

POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS OR A NATURAL PHASE OF TRANSITION-FR. JIM

(This is a letter to our Parish Pastoral Council Members that I decided to put in our bulletin)

There are often warnings on television or radio about certain symptoms that might be indicators of a particular health problem. It is usually not one symptom, but several that point to taking some corrective action. This is a critical time in the history of St. Joseph's as a partner with Guardian Angels & Good Shepherd. As I conclude my time here in just a few weeks, I am concerned about some indicators that might be warning signs for our St. Joseph's community to be aware of. It might possibly be just a phase of transition that all parishes go through while people sift through their preferences, and this pattern will eventually stabilize in each of our parishes. What concerns me as I write this is that there not just one indicator, but several that I have recently observed:

1. Catechists: about half of our catechists have stepped down, and despite our plea for the need for more catechist, we have had no one come forward so far, to help pass on the treasures of our Catholic Faith to the next generation.
2. Lectors: We had a total of 41 lectors before the Mass change and now have a total of 33.
3. Eucharistic Ministers: We had a total of 59 Eucharistic ministers, now we have 38.
4. Altar Servers: We had a total of 36 altar servers with our former Mass schedule, now we have 25
5. We also have lost some greeters, ushers, sacristans, and Children's Liturgy of the Word.
6. We had a poor response to our recent "volunteer sheet" (only 4 new responses out of 500 registered families and over 400 people that ordinarily attended Mass at St. Joseph's).
7. Some people have dropped off some of the parish committees, and others haven't yet joined.
8. Mass attendance: before the Mass changes we averaged 420-440 people. Two weeks ago our attendance was 340 and last week 306.
9. The collection. It has been down, but with people away and envelopes being returned from the other two parishes, it is hard to know yet exactly what is happening in this area.
10. Buildings & Grounds-St. Joseph's has always had a history of giving generously to needed parish projects (church roof, new office building, Partners in faith, etc.). We will have to monitor the blue stripe "Necessary Repairs & Improvement" (or "Special Offering) envelopes to see if parishioners are responding to the request to defray the cost of the new boiler for the church and the expansion of our parking lot (\$20,000). It could be another indicator of the future vitality of our parish and the cluster.

I was told by a staff member when I first arrived at St. Joseph's that the parish had held town meetings and they had agreed to support the parish if it went down to only two Masses. These above indicators might be just a temporary situation that all parishes go through in the clustering process. It also might be a warning sign that members of St. Joseph's have pulled back their time, talent, and treasure because of their response to this period of transition. On this upcoming Feast of Corpus Christi we are reminded that we need **everyone's** help and support in the Body of Christ as we face the challenging days ahead. As I wrote before, either people will see that the parish (as part of the RH Catholic Community) needs their help more than ever and increase their time, talent and treasure or people will hold back or even leave the parish, with some unfortunate consequences for St. Joseph's future, as well as the RHCC as a whole. **This is a key moment for all parishioners to decide if this new reality at St. Joseph's and our church life (no matter how it evolves) is worth investing in or not.**

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