

REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE PARISH

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General Meeting of Kidane-Mehret Ge'ez Rite Catholic Parish

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Introduction

When I came to this parish in January of 2001, I had no clear idea of what the parish was like or needed. Now, looking back, after two and a half years, I think I can confidently claim that the parish has achieved a great deal.

Right at the beginning, I decided on specific goals that I would work towards in the parish. They fell into roughly into three categories: spiritual growth, administration, and financial independence. In reviewing what was set as a goal, and what has been done, I see many successes and, at the same time, some goals that have yet to be met. But we must press on to achieve them, looking to the future with renewed hope.

Progress

Spiritual Growth

Since I took over nearly three years ago, attendance at our Divine Liturgies has improved. We have had 20 marriages celebrated; 59 Baptisms, 35 First Communions, 16 Confirmations, 4 couples celebrated 25th Silver Jubilee of their marriage and 5 funerals.

Bible study group

This was begun shortly after I arrived, and it has been meeting regularly ever since. In this time, we have read through the Gospel of St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles of the Bible, as well as studying the New Catechism of the Catholic Church and Encyclical of the Holy Father "Ecclesia de Eucharistica" (the Church of the Eucharist). Through our efforts at getting to know and understand the Scriptures, a sense of community has been fostered and also our prayer lives have been deepened.

Pious Associations

There are now three pious associations in the parish, one of which celebrates the work of St. Jacobis de Justin who shepherded us back into the Catholic Church in the 1800s. Another, the Women's Association, concentrates on the patroness of our parish Kidane-Mehret. And the final one is The Sacred Hearts Association that meets regularly for prayer, worship and *agape*.

Bilingual Choir

Under the heading of Spiritual Growth, I am also including the Bilingual Choir. This has been formed to sing in both Amharic and Tigrigna at the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and special Feast Days. This is really a great Apostolate task, which enlightens all the faithful and enriches them spiritually..

Spirit of Cooperation

And I must not forget the spirit of cooperation there is in organizing and attending special occasions such as Feast Days like Kidane-Mehret, the annual feast of the parish, and other important Feasts such as Christmas and Easter. This is a strong witness to those who do not come to Divine Liturgy on a regular basis, and is also good for the youth of the parish to see.

Administration

Parish Pastoral Council

It is only when people are willing to give of their time, their treasure, and their talents that a strong parish can exist. We are fortunate to have people who are willing to give of their time and talents by serving on the Parish Pastoral Council and its subcommittees. Some of the subcommittees have been less successful than others, but all have helped make this parish what it is today. However, we must remember the Parable of the Talents. Our God expects His people to share what He has given them and to make their God-given talents more and more productive. We cannot allow ourselves to sit back complacently, but must strain forward in hope, to do even better in the years to come.

The Parish pastoral Council was fortunate to have an expert from the Archdiocese conduct a workshop for them so they would know and understand just what the Church expects from its Parish Pastoral Councils. With these expectations in mind, we have worked to make this parish a community in which the Gospel values shine out to the world.

Church Bulletin

A church bulletin has been published each month since the Spring of this year. In this, I have as my goal not only publicizing important events in the Ge'ez Rite calendar, but also telling interesting stories that witness to God's work in the lives of His people.

Parish Website

A remodeling of the parish website has been undertaken.

We have a section that is devoted to information about our unique Rite. It has an excellent dissertation by Cardinal Tsadua about the Anaphoras we use in our Rite. There is a very informative history of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia by Fr. Kevin Mahoney, telling the story of St. Jacobus de Justiny, and a new translation of the Divine Liturgy into English for children which I did when I first arrived in this country. I instituted monthly Divine Liturgies for the children attending the Church School using this translation.

Another page on the website is for the youth of the parish. We have some articles by Sr. Weynshit for the youth, including an excellent one on prayer. There is another page on Holy Scripture and then finally the Saints' Page. On this page, we are concentrating on the lives of the great saints and Doctors of the Church who have shaped the Christian heritage and culture of Eritreans and Ethiopians.

