

From The Pastor

As I am writing on Wednesday morning, I am aware that our new light fixtures are to be installed on Thursday and Friday of this week. As you read this bulletin on the weekend, I hope the lights are in fact installed and we all find them most appealing.

We have been looking for a compatible upgrade for our Church lighting for many months. After discussion with both electricians and sales reps, and viewing many catalogs of fixtures, our best find was the same lights we have in the back of church. Having discovered their availability in three sizes, it appeared to be the most consistent light scheme and esthetic look we could find. After discussion and approval from the Parish Council, we purchased the lights in late December with a six to eight week delivery delay. To our pleasant surprise, they have arrived.

The six new fixtures cost twenty-six hundred dollars, and the labor and installation was an additional twenty-eight hundred, including a necessary upgrade to the electrical panel. I am pleased with this effort and consider this a good cost effective upgrade to our lighting in church. I hope you find the additional light helpful as well as pleasing overall.

For now, we can absorb this cost in the general budget and cover any overruns from our savings. I will review our financial status at the time of the CSA and update our needs. Currently our checking account is in good shape thanks to your generous Christmas giving. Our Christmas collection was \$19,600.00. This is an increase of about four thousand dollars over last year. This may also account for what seemed to be a much larger crowd at the 4:00pm Mass on Christmas Eve.

Some have expressed concern about the collection amounts being reported in the bulletin against the budgeted \$9500.00 per Sunday. As you see reported there, we rarely collect this amount. This is the projected amount needed per week to remain balanced; however, this figure is supported by rental income, Mass stipends, and other misc. incomes. As I have mentioned on a couple of occasions, our budget is tight, but do-able. Your faithful and generous contributions are sustaining us now. We have found several ways to save money on the current budget and continue to look for new ways to be more efficient. Your faithful use of the 'Winter Envelope' is a great help. Our December heating bill was four-thousand dollars with fourteen hundred dollars needed for snow removal and salting. We collected about a thousand dollars through the Winter Envelope. Please do not be swayed by rumors about our viability. If there is an overriding concern, I will surely share that with you. We have a regular review of expenses at the Parish Council meeting as well as an annual review of the whole budget. Thank you for your support in these important matters.

Thanks to all who shared in coffee and donuts last Sunday. It seems as though an initial frustration has turned into a great positive. I met and greeted more people after the ten-thirty Mass last week than any previous weekend. It was a very pleasant experience, and I hope many of you will continue to say hello regularly. Even with a double order of donuts there was none left over after the ten thirty. I hope this was a positive occasion for you that will be repeated. I received six names of people willing to host this event and would be pleased to receive more. Thank you to all who participated.

This sharing in community after Mass is a beautiful bridge into the feast of the Lord's baptism. Baptism is an initiation and commitment into the person and the life of Christ. The life of Jesus is most vibrantly, and at times with all the human frustrations, found in the parish community. We are the Body of Christ, and it is in relationship with one another that we most effectively exercise our faith.

The Lord's baptism is a personal event that deeply affects each of us, but most immediately Jesus himself. Through his baptism, Jesus has a new and awakening experience of the Father's love for him. We have long called the Lord's baptism his public call to ministry and commissioning to go forth in his mission. Before this sending forth, Jesus receives a new consciousness of the Father's love: 'My beloved Son, on whom my favor rests'.

Why is this so important? Like us, in his humanity Jesus had to grow into his own self-awareness and unique relationship with the Father. His baptism is a very personal and essential affirmation of his identity as the Father's Son, the beloved One. What is given to Jesus is intended for us. To share with us the Father's love, Jesus must first know and embrace this identity deeply in himself. There was no need for forgiveness of sin in the case of Jesus, but there was a need for this divine inner awakening. Now awakened and totally accepting of the Father's love, Jesus can convey and offer the same identity to us. This is the constant message and mission of his whole ministry: to convey and affirm that we too are the beloved ones of the Father. From John's gospel: 'as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you'. 'The one who loves me is loved by my Father'.

Through the baptism of Jesus, you as a believer are also a beloved of the Father, and his favor rests on you. Relax, enjoy, receive.

Father John Esper