

A.M.D.G.

State of the Parish Address St. John Fisher Church

October 18, 2018

Monsignor David A. Sork, Pastor

As we listen to today's Gospel, we can sense that Jesus' disciples were taken aback by the challenge he extended to the man of great wealth. Their surprise was even greater when Jesus told them how difficult it is for the rich to enter God's Kingdom. There was a world where riches were regarded as a blessing from God for the just and upright. Wealth offered security and a sense of well-being. To give all that up seemed senseless. But Jesus was inviting those who would be his disciples to find the basis of their security and well-being not in transient riches or possessions, but in him. Could they do that? Did they even want to do that? The dismay of the disciples is clearly reflected in their question to Jesus: "Then, who can be saved?"

Up to that point, the disciples had been thinking like the man with many possessions. He had come to Jesus asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" as if such a gift could be earned. Both the disciples and the man who went away sad were focusing on themselves, their efforts, their obedience and their accomplishments instead of focusing on what God can do for them. Once again, Jesus' response was intended to shift their focus from themselves to God: "For human beings, it is impossible ... all things are possible for God." In challenging the young man to give up his possessions to follow Jesus, Jesus is challenging us as well. Every challenge, every demand Jesus places upon us becomes possible if, by faith, we learn to rely on grace and to approach each challenge as an opportunity to respond to God's call. This we cannot do alone. We need one another. That is how we are Church.

As the local church, we at St. John Fisher are called to work together in service to others and for God's glory. Our mission is: Love God. Love all people. Make disciples. It is in this light that I want to speak with you. Today's annual State of the Parish Address is my 20th here at St. John Fisher. My address this year will be through the lens of Jesus' challenge to us to serve one another as he has served us. 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. So it is impossible to acknowledge all.

Your Pastoral Council approves its pastoral plan each year with several objectives. The Pastoral Plan for 2018-2019 is available for you today after all Masses. Please be sure to pick up a copy. One of our objectives for this year is to produce a new 5-year plan with new goals. You'll hear more about this as the year progresses. During this past year the Pastoral Council approved five pastoral objectives. I will report on two of them.

Objective two: we will offer, on a regular basis, Masses with the homily focused on children. This past year I scheduled Father Francis for the 9:00 Mass to do just that. His child-focused homily occurred about once a month. I'd like also to acknowledge the wonderful work that Carolyn Correnti is doing in leading the children's choir. Even at those 9:00 Masses when the homily is not focused on the children, we dismiss children from grades 1-6 to hear from one of our parishioners reflection on the scriptures at the children's level. They then return after the General Intercessions for the rest of Mass. Margaret Johnson, our Director of Religious Education, distributes a gift at the end of Mass for all children attending that Mass. It usually involves the theme of that day. If children are attending religious education classes that morning at 10:30, they are expected to attend the 9:00 Mass with their par-

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ents. Frankly, it bothers me when I see parents leaving the 10:45 Mass to pick up their children from religious education classes. It means that their children probably didn't attend Mass. Religious education class is NOT a substitute for Sunday Mass.

Objective four: we will identify underrepresented groups within our parish and work to develop ministries to address their needs. One involved the separated and divorced. This past year one of our parishioners organized a support group for the separated and divorced that presently meets on a regular basis. Another of the underrepresented groups involved lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, sometimes shortened to LGBT. This is a more complex issue, for the needs vary. Sometimes it involves the persons themselves; sometimes it's the parents. A person who is gay is not necessarily transgender, and a person who is transgender is not necessarily gay. What is in common is a person feeling isolated or alienated. We invited a speaker who coordinates an LGPT support group in another parish to surface the issues involved. Over 150 attended the event. Although there is not presently a support group in our parish, we found out about a new group that had formed at St. Lawrence Church, Redondo Beach, and for now are referring interested persons there. Members of the Pastoral Council are continuing to monitor this.

Out of this objective came a statement of welcome that appears on page 2 of our parish bulletin that strives to make all persons feel welcome here. If you haven't read it, I recommend you do so.

Many people have commented that when they return from vacation and have attended other churches, they appreciate all the more the excellent music that takes place here at our Masses. One of the means of evangelization is through our music ministry, specifically the series of concerts that take place throughout the year. This attracts a wider audience than our Catholic congregation. I always attend them myself and have noticed how the attendance has been steadily increasing. I encourage you to invite your non-Catholic friends and neighbors. What a great way to bring people to Church!