A calendar for each month is posted, giving details of any special celebrations as well as any changes of location or time.

Financial Independence

Since this parish was inaugurated 20 years ago, we have been dependant on the Archdiocese of Washington. It was through Cardinal Hickey's patience and generosity that we have been able to exist for so long. Now we have to thank Cardinal McCarrick for his continued support. However, it is time for us to look to the future and set goals to help us become self-sustaining.

Sunday Offering

The amount of money given each Sunday has grown. This is a great blessing and I must thank you all for your generosity. However, as your pastor, I must also urge you to give more. Programs in this parish can only flourish if there is the money to do what is necessary for their continuation. There is a great deal that can be done...if only we had the money to do it!

Parish Funds

The parish has three accounts with Chevy Chase Bank: the parish checking account, the Parish Building Fund, and finally an investment account in which funds are gathered before being moved into our Parish Investment plan. We have CDs and other investments that fluctuate according to the Stock Market. During this last recession, we were fortunate to have invested in stocks that did not lose value as dramatically as some.

Failures and Weaknesses

Church facility

We were looking forward to having the church promised us by the Archdiocese but instead we have ended up having to 'borrow' someone else's parish for the Divine Liturgy, for weddings, funerals and baptisms. There has been a lack of will from our parishioners to remedy this situation. Now, the parish is in a very critical situation that will require everyone to think about a solution and work hard to implement it..

Parishioners

Most parishioners do not fulfil their duties as Christians or as Catholics. They expect great things from their parish but leave everything to be done by the Church or their pastor, without lending a helping hand. They are less than supportive in financial matters. The Archdiocese expects everyone to contribute to the running of the Church consequently the reluctance of our parishioners to give generously has had grave consequences for the parish.

Children

We are unable to rent space for Religious Education because of the behavior of the children. Parents need to be more responsible for their children. On Sundays, they need to control them in the Church during Divine Liturgy and make sure they behave well when they are outside, playing in the grounds.

Future Plans

Since I came here as your pastor, we have had to move office. We have had to find a place in which to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. And we have had to use someone else's space for our children's Religious Education Classes. Now, we are again without classroom space for the young people and the catechetical program for them is going to be very curtailed. This is a very difficult situation. As a parish, we need to reassess our options and our goals.

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, he led them on a circuitous route for 40 years. Well, we have been nomads for 20 years. Do we want another 20 years of wandering? Are we satisfied to be a nomadic parish—this is at least the fourth move in the 20 years this parish has been in existence. Are we satisfied that our youth, whom the Holy Father describes as the Hope of the Church, are receiving only the barest minimum of Catholic Catechesis because we have no permanent classroom space for them? Are we satisfied at having to beg accommodations for our celebrations and parties?

I have been meeting with representatives from both national communities in Kidane-Mehret to discuss what we should do about this situation. The Committee came to the conclusion that our parish should have its own facility.

Having our own parish church will require a lot of money not only to buy, but also to maintain. This will require a considerable effort to raise the funds needed. It will also require sacrificial giving from everyone. Some people have more money than others, but all can give something.

However, one thing we can all do equally well is to pray. Let us cry to God with our request, and let us persevere in our prayer. In Luke's Gospel we are told about the widow who kept nagging the judge for justice. Eventually, because she did not give up, he gave in. Our Lord asks us to be like this in prayer and not to give up...

I ask all of you to pray each day that we get a permanent home. We need to ask God to find us a home that is within our means and convenient to both those who live in Maryland and those who live in Virginia. We also need to beg Him for the grace to be firm in carrying out our resolve to raise the money and not let trivial matters get in the way.

Do you remember the story we had in the bulletin about the little girl who was refused admittance to Church School? It was called Faith can Move Mountains. It is a story that should inspire all of us. I have put it on the website, on the Parish News page. Please take a moment to refresh your memories by reading it.