

From the P.A.'s Desk

**Reaching Out to People:**

One of the invitations or challenges given to us by Pope Francis is reaching out to people in our community. In light of his encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel*, he pushes us to make contact with people who have “fallen away/drifted away” from the Catholic Church. Pope Francis often likes to say that “the church should be a field-hospital on the edge of the battlefield.” In other words, close to the everyday lives of people.

The largest Christian Church is the Catholic Church – both here in the U.S. and around the world. Do you know what is the second largest church or group? It may surprise you! The second largest church/group/or denomination is: people who have fallen away or left the Catholic Church. For many reasons, they are no longer practicing their Catholic Faith nor attending church. Often these people might consider returning if they are simply invited by someone they know.

The invitation or challenge for us is how do we (you, me, all of us) invite them and welcome them back? They may be afraid to return to our church, because they felt hurt or rejected by us (either directly or indirectly), and are not sure how to come back.

The way to come back is simple. We simply invite them to come back and continue to reach out to them, letting them know we miss them; informing them that our doors are always open; that we will meet and welcome them whenever they are ready to return. Like a good father or mother, the God revealed in our scriptures is always ready and willing to seek and welcome anyone, especially the lost, or those that were a part of us at one time.

Francis also likes to say that “a shepherd should smell like his sheep,” and that is a challenge to any pastor or pastoral administrator, that they need to be where the people are at. If you give me the name and number of anyone you know who has walked away from the church, and might be willing to return if invited, I’d happily make contact on behalf of the community. Chances are that if they know you, they will listen to you before me, but I’m willing to step in if you’d like.

**CSA:**

As of July 12, 2016, we have pledges for \$31,899 of our \$44, 221 assessment goal. We are approximately \$12,320 short of our 2016/17 target. Currently we have received 145 pledges out of 310 registered families, and in the next week, I will send a letter to the remaining 170 households who have not responded.

Participation by sending back a pledge card is very important, even if there is a small amount or zero amount pledged, for that is how we and the diocese can see if our total assessment is a realistic number to begin with. I’m asking for equal participation and equal sacrifice, but not equal amounts. I know realistically that there are a myriad of reasons for financial burdens of all kinds, and I’ve been in that spot many times myself. I do understand that there are times when it is not possible to give, or to give very little, and I understand and respect your individual decisions.

The diocese too has a tax that it must pay to Rome every year, but if it wasn’t for the Diocese of Saginaw, we as a parish would not exist. There is no stand-alone, independent parish, and for us to exist in the first place, we need both our Mother Church in Rome, and our local Diocese.

For the many people who have responded so generously, thank you for supporting our parish. I pray that God will bless you many times over.

**Defibrillator Update:**

We have the four Defibrillators that will be placed in our two locations in Shepherd and Irishtown, and now we need a group of people who want to be trained in how to use them should the need arise. There is no limit to the number of people who can be trained, and the more people the better since the probability is greater that if we need to use one, chances are somebody at the parish will now know how to use it. If you’d like to learn, we will schedule a meeting soon to train all of us. Please let me or the office know who you are.

**RCIA – Becoming Catholic:**

Here at St. Vincent de Paul we participate in a joint-parish RCIA process with our neighboring parishes. Just this past weekend someone approached me with a question regarding how to become Catholic. I'm convinced there are others who would consider becoming Catholic if invited, and perhaps you know someone wondering about it. Perhaps this pondering has occurred over some time, or is a recent thought. Perhaps their thinking is energized by the Spirit, prompting them to investigate further. Know that the Church offers a way of discernment, a process called the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). The process involves learning more about the Christian way, and following an apprenticeship of prayer, worship and Catholic practices. For someone who is already Christian, or has been practicing the faith for a number of years, the process for getting them initiated is much simpler than the formal RCIA, and doesn't require as much time. If you would like to know more, please contact Jerry Green. There is absolutely no pressure in joining the church, but I'm here to help anyone discern if they are being called to Catholicism.

**Scripture Today:**

The sisters Martha and Mary mirror the two expressions of the disciple's call: loving service to others (Martha) and prayer and contemplation (Mary). But as Martha comes to the realization in today's Gospel, discipleship begins with hearing the Word of God, with opening our hearts and spirits to the presence of God.

The Middle Eastern world where Jesus grew up believed that hospitality was a sacred obligation: that the opportunity to be of service to, and to welcome others, was a blessing from God. I want to say that is something we do very well at St. Vincent de Paul Parish. Within my first few days in this parish, I was struck with how hospitality is a pillar of this parish, both in how we treat those that come to us for food, and how we prepare a feast for the families at the funeral luncheons. Whenever I'm at our churches in Shepherd or Irishtown, I always return to the rectory with my stomach and doggy-bag filled. I have a lot to learn from you about being a "Martha" to others. That is one reason why every Sunday I'll be outside the church greeting you. It doesn't matter if it's 90 or 0 degrees, rainy or snowy, and outside I'll be to greet you. If you must deal with the weather outside to get here, then I too at least can be outside dealing with the weather to greet you. Since we have three doors and there is only one of me, I'll rotate a different door each week.

Even today, the Holy Land still operates that way. Back in 1983 I studied in the Middle East for three months while a student at St. John's Seminary. Often, whenever I entered a merchants shop to look around or buy something, the first thing they would do is sit me down and offer me tea; even before talking about why I was there. Hospitality and family are among their strongest cultural foundations.

Today's first reading (the first reading every Sunday always corresponds to the same theme in the Gospel), Abraham's welcome of the three strangers, illustrates that belief. The spirit of such hospitality is contained in Jesus' instructions to his disciples that the greatest among them – and us – are those who serve the others.

Like Martha, we can become so obsessed with the business and "busy-ness" of life that we fail to grasp the joy that is the essence of life. We can become so caught up with agendas and schedules that we are soon anesthetized to feeling and experiencing the very real presence of God in our lives; our need for having everything (including people) perfect and in order drives away the ability to experience the beauty in present moment. Jesus invites each of us to choose the "better portion" of welcoming the joy and love of family, and then to extend that to all the strangers we meet every day.

Last Monday we remembered the feast day of St. Benedict at our Word and Communion Service, and he had a motto in all his monasteries around the world: "Let all be received here as would Christ." Like Abraham's welcome of the three strangers and the welcome Martha, Mary, and Lazarus extended to Jesus in Bethany, hospitality is not only a holy responsibility but also a joyful opportunity to welcome and serve Christ in the persons of others who come to our tables, or our church.