

A.M.D.G.

## State of the Parish Address St. John Fisher Church

October 13, 2019

Monsignor David A. Sork, Pastor

Some women were talking among themselves about their grandchildren. They were even complaining. They all gave them Christmas gift, but it seems that they never acknowledged the gift or even say thank you. However, one of the women said that she doesn't have that problem. Soon after Christmas all the children stop by to thank her for the Christmas gifts. The others were quite impressed and wanted to know how she instilled such an attitude of gratitude in them. She said that the Christmas gifts she sends to them contain an unsigned check.

In today's Gospel Jesus healed all ten of the lepers. Yet only one came back to thank him: the Samaritan, a pariah in Jewish society. Jesus reminds us all of the importance of gratitude.

Today's annual State of the Parish Address is my 21<sup>st</sup> here at St. John Fisher. My address this year will be through the lens of Jesus' challenge to us always to be grateful. I am most grateful to all of you who by your activities and involvement give life to the parish. There are over 80 parish organizations, ministries, and activities. What a powerhouse of activity!

Your Pastoral Council approves its pastoral plan each year with several objectives. Every five years the council approves a 5-year pastoral plan with new long-term goals. One of last year's objectives was to prepare a 5-year pastoral plan with new goals. This past year the pastoral planning committee recommended that we do an in-pew parish survey to guide them in the new 5-year plan. This survey, designed by CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, enabled us to see how we compare nationally with other Catholic parishes. It took place in March. The 84-page report was most helpful in guiding the committee on their goals and objectives. A 4-page executive summary was inserted in the parish bulletin.

In reading the entire report, I was quite impressed when your responses were compared to parishes nationally. In the categories of music, liturgical decorations and environment, hospitality, and homilies your parish surpassed the national level. Music was particularly noteworthy where 81% gave it an excellent rating compared to 48% nationally. I thank Grant Hungerford and his music department for their talent and commitment. Quality liturgical music doesn't happen automatically.

Your parish also surpassed parishes nationally in the following: managing parish finances, fostering spiritual growth, and communicating with parishioners. In the area of finances I am grateful to the advice of the finance council. We are committed to transparency and responsibility as stewards of your resources. In a few weeks members of the finance council will speak at all the Masses to explain the annual financial report. As usual, a written copy will be distributed to you.

Fostering spiritual growth takes place through the homilies at Mass and various opportunities for religious formation. Under the leadership of the director of Evangelization, Misty Jesse, there were many faith formation offerings, including bible study, scripture lectures, the Dive-in Lenten series, the festival of faith, and the Dawn Unity series, now in its 19<sup>th</sup> year.

Your parish also surpassed parishes nationally in its outreach to the groups in need. However, this is not a time for complacency. Even though we surpass parishes nationally, there is still room for improve-

ment. The top 3 priorities were children's religious education, youth ministry program for teens after Confirmation, and providing opportunities to help the needy.

One of last year's objectives was to provide assistance when needed to the programs for youth and teens. In the CARA survey you also said this was a priority. Almost 100 of our high school students received their Confirmation after a 2-year period of study and formation. Many have volunteered for the program after they have been confirmed. We wanted to improve youth ministry even more by offering more programs after they are confirmed. The consensus was to reinstate a program for youth known as LIFETEEN. Father Francis, Katie Dante, our coordinator of confirmation and youth, and 5 other parishioners attended a 4-day Youth Ministry Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona, for LIFETEEN training. Returning enthusiastically from the conference, they agreed to be part of a core team to implement LIFETEEN. They have been meeting regularly since May. Katie Dante and six parishioners attended a second training session in September in Orange County. The core committee strongly felt that LIFETEEN's success would depend on our hiring a youth ministry specialist who could focus on LIFETEEN. I agreed. After interviewing the top 3 choices of the search committee and reviewing their résumés and references, I decided on one of them and am happy to report that the new youth ministry specialist, Zachary Zuvich, will begin here on October 22. I thank all those whose efforts made this possible.

Two years ago the archdiocese announced that there would be a capital campaign to meet the physical needs of parishes, schools, and other institutions throughout the Archdiocese. Each parish has a 5-year goal to contribute to this campaign based on its income. Half of that amount would be returned to our parish for its own maintenance and construction needs. Because we were assigned to begin summer of 2019, an objective for this past year was to prepare for that campaign.

