

CHALLENGES

This is the first in a series of short essays designed to illuminate and promote discussion of important issues regarding the state of our parish.

Members of St. John's Finance Council have been studying the relationship between our budget and faith formation issues in an effort to plan for the future of our parish. Fr. Tim has asked us, as members of the Finance Council, to explore the crucial financial and spiritual challenges facing St. John's with parishioners. We will be providing important information in the bulletin on a regular basis. We are hopeful that these points will promote discussion among parishioners and lead to feedback that will enable us to meet these challenges in the forthcoming months and years.

Some of the challenges we face reflect demographic, political, and cultural changes affecting the Catholic Church at large while other changes are unique to our parish. During recent years, attendance at Sunday Mass has slowly fallen at St. John's which reflects a national trend. Locally we have experienced demographic changes which bring many blessings, but also present challenges. Hispanics now make up 50% of mass attendees (an increase over the past). There are three separate Spanish masses weekly and it is necessary to provide a Spanish speaking employee in the parish office in order to communicate with this segment of our parishioners. We have responsibility for Notre Dame School, a blessing providing excellent academic education and teaching the Catholic faith to our youth. In addition to a direct yearly contribution from the parish of \$30,000 for Notre Dame School, we share janitorial services, the cafeteria and gym space, utility costs, the costs of repairs and improvements of the shared facilities, and we share the time of our priests. Our priests also serve our mission church, St. James, and the Newman Center. The departure of Fr. Michael has further strained our priestly resources.

Declining attendance, demographic changes, and the special characteristics that define our wonderful parish mean our costs are exceeding our revenues. Do we increase revenues? If so, does that mean those of us remaining in the pews may have to work a little harder to contribute? Or do we cut costs which will likely result in a reduction of services? Perhaps the most disturbing problem arises because declining attendance suggests some who used to sit next to us in the pew on Sundays, our friends, our children, and our grandchildren, may not be attending church at all. Is it possible to bring them back? In what ways might we foster greater spiritual engagement and fuller participation in our church?

We will visit these issues in greater detail in the weeks ahead. As we proceed, we encourage you to contact us with your comments and suggestions.

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