

Pastoral Council Meeting Summary-August 2020

Education and Formation Commission: Middle School Principal Matt Tucker, as Interim Head of School replacing the retiring Diane Wolfe, reported St. Joseph is ready to open for both in person and online instruction on August 17. As of last count, about 20 per cent of the student body would be learning online. There was a recent change by the Diocese in regards to a form parents of online students needed to fill out and submit for approval by August 12. Although contributions for the capital campaign to build a new high school continued to come in over the summer, active solicitation of such funds has been put on hold because of the impact of COVID-19.

Social Justice and Charitable Outreach Commission: The Missions Committee reports that due to the ongoing pandemic, no money is being budgeted for International Mission Trips. Delta Disciples Mission Trips have also been impacted by the pandemic. The second planned weekend in 2020 has been cancelled. It's also unlikely there will be a St. Peter's Episcopal Guatemala Mission in 2021. A subcommittee on the Diocese of Little Rock's "One Church" Campaign is planning an alternative virtual event on August 29 that will include special videos and a donation request. The Missions for Transitions Deliveries has grown into "the largest and most complex program." A virtual meeting is planned to discuss program administration and changes to deal with the increasing client requests.

Old Business: Father Tony reported that to accommodate the safety measures being taken to open school, a restructuring of the student Mass schedule is taking place. This relates to the numbers in attendance and social distancing. The high school will have Masses on Mondays and Fridays. The Middle School will participate on Wednesdays, and the Elementary School will also be on Wednesdays, but it will be done through live-streaming to avoid bussing them to church. These Masses will be closed to the public. Father also said he eventually hopes to conduct in-person Masses at the Elementary School.

New Business: Father Tony led a discussion on Bishop Taylor's recent public statements on racism. The Bishop wrote in July that "Loving our neighbor as ourselves leaves no room for anything that harms our neighbor. In our country, no disease has inflicted more harm to our African-American neighbors than that of racism. Both individual acts of hatefulness and systematic evils rooted in our nation's history continue to produce societal differences that especially disadvantage many African-American children right from birth." The Bishop added "nor are African-Americans the only victims. Our willingness to tolerate the systematic economic and social disparities that so disadvantage people of color right from birth is very damaging to the entire fabric of our society." Among the suggestions coming from this discussion were to have Father Warren Harvey make a presentation on racism to parishioners and/or high school students. Fostering efforts to encourage diversity within lay ministries was another idea. "We, as Catholics, must make sure everyone's dignity is honored and respected," Father Tony said.

Pastor's Report: Gratitude for retiring Head of School Diane Wolfe's service was expressed. There's been a change in Diocesan priest assignments. Father Jules Nobert Njopmo, who was to come here in September to become an Associate Pastor, has been reassigned to St. John the Baptist Church in Hot Springs. In his place, Father Balaraju Desam from St. Edward Church in Texarkana will arrive September 1 to assume those duties.