

SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER 2011

ST. JOHN BERCHMANS CHURCH AND SCHOOL

I hope this newsletter finds you in good health and peace.

The months of July and August have been brutally hot. In the last newsletter it was stated that new landscaping plants such as shrubs, flowers, and dwarf bushes were planted around the entrance of the school and by the cafeteria towards the end of July to improve its appearance. Unfortunately the drought and heat took a toll on them and in two weeks they were all dry and at the point of death. The only thing that seemed to survive was four of the five lantanas and two rosebushes. It has been a long, hot, dry, summer. Please pray for rain, we sure do need it.

The big spiritual event last month was the ordination of Oscar Tello-Curiel to the ministry of the diaconate by Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller, M.Sp.S., at San Fernando Cathedral. This great event took place on Monday, August 15th at 7:00pm. Oscar did his pastoral year with us and has become a part of our parish family. He was the only seminarian ordained at this ceremony and it was so nice to see so many from the parish and school at the ordination mass. In the short time he was here he got to know many people and developed friendships with them all. This was very evident in the large number of people who attended his farewell party on Sunday the 28th of August in the school cafeteria. Oscar has moved on to his new assignment and we wish him well as he continues to follow Gods call to the priesthood. We thank everyone who had a part in his formation here at St. John Berchmans.

We will soon be having our annual dance at La Villita Assembly Hall. It will take place on Friday, September 9th with music by entertainer Ruben Ramos and his band. Mr. Ramos put on a terrific show last year and this coming dance promises to be just as good if not better. For individual tickets or to purchase a table please call the rectory office at 434-3247 and ask for one of the dance committee members. For now please put this date on your calendar and invite everyone you know to come. If you plan on coming please get your tickets as soon as possible because tickets will not be sold at the dance hall. Due to a substantial increase to rent La Villita, this will probably be our last dance there. In the mean time let us all do our part to make this dance as successful as possible. All the money made from this dance goes to the church to help it pay its bills.

August 15th was the first day of school for our students. For many it was a day they were dreading and for some of the younger ones it was quite traumatic to be separated from their families. For me it was a great day, a day to welcome the kids back and find out how their summers went. We have six new teachers this year, they are: Ms. Susan Galvez, Ms. Julie Ortiz, Ms. Crystal Piña, Mr. Joel Viramontes, Ms. Lupita Sada, and Ms. Rhonda Chozinski. These teachers are excited to begin a new school year and we are very happy to have them. Last year we had 372 students and this year it looks like we will have about 362. Many did not come back due to an increase in fees instituted by the board of governors of the Good Shepherd Network, a network our school and nine other schools are part of. As mentioned in other newsletters, this network has a board of governors who are overseeing the operations of the schools. The idea of raising fees came from them so that the network schools would have additional funds to operate. It had been agreed to by the pastors of these schools and the Archdiocese that from July 1, 2011 whatever existing debt the school had would be transferred to its parish and from that moment on the network, not the parish would be responsible for all future school expenses. This new model was put in place in order to help schools not only improve their current condition but thrive in a very competitive environment. It was not forced upon them and it was the pastors of those parishes that have these schools who decided whether or not their school would be part of this new network. I had decided to put our school in this network because I care about our students and feel this system is the best chance we have of ensuring our school will be here for many more years. We have the only Archdiocesan Catholic grade school in our area of San Antonio and I want to make sure children will always have the choice of attending our school. I will do everything I can to ensure this option will always be available. Please keep our school and this new association in your prayers.

As you probably already know we have been restoring and renewing our parish facility for the past five years. Thanks to God and you a lot has been accomplished and you can be proud of what you have done. While much has been accomplished there is still much more to be done. One of the chief concerns I have is with our school roof. When the school was broken into and put on fire the insurance company replaced only the part of the roof damaged by the fire. Since we did not have the funds to replace the rest of the roof it was left alone. This section of the roof is now 46 years old and badly in need of replacement. We tried one time to raise the needed funds but only one tenth of the money needed to start the project came in. This is where we are right now, with not enough money to begin the work and a roof that is slowly deteriorating. I try not to think about it very often because it bothers me when I do but I also know that the problem will not go away simply by ignoring it. If you have ideas or suggestions on this issue I would love to hear them. Another thing we have been trying to do is replace the ramp on the west side of the church. Some people are still questioning why we should replace it in the first place. To them I say be considerate to the elderly, and those with disabilities who find it difficult to use the one we have now.

