

Jan. 11-12, 2014

Thoughts from the pastor,

As I mentioned last week the Archbishop's *Ignite the Faith* Campaign is starting for the parishes in our area. Some parishes, like Elkhorn St. Patrick and St. Patrick's in Gretna, have been going on this for a few months. This campaign is a small version of a home make-over. When you have a house you have constant costs like utilities do deal with. The Archdiocese has those costs also. They are paid for by the A.A.F. tax that every parish pays each month. It is a percentage of our Sunday collections. A home owner also has extra bills that come up for repairs that can be simple like a new toaster or scary like a new roof. The Archdiocese has those kinds of bills also. The small ones it can usually handle within its budget. A while back they had to have a campaign like this to upgrade a bunch of their buildings. It seems like that was over twenty years ago but my memory is vague on those details. But periodically a home owner has to remodel or upgrade on an even higher level to keep things going well. This doesn't have to be in terms of buildings because the Archdiocese is not just a bunch of buildings. It is people in agencies doing programs for the parishes and parishes doing things for the people.

One part of this campaign is about some of the people who have been doing this kind of work all their lives, the retired priests. We have an annual collection for retired women religious and you are generous to that. The Archdiocese thought that it had set up an adequate pension plan for these priests for the years to come but it has not been enough.

Several factors contributed to that. The financial crash of 2008 hurt the fund because it came at a time when we had a lot of men using it. We couldn't hold back and wait for the market to correct itself so the fund is lower than it needs to be. The other reality is that priests are living a long time. That is good news because many of them are still helping out where ever and when ever they can, but at this time we have about fifty priests receiving from that pension fund. The third reason is that many of those older priests who have been working the longest and have been retired the longest have very limited Social Security. They were working during the years when a priest's salary was barely enough to keep them going. Parish budgets were tight. I remember one priest telling the story of how he received three squares of toilet paper per day as an assistant pastor. Because Social Security is figured on the wages you earned throughout life these guys are hurting financially because their Social Security is so low. The good news is that the priest's wages are somewhat better at this time. As you can guess this is important for as you know the long term viability of Social Security is not good for the future.

Another part of the *Ignite the Fire* Campaign is for education. Some of it will go to the three schools that work with the poorest parts of Omaha. The CUES organization with Fr. Tom Fangman at Sacred Heart Parish has been helping the students around 22nd and Binney for years. But they have taken on the task of helping two other schools that work with the poor, especially the new immigrants, All Saints and Holy Name. These east Omaha Schools needed support or they would have gone under. Before this was decided the Archbishop commissioned the Meitler Group to study the Catholic School system in Omaha east of 72nd Street. You have been seeing some of the results of that in some of the closings and merging of schools and parishes in that area. Some of those parishes and schools were simply running out of people and children because of changing demographics. In North Omaha there will only be a few schools left. St. Richard's closed a five years ago and Blessed Sacrament closed shortly thereafter. In the areas of Hispanic growth in South Omaha, some of the parishes were finding they were totally unable to meet the needs. The result was a plan that the Archbishop is putting into action with the help of money from this campaign. More next week.

May God bless you,
Fr. Frank