

Dear IHM community,

A few weeks ago we held our annual Mission and Vision event. As a member of the pastoral council, I'd like to beg a few minutes of your attention to tell you what we're learning.

We know – but we learned anew! – what a wonderfully gifted and vibrant community this is. We heard people's stories about what this community has meant to them. Some of our members have gone to this church almost all of their lives. Some of our members are relatively new. Some of our members come because they want to worship and minister very specifically in the Catholic church. Some of our members have found this community to be one of the few places they can call home as a Catholic, given trends in the larger church. Some of our members come because the liturgies nourish them and center them for their work in the world. And others come because this community is within walking distance and intimate in nature.

Nearly everyone who came to the Mission and Vision event talked about how important IHM has been for their spiritual nourishment. People come here for thoughtful liturgies and good preaching, they come for a community dedicated to the fullness of Christian faith, lived out in our daily lives.

This is good news!

But we also heard deep anxiety. We heard the grief people are only now beginning to articulate as they recognize all the ways in which Fr. Chuck was at the heart of our community life. We heard the concern

about the changes people see, wondering how they've come about and what they mean.

As a member of the pastoral council, I'm here to say to you that we are trying very hard to listen carefully and respond thoughtfully. In the last few months we have been inundated by requests to do things, and have only begun to perceive all that Chuck did without anyone really noticing. Some things have not happened because no one realized they needed doing – Chuck just always did them. Other things have happened without us recognizing that we were doing something different.

Many people have assumed that our new pastor has instituted these changes deliberately. Please do not assume that! Or at least check out the specifics, first. Fr. Chuck nearly drove himself into the ground trying to respond to the disparate needs of two very different parishes. We cannot allow Fr. Joe to do so.

Some of you may have already noticed that Fr. Joe has only one office, and it's at St. Luke's. Or you may have wondered why he doesn't preach at all of our liturgies on a given Sunday. He simply can't be in all places at all times. While some have expressed concern that the diocese may be slowly "preparing us to close," we are here to tell you precisely the opposite.

Our community is very healthy, and it is growing (new families coming, younger children and senior members, financial giving is strong, etc. etc.). We know how important good preaching, solid liturgy, and faithful community service are to our lives together. Please

hang in there with us as we go through this time of transition. There are bound to be some missteps in the process as we live more fully into lay leadership.

We – as your pastoral council – would like to make sure that this transition participates authentically in the Spirit and remains true to the vision of our life together.

Two things about this:

First, please have some patience with us! We are still trying to figure out what the appropriate processes are for sorting through the many things this parish does, and the dozens of decisions that need to be made. Fr. Joe is very committed to empowering us as lay people to participate fully in the leadership of IHM. But we need to do that wisely, and with a sense of the whole. IHM is a congregation of diverse and busy people, and the council would like to be sure that we are representing you wisely and well.

Towards that end, we have decided to spend the next couple of months in a coordinated effort of “in-reach.” That means we have asked an outside organization to help train volunteers to learn how to listen carefully – and then we will send volunteers out to meet with every member of this parish. That may sound like a huge task, but we are convinced that we can spread it amongst enough of us so that each volunteer will meet with just five other members (or families).

In the process we hope to hear your stories of what this parish means to you, and what your own gifts and needs might be. This is NOT going

to be about asking you to give money to the church, and it is NOT going to be about which committees you might like to serve on. Rather, we are going to be listening to the Spirit at work amongst us in the world, and trying to discern how our community can best move forward in collaboration.

Second, as you notice things not happening, or things changing, please talk to us about them. It is often all too easy to fall into the trap of feeling hurt or resentful, and assuming the changes you perceive are deliberate – when much of the time they may not be that at all. We are going to try and make the pastoral council the central gathering place for the main issues we face as a community, and empower various committees or task groups to go out from that center to get things done. So if you have questions or concerns, or ideas of things you'd like our parish to be about – please send them to us! You can reach us through the parish office by both phone and email. We will also search for other ways to communicate as clearly as we can, to be as transparent as possible, as we move through this time. If you have ideas about how to better do this, PLEASE let us know.

The energy and hope and yes, love, that enveloped us at Mission and Vision is a clear sign of the Spirit at work amongst us. We hope that you will help us all to perceive that Spirit and live more fully into God's embrace.

Sincerely,

IHM pastoral council