Those in good health have no problem with the current one but those whose health is declining do. Our parishioners are all getting older and we need to accommodate them as best we can. I was so happy when I first saw the drawing of the ramp and was looking forward to seeing it become a reality but everything changed when the engineering report came in. The engineer had visited our site and made note of the offsets of the three concrete ramps relative to the landings. His observations were: 1) the front church concrete ramp was pretty much level with the landings and did not show much movement 2) the school ramp did show an inch difference and 3) the south church ramp had the most differential movement of about three inches. Based on the three inch movement the engineer felt it was best to go with five feet of existing removal and base infill to control future movement to an inch at most. This recommendation for the ramp foundation requirements put the project cost at \$11,000 over budget. This deeply disturbed me and I had trouble sleeping that night. The next day I sent the architect and general contractor an email stating I could not in good conscience pay that much money and was canceling the project. We have since exchanged a lot of communications and have decided to try to find another way to meet our goal at an acceptable price. When we finally get this done we want to start on the CYO concession stand and storage shed. Since this also involves a new foundation we might be running into more costly problems. Please pray we can get this work done at a tolerable price. More information on this will be given out in the newsletter as it becomes available.

The spiritual side of our parish continues to be very strong. This month the men's Acts team was commissioned during mass and are now preparing for their retreat which will be November 17th – 20th. All men who have not made one of these retreats are strongly encouraged to attend. The religious education program under the Direction of Mrs. Rosalinda Rodriguez is well underway. We take the religious education of our children very seriously and while we try our best to provide an environment in which these children can learn and grow in the Catholic faith there is only so much we can do. We NEED the help of the parents if we are to be successful. Please aid us by attending mass with your children and asking them what they learned in class. Showing an interest in what they covered in class and keeping in touch with their teacher tells the kids we are serious about their education and encourages them to do their best. We are also in need of catechists to help teach our faith and also teacher aids. Our D.R.E., Mrs. Rodriguez, is in charge of our program and has been putting in many long hours during the summer in preparation for the new religious education year. She has done great work for our kids but she cannot do it all by herself. She needs many volunteers to make this program a success. You do not have to be a teacher to help. There are other things that need to be done and Mrs. Rodriguez will be happy to discuss these things with you. We are also getting ready for our adult religious education classes. All adults who for one reason or another have not made their sacraments of baptism, first communion, and/or confirmation are asked to meet with Mrs. Rodriguez to find out how they can be fully initiated into the Catholic Church. It takes a commitment to get all this done but it is well worth it.

Our finances are slowly beginning to recover. During this past school year no major repairs and improvements to our facility were done because I thought it best to wait until the summer time when all our students were gone and there were just a few people around during the week. Getting all these wanted items done caused the balance in our account to drop by thirty percent. It worried me at first but within a few short weeks the balance in this account had improved and has continued to improve slowly. Thank God we have not had any major repairs since then and thank God for you, the parishioners of St. John Berchmans Church for your continual financial support. It is your support that has made all the needed improvements possible. As always you will receive a monthly financial report detailing how much money came in on a particular month and how it was spent. This is my way of being financially accountable to you.

Well, that's all I know for now. I don't have anything else to tell you. If something new happens it will be shared with you in the next newsletter. Please know you can always count on me to be honest with you and tell you how things are, even if they are not good. Overall I am happy to be here. The only things bothering me right now are the school roof and the school debt we have to the Archdiocese of San Antonio. These are two really big items that at times weigh heavily on my shoulders. When I feel weighted down by these things I think of what Jesus has taught us, namely, to come to him and we will find relief from the many hardships and burdens of life. In Jesus we will find our true rest. Someone once said, "Serenity is not freedom from the storms of life but peace amid the storms" (author unknown). I believe this to be true and know that God will always be there for us and help us. With His help and all of us working together there is no challenge we can overcome. Let us continue to do our best to live out our Catholic faith each day of our lives no matter how difficult it may be. May the Holy family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph watch over all of us and keep us in their care.

Remember, God loves you and so do I.

Fr. Rudy T. Carrola, Jr.
Pastor, St. John Berchmans Church and School