

**St. Andrew Parish Community**  
**State of the Parish Address**  
**October 26, 2008**

The following is a more readable version of the State of the Parish address that Fr. Tom gave at the parish assembly, Sunday, October 26, 2008. By way of introduction for those who were not present, the opening portion is a description of the visual centerpiece of prayer for the assembly.

I call your attention to the Prayer Table beside me. Let me tell you what is placed upon it and why each of the items is significant for our Parish Family.

- The Lectionary is God's word to everyone in the world AND to us. In the letter of James we read that this word of God has power to save us, but we must take action upon what we hear, for if all we do is listen to it, we deceive ourselves.
- The Sacramentary is the official book of prayer for all Roman Catholics, from which comes the proper texts of prayers for Sunday and weekday Masses, Holy Days, and some Sacramental Rites. We pray in our particular Church building, but we pray in the same words as all our brother and sister Catholics.
- The Diocesan Crest is representing the nearly 40 years that the Local Church of Fort Worth has been home to this parish of over 50 years of history. It reminds us that although we have had, have now, and will always have our own joys and sorrows we exist within the bigger family of our diocese and that of the Universal Church.
- The Crest of the Friars of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of the Sacred Heart Province is representing the more than 800 years of Franciscan Spirituality's contribution to the Universal Church and the mutually blessed relationship that this diocese and the Friars serving here have enjoyed for over 30 years.
- The Parish Financial Report as was printed in this weekend's bulletin reflects our stewardship of treasure for the Parish and the Parish School.
- The Parish Directory contains a list of nearly 100 ministries in this parish from which many have benefited and many have contributed countless loving hours of service. The directory also lists our current census of registered parishioners, comprising 3,162 families. The directory represents stewardship of time, talent and the treasure of the People of God who are the Parish Family of St. Andrew.
- The School Directory similar to the Parish Directory, but reflecting the vibrant ministry and community that is our parish school of 705 students from 447 families.
- The Religious Formation Roster contains the 345 children enrolled in our Religious Education and Sacramental Preparation programs. This Roster together with our School Directory, remind us that if we live our faith and share it with our children, then our parish our community and Church will have a bright future.
- The Map of St. Andrew Parish property and details of our boundaries represent the buildings and property that are our treasure of a place to pray and learn and celebrate our faith. But I also placed a copy of our official boundaries to remind ourselves that EVERYONE who resides within these borders are our responsibility and in a sense, our parishioners, even if they never step onto our property! We must, at least, be welcoming to everyone. Even better, we must strive to know our neighbors, their needs, their concerns, and, reach out with an invitation worthy of the Lord of all, with whom as the Body of Christ we claim to be united.
- The Parish Record Books are the permanent records of Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, visits to the ill, and, services for those who have completed

their earthly pilgrimage. They are evidence of the genealogy of faith this parish community has lived and shared for over half a century. Listed in these are the names of those just beginning their journey of faith all the way through those who have heard the words from our Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servant; come share your Master's joy!" Many of your names are inscribed in one of these books as are your parents, children, friends, sponsors and witnesses.

- Finally, above the table stands our Processional Cross and the Easter Candle. One clear lesson the Lord Jesus taught was that we must take up our cross each day and follow in his footsteps. He always did what was holy and good for everyone, yet he was rejected, put to death, but he rose from the dead. He promises to bring to Eternal Life all who seek to serve him with a sincere heart: all this for love of you and of me and of all creation. In our mission as a parish family, we must also be willing to suffer our crosses, for the greater good of others, so as to live with the Lord forever.

With these images before us, and aware of what they represent, let us begin this gathering, conscious that we engage in the work of the Lord.

### **State of the Parish:**

Here begins my address on the State of the Parish. I thank all of you who are present. I also thank the people who have been and now are part of this parish family, but are not present. Without their sacrifice, commitment and faithfulness over these 50 plus years, this address would be very different.

I especially thank the pastors (there have been seven, I believe) other clergy and religious who served here and who now serve. I am certain that your labors were sometimes very difficult, but the mark you have left or are now making, has truly been the work of the Holy Spirit.

