

State of the Parish Homily

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Saint Rose of Lima

February 2-3, 2019

I've been calling this Sunday homily the "**The State of the Parish.**" It's an occasion to look at the life of our parish together, to give thanks for God's blessings to us, to read the signs of the times in our community, and to then listen to the voice of the Lord. Lord, where are you leading us? Lord, what is your will for us? In the gospel today we heard the surprise of Jesus' fellow Nazoreans. They can't accept that Jesus, who they grew up with, has the audacity to claim that he will fulfill the scriptures. Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary: Who does he think he is? Jesus will eventually reveal himself: a king, a god, a savior. As we look at our church's life together, we should also prepare for Jesus to surprise us, to lead us somewhere new, to go above and beyond what we think is normal, expected, or sensible.

Today I'm going to mention some important trends and facts about the parish, but this is really just a run-up to next week's **All Parish Meeting**. I'm really excited about this event. Here's what will happen: After the 9:00 AM Mass next week, we'll have a break with some food in the narthex. Then, we will come back into the church. There will be some brief presentations from parish leaders, and then time for discussion and questions. At this point we aren't able to provide child care in the school, but some parents could take care of the little ones in the crying room, and, of course, children are always welcome in church. I really want as many people as possible to come. We need to hear as many voices as possible.

In the week between now and then, I ask you to think about what you hear today, look over the bulletin insert which gives a snapshot of Saint Rose over the past few years, talk to one another about how you sense God speaking to us and leading us, and write down your questions or ideas. There will be several ways to submit questions and ideas in advance of the meeting next Sunday: First, you can write down your comments right now during the homily with the paper and pens in your pews. Just drop your comments in the collection baskets as they come by. Second, you can call the parish office anytime this week. Third, you can email us via our website.

Okay, so what is the State of the Parish? I want to open with our mission statement: **“Through the love and grace of Jesus Christ, we, the people of Saint Rose Parish, are to encourage participation in the celebration of our Catholic Faith, to nurture and teach ourselves, and our children, to proclaim the Gospel values of Christ and His Church, and to open our hearts and respond to the needs of those in and beyond our parish community through worship and service.”** Our mission statement is all about Jesus Christ: his love, his Church, and his call to serve. Our mission is simply a sharing of his mission.

Let’s start by talking about **worship**. The most important way we encounter Christ is when we gather for the Eucharist. I am continually grateful for the devotion and faithfulness I see at Saint Rose of Lima every weekend. I have also been moved by the beauty of our sacred music and the reverence of all who worship here. Each weekend about 800 people come through our doors. Last year, 32 new parishioners joined Saint Rose. In 2018, we had 35 funerals, 14 baptisms, and 2 weddings.

Unless you've been living under a rock, you know that **Roseville is aging** and so is Saint Rose. 1 in 5 parishioners is over 70 years old. That means that pastoral care for our seniors is a big part of our parish ministry. Many people can no longer physically come to Mass, but a team of two dozen pastoral volunteers visits them and brings them Holy Communion. Grace Koleczek and Amy Chabot, our pastoral care staff, coordinate all of this. Because of my ministerial workload, I needed to reduce the number of senior residence Masses offered when I arrived to Saint Rose in July. That means that there is even more need for volunteers to visit the elderly and homebound. So, if you are thinking about serving Christ in 2019, one of the easiest and best ways is to visit our aging seniors. Think about it, and call the parish office! Here is another impact of our demographics: many parishioners have been volunteering in their ministries for decades. Their service has been exemplary, but many times they look back and see no one following their lead – to learn the ropes of a ministry – and one day take the reins. The percent of people who have been serving for less than 4 years in a ministry is very low. Our parish needs to be renewed in a culture of stewardship, where it is expected that we offer our time and skills to the parish community. This is especially true for our youth: how can we invite them to serve Christ and the Church, right now, today?

Next, let's talk about **Faith Formation**. Our Wednesday night programs have 48 children in faith formation, taught by paid, professional catechists, with 11 children taught by volunteers. We also have 17 teens preparing for Confirmation this year. Our Adult Education Series and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults continue this spring; those are the two ministries we formally share with Corpus Christi. I also just want to highlight a new ministry that started up last fall: Roseville Area Young Adults. We have

teamed up with Corpus Christi, Maternity of Mary, and St. John's in Little Canada. I've been to several of the events and they have been awesome. If you call yourself a young adult, you should really check out the events for 2019.

Next up: our **school**. Last week was Catholic Schools Week, and the good Lord decided to celebrate by giving our kids four days off from classes! Today I think I can actually feel the increased holiness of our parents, who not only had their kids at home last week but also had to keep them inside most of the time. Saint Rose of Lima Catholic School has an amazing legacy going back to 1940. It's hard to sum up how deeply our parish's roots are sunk into the soil of our Catholic school. I want to tell you some good news about our school, and then move on to some of the challenges we need to address as a community.

