

## Pastor's Notes: Rebuilding Community Under One Roof

May 16, 2021

Dear Parishioners,

As we celebrate the success of reaching our initial Under One Roof Campaign Goal and now prepare to replace our roof, we are also preparing for the return of more of our members who have been absent from our physical church during the coronavirus pandemic. Bishop Stika has announced a return to the obligation to attend Sunday Mass in our diocese, beginning May 22-23, Pentecost weekend, for all who are able, with a continued dispensation for those who are sick or otherwise unable to attend: *"This obligation does not apply to those who are ill, those who have reason to believe they were recently exposed to COVID-19 or another serious or contagious illness, those who are confined to their home, a hospital, or a nursing facility, those who care for the sick, the infirm, and the homebound, those who are unable to attend Mass through no fault of their own, those with underlying health conditions or in a high-risk category, and those who have significant fear or anxiety of COVID-19 exposure by attending Mass."*

Our experience through the Under One Roof campaign and the coronavirus pandemic presents a challenge to us: that we should work to build this community that worships Under One Roof. During the campaign, our volunteer team of parishioners, including myself, reached out to contact all our active parishioners individually. While making those contacts, we heard from many parishioners about life situations and struggles they have been through or are currently facing. Some were burdened by things going on in the world, the Church, or their families. Some were in need of help and wanted to connect with resources through the parish. It will take us some time to address all the needs that arose during these conversations, but we have begun to recognize the need to increase our connectedness as a parish and to help as we can. A hard lesson I learned from this experience is that, as often as people look to me for solutions, the pastor alone cannot possibly answer all of the needs within our community. Everybody wants a piece of Fr. Carter. :-). But truthfully, if the only relationship you have is with the priest, you will be sorely disappointed. The members of the Body of Christ have to be there for each other, too. What if we were to use the model of the volunteer team, who contacted parishioners during the campaign, and start calling people not to ask for money, but just to get to know them better?

We have a lot to learn from our Hispanic community. They come from a family-centered society that prizes community. We come from a society that is very individualized. We are anti-communist, and rightly so, but that doesn't mean that we are against the common good and society and community. Radical individualism is bad for us. In the past year it seems we have had one tragedy after another that has affected our members and our families. It is easy to wonder, what is the meaning of all this suffering inflicted on our parish family at once? One possible answer, which I am witnessing as we respond to these tragedies, is an outpouring of community. Families who had not thought to connect with each other previously are rushing to support those who are in need, spiritually and materially; and families who have always been completely self-reliant are learning the value of accepting the help that others willingly offer. In addition to having members of all ages suffer serious illness, injury, or devastation, we've had people going through rough times financially, and we've been able to put people with each other—building a roof, a deck, an addition, a ramp.... We now have a "Buy Nothing" group to connect people with material goods. All of this is building community. We have started a new "Pray for Us" page on our website to highlight at least a few of the current needs in our parish community. I encourage you to visit this page, pray for those in need, and consider how you might help.

One of the community efforts as we come back together is going to have to be a big reconciliation. There has been a very poisonous and divisive political season, that has crept in even to the Church. The act of wearing or not wearing a mask, for instance, was viewed as both an act of kindness and an act of oppression, as effective or ineffective, or as a political statement. It has led us to judge one another and draw lines in the sand and to harbor resentments in our hearts. The months ahead are necessarily going to be a time of healing, which can only come from forgiveness. We must be generous in interpreting each other's actions this past year, looking at it in the best light possible. It will also mean asking for forgiveness when we have harbored resentments and giving it freely when others have asked for our pardon.

The Cursillo model is "Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ." Connection—relationship—is the greatest evangelizer. FOCUS missionaries call it "the model of the Master". This week I will be meeting with the Parish Pastoral Council to discuss ways of addressing our need for greater community and reconciliation. I invite you to join with me to rebuild our community.

Sincerely in Christ Jesus,

