

Hello parish family!

As you have probably already heard, my name is Fr. Tom Gardner and I am your new pastor. I am so humbled and excited for the opportunity to serve all of you at Sacred Heart and St. Francis de Sales. I can't wait to see what God has in store for all of us in the coming years! By way of introduction, I wanted to share with you a brief personal biography.

I was born and raised in Bexley, Ohio, the second oldest of five children raised in a wonderful, loving Catholic family. Growing up, I was a very active student in the Bexley Public Schools, involved in choir, school newspaper and theater. I also was very active in Boy Scouts, earning the Eagle Scout award when I was 18. I grew up in St. Catharine parish, where I participated in CCD and was an altar server along with my siblings. Faith, family prayer and scripture were normal parts of life in the Gardner household growing up. During those years, I occasionally had thoughts of being a priest, but hadn't yet thought about it deeply.

In 2005, I graduated from Bexley High School and was accepted at THE Ohio State University in their Technology Education program. At Ohio State, I became part of a Catholic group called Saint Paul's Outreach (SPO). Through my time with SPO during college, the seeds of faith planted by my parents started to grow and take deeper root and I started to seriously discern a call to the priesthood. Through SPO, I had the opportunity to live in a type of Catholic fraternity where the men I lived with encouraged me in my faith and we prayed and went to Mass together almost every day. SPO gave me the opportunity to participate in many great faith-building retreats, sharing my faith with other students on the OSU campus, and going on various mission trips. I graduated from OSU in 2009 with a Bachelor's degree in Technology Education. My time there had deepened my walk with Jesus and I knew the right next step was to enter seminary.

After graduating from OSU, I entered seminary in the Fall of 2009 to study for the Diocese of Columbus. I studied for six years at the Pontifical College Josephinum (PCJ). During that time, I was able to grow more deeply in love with Jesus and His Church and had many wonderful professors in philosophy, theology, liturgy, scripture, Greek, Latin, homiletics, and more. It was a packed six years! In my free time, I enjoyed running, bowling, swimming, watching movies and spending time with friends. One of the annual highlights was participating in the "Mud Bowl," a high-intensity flag football game between the older and the younger students. In the end I earned three degrees from the PCJ: a Master's of Theology, a Master's of Divinity and a Bachelor's of Sacred Theology. My Master's work focused on the application of the theology of Pope St. John Paul II to Christian Marriage.

I was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Columbus on May 30, 2015 at St. Paul's Church in Westerville. As a priest, I have served in multiple different assignments throughout the diocese. First, I served as a parochial vicar in a three-parish consortium of St. Peter in Chains in Wheelersburg, St. Monica's in New Boston and Holy Trinity in Jackson (all near Portsmouth). For the next two years, I was parochial vicar at St. Brendan parish in Hilliard (a suburb in Northwest Columbus). Since then, I have been parochial vicar in the consortium of Immaculate Conception in Dennison, Sacred Heart in New Philadelphia and Holy Trinity in Zoar for three years.

As a priest, I have had the privilege of serving in many different capacities. I have taught in RCIA and PSR, prepared couples for Marriage, led Bible studies, directed men's faith sharing programs, been the chaplain of Knights of Columbus Councils, planned parish activities, led trips to the March for Life, helped in Youth Groups, taught high school religion, and been a guest teacher in elementary school classrooms, among many other activities. I love life as a priest and especially relish my time celebrating Mass and feeding people with Jesus in the Eucharist. It is a privilege and joy for me to be an instrument of Jesus' grace in all of the different Sacraments and I look forward to celebrating them with you and your families.

Please pray for me as I begin my time here as pastor. I am excited to serve you and pray that Jesus helps me to have an open heart to His grace so that I might be a good shepherd for all of you after His example.

In Jesus through Mary,

*Fr. Tom*