

Out Reach

Saint Francis Xavier Brooklyn
Fall /Winter 2019-2020

Father Bill Rueger on life and joy ...

In June 2005 Fr. William Rueger became the 8th Pastor of St. Francis Xavier and the longest serving Pastor since Msgr. David J. Hickey, the first Pastor of St. Francis Xavier. Struck by the diversity and relative young age of the parishioners, Fr. Rueger undertook his first Pastorate in his 29 years as a priest here at St. Francis Xavier. Now, 15 years and over 2000 marriages and baptisms later, he is moving onto the next phase of his priesthood. OutReach interviewed “Fr. Bill” as a way to say farewell and for him to say farewell to us.

OUTREACH: You once recounted in one of your sermons (and I’m paraphrasing) how it was a leap of personal growth and faith and a decision you struggled with to take on the pastorate at SFX. How did it turn out?

FATHERBILL: Being Pastor of SFX was almost always a great joy. The people of the parish are energetic and



Father Bill with altar servers Gabrielle and Danielle Phillip along with their dad, Francis

are faithful to Christ. That makes everything work out well. I say “almost” because the administrative duties are daunting, to say the least. The last part made me hesitant to become a Pastor. I have always found that concentrating

solely on the ministry to be the most important aspect of being a good priest, and the administration of a parish is a distraction. Yet, if I did not take on that responsibility here, I would not have had the occasion to share my faith with such wonderful people.

OR: Can you briefly reflect on some of your most important accomplishments at SFX?

FB: It’s hard to measure accomplishments in this vocation. I could list activities, events, various ministries, etc., but I see none of them as true accomplishments; they are the work of the Lord, not me. I do want to believe that I have helped people grow spiritually, but only the Lord can answer that.

OR: What will you remember most about your time at SFX?

FB: Again, that is hard to pinpoint as there are so many. If I could sum it up in one thing I would say that it is the strong faith of the people here

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Photo by J. Napoli

Father Bill at the Seventh Heaven Fair



Photo by Steve Kabacinski

Blessing of the animals on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi

especially knowing that their peers, meaning relatively young adults with families, do not believe in Christ or the Catholic Church. SFX people do, and that is truly a blessing.

OR: __What are you most proud of having done at SFX?

FB: I am always cautious when someone asks me what I am “proud of”. After all, pride is one of the seven deadly sins. However, that being said, I am proud of being able to let go of a “good thing” - being Pastor here for so many years. I have seen how many pastors, good pastors, have stayed too long in one place and not given other priests the opportunity to share their faith with a particular parish.

OR: What do you hope the parishioners will remember most about your time at SFX?

FB: That we really enjoyed being followers of Jesus—and when we didn’t always agree, we understood that the



Photo by Steve Kabacinski

Father Bill with Esperanza Rodriquez, Pat Siconolfi, Msgr. George Deas and Haydee Von Sternberg at a parish Christmas party

parish was about something bigger than ourselves, our commitment to Christ.

OR: Do you have any regrets?

FB: Regrets...only that I don’t have the energy to do more.

OR: What do you look forward to most as you move on?

FB: I look forward to helping other pastors “get a break”. As we all know, to be a priest in this day and age means you have to wear many

“hats”, and that can be exhausting. I hope I make it easier for some to do that.

OR: What if any suggestions would you have for your successor?

FB: All my successor has to do is be a person of faith, put Jesus at the center and see Christ in all of our parishioners. If he does that he will be a mega hit.

OR: What suggestions would you have for the parishioners?

FB: Realize that just as all parishioners have different personalities, all priests do too. Yet we are all united by one faith in Christ Jesus. Be open to that difference and rejoice in that unity.

Fr. Bill will be with us at St. Francis Xavier until the end of January,



Father Bill greeting parishioners after Mass

2020. That will give all who choose to an opportunity to say goodbye to Fr. Bill, personally, at the end of Mass or by sending him a note or card telling

him what he has meant to us here at SFX. Also, there will be a special mass for Fr. Bill in January followed by a reception. And other event(s) are in the planning stages. These will be announced in the weekly bulletin. We all appreciate and are thankful for Fr. Bill's strong, unwavering faith in Christ and in us. And we are grateful for all the hard work he has done. He is being modest when he minimizes his accomplishments. He has kept SFX together, strong and faithful during some very difficult times the past 15 years and he has always made himself

available to anyone who needed him. Thank you for all you have done and for all that you are Fr. Bill. Good Luck.

