

# ST. JOSEPH PARISH AND SCHOOL – OCTOBER 15, 2017

## Dear Parishioners and Families,

The priests of the Portage County Deanery met in Kent with Fr. Pentello (Dean) to discuss the conferral of the Sacrament of Confirmation during the 75<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year of the Diocese. It is likely that all the parishes of this Deanery will have a joint Confirmation ceremony around April of 2019.

Following that discussion, a number of ancillary items engaged our conversation. It appears that most of the parishes in the Deanery are experiencing a decline in membership but St. Joseph, Randolph is an exception by showing growth. This growth is also experienced in our school.

However, one of the great concerns for all the pastors is a fact that once children receive the Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation, the attendance of those young people at weekend services along with their parents is highly irregular. For instance, one pastor reported that in a photograph taken of 31 Confirmandi 2 years ago, he can only count 5 or 6 who are regularly coming to weekend services. It appears that to many the Sacrament given in First Communion and then in Confirmation is something like a check-off list: “been there, done that.”

Deepening of our Faith is a lifelong learning process, not a check-off list. The growth in our Faith and its commitment is especially in the hands of the parents for their children. This is physically true as well as intellectually true. Children cannot come to weekend service unless they are brought by their parents.

Two of the most fundamental commandments of God are: Keep holy the Sabbath, and Honor your father and mother. Holy Scripture tells us that Jesus was accustomed to going to the Synagogue on the Sabbath. He honored his father and mother by following their leadership by going to Synagogue. Some of the high school children after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation dishonor their parents when they do not come to service even when their mothers and fathers are faithful.

Experience and data both show that when adults and families are irregular in practicing their Faith by omitting Sunday Masses, Faith diminishes further and further in the children. What parents do is what children believe.

St. Joseph School is a major assistance to parents in presenting and practicing the Faith. However, the parents are primary and the school is secondary. The parish emphasizes this by having an active parishioner rate for school and a different higher rate for those who are inactive. This rate is not meant to penalize but rather to encourage.

Who is an active parishioner? An active parishioner is one who comes regularly to weekend Masses (more than 50% of the time) and also joins the school for special events. It is the cooperation between parents and school that gives children a head start not only in their education but in their spiritual growth.

I am especially thankful to the parishioners and families for the support of the school. Children are often one of the great incentives for the parents to become active. During my seminary days I taught young children catechism and this was probably one of the major items that helped me preserve the vocation to the priesthood. Children ask the most simple questions and force adults to think deeply about God. Grandparents and other relatives are equally important with their example and their wisdom in transmitting the Faith to their grandchildren.

Thank you for making our parish an exception to the decline found in so many other parishes in the Diocese. This is an expression of the depth of your Faith and I thank you.

Fr. Tom Acker, S.J.  
October 15, 2017