

29th Sunday per Annum - B
Isaiah 53:10-11;
Hebrews 4:14-16;
Mark 10:35-45
Little Flower - 10/21/12

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today it is my privilege to present to you this year's Little Flower Parish Stewardship and Accountability Report. Copies of the report are in your bulletin.

On Thursday, Archbishop Joseph Tobin was introduced as our new Archbishop at a press conference in Sts. Peter & Paul Cathedral. In response to a reporter's question, he mentioned that both the Papal Secretary of State and the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops told him that he was coming to a wonderful Archdiocese. I can confidently say to you that Little Flower Parish is a very healthy part of this Archdiocese.

This year the number of parish families grew by four, but our number of parishioners grew by 47. Fifty-two new families registered in the parish, and 48 families were inactivated. Only 33 individuals were buried from the parish, down from 47 the year before.

I am delighted to report that we ended the fiscal year with an operating surplus of \$28,887.93. Please note that this resulted primarily from increased tuition revenue due to increased enrollment. Several years ago we experienced serious shortfalls in tuition revenue, so this surplus simply replaces reserves that were used at that time. However, although Sunday and Holy Day collections increased 1.07% from the previous year, compared to budget, we experienced a shortfall on Sunday collections of almost \$6,000. In any case, this is the third year in a row that we finished our fiscal year with an operating surplus. This is an outstanding accomplishment in light of poor economic conditions. We also held our most financially successful festival ever—with profits in excess of \$68,500, an improvement of \$9,000 over last year. Because of your generosity we were able to complete necessary masonry repairs on the west wall of the school building.

This past year we began preparations for the launch of a new website for both the parish and school to take place this fall. I am happy to report that the new website was launched this past week. In an e-mail, our Catholic School Management Consultant, Susan Hoffman, wrote, "I am at a loss for superlatives. The new website is exceptional." If you use computers, please check it out.

Beginning on the First Sunday of Advent in 2011, we implemented the Revised Roman Missal. We learned new musical settings and responses, and we continue to have good participation at Sunday and weekday Liturgies.

The Parish Life Commission continues to sponsor parish activities, such as the Parish Picnic, Halloween Party, a family evening focused on preparing for Advent, and the Christmas Party. This year it hosted the first-ever Little Flower Night at Victory Field. We also completed two seasons of Seasons of Hope, a bereavement support group, in conjunction with Holy Spirit and Holy Cross parishes.

As a result of your generosity, the Gabriel project and our St. Vincent de Paul conference continue to serve those in need in our community. You contributed over \$6,400 to the St. Vincent de Paul Society. This, however, represents a 25% decrease in donations from the previous year. Nevertheless, the Little Flower St. Vincent de Paul Conference conducted over 400 home visits to the poor throughout the year and assisted 178 families at Thanksgiving and Christmas through your food donations and Christmas Giving Tree donations.

Little Flower School has continued to thrive through your generous support. This year we have 233 students, 19 more than last year, an increase of 10%. Last year we achieved our second-highest I-

STEP scores of the past 15 years. This past year we also conducted our first broad-based school Annual Fund. We reached 110% of our goal. I am delighted to report that the monies raised funded \$23,420 in needs-based tuition assistance, 17 MacBook Air computers for teacher use, 8 new SMART Boards for classroom use, 10 Document Cameras for use with new and existing SMART boards, the complete rewiring of the school computer network with new switches and wireless routers throughout the building, and finally workbooks and materials for eighth graders experiencing *Lead Like Jesus*.

At the same time, we face some challenges. Although the number of parishioners registered has increased and parishioners' financial support of the parish has increased, the number of people who regularly attend Sunday Eucharist has decreased. We need to find ways to boost Sunday Mass attendance. To strengthen our school, we need to continue to fund tuition assistance for our families who do not qualify for vouchers and to obtain additional funding for the next phase of our school's technology plan. To strengthen the effectiveness of our ministries, we need to re-energize the Faith Formation Commission of the Parish Council, to increase our ability to help those in need in challenging economic times through St. Vincent de Paul, the Gabriel Project, and other service-based ministries, and to increase our efforts to assist parishioners experiencing difficult times due to illness, hospitalization, or the death of a loved one. To strengthen our parish overall, we need to engage more people in high-level leadership and other roles, to modestly increase our Sunday collections in order to continue to meet the demands of our parish budget even as some parishioners continue to be affected by the prolonged economic downturn, and to meet the maintenance challenges and economic challenges of an aging facility.

As I ask for the gifts of your time, talent, and treasure for the parish, I also ask them for the Archdiocese. Please note that there are two parts to the Stewardship Card, one part for parish stewardship and one part for the Archdiocesan appeal, *Christ, our Hope*.

No parish is an island. We are an interdependent family. What affects the parish affects the Archdiocese, and what affects the Archdiocese affects the parish. For example, a significant part of what you give to the Archdiocese will be used to recruit and educate tomorrow's priests. If there are not enough priests, it is inevitable that some parishes will be closed, merged, or combined or that parishes will not have a full-time pastor or resident pastor. In fact, in one deanery, several parishes have already been closed. Your support of the Archdiocesan appeal ultimately benefits Little Flower and all parishes of the Archdiocese.

The United Catholic Appeal also enables the Archdiocese to assist those parishes and schools that are financially unable to completely support themselves and to offer ministries that parishes generally could not offer by themselves. For example, Catholic Charities provides many services for senior citizens, crisis relief and shelter services, pregnancy and adoption services, and individual and family mental health and support services.

At his opening press conference, Archbishop Tobin emphasized that we are all called to be missionaries and expressed his hope that as an Archdiocese, we will do our best to support families, especially struggling families, and those in need. After listening to him and reading about him, I believe he will be a great pastoral bishop. What better way to welcome him than to demonstrate our support for the ministries of the Archdiocese through the United Catholic Appeal.

My brothers and sisters, I invite you to share your gifts of time, talent, and treasure with the parish and the Archdiocese to the extent that you are able. I want to end with one final challenge. Although this might seem like a small challenge compared to the others, we need to have as many stewardship cards returned as possible. Therefore, if you have not already done so, please return them next weekend, October 27-28, or as soon as possible thereafter. Please remember that the meaning of stewardship is captured in one verse of Matthew's Gospel: "*The gift you have received, give as a gift.*"