



# IMMACULATE HEART<sup>OF</sup> MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

## A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

JUNE 3, 2018

Dear friends in the Lord,

I write to you from my annual retreat at a retreat house in the Northeast. I know that it can seem like an uncommon luxury for a priest to take a week off from work for nothing but prayer. Daily I see the look of disappointment on the faces of those who drop by the parish office or stop me at the church door hoping to have a moment of my time, only to learn that my next unscheduled hour is sometime in July! Yet, in the wisdom of the Church, we priests are obliged by law to make a retreat each year—not *despite* our busyness, but precisely *because* of it.

A recent study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate concluded that parish priests in the U.S. typically put in a 60-hour work week—about double the hours reported in a 1958 study. My unscientific tally of my own work week comes in at about 75 hours. And yet, like every priest I know, I still go to bed each night aware that there were expectations I could not meet that day, calls and emails I couldn't return, visits I had to postpone.

If that is true of celibate priests, how much more conflicted are the lives of those with families. Chauffeuring children to endless activities, caring for ill loved ones, juggling (sometimes multiple) jobs and community commitments (including church!) with the needs of family, could lead anyone to the brink of exhaustion.

I'm reminded of the words of Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and spiritual writer: "There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which we easily succumb: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence."

By the time you read this, I'll be home from retreat and back at work, trying to be responsive to your needs, but also trying not to "succumb to violence." Please continue to pray for me, as I pray for you.

Your brother in Christ's word and work,