

St. Thomas church appoints new pastor

By Daniel Jackovino on December 21, 2019 · Comments Off

BLOOMFIELD, NJ — The dozen or so fir trees near the altar of St. Thomas the Apostle Church gave the air a fragrance of forest and Christmas last Saturday morning. It was quite a sight to see so many trees in a single holiday setting, Father Larry Fama said. But it is like this every Christmas season at the church, where Fama, or “Father Larry,” began his pastorage in July.



Photo by Daniel Jackovino Father Larry Fama, the new pastor at St. Thomas the Apostle Church

“I grew up in North Newark on North 13th St.,” he said while sitting in a pew as the work to arrange the trees continued. “We moved three times on the same street.”

An only child, Fama, 56, said his parents finally moved into the house where his mother grew up.

“So it was full-circle for my mom,” he said.

Most of his family lived within two or three blocks of him, so Christmas Eve was a boisterous affair.

“I say the Greeks invented drama, but the Italians perfected it,” Fama said with a laugh. “On Christmas Eve, we always had special foods. My grandmother made a Sicilian pizza called sfincione.”

He also remembered going out to buy salt cod for one of the traditional Italian Feast of the Seven Fishes served on Christmas Eve.

“It was all about preparation and participation,” he said. “We had

it in my grandmother's home, things you had only once a year." Fama said he never met his grandfather, who died in 1955, but he spent a lot of time with his grandmother and had breakfast with her every day.

"We did a lot together," he said. "Sunday was special."

It was after Sunday Mass that Fama would go to his grandmother's home to dip bread into the spaghetti gravy simmering on the stove. So much of growing up Italian and family is about food, he said. And it was from his grandmother that he learned how to pray the rosary. He has her rosary beads somewhere in an unpacked box.

Being the only one to carry on the family name, Fama said he felt a lot of pressure not to become a priest.

"My parents wanted grandkids," he said. "I had aunts who said to have kids now and become a priest later. I told them it doesn't work that way."

But when his parents saw him in seminary school and happy, they changed their minds and were happy, too.

Fama attended Montclair Immaculate High School and graduated in 1981. He attended Rutgers University and changed majors seven times. He knew he was going to be a priest so he approached college as a smorgasbord of opportunities.

"It was let me try this and let me try that," he said.

He graduated with dual majors in political science and urban studies. He attended Seton Hall Seminary and was ordained in 1992. He has been assigned to St. Philomena's in Livingston, St. Mary's in Rutherford, St. Helen's in Westfield and most recently, Our Lady of Peace in Maywood where he was pastor.

"I used to come to Mass here on Saturday nights, on occasion," Fama said of his new church. "It was always an active parish." He noted that the church serves 3,500 families.

"I want to build on what they have here," he said. "There's a rhythm and people take pride here. My motto is 'I want to leave the parish in a better way than when I came.'"

Fama would like to start a pastoral council by September 2020. At one time, the church did have one, he said. He wishes that more children came to church, but is buoyed by the high number of altar servers, between 35 and 40. Seeing young families at Mass adds to his joy.

“That’s an inspiration to me,” he said. “I remember growing up and going to Mass with my parents and going to confession with them. They went before me to set an example.”

Fama also hopes to start a youth choir.

For mass last Sunday, he was working a homily about John the Baptist.

“He asked Jesus, ‘Are you the one we’re looking for?’” Fama said.

“I will ask, ‘Where are you looking?’”

It is his hope that they are looking for God.

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