

## **HANGING ON BY A THREAD: SEEKING PEACE AMIDST CHALLENGES**

Some conversations begin a little awkwardly. When visiting recently with a priest in a sacristy before a funeral, he somewhat sheepishly inquired: “Have you experienced a drop?” For a split second I was a bit confused. He elaborated: “We are down 8% in stewardship,” and he was wondering if he was alone. A **certain malaise** has set in among many priests and laity alike. His sigh of relief only came after he was assured that indeed he is not alone. Many parishes are experiencing the same trends. A **common denominator** seems to be the fallout from 2018’s “Summer of Shame,” surrounding the disgraced former Cardinal, Theodore McCarrick followed up by the report of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury. The deleterious effects of these events are clearly being felt, both across this Archdiocese and the nation. Still, while the roots run much deeper than a single scandal, some people are quite honestly “hanging on by a thread” to their Catholic faith, so demoralized do they feel.

At the same time, people do not come to church Sunday after Sunday in order to hear bad news or to see long faces from the pulpit. No, people come to be **refreshed** in spirit and **nourished** with the sacraments. That will continue to be the focus of my efforts here, even while acknowledging people’s concerns about living a Catholic life in today’s society. Recently, the U.S. bishops approved several follow-up protocols to the papal document *Vos estis* which requires more universal standardized procedures for dealing with abuse and episcopal oversight issues. I hope and pray that a definitive response to the questions about how a man such as Theodore McCarrick was able to rise through the ranks and act with such apparent impunity is forthcoming. We long for greater transparency from Church leadership and wonder how much longer we will have to wait? Absent a comprehensive response, the mistrust may only increase.

We would all be wise to focus our attention on **what is within our purview** whenever we are tempted to discouragement. It makes little sense to focus on areas that are beyond our scope. I express my tremendous gratitude to all who have remained steadfast in the midst of such turbulent waters. Words do not adequately express my respect for you lay faithful who continue to lead your Catholic lives despite the challenges and disappointments. Scripture tells us, “... sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame.” (1 Peter 3:15-16)

Ultimately, our reason for hope is found in the person of Jesus Christ. After that, my hope lies in the resilient members of the lay faithful, who continue to inspire me in countless ways. Without volunteers, relatively little could be accomplished in this parish. We have an able and motivated staff, but it is relatively small. I recently read that the **Basilica Shrine of the Immaculate Conception** in Washington DC boasts a **180 member** staff. That floored me! There’s no way that we could even come close to a payroll of that magnitude. We simply do not have the resources. Nevertheless, when I observe zealous volunteers for our children’s choir camp or see the hours of work it takes to create beautiful floral arrangements throughout the year; when I consider the generous souls who volunteer after Mass on Wednesday evenings to sweep the church, I am truly heartened.

The **Church needs you** and we value you. The first time I spoke before my fellow college seminarians— I was petrified. I immediately realized “This is much tougher than I thought!” Our lectors proclaim the Word of God so effectively. Our Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion **battle road closures** and weather to ensure that they fulfill their assigned duties. Our **altar servers are flawless** in the execution of their service, and our **tour guides** provide a wonderful introduction to the Cathedral to our many welcome visitors. I am only scratching the surface with these remarks, but I write them to remind all of how important you are to the life of this parish. As we gather behind the Sacristy following the 10:00 a.m. Mass today, our picnic is but a small token of a **deep appreciation** for your commitment to the Cathedral.

- A U.S. Supreme Court decision (7-2) allows the World War I **Bladensburg Cross** to remain on public

land in Washington D.C. While a victory for **religious freedom**, the written opinion reveals complicated underpinnings. Parts of the majority decision trouble me, especially the argument that claims that the Cross is **not an overtly religious** symbol. If that's the case, it could turn out to be a **Pyrrhic victory** at best.

- Our 2018-19 **fiscal year** ends today. I am **profoundly grateful** for your support in challenging times. We will make necessary adjustments as we establish our new annual budget. In light of recent trends, it must be on our collective radar to address ways to increase revenue needed to maintain our valuable parish programs, while caring for the Church.
- According to a Wall St. Journal/NBC News poll, just 29% of Americans attend religious services weekly, down from 41% in 2000. Conversely, 26% **never** attend services, up from 14% in 2000, while 36% millennials (18-34 years old) never attend. Ouch—we surely have our work cut out for us!
- Tomorrow (Monday) evening, we will offer a special **Mass for Vocations** with Archbishop Hebda, observing the Feast of **St. Junipero Serra**. The Serra Clubs of the Twin Cities work hard to promote vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. I hope you will join us. I remain convinced that God is calling young people from our own homes to serve as priests and religious. May they hear His voice and know of our prayerful support.
- Mark your calendars. An **extremely talented** Choir is making its way to the Cathedral. **Libera**, a Boys' Choir (ages 7-16) out of South London, UK was here in 2011 and returns next month on **Friday July 26**. They have a unique sound, one that I find incredibly engaging. They sang at two Papal Masses as well as for a U.S. President! We try to balance free and ticketed concerts so that all may enjoy beautiful music. This will be well worth the price of admission. Please join us. We do not want to be outdone by the Cathedral in St. Louis the following week!
- Would you consider **spending an hour** in Eucharistic Adoration, once per week or once every other week? We are desperately in need of more adorers for the Cana Chapel, especially on Fridays. Please call the parish office for more information.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel

Rector