September 30, 2018

Dear Friends,

 I wanted to write to you to communicate a few things. Before doing so, thank you for all you do for our parish most especially sharing your great gift of faith and family. We are truly blessed.

**October & Respect for Life Month**: We continue our support of women needing prenatal and postnatal services through our “baby bottle” collection program. Please take home a bottle and place your spare change in it this month. For the past two years, we have donated over $2000 for this project. We also begin our devotion to the ROSARY this month offered at a different person’s house nightly culminating on All Hallows Eve with the recitation of the final rosary, a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and a Mass of Healing that evening.

**Cathedral Speaker Series:** in an effort to assist our continual faith formation and to bring us together outside the Eucharist, the sun of all our spiritual exercises, we have developed this series inviting monthly guest speakers on various topics. ***Our first presentation is THIS WEDNESDAY*** on Faith & Spirituality presented by Sr. Sarah Lamb who has worked in the Jesuit Spirituality Center for many years while giving spiritual direction to many. You will sense a joyful presence of Christ in her. Her talk begins at ***7 PM*** followed by a question and answer session. ***Please plan on attending.***

**Advent Series:** as we do every year, we will offer a weekly program. We will look at four Salesian principles from the treasured spirituality of St. Francis de Sales. This year, we will offer the presentation in Spanish on Tuesdays and in English on Thursdays.

**Catholic Strong:** there are a few people, including myself, who are asked to engage you in personal asks to help us with our five-year goal of $205,000. Please know that all of us are uncomfortable in doing so, but you have been identified because of your past incredible generosity. We have seen the video (though it did not work for the 11:30 Mass) and both are available on our website. During the first two Sundays in October, I will show you the PowerPoint presentation which will outline our Case Statement. Again, we retain 70% of our contributions and the 30% that goes to the diocese also benefits us in many ways. I ask that you keep in prayer our collective participation. One goal of the Catholic Strong campaign is to offer a continual and pertinent faith formation program. As you can see from the above, we are well on our way.

**National V Encuentro:** I wrote my first impressions in this week’s bulletin and the findings will be culled from the data given last week as 3000 delegates gathered in Grapevine, Texas. Mariannie Zayas, our parish representative, will speak at both Masses during the third Sunday of October to give her thoughts. As I mentioned in today’s bulletin, what is clear is our need to develop an outreach to attract the young of the parish, so that they may be fully present and involved. They are **NOT** our future but our **present**. I also encourage you to visit the vencuentro.org website and read the well-delivered and thought out homilies over the weekend.

**House of Charity:** as of this writing we have exceeded our goal of $52,000 if all pledges come to be. Should we go over our goal, we benefit with a higher percentage of return. More importantly, brothers and sisters whom we will never meet will be helped in their need. Thank you and great job!

**VISA Raffle:** The **Sacred Heart Society** of the St. Joseph Apostolate is selling raffle tickets to its annual Holiday Shopping Spree. Tickets are $2.00 a piece or 3 for $5.00. First Place: $250 VISA card; Second Place: $150 VISA Card; Third Place: $100 VISA Card. Tickets are available after Mass or during the week in the Parish House. Please support!

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**The growing number of homeless and the temporary suspension of our sandwich ministry**: for one reason or another, we have seen a numerous amount of homeless congregating around our property on N 7th Street and on Broadway. They sit all day on the rectangular gardens on the side of the rectory and on the steps of our front entrance of the Cathedral. They make passage between the Chancery Office (on Market St) and the Pastoral Center (next door) difficult and intimidating. At any time, there can be 30-40 people hanging out. Walk around the quadrant between Market and Federal Streets and you will see another 30-40 people. Children going to school are at risk especially with the omnipresent needles and trash on the ground not to mention the ever-present aroma of marijuana. The diocesan employees are forced to walk in the street if moving from one building to the other. Many have told me of their growing fear from the increasing number. One department that is mostly women have agreed to exit the building only with another employee. For the past two months, I have called 911 at least 2-3 times daily. The homeless leave when the police arrive only to return soon after they drive away.

Last week, I met with two top county administrators and one of the chiefs of police for the second time. They made clear that the two problem areas are the methadone clinic (which is supposedly moving in December) and our property. The trash, language, arguments, fights and in general unhealthy living are a growing concern. They asked if we suspend our sandwich ministry for a while until we can find another way of offering services in a better manner. I realize our intention is to respond to the Gospel mandate “when I was hungry you gave me to eat.” So many wonderful people and parishes donate their time and treasure to feed the many who are truly poor and delight in our sandwich ministry.

This past Wednesday, standing in front of Delia’s desk, I witnessed about 15 people gathered around a drug dealer who was selling his poison. Two men broke out in a fight. I am not happy to say that I rushed out in a fit of anger, yelled at everyone asking them to leave our private property and demanded that the drug dealer never return. He laughed at me and moved on to no doubt another place of peddling addictive drugs. Many are the days when I need to check the front steps before the noon Mass so that it may be cleaned and passage cleared for our congregation.

In the interest of full disclosure, I am spiritually and morally weakened by this problem. My heart often grows cold. I am tempted to lash out and spend too much of my time fighting this issue. While I know others complain, including several of you about this situation, I pity myself by saying interiorly that everyone leaves to go home. We live here 24/7. Something has to give.

This situation needs to improve. So, beginning tomorrow, October 1 we will suspend the sandwich ministry and work with the county on other alternatives, to see if after a month or so, things have improved.

I have struggled with how to address this situation. I hope this helps a bit to understand my position at trying to improve the presence and safety of the Cathedral property.

**Days of Penance and Reparation:** of course, the abuse crisis makes the previous discussion somewhat insignificant in comparison. Priests and bishops have seriously wounded the Body of Christ in their “power over” the innocent flock of Christ. Last Wednesday, we met as a presbyterate asking God’s mercy and forgiveness, praying for all victims of abuse of any form and demanding from one another a daily fidelity cooperating with God’s grace to image his presence, to rebuild the Church we harmed by taking our eyes off him, the center and capstone of this Church. We are all the Body of Christ and when one suffers, we all do. Let our mantra be “My grace is enough for you” and rebuild this Church by doing so here and now at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

**Second Pastoral Council Meeting:** Tuesday, October 2 @ 7 PM

**Next St. Joseph Apostolate Meeting:** Wednesday,October 17 @ 7 PM

**First Building & Property Meeting:** Tuesday, October 23 @ 7 PM

**First Finance Council Meeting:** Tuesday, October 30 @ 7 PM

Fraternally,

John Fisher, OSFS