

State of the Parish | January 17 & 18, 2015 | William C. Graham

As we enter the Year of Our Lord 2105, we understand that while there are great challenges to the Church in our era, we are a hope-filled people with one eye fixed on the past, and another fixed on the future, confident that God will never abandon the Church.

Our United States Catholic bishops guide us in thinking about our parish:

<< *“The parish is where the Church lives. Parishes are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. They are where the Gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth. Parishes are the home of the Christian community; they are the heart of our Church. Parishes are the place where God's people meet Jesus in word and sacrament and come in touch with the source of the Church's life.”*

—*Communities of Salt and Light*, p. 1¹

The concerns that we share, you and I, include re-membering the Parish, seeking new members, or the return of members who have been inactive. Together, we seek salvation; together we announce the Reign of God that is already present among us.

We will remain committed to worshiping as best we can in noble simplicity, to the promotion of ministry among all of us as the people of God, to praying and working for social justice, to ongoing formation through appropriate education offered for all age groups.

St. Michael's Parish remains a vibrant community peopled with faith-filled seekers. I am both pleased and proud to be numbered among you, called to serve a second term as your pastor. We are all grateful, I know, to Fr. Tom Radaich for his years of prayerful leadership, and for inaugurating the campaign that, with your hard work and generosity, has given us a renovated space. I hope you noticed our tribute to him last Sunday; as we carried water to the font from all our diocesan parishes, first we poured in water from the Jordan River; next, water

¹ <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/communities-of-salt-and-light-reflections-on-the-social-mission-of-the-parish.cfm>

from St. Cecelia's in Nashwauk, where Fr. Tom was baptized, followed by water from the beautiful font in Grand Rapids, commissioned by Fr. Tom when the next church was built there. It is very rare in our diocesan history that a pastor dies while in office. We all mourn his death, and continue to give thanks to God for blessings to Fr. Tom and to us through him. I am grateful for the smooth transition you allowed me in my return here, and for the welcome you continue to give. Because we were known to each other, I think, we were able to carry on with all our projects, and continue to make headway where growth was called for.

In reviewing the last year, we can note that: Registrations for youth group are up from last year, as was our number of those confirmed in October; Both our Pumpkin Patch and Christmas Tree fundraisers were sold out; Daily Mass has seen regular attendance from parishioners non-parishioners alike; SMLS food drive was featured on the local news, and our teen service at St Michael's featured in *Ministry & Liturgy* magazine. Our new music director is showing himself to be both capable and affable as he begins to take our always-commendable liturgical efforts to another level; We are reinvigorating our Liturgy and Ministry Committee to help us shape and understand a true theology of each ministry at St. Michael's, calling us all to grow in understanding of the sacraments and their impact on our lives.

Further, we are looking into the possibility of creating a choir school for anyone in grades 1-12 as a ministry to foster and support arts education for the greater Duluth community as it supports our own life of prayer.

We expect a new youth minister on board in the summer to give us new direction and fresh enthusiasm, and Jake will transition to a new ministry as he continues to assist us to grow in holiness. The Knights of Columbus, Social Concerns Committee, Parish Council, and Liturgy Committee are all re-established, re-invigorated, and active.

Additionally, the parish welcomed Chris McMahon as a fulltime parish administrator, freeing the pastor from most of the day-to-day office, staff and plant operational concerns, thus highlighting the pastor's role in preaching, teaching and baptizing. Further, we made a \$25,000 gift to CHUM for the Steve O'Neill Apartments in honor of Fr. Tom; we enjoy

on-going participation in a variety of community and ecumenical events; we were fortunate to have a well-received visiting preachers summer series in 2014, and have scheduled a continuation of the series in summer 2015. We have welcomed a series of parish educational retreats by a series of scholars and pastors, and have scheduled a number more for 2015; and, we have invited a Notre Dame doctoral student to come spend part of the summer here as scholar-in-residence, in exchange for offering some educational opportunities for us.

At our School: a new all day preschool room has been added, a stand-alone third grade added, new bathroom built, new afternoon science club formed, a new Lego robotics team introduced just this year and already on its way to the state championship tourney; and we have made significant improvements to the school grounds.

