

STATE OF THE PARISH HOMILY

ST RAPHAEL CATHOLIC CHURCH

Tuesday, June 30, 2020

As it is my custom every June or July, I offer you my Annual Report on the status of our parish. This year, I am not delivering this report at weekend Masses but rather through social media; our webpage, Trumpet, and Facebook.

I preface this report with a warning that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected this parish in many ways, especially financially since we were without weekend Masses for 8 weeks. So, I begin by speaking about our Finances. It is not a pretty picture. This pandemic caused real harm to a budget that was already under stress. We began fiscal 2019-2020 projecting that we would be \$43,000 short of a balanced budget. In March, before Covid-19 paused our Masses, we were on target to end the fiscal year with that deficit, which we would have taken from savings to make up the difference.

After 8 weekends without Masses and a new restricted capacity Mass schedule since mid-May, we are now projecting a deficit of \$191,500 on June 30, 2020.

St Raphael does not have this type of funds available in Savings to cover the shortfall. We have had to make up for this in two ways. First, we took out an interest free loan from the diocese for \$100,000 and secondly, we applied for and received a Payroll Protection Program (PPP) loan/grant for \$129,000 meaning we will not have to pay a large portion of this money back.

So, that still leaves us with a \$100,000 deficit. We will hopefully begin paying this loan back to the Diocese during this new fiscal year.

Fiscal 2020-2021 looks horrible. Even preparing this budget has been a nightmare. Covid-19 could affect the budget in so many ways; lower collections due to unemployment of many parishioners, possible pauses in weekend Masses this upcoming winter, lower fees from the PRE program due to classroom size restrictions, no Food Sales and cancelled parish

fundraisers. To achieve a budget with a deficit that we could manage, we had to look at our income and expenses differently. We assumed that our collections will not be as good, so we dropped our collections to \$844,000. We are still assuming that people will donate, so this number is our best estimate, but it depends on you continuing to contribute to the parish. As we turned to our expenses, the largest part is payroll. The only way we can cut expenses is by cutting everyone's hours each week. This means that effective July 1st, our office will no longer be open on Fridays. Even with cutting employees' hours, we are still projecting a budget deficit of \$51,000. We do have this amount in parish savings but that would leave us with no savings at the end of next fiscal year. If collections do not come in as projected, we would have to take an additional loan from the diocese to function.

One good piece of news is that our building collections continue to be good, as we monthly receive what is necessary to pay our loans to the diocese and we are on course to pay this loan off within the next fiscal year. Our balance on this loan as of June 30th is \$272,000. If we include the balance of \$100,000 on the new loan, our debt is \$372,000. In other words; we will be making loan payments to the diocese for the foreseeable future, so I ask you continue your faithful giving to this fund.

THIS PAST FISCAL YEAR

Last fiscal year, until Mid-March, was a great year. We were blessed last June to receive a newly ordained priest, Father Jon Miskin, who had quite a different first year of priesthood. I am happy both Father Jon and Ramos are still with us during this most unusual summer. Keep Father Jon and Father Ramos in your prayers. It is hard being a young priest in the middle of a pandemic, so pray for them.

The big change to our parish last year was welcoming three Religious Sisters from the order of Missionaries of Charity of Mary Immaculate into our parish. Sisters Deyanira, Minerva and Sandra arrived in September. After a few months of culturalization classes in San Antonio last fall, they began their ministry in earnest in January. They are working with young Latina girls and women who are dealing with life problems and will walk with them and their families.

Like everything else in this parish, their ministry was paused in March, but they have once again begun ministering to those in need with special restrictions implemented due to Covid-19

Father Jon had begun to work on forming small group communities with our young people, here at St Raphael, in Northwest Arkansas and in the Diocese. Although this is pretty much on hold right now, we all have hope that he will resume that work this fiscal year.

Father Ramos continues to work with Sergio Garcia, our coordinator for Hispanic Ministries, to meet the needs of our groups and in the planning of yearly events such as Feast of Guadalupe and the Via Crucis. Father Ramos had knee replacement surgery in the first of June but is doing well and should resume celebrating weekend Masses in July.

Both of our fundraisers last year, Summerfest and Brewtober Chilifest were the best attended in the histories of these two events. At Summerfest, we added some carnival rides, that, combined with good weather, made it very successful. Brewtober was also the best to date in regard to attendance, fun and income. As reported earlier, Summerfest 2020 is cancelled and a decision on Brewtober will be made after Labor Day.

Our STEP Lunch program had seen continued growth in attendance until it too was paused because of this pandemic. Our Food Pantry during this time has remained open to take care of those who need groceries. It is in a modified way, but we are committed to taking care of those who are hungry and without means during this time. I am also working on a way to help our parishioners in need at this time. I will let you know later this summer of a plan where we can help each other in during this pandemic.

