

Financial Report 2009-10
October 3, 2010

It was a startling revelation which caught the world by surprise. The revelation came by way of some personal writings that became public in the wake of her death. Mother Theresa of Calcutta, the epitome of holiness and the personification of childlike trust in God wrote for years in a personal journal about her struggle as a believer. In describing this struggle, this Saint who served the poorest of the poor, used words such as “loss,” “darkness” and “loneliness.” Mother Theresa, unbeknownst to us clearly carried this struggle every day. Some might ask, how could someone so holy face be overburdened by such a great struggle?

And yet, struggles are part of every human life. The Word of God today contains ripples of the human struggle. In the first reading Habakkuk cries out, “How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen.” In the second reading Saint Paul seeks to encourage Timothy amid his every day struggles. He writes: “I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.” Finally, in the Gospel it is the apostles who are seemingly struggling. They turn to Jesus and say, “Increase our faith.”

Every week we come to Mass we bring with us among other things our personal struggles and we ask God to help us. But we also carry those common struggles which are endemic to our time and place. One such struggle that is so real in our society today is the economy. Since the events of 911 the economy has taken a major hit which has affected us all individually and collectively. Even our parish has suffered as a result of the economic downturn.

For the last five years we have been in deficit spending. The famous Minuteman Campaign a long time permanent and supportive structure bottomed out in recent years necessitating a change in direction. What is more, on many occasions over the last few years we have had to dip into our modest savings for operations. Last year at this time you might recall I shared with you the Annual Report and announced that the parish had a deficit of \$330,000 while the school had a deficit of nearly \$86,000 amounting to a combined deficit of \$416,000.

Indeed, this has been a time of great financial struggle. But today, as you open your bulletin and read the four page financial report for the past fiscal year 2009-2010 there is good news. Thanks to good stewardship and your overwhelming generosity particularly with the Parish Share Program our parish deficit for this year is only \$122,000, while the school after subsidy is in the black by a few thousand dollars. In one year of working together we have made great progress. Thank you for your generosity and support of all that we are and do as a parish.

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Given these numbers it is very tempting for us, I know it is for me, to sit back and gloat about our success. Nevertheless, while it is important for us to be good stewards, and celebrate at that, we must never become absorbed with the numbers, for the Church is not about numbers but people, people who continue the work of Jesus in a spirit of faith, hope and love.

As the Trust Administrator and steward of this parish I must confess to you that one of the struggles that I have lived with every day since my arrival over a year ago is the burden of responsibility that comes with being pastor of this large parish in such a difficult time. What makes this struggle even more difficult is the disparity of numbers. Of the almost 4,000 families who belong to the parish only 800 contributed to the Parish Share, of the 3100 people who receive church envelopes only 900 to 1000 use them regularly and of the 519 people who died since 2005 we received only four bequests. Given these numbers I have often wondered and sometimes even worried about what to do. I don't for one minute think people have stopped being generous but I do think there are more charitable institutions in the mix that often, for whatever reason, win out over the Church. Obviously it is easy to become caught up in the numbers.

During the past year I have had a series of meetings with the Diocesan Director of Stewardship and Development, Dr. Pat Joyce. His message to me has always been the same. "Fr. Dave it's not about the money, but the mission. If you have mission, money will always follow." I am so grateful to Dr. Joyce for that insight and I am very much committed to the mission of Saint Bernard Parish.

To that end, perhaps the best news to report from this past year is the formation of our Parish Pastoral Council, six men and six women, who have already rolled up their sleeves and begun to work with me on developing a pastoral plan for the future. Our first project was to develop a parish mission statement which is foundational to all that we are and do. While this statement appears on the cover of our bulletin each week and will soon be found framed in every building on campus, hopefully it will become ingrained on our collective hearts.

This statement is our shared mission that I invite all to embrace. Of particular note, especially as we forge into the future, I want to highlight its five constitutive elements, with the first being "the power of the Eucharist." Everything that we do must be Christ centered. Whether it is Holy Mass or Eucharistic Adoration we need to exercise the proper respect and reverence for the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and in the words of St. Augustine "become what we receive." Of course, a great part of Eucharist is "thanksgiving." As the faithful of this parish we must never allow ourselves to feel "entitled" but we must always be grateful for we are richly blessed. Everything that we have is a gift from God.

