

September 3, 2011

Dear Parishioners,

Every September, we celebrate **"Stewardship Weekend."** In conjunction with this weekend, I am sending you my annual letter on the "State of the Parish." So many ministries, activities and programs take place in our parish. I would like to mention a few to you.

Even in these difficult economic times, our **Parish School** continues to grow in enrollment. We now have 940 students in our school---the most ever. We have four classes of every grade—K through 8<sup>th</sup>. The Dominican Sisters and the lay faculty are educating our children both academically and spiritually. The Catholic identity of our school is so obvious and is truly the hallmark of our school.

**Our Parish School of Religion (PSR)** serves well our many students who attend public schools. As in previous years, the priests, deacons and Sister Nancy (our new pastoral associate) will be visiting those classrooms during the year.

More and more teens are being involved in our **Life Teen Program**. This summer over 80 teens participated in Christ Power which was held here at the parish. It was a time of spiritual enrichment and service to the community. The 12:15 p.m. Sunday Mass is geared toward our teens. Every Sunday evening at 6:00 p.m., the teens meet with our youth minister concerning some aspect of our Catholic faith.

For parishioners who wish to learn more about their Catholic faith, you are able to sign up for classes at the **Paul VI Institute** at no cost. In addition to classes held throughout the Archdiocese, classes are given "on line."

Back in April, our **Parish Council** sponsored a **"Week of the Eucharist."** Thousands of parishioners participated in the many activities of that week. Those who attended would agree that they grew in a deeper appreciation and love of the Eucharist, our most treasured prayer as Roman Catholics. Our Parish Council is also responsible for our new parish website, [www.stjoecot.org](http://www.stjoecot.org). Our new website is informative and up-to-date. Please take the time to check it out and use it regularly.

**From a financial perspective, the big news is that we are "debt free."** During our annual parish picnic, we celebrated Parish Night at the Picnic. To celebrate our debt free status, we provided free food, soft drinks, ice cream and we ended the night with a great fireworks display! Members of the Picnic Committee still wonder if I lost my mind by giving out all that free food.

Over the past seven years, I have requested that everyone consider giving 5% of their income to St. Joseph Parish as part of your tithe. Even though we are debt free, I still would request that you give 5% of your income to St. Joseph Parish. I am making this request for a number of reasons. First, tithing to your faith community of St. Joseph Parish is an excellent way of showing your gratitude to God for all that you have. Your tithing ensures that we will continue to do the Lord's work at our parish. Secondly, this is an extremely large parish and we have many ongoing maintenance projects scheduled or under way. Projects were neglected during the past few years in an effort to retire our debt. We are now

addressing all needs. Thirdly, in the past we have supported various charitable organizations outside of our parish. Because of God's generosity to our parish, I would like to formalize our tithing to other charitable groups. With the endorsement of our Parish Finance Council, I am proposing that St. Joseph Parish becomes a truly tithing parish. By this I mean that our parish would give 5% of its income (Sunday revenues) to various charitable organizations within and beyond St. Charles County. The philosophy of these groups must be consistent with Catholic teaching. Some of you may have a favorite charity and even give of your time and talent to these charitable groups. **If you would like a specific charitable group to be considered for our tithing, then recommend that group to the Parish Finance Council with a letter stating the purpose of that specific charity and the reasons for supporting it. Depending on the number of requests, please be advised that we may not be able to financially support every charitable group. We will probably implement this program in the new year.**

My hope is that we will now be able to put funds aside for a parish savings account. All surplus funds must be deposited with the Archdiocese and earn interest. Please note that we can withdraw these funds any time the parish desires. **These parish funds DO NOT become Archdiocesan funds.** These funds can only be used by our parish. The Archdiocese cannot take our savings from us.

**As your pastor, I want you to know how much I appreciate the fact that so many of you have embraced stewardship and tithing. I have mentioned in my previous letters that stewardship is basically returning to God a portion of what God has given to us. Our God has been so generous to us. All we are and all we have can ultimately be traced back to God, e.g. our lives, our intelligence, our talents, our families, our faith, our home, our careers, our cars, etc. God simply asks that we return but a fraction of these gifts to Him. The Bible states very clearly that we return the tithe—10% of all we earn—to God. In the past, I've encouraged you to give 5% to St. Joseph Parish and 5% to other charities. Certainly, if you find yourself in a financial difficulty or struggling with tuition or on a fixed income, our God understands. So, do I. Give whatever you can.**

For those interested, we have a program that enables parishioners to contribute to St. Joseph Parish by making automatic withdrawals from your checking or savings account or by making automatic charges to your credit card. It is called **Faith Direct**. A brochure/enrollment form explaining Faith Direct is included in this packet. If you have any questions about this program, you can call the parish office and talk to our parish business manager, Joan Cleaveland at ext. 103.

Finally, enclosed you will find a parish pledge card and a stewardship brochure. Please spend time in prayer and decide with God what you can truly return to God and then complete the pledge card and place it in the collection basket in the next few weeks. Enclosed you will also find a registration form to update our records, especially phone numbers, e-mails and areas of interest in the parish. These forms can also be placed in the collection basket.

Once again, thank you for all you do to make St. Joseph Parish such a vibrant parish.

God bless,

Msgr. James P. Callahan  
Pastor