First off, last Fall, Saint Rose School had the largest incoming kindergarten class in 4 years – this year at 13 new kindergarteners. Second, our school is accredited by MNSAA, the largest accrediting association for nonpublic schools in the State of Minnesota, — and — we are in the process of updating every curriculum area to always stay current with our standards. Third, we're keeping up with technology: Every student has a Chromebook, our STEM room lets students learn robotics, programming, and 3D printers, and our new website showcases the best of our school. Finally: our teachers and staff are rolling out fresh ways to respond to parent input and concerns, especially in our middle school. I love our school, and I'm grateful for the dedication and hard work of our faculty, our staff, and Sean Slaikeu, our principal at Saint Rose of Lima Catholic School.

Now let's talk about some of the challenges we face: Student enrollment has been declining. And that is not a recent hiccup – in fact, in the last 15 years, there was only one year in which the school enrollment grew, and that was a net increase of three students. In 2003, we had 400 students Kindergarten through 8th grade. Today, we have 98 students. The declining trend has slowed somewhat. We should also keep in mind that Ramsey county is quickly becoming more secular, with 50% of residents who, when surveyed, say they have “no religious affiliation.” That number has doubled since 10 years ago. At the same time, new families continue to move into our area who are interested in non-public education. The question is: how can we show them what we have to offer?

I want you to know that I am committed to Catholic education and to our school. Recently there have been rumors that the school is going to close next year and that I am following a plan to do just that. These are false. There are definitely hardships to confront, but there is also great opportunity. As I mentioned last week, one of our parents who has been very involved with the school for many years said, “I'm more hopeful than I have ever been for our future.”

Next let's talk about our **finances**. There's some great news here. First of all, we have no long term debt. Second, contributions have been very consistent and strong in spite of a slight drop in our parish population. Overall, Saint Rose has done well at working within our budget. We've had a few setbacks and unplanned expenses over the past five years. This caused our budget to miss the mark, but we easily covered the difference with our contingency funds, endowment funds, and savings. Speaking of our endowment, we have these funds invested in very secure and highly rated bonds at

Catholic Community Foundation. Our parish school has been 70% self-funded for the past few years. The parish invests, on average, 26% of our annual revenue into the school. Next year, however, will be a bit more challenging. Our budget will be off for two reasons: First, we were too optimistic in projecting our enrollment, and second, some families transferred their children to other schools after the parish entered the new fiscal year. When our fiscal year ends on June 30, 2019, our projected loss is anticipated to be \$125,000. The staff and I are researching the best options to cover this deficit by either increasing revenue or controlling expenses. We could look to using our savings and contingency funds also, but tapping into them would be a last resort.

Now I would like to talk about our **facilities**. Our campus is beautiful and well-kept, centrally located and very visible to the city of Roseville. I always love the colored light that streams through our stained glass windows here. The same light of the sun sparkles through them, but not one is identical. Just like the saints. Just like us. The same Spirit of Jesus, but each soul unique. However, our campus has some much needed capital repairs soon due. These include: resurfacing our parking lot, expanding our security systems, and refreshing the adoration chapel. Besides these upgrades, there is a lot of potential for the future of our campus. That's where you come in. What will serve our mission well? What might be possible? Next week, bring your ideas for how our capital campaign can move us into our 9th decade of faith, hope, and love.

I want to offer a word about **Corpus Christi**. Corpus Christi, who we are clustered with, is also starting a capital campaign this spring. I plan to launch both parish campaigns at the same time, even though they will be separate. Corpus Christi's weekend attendance has remained stable, even after last summer's Mass time changes

– and their contributions have actually grown. With the cancellation of the 5:00 PM Saturday Mass at Corpus Christi, some parishioners have been worshipping here while remaining members of Corpus. Each parish is very gifted by God as a community of disciples. I've been encouraged by the works of justice, mercy, and service at both Corpus Christi and Saint Rose, and the willingness to support each other in our shared Catholic faith.

Finally, I should say a word about the **pastor**. One of the biggest changes at Saint Rose was when I came in July to serve as shepherd, as a pastor for the first time, and of not one but two parishes! I'm often asked, "Wow, Father, two parishes... how do you do it?" Well, only by the grace of God! And I mean that, God gives grace from high when he gives someone a mission. That, and I've also gotten pretty good at the daily shuffle crossing Snelling Avenue many times. In fact, I have memorized where all the potholes are on County Rd B and I know how to avoid them without slamming into the car next to me. But in all seriousness, I am really glad to be at Saint Rose of Lima. It's such a gift to serve as your priest, and, as Archbishop Hebda mentioned during his visit, to be shaped by you as a pastor and shepherd. Most weeks are exhausting, and my number one personal concern is avoiding burn out, but overall I am doing well and feel very fulfilled in the ministry I do and in the person God is making me. I ask you to please keep me in your prayers and to call me on to deeper holiness.

Next week, come to the **All Parish Meeting**. Take this coming week to pray about: who are we as a parish? Who do we want to become? What does God ask of us? What change is hard but needed? How are we called to make disciples of Christ in 2019? This is your parish! This is your time to listen to the Holy Spirit! This is your time to speak!

Jesus is the Lord and he has many blessings prepared for us. He desires to fulfill his word to us, today, now, in our hearing. He is bringing about the Kingdom of God in its fullness – may this Eucharist today give us the wisdom and strength to do our part as Saint Rose of Lima Catholic Church!