

From Fr. Fleming's Desk

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At our last Parish Pastoral Council meeting we dedicated the entire agenda to the crisis gripping the Catholic Church around the matters of sexual abuse and its cover-up. Such conversations are never easy or comfortable but Monday evening's discussion at the PPC table was open, thoughtful, heartfelt, prayerful and blessed by that wisdom that comes from loving the Church as the Body of Christ. I was not the only one at the table who found the conversation as helpful and encouraging as much as it was difficult and wrenching.

Part of our meeting was devoted to exploring ways in which we might reach out to the parish at this time and possibilities for us as a parish to do something in response to the news that seems to grow more challenging every day. On behalf of the Council, then, I want to share with you three initial possibilities.

(1) On Wednesday night, October 3, we will gather in the church for prayer and lamentation. Lamentation? Well, there's a Book of Lamentations. As a literary work, the Book of Lamentations combines elements of communal and individual laments (in which the speakers attempt to persuade God to intervene in the face of an acute crisis), funeral dirges (in which a death is mourned), and ancient city-laments (in which the destruction of a city is mourned). I think you can see how these themes relate to our present situation in the Church. And I'm sure that you are lamenting the abuse of innocent children, the abuse of power and authority and the betrayal of trust and confidence. There is, indeed, much to lament. Our time of prayer on October 3 will include scripture, music and the opportunity for individuals to come to a microphone and lament:

O God, I grieve over...
O God, I mourn the loss of...
O God, I lift up the pain of...
O God, I'm angered by...
O God, I cry for justice for...
O God, my heart is broken by...
O God, I weep over...
O God, I lament the loss of...
O God, I plead with you...
O God...

Recognizing that not everyone might choose to speak their lament publicly, there will also be paper and pencils for you to write your lament and come forward to place it in a basket on the altar. After the prayer service, any who choose may remain for conversation with the Parish Council and me.

(2) October is the month of the Holy Rosary and October 7 is the feast of the Holy Rosary. On Sunday night, October 7, we will have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction, including praying the Rosary together in reparation for the harm done to innocent victims and to all in the Church.

(3) Many are tempted to leave the Church at this time, not wanting to be part of or to associate with an institution which has permitted such tragedy to thread its way through our history. As I have written and preached I see you as the hope for the reform and rebuilding of our Church and so I see this as a time for us to redouble our efforts and to make our parish community even stronger than it already is. So we want you to consider this a moment to deepen your ties to our parish and to become more involved. A helpful opportunity is already scheduled, our annual parish Ministry Fair after all the masses on the weekend of September 22/23. All our parish committees, councils and ministries will have tables on the lower level of the church with information about their work, representatives to answer your questions and clip boards to sign up to strengthen our parish and the Church at large through your own prayer, good will and efforts.

We will be looking for other ways to respond to all that's happening - these are three first steps. I hope, I pray and I trust that you will take those steps with us.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming