

January 2021 Pastoral Letter

The Church has dedicated this year, 2021, to St. Joseph, patron of our country. Joseph was the ‘quiet’ guardian of Jesus, providing home, protection and taught him the skills of a carpenter. At the beginning of this year, let us model our hearts and lives to this ‘silent witness’ to the Gospel. Unfortunately, the pandemic is still with us, but there is hope of a vaccine that will reach us sometime this year. In the meantime, we still abide by the rules of living between code ‘yellow’ and ‘red’. We still listen to our medical, political and religious leaders in doing our part to protect ourselves and others. At the same time we know that businesses, schools and healthcare have received a direct hit in their ability to provide services. Our religious institutions are no different.

We too, have witnessed the fallout of the pandemic: reduced numbers at weekly Mass, funerals, weddings, baptisms and other sacraments, as well, a reduction in our ability to provide ministry to our worshipping communities. Here at Holy Spirit Parish, the roll that we were on; the ongoing ministries and outreach by various committees; the implementation of new pastoral practices and ideas has been suspended and pushed to the ‘back burner’ so to speak. However, I cannot help that we have been given this time for renewal in our community. Although we are in a so-called ‘holding pattern,’ this time is not to be wasted.

During this time of suspension let us look at our ministries in private prayer, to write down ‘new ideas’; look at the direction that we are going and to make those much needed changes by asking ourselves, “Is this ministry working... is it addressing a particular need in our community?” If the answer is “yes” then great. If the answer is “no” then ask yourself this: “Where do we go from here?”

This is the time of year that we begin preparing our **Accountability Report** for the parish. This report tells the community three important things:

- 1) Who you are with a brief description of your ministry/committee.
- 2) Give a detailed account of what has been accomplished this past year.
- 3) What are the goals of this ministry for the parish in the coming year?

I realize that because of the pandemic many committees have not been able to meet nor exercise in totality their ministries. Regardless, we still want to know who you are and what are your goals, objectives, and plans for the coming year (or when the pandemic is over). During this pandemic we could use this time as an opportunity to review what your ministries are doing and to re-evaluate where you are going.

This may be a time to say, “We have done this for so long and it has finally run its course.” This is not a failure! Rather, this shows growth. I believe that it is the Holy Spirit telling us that we need to move on from this particular ministry and to try something new. Therefore, I encourage you as you prepare your yearly report to prayerfully reflect on what you have done in the past and to see if it is still working and if not... what opportunities are available to us?

When this pandemic is over and we return to ‘normal’ society will be different. If society has changed, that means that our ‘Church’ will be different. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves: “Are we ready?” What new ministries will evolve? What could I do to help address these new needs? For example:

- How could we minister to the many students of all grades who will no doubt need some sort of tutoring or support now or when this pandemic ends?
- What about affordable housing? This is so desperately needed from young families to those entering into retirement.
- What about feeding the hungry? Or helping with existing programs that offer ministry to those who suffer from addictions? Or those who are grieving... what are we doing for them?
- What about Alpha Program that is now offered in our parish?

All ministries arise from a particular need. The Pandemic Committee is the most recent example of this. However, in due time, the Pandemic Committee’s work will be done and yet, there will be other opportunities for this group. As Jesus told us not too long ago, ‘we need to stay awake and keep watchful...’ (Mk 13:33) for opportunities that come our way.

At the beginning of this New Year, I want to take this opportunity to re-affirm all of you in what you are doing to live out your faith and share your ministries during these trying times. As well, I want to express my gratitude to all of you for all that you do. To say that I am proud of you is an understatement. “I give thanks to God for you and for all your wonderful deeds...” (Ps 9:1). Let us keep each other in prayerful support as we continue live the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Fr. David