

State of the Parish Update

June 11/12, 2016

Before we get into summer I thought I'd give the parish a brief report on the year that's wrapping up, and also a sense of where we want to go from here. It's been two years, now, since our re-organization, and I want to start by thanking all of you who pitched in to help our parish to renew itself. It's working.

Let's start with what you see around you every Sunday: the church is less full for Mass than you probably remember from the old days. This isn't unique to us: churches – including non-Catholic churches – are seeing their membership plummet, especially in the Northeast U.S. (One commentator recently said that attendance at Catholic churches in the Northeast is “in free-fall.”) I'm not happy about that, as I'm sure you're not, and we're doing everything we can to invite people back – something I'll return to at the end of my talk. But you should know that, so far this year, Mass-attendance is actually up over last year by about 50 people per weekend. We're doing something right.

And just a word about the 5:30 Sunday evening Mass, which is a case in itself. Attendance at that Mass drops in the warm months (from about 200 people to under 150 – it was 110 last weekend). So we'll once again suspend that Mass for July through Labor Day. Sunday Mass simply isn't a good experience for anyone when the numbers get that small, especially in a big building like ours.

Let's look at some more good things: Last month Bishop Brennan came to Confirm 143 young people from the Faith Formation program. Throughout the year – at Epiphany, at the Mass for Persons with Special Needs, and at Pentecost – we Confirmed about two dozen more teens and adults. This spring we celebrated 150 First Holy Communions. And the kickoff for Youth Ministry saw over 50 teens in attendance, many coming from Faith Formation which they had just concluded.

While we're on the subject of young people, a word about our other children's programs: Day Care has been at times up to 80% full (it's 72% as of Friday), and is showing a small financial surplus. Angel Care this past year hosted 190 children, about our biggest year ever for before- and after-school activities. And registration for Summer Fun was, when I last checked, about 40, but that's probably wrong by now because registrations are coming in fast for sessions that begin at the end of this month. All good news, and all a service to young people and young families.

Now let me talk for a bit about the infrastructure that makes all our worship and our programs possible: our finances and our buildings. You can see from the *Bulletin* that Sunday offerings are on track, even a bit above budget, thanks to your generosity. Through May 31st the overall parish accounts are in good shape, showing a small surplus. We're continuing to pay off past-due bills which we had from before the reorganization; we have just over \$27,000 left to pay, which we will do by the end of August. So starting September 1 the parish will be out of the hole with some money in the bank. And the budget for next year looks manageable. The Finance Council approved a plan that is in the black by just over \$50,000.

Things aren't quite so rosy when I turn to our campus. As you look around, you no doubt notice that our maintenance staff keeps things in good shape; spaces are clean and orderly thanks to their hard work. But we have two particular issues that we need to address.

The first is our parking lots. They're showing a lot of damage, from age and from snowstorms. The Finance Council has approved a contract to fix them where they most need it, which will cost us about \$39,000. The work should be done this summer, and it won't result in perfection. Eventually the entire paving will need to be removed and replaced, which we can't afford right now. We hope to get another five or ten years out of the current paving with this project and then with some small annual repairs.

The second issue involves that word homeowners like many of you dread to hear: roofs. The roofs on the convent, on the lobby, and on the one-story office area of the Center badly need to be replaced. We can hold off a bit on the convent with patching, but the other sections need to have the old roofs removed and entirely new ones installed soon. We're waiting for an engineering study on what the most cost-effective approach would be, but it won't be cheap. I'll tell you more as things develop.

One more cost the parish has to address this coming year is the revised New York State minimum-wage law Governor Cuomo signed a few months ago. While all our lay employees make above minimum wage, they don't make much above it, and we'll have to increase their pay to comply with the law and have a legal and fair wage structure. We estimate that this will add about \$100,000 to our payroll costs each year for the next five years as the new minimum wage is implemented between now and 2021. That will mean annual increases in tuition in Day Care, Angel Care, Summer Fun, and Faith Formation; you'll hear more about that in my *Bulletin* column next week. And it will also mean that the pay increases for some employees will have to

be paid out of the Sunday collection, so your generosity will be especially important to keep our parish moving forward.

Along that line, let me again recommend that you consider electronic giving using *WeShare*; especially if you're going to be traveling for the summer, it's a way to continue supporting Our Lady of Grace even when you're away. Over 400 parish families now use *WeShare*, and I'd like to see every parish household consider using it. There are brochures about it in the pews. So much for the introduction. (No, really, I'm almost finished.) But the main thing I want to talk about is our mission from Christ. What are we going to do to advance our mission to change lives through His grace and power? How can we make our parish a true servant of the needs of our neighbors and of one another?

You know from Matthew Kelly's book, and from the Gallup surveys we've done in the past, that the engagement of parishioners in their faith and in the life of the parish is the most important thing. Engaged Catholics invite people back to church more than the non-engaged; they volunteer more (in the parish and in the community); they give more; and they're more satisfied with their lives. Engaged Catholics, as Kelly says, do four things: they pray daily in a disciplined way; they study our faith; they give; and they spread Christ's word to others. We need more of that. We told Msgr. McNamara when he visited last February that this would be our primary focus, and both he and Bishop Murphy affirmed that goal. So, with the Pastoral Council, we'll be working on deepening parishioners' engagement, primarily through inviting adults to grow spiritually. We have a few things in the works:

First, you'll be hearing more about Kelly's *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, the book we gave out last fall. I wish every parishioner would read it or reread it. Kelly has some very practical things that each of us can do:

- *Prayer*: Dynamic Catholics have a routine, a daily time and place. The *Four Signs* book will tell you how to do that, if you don't do it already. Start now! Directions are in his book.
- *Study*: Read five pages of a great Catholic book every day. Reread five pages of Kelly, for starters.
- *Generosity*: Dynamic Catholics often think about how they can do the most good with what they have from God. There's a great summer project for you, and perhaps a topic for conversations with your family. How can you do the most good with what you have from God?

- *Evangelization*: People don't feel good enough about being Catholic; pay attention to what's right, not so much to what's wrong.

Second, we're again planning something special for Lent – something that will give us all some tools and encouragement to come closer to Christ and to be more effective disciples. I'll have more to say about that closer to Christmas.

Third, we plan to have occasional evenings of renewal for ministers and for parishioners, similar to the very successful one we had for Eucharistic Ministers and Lectors earlier this year.

But the real renewal of Catholic life, and of our parish, will depend on what each of us does – not just at programs of renewal, but each day. Remember that every chance meeting – with a friend, or family member, or fellow-parishioner, or stranger – brings that person closer to Christ, or drives him or her away. By baptism each of us is, potentially, the presence of the Risen Christ to every person we meet. We need to be aware of that, so we don't miss the opportunities the summer will provide. Thank you, and may God bless all of us and our parish.