

**Greetings from
Fr. Jim Berning
our New Pastor**



Beginning this week and continuing for the next several weeks, I will offer a biography with the hoped-for outcome that parishioners have a better understanding of who it is that is taking up the reins of pastor. While each week is meant to highlight another segment of my life, I encourage that parishioners do the same--with each other!

By revealing more about your lives in the course of the last seventeen months, together we develop an attitude of openness, such that, becoming acclimated to life that looks to move beyond the pandemic, we proceed with renewed faith, energy and vigor to live St. Benedict's mission "as signs and bearers of God's love".

How was the journey coming to Canada?

My Canadian experience began when I was fifteen when our baseball team played in a regional tournament in Trails British Columbia. We flew into Seattle, Washington and then took a breathtaking scenic chartered bus into Canada. Then we were paired up to live with host families. I still remember this familial experience; the couple's playful young children, the inspiring first-time experience of a professional hockey game, and the luxury of eating well since our host father was a butcher. Although our team did not advance to the next level, our coach arranged for us to take a private tour of an iron ore plant. This experience brought about a realization of Canada's prosperity with its rich resources.

My second experience of Canada happened when I was assigned there as a Salesian in 2015. When I moved to Etobicoke, two events really stood out for me. First, having flown into Toronto with Fr. Mike Pace, our first stop was a welcoming luncheon hosted by his parents Salvina and John, and his sister Antoniette. This was a most hospitable way to ease the pinch of crossing the border and starting life in a new country.

Earlier that month Fr. Mike featured me with seven missionaries working for the mission appeal that summer at the Salesian formation house. The posting had a catchy quote which read: "Fr. Jim Berning, missionary to Canada," then, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*" (Psalm 22.1).

While this brought us a good laugh, the truth of the matter was that I made application to the missions in 1985, but this was the closest I would get! Moving across the border, however, has never made me feel like a missionary, rather there have been ongoing friendly encounters providing me with a felt sense of reassurance, so much so, that I am in the final stages of securing the status as a permanent resident.

The second event that fell into suite with the initial friendly encounter to St. Benedict was the annual parish pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Parish (St. Michael's Cathedral was still under construction that year). Many parishioners joined in this long excursion which gave me a good feel for being part of St. Benedict, and I suppose it gave parishioners a feel for me. Those relationships were the beginning of many wholesome and fruitful relationships that have taken shape. That pilgrimage must have been absorbed into my bones, since in 2018, for my 25th anniversary to the priesthood, I felt summoned to make The Camino del Norte in northern Spain— "The Way of St. James, Apostle". That pilgrimage was a bit longer, some 265 kilometers in nine days, and will be a story to develop and tell at a later date.

Stay tuned for the next segment of my biography, "*What preceded the Canadian experience*"?