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 1999 persons, up by 6% from the previous year. The numbers for sacramental services from July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2018 were as follows: 62 Baptisms, 87 1st Communions, 84 Confirmations, 38 Weddings, and 65 Funerals. In comparison with the previous year, Baptisms were up by 13%, First Communions remained the same; Confirmations up by 5%; weddings up by 111%; and funerals up by 14%. The spike in weddings is due to the visibility of our new church. We have become a destination spot.

Our parish school offers Catholic education and formation through 8th grade. This past year was the first year we admitted 4-year olds into the school through our Transitional Kindergarten. These little ones have added an exciting new dimension to the school. Our enrollment increased by 20% from last year. Our students placed in the top 5% nationally and internationally in standardized testing in Reading and Math. This past year all our students were accepted into the high school of their choice.

This past year Father Francis has been actively engaged with Katie Dante, our coordinator of youth and confirmation, in the High School Confirmation program. He teaches with her on both Sunday and Monday. If you ever attend the 5:00 Sunday evening Mass, you may notice him actively involved with them in liturgical movement. There is a lot of excitement at that Mass. I'm happy to see more teens at that Mass. Father Francis has also been involved in "Cross Walk," a program in which

the youth go with him to skid row carrying a cross, feeding the needy, and interacting with them. It gives our young people an opportunity to experience poverty not that far from where we live.

Father Bernard Kalu had originally come to our parish as a student in residence when he was studying at Loyola Marymount University. When his studies were complete, I asked that the Archdiocese assign him here full time as Associate Pastor. He is presently in his second year, and, pending an extension of his Religious Visa, I hope he will be with us through 2021. He has been a wonderful addition to our parish.

Since the parish began *Campaign 21*, it has committed itself to support financially the construction of a church for the parish of Sagrado Corazón in Cudahy. Your generosity was instrumental in making that happen. This past December I was privileged to be present at the dedication of their new Church by Archbishop Gomez. If you ever visit that church, you will see vestiges of our former church in the chairs, pews, and baptismal font. The people there are so grateful to you. At the ceremony I was asked to stand and be recognized. I was embarrassed for myself but proud for you when I heard the enthusiastic applause. They also announced that the largest room in the parish complex would be named “St. John Fisher Hall.”

A comment about Monsignor Gilb, our Pastor Emeritus. As you probably know, for the past 3 years he has been living at the Jeanne Jugan Home in San Pedro, operated by the Little Sisters of the Poor. He can no longer drive, so he is not able to come up here as he did before. Feel free to visit him. I know he relishes visitors from St. John Fisher. I just saw him this past Friday, and he was in the best spirits I had seen him in quite a while. Perhaps we may see him once again concelebrating at Sunday Mass. He misses you.

In 2002 at my *State of the Parish Address*, I said: “This past year was a very challenging one for the Catholic Church. We read almost daily in the newspapers about the sexual misconduct of priests throughout the country. Although like many of you I only became aware of these events through the press and have no control over the bishops of the country, I have tried to do what I can to deal with it on the parish level.” This past August it arose again. Only this time it involved a Cardinal of the Church. Pope Francis stripped him of his title, but it raised other concerns. Who knew and when did they know it? I already spoke about this at length in my talk this past August, so I won’t repeat it. I am praying that Pope Francis can clean the swamp and give the Church Universal bishops who smell like the sheep, and not ones vying for power and prestige.

As I said in 2002, I am committed to do whatever I can to provide a safe and secure atmosphere on our campus and in all our programs. My commitment has not waned. This is a responsibility that I take most seriously as your pastor. It was in 2002 that 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. Children are safer in Catholic parishes and schools than in any other public or private institution.

The Lord has challenged us to let go and give of ourselves for the kingdom of God. I hope we will continue to be faithful stewards and dedicated disciples and work in his service. Let us remember our mission: “Love God. Love all people. Make disciples.” As I go into my 20th year as your pastor, I am grateful for ministering to you and appreciate all your support. You are a very gifted community, and I hope that you will continue to utilize your gifts in gratitude to God and serve your brothers and sisters.