

Dear Parishioners,

24/25 January 2015

I just listened to the homily given by Cardinal Seán O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston and Chair of the United States Catholic Conference Pro-Life Committee, at the opening Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life this past Wednesday, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC. It's a great message and it is directed toward the youth of our Church and country. I recommend it to everyone, but especially to parents and their children. (See the citations at the end of this "From The Pastor" message to get connected.)

In his homily, the Cardinal offers some words of encouragement for all those preparing for the Right To Life March the next day and for all who work for the right to life for the unborn and all who are vulnerable. Near the end of his homily he said:

We must direct our love and attention to wherever life is most threatened and show by our attitudes, words and actions that life is precious, and we must not kill. We must work tirelessly to change the unjust laws, but we must work even harder to change hearts, to build a civilization of love. Solidarity and community are the antidotes to the individualism and alienation that lead people on the path of abortion and euthanasia. The rich young man (Mark 10:17-31) left in discouragement because what Christ asked of him was difficult. The challenges we face are great and discouragement is our greatest enemy. But know that Jesus is looking on us with love. His love should energize and unite us. No sacrifice is too great, we must not count the cost, but press on with the full assurance that we shall overcome.

Recently I have had to make some difficult decisions for the good of the parish and such decisions, while I believe correct, can be discouraging. For this reason then, these words of Cardinal O'Malley are especially poignant for me. Listening to his message helped me to realize a universal encouragement necessary in every Christian's life. First, I am encouraged as one who wants to work for justice in all areas that challenge the right to life of any human being, especially the most vulnerable. I am also encouraged as a pastor as I work to confront some of very challenging realities for our parish community. I do not mean to imply that the challenges that we face as a parish community can compare to the threats the confront the gift of human life in our national culture, but pastoral challenges can certainly be difficult and daunting and require encouragement and remembering that "Jesus is looking on us with love."

This past Friday, January 23, 2015, I met with several officials from various archdiocesan offices, namely, the offices of the Moderator of the Curia, Parish Financial Services, Temporal Services and the Regional Episcopal Vicar. The purpose of my visit was to speak about some of the temporal and pastoral challenges that we face as a parish community and to present a birds eye view of "sustainability initiatives" currently underway in the parish through the efforts of the Pastoral Council, the Finance Council, the Real Estate Sub-Committee, the Friends of Saint John the Baptist as well as the pastoral efforts, prayer groups and youth groups that encourage personal prayer, spiritual growth and evangelization. Some of the challenges that face us and the responses to them can be both encouraging and discouraging. Even so, as Cardinal O'Malley suggest, we should remember that discouragement can be a great enemy and that we need to stick together in solidarity and community, with hearts, minds and actions, working together tirelessly. Here is a summary of some of my conversation with the diocesan officials. I share them with you in an effort to keep you informed.

**The Pastoral Council and Parish Planning:** Since September 2014, when the work of the Task Force ended, I began a discussion with members of the pastoral council about developing a parish pastoral plan. As a result of the ongoing efforts and leadership of the pastoral council, on Sunday, May 3, 2015, the parish will be invited to gather for the first annual Spring Assembly. Here the parish will begin a process of planning that will give us a direction for the future. As a faith community, we will enter into the assembly with the underlying assumption that the Holy Spirit is at work in the midst of our community. A sure way to faithfully interpret the movement and desire of the Spirit for the community is to inquire into the feelings, hopes and concerns of the members of the community.

For the next several months leading up to May 3rd, the pastoral council will publicize the Spring Assembly. At the assembly itself the council will invite the members of the parish to convene with one another and envision the future of the parish according to God's plan for the community. Parishioners will have an opportunity to listen to the parish history, most especially, as a recently merged community. Parishioners will be given relevant, concrete and practical data on all the measurable aspects of the community. Finally, essential and universal elements of parish life (Evangelization, Worship, Word, Community, Service, Stewardship and Leadership, Eucharist Centered) will be highlighted and studied. Through a process of brainstorming and consensus parishioners will then have the opportunity express their hopes, envision the future, energize each other and engage in a commitment to grow as a parish with the focused aim of developing a new parish plan complete with mission statement, goals and objectives that will put flesh and blood on the skeleton of faith and guide the parish community for the next three to five years.

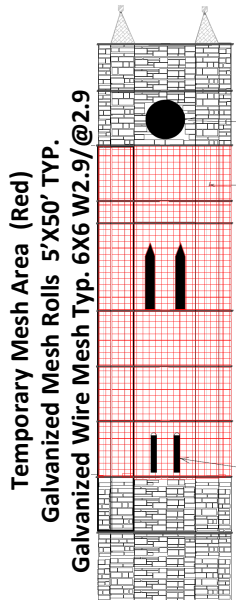
**Fiscal Austerity Plan:** In late October I shared with the parish a concern that our current fiscal year (July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015) budget had a scheduled \$290,000.00+ deficit (loss). Realizing that we could not operate this way, I began an informal audit of the parish finances and have had an opportunity to squeeze the budget seeking ways to increase income and reduce expenses. In early December a "financial study and fiscal state of the parish" was presented to the Finance Council. Represented in this study was an austerity plan that required the reduction of expenses through more conservative utility use, temporarily eliminating some auxiliary maintenance cost, reducing outside contracting services as much as possible and, most difficultly, the termination of employment for some staff. This past week after consulting with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia human resources office, I finalized a reduction of staffing and informed parish employees. Unfortunately, this means a loss of employment for some of our dedicated staff, through no fault of their own. It also means a reduction in salary and/or hours for other employees,



**Jonah: The Reluctant Prophet**

again, through no fault of their own. Over the past several months, during individual meetings and discussion with each of the employees, I have shared the very real concern about the parish's difficult financial situation and that there was an evident need for me to address it in order to preserve the sustainability of the parish. While this is very trying news for the staff most affected, each one of them understood the reasons for this action. I reiterate here what I have said to each one of them; that, I deeply appreciate all they have done in carrying out their duties and ultimately the parish mission. I also deeply appreciate their understanding and cooperation especially now as we try to be good stewards of the parish's limited resources. Please keep all the parish staff in your prayers.

**SCRIP Program:** As you read in last weeks parish bulletin, the SCRIP Program is being discontinued. Again this is due to the need for careful fiscal planning. While I know this program has been very helpful to families with school age children, for the past few years it has been losing money on the parish side of the equation. If only to help our school families, I would keep the program. However, the parish simply cannot afford to lose income at this time. While I am encouraged by the great work of education and evangelization carried out by the dedicated staff and volunteers of our Parish Religious Ed Program (PREP), I would hope in the future we can do more (much more) to support Catholic Education for all our children. ***I also remind all our families that a great way to help support the parish and a child's education is to sell the Parish Lottery Tickets. Sellers receive back 20% on every dollar for tickets sold and turned in which can be dedicated to a child's education.***



**Physical Plant Projects:** All the repair work on the church building currently being performed or considered is temporary and designed to begin meeting the requirements of the City Façade Ordinance, provide a level of safety and hopefully buy the parish some time to raise funds before the permanent work begins. With this in mind, a "soft" mortar mix has been applied to the Cresson Street buttress to seal it for the remaining winter season. The cost of this was nearly \$14,000.00. Temporary repairs have also been made to the flashing/gutter above the buttress where it is suspected ongoing water saturation along with a freeze and thawing effect has caused the movement of the stones in the buttress. Once the parish decides on an engineering firm to draw a design plan to address the permanent repair work in the buttress, the project can go out to bid and the permanent repairs will hopefully take place in the Spring/Summer of 2015, cost permitting.

Another temporary repair being considered is the bracing of the clock tower. Most recently, on January 12, 2015, architects, contractors, and parish representatives sat down to review a drawing prepared by the contractor for the stabilization of the tower. There are many details to be considered in this work but it will hopefully begin in late February or early March. The bracing planned for the tower has a lifespan of 1 - 3 years (possibly 5 years) and has an estimated cost of \$151,000.00. If the bracing remains in place for more than 1 year, it will be checked periodically to determine any further movement in the tower structure. While it is not desirable that the bracing remain in place for too long a period of time, this temporary repair will provide the parish, through the Friends of Saint John the Baptist and other efforts, an opportunity to conduct a substantial capital campaign to help meet the cost of the permanent fix of the tower, the buttress and other repairs and renovations. In the meantime, it is highly recommended that the parish have an inspection of all the flashing all around the roof and upper levels of the church and have all the downspouts and rainwater conductors cleaned out.

**Friends of Saint John the Baptist:** In July 2014, the Friends of Saint John the Baptist was created to assist the pastor in fundraising for the church building restoration and maintenance, and to help sustain and grow the parish community. The Friends group is always looking for new members, especially some of our new parishioners from the former St. Mary and St. Josaphat parishes and schools with backgrounds in buildings and fundraising. The group is currently composed of present and former parishioners, high school and grade school alumni, and those who have a genuine love and interest in the welfare of Saint John the Baptist Church. At this time, the active focus of the Friends is fundraising. As a result of the Friends first mailing, an appeal designed to raise initial start-up funds as well as get the word out about the need for extensive repairs to the church, \$120,042.00 was realized in donations and another \$112,350.00 in pledges; for a total of \$232,392.32. This is very encouraging. The group recently agreed to search for and hire a fund raising consulting firm which will assist with a capital campaign startup and execution. There is always an effort to gather more alumni addresses with the possibility of hiring a data search firm who will take old addresses and provide up-to-date addresses for future mailings. Along with this, members of the Friends are working on two local events that will be both "friend-raisers" and fund raisers: The All Alumni "Take Me Back To Manayunk" Class Reunion on March 21, 2015 and Men Who Cook on April 25, 2015.

**Prayers and Love:** I hope this information is helpful. There is more that I would like to share with you (like the work of the Real Estate Committee), but the space here is limited. There will be time in the future for more. Once again I encourage your prayers for our dedicated employees, especially those whose jobs are effected by the fiscal austerity plan. I also repeat the words of Cardinal O'Malley in the opening paragraph of this message: The challenges we face are great and discouragement is our greatest enemy. But know that Jesus is looking on us with love. His love should energize and unite us. No sacrifice is too great, we must not count the cost, but press on with the full assurance that we shall overcome.

*Margaret C. Lawrence*

PS: Be sure to check out the full text of Cardinal O'Malley's Pro Life Talk at: ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)) <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events/2015-national-vigil-for-life-homily-by-cardinal-sean-o-malley-ofm-cap-archbishop-of-boston.cfm> OR (Whispers in the Loggia Blogspot) <http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.com/2015/01/we-need-to-be-field-hospital-not-judge.html>