

***St. Mary's Parish, Simsbury, CT***  
***Pastoral Report – 2020***

In the gospel we just heard, Saint Matthew describes the beginning of Jesus's ministry. In doing so, he notes that a people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. That light is Jesus Christ who brings healing and grace to a broken world.

What Saint Matthew says about Jesus's ministry is a good description of our mission as a parish. Every week we gather to hear the Word of God and share in the Eucharist so that we can bring the light of Christ to a broken world. Because our mission is so important, I am giving a pastoral report today that summarizes *where we have been*, *what we are doing*, and *what we must do to* bring the light of Christ to a broken world.

***Where We Have Been***

Many good things have happened in the past year. We regularly collect food and clothing items and serve meals to people living in homeless shelters. Our extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist bring Communion to the homebound and those in convalescent homes. Seventeen Stephen Ministers provide care to those experiencing life's challenges, and through the AAA and our second collections, we contributed \$253,160 this year for those in need.

In 2018 our Parish School, which is celebrating Catholic School Week this week, was awarded a national blue ribbon in recognition of its academic and overall excellence. I visit the school every day to join our children in Morning Prayer, and I work closely with our principal, Mrs. Williamson. I am proud of the central role the School plays in our parish mission of preaching the gospel and preparing future leaders.

We also have a strong Religious Education program that guides and teaches our children from first grade through Confirmation. Between our School and Religious Education Program, we are providing our children with an in depth understanding of their faith and preparing them to be leaders for tomorrow's church.

In the past year, we completed our Parish Connection Project *on time and on budget*. Parking has improved; the church is handicap accessible; we have a new baptistry and gathering space; our parish offices are centrally located; and we have the space we need for school and parish. The Lower Church has been transformed into a beautiful learning space with a library and religious education office and is now called the Forcucci Faith Formation Center. We have much for which to be grateful.

I acknowledge that the past few years have been very difficult for us as Catholics. The scandals we have endured have caused some parishioners to leave us. I do not judge them, and I continue to pray for and welcome them. I am especially grateful for you who have remained in our faith community during this difficult time that has tested our faith, which must be centered on Jesus Christ.

### *Where We Are*

Saint Mary's is an active and vibrant parish. We have a large number of parishioners engaged in a variety of ministries: Stephen Ministers, Lectors, Extra-Ordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, Altar Servers, Ushers, Counters, Cantors, Choir Members, Music Ministry and Catechists. We have parishioners involved in Adult Enrichment, others who serve on the Parish Council, School Board, and Finance Council, and others who volunteer in the parish office throughout the week. We have a large number of women involved in the Women's Guild and the Prayer Shawl Ministry. We continue to engage the youth of the parish

through our Youth Ministry program. We regularly highlight the Sacrament of Marriage by recognizing the weddings anniversaries of all our married couples throughout the year, and this year we will have ten weddings. We have also developed new ministries such as the Woman's Bible Study, *Walking with a Purpose*, which meets on Wednesday evenings, and the Men's Ministry that meets every Saturday morning at 7:00 AM, and the Mother's Rosary group which meets monthly on Monday mornings.

Like any living community, St. Mary's is always changing. Established parishioners whom we love have moved away or died, and new parishioners whom we must welcome into our community have joined us. I especially want to note that the parishioners who came to us from St. Bernard's have been a special blessing for us and enriched our parish life. The number of children in the parish is less than when I first arrived, in part, because of the changing demographics of Simsbury, which is becoming an older community. Finally, while we have about 1500 households registered, many of those registered do not attend Mass regularly. On an average Sunday about 800 people attend Mass. *But you are here, and for that I am grateful!* You are here to be nourished by God's Word and the Eucharist.

### ***What We Must Do***

We are now at a critical moment in our parish life when all of us must be more fully engaged in preaching and witnessing to the gospel, as so many of you did last year on our Witness Sundays. The days when we could leave evangelization to others is past. All of us need to be involved in the work of witnessing to and spreading the good news of the gospel. Many of you are already doing this. And now, it is time for others to become more fully involved.

The Parish Council has begun a process of asking how we can become more actively involved as a parish in reaching out and proclaiming the gospel, especially to those who have fallen away from the faith. In the coming months, we will continue to be engaged as a parish in the Synod process, and the Archdiocese will publicize the results of its Synod. The Synod will map out a path for the future of the church in Hartford. When that happens, I would like St. Mary's to be at the forefront of renewal and evangelization. And so, whereas we have focused somewhat internally in the past few years because of our building project, we must now look beyond ourselves and ask how we can bring the light of the gospel to the world about us.

I have been ending my homilies by saying, "Here is something you can do this week," and you have expressed your appreciation for this. So, let me end this pastoral report with *something you can do this week that will make you more involved in the work of evangelization*. Set aside some time, to assess how involved you are in St. Mary's and what you are doing to bring the gospel to others. If you are not involved, resolve to become more alive in Christ by becoming more actively involved in our parish life and spreading the gospel. And, if you are not sure how to proceed, do not hesitate to ask me what you can.

*~ Rev. Father Matera*