

JUNE NEWSLETTER 2010

ST. JOHN BERCHMANS' CHURCH AND SCHOOL

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

June is traditionally the time when our thoughts turn to summer vacations and taking a break from school and our jobs. It is a great time to refresh and rejuvenate our body, mind, and spirit. I hope you can get some time off this summer so that you can renew yourself. While you are taking time off please remember this time off does not extend to the obligation to attend mass on the weekends. Many times when we take a vacation we take time off from everything. We cannot afford to skip mass and deprive ourselves of all the spiritual strength and blessings we receive.

This past month of May has been a very busy one for us. The school had twenty-seven students make their first communion and our religious formation program had twenty-six. Bishop Cantu confirmed forty-eight candidates and it made me happy to hear him say how well prepared the students were and how happy he was to be back at St. John Berchmans'. We had our annual festival last month and it was a big success. When I wrote last month's newsletter the festival had not yet occurred and I was praying for good weather and a decent profit. Under the superb leadership of our chairmen: Mr. and Mrs. Adam Healy, Mr. Ted Hernandez and an army of volunteers we surpassed all our expectations. It all began with the barbeque plate on Saturday which was a complete sell out. On the day of the festival we had on hand the same quantity of food we had last year. What we sold in six hours last year we sold in two and a half hours this year. The food booth workers had to buy more food and in a spirit of generosity they donated everything they bought to the church. The school did its share by providing a host of games to keep the kids occupied and prizes for the silent auction. This was the first year we had a silent auction and it made over a thousand dollars. The bingo, raffle and everything else did terrific. For my part I was very happy to provide hay rides for all those who wanted a different kind of entertainment. Driving the tractor was a lot of fun for me and reminded me of the days when I used to be out in the country. When the festival was over we all gathered in a big circle, held hands and I led everyone in a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings we had received from God. If you have not received a financial statement you will be getting one very soon. To summarize it all we made a profit of over 28,000 dollars, the best since I have been here.

A few months ago the seminary had asked me if I would be willing to have two seminarians stay in the parish, one for the summer so that he could see what parish life is like and the other to do his internship. I told them I had plenty of room and would love to have an opportunity to mentor a candidate for the priesthood. Mr. Miguel Moreno was selected to come to our parish and he will be staying here the months of June and July. He has already visited a few times and has met some of the parishioners. Miguel is excited about spending some time with us and is looking forward to getting involved in our ministries. He will be introduced to the parish at all the masses on June 5th and 6th. Miguel used to be a teacher and after much prayer and discernment decided to change directions and begin his journey towards becoming a priest for the Archdiocese of San Antonio. He has just finished his first year of pre-theology and will be starting his second year in August. On August 1st we will be getting another seminarian who will be doing his internship here. At this time, I do not know who he is but have been told he has completed all his studies and the only thing lacking for ordination is to successfully complete an internship in a parish. An internship lasts about nine or ten months and the intern will be given his duties and receive regular evaluations from a group of ten parishioners, the seminary staff, and me. As his arrival time gets closer the seminary staff will inform us on the expectations they have for us.

Our finances continue to improve slowly. I am very grateful to all those who financially support the parish and to the finance council. Four years ago I spent many a sleepless night wondering how we were going to make it. Added to this was an older facility that was in constant need of repairs and maintenance. All of this stressed me out at times but now I am glad to say things are much better. Thanks to your financial support the balances in our bank accounts have improved. I am also grateful to our finance council for the service it provides me. Having a group of dedicated parishioners who care about the parish and want to see it prosper is great. Knowing that I am not alone with the parish finances and have a council willing to offer sound advice takes a big burden off of me. I consider myself very blessed to have a council like this. Please keep them in your prayers and ask God to bless them for the service they provide.

Many have been asking about our church renovations. I have already met with the Archdiocesan debt and review committee as well as the Archdiocesan building board. After a thorough review of our finances and other pertinent information they have given us permission to continue with the proposed work. The architectural firm of Fisher– Heck along with Keller-Martin Contractors will be doing this phase of the renovation. I have given the architect a budget and right now he and the contractor are figuring out all the cost. Hopefully they will soon be getting started on this project.

Another area of concern is our school roof. It is the original one when the building was first built and is in desperate need of replacement. We have gotten a bid on a new one and the price is over 200,000 dollars. A consultant and contractor have been selected and right now the finance council is discussing ways to raise the needed funds. More information will be given out on this as it becomes available.

I love having a school and being around the kids, their parents, teachers and staff. Our school has overcome many obstacles including its reopening in the 80's after the parish rallied enough funds to bring the school back from a decade of disuse. The school also survived a fire that destroyed the office and library and the loss of two scholarships which resulted in a big drop in the student population. The student population is back to where it once was but there are other threats on the horizon. While we are doing fine, other urban schools are not as fortunate, and what is happening to them now could happen to us in the future. Mindful of the plight of other schools, early in the fall of last year Archbishop Gomez asked Bishop Cantu to work with superintendent, Pattie Davis on a plan for the future of Catholic education in the economically challenged parts of our city. This plan would redouble efforts of excellence in education, strengthen a student's grounding in the Catholic faith and traditions, provide oversight and accountability, and reach out to families and to the community at large. On March 11th. I met with an archdiocesan official and gave them a verbal agreement to allow our school to participate in this new model and the network of member schools. The schools included in this model are: Holy Name, St. Benedict, St. Cecilia, St. James the Apostle, St. Leo the Great, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Paul, St. Philip of Jesus, and St Gerard High School. This change in how we operate our school will go into effect during the 2011-2012 school year. After much prayer and thought I have decided to move our school in this new direction because I see it as the best way to ensure that Catholic education will be available to our parishioners and community for decades to come. I know there are probably some who are against the changes that will be coming but I feel it is in the best interest of our students. Some of the things I like about this new school model are that there will be academic accountability to required standards, a move towards common academic programs, and a network control over school finances to include centralized financial accounting, common tuition rates, tuition collections, review of staff compensation, and bulk purchasing. There will also be a new model of governance where a board of directors would make binding decisions for the network and member parish schools. I was on the search committee that selected a director who will carry out the wishes of the board of governors and have oversight over the parish school, the school principal, school staffing, academic programs and finances. I am pleased with the person who was selected and feel he is the right person to lead us in the direction we want to go.

As you can see a lot has been going on that will have a direct effect on our parish and school. Many of these changes have been in the planning stages for a long time and I did not want to share them with you until I was sure they would happen. One change that will not happen is the way I serve the parish. I will always hold myself accountable to you and keep you informed of what is going on by means of the monthly financial statements and newsletter. This is your parish and you have a right to know what is going on. Zena and I are happy to be here and we will do our best to make this parish a better place. I am so grateful to God for his goodness to me and to all the parishioners whose friendship has sustained me and whose generosity of time, talent, and treasure has made a big difference in the quality of life of our parish and school. May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, watch over us and keep us in their care.

Remember, God loves you and so do I.

Fr. Rudy Carrola, Jr.
Proud Pastor, St. John Berchmans' Church & School

