

The “State of the Parish” – April 2009

Saints of God, the Lord be with you! Last year at this time I gave you an overall “state of the parish” report and I’d like to do the same this year. Once again, I can report that the state of the parish is good: we are vibrant, hospitable, and continue to adjust as our parish and the surrounding community changes. Our liturgies and sacramental celebrations continue to be lively, spirit filled and reverent. Just to give you an overview, last year the parish celebrated 852 masses, 62 funerals, 149 baptisms, 38 weddings, 85 first communions and 60 young people we confirmed. In addition, nine people were received into the church at the Easter vigil through the RCIA.

But, the parish is who we are not simply because of the presence of the Friars and Sisters. We are vibrant and hospitable due in large measure to all of you who minister along with us. Just to give you an idea of how active you are: in the area of Pastoral Care, 30 people bring communion to the home bound or those in nursing homes; 40 people bring communion to those in the hospital. We have 30 people involved in our Care Ministry which helps the bereaved with funeral planning. To celebrate all those masses and sacramental celebrations, the parish has 280 Eucharistic ministers, 90 lectors, and 155 ministers of hospitality. Our three choirs include 24 children, 18 teens, and 62 adults. There are 37 of you who give your time to teach 494 young people as catechists. To all those who give their time to minister to all of us, I once again say a big THANK YOU! Without you, there can be no us.

As I said above, the parish continues to change and grow. This is also true of your Franciscan Friars. In 2008, the friars of Holy Name Province saw 12 friars enter into eternal life, while we solemnly professed and this year ordained five men. The biggest change for us here at St. Francis was the election of Fr. Tom to the Provincial Council. While Tom still continues full time ministry with us in the parish, his responsibilities to the Province (as a councilor and the chair person of the Provincial Finance Directorate) has him spending a lot of energy and a lot of time away from us. Fr. Jim has been asked to work with our novice in Wilmington, DE, once a month and also serves on the provincial Fraternal Life Directorate. Fr. John continues his treatments for cancer and also serves on the Provincial Finance Directorate. I, too, have been asked to serve the province as the co-chair of the Ministerial Development Directorate. I can’t think of another friar community where every friar has been asked by the Provincial to serve the province. This speaks highly to the talents of the men who serve all of you.

In addition however, I think it necessary to remind you that all of the friars this past year have had our share of personal family pain: Fr. John’s sister and brother-in-law both died, Fr. Jim’s dad died, Fr. Tom’s mom continues to do well in assisted living, and my mom is being treated for bone cancer. What is truly a blessing is the concern all of you give us in regard to our families.

The question about the future of St. Clare’s proceeds. The parish was asked to give the diocese a report on income and expenses which we gave them in a timely fashion. The diocese also asked for a count of mass attendance, and this will be given at the end of the season this year. We all need to remember that Church governance moves slowly. I had always planned that St. Clare’s would be open for the 2009 season. The mass schedule for this church is still open and subject to the availability of presiders.

You might have been aware that Verizon had requested permission from the bishop to build a cell phone tower on the property in Brant Beach. The rent for the land would have been about \$3,000 a month going to the parish. The Township land use board refused permission however. This is unfortunate since the money received would have gone to the maintenance of the church buildings.

I believe that the mass schedule is now workable for the foreseeable future and no further changes will be necessary if the number of presiders we now have remains the same. The decision to drop the Sunday 7:30 a.m. mass from Advent to the first Sunday after Easter initially caused a few parishioners unhappiness. Most people on the pastoral staff believe that this change has been successful since it has made the other masses more celebratory given the fact that the church is now full at the other masses particularly the 8:45. The change to make the 5 p.m. Saturday vigil mass year round will be reviewed at the end of the summer season. One question still under discussion is the time to have the holy day vigil masses. The 5 p.m. mass doesn't seem to be suitable for those who work or have children in school.

As I look to the future, one goal I have for the parish this year is to constitute a parish council of laity who would be charged with the task of visioning what the future of the parish might look like. I'm stumped at how to do this given our three distinct populations: those who live here year round, the snow birds, and our summer family. My initial idea is to ask six people to serve on this committee and develop a way to hold an election of a council by 2010. If you have any ideas write them down and put them in the collection basket.

Our regional Spanish ministry (with St. Mary's and St. Theresa's) continues to grow. I am happy to announce St. Francis has reconstituted its' own youth ministry even though we are a part of the youth ministry cluster hosted by St. Mary's. As we continue to grow into the future it is my belief that not every parish needs, nor can support, every ministry. Sharing personnel, facilities, and funds is one way to ensure a sound future and I am proud that St. Francis and the other surrounding parishes have begun to do this. We are a model not only for the friars of Holy Name Province, but also for the Diocese of Trenton.

This year, we need to repair the roof and replace the vestibule in the Brant Beach Church hall. I also want to convert the stage area into two small rooms so that our youth ministry has a place of their own, as well as discuss and hopefully improve the parking situation in Surf City with the local authorities. During the month, John Platt the parish comptroller, Connie Becraft the Assistant Executive Director of the Center, and Angelo Sammartano the coordinator of the maintenance department will all give you a report on their areas.

As I've said before, you are a blessing to all of us who serve with you as the Body of Christ. May God continue to bless all of us!

Fr. Steve, ofm
Pastor