

**Sixth State of the Parish Address
Sunday, October 29 - 30, 2011
Monsignor John C. Marine**

Since I became your Pastor six years ago, I have used this last Sunday in October as an opportunity to speak at all of the Masses and give you what I call:

Your Pastor's State of the Parish Address.

I thank Father Bob, Father McKale, and Deacon John for allowing me to borrow the pulpit this weekend so that we can reflect for a few moments at every Mass, on this community of faith we call St. Bede the Venerable Parish.

In today's second reading, St. Paul is speaking to the Christian community of Thessalonica and he describes the mission of the church in these warm and beautiful terms, he says:

"We were gentle among you as a nursing mother cares for her children."

"With such affection," St. Paul goes on to say: "we were determined to share with you, not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well."

I love that passage and I think that it is so appropriate for the times. While St. Paul is talking about the church in his time, this is what we should be able to say about the Catholic Church today, especially about any Parish and in particular here at St. Bedes. If I am to properly provide you with what I believe to be the State of the Parish, no better criteria for evaluation than those words of St. Paul.

Are we, as a parish, that nursing mother St. Paul speaks of caring for her children? Are we determined to share not only the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but our very selves as well with each other? As your Pastor I would answer with a resounding - yes. Do we still have a way to go? Is there opportunity for improvement? As your Pastor I would respond with a resounding - yes.

As many of you know, Miss Carole Obrokta is our new director of Religious Education. She oversees our CCD program which has over 700 children, our adult education, and faith formation which, includes our Great Adventure Bible Series, our RCIA, for those considering a catholic life and our pre-baptism parents sessions.

These are simply a few of her many responsibilities and opportunities.

Now prior to her coming here to Saint Bede's, Carole was a DRE in Pittsburgh, in Baton Rouge Louisiana, and New Orleans. She has seen many parishes, and she has remarked many times that St. Bede's is just a remarkable, vibrant, and alive parish. Carole has said:

“What doesn't St. Bede have?”

Well that is the question that our parish Pastoral Council has been considering over this past year as they have developed a - new *Strategic Pastoral Plan*. The Pastoral Council is a group of parishioners, some elected by you as your representatives, who along with some of our professional staff personnel, meet with me every month. Their role is not to raise money or plan events. They look at the

challenges and opportunities that are before us. They consider the pastoral needs of our people, and they help me plan in light of all of that.

For instance, a recent review of Sunday Mass attendance concluded that only 24% of our registered parishioners currently come to Mass on Sundays. The council has taken into consideration the harsh reality that many Catholics are concerned, or worse, disturbed by what has happened in light of the Grand Jury report and about the handling of priest clergy abuse. In reality, while many parishioners aging and downsizing, and therefore moving out of our area, we continue to register new families about every week, replacing those we lose.

The Pastoral Council, has discussed and deliberated the many needs of the parish, taking these and many other realities into consideration and have now, with my blessing, finalized a new five year strategic pastoral plan. A plan that will soon be unveiled to the heads of all of our parish organizations and ultimately to the entire parish in the months to come for their input and support.

There are five, broad based goals which build the foundation of this plan.

Goal 1:

Increase personal participation of all parishioners to lead us to a deeper faith and spiritual development. The goal is to approach 50% attendance within 5 years. And while we do not expect to jump to this number immediately, we all can become proactive in making this goal a reality.

Our **second goal** is:

To cultivate an atmosphere of learning, integrating our Catholic faith into every stage of life. What does that mean? While we must continue to insure that we have an affordable, excellent Catholic school so that many more parishioners will enroll their children in St. Bedes, and while we will continue to do everything to make our CCD program a more effective, Catholic education must be something that continues to be supported and sought after through every stage of our lives. Therefore, the Council recognized the importance of expanding opportunities for adult faith formation and has established this as an important goal for our parish.

The **third goal** is:

To proclaim, embrace, live and share our Catholic identity. You know once people know more about their faith, they become more inclined to want to share it, especially with people who no longer come to Mass or receive the Sacraments.

The greatest challenge is: "How do you get them here?" Years ago, Priest visitations to the home, or Bible study seemed an easy way to share our faith and understand what the needs of the parish truly were. The Council quickly realized traditional methods do not seem appropriate or practical in today's fast paced world. But we are intrigued by another idea, which we tried out this summer. The idea of having small neighborhood gatherings, offering informal opportunities to talk and share and understand each other a little better.

In July, one of our Pastoral Council members invited neighbors from his street who he knew were no longer coming to church. And in an informal way, over light refreshments, a few select council members and I spent an hour and a half sharing why we participate in the life of St. Bede. And then we allowed them, in a non-judgmental way, to share their obstacles. Those invited thanked us. And while we feel we built some bridges from our side of the divide, they felt the same had been done from their side as well. I am really excited about this opportunity to learn (so is the Pastoral Council), and we look forward to getting started with this real grass roots, neighborhood outreach to the Catholic people of our community.

The **fourth goal** is

To create an environment that empowers individuals to an active role in the community. How do we accomplish this? Well there are a lot of wonderful things going on here. Our bulletin is so filled with parish activities that we can not even find room, at times, for things in the community to be listed. For those who have children it is easy to become integrated into the life of the parish. But for others that doesn't always happen as easy. We are therefore revising the way we register new parishioners and how we welcome them and bring them into the life of St. Bedes. For example, we are considering having a social gathering twice a year for all of those who are newly registered., building community from the start.

The **fifth and final goal** is:

To empower parishioners to identify and communicate their needs as well as those of their neighbors so that the parish can respond appropriately. St. Bedes has one of the most effective Parish Nurse Ministry outreaches of all the parishes in the Archdiocese. If the need is expressed, Kris Ingle and her core group of volunteers, is there to respond. But our Pastoral Council feels that we can be even more effective identifying unmet needs and connecting people with the wonderful outreach here at St. Bedes. If there is one thing that makes those who no longer come to church sit up and take a second look, it's the help that they receive from this parish in time of need, for themselves or a loved one.

As you can see, as we begin to discuss and implement this plan, you cannot help but feel this is an exciting time to be a parishioner of St. Bede Parish. And for me it's personally exciting to be your Pastor. Not just to see all the wonderful things that are going on to make our parish a better place, but most especially, because of our new church and the many improvements to facilities which aid our congregation in so many ways.

Indeed this church expresses, in brick and mortar, the mission of our parish and what we hope to accomplish in the next five years. For in a dramatic way it teaches our Catholic faith. In a powerful way it proclaims to our neighbors our commitment to our faith, our priorities and our belief that despite, what people have heard in the news media, our faith is strong, our worship is important and the Catholic Church is here to stay. This wonderful church serves our own need to remember that life is more than

what happens in the marketplace and that what is most important is our encounter with God and finding the gateway to heaven.

Speaking of our church I am thrilled to announce as part of this report that we have reached another milestone in our capital campaign. This weekend another marker was added to our success thermometer on the front lawn. We add a marker each time we receive an additional two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. A testament to the dedication and support of so many. We are now at the milestone of three million seven hundred and seventy thousand dollars in cash and pledges. The Capital Campaign Committee and I feel confident that the momentum is present for us to complete our campaign goal of 4.5 million over the next few years.

It is personally edifying for me to see the sacrifices made by all of you, despite the extremely difficult economy, that has made the dream of a new church become reality. Unfortunately, the economy has had noticeable impact on our regular collections. Like most parishes, we have seen a decline in our Sunday collections over the past two years. More people than ever are feeling the effects this year. So where possible, I ask those families who are not feeling the effects to consider an increase their donations to make up for this deficit, hoping it is temporary - your generosity at this time would be most appreciated.

As I do every year on the occasion of this State of the Parish Address, I have enclosed in our bulletin our Annual Financial Report. When you look at this report you

will notice a modest surplus. It looks good in comparison to the deficit we reported just two years ago. As good stewards of our parish resources, our parish Finance Council, in conjunction with our School Advisory Board, have been adjusting expenses related to our school, consistent with a smaller school population.

Besides that, I recently appointed a special sub committee from our finance council to advise me on cost reductions throughout the parish. Looking at cost savings on supplies in contracted services, like trying to take advantage of energy de-regulation to purchase electricity and gas through a Diocesan contract, is but a beginning.

Breaking even in our financial operations is not what we want for a parish of our size and vibrancy. We need a larger cushion to provide for inflation, rainy day contingencies, and to support the new initiatives that the Pastoral Council is planning. Here is where careful management of our expenses, along with increased generosity of those who can, will help us as we move to the future.

My dear parishioners, I have been a priest for 35 years and I have been stationed and involved with many parishes in the Archdiocese. But I have never experienced such pride and enthusiasm and joy among parishioners as I have experienced here at St. Bedes, since the dedication of our church in September. Indeed there is an enthusiasm and a spirit that we need to capture and channel in ways that will help us renew our mission as we approach the 50th anniversary of St. Bede Parish in 2015. Yes, St. Bedes is that holy nursing mother caring for her children, but we know

what we have to do in order to reach so many more of God's children out there that are unconnected and in need of Jesus Christ.

Speaking for Father McKale, Father Bob, and Deacon John, I echo today's words of St. Paul as I conclude by saying: "And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly." That in receiving the Word of God from us, you receive not a human word, but as it truly is the Word of God which is certainly at work in you who believe and belong to St. Bedes.

May God Bless You.

