

Farewell  
Fr. Peter Daly  
Parish Diary  
September 18, 2012

*(Fr. Peter Daly says farewell to his CNS readers after nearly 20 years of Parish Diary.)*

After nearly 20 years, it is time to say good bye to my readers in the diocesan Catholic press. I am sad, but I know its time to move on.

I began writing Parish Diary for Catholic News Service in January of 1994. I have written every two weeks since, more than 350 columns. Together they chronicle parish life over the last two decades.

I started writing for the Outlook Section of the Sunday *Washington Post* in 1987. The *Post* was looking for a clergyman to write a series of articles on what it was like to be a pastor in Washington, DC. I continued writing for our Archdiocesan newspaper and eventually Catholic News Service picked it up.

Much has changed in the last two decades. Both the Church and our society have become much more polarized. The divide seems to be growing.

I have always tried to be a voice from the center.

The work of the parish priest, however, has not changed much. The message of Jesus Christ is still the same. Priests are still called to love and serve our people. We still preach, teach, comfort and forgive. My life revolves around the sacraments and the scripture. My parish has become my spiritual family.

But parish ministry is not purely parochial. It has taken me far beyond the walls of the church and boundaries of the parish, to other countries and to people. I have tried to share that experience with you.

We have helped rebuild a parish in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina. We have gone on mission to Mexico and helped build houses in Nicaragua. We have bought oxen for farmers in Zambia and sent missionaries to Africa and Asia. It is all very exciting.

Here at home, the gospel concern for the hungry and homeless has taken our parish outward to shelter and feed the needy who are our neighbors. I firmly believe that if we do not forget the poor, God will not forget us.

These last two decades have not been an easy time to be a Catholic priest.

Scandals have wounded us. The terrible sins of child abuse committed by some priests have wounded us all. The bonds of trust between bishops and priests have been harmed by the scandals too.

Also, we parish priests are older and fewer.

For the last 20 years, in North America anyway, the Catholic Church has ordained about half as many priests as we need to replace the ones who die or resign. Everyday in the U.S. there is one less priest than the day before.

As a result, we are tired. Sometimes I feel like a sacramental machine.

In the last two decades the Church has changed culturally. We are increasingly a Latino church. I had to learn Spanish. Our parish offers mass and some programs in Spanish. In my opinion, this change has been a great blessing. It has also been a challenge.

The Catholic press has also changed. Many Catholic papers have closed or reduced their frequency. Some have shifted to monthly or quarterly magazines.

I am deeply grateful for the chance to chronicle the joys and sorrows, successes and defeats of an ordinary parish priest. The parish is where the Church really lives.

I will continue to write for other publications. I may even write a book.

Thanks for all your letters over the years. And thanks most of all for letting me come into your life when you read the column.

It has been a joy and a blessing to share my life with you.