

28th Sunday per Annum - C
II Kings 5:14-17;
II Timothy 2:8-13;
Luke 17:11-19
Little Flower - 10/13/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today it is my privilege to present to you the 2012-2013 Little Flower Parish Stewardship and Accountability Report. Copies of the report are in your bulletin.

As of June 30, 2013, Little Flower had 975 families and 2,266 parishioners. This represents a decline of 13 families but only 12 parishioners. Thirty-nine new families registered in the parish this past year. However, 52 families were deactivated. This year 31 individuals were buried from Little Flower, a decrease of two from the previous year.

Once again, I am delighted to report that we ended the fiscal year for the fourth consecutive year with an operating surplus. The operating surplus this year was \$40,740.14. Two primary factors enabled us to have a budget surplus. One factor was tuition/fee revenue that was higher than budgeted due to increased enrollment in school. However, the major factor in this surplus was the presence of controls that allowed us to spend approximately \$90,000 less than budgeted in the area of salaries and benefits. Were it not for this spending control, we would have an operating deficit!

However, there is also some bad news. Sunday and Holy Day Collections decreased 1.52% from the previous year. Compared to budget, we experienced a shortfall on Sunday collections of \$ 19,242.47.

This year we had our second most successful festival. Also, we sought and obtained \$40,000 in grant money for replacement of obsolete lighting fixtures throughout the parish center and in part of the school. We continued work on the formation of the St. Therese Legacy Society for Planned Giving and completed the installation of the St. Therese Legacy Society recognition wall in the gathering area. If you have not stopped to notice it, please do so.

Catholic theology teaches us that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of Christian life. Sunday Eucharist should be the most important thing a Catholic parish does each week. The quality of Little Flower's Liturgies was never more evident than when we hosted the East Deanery Mass and reception to welcome Archbishop Tobin. We continued to receive compliments for some time after the Mass. Just last Sunday one of the members of the team working the women's *Christ Renews His Parish* weekend who comes from a much larger, much wealthier parish than ours commented that she wished her parish had a choir like ours.

When people are asked what drew them to Little Flower, they almost inevitably point to our Sunday Liturgies, especially our music. The other thing that draws them to Little Flower is our community. They feel welcome here whatever their situation. Different though we may be from each other, we are still one. They also recognize that Little Flower parishioners have a sense of ownership for the parish. For example, when the annual appreciation dinner was winding down a couple of weeks ago, several people joined the clean-up crew carrying out trash and stacking chairs without being asked.

The Parish Life Commission continues to host parish activities including our annual Parish Picnic, Halloween Party, Christmas Party, and Advent Night. Last year they also organized and hosted our first Little Flower Night at Victory Field. They continued to offer Seasons of Hope, a bereavement support group, in conjunction with neighboring parishes.

Through your generosity, our St. Vincent de Paul Society helped 65 families at Thanksgiving and 60 families at Christmas (191 children and 49 nursing home residents). They made 453 home visits, helped 116 families with utilities, and gave out 25 food baskets. The Gabriel Project assisted over 100 mothers in crisis pregnancies by offering them financial support, love, and educational opportunities.

Each year I am amazed at what our Ladies Club accomplishes with a small number of members, many of whom are older. Through their fundraising efforts, the Ladies Club presented a check to the parish for \$5,000.00 to help with parish expenses. In addition they collected money for flowers for Easter, Christmas, and our Novena and paid for sanctuary and sacristy expenses.

Last year Little Flower Catholic School grew to 230 students, a 7.5% increase. This year we have 256 students, a 10 % increase over last year, and our highest enrollment since 2005. In addition, we installed 27 new MAC mini computers with new monitors in the computer lab. We hired a school counsellor to provide service two days per week which we increased to three days per week this year.

Not only was the school larger last year, but students achieved more academic success. We achieved our highest ISTEP scores ever (the results came out in September 2013). For example, 89% of middle school passed both the English/Language Arts and Math portions of ISTEP, demonstrating that the longer students are with us, the better they do. Our students achieved a 100% pass rate on the 3rd grade IREAD. 100% of our 8th grade graduates enrolled in a Catholic high school.

However, parents and students were drawn to Little Flower Catholic School not only because of our academic program, but also because of the kind of community we are. When families come to Little Flower, they usually feel at home. One vendor, after walking down the hall, said, "I know something right is going on here."

We successfully completed the Catholic School Management four-year development and planning program. Catholic School Management cited us as an exemplary model for implementation of their program. Evidence of our success in this program and your generosity is that we exceeded our Annual Fund Goal of \$95,000.

Several challenges are listed on our accountability report, but I would like to focus on four.

The first is financial. This year we actually lowered our Sunday collection budget to account for the fact that generous parishioners have died and that people's circumstances have changed, resulting in lower collections. However, even after lowering the expected amount, we are not meeting our weekly number. As of the end of September, three months into the fiscal year, we already had a Sunday collection deficit of nearly \$12,000.

Second, evangelization within and outside of our community has to become a priority. If we are going to survive and prosper, we must grow. To grow, we must become more inviting to others. This can range from re-invigorating our ministry of hospitality at church to inviting people to RCIA and lots of things in between. For some of us, this needs to start in our own homes as we hold our students/children accountable to participate in parish life and liturgy. However, the bottom line is that we have to find ways to increase attendance and participation at Sunday Eucharist.

We need to find ways to increase participation in parish life and activities. We need to find ways to encourage more people to become involved in parish ministries. Perhaps most importantly, we need the time and talent of more parishioners to make things happen! One need only look to the efforts of Dan and Joanne Mages who worked to bring *Christ Renews His Parish* to Little Flower when it became evident that we did not have time as a staff to make this important initiative happen.

Finally, we need the flexibility, patience, and perseverance to implement whatever changes *Connected in the Spirit* will bring.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel tells the story of the ten lepers healed by Jesus. Only one came back to thank him. He asked, "*Where are the other nine?*" I would suggest that our stewardship and accountability report testifies to your gratitude to God for all the gifts that God has given you and given us as a parish. Finally, I would like in my own name and in the name of the parish staff and in the name of your fellow parishioners to thank you for your generosity in sharing your time, talent, and treasure with Little Flower Parish.