

Dear Friends in Christ;

As I complete my fourth year as pastor and soon will begin a fifth year in June, I just want to share an overall assessment of our journey together and perhaps a little “visioning” of our future.

On a diocesan level; the Bishop’s challenge is to shepherd all catholic parishes in New Hampshire. Statewide, some 75,000 people no longer are identified as catholic due to migrations south, growing secularism and “no affiliation” among the young. An aging population, therefore is trying to maintain the parishes. The number of clergy is expected to drop an additional 40% during the next 5 years. Secular attitudes in society have drastically changed the way marriages, baptisms, funerals, and church affiliation are lived out. Christianity as a vital option of the moral fabric for our society requires us to stay ahead of the curve. Change is difficult, but to not change is certain death. We need to realistically envision where we might will be 5–10 years from now and make adjustments.

To date, we have been able to maintain a wonderful, healthy and hospitable parish. The Eucharistic gathering on the Lord’s Day is an essential genesis to all other ministries. Without the Holy Mass, programs and personnel cannot be supported. Our new parish Faith Formation /Office Building; has been a vital hub for teaching and administration. Our debt mortgage for this new structure is about \$734,000, which is paid from the *second collection* held the *first* week of each month! Ever changing and increasing demands by federal, state and local regulations on insurances, wages, inspections, repairs, new computer and finance programs etc. must be upgraded to comply with the current laws. Recent maintenance of the Church property included filling cracks of parking lot, rebuilding 2 new bathrooms, updated lighting in the Church, new paint and repairs inside and outside the Church. Now our new air conditioning system is installed. We have a parish library in the Youth Room, new adult programs for spiritual formation, enhanced liturgies and ministries to meet all the new and ever changing expectations of our people. We have adequately maintained the facilities and programs without raising the debt.

However, our monthly financial demands are reaching \$7,500 weekly or \$30,000 a month; which is a daunting task with fewer and fewer people attending mass. Knowledgeable staff, new pastoral and financial council personnel are essential so even more people will understand the needs, procedures, legal aspects of administering a parish. New blood is always needed as are volunteers for ministries, teaching and administration. In order to attract new people there must be something beyond Mass attendance for families to invest in our parish.

Soon we hope to build upon the adult spirituality with a program called **FORMED**. This program will allow parishioners to download at home or here in the parish, religious films, programs, DVD's and CD's. We envision faith formation not merely as a childhood demand but rather a life-long enhancement of our people's needs, emotionally, physically and spiritually. We expect to upgrade our meeting rooms so TV's will be readily available for presentations. Permanent TV monitors for the narthex and parish hall, plus a new bulletin company and updated Facebook and website will enhance information sharing. Other future projects result from the Church being 30-35 years old. Many lighting, plumbing, heating and electrical fixtures sometimes no longer exist, are obsolete or need total replacing to meet current codes. The professional appliances in the kitchen are 30 years old and require constant repair. The carpeting in the church and sealing of floor tiles are other projects to be done.

Might we consider a **St Joseph Epping Trust Fund** to ease the financial demands? Bequests to our parish through a remembrance of \$5, 10 Thousand, or more in one's life insurance can add up. Some larger parishes enjoy million dollar bequests to survive. We hope that people will consider St. Josephs in their last will's and life insurance policies too. We have been blessed! I feel we have been financially responsible and good stewards of what God has given us. So, we will carry on as best we can, as long as we can. May God continue to bless us!

Sincerely yours in Christ

Fr. Don Clinton