Two big editions to our Masses are a video projection system, which was installed last fall and our camera, which was installed in May. Little did we know how timely our projection system would be! Now that there is an absence of missalettes and hymnals, it projects the words for our readings, prayers and hymns. The camera was added after we suspended Masses in March and realized that even when public Masses resumed, this would be an essential tool for us to provide live Masses to the sick and those unable to attend. It will also come in handy for weddings, funerals, ordinations and first Masses down the road. I wish to thank Travis

McAfee of McAfee Studios, who in the first days of suspended Masses came each Sunday to make sure we could Live Stream an English and a Spanish Mass, and who also was instrumental in getting the camera set up.

My ministry over the past year has changed as well. You know I was named Vicar General of the Diocese of Little Rock by Bishop Taylor in March of 2019. In July, I was elected Dean of the West Ozark Deanery here in Northwest Arkansas. I also helped with the organization of Bishop Malone's Farewell festivities in December and January. With all the meetings and other responsibilities, I was handling, I put almost 4,000 miles on my car in January and I jokingly said to the Lord, "This has got to stop!" Well, you know the rest of the story. Like all of you, my work with the diocese and deanery is via emails and video conferencing these days.

As to our next fiscal year, outside the \$51,000 projected deficit what can I say? I usually have a few goals to complete, but to be honest with you, the only goal I have for fiscal 2020-2021 is to navigate this pandemic. So, next I will look our ministries in general.

Liturgies: Confessions, Masses, Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms, First Communions and Confirmation will take place in this fiscal year but restrictions which will change based on the contagion rate. There will probably be size restrictions, masks, and social distancing of some type until there is a vaccine. If the virus makes a comeback this winter, we could be looking at tighter restrictions or even a pause in the sacraments. I pray that does not happen.

Formation: Whether it is our PRE-Classes, Small Faith Communities, RCIA Classes, Baptism, Quince Años and Pre-marriage workshops, or any other formation at St Raphael, so much is uncertain at this time. With PRE, we will focus on students in Sacramental prep for First Communion and Confirmation. We are looking at online (options) programs to help families and students to learn and to deepen their faith who are not in those sacramental preparation years. RCIA will probably be a hybrid of online and classroom learning. Workshops will probably start sometime this fall, but with restrictions on the number of participants, so we will probably add to the number of workshops we offer.

Food Pantry: Our Food Pantry is operating but with restrictions. We very much want to feed those who are especially hungry, and it is our goal to do so, but we have to do that with safely precautions in place. I applaud Darla Lucas, our Food Pantry coordinator, for getting food to needy during the shutdown of our parish. As always, we need donations to our Food Pantry, so if you can help, we would appreciate the donations.

Other Ministries: All of our ministry groups such as; lectors, ministers to the sick, Woman's Council, Knights of Columbus, Campamentos, Fuerza, and Renovacion are presently suspended until we can ensure everyone's safety. Much of this depends the current Covid-19 data, the Governor's maximum group size and directives from our Bishop. The smaller groups with adults only will probably be able to resume their ministries this fall. Unfortunately, larger groups or groups with children will have to wait until later, when we are sure we can stop the spread properly.

Parish Fundraisers: The parish has 4 ways of fundraising; The Gift Shop, Summerfest, Brewtober Chilifest and Food Sales. Thankfully our Gift Shop is open at its regular hours and business is picking up. As I already said, Summerfest 2020 is cancelled this year, and we will wait until September to decide about Brewtober which is scheduled for late October. Our monthly Food Sales are on hold until a time when they can safely restart, hopefully some time during this new fiscal year.

Parish Celebration: Our parish has a big celebration to honor our Lady in Guadalupe every December. Our plans are to celebrate this day as we have had in the past, but Covid-19 will dictate to what extent we can celebrate this Feast; at a minimum, we will have Masses on December 12th.

Even in the midst of a pandemic I still dream. I would still love to have an LED sign on 412. As of the end of June we have received over \$15,000 in donations for this project, so I know the dream is slowly but surely becoming a reality. I also understand that during a pandemic, dreams will have to wait. But, someday....

IN CONCLUSION:

As I complete my 11th fiscal year here with you all, I continue to make this promise: I am here for you; Father Ramos and Father Miskin are here for you. There will always be many changes as our parish moves forward on its journey of faith, but I remain committed as your pastor, even in these most difficult days. I love this parish and what it stands for. As I said before, I am not going anywhere because I believe in each of you and what we can do together. I believe our best days are ahead of us and I believe that our Lord is with us always.

I want to thank my wonderful staff. I am truly blessed to have each and every one of you working for our parish. Thank you.

As I say every year, as your pastor, I realize that I am not in control of events or what will happen in the future; our Heavenly Father is. For that I am eternally grateful because I am only His servant. I place our parish in His hands every night and pray for each and every one of you.

Our complete financial report, with actual figures for this past fiscal year and our new budget figures for this new fiscal year, will be available in August via email by contacting Rebecca Hodges at the office. Thank you for your support and may God bless our parish and our families. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.