

# Good News

Dear Friends,

This Tuesday, October 8, Fr. Brown will receive the McCauley Award from Notre Dame High School in Elmira. This award is presented to people who represent the ideals of Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, which are to be conscious of the needs of those around us and to exercise the works of mercy in the community. He is a proud graduate of this school and has faithfully supported his alma mater since then. Please send Fr. Brown a note of congratulations or express your congratulations in person. This is a tremendous honor for Fr. Brown and our parish.

Today I'm introducing a series of articles that will come from the parish council over the next few months. These articles will explain more clearly the current major focus of the council, which is to develop a strategic plan to respond to the current and future needs of the parish. One of the Council's first tasks was to craft a new mission statement for our parish. It debuts on the cover of today's bulletin. The key priorities of the strategic plan at this time are to

1. Create an operational structure enabling the Council to most effectively meet the role of overseer of the strategic plan.
2. Develop Council members as visible leaders and communicators in the parish community. (Recently, especially since the parish picnic, many parishioners have asked questions about parish council. Who are the members? What does parish council do? Future articles will answer these questions.)
3. Develop a total parish volunteer operation that recruits, trains, monitors, evaluates, and maintains ministry opportunities for individuals and families.
4. Lead and support alternative fund raising to meet immediate infrastructure needs such as church air-conditioning.
5. Provide a welcoming and hospitable environment at all weekend Masses especially for returning and new individuals and families.

The Strategic Plan is designed to respond to the current needs of the parish as well as the expected 25 - 40% growth of the parish in the next five years. Note: This is a minimum goal for the parish. Sound high? It's an attainable goal if we want it to be, not limiting our selves because of doubt or disbelief.

As I've said many times, things cannot continue the way they did in the past. That observation is very apparent at All Saints since four parishes have become one and our population has declined due to death or departure. A large attendance at Mass and an influx of priests after World War II was just a blip on the screen. A shortage of priests has been looming for decades, and we have yet to respond to this reality by making adjustments in our practices and thoughts or by actively supporting the cultivation of new priests for our diocese. Why does the work of keeping a parish afloat continue to be left to staff members or just a small percentage of those who participate by way of service? The strategic plan will address ways to build a minister (a much better term than volunteer) base. Ministry is the sharing of the mission that is Jesus Himself. If this is not seen in even the smallest of tasks, then it is clearly time to rethink what we do.

The aim of our strategic plan is to keep us organized, focused, and accountable for executing the tasks, eventually encompassing all areas of parish life, necessary to grow and sustain our parish. In today's world, you cannot exist without a plan. Even to evangelize and reach out to those who have left the Church takes planning. Again, this cannot depend on one person or clergy alone. This is a mission that all of us share. We need look no further than the acts of the apostles who tirelessly worked to bring the gospel to all corners of the world. Their mission was not a personal one, rather it was to share the message of salvation through Jesus Christ and to pass this mission on to their successors.

The Parish Council used the REBUILT Field Guide to provide structure for many of the strategic plan's elements. Several other models continue to be consulted. A simple Google search shows that parishes across the United States are engaged in a similar planning process. However, we have another advantage. In an area like Corning, it seems foolish to waste the talents and attributes of some of its most accomplished professionals. Drawing on their expertise, we are able to develop what is lacking in the Church today -- professional elements including critical thinking, planning, organizing, identifying goals coupled with a determination to grow and share its values.

It seems we've reduced our participation to showing up once a week and feeling good about it, without much regard for the depth of the Mass, or how much the Church really needs all of its members to do more than say they believe but to roll up their sleeves and demonstrate by their actions that they do believe. To change this is going to take a lot of work.

The world does not see or has lost its vision of the true beauty of the Catholic Church which is waiting to be rediscovered. I am glad that our parish council is inviting us to step-up to the task. Over the next few months, you will learn more about the strategic plan, members of the parish council, specific initiatives, and ways you can participate.

In Christ,  
Fr. Jones

