

December 30, 2018 - Entering a New Year of Hope and Spiritual Renewal!

Happy New Year 2019 to all of you, my brothers and sisters! While we are still rejoicing in the beautiful Liturgical Christmas Season (ending on Sunday January 13, The Feast of the Baptism), we now turn part of our attention to the beginning of the new calendar year. It is an opportunity for the entire society and not only the Church to reflect on the main events of the past year 2018, to anticipate the challenges of the next 12 months and make our personal New Year resolutions.

For the Catholic Church, especially in the United States, the year 2018 will be recalled as a year of crisis, very similar to 2002 when the scandal of child abuse exploded in Boston. This time however, the crisis was closer to us as it affected directly our former Washington Archbishop McCarrick (though for events that took place much before his appointment here) and indirectly his successor Cardinal Wuerl (though for events that took place when he was the Auxiliary of Pittsburgh). Pope Francis has demoted Archbishop McCarrick. He is no longer a Cardinal and at the Pope's request, he is now living in seclusion and solitude a life of penance, cloistered in a monastery. Cardinal Wuerl has also asked Pope Francis to replace him as early as possible so as to provide a new, fresh leadership in our own archdiocese. While as a Church, we will continue to suffer in sharing the pains of the victims abused by priests and bishops, we will need to pray collectively and provide all assistance required to minimize the pains of the children and families affected, we all hope the new year 2019 will be a year of cleansing (ensuring that such scandal will no longer happen) and a year of spiritual renewal. We hope Pope Francis will shortly appoint a new Archbishop for Washington with the mandate to unite all priests and laity and to lead all of us in major spiritual renewal as true disciples of Christ! We also hope the February meeting with Pope Francis of all the heads of national Bishops Conferences (representing over 100 countries) will come up with strong actions to address the roots of the child abuse problem, including changes in supervision and accountability of the individual bishops (giving a greater say to the laity leadership in the church). At our parish level, as your pastor I will continue to ensure the protection of all our children, and with your support and that of all staff and clergy, I will endeavor to foster a parish-wide spiritual renewal focused on Jesus Christ!

For our own parish, God has continued to pour out many blessings throughout the year 2018. Just some quick highlights. Our religious education program has continued to be strong and vibrant with record number of participants. New innovations have been introduced successfully this fall to strengthen the sacramental preparation (both for first communion and confirmation) and increase the involvement of parents in regular workshops. We began our Year of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost with a first-ever all-night Vigil and a well-attended Outdoor Mass with key participation of our children and youth. This was followed by a Vacation Bible School for our children "Surfing with the Holy Spirit", and two well-prepared formation programs for our entire parish: "The Wild Goose" through the summer, and **the Gift - "Life in the Spirit"** course throughout the fall, both programs with the view to deepen our understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Our Youth Programs, including Life Teen for high schoolers, have also continued to be strong and innovative throughout the year. We have also been blessed with continued devotions to Mary, our Patroness Saint, and most recently, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) we welcomed and dedicated our new statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

Looking ahead for the next 12 months, we hope that the remodeling of the Social Hall with movable partitions will be completed by the end of January! We had hoped initially for a completion by the end of December, but we knew it was a very tight deadline and unexpected delays in manufacturing and the custom-made partitions have occurred. We also hope to complete the funding of our capital campaign by the end of 2019 and will come back soon to you with a final plan for the remaining activities (including additional meeting space, perpetual Adoration Chapel and steeple). We also look forward to the completion of the Year of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (June 9, 2019) with some new spiritual formation programs based on the recommendations of the participants on the fall's successful Gift program, as well as your own input. We will have the opportunity to discuss some possibilities at our next Parish Council on January 10, but we would like to hear from all of you. Do not hesitate to send me a note directly at pastor@olhoc.org or through the suggestion box in the Narthex. You are all also invited to participate in a parish-wide discussion at 7PM **Thursday, January 17** in the Narthex. In the first part of the meeting, we will discuss the book distributed at Christmas Masses, **Beautiful Hope: Finding Hope Every Day in a Broken World**, by sharing our own personal stories of Hope (the Christmas book this year is an easy read of 18 different stories of hope by 18 diverse authors). In the second part of the meeting we will discuss several proposals emerging from our Parish Council and from your own reflections on how to renew our spiritual formation at OLHOC. I hope that the spiritual enthusiasm of the over 100 participants at the fall's Gift program can be spread more widely within our parish. I hope that each parishioner can have a better understanding on how the Holy Spirit can transform their own daily lives and be prepared to be totally open to the movements of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

Hope! Let us pray that the **Year 2019** will be a **Year of Hope and Spiritual Renewal** for our Catholic church, our parish, and for each one of us and our families! Pope Francis in his introduction to Beautiful Hope writes, “Hope never disappoints.” We need Hope!! We must not let hope abandon us because God, with **his love** walks with us. **I Hope** because **God** is beside me.. Each one can say **I Hope, I have hope** because **God** walks with me. He walks and He holds my hand. **God** does not leave us to ourselves... The only certainty that will **save us** is that **Hope in God**. It will save us because it is strong and enables us **to journey in life with joy, with the will to do good, with the will to attain eternal happiness...** Every **Yes to Jesus who comes, is a bud of hope**. Let us trust in this bud of hope, to this “**Yes. Yes! Jesus! You can save me, you can save me!**”

On behalf of Fr. Santiago, Deacon Rich, Deacon Bill, Sister Rosario, and our staff, we wish to each one of you a **Happy New Year** filled with **hope** and **Spiritual Renewal!** May the **love** of the Holy Spirit fill all of us with hope, joy and peace throughout the New Year 2019! Let us live joyfully in the hope of being in the presence of God not only every day of our lives on earth, but then also in **Heaven** for ever and ever!

One in Christ,
Fr. Alain