

June 10, 2009

Dear parishioner:

Enclosed is a copy of the text of the homily I delivered at our Pentecost parish celebration the weekend of May 30 and 31. You may not have been able to attend any of the three parish celebrations but I want you to have access to what I announced at those liturgies. Even if you were present, I know how difficult it is to retain what one hears for the first time.

Allow me to offer you a bit of a 'roadmap' to what is in the enclosed text:

- In my homily I referenced what I heard you say in the variety of listening sessions last spring, especially in relation to four key areas of our parish's life: liturgy and worship; building community; formation; and the parish school. I also offered some of my own observations.
- From that starting point I asserted that the mission of our parish must direct and critique everything we do. "What is central to our mission as Catholics is to produce a people who are able to live by the faith of Jesus Christ. The Lumen Christi Catholic Community exists to manifest the light of Christ in our community and beyond it. That's why our name is Lumen Christi."
- Our core strategy for carrying out the mission of our parish will be engagement by which I mean active involvement and participation in the life and mission of the parish.
- Stewardship, which is more than just fund-raising or volunteering, will be key to our successfully carrying out our mission.
- Finally, I offer some concrete examples of changes that will occur.

The homily I gave at our parish celebration is only a snapshot of the living reality of our carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ. This being said, I expect that the principles I have articulated will give a durable sense of direction to the parish.

I invite you to carefully read through the enclosed material (dare I ask you to pray over it?) If you have any questions or would like to make any comments please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Fr. Paul Feela
Your Pastor

**Pentecost Homily-Statement of Vision for
Lumen Christi Catholic Community, Saint Paul, Minnesota
Saturday/Sunday, 30/31 May 2009**

How do we enthusiastically celebrate the spirit behind Pentecost – especially during these increasingly spiritless recessionary times? I think we need to pray to make Jesus larger and more visible in this fractured and alienating world of ours. We need to pray that all Christians become more “the Church,” grounded in the excitement and preaching of those early disciples. We need to pray that the Spirit of the One God will mend Christ’s splintered and fractured body and that all who speak the various languages of today will learn to understand each other more compassionately. In these recessionary times, we need an inflation, an expansion-economy of God’s Holy Spirit and a more personal investment with high interest and great returns, so that the world will literally become the Kingdom of God.

A year ago, we began to celebrate the feast of Pentecost as our parish feast day because Pentecost focuses on the beginning of the Church; it was the day when God ‘inspired’ those dis-spirited disciples. At that time, I spoke to you with gratitude for the fact that this parish had moved, like those early disciples, from fear to faith, taking the risk to become bigger than what it was. The bringing together of the three parishes, Saint Therese, Saint Leo’s & Saint Greg’s was a huge risk. But the payoff for taking such a risk was this wonderful facility that has created for us far more possibilities than we could ever have imagined at the former sites. And yet we knew – even back then – that we couldn’t just come together physically without also taking the equally risky challenge of coming together spiritually.

I began to address this challenge last spring when we initiated a series of “Listening Sessions” with all of you and with various groups of parish leadership. I want to thank you for all the thoughtful comments and suggestions you made which have been instrumental in setting a vision for our parish. I have listened and listened hard to your hopes for our parish, to what you wanted to see for our parish’s future. I want to take time today to spell out some of what we heard, of where we will proceed, and how we will move forward to an even brighter future for our parish community.

I want to make a few observations about what we heard, focusing around some of the key functions that can be found in any parish’s life:

LITURGY AND WORSHIP:

We received more comments about our parish’s liturgy than anything else. As you might imagine, the comments were all over the board. Maybe the reason behind all that passion is that the liturgy is the heartbeat of any parish’s life. When our three parishes came together, the three styles of worship were essentially “blended” without much critical thought given to the way our celebration of the liturgy is shaping us. What was observed by many in our listening sessions is

that we have essentially four discrete experiences of weekend worship in which sections of our community are satisfied but none of which bring us together as one worshipping community. My priority will be to critically re-evaluate our liturgy and music here at Lumen Christi with the essential value of *the active participation of all the faithful* as THE critical component of any thoughtful reconfiguration of our liturgies.

BUILDING COMMUNITY:

As we listened to what you said, there were many comments about how welcoming the Lumen Christi community is. Yet these comments were actually split about what this welcome meant. Some people feel that the parish is already warm and inviting. These are the people who are heavily involved in many of the programs and activities of the parish. Other people felt that it is hard to break in to existing parish groups because there is so much lived history among the long-time members. Consequently, new members sometimes feel unwelcome and unwanted.

My priority is to engage as many people as possible to carry out gospel ministry in this parish. Christian community differs from other associations in that we really don't build community here; we discover the community we already are.

