

My dear parish family,



Last Sunday, on Divine Mercy Sunday, we launched something simple... and yet, something very beautiful: The Little Flower Story Wagon.

And perhaps the most important question is this: What is the Little Flower Story Wagon?

At its heart, it is a simple and tangible story rack—a place filled with books and stories that introduce our children to the lives of the saints, moral lessons, Catholic values, and beloved fables. These stories are lovingly shared with you, and at times even brought to life, by our four caring friends.

Over these past months, our NCCL Family Ministry and Siena Ministry have been in prayer and reflection, rediscovering a truth as ancient as the Gospel itself: our faith is a story—God's story—and each one of us has a place within it.

We carry this story in quiet ways: in our homes, around our tables, in the kindness we choose to do for others, in the sacrifices offered to God that no one sees, in the love we give, and in the faith we live.

And just as this story was handed on to us by those who loved us... we are now entrusted to pass it on—with joy.

It is in this spirit that I am delighted to introduce to you: THE LITTLE FLOWER STORY WAGON — A Catholic Parish Fable

The Story Wagon is a space—both here in our parish and in your homes—where stories come alive. It is a place where the Gospel can be shared gently and joyfully through the adventures of four beloved companions: Giuseppe, the Wise Pepper Farmer... Pip, the Rabbit... Luma, the Firefly... and Pastor, the Black Dog.

Together, they travel through fields and seasons, sharing stories of the saints, of virtue, of kindness, and of God's love. And they dwell right here among us—because the Church of the Little Flower in Berkeley Heights is truly a place where hearts feel at home.

But behind the whimsy... there is something deeper.

Why do we tell stories? Because stories form us. Because children remember what makes them smile. Because faith grows when it is shared with joy. Because even Jesus chose to teach through stories.

The Little Flower Story Wagon is one more way for our parish to: – Hand on our Catholic tradition in a creative and gentle way; – Give witness to the Gospel in language families can share together; – Help children see themselves within God's great story; – Support parents in speaking about faith at home—at bedtime, at the table, in the car; – Celebrate who we are as the Church of the Little Flower, where small acts of love become great offerings to God.

In a world filled with constant noise, distractions, and pressure, the Story Wagon offers something different: a quiet voice... a gentle beauty... a space where wonder and faith can meet.

And this year, its meaning becomes even more profound. As we celebrate 100 years of the Church of the Little Flower, we are not simply remembering buildings or dates—we are remembering stories.

Stories of faith handed down... stories of families who built this parish... stories of quiet sacrifices, baptisms, marriages, vocations, and lives changed by Christ.

The Little Flower Story Wagon becomes, in a beautiful way, a living bridge between our past and our future.

For 100 years, this parish has been telling the story of God's love—through liturgy, through service, through community. And now, we place that same story into the hearts of our children... in a way they can receive, remember, and one day pass on. What began with those who came before us... continues now through us... and will live on through them.

In this way, the Story Wagon is not just a project—it is part of our centennial legacy. A way of ensuring that the next 100 years of Little Flower will not simply preserve the faith... but live it, love it, and share it with joy.

My hope is simple. That these stories become part of your family life. That your children begin to look forward to them. That they become memories—small, sacred moments that stay with them. That seeds of faith are planted... quietly... patiently... and deeply.

Because that is how God often works.

This initiative is part of our ongoing mission of evangelization, hospitality, and formation. I am deeply grateful to our Siena Ministry and our NCCL Family Ministry for helping bring this vision to life, and to all of you—for being a parish that welcomes creativity, joy, and new ways of sharing the Gospel.

As we continue in this Easter season—a season of new life, of hope, of the Risen Lord walking with us—we remember: the greatest story ever told is the story we walk with Our Lord - and it is still being written... in us. And we are invited to share it.

May Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, our Little Flower, guide this humble effort with her childlike trust, teaching us once again that even the smallest acts—offered with great love—can change the world.

Your parish priest,
Fr. JC Merino