Our parish staff is aware that we must examine the state of our ministries, including the ministries involved in our weekend liturgies, our efforts to enhance the excellent work of our Used-a-Bit ministry, our support for CHUM and other social outreach organizations, as well as the opportunities for spiritual growth and formation we offer. We will need to develop strategies and infrastructures that will facilitate and ensure the vitality of all these ministries. Our staff has taken collective and individual responsibility for these areas, and plans to work with our newly reformed committees and councils to accomplish our goals. We hope that by Easter of this year, our ministries will all boast a significant increase in levels of participation and organization, and will have incorporated programs and opportunities for those involved in ministerial roles to experience growth and through their ministries. Your active participation in parish life should represent a constant source of blessings and joy, and we, the staff, will work hard to make it so.

A parish community whose members live in close discipleship with Christ naturally draws others into itself by their witness; we become a source of God's love to those who might think of Him as distant or absent from their lives. Our goal in the Christian life is not to put our own salvation above all else, but to spread the good news of the resurrection in the world by and through our daily lives. In learning to do so within the framework of our respective ministries, we can and will

fulfill the Church's mission of evangelization.

As we prepare to move forward, I will suggest today some elements of a five-year plan for us. After Mass, those members of the parish and finance councils, the trustees, and parish staff who are present will be available to meet informally with those of you who may have opinions or questions.

We have a unique opportunity, I think, to make some bold moves that will invite us to grow in solidarity as a Catholic parish with eyes firmly fixed on the future of God's earth and church. We can move things along so that when it comes time for a new pastor to be appointed, St. Michael's will be operating smoothly, leaning and praying into the future, and the new priest will be able, please God, to slip into this community of faith seamlessly. I have no plans to move away in the immediate future. But remember: this time last year, Father Tom had no plans to move either. And I was living at Saint John's in Collegeville, where I would be for the rest of my life. It is clear, at least to me, that my time here is limited. If we do not do these things now, we may well miss opportunities that we will not be able to reclaim.

Here are the initial components of a plan:

First, we learned that our Wicks organ in the loft was in need of \$80,000 work if it were ever to sound another note. Then, another technician got it started up, and reminded us that its sound will fill the balcony, but cannot lead a congregation. The Rodgers digital organ in the sanctuary turns out to be so completely outdated that it would need to be replaced rather than upgraded; it was purchased in the 1980s as a stopgap when the plans to bring the large pipe organ from the former Sacred Heart Cathedral to St. Michael's fell through. So: now we have the opportunity to buy a pipe organ from Bowling Green University in Ohio for \$16,000, and Brian Kapp, our musician, has explored the possibility of moving and overhauling it with an eye to installing it here. We would end up with a million dollar instrument for less than \$300,000. We do not have \$300,000; we are not in a position to have another capital campaign! But, we could get a loan from our local bank at 3.9 or maybe 3.1 percent interest, and make modest monthly payments. If we attract five or ten households to (or back to) our

parish, we will easily meet this expense. The finance council, trustees and outgoing parish councilors agreed that this option should be explored; we have sent Brian to Ohio for an inspection tour. This project will give our parish added versatility to embrace all types of music, to attract new parishioners, to generate income through recitals and concerts, to allow St. Michael's to be a bold supporter of all arts in the Catholic community and beyond. Drawings of the organ project can be seen in the gathering space.

Next, we are in Year Two of the Five Year Window that the parish granted to St. Michael's Lakeside School, with the goal of being at 100 students by year five. I am concerned about our progress toward that goal. I found a picture of a first communion class here from the 1980; I stood in the sanctuary with 63 first communicants. Next spring, we will welcome only 10 second graders to first communion. So, I have begun exploring a plan that would be a bit of a departure from business as usual. I had a green light from Bishop Sirba, the (former and current) parish councils and the finance council, and the trustees to begin exploring a joint venture with Lakeview Christian Academy, a K-12 school in Duluth Heights.

I am proposing to the trustees, parish and finance councils, and all of you, that St. Michael Parish invite Lakeview Christian Academy to share operations for a trial period of three years, running two schools under one roof both in the SMLS building in Lakeside and in the LCA building in Duluth Heights.

We begin as seekers, knowing that the love of learning is the desire for God.

The common, ecumenical goal would be to share classes and a curriculum, with students studying together in joint classes, separated into two religious groups when appropriate for religious instruction or their own denominational prayer or sacramental preparation and celebrations.

The Catholic tradition, as it has been embodied and transmitted in St. Michael's School since its foundation in the 1920s, would remain a part of the enterprise by arranging to employ a certain number of Catholic

teachers, and a religion specialist who would ensure that Catholic catechesis would be provided on an ongoing basis.

During the three years, either party could decide to cancel the agreement.