Fr. Warren, I mention you specifically. He decided to not be here so as to help insure that his presence might not cause anyone hesitation to participate fully in the process. In the nearly twenty years of his shepherding, I know well how he sometimes met with opposition to his decisions – he knows that I did not always agree with him. But he always listened to me or anyone else who wanted to talk with him. I applaud that he never became calloused. Instead, he suffered with those who disagreed with him, because he truly cared about them and still stayed the course of what he believed before God was the right thing to do. I am sure he wishes he had done some things differently and that he could have completed other goals. But remember, none of those diminish the wonderful things that are part of St. Andrew Parish's history BECAUSE of him! In the name of a grateful parish, I thank him!

As a parish and parish school community, over the past few years, we embarked on a journey through a pastoral planning process. Early in 2007, committees were formed to move us toward the realization of several goals. I will highlight the accomplishments and progress of those committees for the rest of my presentation.

In this weekend's (October 26<sup>th</sup>) bulletin is a copy of our financial report. Please be sure to get a copy and read it carefully. Of course if you have a question, call the parish office. The first thing to mention is the two major building projects that are currently in process.

Our parish school will soon begin construction of a new kindergarten building. The four classes of kindergarten have been doing fabulously well in space that is less than ideal, for years. It was clear that we were losing potential students when parents toured the space and then enrolled their children in competing schools. Recognizing the problem, school administration began to save for a future building. Recently, donors who wish to remain anonymous gave a sizable gift that has made it possible to advance the timeline of the project. The parish and diocese have fully approved the plan, and, if the schedule holds, the building will be in use by the start of next school year.

#### Parish Hall, Master Plan Committee and Parish Organization :

The second major project is our parish hall's second floor completion and first floor renovation. In the pastoral planning process, completion of the parish hall was ranked in high priority by those who participated. We paid off the debt on the hall in February 2007. Since then, we have steadily increased our savings, completed a feasibility study to identify what had to be done with the entire building, since codes and code interpretations have changed, and we have conceptual sketches as to our options on both floors.

You might ask, "Why are we doing anything to the first floor; why not just finish the second floor and keep the costs down?" Good question. There are a few parts to the answer. First, through the thirteen years we have used the first floor, we have found some aspects of the layout limit optimal use of the space. For example, the stage has hardly ever been of use, and the storage areas on either side of it reduce the number of people who can be seated in the main hall. One more example – the current sliding partitions are inadequate for blocking out sound. If a large group is meeting in the main floor space, the rooms that we are supposed to be able to section off for smaller groups are essentially useless because of sound transfer.

Second, the advice we have received through the feasibility study highly encourages us to install fire sprinklers throughout the parish hall. This will mean tearing out ceilings and routing pipes on the first floor.

Third, in the present layout, several doors open directly to the outside and are a source of energy loss with the heating or air conditioning having to work extra hard to maintain a comfortable temperature in the hall. Also, these same doors are the most used doors and yet from the outside they appear to be "back" doors.

What I have been hearing from many parishioners seems to indicate that most people want the parish hall to be finished AND finished well. If we are going to be doing major work on the second floor, very likely must do at least some work on the first floor to bring it up to code, and, will probably have no use of the entire building during most of the construction, then we ought to do what needs to be done on the first floor at the same time.

Right now, we have \$700,000 in parish savings that we can dedicate to the project. Our parish school, recognizing how this project will benefit the entire parish, from its savings, will invest a total of \$300,000. That brings us to \$1 million.

Estimates on the cost for the basic work on both floors of the hall are at least \$1,500,000. Adding architect and other fees, the need to rent temporary buildings for our nursery and Learning Center during construction, and the wisdom of fitting the hall with the technology that would make the meeting rooms most useable, brings us close to \$2 million.

Currently, I am working to gather the best wisdom and counsel to determine the most appropriate course of action toward completing the parish hall. We will certainly proceed with getting the design drawings we will need to present the project to the parish and eventually the diocese. We will work to get a more accurate estimation of what the total cost is likely to be. The parish will be kept apprised of what we find out as well as our options of how to finance the project. The wonderful news is that we are well on our way to actually having two very nice floors of up to 9 meeting rooms of a variety of sizes and uses!

