

FATHER JIM'S NEW YEAR REPORT

My Dear Parishioners,

This letter is my greeting for a very happy new year as well as a report on what has been happening in the parish in recent days. I also want to thank all of you who sent Christmas greetings, gifts of sweets, spirits, baked goods and legal tender. It was most kind and is deeply appreciated. My Christmas was quite busy especially since Advent was so short and our Christmas Masses began on a Sunday night.

I did have a very nice break right after and was able to visit my brother and his wife in Boca Raton, Florida. He and I are the only ones left of our immediate family and it had been more than thirty years since we had spent any holidays together. I was there for a week. We saw a couple movies (*Volver* and *The Painted Veil* - both excellent), attended a *Salute to Vienna* concert, talked late into the night, slept in most mornings, and played cards with some of their friends till about 3:00 am on New Years. It was a great visit and we both recognized that we need to do it more often.

Now here's what's happening around here. The interior of the large hall and Barry Hall were both painted during the Christmas break and the lower parking lot was repaired, resurfaced and re-stripped. That means that our entire parking lot is now finished and hopefully will not have to be done again for a few years. In the process we were able to add six or seven handicap spaces. I would have liked to have added more, but because of the many slopes in the lot it isn't allowed.

As soon as the painting of the halls was done we began replacing the flooring in Barry Hall. It is finished now and looks wonderful. We did however discover a serious problem with the floor in the large hall. In Barry Hall we were able to lay the new floor over the old floor, but in the large hall we discovered a moisture problem and crumbling cement in some areas beneath the existing floor. That means the old tiles - two layers - will have to be removed and the concrete below repaired and sealed. Because one of the layers is asbestos tile the hall has to be sealed off and the flooring removed by specialists. It also had to be reported to the Air Pollution Control District who will issue a permit, oversee the removal and inspect it when it's done. This adds another \$20,000 to the cost of re-flooring that hall and means that the hall will be unusable during the process. That also means no bingo the first two Wednesdays of February. There will be Bingo however on January 24 and 31.

I know this will inconvenience several groups and organizations in the parish, but we have no choice in the matter. Because we are a church with a school, once the problem is detected it has

to be addressed as soon as possible. The good news is that we will finally be rid of the asbestos, the hall will look great and we can begin using Barry Hall this week. The next project will be to get bids on the painting of the hall exterior.

I'm sure most of you noticed that the doors on the south side of the church can not be used this weekend. That's because we have replaced the damaged stairs on that side of the building. The old steps were removed and the new ones poured on Friday.

I need to bring to your attention some rather disturbing events of the past few weeks. They involve vandalism and burglary. On the night that we held the school pre-Christmas concert one of the cars in our parking lot was vandalized. The damage was more than a thousand dollars. No other cars were damaged. Police were notified and a thorough investigation is now taking place. If any of you have information that will help us identify the vandals please call the school office (619.466.3241).

On the last weekend of December a car window was broken and a purse was stolen. Please do not leave valuables in your cars while attending Mass. These kinds of incidents are rare but they do happen.

On January 3 the Youth Ministry and Catechetical Offices were broken into and some very expensive electronic equipment were stolen. In addition a set of keys to the school, church and hall were also taken. Though these keys have not been used to enter any of the buildings on the campus, we must re-key all the doors of the church, hall and school to keep our insurance valid. The school has already been re-keyed. The church and hall will be done tomorrow. This means that any parishioners who have keys to these buildings must turn them in and get a replacement.

Now to the "suggestion-comment box". Since the box was placed in the vestibule a little over a month ago eighteen people have submitted questions, suggestions or comments. One comment was that we put the box in a better location, but no suggestion of where was given. Tell me a better place and I'll put it there. Several people wanted to know how they could be more involved in the parish and they will be contacted. One person said we need a Men's Club. I agree. Whoever is interested and would like to help organize a Men's Club, please call me and we'll get one started.

One person suggested we name the "north chapel" the "Holy Spirit Chapel". I do not know how that chapel became the *north* chapel and since many of you are directionally challenged as I am, I would have no objections to calling it the Holy Spirit Chapel. That's the seating area to the right of the sanctuary as you face the altar. There is a beautiful stained glass Holy Spirit window there and so from now on, unless there's strong opposition, it is the Holy Spirit Chapel.