FORMATION:

There were a number of comments about formation in the faith as well. Formation is more than just religious education. It is a way of patterning oneself to live by the faith of Jesus Christ. This demands an adult community of faith into which we draw the next generation. If there is no committed core community of faith at the adult level, there will be little incentive for our children to be a part of the church as they grow into adulthood.

My priority is to cultivate this adult community of faith in order that our adults might help our children find their rightful place within the Church as they mature. This also means that we will develop some youth programming, perhaps in connection with other neighboring communities, for the purpose of drawing our youth into our common life.

PARISH SCHOOL:

A critical ministry of our parish is our Catholic grade school. It offers great vitality to the parish and it also assists our children in developing a strong Catholic identity as members of our parish. While the school is presently in good shape, there are a number of factors, both cultural and fiscal, that are posing challenges to the traditional strengths of our Catholic School. With the ever-increasing cost of education, Highland Catholic School cannot be all things to all people.

My priority is to develop a plan that assures the long-term vitality of the School even in the

midst of economic downturns and demographic shifts in the area.

This is but a sampling of what we heard in the Listening Sessions. My question to you is this: *How can your observations affect the overall direction of the parish?* I would suggest to you that the answer is found in our attentiveness to **the mission of Parish**. What is central to our mission as Catholics is to produce **a people who are able to live by the faith of Jesus Christ**. The Lumen Christi Catholic Community exists to **manifest the light of Christ in our community and beyond it**. That's why our name is Lumen Christi. Our mission has to direct and critique everything we do. This implies that the mission of the parish must have primacy over our individual preferences regarding what we do and how we do it. That is to say that the needs of the parish in terms of living out its mission must "trump" things we as individuals would *like to do* or things for which we might have a passion.

The reason for this is really quite simple. The purpose of parish is to spread the power of the gospel within our community, to the next generation, and to the ends of the earth. Our personnel and resources are limited. We cannot do everything we would like to do. We have to make choices. A focus on mission keeps our energies from dissipating in a hundred different directions. So often today we think that parish vitality is found in all the things we *DO*; I would suggest it's just the opposite. Parish vitality is found in the way we *ARE*. The way of faith is the spiritual dimension that we live by.

Engagement of parishioners will be the "core strategy" for our parish to carry out its mission. This is the way that Lumen Christi can live its vision of being a vibrant, spiritually bigger, actively involved community. What I mean by engagement is this: Active involvement and participation of more and more parishioners into the life and mission of the parish. This kind of **engagement starts with personal invitation**. This strategy requires that we understand that a significant portion of the staff's work will be devoted to engaging parishioners to carry out the ministries of the parish (rather than the staff *doing* a large percentage of the ministry *for* the parish). This means that each of our staff members will take on a volunteer coordination role related to their particular area of parish life.

We will be less about *doing* and more about **relationship-building** as a key component in our volunteer services. Reasons for this are: the building of relationships enhances engagement; engagement brings about greater commitment to the mission and ministries of the parish; this broader notion of relationship-building will also keep our volunteer ministries from isolating themselves in the parish with the same people doing the same ministries all the time; it also brings parishioners together in a way that invites new parishioners and our children into what we hold so dear: the faith of Jesus Christ.

The key to all this is **a renewed sense of stewardship** which is more than just fund-raising or volunteering. Essentially, stewardship is not a program but *a way of life*. A steward is someone who manages *someone else's* house. As the psalmist puts it, “we are the stewards of God’s house.” Our model for this way of life is Jesus himself. He was put here on earth for one purpose – to bring people to our common destiny, union with God.

As baptized followers of the Lord, we are called to continue this work in the particular circumstances of our time and place. From the perspective of stewardship then, we are asked to use the resources we have to the best of our ability. We must engage one another in the work of the gospel. We must develop a consciousness in the parish about what this notion of stewardship will require of us. We need to understand the current realities of the parish. We need to establish priorities and make choices. We need to create a plan for the future. We will make adjustments to our plans as they are needed.

Some of the concrete changes that are likely to occur over the next year are the following:

1. Some modifications to our liturgical music program in order to focus our efforts more precisely on the singing assembly and our participation.
2. The cultivation of a youth choir to be a part of our weekend celebrations and special parish feast days.
3. Development of a youth program here at Lumen Christi to help our young people find their place in the life of the parish
4. Some adjustments to our parish mass schedule.
5. An increasing number of educational and faith-sharing opportunities for our adult community and for our young adults as well.
6. The offering of more inter-generational community-building activities in the parish.
7. More volunteers trained to bring pastoral care to our seniors, particularly to those who cannot, for health reasons, be a regular part of our parish life.

As Jesus says in today’s gospel, “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.” ☺

Please know that as we begin to implement these changes, we will continue to seek from you the Spirit of the Lord who guides our common efforts. I really hope you know what a wonderful parish community we are. Our task is not to hide who we are - this light of Christ - under a bushel basket. Our annual celebration of Pentecost reminds us that God’s Spirit is not done with us yet.