The second element is the "grace-filled guidance of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit transformed fears into faith in that upper room and the Church was born. That same Spirit can do wonders for us especially when we follow its lead. I invite you to join me

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in every day praying to the Holy Spirit which inevitably, if we are true to the Spirit, takes us out of our comfort zones but always with God's trust in us.

The third element is "serving all through the teachings of the Gospel." We are called to preach the Good News not just in our school and religious education programs but in all that we do, with every breath. Preaching this good news is something we are called to embrace daily. We all need to tell the story of Jesus and his love for us and with great passion, we need to tell world the Good News of Saint Bernard Parish. That means focusing everyday not on what is wrong but what is right and celebrating it accordingly. I long for the day when the letters we priests receive tell us not what is wrong with us or the Church, but what is right. I believe we have so much right here and we need to do our best to accent it. That was one of the recurring messages of our Clergy Multi-Day Convocation this past week. But when things do go wrong, and they will at times because we are human, there is always the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Very soon work will begin on our confessionals so as to insure the privacy and respect the sacrament deserves.

The fourth element is "United with the Shepherd of the Roman Catholic Church, our Holy Father." As a faith community we follow the lead of Christ's representative on earth, the pope in the person of our Bishop David, a successor of the apostles. In the creed we profess we aspire always to be "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." And we are to be according to the mandate of our Bishop "A Church Alive." This sense of life is not about survival and maintaining the status quo but rather flourishing abundantly, sometimes at great risk, for the sake of the Kingdom in collaboration with our neighboring parishes and in partnership with the Diocese and the Bishop who are our allies. They exist to teach and support us all in service to the world.

The fifth and final element of our mission statement is "our Parish seeks to foster a growing, supportive, and welcoming Community that proclaims the Kingdom of God." Sunday, August 22nd was my proudest day as Pastor. That was the day of our first parish picnic celebrating our patronal feast. Over 1000 of our faithful participated in that day of which started with an outdoor Mass and just a wonderful experience of community. That day we showed that we are not only a growing, supportive and welcoming community but we are also alive and well. In the future I hope we can find more ways to grow closer as a community and share the many responsibilities for ministries. There is something for each of us here. One future initiative will be the establishment of greeters at Sunday Mass along with a little more time between Mass for fellowship.

In the meantime, I want to thank the 143 parishioners who participated in the consultation process regarding the proposed Sunday Mass changes. As you know this was a process open to the entire parish. 115 parishioners expressed support for the changes while 28 had questions, concerns and or suggestions. One of the major areas of concern centered on the 1:00pm Mass. Many thought it was too late. As a result we modified that proposed time to 12:45 PM. On Friday I received approval from the diocese for our new Mass schedule, which will take effect in January 2011. (Saturday 5:00 PM; Sunday, 7:00

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AM, 9:00 AM, 9:00 AM Clairvaux, 11:00 AM, 11:00 AM Clairvaux, 12:45 PM and 7:30 PM.

A “growing, supportive, and welcoming community” is one that includes every one and excludes no one. Today, I stand here and invite every member of this parish, young and old, rich and poor, to join my brother priests and me in embracing the mission. This is our moment. How blessed we are to have inherited such a rich and storied past. God knows it did not come easy for our ancestors in the faith. There were many struggles. The closing hymn we will sing “Faith of our Fathers” speaks of those struggles. As we walk into the future we, too, will have our struggles. But like those before us, including Mother Theresa, we can allow those struggles to not become obstacles but opportunities, not stumbling blocks but stepping stones to a brighter future which ultimately leads to the fullness of God’s kingdom.

Thank you for your support of Saint Bernard Parish. A complete four page Financial Report is inserted within today’s bulletin. I hope you will take some time to read the report and become more aware about our parish. Remember, “It’s not about the money, but the mission.” May God bless you and may God continue to bless Saint Bernard Parish.