July 27, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I return from retreat with an expansive optimism, full of hope for the future. Thank you all for your prayers while I was gone, and know I was praying daily for our parish and each of you.

As it is July, I write today to give updates on both our Strengthened in Faith capital campaign, and the Pastoral Planning process we embarked upon in Fall 2017, which set forth goals in the areas of finance, welcoming, stewardship, and church and school unity.

We’ll start off with finances: Even with the challenges of COVID-19, and after a below-average March and April, our Sunday Collections miraculously went up year-over-year in May. Your weekly Sunday Offering continues to be critical to our staffing and operation needs. I cannot thank you enough for your continued support and generosity.

In my April letter, we were pleased to report that the capital campaign was a resounding success. Through June 30, we had $968,168 pledged. To date, I am so humbled to announce we have $363,966.86 cash in the bank (which is monies on hand after expenses); all told, we’ve received more than 40 percent of our goal in the first year! Taking into consideration the very uncertain financial environment we are living in, myself along with staff and the Finance Council have been looking closely at our next steps. We must be good stewards of this money. I’m so glad to announce we will be paying off the mortgage in mid-September. We will celebrate being mortgage-free at the School Marathon and Fall Festival on Sept. 26. And remember, that same weekend Archbishop Hebda comes to kick off our Discipleship Sunday initiative on Sept. 27. See the enclosed flyers promoting the Fall Festival and Marathon. Don’t forget to order your Grand Raffle tickets today: You need not be present to participate in all of our weekend festivities; we will have drive-up communion distribution on Saturday, and you could head right over to the curbside pulled pork to go station, then check in on Facebook Live to see if you win the raffle!

This brings us to updates on both church and school unity, and welcoming. You might have heard inklings of this “Discipleship Sunday,” and wondered: What is this all about? Believe it or not, this is a Saint John’s-owned event series that’s already two years in the making. Spearheaded by Director of Faith Formation Joe Block, some of our staff and a dedicated committee have crafted an exciting line-up of presentations and activities, geared toward sharing and growing our Faith in a family-friendly, socially safe environment, conveniently positioned between both Sunday Masses (at 9:30 AM) to encourage people attendees from both to attend and participate. Each month, there will be free childcare for ages 0-2 and 3-5, age-appropriate activities for older children, and engaging speakers or presentations for adults, along with delicious food, juice and coffee. The goals of these gatherings are simple: To help grow disciples in our Faith, at whatever place you might be in your faith journey, and to welcome more people in—not only to Saint John’s, but to a better understanding of our Catholic beliefs. Highlights include Archbishop Hebda, Advent wreath-making, Catholic Trivia and Scavenger Hunts, and a Eucharistic Miracles traveling display. Stay tuned for more specific updates each month, and in the meantime please visit our website to learn more: www.sjolc.org/discipleship-sunday.

We have more good news from the school: Currently, we have 28 kindergarteners enrolled for next fall, split into two classes. Total Pre-K to 8 enrollment is at 153 for the upcoming school year. As of now, the plan is to return to in-person classes Sept. 8. Of course, the pandemic compels us to take all necessary precautions to minimize the spread of COVID-19 within our community. As such, a group of parents, staff and faculty have been working closely with Principal Dan Hurley to craft a thorough Pandemic Preparedness and Readiness Plan, per the directive and under the guidance of the Archdiocese. Given the current public health conditions, these precautions may include wearing masks, distancing desks, having lunch in the classroom or putting acrylic shields in some spaces. Additionally, powered by Catholic Schools Center of Excellence (CSCOE) and in partnership with Groves Academy, we are implementing new literacy instruction. Learn more about Believe and Read, as well as regular updates about the school, at www.school.sjolc.org.

I know that we have overcome many hurdles throughout the past couple of months, and that there are likely more to come. I am thrilled to announce that, after a successful start to drive-up Communion distribution the weekend of July 24, we will continue to offer this after the 4:30 PM and 10:30 AM Masses. Please join me in prayer for hope and confidence in the elevation in spiritual awareness and faith that leaping over these hurdles has granted us. The future is filled with opportunity, my friends!

Peace,

Father Tom Balluff

Pastor