

Jan. 14-15, 2011

From the Pastor,

You have been hearing about the Meitler Study for the last five months. This consulting firm has been brought to Omaha by Archbishop Lucas to help with the decision making process concerning the eastern part of Omaha. The Archbishop knew that something had to be done because of the closings in recent years. St. Ann Parish, St. Richard Parish and School, Christo Rey High School, and Blessed Sacrament School have closed in the past four years. The Archdiocese was responsible for the significant debt that was incurred in terms of those closings. A plan had to be put together before the Archdiocese incurred more unnecessary debt. Archbishop Lucas was wise in realizing that trying to do it in house does not work well with all the emotions involved.

The Meitler Group has been gathering information and ideas from people in the parishes and schools east of 72nd Street. At this point they are at the stage of drawing some conclusions from their findings. There were two meetings this past week concerning the parishes and two more will be held next week concerning the schools in this area. These meetings are to share the information they have put together and to make some proposals. This is like the old saying of “releasing a few trial balloons to see which ones get shot down.” It becomes very difficult to work through this stage because these proposals have significant research behind them but they are not final conclusions. It is at that time that rumors really go crazy.

This week I will be meeting with the School Board and the Parish Council to talk over some of those trial balloons. Part of their findings lead to a proposal that would significantly change the way Holy Name Parish would operate. We could become a home base for one or more of the different immigrant communities in the Omaha area. This would probably change our Mass schedule and how we use some of our buildings. Knowing how so many of you operate and how welcoming you have always been, I can't see that this would be a problem. The other proposals look at the harsh reality of how hard it is for us to keep our aging facilities in operation and wonder how long that will be possible.

The situation that we find ourselves in as an Archdiocese is not unique. There have been large blocks of parishes and schools closing in many dioceses across the country these last ten years. Ours have come more gradually but we have had them. Now we need a plan because the demographics of our Archdiocese have changed rapidly. Saints like John Neuman, Mother Cabrini, and Elizabeth Ann Seton were pioneers in building schools to make it so that Catholic students would get a decent education in a country that did not treat Catholics very well. The good news is that it worked. Our Catholic Schools have been very successful. Most Catholics who have been through that system have done very well and so are upwardly mobile. The bad news for us is that this mobility has given them the chance to move to other areas, leaving schools and churches behind that are almost empty. Those under-utilized facilities are costly to maintain and those institutions have been struggling to meet the needs of the people left in the area.

Archbishop Lucas once told me, “You can only do what you have the money for.” In eastern Omaha we are past the stage when we can just “wish” everything we have had in the past will continue. We have to decide what we can afford or we might lose it all. Please pray that everyone involved will have the Holy Spirit guiding them.

God bless you all.

Fr. Frank