



CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST OF LITTLE CANADA

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April 28, 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Happy Easter! Christ is risen; he is truly risen! Alleluia! Today I have the honor of again updating you on our Pastoral Planning process, which we initiated in Fall 2017 with a parish-wide survey, that highlighted needs in these areas: Welcoming, School/Church Unity, Finance and Stewardship.

In my last letter, I shared we were tackling some of the Welcoming and School/Church Unity goals with redesigned websites. As you all have hopefully seen by now, not only do we have the new sites fully functioning, but we are gaining users to both sites and getting requests for our regular e-newsletters. In the past two months alone, we have had more than 600 users to our school site, and more than 2,000 to the church site. We also have a dynamic new digital sign on Little Canada Road that we hope draws more people to our church and school events. If you've been liking what you see, I encourage you to share these links with friends and family outside of our parish community, because *you* are our biggest marketing agents/evangelists: sjolc.org and school.sjolc.org.

One of our primary Finance goals was to balance the budget within three years, to accommodate the decline in parishioners and contributions I've referenced in past letters. Church and school leadership, along with the trustees and Finance Council, have been working tirelessly to find savings, and our budget for Fiscal Year 2020 saves the parish more than \$190,000 as compared to our current fiscal year. This aligns with the larger three-year plan to right-size the budget. This does not come without some pain points, however. In my commitment to transparency, it's important that I share with you we will not be rehiring for Judith Pieper's position at the school after her retirement this June. This means a creative restructuring of existing teachers' roles, that has led to a reduction in hours for some, while maintaining and right-sizing our staff for the existing student population. The good news is no STEM, core curriculum or extracurricular activities were eliminated in this process. Please keep these amazing educators in your prayers as they continue to do God's work of growing future Catholics in the faith.

Challenging decisions aside, principal Dan Hurley continues to make headway on his marketing and recruitment efforts for the school. He has a newly formed Marketing Committee meeting monthly to advise in methods and opportunities for increased school awareness in the greater northeast metro area. He's applied for grants that allowed for digital bulletin boards on both 694 and 35E during the enrollment push this past February, and this year alone he's added eight new K-8 students mid-year, and another eight prospective students on tap for next year. More important, our Pre-K continues to grow, with 20 in this year's class and 13 more already registered (with four months to go) for next year. We have said from the beginning that this will be a long process, and your support continues to be so appreciated by Mr. Hurley, myself and all the school students, staff and families at Saint John School.

As we continue to welcome more folks into our parish community, I'm excited to announce the dates of September 28 and 29 as our next Fall Festival, which will be a multi-day event again this year in full collaboration with the school. In fact, the annual School Marathon will kick off the festivities on Saturday morning. Other highlights include barbecue pork and a polka band, in addition to inflatables, kids' games, a "Corn Holy" tournament, Ste. Anne's bake sale and all the usual fun. Please save the date(s)!

On the Faith Formation front, both church and school are exploring ongoing religious formation for staff utilizing the Franciscan University of Steubenville Catechetical Institute's online formation program, Franciscan at Home. And lastly, but not least important, we made a big push with our new Stewardship Committee this past fall, and that core group has been working tirelessly to update our parish database with the census data gathered during the Time, Talent & Treasure campaign this past October.

As ever, my office is always open, and I encourage feedback and conversation as we continue on this Pastoral Planning journey. The group is meeting in May to re-evaluate goals and set direction for the next 18 months. Watch for news on those in my next update mid-summer.

Peace,

Father Tom Balluff, pastor