

November 9, 2025



## WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

This week I want to encourage you to consider trying something that is radical and maybe the most controversial idea I have ever shared! Now that I have your attention, you're going to have to keep reading because I first have to explain.

My first parish was Our Lady Star of the Sea in Long Branch, now called Christ the King. It is a beautiful gray-stone structure that sits about two blocks from the ocean. With a combination of age and proximity to the salt of the sea, there was deterioration and leaking. As an assistant priest, I didn't have to worry about building maintenance (oh, the good old days!). After an evaluation, it was decided that the church needed to be re-pointed, something about which I had no clue. It was an expensive and large undertaking. Now, I understand that it involves the tedious work of removing deteriorated mortar from between the bricks and replacing it to ensure structural integrity and weather-proofing. One of the challenges with fundraising for such a project is that the problem was not immediately visible to the average eye nor were the results. Nevertheless, it was necessary.

Just as buildings need to be repaired and maintained, so do parishes. The community that uses the church building must also be regularly attended to and renewed. That's one of the reasons we have parish missions, like this week. It is easy to fall into a rut and merely go through the motions of faith. In addition, we also need to continually reach out to bring people either back into Church or to enter for the first time. Like buildings, we can fall into disrepair.

This leads me to my controversial suggestion. One of the most important steps we can take to revitalize ourselves and the parish is to adopt and promote an active spirit of welcome and hospitality. This communicates faith and love, and engenders enthusiasm and invitation. It serves like repointing on an aging brick church.

This is, of course, not a new idea and is certainly not controversial, but can it be?

What is my suggestion for "repointing" our parish? Before you get too nervous, I'm not suggesting that you have to do this every week. In fact, you may only do it occasionally, maybe only once a month or even just twice a year. Are you ready? Here it is. Why not try when you come to Mass to sit in a different pew! That's right, give up your favorite seat, and try sitting in another area, maybe even on the other side. However, there's more to this than just a geographic re-location. Once you pick a different place, say hello to those sitting there. Introduce yourself, maybe ask their name. I'm not talking about a long conversation, but a gentle outreach to get to know other members of your parish family. There is one caveat. If everyone in one section moves together to another section, this won't work!

Another way to "repoint" is to be sure to say hello to one new person, if not each week, maybe once a month. You get the idea. The goal is to create a real sense of family and community as we gather for Mass. We are not taking our focus off the altar or the sacredness of the Liturgy. After all, we can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can be prayerful and devoted, and friendly and welcoming. Give it a try. Just like repointing helped preserve the structural integrity of the Star of the Sea, this can strengthen the community of St. Mary's. Just like repointing helped prevent leaks in Star of the Sea, this can discourage people from becoming lax or inactive. The Church is in constant need of being refreshed and renewed. We don't have to stand on a street corner and preach. Maybe all we have to do is say "hello" more often and give a friendly smile, even to parishioners we don't know!

***"Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." (Hebrews 13:1-2)***