

Rev. Joan announces her upcoming retirement from Church of the Ascension

Dear friends in Christ,

After 18 years as Rector of Church of the Ascension (Sligo Parish), the time has come for me to announce my retirement, which will be officially effective on September 1, 2025. However, my last Sunday at Ascension will be in August (TBA) as I take my last few weeks of vacation.

I can't even begin to express what a great honor, privilege, and joy it has been for me to serve as Rector of our parish. I have always said, for me, Ascension exemplifies God's kingdom at its best. Our diversity and our commitment to welcome all into our community is truly what Christ calls us to do, and Ascension surely embodies this call. I can honestly say, that in my years at Ascension, I have had the blessing of working with the finest vestries, lay leaders, musicians, volunteers, and clergy (especially my colleague and partner in ministry, Terri+.) Together, we all have made Ascension what it is today, a shining star, a light on a hill that radiates God's presence.

I am so proud of what we have accomplished together as a church family. Our membership has grown, welcoming many, including families with young children. We have established new ministry programs, including our Street Ministry, Tommy's Pantry, Conversations on Race, and Small Group Ministry, just to name a few. Our music program has thrived and Ascension now has become a concert venue under the leadership of Bailey Joy Myers, our Director of Music Ministries. We conducted a very successful Capital Campaign which improved our buildings and grounds.

We built two columbaria to lay our beloved members to final rest, one outside and the other indoors. We built an outdoor worship space, St. Clare's Chapel, which gives us opportunities for a third worship service during the summer months. We have become a premier training site in the diocese to prepare men and women to become priests and deacons. Our retreats and pilgrimages have contributed to community building, spiritual growth, and the formation of friendships. We thrived during Covid. Our online ministry, live streaming worship services, and using Zoom for business meetings, book clubs, Lenten and Advent series, Annual Meetings, and Fundraisers, has become a permanent fixture, allowing our homebound members, and others who exercise this option, to be part of our community, whether they are local or in other parts of our nation and world. The list goes on. But last but not least, Ascension's financial foundation is the best it has ever been, thanks to your generosity.

The decision to retire from active parish ministry is one of those big milestones in my life. It has not been an easy decision - *because I love you all so much* - but after much prayer and discernment, I know it is the right time. Ascension has so much to offer a new (and hopefully younger) spiritual leader. The foundation of ministry we have built together, is truly a blessing to anyone who serves you as Rector. You will continue to grow and thrive as a church, and I can only imagine the blessings you will be to each other, to our surrounding community, to the Diocese of Washington, and to all who enter our doors seeking love, unconditional acceptance, hospitality, and shelter from the storms of life.

These years with all of you have been some of the happiest of my life. You have been (for me and my family) God's "Sweet, Sweet Spirit." And you will continue to be God's "Sweet, Sweet Spirit" for so many people, not only today, but also for the generations to come. Of this I am certain. Because this is who you are. For now, God bless you all. As the late Henri Nouwen, Catholic priest, professor, writer, and theologian writes: "*From now on, wherever you go, or wherever I go, the ground between us will be holy ground.*" God has consecrated this ground between us because it has been tilled and nurtured by our binding ties of love, faith, and hope.

Faithfully, with much love,
Joan+