

Pentecost is a powerful day for the Church. Not only does it recall the Holy Spirit *so* transforming the hearts of the apostles that they went from hiding in a locked room to going out, proclaiming the faith so powerfully that 3000 people were baptized that very day, but it remains a powerful day for the Church today. Thousands upon thousands of people have been praying the great novena asking for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on our Church and world. Archbishop Naumann has also called for the outpouring of the Spirit within our archdiocese. He said, "I believe the Lord wants a new burst of evangelical energy to come forth from America's Heartland. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to penetrate the very core of our Catholic community – our parishes. It is time for a new Pentecost."

My brothers and sisters, let us specifically ask for the Holy Spirit to bless and guide our parish and our parishioners. We believe that possibly we are at the most important moment for our parish that we may face in our lifetimes. We are at a crossroads, and we need the guidance of the Spirit. A few months ago, Fr. Jeremy updated Archbishop Naumann with realities that face our parish, both those where we excel and where we face challenges. By next weekend, we will post many of these findings and facts on our parish webpage.

Some of the successes Fr. Jeremy pointed out to the Archbishop is that we truly do respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit through our generous service, such as at Sacred Heart Variety Store and by reaching out to those in need. We also strive to have our faith fed through the sacraments and Eucharistic Adoration.

But, Fr. Jeremy also explained to him that over 70% of our overall parish income is through EFTs and the Sunday Mass collections, bringing in approximately \$825,000 a year. Yet, the cost to operate our four churches, along with other parish-wide expenses, is about \$970,000 a year, not including the expenses for the Variety Store, Mt. Calvary Cemetery, or to complete any of the deferred maintenance we need to do. Sadly, to complete all of our immediate maintenance needs for our churches and other facilities would cost several hundreds of thousands of dollars. And as you just heard, we do not have a lot of wiggle room for additional expenses for repairs or for other unexpected needs.

Like is true for many parishes, Fr. Jeremy pointed out to the Archbishop that a significant part of our expenses helps to subsidize our parish grade school. While some parishes run soup kitchens or homeless shelters or even support overseas missions, our parish has made and continues to make Catholic elementary education in Atchison *the* focus of its financial mission. A few years ago, unfortunately it became obvious that the tithing model was no longer financially viable. Thus, we now ask families to pay tuition. Even though parishioners currently pay \$2000 for the first student, even that is less than 1/3 of the nearly \$6500 it costs to educate that child. We want Catholic education to be available to all

of our families, so we do our best to provide need-based assistance. Additionally, profits from our parish's Variety Store help to subsidize our school, as does the approximately \$400,000 given in annual parish subsidy to SBCS.

Right now, we have about 950 registered households that make up our parish. When the four parishes merged to form our one, united St. Benedict Parish, parishioners were asked to re-register. If you still need to do so, or are not sure if you have done so, please contact the parish office, and they can help you.

We are thankful for the generosity of our guests and unregistered parishioners, who occasionally give to our collection. But, if for the sake of simplicity we assume that all of our parish collections came only from registered parishioners, the average donation per household is \$865 per year, or put another way about \$16.60 per household per week. My friends, that is about 1.8% of the estimated median household income. This rate of giving only adds to our financial challenges. Over the next months, the Stewardship Committee will be sharing ideas of how we can better respond through our gift of time, talent and treasure.

My brothers and sisters, we have a choice to make. We can ignore these difficult realities or we can face them, and put our parish in a position to thrive. Abbot Barnabas and Fr. Jeremy need the support of each one of you to help our parish thrive! More importantly, your fellow parishioners and our parish *need* your support.

We are truly blessed to have two priests serving this parish. We are especially blessed to journey with Abbot Barnabas as both he and we adjust to allow for his continued service. Let us make this clear, he is *not* retiring right now. Whenever it is determined it is the time to retire, from Fr. Jeremy's conversations with both Abbot James and Archbishop Naumann it is very likely that our parish will *then* be served by only one priest. At that time, we only will be able to have a maximum of four weekend Masses.

As you can see, these next few years are an extremely important time in the life of our parish. We have much to be thankful for and much to consider. So, following the recommendation of the Archbishop, we have begun the process of putting together a strategic plan for the parish. We have an amazing core team, who helped to identify our five goals for the plan:

1. The Archbishop's Pastoral Priorities, which include conversion, evangelization, outreach to the needy, Catholic education in all its forms, and stewardship
2. Parish Life Participation
3. Finances
4. Facilities Maintenance

## 5. (and) Facilities Vision

The core team recognized that our vision for how we will use our facilities necessarily will determine how we accomplish our other goals. A wonderful and knowledgeable group of parishioners have been gathered to form the Facilities Vision Team. We thank them for their service. They are hard at work, and will present their recommendations to Fr. Jeremy around the end of the summer.

We need to recognize that as a parish, we are in this together. Our parish will thrive. We will achieve a solution that will carry the parish through the future years. We priests cannot do this alone. We need the support of each and every parishioner! In the next couple of months, Fr. Jeremy will be asking various parishioners to serve on the other teams. The hope is to have recommendations from all of the teams by the end of the year. We thank you in advance for your willingness to be consulted by the teams, to serve on a team, and most of all, and most importantly, for your prayers in this process.

As you can see, we all *need* the guidance of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit transformed the cowardly apostles into irresistible evangelists. May we be open to the power of the Holy Spirit. For, that same Spirit can bring about a new Pentecost in each of our lives and in our parish. Come, Holy Spirit!

We encourage you frequently ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance by praying these petitions. Please respond with, *Come, Holy Spirit*:

- Holy Spirit, transform each one of our hearts and the hearts of all Christians.  
*Come, Holy Spirit*
- Holy Spirit, strengthen our faith, increase our hope and help us to better love and serve God and one another. *Come, Holy Spirit*
- Holy Spirit, guide us to understand what you ask each of us individually, as a parish family, and as the Church. *Come, Holy Spirit*
- Holy Spirit, give us the wisdom to know what you ask of us and to do the right thing, especially when it is difficult. *Come, Holy Spirit*
- Holy Spirit, bless our parish through this strategic planning process. *Come, Holy Spirit*
- Holy Spirit, bring about a new Pentecost in our parish and help us to thrive.  
*Come, Holy Spirit*