

Scranton church rallies pro-life community

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



Pro-life marches don't have to be relegated to bigger cities like Little Rock and Rogers.

In the town of Scranton (Logan County), with a population of around 250 people, St. Ignatius Church has organized an annual pro-life march since 2019 — an event that has united Christians across denominations and has gotten over half of the town's population to publicly display their beliefs.

Father John Miranda, pastor of St. Ignatius Church in Scranton, St. Meinrad Church in Prairie View and Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Morrison Bluff, has been in the parish since 2017.

He said he noticed parishioners were having to make the two-hour drive to Little Rock for pro-life events.

"I realized that the CYM kids ... would go to Little Rock to participate in the March (for Life each January)," Father Miranda said. "And when I asked them, they said, 'Father, it's a two-hour drive each way, four hours all together. It's not possible.' And then I said, 'You know what? We can do it here.' And then we started it. We asked the other churches."

Father Miranda reached out to the churches in the town and explained that he was putting together a pro-life march so people didn't have to drive to Little Rock. Other faith leaders began sharing information about the march with their own congregations.

Father Miranda's other parishes also join the march.

“All of the churches come to Scranton ... I also ask people from Subiaco and other churches, if they’re interested they can come,” he said. “So we do have a mixed group, not just people from my parish. I would say from everywhere.”

Over the past five years, Scranton has faced several challenges in getting the march, which is held in February, together, from staying healthy during COVID to navigating winter weather. But at each march, anywhere from 120 to 150 people show up with signs and march around the town.

“We inform the sheriff about it, and he sends two deputies, and they block the road for us,” Father Miranda said. “We go down the street, go around town and come back.”

Katrina Willems, a parishioner at St. Ignatius, has helped parishioners prepare for the march since its inception.

“We have a church in Scranton, Prairie View and Morrison Bluff ... we joined all three of our churches together, and we all met at the hall and we had our religious education programs,” Willems said. “The kids made posters and banners and with all of our church members who wished to participate. We all met right here at the church, and for our elderly that wanted to join but could walk, we had golf carts and side by sides.”

Willems said part of the route consists of walking along the highway in town and displaying their beliefs for passersby.

“It’s just this really moving moment — we’re just walking down the highway and cars are pulling over because they’re in awe and wonder of what’s going on,” she said. “And with our banners and signs, you can visibly see that this is a march for life. Then we all meet back at the church. It’s really simple, but it makes a really bold statement with that big of a group together in a public statement of where we stand on the issue of life.”

Father Miranda said it’s important for all parishes and towns, regardless of size, to publicly display their pro-life beliefs.

“This is a very, very small community here ... they’re very closely knit,” Father Miranda said. “I don’t think we should divide ourselves saying that we are Catholics, and they are Baptists — we are all children of God. I think all of us need to understand that God is giving us life, and that should not be something that we differentiate with each other in. We are all children of God.”

Willems encouraged other parishes to start their own marches especially if they are some distance from Little Rock.

“It was a really simple idea that Father John thought of,” she said. “It’s so easy. We just let our church know when we’re going to meet at the hall. We’ll have golf carts available. We usually have donuts and coffee beforehand for fellowship. And then we just take off and start walking. It’s not a hard thing to do, it’s just that you have to plan it really — to say, ‘Hey, we’re going to come together and do this.’ And I think once that first march is over, you just get that feeling of making such a bold statement. There was something about being on the highway and the cars that we’re stopping and seeing the amazing on their faces. I think that’s the biggest thing — just asking your church to try this out.”



More than 150 participants in the Scranton March for Life walk around the town, holding signs and banners before marching alongside the highway in January 2021. (Katrina Willems)

Leadership changes set for churches, diocesan offices

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Frank V. DuPreez relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Joseph Church in Pine Bluff; Holy Cross Church in Sheridan and St Mary Church in Plum Bayou, to cover St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Fayetteville from May 25-June 14, after which time he will return to South Africa to continue his ministry in his home Diocese of Cape Town.

