

Dear Parishioners,

In 2014, the Parish Council undertook a mission to build a stronger parish community. We have addressed that mission in two ways: 1. To improve parish education, both for our youth and our inquisitive adult populations and 2. To provide an atmosphere that helps us show love for our neighbor.

The first of these has been, perhaps, a bit more straightforward. Under the leadership of Kerrie Wiese, who serves as both a council member and the Sunday School Coordinator, a survey was developed to examine both the desires and the needs of our parish and the results may or may not shock you. We found that nearly everyone who completed the survey felt that youth education was very important (good, we agree!) and from your responses we have also grown our pool of people willing to help in the classrooms. Admittedly though, this number is much smaller than the number of people who felt education was paramount. That means that if you were waiting to see if we need more help, consider this the call. Yes! You are still very much needed and we would be grateful to any and all volunteers. Thank you! We also found that people were interested in more learning opportunities than the various classes already offered (Learning = Good). With Council VP Bill Turri leading the charge, we implemented a trial class on Icons through the summer and fall months and thanks to positive feedback, we will continue offering a parish wide (parish welcome) class every other week. We look forward to some great topics and even better discussion.

The second goal has been less straightforward, but I believe no less fruitful. The question, how do we show love for our neighbor, can be answered in innumerable ways, but likely most answers require us to examine how our behavior affects those around us and in what ways we can be respectful and deliberate in both our thoughts and actions to show love for each other.

We were approached by people concerned with the disruptions and distractions by the children with whom our growing parish is blessed and, conversely, we were approached by people who are concerned with a lack of patience shown to the children and their parents. Both have a valid position. The answer really boils down to a call for everyone to examine how they can make our church a place where everyone can worship and participate in the Liturgy and other services to the best of our abilities. So, to the parents we are saying, "Thank you for bringing your children and adding their exuberance, innocence, and unbiased love to our prayers. They are important. However, they at times can also be a distraction to those around them. If your little one is having a hard time (don't we all have those occasionally?), maybe he or she needs a small break. Consider how their joyful noises (or less than joyful noises) are affecting your neighbors. Would it be a loving gesture for you to remove your beautiful distraction and allow your neighbor a moment to find their way back into the service?" And to the neighbor we are saying, "Thank you for adding your prayers with ours today. We know that the little ones can be distracting at times, but they will grow and learn in part due to your patience and the

understanding and grace you show them. Consider how your less than welcoming looks can affect the parents struggling with their little ones. Consider how the small child might feel unwelcome seeing a censorious look upon your face or hearing negative whispers to your pew-mate. Would it be a loving gesture to offer a helping hand, an encouraging word, and a re-dedication to pray through the disruption?"

You may have noticed the welcome cards that were placed in the pews in November. The information in these cards outlines the times during the services when it would be appropriate to move about or when it is important to be more attentive and reverent. Hopefully this information will help give balance to the needs of parents with small children everyone around them.

We have also been asked by parishioners and people planning to visit our parish, what constitutes appropriate church attire. It seemed to us there was a need for the parish council to make a statement addressing these questions. No, there is no dress code, though we will be putting forth a guide for self-examination. Again, we think the answer boils down to how our actions and decisions affect others and how we might show love for our neighbor. Preparation for Liturgy begins, not when we walk into the sanctuary, but from sundown the evening before. We make the decision to abstain from certain activities and fast to prepare our bodies, and in many ways the clothes with which we choose to adorn ourselves are part of that preparation. We choose clothes that are perhaps a bit special to show reverence for God and we choose clothes that are more modest to show our respect for Him as well as our respect for our fellow parishioners. We should ask ourselves if our wardrobe would act as a distraction for those around us. Yes, in our "individual satisfaction is king society" someone is asking you to dress for the benefit of someone else, not to impress him or her, but rather to help him or her keep a prayerful mind during service. We don't know the struggles of those around us, but our job, the work of the people (Liturgy = work of the people), is to not only become stronger Christians ourselves, but to help and encourage those around us to be stronger Christians. If not wearing my favorite, but distracting, blouse to church helps my neighbor, shows love for my neighbor, then I'll save it for another day. And likewise, if I goof and wear something that distracts my neighbor, I hope they show me love and forgiveness. I can only do my best and my best, regrettably, is not perfection.

Thank you for your prayers of support and guidance. They are appreciated. And, as always, your thoughts are welcomed and encouraged.

Christ is in our midst!

Sincerely,

Mary Kay Smith