

LOTW Testimonial from a reluctant pastor

From: Father Nicholas Desimone [mailto:ndesimone@gmail.com]

Sent: Wednesday, February 08, 2017 10:58 AM

To: Dcn. Tim Weinmann

Cc: Rev. Jonathan P. Bakkelund

Subject: Re: Requesting your testimonial about the impact of the Light of the World retreat to your parish

Dear Deacon Tim,

I'm thrilled that you're considering LOTW for your parish in Kentucky. For me and for my parish, LOTW has been a game changer. I've attached an article that appeared in the Catholic Free Press, our local diocesan paper, about LOTW at Saint Mary Parish. It gives a good overview of my perspective as a pastor as well as the perspectives of parishioners who have experienced LOTW.

I came to Saint Mary Parish three and a half years ago and my initial feeling was that the parishioners expected a highly level of service and attention from the pastor and the pastoral staff, but they weren't willing to contribute to the life of the parish with their time or talents. Fr. Bakkelund had been telling me that I needed to bring LOTW to the parish but in my estimation we weren't ready because I didn't have the volunteer base to support it, to which Fr. Bakkelund replied that I REALLY needed to bring LOTW to the parish. He was right. As a pastor I am constantly bombarded with companies telling me that their program is the one thing that will save my parish. I'm sure that many of them are good but I quickly came to realize that no program could save my parish, only Jesus Christ and an authentic encounter with him could save it. For me and my parish, that encounter has come through LOTW.

I admit at first glance LOTW seems daunting or even overwhelming but the support that I received from the central office in Illinois and the team of volunteers that came to lead the first retreat were truly a blessing. They helped to put everything into perspective and led us through the process one step at a time. It is all very manageable.

Here are just a few highlights of parish life at Saint Mary Church since LOTW:

1. We have held five LOTW retreats with the sixth retreat being held in March
2. More than 120 parishioners have participated in a LOTW retreat. (This is largely because someone who has experienced a LOTW retreat has invited others to come. It survives and thrives because parishioners are actively inviting others to come.)
3. Approximately ten small faith communities have formed in the parish and meet regularly. (To me this is one of the most significant parts of the LOTW experience. It's difficult to live the faith apart from a community of faith. These small faith communities allow people to continue the journey they began on the retreat. They engage in prayer, study, service, and fellowship.)
4. Since beginning LOTW in the Fall of 2014, 182 families have joined the parish. Obviously that isn't all because of LOTW but I sincerely believe that part of the reason is because of LOTW and the parishioners who have experienced it are more welcoming to people and are actively inviting people back to church.

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5. New ministries have been born in the parish largely through the efforts of LOTW participants and existing ministries have received new life through an influx in participants.

The parish has gotten stronger, and my job has gotten easier.

Finally, what I notice most about my parishioners who have participated in LOTW is their willingness and ability to speak meaningfully about the faith and about their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They have a desire to share what they've received and they actively promote the faith to their families, friends, co-workers, even strangers. I am overwhelmed by many of their stories of conversion and how Jesus is working in their lives.

I hope that this email helps. Be assured of my prayers.

Peace,

Fr. Nick

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