OVER –

One person suggested we install railings leading up the steps to the altar. There are already railings on the far ends of the steps, but another railing would be helpful. The steps are very steep and Msgr O'Neill and one of the Augustinian fathers and many of our parishioners are unable to negotiate them safely. I will look into it, get some bids and make sure that whatever design we may use does not in anyway obscure or detract from the altar. Let me know what you think.

There was one parishioner who would like to hear more of the old, traditional hymns at Mass. No objections from me. I have turned the suggestion over to our musical director, Joe Pechota. He does try to include a variety of traditional and contemporary hymns at Mass, especially at the 10am Mass, but a few more traditional hymns I'm sure would be welcomed by most of us.

We had two suggestions related to Mass times: one that we start the Saturday evening Mass a little earlier (430 or 500pm), and another that we start holy day Masses during the week a little later (like around 600pm). The whole issue of Mass times and how many Masses are celebrated each weekend is going to have to be looked at in the coming months. Some of you don't like to drive at night and some of you have jobs that prevent you from getting here early.

Right now we are fortunate that we have the Augustinians and Msgr O'Neill to help us, but his may not always be true. I will revisit this issue in the coming months with the Liturgy Committee, our Liturgical Ministers and I welcome suggestions from all of you. Please let me know if we really need four Sunday morning Masses. If we change Mass times, what are your preferences? The Sunday evening Mass is very poorly attended; should we continue it, have it less often per month, or not have it at all? Obviously we won't be able to please or accommodate everyone, but let me know your thoughts.

I know this makes for a very long report but I would like to address a couple more comments related to Mass. One person said "it would be nice to have a priest at the conclusion of Mass to be at the church entrance' greeting the people. I know of only two of our priest helpers (Msgr O'Neill and Father Pejza) who are unable to do this. I am at the entrance before and after every Mass I celebrate - even weekday Masses. I also try to be at the entrance of the church for the Masses I do not celebrate. I just wish I could be at all the doors all at once. I'm working on it.

Another person suggested we "do away with hand holding and handshakes" during Mass because "it is not safe and passes germs." Hand holding at the *Our Father* is not officially a part of the Liturgy. It is not done everywhere, but does seem to be very popular in southern California and has been for several decades.

The Sign of Peace is an official rite within the Mass. The *General instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) says simply that "before they share in the same bread, the faithful implore peace

and unity for the Church and for the whole human family and offer some sign of their love for one another." There are no specifics about what the sign should be.

In our culture we usually greet one another with a handshake or embrace. Those who prefer could turn to those around them, nod and say "peace be with you" without a handshake. The same goes for the *Our Father*, those who prefer not to take the hand of fellow parishioners, could use the "*orantes*" prayer gesture (open palms, hands raised in front of them). Those standing nearby would get the idea that you prefer not to join hands.

I do observe that the overwhelming majority of parishioners are comfortable with touch during Mass. I disagree strongly that handshakes and other gestures used at Mass are "unsafe". Touching the hand of a fellow Christian is no less safe or healthy than touching a door handle, a steering wheel, a phone, a shopping cart, a hand railing or the money in your wallet. The warm greeting of a fellow parishioner is much more meaningful and satisfying. As far as I know I shake more hands and kiss more babies than anyone in this parish. I am also close to people who are sick on an almost daily basis. Very often I am the first and last person to drink from a Communion cup. By all accounts I should be the least healthy person in this parish. I'm not.

There were several cards in the box with comments like "awesome", "everything is perfect", "church is fabulous", "I appreciate everyone involved in this wonderful community", and "thank you for this idea" of a suggestion box. I will continue to report and respond to your comments in the months ahead.

Lastly, I want to thank the pre-school children who brought me a birthday song, hugs, homemade playdoh, and a little cake made out of half a bagel, cream cheese, two pieces of kiwi, one piece of cantaloupe, lots of mini marshmallows and a pretzel stick. I am also grateful for the other anniversary and birthday cards and gifts I have received. Thank you all so much. You make me glad I'm your pastor and make me feel very welcome and loved in this parish family.

My birthday today is one of those so called milestone birthday - sixty-five. Eee gads! I do feel however so blessed and grateful for every one of these years. I thank God for giving me life, wonderful parents, two great brothers, a loving family, fantastic friends, relatively good health, opportunities to get an education, travel, grow in faith, be ordained, have terrific assignments and spend my "senior years" with this marvelous faith community.

God bless you all.



January 14, 2007