We did not complete all of *Campaign 21* when we built the church and remodeled the former church into the parish activity center. Since we were committed to the Archdiocesan Capital Campaign, I thought now might be the time to combine that with the completion of *Campaign 21* rather than have another capital campaign in the future. The main uncompleted portion of the master plan was a pastoral center centrally located for all business of church and school. I asked the church architect to draw up a conceptual plan with estimated costs. She met several times with the pastoral staff as we considered all the needs that could improve our ability to serve our parishioners. I presented that plan to the pastoral council this past March. The council liked the plan and recommended that we do a feasibility study to see if there was parish support for it. I asked CCS to do study. This is the same firm that did the feasibility study in 2006 for our new church. The study took place in June of this year. After reviewing the report and recommendations, I presented it to the parish's finance council. They recommended that we hire CCS to help us with a combined capital campaign to complete our master plan and support the Archdiocese. We began preparing for this in August. I will keep you informed as things develop. I thank the pastoral council, the feasibility study committee, and the finance council for all their work and advice.

I am committed to do whatever I can to provide a safe and secure atmosphere on our campus and in all our programs. In 2002 I initiated the Safeguard the Children Committee. That committee is still active and working diligently, under the leadership of Margaret Johnson, our Director of Religious Education. A program known as VIRTUS is designed to keep people aware of where children might be vulnerable to predators. All parish staff and all volunteers who work with children are required to attend the VIRTUS Awareness sessions. Many other parishioners have also attended these sessions, including those in liturgical and outreach ministries. VIRTUS attendees keep their information current by reading monthly articles and by attending refresher classes every four years. I know from personal experience that compliance is tracked and mandatory. Since 2004 more than 1200 parishioners and staff have attended VIRTUS.

All parish staff and all volunteers who work with children are required to be fingerprinted by the Archdiocese and undergo a background check. Almost 1000 parishioners and employees have done it.

All our children in both the school and religious education program are taught safety training every year through a program called *Empowering God's Children*. These lessons are taught by trained teachers and catechists at the appropriate grade level of the children. This coming year they will be learning about Internet safety. I can say with confidence that children are safer here than in any other any other public or private institution thanks to the aggressive action our archdiocese has taken. I am grateful for Mrs. Johnson's leadership in this very important endeavor.

Our parish school continues to provide excellence in education. It is considered one of the top schools in the Archdiocese. Of paramount importance is its commitment to the children's religious formation. Anne-Marie Hudani, principal of the school since 2002, knows its primary identity is as a Catholic School and keeps that in focus.

You may notice today that there are people taking a head count. This week and next members of the Pastoral Council will be counting all persons attending Mass. We have been doing this every October since 2005 to give an idea of trends of Mass participation. We then average the two Sundays. Last year we counted 1984 persons, down by 1% from the previous year. The numbers for sacramental services from July 1, 2018, to June 30, 2019 were as follows: 72 Baptisms and Professions of Faith, 86 1<sup>st</sup> Communions, 100 Confirmations, 27 Weddings, and 52 Funerals. In comparison with the previous year, Baptisms were up by 13%, First Communions remained the same; Confirmations up by 5%; weddings down by 28%; and funerals down by 20%.

Another ministry that stays in the background is that of "sick calls." Sometimes we get calls in the middle of the night for someone dying, critically sick, and in need of a priest. One of your priests is always on call for these unexpected events. Our sick call registry indicates that a priest responded to this 162 times this past year. In addition, our Eucharistic Ministers regularly brought Communion to over 70 people each week who, due to illness or other incapacities, cannot make it to Mass. Many of them were able to view the 9:00 Mass each Sunday on their TVs and computer screens because of the volunteers who take care of live streaming. More reasons to say thank you to all of them.

This past May just 2 days after his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, Monsignor Gilb, our pastor emeritus, died. These last few years he received marvelous care from the Little Sisters of the Poor at the Jeanne Jugan Residence in San Pedro. He was very happy there particularly when he had visitors from St. John Fisher. I ordinarily visited him on Friday mornings on my way back to the parish. I had lived with him longer than with any other priest and he with me. We developed a special bonding over the years as brothers in the priesthood. At his funeral Mass which was live streamed, there were six bishops present, one more than at the church dedication. His classmate, Bishop Sylvester Ryan, preached the homily. A few months later his cremated remains were interred at our columbarium. Please drop by to say a brief prayer there for our third pastor, who shepherded the people of St. John Fisher for 14 years.

Jesus reminds us to have always an attitude of gratitude. Everything from God is a gift. As I go into my 21<sup>st</sup> year as your pastor, I am grateful for ministering to you and appreciate all your support. When I read the CARA survey, I felt personally affirmed by your response to the statement: "I would feel comfortable talking with the pastor." 85% at St. John Fisher said that they agreed with the statement compared to 48% nationally. Thank you for your trust in me. I will continue to strive to meet that expectation. This is the heart of what I should be as your pastor.