

July 5, 2024

My Fellow Disciples of Christ,

May God our Father give you grace and peace!

This greeting is from the first chapter of St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians, which well suits our merger, "*We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, . . . For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people,*" (3,4). As a church St. Andrew has been praying specifically for Holy Family for over a year and a half.- As prayer is a great way to begin our unification!

Now, we officially begin this merger between our two churches, with the goal being, the same as St. Paul's was; to send the "*Good News*" out, to move many to conversion in Christ, and to bear good fruit in our lives. Like St. Paul, I your pastor, have been given, "*the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you . . . To share with you the riches and glory of Christ.*"

In my conversations with Parish Administrator, Catherine Banning, and Principal Teresa Day, I have heard their great optimism, and the love they have for Holy Family Church, that so many of you I'm sure share. I'm looking forward to meeting and hearing this from you. I will be attending small group meetings to give me a better idea on the affection and commitment you all have for your parish. I'm interested in listening to your answers to these three questions:

- What brought you to Holy Family Parish?
- What are your dreams?
- How are you going to become a part of this?

I realize I am being called to change the direction of Holy Family. I'm aware that this once financially stable church is now running a deficit, with depleting funds, and dwindling mass attendance. The school as well is in trying times. There is a lot of deferred maintenance, and the grounds and the building exteriors need TLC. As well, there are a lot of "*things,*" that have accumulated over the years that need to find new homes. To attract parishioners, the parish needs to be attractive. Some hard decisions loom before us, and we must act, and act now, or the situation itself will begin to make the decisions for us.

But, we do have a secret weapon in my fellow priest: Fr. Thomas Tran. Fr. Thomas is living at the Holy Family rectory and is going to have a lot of responsibility in how Holy Family Church operates. He is super capable and did a wonderful job leading St. John Bosco in Lakewood, turning around a parish that was in a similar straits. As well, St. Andrew parishioners are asking me what they can do to help.

Finally, for the Catholic Church to flourish, we have to have success in encouraging youth to serve the church as priests or religious. I'm seeking to do this through prayer, adoration and a devotion to Sunday Eucharist; the source and summit of our lives. If we implore Jesus to help us, he promises that, "*whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive,*" (Matt. 21:22). We've got a lot of work to do, but if St. Paul could pray, work and evangelize for Christ at the same time- so can we.

More attractive and sound, spiritually, aesthetically and financially. These are my goals for Holy Family.

I close as St. Paul would; "*May God our Father give you grace and peace,*"

Fr. Jerry Burns, Pastor St. Andrew & Holy Family Churches