Words cannot express my sincere thanks and heartfelt gratitude for the many ways I was honored during the 25th Anniversary celebrations of my Ordination to the Priesthood; I never imagined it would be so wonderful – especially the Mass of Thanksgiving. In 25 years of priestly service, I have almost always celebrated Mass at least once a day; some days two, three or even four times, even while on vacation - which adds up to more than 10,000 Masses! Yet I was shocked by how emotionally and spiritually moved I was during the magnificent Mass of Thanksgiving; the superb music by our music ministry, the sincere accolades, the moving, scripturally-based homily and above all, the vibrant, thunderous participation of the ‘standing-room-only’ assembly was a true taste of heaven! But now back down to earth …

As I said in my closing comments at the Mass of Thanksgiving: what the Lord Jesus promised us is indeed true: those who leave their own family to serve the Lord inherit innumerable family members ... in the family of faith which is Christ’s Body, His Church. Of all the gifts I have received, the only one I could not live without is the prayerful support of my family and friends and co-workers in the Lord’s vineyard! So please continue to pray for me and for all priests, for my family by birth, for my family through baptism, and for our parish during the stressful time of construction of our ‘new’ church.

Since the Eucharist is the high point of everything we do as Catholic Christians, and is the highpoint of my life as a priest, the greatest gift I received was standing with my brother priests at the end of Mass for a standing ovation given by the people to their priests. After all we’ve been through ... it was a refreshing reminder that many do appreciate what we strive to do, despite our many weaknesses and sins. Not that the struggles or sorrows of living as a priest in today’s world has really ever gotten me down. Last month, while in Hawaii, I concelebrated the 5 PM Saturday Vigil Mass in Saint Augustine Church on Waikiki Beach; the pastor, Fr. Lane, is a friend of Fr. Tom Serafin; they served together on the Engaged Encounter National Board many years ago. Fr. Lane graciously acknowledged my 25th Anniversary at Mass that I concelebrated along with Father Tom and my brother Father Mark, and afterwards a couple from California congratulated me and said, “Father, our son was just ordained a few months ago for the Diocese of San Diego; we hope he’s as joyful are you seem to be 25 years from now!” What a great compliment! And it’s true: I do love being a priest – and a Roman Catholic!

25 years ago, on November 16, 1985, it actually snowed in Newark NJ; some said my Ordination caused Hell to freeze over! [It really did snow in Newark as we left the Cathedral!] And some suggest that Archbishop Gerety,
who ordained me, and who graced us with his presence at my Anniversary Mass, and who is still going strong at a mere 98 years of age – has been granted a long life by the Lord ... so he can do ample penance for ordaining me!  [Sorry, Archbishop!]  Archbishop Emeritus Peter Leo Gerety, who is [as of this writing!] the 9th oldest bishop in the world – and the oldest bishop in the United States – even remained with the priests at the special clergy dinner afterwards.  [Some may question why priests are treated differently, but to be truthful: priests cannot give what they do not have ... so they MUST spend time together in prayerful fellowship ... and in eating and drinking – just as married couples need time for themselves!]  I was also grateful to Bishop John Flesey, the Episcopal Vicar [the Archbishop’s personal representative] to Bergen County, who was present and to Bishop Tom Donato, Bishop Manny Cruz and Bishop Dominic Marconi who all sent beautiful letters of congratulations and regrets that they had other commitments on that day and to all the many priests and deacons who, after attending many Masses and other events that day, made time to celebrate with me.  And that goes for all the lay ministers who served in their own churches, and the people who went to Mass at their own parish and went to Mass again ... just to be with me.  I am indebted to all of you for your support of me throughout my 25 years of being privileged, though unworthy as I am to serve our Lord Jesus Christ and the people He has asked me to shepherd in His Name.

It was God’s will that I would spend the lion’s share of my years as a priest at Saint Mary Church; priests usually retire at 70 ... which, for me, is not that far away!

Although this is more than a celebration of this parish of Saint Mary and the part it has played in my life, I must add to what Fr. Tom said in his homily about our parish’s finances.  He stated that when I arrived in 1997 the parish had less than $200,000 in the bank and now we have a beautiful Parish Center and are ready to embark on a five million building project all while being debt free.  I would never presume that I could do all of this alone.  I am grateful to the Finance Committee, Dave Valente, Sheila McPherson, Kevin McLean, Ed Ryan, Anne McCormack, Carmel Caramagna, Debbie Moran and our accountant, John McGovern, who have been invaluable to me, and my very capable staff, led by our High School Principal, Roy Corso, our Academy principal, Elena Simmons, and our Religious Formation Coordinator Betty Hatler and all of their assistants.  We may not always agree on the how, but we always agree on one thing: the importance of Saint Mary and Catholic Education.  We all work as a team and together we can do great things in God’s Name.

