

## **THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON US: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

*A Pastoral Letter to the Parishioners of Saint Margaret of Scotland Parish*

30 June 2016

Thursday

Dear People of God,

As I mark one year of service as your pastor, I have felt the invitation of the Holy Spirit to write you to share my observations from what I have seen of our parish and heard from you. I have pondered and ruminated on these observations over the past months. From them, I am beginning to formulate pastoral priorities. These pastoral priorities will help form a vision for the future. With a common vision, united with Jesus and always oriented heavenward, our pilgrim journey as pastor and parishioners, and, as brothers and sisters in our Blessed Lord can bear much fruit. Jesus said: ***“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit”*** (Jn. 15:5).

Seeking to bear much fruit for his Father’s kingdom, Jesus shared his vision for his pastoral priorities with his listeners in the synagogue at Nazareth. Quoting the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus proclaimed: ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord”*** (Lk. 4:18-20). His vision shaped his encounter with God’s people. It is in encounters with Jesus that those held captive by sin received liberty, the blind recovered their sight, and many who heard his glad tidings came to follow him as their Lord and Savior.

Just as Jesus shared his vision, the Church shares the vision of her founder and her very mission of bringing “glad tidings” flows from it. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his Petrine ministry calls the Universal Church to the ways in which we need to live out the vision of Jesus. His Excellency, the Most Reverend Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles, in union with the Holy Father, guides us in faithfully living for Jesus Christ and as Diocesan Bishop he appoints Pastors to lead, teach, and sanctify the faithful.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us! The Holy Spirit allows the work of Jesus to be done here at Saint Margaret of Scotland Parish. I see the Spirit at work in all good works done for God through parish activities and ministries such as, the celebration of Masses and the sacraments, our charitable ministries through Saint Vincent de Paul and the Oak Park Food Pantry, our ministry to the sick, our educational ministries of our parish school and religious education program, and in the lives of people of good will who seek to live lives of holiness.

Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work?

Aware that the Spirit of the Lord is at work when we strive to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ, we must ask this question in prayer: *In what ways are you, Lord, inviting Saint Margaret Parish to live out your mission today?*

In order to hear the Lord's answer, we must ponder this question in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. In the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, we must empty ourselves of our wants and desires, and in the solitude of prayer listen to God's will, his wants, and his desires for our parish. We can be assured that we will hear the Lord answer us. It is he who said: ***"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened"*** (Mt. 7:7-8). How joyous it is to know that God guides us! There are so many exciting ways his mission has been lived out in the past, is currently being lived, and can be lived out in the future!

Just as there is great hope with new opportunities that the Lord invites us to, at times, there is a danger in seeking to maintain the status quo at all cost. We can get very comfortable with the predictable and routine, but our comfort with the predictable and routine may stifle our personal growth. The same can happen in any church parish, especially an established one. Once the physical plant is built and programs are in place, there may be a tendency to let things run on autopilot without periodically assessing current needs.

We live in an age where we have decreased Mass attendance, in which fewer people are catechized, and many suffer from a lack of knowledge of God and the teachings of the Church. There is too much work in which to engage in for the mission of Jesus Christ to only do the basics and not try to actively evangelize. One mark of dynamic communities of faith is that they face challenges by employing current solutions and not outdated methods.

Spiritual discernment is a key process in parish life, which asks for God's Divine guidance to hear and respond to Jesus' call for the community today.

In order to respond to Jesus' call for our parish we must have a shared vision for the future, taking into account the wonderful history of this parish, the legacy that we have inherited, and the opportunities we have. From my personal prayer and discernment and from dialogue with you, I would like to propose five areas that will allow us to effectively respond to the needs and challenges of our parish.

**First, fostering ways in which people are assisted in growing in deeper intimacy with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is fundamental to our mission and ministry. This can be achieved by offering more prayer opportunities and retreats.**

**Secondly, actively promoting Stewardship is important for our future. Our personal encounter with God allows us to realize that he has blessed us abundantly. When we recognize the goodness of God, we respond by offering our---time, talent, and treasure--- as an act of praise and gratitude to him.**

**Thirdly, Saint Margaret Catholic School is a most important ministry of evangelization. Under the leadership of Ms. Wendy Wicke and served by a dedicated faculty, our school serves nearly 285 students. We invest \$108,132 annually of our treasure. We must do all that we can to ensure our school's success in fulfilling its mission as a Catholic School.**

**Fourthly, in order to preserve the legacy of our past generations who helped to build this parish, we must begin an aggressive maintenance program to address the needs of our aging physical plant. The youngest buildings are the Jo Self Library that was dedicated in 2002, and the Family Center, completed in 1980. As our buildings age, there will be an increased cost for preventative maintenance and modernization.**

**Lastly, Jesus in the Gospels showed a special concern for the poor and vulnerable. Saint Margaret lived this Gospel call by joyfully serving the poor in Scotland. As queen, she personally handed out food. Pope Francis has stressed this concern to the Universal Church. We have an active Saint Vincent de Paul ministry and Oak Park Food Pantry ministry. We must ensure that those in our parish and territorial boundaries receive the care and attention that they need during times of**

**struggle. We must strengthen ways in which we can reach out with the compassion of Christ through charitable works.**

These five areas will serve as the core of my pastoral priorities from now into the future.

As we continue our shared life together, let us pray for a new Pentecost here at Saint Margaret. Why do we need a new Pentecost? We need a new Pentecost because the People of God are always in need of the fresh outpouring and stirring of the Holy Spirit. A fresh outpouring of the Spirit allows us to receive the Divine power we need to do the work of Jesus Christ in our parish. Recall how the disciples, after the first Pentecost, were able to do the work of Jesus in bold ways. Think of how the Holy Spirit, working in the Church and the faithful, has been able to enable men, women, and children to live the Gospel for two millennia. Think of the spiritual fruits borne because of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our parish community for 71 years.

In conclusion, let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to pray to her son for the needs of our families. Let us seek the intercession of Saint Margaret, Queen of Scotland. Let us ask her to pray for the ministry of our church and school.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us! May we continue to respond by being faithful to God's will, for by our faithfulness, bold things can be done for the good of his Kingdom!

Be assured of my continued prayers for you, and I ask that you remember me in your prayers!

Pax et bonum,

The Very Reverend Marcus Johnson, VF  
Pastor