

A CALL TO GROWTH AND ENGAGEMENT: CHRIST, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

With the loosening of restrictions and the encouraging numbers emanating from the Minnesota Department of Health, the **transition** towards **normalcy** is picking up speed. Hours after Minneapolis removed a mask mandate, the city of Saint Paul did the same, albeit somewhat reluctantly. I'll allow the medical experts to debate the efficacy of a mask mandate— books will be written, and documentaries made about the topic in the years to come. Suffice it to say, we have tried to steer a **middle course**, fully aware of divergent opinions on a host of COVID-related topics. We have taken seriously the pandemic that has claimed nearly 600,000 lives in this country, while noting the consequences of a **lockdown** strategy that left negative effects in its wake. We cannot change that now; rather, we must learn our lessons and move forward in hope. Our mission shows continuity, even amidst change.

We recently completed hosting year-end ceremonies (graduations, concerts, Baccalaureate Masses) for no less than six Catholic schools within this Archdiocese. I tried to place myself in the shoes of the Class of 2021. The final 15 months of high school for these students was unimaginably different than was mine **40 years ago**, when I graduated. They endured a **complete shutdown**, followed by a return to in-person learning, complete with significantly challenging protocols that must have been both tedious and cumbersome to maintain. I can neither imagine trying to participate in athletics while breathing through a face mask, nor wearing one for six + hours each day. Even in our parish office, if we were in our own offices, off came our masks. We assiduously followed the guidance and dutifully received regular updates from Mike Snyder, our parish business administrator, who skillfully and prudently managed our protocols.

While redoing a sacristy cabinet, workers discovered a remarkably preserved Sunday bulletin, dated **September 3, 1944** that had fallen in between two drawers. While it lacks the amazing photography found on our covers today, it reveals a treasure trove of information— the parish telephone number was “Dale 5417” and the Mass schedule was impressive. The parish celebrated **six Sunday Masses**, each hour on the hour beginning at 5:00 a.m. That's right, **5:00 a.m.** The earliest Mass was a World War II special, you might say. **Fr. George Welzbacher**— a Cathedral native son— shared with me that he himself served at that pre-dawn Mass. “Who on earth came that early,” I inquired? He explained that **buses** filled with workers arrived for the early morning Mass, then transported them to the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP) in Arden Hills. At its peak, 26,000 workers produced .30, .50 and .45 caliber ammunition. It was “all hands on deck” for the war effort.

Still, the number of Masses (there was neither a Saturday nor Sunday afternoon Mass) was impressive, as were **three** daily Masses. To be clear, there were **multiple assistant pastors** in those days. The rector was unapologetic in challenging the parishioners. Though the comments were unsigned, (it was the rector, Fr. Schenk, who six months later was named the Bishop of Crookston!), the **bulletin notes**: “Did you go to Mass last Sunday?” If you missed, was rain your excuse? The attendance was noticeably lower. The poor attendance was also reflected in the collection— the lowest of the year.” Another notes: “Next Sunday is Communion Sunday for all the men and young men of the parish. These reminders of the need to be faithful in receiving the sacraments should be heeded.” This may seem strange—isn't it “**Communion Sunday**” every week? In those days, the worthy reception of the sacrament was paramount. Many who attended

Mass did **not** receive Communion, be it due to the long Communion fast or the need for confession.

Other announcements concerned the Altar and Rosary society and a plea for school registration for the parish school. While the parish school is long gone, I still encounter proud graduates of the **Cathedral School**. I did so just this past week at the funeral of a 96-year-old parishioner, whose children attended our school. While it is sad that the parish could not keep its school open, demographic shifts in the 1970's made the school unsustainable. Many more have closed since then, though this past year saw a 5.5% increase in Archdiocesan K-8 enrollment, thanks in part to in-person learning. A positive experience, combined with the increased scrutiny of public school curricula, may well lead to additional increases.

Through all the **changes** both in society and the Church, this parish has remained a **fixture** in the Cathedral Hill neighborhood. To remain vibrant and relevant, we must engage the culture and invite people to join us, while remaining true to our **core convictions**. I desire more outreach, especially to the relatively large number of young adults I see in attendance. The Church's role is not to **conform to culture**, but rather to **transform** it. It is not easy swimming against the tide. I am extremely concerned about the **indoctrination** that appears to be taking place in many of our institutions. We should be proud both to be Americans and to be observant Catholics. Our founding principles as a nation are consistent with our freedom as Catholics to express our convictions without fear or shame.

- I was delighted to attend a celebration marking Fr. George Welzbacher's 70th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. No, that's not a typo— **70 years!** Imagine what he has experienced in his lifetime of faithful service to Christ and his Church. He greeted each guest individually, with his characteristic charm. It was a joyous and uplifting celebration. Fr. Welzbacher is truly *sui generis*.
- Admittedly, I haven't seen the long-expected U.S. Government report about **unidentified flying objects**. As a result, my prediction is not worth much. However, there is a significant difference between something classified as "unidentified" and it being **alien**. While not dismissing the possibility that other intelligent beings exist in the universe besides us, I find that **theoretical** possibility to be entirely unconvincing. (see Psalm 8:4-6)
- **Francesca Keating**, a senior at Saint Agnes School, sang her award-winning aria at a concert held here at the Cathedral. **Wow!** Hint: Might we have a future cantor here soon? And Cathedral lead 10:00 a.m. altar server **Thomas DeWitt** was named **Valedictorian** for Trinity School, delivering an address at graduation. Atta boy! I am proud of **all** our graduates this year!
- An **observant** staff member discovered a phone last week in a pew near the confessionals. Knowing our attachment to our phones, I took it with me to the rectory. To whom does this belong? Even a text message popped up. Since it had **fingerprint** access, I was out of luck. Or was I? What if I hold down the button and see if "Siri" appears? So, I said, "Call Dad!" **Bingo!** "Dad" answered and was able to let his daughter know the phone's whereabouts. Owner and iPhone were reunited at 8:00 p.m. that same evening. The wonders of technology!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector