

Second State of the Parish Address

Sunday, October 28, 2007

Monsignor John C. Marine

My Dear Parishioners,

Almost a year ago, I stood before you at every Mass to deliver what I called my *First State of the Parish Address*. On that occasion, I promised that I would make it an annual event. So allow me now a few moments of your time and your attention. As your pastor, I am ultimately accountable to Almighty God and to you my parishioners, and I believe there is no more appropriate location to make this accounting than in the place where Almighty God and we his people join Him each week, namely at the celebration of Sunday Mass. And while my report is strictly speaking not a homily, I believe it will clearly show how what we preach about each Sunday is translated into action within our parish community.

You know when you look at some of the recent successful events of the last few months: our parish picnic, the closing of our Forty Hours Devotion and last weekend's Open House and Ministry Fair, it is truly evidence that our parish is vibrant and moving forward. Comments we priest have heard indicate parishioners are generally pleased about the parish's present state of affairs and are hopeful for the future. While these big events are good barometers of the vitality of our parish and the interest and goodness of our people, I am not naive to think that in any way they tell the whole story of the state of our parish. I

believe that the best way to evaluate that is to look at the Mission Statement adopted a few years before I came by the Pastoral Council of that time and see if we are fulfilling it.

They wrote:

“We as a people and as a parish set forth as our mission

- **to worship** God through the Eucharist, the Sacraments, and our care as a Christian community.
- **to teach** the message of Christ by the way we live; by educating our members through our Catholic school, our CCD, and adult education programs.
- **to build community** by our loving concern and support of one another and by fostering in all our parishioners a feeling of **ownership and belonging**.
- **to serve** those in need by our prayers, our presence, our service, financial support and outreach.
- And finally, **to proclaim the good news** which should be visible in our demeanor in all of our activities: whether they be spiritual, service related, athletic or social”.

Last year, at this time I felt it was important to find out how our parishioners believed we were fulfilling that Mission Statement. And so, with the help of a Strategic Planning Committee and the support of our Pastoral Council, we set up focus groups to solicit the input of our parishioners and to find out what

people thought about our parish and what we could do to become an even more vibrant, welcoming community. These focus groups consisted of close to 200 people, most of whom who were randomly selected from our parish records.

The members of the Strategic Planning Committee and I were delighted by the openness, insightful comments and the genuine love for the parish exhibited by those who took the time to participate.

You may recall that around November of last year, a summary of the comments and suggestions made by participants of these focus groups was published in our bulletin and your own comments and suggestions were invited and welcomed.

The careful consideration of these comments and suggestions has become the agenda of our Parish Pastoral Council over these last several months as they advise me in planning for the present and future.

To give a few examples:

Participants in the focus groups raised concern about our religious education program for CCD students after confirmation and up to high school age.

Others from CCD asked that we find ways to help their children more fully participate in the life of the parish.

As a result, the Pastoral Council recommended to me that a CCD Advisory Board be formed composed of parents, catechists and administrators. This already formed board has begun to recommend many needed improvements which have been well received by our CCD parents, including a completely new formatted Junior High program and a soon to be initiated new Junior High Youth Group. I should also mention at this time that our High School Youth Group is well on its way and several of our parish teenagers from various public, private and Catholic schools have been joining together in service, spiritual and athletic events.

Many focus group participants saw the need for more contemporary, upbeat music at our liturgy and to involve more of our teenagers in this particular goal. In response to this suggestion and with the advice of our Pastoral Council, we have begun to organize a High School Contemporary Youth Band which will soon provide music at one of our weekend Masses

Several participants in the focus groups hoped that our parish school which is already outstanding, would be further enhanced to attract more students by ensuring that it would always be on the cutting edge of technology, science, language and mathematics, but especially as a place for authentic Catholic formation of children in a culture that increasingly makes God and morals unwelcome. These suggestions about our school were timely because they have

become the foundation for the self evaluation report currently being used by our school as it prepares to go through Middle States accreditation in early November. In the meantime, our school has been, identified by the Archdiocese, as a candidate for Blue Ribbon status, a national recognition toward which we have begun to work, the first step being the addition of Spanish to our curriculum.

Numerous participants in our focus groups saw the need for the parish to find ways to invite back the inactive, to keep parishioners better informed about our many organizations and motivate more people to use their talents or simply to take advantage of what is offered by our parish ministries. Last week's Open House and Ministry Fair was one of the first attempts proposed by our Pastoral Council to achieve this on-going goal. I found it encouraging that numerous parishioners, whose children are grown and who now feel somewhat unconnected to parish life said they volunteered last week and believe that will re-establish the link they felt they had lost.

There were several comments made regarding our facilities. Many people in the focus groups said that finding meeting space is often a problem. They said an evermore active parish needs more and varied places for people to meet. The kind of meeting space that our High School Youth Group needs is vastly different from what is needed for a small intimate group of adults who want to share their faith, as in a Bible study or a Divorce and Beyond support group. **A common**

remark was that it is finally time for us to do something to beautify this church.

They said: “fix the pews”.

“Consider increasing vestibule space so that our social gatherings after Mass can be right on the level of where our Church is”, and therefore more accessible to more people. Better handicapped parking and drop off points for older parishioners was also on the minds of many.

Several parishioners both in the focus groups as well as in our various advisory groups have pointed out to me that while our church building has served us well over the past 42 years, and though it has had some cosmetic additions, there is a need to enhance it, possibly enlarge it and consider its adequacy, durability and aesthetic qualities for present and coming generations. On numerous occasions parishioners have pointed out to me that our church furnishings such as our altar, baptistery, this pulpit, even our sanctuary walls were all originally meant to be temporary until the other needed facilities of the parish were built.

Parishioners have said:

“After 42 years many of these furnishings need to be repaired or replaced to make a more permanent and appropriate worship space”.

One of the factors regarding our church that concerns me greatly is the fact that although we now enjoy the privilege of having three full time priests, you

must know that with the continual decline in the number of available priests this will not last long. And so, we need to prepare our worship space for a time when, in the not too distant future, **there will be fewer Masses but larger congregations.**

So where do we go with all of this? Well, with the advice of our Pastoral and Finance Councils, our Building and Grounds and Strategic Planning Committees, I recently hired an architect to develop options to address these capital needs. Those options in the form of architectural drawings will be available to us in a couple of months. With the collaboration of you the parishioners of this parish, we will together decide on what is the best long term plan for the future, not only for our church and the identified needs for additional space but for continual improvements to our school and other facilities that must not be overlooked.

I hope you can see that planning for our future, under my pastorate, has been and will continue to be done with a tremendous amount of collaboration. The vision for the future is not mine alone to develop but must be a vision that parishioners and their priests create together in an atmosphere of prayer, careful study and discernment guided by the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, any planning for the future must be done with prudent

consideration of our parish financial resources and by keeping in mind the sacrificial capabilities of our people.

In fact this State of the Parish Address is a good opportunity for me to thank you for your response to the increased offertory appeal I made last year at this time. Because of your response to that appeal and as a result of a conscious attempt to eliminate expenses where possible, as well as the generous contribution of time and talent of several parishioners, I am happy to report the deficits we experienced in previous years have been turned around. When you take with you a copy of the Financial Report that I have provided in this weekend's bulletin, you will notice that there is a positive increase in our operating income. However, some of our maintenance and capital projects that would have utilized this money last year **have been deferred due to the fact that we must first of all identify a long term plan for all of our facilities. These projects will need to be done but will be done in a manner consistent with our long term plan.** So while the report shows there are funds in reserve, kindly keep this thought in mind. **Constant generosity and where possible, future increases in your weekly contribution remain the foundation of our parish's continued financial stability and of our response to God for His goodness to us.**

My brothers and sisters the State of our Parish is very good in many ways. Your kind words of affirmation, your insightful suggestions, your generous

contributions of time, talent and treasure as well as your edifying presence at Mass each weekend and in our Adoration Chapel in prayer are all indications that your love for God, for His Son Jesus Christ and for your parish is deeply rooted in the way you live your life.

While we have some challenges to face, as we develop this long term plan, these are nonetheless exciting times when Christ is calling us as a parish community to renew our commitment to Him and to His church. These are positive challenges that come from growth and are connected to the fulfillment of our parish mission: to worship, to teach, to build community, to serve those in need and to proclaim the good news.

This coming Thursday we celebrate the feast of All Saints. One of the purposes of that feast is to remind us that the goal of our lives as baptized Catholics, in fact our personal mission, is to become a Saint. While all of the many activities and future plans that I have been speaking about are all good in themselves, we must never forget that the real mission of this parish is to help us get to Heaven, our ultimate destination.

On the day of our parish picnic, we received a very beautiful and surprising visit by his Eminence Cardinal Rigali. And as he stood by his car as he was leaving and looked over the vast crowd of people and our beautiful grounds, he said:

“Oh my, what a beautiful parish.”

He echoed something that I have said almost on a daily basis since I came to this parish as your pastor two and one half years ago. But knowing that a parish is not just buildings or grounds, but most importantly it is you the people and the God who calls us together in Jesus, I would like to add to what the Cardinal said and say:

“Oh what a beautiful parish family this is”.

In conclusion allow me to express what a joy it is to report the status of the parish to you and to share with you the pride and appreciation that I feel on a daily basis for the privilege of being your pastor and of joining with such wonderful, dedicated priests as Fr. Bordonaro and Fr. Kolenkiewicz, in walking the journey of faith with you, the good people of St. Bede the Venerable. So let us once again go forward as brothers and sisters with great hope, anticipation, vision and faith and through the intercession of our patron St. Bede the Venerable assist Almighty God in building the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in Heaven.

May God Bless You.