Yes, “We Are Saint Joe’s”

As I come up on four years as pastor of Saint Joseph’s, I’ll never forget the first day that I visited the parish.

After my iPhone took me to the former site on Robert Trail and I found the new location, I parked and was greeted by some of the staff, had a great talk with Fr. Paul Jarvis, and was also struck by the sign that said simply “We Are Saint Joe’s.” Fr. Paul talked to me about his love for the community and how well people both got along but loved their parish and helped in so many ways. And indeed, that’s something I’ve seen time and time again over the years. Some parishes have so little going on because no one wants to volunteer. And then you have parishes like ours that are hubs of activity.

A testament to that is our “new” campus. I put “new” in quotes as while it’s still relatively new, the church is 16 years old and the school 11 years old now. How time flies!

While obviously I was not a part of that project, it goes without saying we have a beautiful campus. The sanctuary has a warm feel and incorporates stained glass from our former site and is truly striking. A lot of care goes into the maintenance of the church and school from both volunteers and our excellent maintenance staff. And thanks to the generosity of parishioners, we are able to provide a number of ministries. I’m also pleased to say this weekend we had our first round of interviews for a youth minister, which has money set aside for the position not using our general fund money as you, the parishioners, helped us reach our capital campaign goal last year.

It goes without saying there is a lot of great things going on in our parish, and a lot of generosity. But at the same time, needs remain as well.

After Mass on Sunday and last Wednesday evening, we had “listening sessions” to talk about the upcoming fiscal year starting July 1st, and some strains on our budget as we work to balance it. We aren’t the Federal Government and can’t print money; so it is imperative we have a balanced budget for the upcoming year.

Looking at our budget, there have been a few strains.

The first is the weekly giving. Weekly giving compared to last year is down $60,000 from what was budgeted. We are not budgeting an increase for next year. This is down about 6% from the prior year; many parishes in the archdiocese are down too about 4%. On the positive side, as part of our “step up” campaign, people did really step up to help us meet our budget for this fiscal year. So, what is the cause for the decline? My sense is that this could be due to a variety of factors. I believe that it could be due to people giving more to the capital campaign; or not knowing about our debt situation or expenses; or also having a lot of obligations too - house payments, car payments, credit card bills, the expenses of running a household with utilities, food bills and trying to have some left over for sports fees for kids or travel. Life is not cheap and throw in a

broken water heater or transmission on a car and it's easy to see why expenses can be a challenge.

Unfortunately, as a parish we have bills that we have to pay, while at the same time paying down our debt. On the positive side, our staff have worked very hard to do all we can to keep expenses low. Pat Archer, our maintenance supervisor, is always striving to save us money on maintenance as well. Compared to last year the school expenses are also lower. We've also worked hard to look for ways to save money too by going to LED lights, and we are adding a solar panel array behind the church which is no cost to the parish, but allows us to purchase electricity from the investors of the panels that will save our parish $15,000 to $20,000 each year. Our preschool is also thriving and is at capacity, which is also feeding into our elementary school as we welcome a big kindergarten class come fall. A big tip of the hat to Randy Haney, Pat Archer, Kelly Roche and our amazing staff for looking at ways to help us contain expenses.

Despite all of this, some things are unavoidable.

One is the debt. Our capital campaign was a success, but even after this campaign ends, about $4 million will remain to be paid off, and part of that is interest payments. We have a very high debt-to-income ratio as a parish. There is also the need for maintenance. As I noted, our "new" building isn't quite so "new" anymore, and things break. We needed a new roof. We had leaks in the underground geothermal unit that needed fixing. And we just wrapped up a nasty winter that put a strain on our plowing budget too.

In planning for next year, our preliminary budget was $133,000 to the red. Obviously that's not viable. However with proposed cutbacks, we can drastically reduce that number and get it close to zero. With that though will come some changes. There is no raise for staff in the budget. The ministries we provide may be reduced. To put it simply, we may have to cut back on what we can provide to people as a parish.

To be clear, the sky is not falling. We do have reserves. The school is not closing, Masses are not ending, and our parish will continue to go on. But as a parish, we can cannot spend more than we take in and can only spend what the people of the parish provide for their parish.

As you look at your donations to our parish, I'd ask that you prayerfully consider trying to set aside a set amount each month. Consider electronic giving if you are not doing it yet. Perhaps you know someone who hasn't been as active and can ask them to give or be more involved, as indeed compared to years past, fewer people are giving but those who gave often give more. And if you do give, even a small increase goes a real long way in helping us to meet expenses.

To reiterate, we are indeed Saint Joe's. I truly love being a part of our parish and seeing so much love and generosity from so many people. I believe so many great days are ahead of us. Our fiscal situation right now isn't pretty, but we'll get our budget balanced.

Hopefully a big reason for that is because people do here what they've done for 150 years - open up their hearts and take ownership of their parish.

Thank you so much for your generosity!

God bless,

Fr. Paul