

ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH

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Dear Parishioners:

In his second letter to the Corinthian believers, St. Paul encourages his local church in their commitment to generosity. Here's what St. Paul says, "Last year, you were the first not only to give, but also to have the desire to do so. Now, finish the work so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means" (2 Cor. 8:10-11). In other words, you've started the initiative of giving; now, see it through to completion. Don't stop halfway, but allow your eagerness to be evidenced by your actions.

This past year of Generations has been incredible. It's difficult to even articulate the overwhelming outpouring of God's grace upon us:

- Our new parking area is not only utilized but full at every Mass.
- Our new Children and Youth Wing has not only been filled with children, teens and young adults, but we see as a result of this space a dramatic increase in participation by these age groups in programs. The commencement of our new Plugged In/RCIC program, the start of Kids Zone for aged 2 & 3 year olds, the beginnings of AVisitation Kids@ for First Communion preparation and our new Confirmation Preparation Program, ASearching in the Spirit@, our Steubenville youth gathering for high school aged teens, the undertaking of our Atrium program for children, as well as our ACatholic Update@ for young adults are all positive signs of growth and great tools of evangelization.
- We have seen maintenance undertaken around our physical plant including our improved sacristy storage space, an enhanced Prayer Garden, new votive shrine areas, distinctive new LED sign and red light in our tower which truly makes us a >light on the hill=, enhancements in our narthex space to help with the increased numbers sitting in our overflow space, a new family bathroom in the lower level of the Church, additional office space, repairs to the interior stone work on our bell tower and to drywall and paint chipping in our Parish Center, upgraded electrical work in the Church, an enhanced presence of the Adoration Chapel with a stained glass window in its doorway and an exterior sign, and the rectory garage roof replaced.
- We have seen lay leadership increase following our Lay Leadership Day last Fall, and have seen a dramatic increase in the number of parishioners involved in various ministries - including several new ministries begun. We have also been blessed with the addition of a dedicated catechist, in the person of Sister Bernadette, to our parish team which means increased opportunities for ministry and outreach.
- We have increased the exposure to God's Word by Making Sunday Matter through our new Heart to Home series, and investments in our website to make audio of our Sunday homilies available.

God is the hero of this story. This isn't to the credit of any one individual or team of people, nor is it even solely to the credit of one local church. All credit, all glory, all praise must be singularly directed to God Himself. He made this happen. And were all witnesses of that.

But we also know that God uses people to accomplish his purposes. He's the one who moves and initiates, but He elects to use us in His mission. This just brings God more glory, because He is able to weave all of our stories, our resources, and our energies into one beautiful purpose: *to give us repeated opportunities to hear and see the Gospel as we provide something for everyone.*

So here is my encouragement to you, now: *finish the work*. Complete the task. This goes way beyond financial contributions, but it must also include that if God is truly Lord over all. *This is why on October 11 & 12 weekend* we offer the opportunity to make a financial contribution to this good work. Our original goal was \$75,000 and we have raised a little over 50% of that amount. This fundraising, which began last Fall, asks each family in the parish to give \$150.00 above their usual giving specifically, over a 12 month period, to fuel and fund the work of Generations. This is much less than our actual costs, as the generosity of the Diocese of Hamilton has made so much of this possible. I believe that God, however, wants us to express our gratitude for His provision by being stretched in the direction of generosity. I want to again encourage you: *let's finish the work*.

Why give, though? Now that we are in the facility, cars are parking, families are coming (and things seem to be working just fine), what is our incentive to give? A few reasons come to mind:

1. *We said we would*. We committed to make this happen just a little more than a year ago. We have seen such an encouraging response, but there is still more to go. We have been blessed that through the resources of the Diocese of Hamilton we were able to do things swiftly that would take many other congregations months to do. This blessing should not be lost on us.

2. *We must constantly fight the temptation to be consumers*. There is a spirit of entitlement that runs rampant wherever we look, and in a world that says, "Me first," the people of God in Hespeler must stand out as those who will not buy in to the Doctrine of Deserving. The only way to fight greed is to be generous.

3. *We have been blessed to be a blessing*. If you've been a part of St Mary of the Visitation Parish for any length of time you know that it is because of the generosity of others that the work of the Gospel has continued in Hespeler. The very existence of a Church in Hespeler came about because a committed group of believers, in the early days, gathering in a small home, then in a Church that would hardly sit a congregation of 100. They made it through several Church fires and rampant growth. But through the generosity of God's people (which certainly includes you), we have been sustained so that we could continue to reach people in our circle of influence. So we clearly have been blessed. Now, as we mature as a Family of Faith, we need to have an eye towards *being* a blessing. By giving to the work of Generations, we can actually participate in blessing others. That includes the people within our local community, but it also extends beyond that. If we commit to owning the remaining amount in our Generations goal, our generosity will extend far beyond the walls of this building and will permit us to have the financial freedom to reach others.

One other thing needs to be stated. The verses I referenced at the outset include one very important line: *according to your means*. St. Paul is aware that not every person can give the same amount. Again, the beauty and brilliance of God's plan is evident: even with different dollar amounts, we realize that all are needed and all are necessary. While we are asking every family to consider a gift of \$150.00, which represents \$50.00 for each of the three Generations weekends we have had, we are always better together, and that includes those who have much and those who have little. If you can offer more, please know that it is needed at this time and if your offering is less, please be assured it is equally valued and required. Once again, let me encourage all of us: *let us finish the work and give to Generations*. May Our Lady of the Visitation continue to be our inspiration, model and guide.

Together in the Lord Service

Father J. Freitas, Pastor