The proposed date to begin this new venture would be with the new school year in September 2015.

The trial period would go for three years; during this time, both LCA and SMLS would accommodate religious education and worship for Catholic students and students from other Christian denominations.

In years four and five, if both parties still agree to proceed, LCA and SMLS would become a new, free standing corporate entity. The Diocese of Duluth is one of only nine dioceses in the United States that does not have a Catholic High School. If we agree to undertake this project, we will answer the prayers of many Catholic families in our city, save our long tradition of Catholic education, ensure that our building be put to a holy use, and be part of what might be the most important ecumenical undertaking in the city of Duluth in recent memory.

I am of the firm opinion, as is Dr. Todd Benson, the LCA headmaster, that if this enterprise is of the Holy Spirit, we will succeed. We read in the Acts of the Apostles (5:38-39): "For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy [it]; you may even find yourselves fighting against God." That applies to us, I think.

This proposal will not cost us more than we are already spending on our school; in three years, it will cost less; in five years, we may be free of financial obligation.

You may well say that this is a lot of movement for a congregation in less than a year. Yes, it is. We have a long enough history, however, to know that some opportunities come with an expiration date. The two, major ideas that I propose are time sensitive. If we do not act now, we may well lose the chance. The only reason to hesitate or delay is fear. But perfect love will drive out fear (see 1 John 4:18).

I look forward to our continued growth in holiness together, and look forward, too, to discussing these matters with you. Our trustees, parish council and finance council will meet on Monday at 6:30 pm, to consider authorizing movement on these matters. I invite you to meet after mass with me, or any of them who are present, to weigh in on the matter. I anticipate and look forward to your blessing, that we might undertake these important projects confident that our work is holy work, that our parish is where the Church lives; That we are people of faith, of action, and of hope; That this is the place where God's people meet Jesus in word and sacrament, and come in touch with the source of the Church's life.

May God be blessed by all our deeds and in all our days.

Amen!

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (B) | January 18, 2015

Lectionary: 65

Readings 1 SM 3:3B-10, 19 PS 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10 1 COR 6:13C-15A, 17-20 JN 1:41, 17B

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (B) | January 18, 2015

For all who announce the Good News; and that their proclamation find fertile ground in hearts and minds, *WE PRAY...*

May our religious and civic leaders cultivate a passionate commitment to justice, we pray:

That our own commitment to the dignity and worth of every human life shine forth in all our efforts and conversations, we pray:

For victims of human trafficking, and all whose dignity as human persons are violated by injustice, that we advocate for those in bondage, *WE PRAY...*

For an increased understanding that our parish is where the Church lives; that we are a community of faith, of action, and of hope; that our parish be a place where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth, we pray:

That each of us do what we are obliged and called to do; that our parish be blessed with the generous support of all our members, each contributing, time, talent and treasure, we pray:

That we who are comfortable might make ourselves a bit less comfortable; that those who are not so fortunate might receive what they truly need, we pray:

May Marge Mudrak, and all of our beloved dead, **and all who have gone before us as friends of God**, see the face of God, and join in an endless song of praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever: AMEN!

2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (B) | January 18, 2015|

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

[Sunday Morning] All are welcome for coffee and conversation downstairs in the social hall after the final hymn is sung. And volunteers to help with this Sunday project are welcome; please sign up at the Help Desk after Mass. We are also looking for new choir members, lectors and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist; nominations are being accepted at the help desk after Mass.

On Monday, January 19, the parish council, finance council and parish trustees will meet in the gathering space at 6:30 pm; our meeting should be no longer than 75 minutes. Could members of the council join in the exit procession and come to the Welcome Desk to meet with any parishioners who might like to chat or say hello?

- Roast Beef Dinner, next Sunday 11-3 -- Signups in GS**
- Catholic Schools Week -- See Bulletin insert**
- Human Trafficking Awareness Month @ St Michael's**
- SMLS Montessori Preschool Info Meeting -- Jan 22nd**
- Help Needed: Childcare on Sundays**

The Immaculate Conception Icon is a copy of the original painting housed in the Cathedral Basilica Notre-Dame de Quebec in Canada, on loan to us for a week from the Knights of Columbus. The icon travels throughout the world, under the organization of local There are Prayer Books, and Prayer Cards, is the Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

You will find a parish staff member at the help desk in the gathering space today; stop there with any questions or comments! And please remember: Visit us online at stmichaelsduluth.org; like us on Facebook; and follow us on Twitter!