are somehow related to that geographical area.

Saint Denis (he did not spell it the Irish way) was the first Bishop of Paris. Tradition has it that he met his fate, as did his entourage, outside of Paris, at Montmartre (*Mount of the Martyrs*, close to today's location of the Basilica of the Sacré Cœur), while traveling back to Paris. Let's say, "He lost his head!" Others and I saw where it was "lost" & where it landed. Tradition has it also, that he picked it up and continued to walk into Paris, carrying it in his hands. I know! Most people think the same as you are doing right now. Twice, however, while traveling in Paris, bound for World Youth Day (WYD), I had to point out to the "non-believers" that the people who built Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris believed it, and they proudly displayed it on its façade! In the picture, he is the third from the left, between the two angels—not hard to single out! If you know another Dennis, caution him not to lose his!



Let me say, it is an honor to be here with you. Unfortunately, I never knew your beloved Pastor, Father Bill Scully. You will have to fill in the gaps for me. I think my assignment here was a surprise to me as it was to many others. Nonetheless, things turned out this way. I therefore accept it as God bringing us together. I am sure that he has his reasons, as he did for the assignments I have had elsewhere. We do not always see or know why. We really do have to walk and act in faith.

Surprisingly, I'm just guessing, I may not be far apart from Father Scully in age. I will be 67 in September. I entered the Seminary in 1987, probably some years after him—after 4 years in the US Navy, a Computer Science degree & career, with 9 yrs on Wall Street: consulting & Banking, and 7 in Boston: Engineering R&D in New Computer Systems. I was thirty-eight. I have now spent over 15 years in Orange County. I spent 4 years in Staten Island and the rest in Rockland. Before that I spent three years as a seminarian at St. Mary's in Marlboro, Ulster County. A great joy: in several parishes over the years I have assisted some priests with severe health problems and terminal illnesses. So, I have some understanding as how the parish might have been affected by Father Scully's health. I hope that I can spend my time being as useful as I can to the parish. At the same time, my hope is that I can serve you and your families as well. I will try my best to be as available as I can for that purpose.

When I baptize children, sometimes I question to myself how much some people know about the saints these days, either their own personal saints or their parish patron saint. I am kind of “in awe” knowing that we will be operating under the auspices and help of Saint Francis Xavier. He was a Spiritual Giant! In his book, *Saints Who Raised The Dead*, Father Albert J. Hebert documents true stories of 400 resurrection miracles in the lives of the saints. Guess what? Amazingly, Saint Francis Xavier was one of them who was raising them (actually God through him)! These were miracles associated with and following his preaching of the gospel. Recorded were twenty-eight people being raised from the dead. Additionally, there were countless other healings, amazing signs and wonders. This was not happening all of his life. Francis was once a brilliant student in Paris when he met Ignatius of Loyola. He was a worldly man, proud, and ambitious to accomplish things. For three years Ignatius patiently encouraged Francis to look at his life differently, asking him along the way, “*What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?*” (Mt 16:26 NABRE) or has been translated in the past as, “*and loses his soul?*” Francis followed as the first of Ignatius’s companions and was ordained in 1537. Perhaps his greatest miracles are the ones he caused in people’s souls, being an instrument of God’s grace. This is not surprising when we realize that because of his extensive evangelizing, missionary travels and hardships, this great Jesuit is considered to be one of the greatest missionaries since St. Paul. And guess what? He is ours! I think you and I have much to learn from this great saint. I believe that if we let him have full reign and intercede for us we will continue to see him working in our lives and in our parish. We might have to tell the people, “fasten your seatbelts!” In some way, I have been thinking that maybe he has had something to do with me being here! Anyway, I welcome him with you as my new Parish Patron Saint

What I am saying is not very far-fetched. As I write this, I am participating this week in an event at Mount Saint Mary’s College Campus in Newburgh called Camp Veritas. You can go to [www.campveritas.com](http://www.campveritas.com) and find out more of it. The Camp Veritas team just spent a week in Ireland with great success. It is here now. Next week in Emmetsburg, Maryland, and then August 16-22 at Camp Lakota in Wurtsboro, NY.

Let me first just ask, What do you think of our youth today? How would you describe them? What do you want for them? What are the possibilities that are open for them? If you could only answer these or other questions about them in a negative way, I am going to challenge you to come with me some evening that week in August and witness these young people in prayer, in Adoration before the Lord Jesus. You will be surprised! You will be in awe! You will want to be there with them! You will see that the work that Saint Francis Xavier did can still be done—that God still wants to work amazing signs and wonders—that he still raises people at any time and age from being spiritually dead to alive in him.

Arriving at St. Thomas of Canterbury a half-dozen years ago, I learned a favorite quote of the saint, also known as Thomas Becket, “Many are needed to plant and water what has been planted now that the faith has spread so far and there are so many people.... No matter who plants or waters, God gives no harvest unless what is planted is the faith of Peter and unless he agrees to his

teachings.” This is what these young people are receiving, “the faith of Peter.” That is what Saint Francis Xavier toiled to bring to the thousands upon thousands in his missionary efforts, “the faith of Peter.” Many before us have planted in the parish. Many of you have done the same. If we follow this wisdom, we will plant and God will give the harvest. You can read on their website, “Camp Veritas is organized exclusively for the purpose of inspiring and forming young Catholic teens into disciples of Jesus Christ. Camp Veritas is faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Catechism and to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church,” a.k.a. “the faith of Peter.” Now, God is giving a harvest!

I was recently at a Christian Leadership Institute in Monroe, offered by the Pallotine Teenage Federation that used to come under the heading of CYO. It is amazing to witness young people respond and gradually grow in their faith and in wisdom. The Teenage Federation is growing once again in Orange County. Months ago, I was asked to be Moderator of Orange. Now in Narrowsburg, they have asked me to be Moderator of Sullivan County along with Orange. I look forward to working in this with Sister Kevin John Shields, OP our Regional Director of Religious Education and Cathy Rauschendorfer, both of whom have a great love for the youth and experience in working with them.

All of us are needed to continue planting and to water what has already been planted. I now join you in sharing in the mission of the parish. I think this is an exciting time! I wonder what excitement was stirring Prophet Isaiah’s heart when God spoke these words through him, “*See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*” (Is 43:19). But God is always doing something new! We may not be aware of it. May God give us a great harvest through working in partnership with the Holy Spirit and Saint Francis Xavier and bring us His Peace, His *Shalom* in abundance!

Finally, what I will do here? Some things will depend on the needs of the people. Of course, there is general parish ministry. There is always Religious Ed. There can be Adult Ed. This can take the form of Bible Classes or other formats. There is a lot going on in the Church these days that we can take advantage of. I know lots of parishioners forming small groups, reading books together like *Forming Intentional Disciples* or *33 Days to Morning Glory*, praying and doing the works of *Divine Mercy*, or studying Sacred Scripture using courses like the *Bible Timeline* or other courses with Jeff Cavins. For over a decade I have written a weekly reflection (like this) on the Sunday Readings or some other significant topic to teach and, supplement my preaching—at the same time keeping me reading, studying, and up-to-date. Maybe we should take a parish trip. A priest friend is taking people to Poland, Prague and I think Vienna. Maybe we could join them or plan our own. If there is any interest, there is World Youth Day in Kraków, Poland in July 2016 with Pope Francis that we should look at. That would be #6 for me. It can be a great experience. These are trips of a lifetime! We’ll see!

Asking your prayers,  
God’s Peace †

