

## From the PA's Desk

**PARISHIONERS NEEDED** to decorate for Christmas: Thursday, December 22 @ anytime during the day or evening- Trees, lights, wreaths, naivety set-up, liturgical colors and greenery. If you can help, even for an hour, let me know. As the new person here, I'll need your help, please.

### **A Community Growing:**

Recently we received data from the diocese regarding our October Count. The news is GOOD!! Our October count shows the community growing!! We actually were down .028 percent, or one less person from last year, but if you factor in the 20 funerals we've had this past year, we actually are growing our community. I continue to see more and more new faces on Sunday's, and many of them are youth and young adults. I think there are wonderful things happening here that are attracting people, and you should feel proud to be a part of it. We have good music and good preaching, and there is a spirit of welcome, celebration and joy at our liturgies. I appreciate your attendance at Mass, especially knowing people are very busy with so many activities, responsibilities, visiting family and friends, and so forth. Even as our news is good, there is always a need to reflect upon who is not coming to Church and why? We continue to unfold the merger of our parishes into the parish family of St. Vincent de Paul Parish. It will take us on average 5-7 years to truly come together as one. Yet, we are seeing "many" positive signs of our journey together, and that is good news! As we continue our journey through Advent, approaching the remembrance of the birth of our Lord, we still need to be aware of who is not here with us, and to reach out to those who no longer attend or have drifted away! Each of us can be a part of the effort to reach out to invite them to our church for the Holidays. Let them know of our spirit & welcome and the hope for them to come and worship with us!

### **Jesus, God's Word Among Us:**

The Bible tells us that Jesus is God's Word, made flesh. In other words, Jesus' life and ministry are our best way of understanding God. In the beginning of John's Gospel, which is the last Gospel written (soon after 100 CE) and the one with the most vivid images and symbolisms about God and Jesus, we read: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Jesus was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*

I have always been sensitive to the power of words and what words can do. Do you remember the old nursery rhyme about **"Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never harm me"**? That absolutely just isn't true. I have witnessed myself just how the power of words can heal or destroy people's relationships and their spirits.

In the Bible we are told that *"The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12) Isaiah 49:2 echoes this idea when we hear: *"He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver."*

As we get closer Christmas, we focus on the reality that Jesus is God's Word spoken right here and right now, through the events of the world, and especially through you and me and our daily experiences. Jesus is not just God's Word from ages past, but for those of us who believe that Jesus Christ is still alive and living—right here and right now—that Word, often spoken through us, has power to accomplish many things.

As we prepare for Christmas, think about your favorite "words" from scripture. Some of my favorite words from the bible are things such things as "love," or "compassion," or the invitation to "do not be afraid." I think my favorite word in the English language is "enthusiasm," which comes from the root words "en theo ism," which literally means to be "filled with God." I especially think of that image when I see the energy and excitement of children at Mass, because what could be a better image of God among us than those who are filled with enthusiasm, or literally, "filled with God." I also like God's invitation to have hope and not be afraid, and to trust in him. I tend to be cautious and fearful of many things, but the scriptures remind me that as long as I stay close to God in faith, everything will always be okay.

Words do have real power to create our surroundings and environment. I often remind myself, almost daily, of something I noticed on Facebook a while ago. It was a quote which read: **"Before I open my mouth, let my words pass through three questions: 1) Is it true? 2) Is it necessary? 3) Is it kind?"** I wonder how different our world, community, church, or families would be if we simply followed those three questions? May the Word of God in our midst continue to inspire and guide us.

### **First Reconciliation:**

Last Sunday our second grade children and their families celebrated First Reconciliation as they make their way forward in sacramental preparation for Confirmation and first Eucharist (communion).

Next spring they will celebrate Confirmation with Bishop Cistone on Saturday April 22nd and be welcomed to the Eucharistic table of the Lord for first communion shortly after that. As a parish let us pray that their journey continue to be a lifetime filled with God's graces in their life.

### **"Believe" Bracelets:**

I mentioned last week that the Youth Ministry Team is handing out "Believe" bracelets intended for all youth in our parish, community, or Shepherd Schools. If you'd like to join our Youth Ministry Team, please see me, or Mary Moomey, Kaylie Willoughby, Shavonne Shanteau, Geri Clark, or Bev Kalmar. I think the bracelets are too big for a child's wrist, but if you want to try one on, see one of us.

### **Christmas Giving Tree:**

For all of you who gave so generously to our Christmas Giving Tree, the Christian Service Commission thanks you! May you be blessed for your kindness and concern for those in our community who are in need of a little extra care and attention.