The planning process also called for a master plan that would move us into the future needs of our parish. Some work has been done, but a lot more needs to be done. The committee working on this affirmed that we need a suitable space dedicated to Youth activities, better space for our active Social Ministry, a Pastoral Center to replace the aging and outgrown former convent, new maintenance facilities, and a serious exploration of the possibilities of increasing the seating capacity of our Church building.

As we continue work on this needed master plan, we have made improvements to the Social Ministry work space and the Pastoral Center. Right now we are modifying an area in the Pastoral Center for the use of the Youth and remodeling the maintenance area for greater functionality and storage of parish vehicles and other maintenance equipment.

That same committee had a third sub-group and their work was to research and propose improvements for our Parish Leadership Council, known in many parishes as the Parish Council. Your presence here (the Parish Assembly) is a direct result of their work. The Leadership Council formed a sub-committee that put the process together for us to discern the make-up of the new Parish Pastoral Council and to do so by means of these Assemblies.

#### Youth Committee:

One committee was formed to research what is the best type of Youth Ministry Program model to aim for and then to search for a person who might lead such a program. Ann Rasch was hired as Coordinator of Youth and Young Adult Ministries through that committee's dedicated efforts. The horizon of this Comprehensive Model of Youth and Young Adult Ministry is huge! The targeted population begins with middle school age youth and goes all the way up to the age of 35! The program is building, paying attention to all its components, but right now, putting most energy into the youth aspects.

#### Welcoming and Hospitality Committee:

Also coming from the planning process was a call for greater efforts to become a more welcoming and hospitable parish community. This committee has had a variety of influences, even if subtle, since the scope of what makes a parish welcoming and hospitable touches nearly all aspects of parish life. To name a few out-growths of their efforts: welcoming envelopes in the Church pews; follow-up calls to those who complete a question card in the pew and personal welcome phone calls to those who register in the parish; a welcome dinner for those newly registered; recommendations as to how we could improve the physical appearance of our facilities (some of which have been acted upon); and, collaboration with our generous volunteer web master to make the site easier to navigate and more informative.

#### Sacramental Life Committee:

The Sacramental Life Committee began its work, partially from those who had concerns that our then current Sacramental Preparation needed to be changed. After researching Church

Documents and Diocesan Guidelines, it was clear that our Sacramental Preparation was exactly on track. The Committee then shifted focus from the format of Sacramental Preparation to finding ways of helping our parishioners deepen their spiritual life. A parish retreat team was formed. They have offered two retreats (1 in Advent and 1 in Lent) and is getting ready for one to be offered this Advent. The number of Scripture study opportunities has increased as have the offerings of adult faith formation. We have added weekly Catholic Scripture Study for men and women and an RCIA process at Carswell Federal Prison on Wednesday mornings.

#### Peace and Justice Task Force:

When committees were forming to meet the challenges identified in the pastoral planning process, the parish added a fifth challenge, originally titled the Pastoral Concerns Committee. They too have evolved and are now the Peace and Justice Task Force. Realizing that their work is about living Gospel values, they have made great efforts to include a cross section of our parish community. This means, for example, cooperation with our Social Ministry Department and encouraging participation of youth and young adults. The task force has been behind our involvement with Habitat for Humanity, the recent drive for voter registration, regular interaction with Catholic Charities, other community organizations, and, they pulled together the Catholic Dialogue on Immigration that was hosted here and for which there was wonderful attendance. Our efforts helped spark the energy which led to a joint effort by the diocese, Catholic Charities and several parishes in creating a Steering Committee on Immigration.

Our parish school also formed several committees in response to the planning process. Some of the committees, such as the Positive Learning Committee, have completed their work and are setting new goals.

The Facilities and Finance Committees shifted energy and worked in cooperation with the existing parallel committee that was already part of the School Advisory Council. The healthy financial condition of the school, the steady improvement of their facilities and the new kindergarten building project are evidence of the school exercising responsible stewardship.