About that song with the turtle doves

“On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me....”

Everybody knows how this tune goes, even if we can't always remember the words. But even those who can recite the splendid order of gifts—the twelve drummers drumming, eleven pipers piping, ten lords-a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking, seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five golden rings; four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree—far fewer people know the source of the song, its value or its meaning.

A recent article appearing in Smithsonian Magazine, “12 Facts About the 12 Days of Christmas,” helps to dispel some of the song's myths and highlights some interesting facts. Among them:

- The earliest printed version appeared in 1780 in the book *Myrth Without Mischief*. It appeared as a poem, not a song, in a form then known as ‘cumulative verse.’ The poem was set to music only recently, in the 20th Century.

- It is often said that the song was written to teach Catholic Children in Ireland the Catechism under British rule in the 1700s, at a time when Catholic teachings were forbidden, and that each of the gifts has a symbolic meaning. This explanation has been dispelled by researchers in recent years.

- There really are 12 days of Christmas! Christmas begins on December 25 and ends on January 5, the Feast of the Epiphany.

- Of the animals represented in the song were commonly eaten during feasts in early Europe.

- Giving someone all the gifts in the song would, in today's terms, be a very expensive gift—running over \$30,000.

The article, 12 Facts about the 12 Days of Christmas, can be found here: The article, 12 Facts about the 12 Days of Christmas, can be found here: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/12-facts-about-12-days-christmas-180967569/>

With Gratitude To Father Bill

*"It has been such a pleasure welcoming children into our Faith with you. You will be sorely missed. Good luck in your new role.
—The Baptism Committee*

*"The SFX gardeners would like to thank Father Bill for his support and appreciation of our efforts in making the garden bloom. All the Best, Father Bill, as you continue your priestly pilgrimage of service to God's people."
—The Garden Ministry*

*"The Library extends a God's Peace to you, Father Bill, as you transition to a new time in your life. If you're like most of us maybe now you'll be able to make a dent in that stack of books on the nightstand! All good wishes for a happy and fulfilling path post-SFX. God bless you."
—The Lending Library Ministry*

The past and current members of the SFX Pastoral Planning Council are grateful to have worked with Fr. Bill to meet the pastoral needs of the parish over the past 15+ years. Your collaboration and guidance has been appreciated. We wish you all the best for your next chapter.

*We thank you for your many years of service here at St Francis Xavier. We will miss you and your great homilies. The Rosarians wish you well, and our prayer is that the future holds good health, peace, contentment and good friends. May God continue to bless you.
Love and prayers.*

The past and current executive board of SFX Youth Sports is grateful to have worked with you, Fr. Bill, to serve the families of our parish and of the greater Brooklyn community over the past 15+ years. Your cooperation and



Maria McGrath holds her baby daughter Maria Louise while Father Bill baptizes her and big sister Conway looks on

collaboration has been invaluable to the extraordinary growth of our ministerial organization during that time. We will keep you in our prayers as you continue to follow your calling in Christ's name.

*May you be wrapped in God's warmth and love in all your future endeavors.
Marge Danser, Prayer Shawl Committee*

*On behalf of the SFX Music Ministry I would like to thank Fr. Bill for all his support and encouragement over the past fifteen years. That support has enabled us to maintain the prayerful beauty that is an indelible part of our faith lives here at Saint Francis. We wish you much happiness in your future endeavors.
Michael Kaminski*

Fr. Bill, The Hospitality Committee wishes you good health and much happiness as you explore the road ahead. May you be welcomed at many doors...and don't forget St. Francis Xavier's!

*Dear Father Bill,
Thank you for planting seeds of faith in our hearts and minds that will help us grow into strong people of faith. Thank you for teaching and guiding us and bringing us closer to Jesus.
We wish you much happiness and many blessings as you leave St. Francis.
With love and prayers,
The Children of St. Francis Xavier*

Dear Father Bill-- we at the Website Committee thank you for your support of our efforts over the years and wish you well in your retirement.