

From the Deacon's Desk

### **We Have Been Counted:**

Each October the Diocese asks us to count the number of people in church. Our average attendance this year was 386... up from 352 from October 2016. Considering the 18 funerals we had this past year, the parish increased in numbers. Way to go parishioners.

### **RCIA: Interested in Becoming Catholic?**

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) has begun and we have three people participating this year. Its various stages and parish rituals culminate at the Easter Vigil with the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Weekly meetings include community-building, faith formation and sharing, pastoral conversations and prayer as we help participants better understand and integrate Catholic beliefs and practices. It is not too late to join us, and anyone who is interested should contact Deacon Jerry at the parish office.

### **Advent Ecumenical Service:**

On Sunday December 3, at 4 pm, there will be a joint Advent Ecumenical Service at St. Vincent's Church with the United Methodist Church and St. Vincent de Paul Parish. The service will be presided over by Rev. Janet Larner and Rev. Mr. Jerry Green, and it will include music by the two church choirs, prayers, readings, a homily, and fellowship afterwards in our hall. Come and celebrate with us as we joyfully prepare to remember the Incarnation between God and humanity. All are welcome!

### **Christmas Outreach:**

This year we will be doing our Christmas Giving Program a little different than in previous years. We are making the change to better become involved in outreach programs which already exist within our local community, and because there are no parishioners who want to coordinate the massive Christmas gift-giving project from the past few years.

One way you're invited to do this is by helping Christmas Outreach of Isabella County which is a kind of "one stop shopping" for low income clients at Christmas time. Last year they served 745 families, a total of 2,500 individuals.

Eileen Jennings from our parish is in charge of Christmas stockings for children and gift bags for teens and older adults. She collects both useful and fun items for these stockings and gift bags. Eileen already has some churches focusing on teens and older adults, but she needs help with items for the children's stockings.

St Vincent de Paul will put decorated boxes in the entrance to the church to collect items, and below is a request for what they need from the parish.

***Christmas Outreach of Isabella County needs your help. We will fill 500 Christmas stockings for children ages 3 to 11. Please consider buying small items to help fill these stockings. A decorated box will be in the***

*entrance to the church through December 3. A sample stocking will be in the entry so you can see the size. Lists of suggested items will be attached to the stocking. Some items needed include boxes of 24 crayons, glue sticks, play dough, matchbox size cars, card games, school supplies, jump ropes, jacks, small balls, toothpaste and brush, small stuffed animals. Unopened McDonald's and Burger King toys are good. Christmas Outreach also offer calendars to our guests, and they are extremely popular. If you received calendars from organizations you support and will not use them, please put them in this box. Do not buy calendars. Do not take quantities from Isabella Bank or other businesses in town. Just give us the calendars you would otherwise throw away. Both wall and pocket calendars are welcome.*

Christmas Outreach will distribute new and gently used winter coats, boots, hats and mittens, jeans, linens (towels, sheets and blankets), books for children and teens. Guests will also be given a basket of household cleaning supplies. Community Compassion Network will have its food distribution at our event. Two ladies from Shepherd operate a table of used Christmas decorations.

### What Makes a Parish Great:

Bishop Ken Untener (from the book, "My Name is Ken") has a homily called "What makes a great parish?" Bishop Ken says, "I wonder what makes a parish a great parish?... If we were going to use this world's measurements, a person might say, 'This is a great parish, this parish I belong to, because it has an oil well and it doesn't cost us any money. Everything's free. It's got air conditioning... and the priest looks like Robert Redford and he never preaches long- one minute and it's over with. And the buildings are magnificent...'

"There's nothing wrong with a priest who looks like Robert Redford, and there is nothing wrong with having air conditioning... Nothing is wrong with a short sermon now and then. But those aren't the things that make a parish great in the eyes of the Lord. If you think about it, what are some things, in no particular order, that make a parish truly great?

"One thing is caring. A good parish is a place that you never have to deserve, that you never have to earn. People here can say to anybody, 'I'm glad you're here.' That would make it a great parish, even if they were in debt.

"I move every two to three months, and I can tell the spirit of a parish... I can't tell how you do that, but you can tell the difference. It's the chemistry. There is life. People smile. People come toward you, not go away from you. You can tell by the youngsters in the sacristy. People laugh and look comfortable when they sit there. I can tell. There is a certain life, a certain spirit to a great parish. A great parish not only cares for people but there is involvement...

"A great parish loves God (I wouldn't want to leave that out!). It's a parish where the word 'God' comes easily to people's lips, and guess that you could tell that partly by being in their homes... There would be a picture, a statue, prayer before meals. That makes a parish great.... [I]t has the rich treasure of Jesus being in the hearts of the people.

"A great parish is inclusive. Everybody is always welcomed... Somebody who is not usually welcome in places in this world could tell you in an instant what a great parish is if they can walk in and feel welcomed...

"A great parish is a parish that gives money away around the world.

"Unity. A great parish has inclusiveness and different kinds of people and lives out what Jesus prayed, 'That they may be one.' Parishioners have a sense of being together, not like being at separate tables in a restaurant, or being anonymous people at a theater, but people who smile and are together."