The school's Communication Committee has transitioned into a web site committee, realizing that it is one of the most effective ways for the parish school community to communicate. However, they are also making strides toward closing the other gaps where communication might fail. Though I cannot trace a direct connection between this committee, Ms. Peninger the principal, and myself, I can attest to bridges of communication that have been built or improved between the parish side of our campus and that of the school. I believe it is the mutual good will of both administrations that have led to refreshing and productive cooperation of efforts toward the good of the entire parish family. The Parish/School Relationship Committee has also facilitated this. A number of years ago, for example, two members of the School Advisory Council were added to the Parish Leadership Council. The result was that both councils are kept in the information loop of what the other is doing.

The previous four pages are a brief summary of what has been happening in our parish. I want to give you an idea of what I anticipate as at least part of the agenda to be considered for the new Pastoral Council. This is not a complete list and the items are not in order of priority. I plan that the new council will participate in the process to identify the agenda and to prioritize the items we agree upon.

First, as mentioned above, we are at a crossroads in determining the best scenario for completing the parish hall. I can see the Pastoral Council assisting me in the identification of that best plan of action.

Second, we need an updated master plan for the physical plant of our parish. We have a pretty good idea of what we need – I listed them above, from the work already done – but that list must be reviewed, priorities ranked, research done as to the scope of the whole and parts of the project, the feasibility of our acquiring the needed finances and a plan of action must be set out. The Pastoral Council will help facilitate the process, and be involved in pieces of it, but will not be the master plan committee.

Third, our diocese is about to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We are told that Bishop Vann wants every parish to participate in the celebrations and that some of the programs might influence the future of the diocese. Depending upon how those programs are presented to the parishes, the Pastoral Council might be instrumental in making those efforts a source of long-lasting spiritual growth in our parish and beyond.

Fourth, Stewardship is a way of life, a calling to every living person, to recognize that who we are and everything within our influence is a gift from God, and, for which we are accountable to God for how we use them. In cooperation with our Stewardship Committee and Finance Council, I could see the Pastoral Council spending time both to learn how to be better stewards themselves and to help others learn this essential scriptural component of discipleship.

Fifth, the demographics of our parish boundaries are changing. The executive director of Allied Communities of Tarrant (ACT), a community based organization in our area, who works extensively with other churches and charitable organizations, said this about St. Andrew Parish: “You are a sleeping giant because of where you are situated in the city of Fort Worth. You are blessed with a rich treasure of diversity and resources. If you surfaced those gifts and tapped them even a little more than you do now, you would be a truly dynamic and positive force in the community.” I would like the Pastoral Council to explore with ACT, and other appropriate resources, who are our parishioners and neighbors. What are the changes we are likely to see in the near and more distant future, within our community? Then, we need to ask ourselves how can we be better disciples now and how can we insure that we are ready to meet the challenges on the horizon?

Again, this is only a sampling of the exciting and important work the Pastoral Council will be blessed and charged to explore and advise upon. Are you called by God to be part of leading this parish community forward?

In closing, I have never been an ambitious person, in the sense of wanting or needing to be in charge. I did not ask for or want the position of pastor. I accepted the calling from my Provincial and the Bishop, because it was the right thing to do. I do not regret it. I will not shrink away from the responsibility. The role of pastor, after all, is not about power or being in charge, it is a willingness to accept responsibility. I can delegate many things to others, but I can never delegate away that I am accountable to God, the Church, my Franciscan vocation, our bishop and the parishioners of St. Andrew. Are you called by God to accept a place on the Pastoral Council and assist me in leading this parish community forward?

This is a wonderful place to be and there are awesome opportunities that await our discovery. This parish and its greatest resource – you who are the Body of Christ, the People of God, are blessed indeed!

In Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, we read,

Brothers and sisters:

I kneel before the Father,  
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,  
that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory  
to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self,  
and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;  
that you, rooted and grounded in love,  
may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones  
what is the breadth and length and height and depth,  
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,  
so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all  
we ask or imagine,  
by the power at work within us,  
to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus  
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21)