

2004 PASTORAL REPORT

If 2003 was characterized by transition in pastoral leadership here I believe that in 2004 that transition ended. In fact I recognize that I am no longer even referred to as the “new pastor”. Over the past months by listening to you at various parish meetings or in individual pastoral conversations I have heard the needs and concerns you have articulated. I have also brought my own pastoral experience and observations to the table. As a result together we embarked on several new initiatives in 2004.

Our most significant one is the decision to change our religious education program from a child-centered, classroom-based program to a process called Whole Community Catechesis. This program, which will begin this fall, will be intergenerational and will take place here in our church and parish center. It will teach the same basics of our faith but in a way we hope will better engage both children and adults. This approach is taking over religious education in Catholic parishes across the country and producing great growth and maturing of faith in adults, children and parishes. We realize that this is a major shift of approach and we are working hard to make it a successful one. No longer will our children have another hour of school in their classrooms each week. Rather they will gather approximately once a month with their families at the parish center with other families and individuals for a 3 hour meal, instruction and celebration focused on some dimension or feast of our faith. They will choose the time slot that best fits their family schedule. They will take home prayers, reflections and exercises for use the rest of the month. We are excited about this new approach and hope that you will find it to be as successful here as it has been in other parishes. I am so grateful to our dedicated and skilled religious education staff and the Core Team formed to guide our transition to this new approach to faith formation.

This past year we came to recognize that our increasing parish census and activities require more space for worship and meetings. We have hired Hugh Sullivan of the local architectural firm Bennett Sullivan Associates to work with a Building Committee to help us determine what type of expansion will best suit our needs and our parish mission not only for today but into the foreseeable future. We are into the thick of that complex process. I hope to be able to report in greater detail to you soon about what this expansion of facilities will be and what it will entail of us. I am very

grateful to the Building Committee that is carefully guiding us through this process.

Sacred Heart Parish is a very generous community in responding to those in need. An announcement one weekend and a basket at the baptismal font the next weekend in recent months produced in one case \$8500 for the flood victims in Haiti and in another \$30,000 for the victims of the recent tsunami in South Asia. These are truly exceptional faith-filled responses to the needs of our sisters and brothers. The experience of the Haiti collection elicited several inquiries about establishing a more specific and sustained connection with those in need. A small group of parishioners has been meeting over the past few months to investigate some type of formal relationship with a poor parish in Haiti. This initiative occasioned others to suggest we do something more local, perhaps with a struggling Waterbury parish. The Pastoral Council has worked on this initiative and they believe we can do both. Our conversations about it are continuing. The fact that we are even having this conversation is a wonderful testimony to the faith of our parish. I hope to again have more to report to you soon. I am grateful to the Haiti Task Force as well as the Pastoral Council and Social Concerns Committee for their work on this project.

Last year our parish came together over the course of many months to discern how best to use the generous bequest of Irma Smith and Mildred Ziegler. Those meetings resulted in a community decision to create what is now known as the Mustard Seed Fund. In December all registered parishioners received the formal announcement and brochure of the fund and this year we are happy to be planning the first disbursements of the interest of the Fund. Although we only invested the money in July it was at a good point in the market and it has yielded over \$25,000 for our grants and scholarships this year. We determined that for now we will disburse half the interest and re-invest the other half in order to build up the principle which will never be touched. This will insure that this Fund will always be an active part of the pastoral ministry of Sacred Heart Parish. That formal announcement has elicited other donations and bequests which are continuing to build the Fund and its ability to do the good foreseen by our parish discernment. I commend the Mustard Seed Fund to all of you whenever you seek to make charitable donations in the future, as you plan

your estates or when you seek to make a memorial donation for someone who has died. For more information on this part of our ministry please contact myself or any member of the Board of the Fund. I am so grateful to the Board of Directors of the Fund and the Investment Committee for all they are doing to get this Fund up and running. Thanks too to all who participated in the discernment process.

Last year you may recall that we did a search to hire a full-time non-ordained pastoral associate. That search was not successful but we will continue the search. I believe that the addition of such a trained pastoral minister is important. As our parish grows in both membership and activity we need more than one person in full-time pastoral ministry. While we have four faithful deacons and wonderful office, religious education and custodial staffs I am the only full-time pastoral minister. Volunteers have been helpful in several areas of pastoral ministry, but the demands are many. Our parish is comprised of 2100 registered households and growing. In addition many who while not registered parishioners are baptized Catholics living in Southbury who call upon the parish for sacramental and pastoral ministry. In addition we are responsible for the residents of Southbury Training School and the various convalescent and assisted living facilities here.

Expanding our pastoral staff will also acknowledge the presence and value of gifted and professional ministers in the Church who are not priests. The Catholic Church has for too long centered ministry in priests, but the Church also has long recognized that God's gifts and call extend well beyond that group. Our parish can benefit from having a full-time, trained and gifted minister to help with pastoral ministry here. It can encourage all of us to take our baptismal call seriously and perhaps even give rise to some vocations to both ordained and to non-ordained professional ministry in the Church. I hope that we will soon welcome a new pastoral staff person.

Finally I want to thank all who give their time, talent and treasure to make Sacred Heart Parish run and run very well. The first weekend I preached I suggested that we all "make Church together". That is happening because of your faith and God's grace.

May God bless you with peace!

Fr. Joe

