

Since I made the announcement about the new pastor this weekend I have been asked lots of different questions about the transition and thought it might be helpful to address them in this format so that all of you who might have questions will be able to get the answers straight from me.

Why is Fr. Lappe being moved?

This one is pretty easy. When I was assigned to St. Thomas I was assigned for six years, my six years are up, thus it is pretty normal that I would be moved to a new assignment at this time. There was always the possibility that I would be reassigned for another six years, and I had hoped that would be the case. However, the fact is that in most cases, priests who are completing their first term as pastor are moved. For example Fr. Olson was moved after one term at St. Rose, my home parish which was his first assignment as pastor, Fr. Nagel was moved after his first term at St. Mary in Port Angeles. In fact as I think more about it, just about every priest I know was moved after six years in their first pastorate. I have been here six years in a parish that is relatively smaller and now they move me to a parish which is larger.

It is true however, that occasionally a priest will be reassigned for another six year term, but what determines that more than anything is the needs of the Archdiocese. Each year the Archbishop works very hard to make sure that all of the parishes in Seattle will be able to have pastors or full time priest administrators. Just looking at this process from the outside it is easy to see what a difficult task it is. There are simply not enough priests who can be pastors to cover all the parishes of the Archdiocese of Seattle. There are many cases where parishes have remained without a resident priest for a number of years until someone can fill the slot. The Archbishop has to replace all of those priests who are retiring each year, along with all the priests who no longer serve as pastors for whatever reason, as well as those who become ill or die. It takes a lot of work, and I have always been very impressed by Archbishop Brunett's ability to provide the best pastoral care possible for all of his parishes.

In my case, due to a series of open parishes that needed priests, the Archbishop determined that he wanted me to take the parish in Bremerton. When you are ordained a diocesan priest you promise obedience to the bishop and his successors, therefore when the bishop tells me to go Bremerton I consider that to be an expression of the Will of God for my life, and so I am very happy to follow it. In this Archdiocese, the priest doesn't need to express any desires to stay or move or to go someplace in particular. I learned in the seminary from Msgr. Dolan, "Never ask for an assignment, and never ask to get out of one," and I hope to always follow that advice. I don't ever want to take my life into my own hands and try to set the direction for it – obedience is a much safer route to heaven.

So, the reason I am being moved is because that is what the Archbishop needed, and he is a successor of the Apostles, and so I trust that he has made this decision with much prayer and discernment and that it is the right decision.

Then why was Fr. Belisle assigned here for 20 years?

This is actually kind of interesting. Fr. Belisle was assigned here in 1982, which was one year before the new Code of Canon Law was issued. In the old code there was no mention of term limits and so he could have stayed here as long as he wanted because he was assigned under the old code. In the 1983 code provision is made for “term limits” to be determined by the local ordinary. In the territory of the United States that term is usually six years.

What is Fr. Gillette like?

Obviously for most of you that’s the important question. Frankly I don’t know too much. I have met him a number of times as he was assigned as the Associate Pastor at St. Joseph in Vancouver a few years ago. Fr. Olson speaks very highly of him. He says that he is a good, holy, and faithful priest. He said that he is a good preacher and “won’t give people a bunch of pap” (at which point Fr. Olson wondered whether or not people would adjust well...)

I should have found out more before I made the announcement, but I only found out on Thursday afternoon who was coming to replace me. Since then however, one of our parishioners called and spoke with some of the staff at the parishes where Fr. Gillette is assigned. This is what he found out: He is about 45 years old and likes to be called “Fr. Gillette” and not “Fr. Peter”, is charming, but a little shy at first, he has a dry sense of humour, he is very much a gentleman, is traditional and orthodox, and is a “holy” priest. He is from the diocese of Cape Coast in Ghana, and his staff described his English as “good” and even “beautiful”. He struggles with some of the uglier parts of American culture (which we all should) and most importantly, he will be missed very much by the people there.

To me all of these things are very good news. Looking through a list of all the priests who were moved this year, Fr. Gillette would have been in my top tier of replacements. And I have every confidence that he is going to do a great job here at this parish. I hope that all of you will share in my enthusiasm and welcome him to St. Thomas.

Why is he a priest administrator and not a “Pastor”?

As I understand it, the Archdiocese of Seattle has a policy, which was put into place just a few years ago, that all new priests and priests from outside the Archdiocese need to go through a five year program before they are named “Pastors”. Since Fr. Gillette has not completed that program he is not yet a pastor.

How long will Fr. Gillette be here?

I would assume that he will be here for five years at least, but that will also continue to depend on the needs of the Archdiocese as well as the generosity of his bishop who is allowing him to serve here outside of his home diocese. I believe Fr. Gillette is also working on a degree at the University of Portland, so he will be a part-time student while he is here as well.

When do you transfer?

I will be leaving St. Thomas on June 30th. It will be a busy couple of months leading up to that date. After First Communion in May I am going to be going down to San Diego for a week to see my brother Justin as he is getting back from Iraq, and my new niece Anna Marie, my brother Jay's daughter who was born yesterday while her father is on a ship somewhere off the coast of Africa. Then I am going to Chicago for a new program I was recently accepted into for priest Spiritual Directors. Then I come back for confirmation with Bishop Tyson (May 19) and the Corpus Christi celebration. My brother Justin will be getting married here at St. Thomas on June 6th (D-Day). June 15th all of the priests of the Archdiocese will be going to Ocean Shores for our Annual Priest Days and then we have the usual Family Camp, June 20-22 and Quo Vadis Days, June 22-25.

Again, I will be very saddened to leave St. Thomas, however this is also a great opportunity for this parish. You all will be blessed in many ways with a new priest, with a different personality, and different strengths and charisms. I am sure that Fr. Gillette will continue to build on many of the things we have accomplished here in the last six years as well as continue to lead all of you to deeper holiness and love for God.

-Fr. Lappe