

St. Mary's Catholic Church

March 19, 2018
Solemnity of Saint Joseph

Dear Friend of St. Mary's,

Praised be Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! As your pastor it is my sincere hope that this Lent has been filled with many blessings for you and your family as we prepare to celebrate Our Lord's Resurrection.

Over the past few years we have gone through some major church renovations and improvements. A great amount of patience was needed to get to where we are today. Thank you for your understanding during the disruptions. Parishioners and visitors alike are genuinely struck by the beauty of the renovations, and there are many signs of the great things happening at our parish. It is encouraging and hopeful to see visitors immediately struck by how beautiful the church is and then take pictures to show to their families back home. From the paintings and mosaics to the new floors and restored pews, the general response is one of astonishment. This has also led to a number of new families joining our parish, and they have said that the beauty of the church and reverence with which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered are what most attracted them. There have also been numerous Baptisms, and we have received an increase in requests for weddings.

None of this would have been possible without the generous investment of your time and resources. A substantial portion of the church renovations was funded by a few considerable bequests along with gifts for other improvement projects our parish received over the years. There were also numerous people who came forward with generous matching donations. Additionally, the Knights of Columbus and Altar and Rosary Society hosted events to help raise funds, and many volunteers came together to help keep our costs at a minimum. I thank each of them for their generosity.

These renovations and signs of renewal are just a small part of the wonderful things happening at our parish, for we also have been blessed with the newest religious order in our diocese: *Labor Mariae*. The presence of religious sisters is a great blessing for any community, especially a parish, and ours is one of the few parishes not only in our diocese but in the country that has Sisters devoted to praying for the parish and helping with various apostolates. Their presence has also prompted us to begin Eucharistic Adoration three days a week and Vespers (Evening Prayer) with the Sisters four days a week. I encourage everyone to attend this beautiful prayer of the Church, which is rarely possible at a parish. We also now offer both the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms of the Mass. Many Catholics are attracted to the Church's traditional forms of liturgy and devotion, which are also options that few parishes offer. We hope eventually to have Perpetual Adoration and Vespers every day. With your participation we can be known as the parish where someone is always praying.

With all these encouraging things, there remains much to be done to improve and strengthen our beautiful parish. One concern is that our weekly collections, which cover all our general expenses—from the gas and electricity to the phone services and staff salaries—have decreased. Our fundraisers helped to bridge the gap, and for a period we were granted permission to rent the gym. This helped generate some revenue to offset a portion of the decrease in contributions, but since the sale of the buildings we no longer have that benefit. There is still a lot to be done in the church, especially to complete the Adoration Chapel, Baptistry, and Sacristy, as well as Fitzgerald Hall. Unless someone comes forward with a donation intended for the renovations, we will have to wait before undertaking any new projects to make sure that we have a balanced budget for our general operations.

Our parish annual budget is approximately \$400,000, and we have nearly 200 regularly attending families. A yearly pledge of \$2,000 from each family would cover all our expenses. This amounts to roughly \$38 per week, or about \$5.50 per day. I realize that not everyone can give the same monetary amount, and many of you contribute generously to the parish. To cover our costs, though, we need an increase in donations of approximately twenty percent. I am asking that you please prayerfully consider raising your annual pledge to the parish. This pledge drive is intended to:

- Cover all annual expenses and general upkeep of the parish;
- Add to our rainy-day fund for unanticipated expenditures and return staff to full-time hours;
- Fund our various parish ministries: Parish School of Religion, youth group, RCIA; and
- Continue to attract new families to our parish and evangelize our community.

My hope is that every registered family will participate in this pledge drive. There are many options for giving. The chart on the enclosed pledge card provides an overview of annual percentages for income levels. Your pledge can be paid weekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, or annually. We also have the option to give online by going to the parish website or Facebook page and clicking the “Online Giving” or “Donate” button. You can setup your automatic withdrawal to be weekly or monthly, or a one-time gift. You can also donate stocks or make a gift from your IRA. Please fill out the pledge card and place it in the weekly collection basket, return it by mail, or bring it by the parish office.

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the other ways you can help our parish by sharing your time and talent. Whatever skills and time you have, we can always use your help. Our various organizations, like the Altar and Rosary Society, Knights of Columbus, Welcoming Committee, and Choir, serve the parish in so many ways. Thank you for your participation in these vital groups. If you are not part of one of these groups but would like to be, you can express your interest in joining or volunteer on the back of the pledge card. These are great ways to give back to the Lord and be more active in the life of the parish.

In conclusion, I am reminded of the words from an eloquent sermon delivered by Father Hammon of Lexington on Sunday, August 20, 1864, on the day the cornerstone of our parish was laid. He remarked that, “St. Mary’s Parish has often and justly been referred to as ‘The Mother Church—Cradle of Catholicism’ for this section of Missouri and points west.” In that spirit, I am asking for you to generously support our pledge drive which I hope will help us not only address funding priorities in the future without having to strain parish savings but preserve our parish as “The Mother Church—Cradle of Catholicism” in our little corner of Missouri. In only five years we will be commemorating the 200th anniversary of the establishment of our parish. In order to properly plan for that historic landmark, my prayer is for us all to come together and make St. Mary’s greater than ever before.

May Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Virgin Mary, foster father of Our Lord Jesus, and Patron of the Universal Church intercede for us in all our endeavors.

In Christ,

Fr. Matthew