

# St. John Vianney Catholic Church's longtime pastor retires

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STAFF PHOTO BY ANDREW CEPHAS



The Rev. Peter Daly leads communion during one of his final Masses Tuesday morning at St. John Vianney Catholic Church. Daly officially retired July 12 and is being replaced by the Rev. Daniel Carson.

After pastoring at St. John Vianney Catholic Church for 23 years, the Rev. Peter Daly has retired and is redirecting his advocacy to legally assisting immigrants and refugees in Washington, D.C.

Daly grew up in a Catholic family in Chicago, where he resided until he was 18 and moved to Baltimore. After graduating from the University of Virginia, Daly attended law school in Washington, D.C., and, subsequently, entered the seminary in Italy. Following the completion of his seminary, he returned to Washington, D.C., and worked at various locations before being coming to Calvert County, including Saint Francis Xavier Church, Saint Gabriel Catholic Church and the Catholic University of America.

In 1994, Daly was appointed to serve as the tenth pastor of St. John Vianney Catholic Church. Daly said the church membership grew from 400 families to 1,200 since he took over. He largely attributed this to the “great growth in population” the county saw up until 2008.



The Rev. Peter Daly of St. John Vianney Catholic Church in Prince Frederick, pictured here in 2015, created a partnership with American Chestnut Land Trust to connect the church property with the trust's trail system and preserve green space as part of his larger project to make the church more environmentally friendly.

“As a result, this campus grew. We grew from just a little church on Main Street to [now having] seven buildings here and about 40 acres that we actually use. We’ve added things over the years,” Daly said while sitting in his office at the church. “We’ve done \$12 million worth of construction and it’s all paid for.”

St. John Vianney Catholic Church opened Christian Beginnings Pre-school in 1996 before subsequently opening a parish cemetery the following year, the church’s website states. A new church and family life center was built in the early 2000s and the parish center was renovated and expanded in 2012. The church also has two houses for retired priests on the campus.

Throughout his years at St. John Vianney, Daly has continuously stressed the need to get outside of the church’s walls and do God’s work.

“The job of a pastor is not just to be pastor of his own people, but to reach out into the community. My big concerns have been the concerns of Jesus in the 25th chapter of Matthew where he says ‘the homeless, the hungry, the imprisoned, the sick and the stranger,’” Daly said. “My focus has been basically what’s on the last judgement.”

Along with expanding the church's ministry to local nursing homes, Calvert Memorial Hospital, the Calvert County Detention Center and the Calvert County Drug Treatment Center, in 1997 Daly was instrumental in establishing the crisis pregnancy center, Birthright, and Project ECHO, a shelter for the homeless. Daly led the effort to establish Safe Nights of Calvert County in 2008 and three years later the St. John Vianney Interfaith Food Pantry opened, which he said is the second largest in the county — feeding 130 to 150 families a week.

“All of those things helped us be more and more involved in the community,” Daly said, describing the mass conducted every Sunday in Spanish and the Spanish bible studies the church used to host. “One of the things I'm happy about is this has become a center in the community. One of the places where lots of people — Catholic and non-Catholic — can come and be part of activities here.”

Daly said the Calvert Interfaith Council and the Daughters of Abraham were started at St. John Vianney. The church also worked with the American Chestnut Land Trust (ACLT) to start a trail which begins on the church's campus and goes seven miles to the bay.

“We sold 50 acres of our property to the ACLT over the years to be preserved in their natural state as long as the land trust exists. It's a way of preserving the land. I think that's very important because the pope has called on us to be good stewards of the environment,” he explained, adding St. John Vianney is the only parish in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington to use solar energy.

St. John Vianney adopted a Nicaraguan church as a sister parish and financed the construction of almost 400 houses there. Daly also led efforts to adopt three sister parishes in Mexico and Our Mother of Mercy Parish in Mississippi to assist them in rebuilding their parish buildings after Hurricane Katrina.

Daly has led parish pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land in 1997, the footsteps of St. Paul and St. John in Turkey and Greece in 2007 and in 2013 the home of St. John Vianney in France.

“St. John Vianney was a 19th-century French saint. A lot of people who are not Catholics don't really [know] we name our churches after holy people because we want to imitate their lives. He's the patron saint of parish priests. The patron saint is the one who sort of is your model or example,” Daly explained.

When asked what the most important thing he has learned through his years in ministry, Daly said kindness and mercy are more important than anything else. He also said he's learned that every life has a story. Daly said he will miss the people of St. John Vianney the most.

“They become good friends. There's a continuity in life. You baptize them. You're there for their first communion, their confirmation and sometimes even for their wedding. You bury their parents. You become very intimately connected to the lives of these families and so it's very hard to say goodbye to that,” Daly said.

Daly confirmed he chose to retire because he doesn't have the energy required to maintain the position at a level he saw fit. He referred to the shortage of clergy in the Catholic church as a reason for his exhaustion. Daly credited the church's 250 volunteers, who give at least an hour a week to the church, for their assistance over the years.

"The other thing is I think it's time for me to move on to do something new. What I'll be doing now is working with immigrants and refugees in Washington, D.C., and trying to help them with their legal problems. I'll be working for Catholic Charities," Daly disclosed, adding he will also be conducting burials at Arlington National Cemetery and assisting churches.

Daly's shoes will be filled by the Rev. Daniel Carson who was previously pastoring at Saint Francis Xavier Church in St. Mary's County. Daly conducted his final mass alone Wednesday morning, as he is now working to ease Carson's transition into the position.