Rev. Joseph Marconi appointed pastor of St. Joseph Church in Pine Bluff, Holy Cross Church in Sheridan, St. Mary Church in Plum Bayou and prison ministry in Pine Bluff. He is relieved of his responsibilities as associate pastor of Christ the King Church in Little Rock.

Effective June 14

Rev. Leon Ngandu Wa Tshianga, SVD, relieved of his responsibilities as administrator of St. Patrick Church and St. Mary Church in North Little Rock and as hospital chaplain at St. Vincent Infirmiry in Little Rock (effective June 1) to continue his ministry with the Society of Divine Word.

Rev. Jack Vu appointed pastor of St. Patrick Church in North Little Rock. This is in addition to his current responsibilities as rector of the Cathedral of St. Andrew, and as minister to the Vietnamese community in Little Rock.

Rev. Francis Damoah, SVD, appointed pastor of St. Mary Church in North Little Rock. This is in addition to his current responsibilities as pastor of St. Bartholomew Church in Little Rock, and

St. Augustine Church in North Little Rock. He is relieved of his responsibilities as hospital chaplain at St. Vincent Infirmary in Little Rock (effective, June 1.)

Dc. Charles "Chuck" Ashburn appointed assistant director for development and academic advising in the Office of Vocations and Seminarians in the Diocese of Little Rock. This is in addition to his current responsibilities as deacon at the Cathedral of St. Andrew, Catholic High School for Boys and the House of Formation. He is relieved of his responsibilities as diocesan director of faith formation and diocesan director of permanent diaconate formation.

Rev. Erik Pohlmeier appointed director of faith formation and permanent diaconate formation in the Diocese of Little Rock, with residence at Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock. He is relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock.

Rev. John Marconi appointed pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock. He is relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Joseph Church in Conway.

Rev. Anthony Robbins appointed pastor of St. Joseph Church in Conway. He is relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Louis Church in Camden; and Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Magnolia.

Rev. Alfhones Perikala, a priest of the Diocese of Nellore, India, appointed associate pastor of St. Joseph Church in Conway.

Rev. Mariadass Vallapaneni appointed associate pastor of St. Joseph Church in Conway. He is relieved of his responsibilities as associate pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church and Blessed John Newman University Parish in Jonesboro.

Rev. Balaraju Desam, a priest of the Diocese of Nellore, India, appointed associate pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church and Blessed John Newman University Parish in Jonesboro.

Rev. Rajasekhar Chappidi relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Malvern, Good Shepherd Church in Fordyce and St. Mary Church in Arkadelphia, to continue his ministry in his home Diocese of Nellore, India.

Rev. Phillip Reaves appointed pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Malvern, Good Shepherd Church in Fordyce and St. Mary Church in Arkadelphia. He is relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Stuttgart and Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in Slovak.

Rev. Shaun Wesley appointed pastor of Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in Slovak and from administrator to pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church in Carlisle and Holy Trinity Church in England.

Rev. Clayton Gould appointed pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Stuttgart. He is relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Michael Church in Van Buren.

Rev. C. Richard "Rick" Hobbs, III, appointed administrator of St. Michael Church in Van Buren. He is relieved of his responsibilities as associate pastor of St. Stephen Church in Bentonville; and as administrator of St. John the Evangelist Church in Huntsville.

Rev. Francis Madanu, a priest of the Diocese of Nellore, India, appointed associate pastor of St. Stephen Church in Bentonville.

Rev. Mathew Vianney Malapati Santhaiah relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Albert Church in Heber Springs. He remains pastor of St. James Church in Searcy and St. Richard Church in Bald Knob.

Rev. Felix Chirapurahtel, O. Praem. , appointed administrator of St. Albert Church in Heber Springs and associate pastor for Hispanic Ministry at St. Mary Church in Batesville. He is relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Blytheville and St. Matthew Church in Osceola.

Rev. Thomas J. "T. J. " Hart appointed pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Blytheville and St. Matthew Church in Osceola. He is relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in North Little Rock (Marche).