I am most grateful for the generous support of this great parish to our Recapture the Dream capital campaign (there is still time to contribute to this once in a lifetime project).  It is hard to believe but our half century dream is about to come true ... though for a while it will be a nightmare: no parking, construction debris, lots of mess and confusion, especially when we must worship in other places outside the church.  Pray that I may be a gentle but firm leader, and let us all pray for the grace of patient endurance and understanding.

Contrary to a common assumption, nothing happens by magic; I became even more keenly aware of this reality as my 25th Anniversary celebration unfolded.  So many words of thanks and appreciation need to be expressed to so many people; as always, if I inadvertently omit anyone – know that God knows who you are – and will reward you!  I begin with expressing my gratitude to the Anniversary Committee, chaired by my most able administrative assistant, Debbie Moran; very few people realize how invaluable she and her family are to this parish and to me personally.  My thanks to the other committee members into whose capable hands I entrusted everything.
My thanks to Father Tom Serafin for that humorous but scripturally based homily/roast. Mary Lanni, who welcomed the civic community leaders present at my Anniversary Mass, Kathe Donovan, Bergen County Clerk and the County Executive Elect; Bernadette McPherson, Bergen County Freeholder; Mayor John Hipp, Mayor of Rutherford; John Genovese and John Parnofielo, Councilmen and Rose Inquanti and Kim Birdsal, Councilwomen; Corey Gallo, Borough Administrator; Paul Dansbach, Fire Marshall; Brian O'Keefe, Health Official, all other Borough officials and Tony Genovese, Architect of our New Church. My thanks to my brother Father Mark who spoke words of welcome on behalf of my two families: to my family by birth, my relatives and friends – and my family by Holy Orders: all the visiting bishops, priests and deacons and their wives. My thanks to the Spiritual Life Committee, and all liturgical ministers, like Linda and Victor Verdinio who shopped for much of the paper products and saw that all was perfect for the Anniversary celebration, and the music ministers, led by our Adult Choir Director, Gerry DeMan and members: Pauline Bertone, Erin Carroll, Dot Checki, Andrea Covais *, Maureen Doren, Madeline Jannicelli, Maggie Ludwiczak, Judy Mack, Fran McCarthy, Michele Zimmerman *, Sister Alice Cardillo, Maria DeFazio *, Lorraine DeMan *, Anna DiMeo, Clarice Garcia, Laurelle Ivey *, Suzy Pranke, Annette Saslow, Catherine Turso, Ben Chavez *, Brad Chiappetta, Walter Palasits, Jun Ruales *, Dr. Joseph DeFazio *, Kenneth E. Focht, George Hensel, Ray Mazzeo *, Brian Smith. Those marked with an * are our cantors which I am most grateful to. Thank you to Andrea Covais, Directory of our Children's Choir and members: Angelica Nino, Eva Tobin, Bethany Wloch-Rapetti, Jocelyn Jordan, Erin DeMayo, Sarah Dzurillay, Katie Whaley, Angelina Scano, Jacob Stillson, Lucia Carpignano, Skylar Wazinski, Sophia Emily Masullo, Michael Davis, Natalia Perez, Kelly Tapia, Chloe Corscchiulo, Caroline McKenna, Ivan Jordan, Matthew Rodriguez, Brooke O'Neill, Shannon O'Neill, Jaeli Espinosa, Maddalena Carpignano, Kinga Kolakowski, Cameron Forsyth, Samantha Gavura, Mariah Gagliardi, Annunziata Paolano, Jeffrey Ventura, Dominick Speciale, Sydney O'Neill, Kevin Nino, Francis Escolin, Katarina McKenna, Patrick Gallagher and Julia Dzurillay. And thanks to our Praise Band members, John Nunez, John DeMan and Michael Mazzola.

Thanks to Shop Rite in Lyndhurst who prepared the Cheese and Fruit Platters all for 50% off the total cost; to Forest Dairy in Rutherford who provided the sandwich platters; Lyndhurst Pastry Shop and Varrellman's Bakery in Rutherford all who gave a discount to us. Thanks to Gerri Wartel, Susan Crook, Ginny Raccuia, Sophie and Ken Zaorski, Bill and Betty Teresavage, Fran and Carol Waples, Libby DeMarco and Frank and Valerie Bowen for picking up all the food and desserts. Thanks to our Peer Ministers from Saint Mary High School who helped bring the food into the Parish Hall, Sara Kos, Megan Macaluso, Amanda Crook, Melissa Macaluso, Maria Costa, Lea Feghali, Anthony Ferrentino, Samantha Cardoso, Nicole Curreri, Shannon Rennie and Kamila Mikos.

