



Christmas 2011

Dearest Parishioners,

Peace in the Lord. This coming year, 2012, is a special year. Our Church celebrates its **125<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a parish**. We have already inaugurated this year with a parish Mission (Retreat) on the joy and peace of Christmas. Our preacher, Fr. Bill Gaffney, had touched many hearts with uplifting reflections full of love and hopefulness. Also, several parish events are scheduled for 2012; consult the flyer that has already been distributed and is posted on our parish website [www.churchofstbridget.com](http://www.churchofstbridget.com).

The theme guiding us this year is: **“Thankful for our Past, United in our Present, Working for our Future.”**

**Thankful for our Past:** In 1868, shortly after the Civil War, our parish began as a mission of St. Mary, Gloucester City serving a band of about 20 Irish families working in the local glass industry. From this small group arose our parish in 1887. In the early 1900’s many Italian immigrants settled in our parish giving it a rich presence that is still vibrant today. A small and vibrant group of African-American Catholics has been a part of our parish for many decades. The Black Catholic Ministry is still a dynamic ministry in our parish. Over the years, faculty, employees, and students of Glassboro State College (now Rowan University) have been members of our parish. They have brought a cultured and cosmopolitan flavor to our church. Within the last decade the Hispanic ministry has flourished here, now forming an integral part of our parish. Finally, since June 2010, the Catholic Campus Ministry at Rowan University is the third leg of our parish family.

**United in our Present:** As you can see in this synopsis, our parish has evolved from humble beginnings to a truly unique parish. There is no other parish like ours in the diocese and perhaps in the entire country! Yet this presents a challenge to us: our present parish structure invites us to think beyond just our past or just within the context of a small circle of friends and companions. How does my praying, socializing, and ministering positively impact the whole parish? How does our parish positively impact the local community? How do I reach out to others (especially new members) in the parish? How do we integrate and build upon the three sectors of our parish? Our parish emblem is the Cross of St. Bridget surrounded by the three sectors of the parish stating that “The Cross of Christ Unites Us” (“La Cruz de Cristo Nos Une”). In short, how do we reach out to one another in order to integrate and build up our parish community? Also, in our inevitable shortcomings and mistakes, how do we humbly reach out to one another so as not to accuse and condemn but to lift up and heal?

**Working for Our Future:** The future of St. Bridget Parish is in **EVERYBODY’S HANDS**. It is not just Fr. Matthew’s parish. It is not just the elders’ parish. It is not just the parish of a few generous individuals or groups that seem to always volunteer. It is the parish of every parishioner: rich or poor; Black, White or Latino; clergy or laity; young, middle-aged or elderly; sick or healthy; territorial members or members of the Hispanic and Rowan University communities. It is **OUR PARISH!** The parish is in our hands! How do **I** contribute? How do clergy, religious, and laity – each with his or hers gifts and responsibilities – collaborate and contribute to the

unity and growth of our parish? Each week in our bulletin there is a whole list of ministries and prayer groups. More can be added to the list. How am **I** a generous and dynamic member of **my** parish? Passivity is not an option! Only active, generous love that goes beyond my small world will assure a vibrant future for St. Bridget Church.

Finally, I end with three exhortations regarding our Catholic faith and parish:

**Pray:** All begins with prayer: my personal life, my family life, and my parish life. We began our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary year with a Parish Mission – a few days of prayer, unity, and reflective listening. Our year will end with a Parish Mission. Prayer is my “love-line” to God, to my family, and to my own heart. We learn about God at the kitchen table as well as at the altar table. At the table we share in fellowship and are fed. May prayer in its many and beautiful forms be the soil, the sunshine, and the rain to help our parish blossom.

**Understand:** We need to actively and passionately understand our Catholic faith. The sins of our Church and the ignorance of our Catholic faith are a two-edged sword that has deeply hurt our families, parishes, and society. Take advantage of all that our parish is offering regarding faith formation and spiritual growth. Many opportunities are offered; yet, few take advantage of them! I suggest going to YOU-TUBE and looking up Father Robert Barron, a priest from the Chicago Archdiocese. He is one of the best messengers of our Catholic faith. His book *Catholicism* as well as the companion PBS documentary series – *The Catholicism Project* are rich mines to explore our Catholic faith.

**Live:** Prayer and understanding have their fruition only in living out the Catholic faith. Prayer and understanding will transform thoughts, words and actions into a **lifestyle of faith, hope and love**. Faith comes to full fruition in a life of joy and compassion. Joy and compassion do not exclude the challenges and sorrows of life; yet, a spirit of joy and compassionate caring will see us through life’s challenges and sorrows. Joy goes beyond simple happiness. Happiness is often based on a situation or rewards. Joy – the fruit of the Holy Spirit – reaches deep into the heart. Joy is based on loving relationships – with God, oneself, and others. The words of St. Augustine succinctly describe this joy: “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in Thee.”

A most blessed Christmas and a New Year full of hope and healing to all and to your loved ones, especially those who are ill or are in need.

Fr. Matthew Weber  
Pastor, Church of St. Bridget