

A Tribute to Fr. Kruse's Ministry in Our Parishes

By Marcine Tracy

Eight years ago, I was called to a meeting with the new pastor, Fr. Phillip Kruse. I didn't really know what the meeting was about, but having been on the deanery committee when Father was the dean, I knew a meeting with Fr. Kruse was going to be brief; and it was. In that spirit, I will keep my remarks today brief, as well.

It is difficult to verbalize just what Fr. Kruse has meant to our parishes, to our family, and to me as an individual. Fr. Kruse came to this quiet parish and he tossed gasoline onto the fire of our faith. Father challenged us to become the Catholic community that God intended us to be. His frank introduction of himself (right from this podium) left us little doubt of just where this community was headed, and this journey will continue for years to come.

Fr. Kruse lives the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and has led us by his example. We have seen this in his care for the sick, his passion for the poor, his comfort to the grieving, his wise counsel to the doubtful and troubled, and his merciful honesty in difficult situations. By standing firm in the teachings of God, Fr. Kruse's homilies have made us more aware of our actions and our responsibilities as Christians. He has helped us bring our faith into our every day through his practical examples--for that, we are all changed.

Father began his career as a teacher and as his vocation has evolved, he has only grown in that role as teacher. St. John Bosco was told in a vision to be strong, humble, and robust. I believe Fr. Kruse has obeyed this call as well. He has been a strong leader, he has remained humble despite his many accomplishments and his ministry has been robust, even in the face of debilitating health challenges. Father has borne his burdens and the burdens of so many of us with grace, unwavering faith, and a wonderful sense of humor.

As a priest, Father has offered us the true presence of God in the Eucharist. As a man, Father is a loyal friend, a great traveling companion, and a sure source of entertainment. Few people are as authentic as Phillip Kruse. I count his friendship among one of the greatest blessings of my life, and I am forever grateful for the love he has shown our family during his time here.

Father relates to people of all ages. His support of the youth and young families (not to mention his patience with some energetic toddlers) has helped us to grow our parish here for generations. His example is a guide for people of his own generation, and his love and attention to the older members of our community is unwavering.

We need only to look around this church today to see the fruits of Father's labors here. But of all the improvements and accomplishments we've experienced through Fr. Kruse's tenure, none compare to the reigniting of the faith of our communities. Thank you, Fr. Kruse. We hope you take with you our love, our prayers, and our gratitude.

A Tribute to Fr. Kruse's Ministry in Our Community

By Dave North

The news that Fr. Kruse was leaving was disturbing, a disruption in what is a world full of disruptions, but one in which Fr. Phil Kruse was a constant. We each handled the news in our own way--I did what I often do and reached in my pocket for a prayer that my father carried with him in his wallet until his last day on this earth. It's referred to as the 'Serenity Prayer.' It has emotional meaning to me and the words are powerful. They guide me in so many situations; I've come to rely on them and its simple message:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things that I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Father came to our community eight years ago and instantly there was a sense that this would not be just another priest. There were letters explaining being a Catholic wasn't something you were baptized with and then had for life, it is a lifetime of faith and practice and learnings, and we had a new teacher in town.

We learned that all of our clocks were too slow because being late was not an acceptable concept. We learned that the amount of reflection and prayer and preaching that could occur in a Mass was not related to the amount of time one spent in a pew, but to the commitment to being in them and the message being delivered. Some of us learned that priests make many sacrifices for their calling, but apparently being a priest in Iowa allows for being exceptionally good at playing Euchre. We learned that the parish can be the center of a community and the community it benefits is not limited by one's religion. We learned that with a passionate leader, Catholic education is alive and well.

You see the first part of the prayer, "the serenity to accept the things I cannot change," is implied understanding that life before you can be amazing if you learn to understand and accept what life presents to you. Part of learning is a recognition that none of us are perfect, but that our faith and our leaders of our church and school provide guidance and how to change our lives for the better, the courage to accept the teachings of the Lord and the courage to admit that we can all be better in our life.

Father has an amazing way of preaching change by example. I've been in communities where the word around town following a Sunday sermon was criticism, expressions of boredom, comments of wondering how many of that half-hour can be applied to one's life (not in this Archdiocese). When Father preaches, the talk at the dinner table, at work, and on the street is a week-long reflection of his message. A connection occurred in those brief minutes where Father found a spot in each of us, connected, and provided guidance in how our lives can be better. It's then up to us to have the courage to change.

The wisdom to know the difference is what allows life to go on in a sane way, to accept that although he was the one who was with us in sickness, he was the one we turned to in the loss associated with death, he was the one who led the education of our children, who counseled and blessed holy matrimony, and he's the one who brought our children into church. Father Kruse has left us with the wisdom to know it was never him anyways. He read a quote from the then Mother Teresa at graduation a couple years ago and the final sentence was this, "In the final analysis, it's between you and God; it was never between you and them anyways."

I accept that Fr. Kruse is moving to another calling. I accept that he provided me with the courage to change my life and the lives of others for the better. I have the wisdom to know that his influence on my life will not change with his address.

Father, you've made us better Catholics, Christians, parishioners, members of our community. We commit to embracing Fr. Miller, we may squirm in our seats the first Mass that starts one minute late, or the sermon that goes on a little long, and we may pray for forgiveness when we utter, "Kruse would have never allowed that." But he will be our priest, and you have left us better than you found us. I may remind you that Fr. Miller may take a day off from time to time, and we will need someone to preach. I believe you have more to say, and I am certain we have more to learn, so please don't forget us. I also know if we go too long without you, the next baptism in Peosta may have the largest numbers of out-of-town visitors they have ever seen.

Thank you, and may God bless you.