Thanks to those who helped plan the celebrations and attended weekly meetings: Linda Verdinio, Fran and Carol Waples, Kathy and Herb Smith, Betty and Bill Teresavage, Dee Cardillo, Marie Boyle, Gloria Ryan, Fran and Valerie Bowen, Diana Wilczynski, Joanne Wilczynski, Mary Ellen Szambel, Kathleen Lovatt, Jane White, Rosemarie Salvatore and Vincent Kratz. Thanks to those who helped serve at the Priests reception: Terry Scannell, Nan Mulcahy, Pat Bennett, Audrey Cuccinelli and to Meghan Moran, bartender. Thanks to those who baked for the priests, Ann Marie VanDyk, Laura Yanitelli and Anne Sorbera.

Thanks to John Celio and Kimberly Hayes who worked together for decorating plans, and to those who helped decorate and cleanup: Bernadette Pogozelski, Frank and Valerie Bowen, Dolores Cardillo,
Kathy and Herb Smith, Trudy and John West, Joanne Wilczynski, Ken and Linda Focht, Lorraine Russo, Andrea Davis, The Szambel Family, Anthony and Erin Marrone, Carol and Fran Walpes, Marie Boyle, JoAnn Bartlett, John Celio, Tom Clare, Linda and Victor Verdino, Dan, Deb and Meghan Moran, Gloria Ryan, Mark and Diana Wilczynski and Rosemarie Salvatore.

Thanks to The Academy at Saint Mary 6th Grade students for carrying all the supplies to the Parish Hall on Friday afternoon before the reception and carrying things from the Parish Center to the residence afterwards. Thanks to my friends Alice Rubino and Tony at Richard’s florist for the deeply discounted floral arrangements.

Thank you Gloria Ryan for the tablecloths and to Tom Verdino, Missy Scanlon, Anthony and Erin Moran and Dan and Deb Moran for use of your ‘coolers.’ And thanks to our bartenders, Dennis Fitzsimons, Len Tully, Tom Clare, Anthony Marrone, MaryEllen and Richard Szambel, Erin Marrone, Victor Verdino and Christopher Verdino.

Thank you Tom Clare who donated all the liquor, set-ups and soda for the reception. Thank you Brenda from Poppies Florist who donated the beautiful floral arrangement on the food table. To Park Cleaners who clean our liturgical items free of charge all year long, thank you. Thanks to the Knights of Columbus and Collins Calhoun Funeral Home for making a donation to offset the costs of the celebration.

Thanks you James Rosso, technology teacher in our High School for making the power point presentation and his intern for coming to the reception to see it through. To our photographers who capture all the moments and highlights of the wonderful Mass and celebration, thank you Shirly Tokarz, Raul Wong, Brian O’Keefe and Pushparaj Aitwai from Caldwell College. Thank you Kathleen Lovatt for our reserve signs.

Thanks to the town Auxiliary Cops who changed their schedule to work around my Mass, Maria Calabria, John Bewighouse and Kathleen McNeill.

Thank you to all the Altar Servers: Martin Hipkins, Marc DeFazio, Kimberly Balacuit, Andy Fenwick, Diane Ellard, Chris Mack, Giselle Borbajo, James Borbajo, Nicole Lucianin, Ricky Szambel, Elizabeth Szambel, Joe Wingo, Dakota Zbuchalski, Ian Michelin, Michael Rodriguez, Dominic Speciale, Jillian Wazinski and Catrina Binder; to the readers, Joseph Kreder, Erin Marrone, Deacon Michael Matthews, Fran Weedfald, Sister Catherine Therese, Dan Moran, Sister Ines Marie, Margaret Augustine, Tom Clare, Jennifer Kreder and Barbara Kreder, all from my family, friends or past and present assignments. And thank you Larry Boland and the Spiritual Life Committee for greeting and ushering throughout the Mass.

I especially thank my good friend, Anthony Macagna, and his assistant, Michael Onorato for prevailing upon me to have a wonderful celebration at his newly renovated reception hall, the Old Tappan Manor, in Tappan NJ; what a tremendous gift! [If any of you know of anyone planning an event or celebration, please tell them about this hidden jewel in Bergen County.] Anthony and the whole team at the Macagna-Diffily-Onorato Funeral home had already done so much for my family, especially with all the funeral arrangements for my parents, my mother Mildred and my father Vincent. I was reluctant to accept Anthony’s gracious offer to host this splendid event, but he was quite persistent; so I graciously accepted his kind gift and honor not only for me as his friend but also for the Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you also Anthony and Michael for the prayer cards which were distributed at the Mass and for the use of your parking lot for parking during the Mass. Finally, thank you to the literally seven hundred people or so that sent me a card, gift and best wishes. May God bless you, one and all.

With God’s love and my most grateful prayers

Rev. Michael J. Kreder