Rev. Rubén Quinteros appointed administrator of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in North Little Rock (Marche). He is relieved of his responsibilities as prefect of the House of Formation in Little Rock.

Dc. Richard Taryn Whittington, to be ordained to the priesthood on May 28, appointed prefect of the House of Formation in Little Rock.

Dc. Norman McFall, to be ordained to the priesthood on May 28, appointed associate pastor for Hispanic Ministry at Christ the King Church in Fort Smith, and hospital chaplain at Mercy Hospital Fort Smith.

Dc. Mario Jacobo, to be ordained to the priesthood on May 28, appointed associate pastor of St. Theresa Church in Little Rock.

Dc. Joseph Tan Chan, to be ordained to the priesthood on May 28, will study at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. , this summer from June 2-Aug. 4. He is appointed associate pastor of the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock and St. Patrick Church in North Little Rock, effective Aug. 5.

Rev. Ravi Gudipalli relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Booneville and St. Jude Thaddeus Church in Waldron, to continue his ministry in his home Diocese of Nellore, India.

Rev. Alejandro Puello appointed administrator of Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Booneville and St. Jude Thaddeus Church in Waldron. He is relieved of his responsibilities as associate pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Rogers.

Dc. Stephen Joseph Gadberry, to be ordained to the priesthood on May 28, appointed associate pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Rogers.

Rev. John Miranda appointed administrator of St. John the Evangelist Church in Huntsville. This is in addition to his current responsibilities as associate pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Rogers.

Rev. Lourduswamy Dhanraj Narla relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Mary Church in Batesville and St. Cecilia in Newport to cover St. Louis Church in Camden and Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Magnolia from June 14-30, after which time he will continue his ministry in his home Diocese of Nellore, India.

Rev. Polycarp Ssebbowa appointed administrator of St. Mary Church in Batesville and St. Cecilia Church in Newport. He is relieved of his responsibilities as associate of St. James Church in Searcy, St. Albert Church in Heber Springs and St. Richard Church in Bald Knob.

Rev. Thomas C. Marks appointed chaplain at Carmel of St. Teresa of Jesus in Little Rock, hospital chaplain at UAMS and VA Hospitals in Little Rock, with residence at Catholic High in Little Rock. He remains associate pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock.

Effective July 1

Rev. Robert Cigainero appointed administrator of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Magnolia and St. Louis Church in Camden. He is relieved of his responsibilities as associate pastor of St. Joseph Church in Conway effective June 13.

Effective Aug. 5

Rev. Silvio D'Ostilio, CSSp, relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Joseph Church in Center Ridge, to return to his religious community.

Rev. Joseph Shantiraj appointed pastor of St. Joseph Church in Center Ridge. He is relieved of his responsibilities as associate pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Fort Smith, effective June 20. He will be covering St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish in Fayetteville from June 21-Aug. 4.

Effective Aug. 22

Dc. Marcelino Luna appointed associate director of faith formation in the Diocese of Little Rock. He is relieved of his responsibilities as diocesan director of Hispanic Ministry.

Sr. Norma Edith Muñoz, MCP, appointed director of Hispanic ministry in the Diocese of Little Rock.

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Pastoral change made at University of Arkansas parish

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Rev. Joseph Marconi relieved of his responsibilities as pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish in Fayetteville; he is appointed associate pastor of Christ the King Church in Little Rock, effective Sept. 25.

Effective Sept. 2

Rev. Andrew Hart appointed administrator of St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish in Fayetteville and relieved of his responsibilities as associate pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Fort Smith.

Effective Sept. 8

Rev. Joseph Shantiraj, a priest from the Diocese of Nellore, India, appointed associate pastor of Immaculate Conception Church in Fort Smith. This is a change to the previously announced effective date of June 17.

Rev. John Miranda, a priest from the Diocese of Nellore, India, appointed associate pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Rogers. This is a change to the previously announced effective date of June 17.

Rev. Mariadass Vallapaneni, a priest from the Diocese of Nellore, India, appointed associate pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church and Blessed John Newman University Parish in Jonesboro. This is a change to the previously announced effective date of June 17.

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