

In September 1993, with Major League Baseball season nearing an end, the first place Philadelphia Phillies visited the 2nd place Montreal Expos. In the first game of the series, the home team Expos came to bat one inning, trailing 7-4. Their first two batters reached base.

The manager sent a pinch hitter to the plate, rookie Curtis Pride, who had never gotten a hit in the major leagues. Pride took his warm-up swings, walked to the plate, and on the first pitch laced a double, scoring two runners. The stadium thundered as 46,000 fans screamed their approval.

The Expos third base coach called time, walked to Pride and motioned for him to take off his helmet. He was puzzled and then understood that the coach wanted him to tip his cap to the crowd.

After the game, someone asked Pride if he could hear the cheering. This person was not trying to be funny – Curtis Pride is 95 percent deaf. “Here,” Pride said, pointing to his heart. “I could hear it here.”

And that is why we gather this weekend, because of the heart of Jesus and it is here (motion to heart) that we experience the presence of Jesus’ love for all of us. Yes, we gather here, the very heart of the Diocese of Richmond.

Here is where the life of the Diocese begins, circulating outward to her parishes. Yes, all of you are the lifeblood of the heart of Jesus - A very special place to be counted as parishioners and rector. It is fitting that my final weekend happens to be the Sacred Heart of Jesus Feast. A good sign perhaps of his blessing to me as I depart from here.

I, too, hear you here in my heart and will speak to you from my heart. When I told the parish I was being transferred, my grocery bill was dramatically reduced as it seemed I spent my remaining days eating with all of you.

What really defines a family, perhaps more than bloodlines, is eating meals together. Meals together nourish more than the body. And today I celebrate one final meal with you, the Eucharistic meal. Thank you for the past twelve years being a part of the Cathedral family.

One of my joys at the Cathedral has been working with couples preparing for marriage, which is the big part of my ministry here. I always ask how they met one another and often hear some humorous stories.

+After a first date, the groom to-be walked her to her door, turned around, took a few steps and was knocked over by a low-lying branch. I joked that her love swept him off his feet.

I have baptized a number of my married couple’s children and others at Cathedral and would later be there to give them first communion.

And then there are those I gave first communion to, who eventually became altar servers and are now in college or getting ready to go. So neat seeing them all grow up over the twelve years and eventually getting taller than me (:

Your greatest gift to me my young ones is to stay with the faith, love the Lord who has embraced you from your first moments of life here.

It is here that men of the Diocese are ordained, surrendering the love of their hearts to the heart of Christ and in service to his people. I was ordained in the Cathedral on May 18, 1996 and never in my dreams that I would one day end up here as your rector.

Did you know that I had to interview for the position of rector with along with another priest? As I recall, I met with a number of folks for interviews and for some reason they picked me.

The Bishop took this route for the Cathedral rector because if it didn't work out, it is on you, not him. Well, you haven't run me out of town, so I guess it was a good choice.

My first Christmas, at the Midnight Mass I celebrated with Bishop D. He told me that in Hawaii the rector always celebrated that Mass. Well, guess where I was the following year? Celebrating the midnight Mass and the Bishop celebrated the children's Mass.

One fact that Bishop impressed upon them was that St. Nickolas was the patron saint of beermakers. I was fortunate enough to be with the kids this past Christmas Eve. I love that Mass as I return to the innocence of Christmas and our childhood that time of year.

+ Another joy for me is being able to celebrate Mass at the Virginia Home where all are in wheelchairs and many do not even have use of their hands. I remember in the midst of the Eucharistic prayer one rolled her wheelchair up to me and whispered, "Did you bring the Bliley calendars?"

Thank you all who bring communion to our homebound – it is deeply appreciated as they are still a part of our family and your presence reminds them that they are not forgotten.

It is here that we have surrendered our loved ones, whose hearts have ceased to beat in this world for that of the Kingdom of God. I have been with many here, mourning with you the loss of your loved ones. I could not take away your pain but sat next you and tried to love you through it.

In thanksgiving for our ushers, who have been so very welcoming to all who pass through the doors, me in particular. Many of the Knights are part of this – thank you for your presence here.

In thanksgiving for our deacons, all of whom I count as friends. Truly men of God.

To our Sunday/Saturday Eucharist teams. I always looked forward to chatting with you, each having a character of their own at each Mass. For our flower ladies and the men that they recruited – you make it beautiful.

I do believe we have the best lectors in the Diocese, thank you Carolyn. And most certainly, I love all of my altar servers. I have loved being with you.

And for to Msgr. Lane for his friendship and mentoring me all these years. Thank you, Mark.

And finally, I say goodbye to my Cathedral staff – including Kim and Mike Kremer. I am so very proud of you all because you have greatly lightened my workload here. I love you all so very much. You are the best of the best! Every day I pray for each one of you by name as you have blessed me so very much.

It was a great run of twelve years and now I have to go where Jesus wants me to be. Thank all of you who have touched my life and priesthood – I carry you all in my heart. Love you all.