

Fr. Jason's Wishful Thinking... Meetings, Approvals, and Book Release

In my last bulletin article, I told everyone that we were getting close to beginning work on the St. Stephen parking lot. Well on Wednesday, after a successful surgery to remove half of my mother's left index finger, I went to the Catholic Life Center to meet with our new diocesan CFO, Mr. Glenn Landry, to iron out whatever was holding us back from getting the money out of our savings. You see, on August 15th, I had our parish council, finance council, and trustees sign a letter requesting the funds as well as a formal resolution. Sometimes, you just have to go face-to-face to get things done. Mr. Glenn graciously met with me, we filled out some paperwork together, and in a rare move, the check was issued that afternoon and I was able to leave with the funding needed to do both sections of the parking lot. Now, we can complete this project and over time, we can replace what we took out of savings to do it. Congratulations, St. Stephen folks!

My meeting with Mr. Landry was actually three-fold... we squared away the parking lot, and then we turned our attention to the bigger projects of St. Joseph Church. As you all know from reading your bulletin, the bell tower drawings are currently at the LA State Fire Marshal's Office for review. Meanwhile, the Head of Island chapel is progressing and we are waiting on the last two custom-made windows from Anderson Windows so that we can move forward. So we talked about the chapel, and then we turned our attention to the big hang-up: the new rectory. It has been delayed since April as the diocesan Building Review Board had certain concerns—namely, they wanted stamped architectural and engineering drawings (as the house designer's drawings would not suffice for them), they wanted soil samples, and they complained that the house was too big and might be perceived as "lavish". Since then, we have done everything possible to satisfy their requests (thanks to Josh Hoffpauer and Danny Kais), but they still feel that the house is quite large and lavish. The house will definitely be big; but it is not "lavish". The new rectory is designed for a dual purpose: it will be a beautiful place for hosting & entertaining guests when the pastor wishes to do so, and it will be a very private & quiet residence when the pastor wants his seclusion. From ten years of experience, the current rectory doesn't allow for either one of those goals as it is. But it will eventually make a great, stand-alone office.

The new rectory will be big because I would rather build it larger than hear priest complaints over the next 50 years that I built it too small and claustrophobic! It will be something that the people of our congregations can and should be proud of. It will be a great enticement and recruitment tool for future priests to come here. It will have three bedroom suites, designed so that unrelated and celibate priests/seminarians and/or guests can be comfortable in their rooms when one of the other residents might wish to host guests or hog the main living room. The bedrooms are 20 x 20 feet because celibate people don't always like to be in community. If they want to stay in their bedroom, then they will have space for a recliner, desk, small refrigerator and a private bath and walk-in closet at their disposal without leaving their suite. This is a most desirable design for priests and seminarians. And, there is a half bath downstairs for guests so the private baths downstairs and upstairs are not shared with the public. As far as "lavish" is concerned—there's lots of space, but the outside is brick, the inside is sheetrock, there are painted cabinets, and we will use standard flooring and I will paint the walls and ceilings myself, with other volunteer help to save us money. Same with the floors—we can install most of that.

The Diocese knows that we have approximately \$265,000 saved for the new rectory, and about \$50,000 saved for the bell tower. We have already invested an additional \$25,000 in architectural and drafting fees, installation of drainage and closing in the back ditch, and moving in the dirt for the house pad. We have already invested \$45,000 in components for the Head of Island chapel between the dirt, nine windows, three stained glass panels, statuary, icons, chandeliers, crucifix, and Stations of the Cross. We have a double entry-door donated for the chapel. So things are going well with our savings and our forward progress on the projects. However, the Diocese wants us to be safe with the construction costs and they are willing to loan us \$250,000 until the capital campaign reaches its goal of \$300,000. That way, we can move forward.

We will have a joint St. Joseph parish council and finance council meeting on Thursday, August 29th to discuss these projects and the construction loan. The good news is that the Diocese of Baton Rouge will loan it to us at

3.75% and they feel confident that we are good for the payoff! I told Mr. Landry that this community took out a loan for \$850,000 for the new church and paid it off six years early... surely we could handle \$250,000 in no time!

Two other things for news release this week! First of all, I met with Mrs. Tina Simoneaux at Hill Top Inn Restaurant this week and we discussed a nice fundraiser for the Head of Island chapel in late October. The good folks at Hill Top are willing to host a **Sunday Brunch** for the benefit of our new chapel. Think all-you-can-enjoy mimosas, appetizers and dips, shrimp and grits, and some great breakfast and lunch entrees served by their staff. Tina says that they've never done this before, but they are eager to do it for the new chapel! So we looked up some Sunday brunch menus from some of my travel stops through the years, and we're creating our unique menu. In the event that you are interested, it will be approximately \$60 per person including gratuity. \$25 will be the cost of the food and beverage, \$25 will be a donation to the chapel construction fund, and \$10 will be the gratuity for their staff. We will publicize the date and start selling tickets once more details are finalized! I want to thank the Hill Top bunch for offering to do this for Our Lady of Perpetual Help Chapel.

And last but certainly not least, I have finally received the edited text of my book, *Flushing That One-Eyed Chicken Out Them Weeds: Funny Stories and Life Lessons from the Craps Table*, back from the editor. I am doing my own final read-through and additions to the book, and then it will be time to publish it electronically. Many parishioners have asked me about the book over the last few months, which is a collection of funny stories beginning with my childhood and focusing mostly on my experiences of playing craps and having fun on my Las Vegas trips. I have heard a general consensus that the electronic publishing is nice, but it is better if I would print the book and offer it to people in a traditional format. That is quite a financial investment on my part, **so if you are interested in a real book that you can hold in your hands and read, please help me by filling out the form below and dropping it in the collection or handing it to me after Mass. If we get enough interest, I will pursue the professional publishing.** If not, I will still appease folks with a paper copy that we will print here in the office, but it just won't look as professional as Fr. Josh Johnson's book that he released recently. And don't expect my picture to be on the front cover, either. This is just some humble, humorous, creative writing that I hope will bring some joy and laughter to your days and help you to understand what all that shouting is about in the casino from that big table with all the people standing around it. There is a chapter on spirituality in the book, but nothing too serious! The book is dedicated in memory of my father and Butch Little (who taught me how to play craps). My next creative writing project is centered on my favorite female saints.

Love and prayers, Fr. Jason ☺

Dear Fr. Jason:

I am interested in purchasing a traditional copy (as opposed to an electronic copy) of your book, *Flushing That One-Eyed Chicken Out Them Weeds: Funny Stories and Life Lessons from the Craps Table*.

I understand that the cost of the book will be approximately \$10-\$12 per copy, depending on printing costs.

Please let me know when the book will be ready. My contact information is below:

Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Number of copies: _____ Email Address: _____

**In the event that professional printing becomes too expensive and you have to print it in the parish office, I would prefer my copies to be printed with: ___ standard size type
___ large print type