



This edition of the "Pastor's Corner" is lengthy because I think it is important to address St. Joseph parish about how we have spent our resources since I arrived here in July of 2015.

First, I want to thank everyone who participated in our planning study these past few weeks! The Steier Group will be presenting their final report on Tuesday, Aug. 23 at 6:30pm in the banquet room of the PAC and I welcome anyone who would like to attend. One of the things they told me in their study of St. Joseph parish was that many people, while in support of moving forward with a campaign, have a distrust because of past experiences in the parish regarding transparency and how money has been spent. I can certainly appreciate that and all I can tell you is that I will do my best to be transparent about our finances.

In my first year at St. Joseph, there were some immediate needs that required our attention. It was the desire of Bishop Joe Vasquez that both priests would be living under the same roof, so we reverted the rectory, which had been used for religious education for the past 8 years, back to a rectory. Since this building had not had any updates since its construction in 1988, there were major areas that were in need of updating. We spent a significant amount of money (around \$150,000) to update the rectory which included new flooring, painting, restructuring of some of the rooms, installing a security fence and reverting more classrooms back to garages. There is still some work that needs to be done (remodeling the kitchen and the front facade of the rectory) and hopefully if we launch a capital campaign, these things will be completed. The decision to revert the rectory back to a rectory was made because it cost far less than constructing a new rectory which would have far exceeded what was spent on the remodel. Both Fr. Tom and I, along with Deacon Jared are very comfortable living in the remodeled rectory.

Another area where we spent a significant amount of money was remodeling the office. Like the rectory, this building was constructed in 1988 and had not had any updates since then. We removed the old carpeting and put in wood laminate flooring, painted the entire office, and combined multiple rooms into single offices because the original offices were too small for what our current needs are. We also spent money on upgrading much of the furniture in the office. The total amount of money we spent in the office was roughly \$80,000.

On the outside of the church, we spent roughly \$60,000 for sandblasting. The church had accumulated much dirt and filth which is a real shame because it masked the beautiful structure we worship in every day. A dirty and unkempt church says a lot about how a parish views itself, and I will not apologize for spending a significant amount of money to show the beauty of our parish and of our Catholic faith. We also invested in some new landscaping that contributes to the beauty of the exterior grounds surrounding the church - again, no apologies.

We completed the sealing portion of the west side of the parking lot, but the entire east side of the parking lot still needs to be resurfaced, sealed and tarred. The original quote to redo the parking lot was around \$190,000 of which half was collected. What I'd like to do is not just do the bare minimum for the parking lot, but to make our parking lot beautiful with new lighting and green spaces that will make us proud of our parish. Yes, it will cost more money, but I believe if we do it right, the parking lot will reflect a parish that is fresh, new and exciting - combining ancient tradition with new and contemporary vitality.

As most of you know, our air conditioning in the church was on its last legs, so we invested \$50,000 into a new unit that included new units for the office. We also invested \$7,000 in new AC units for the choir loft.

The money we spent for the updates over the past year have come from our operating and savings account. Yes, we are low right now in our operating funds and our savings, but I believe that the money we spent was necessary for our parish to function properly. I did not make these decisions without the guidance of some members of our finance council and in consultation with our pastoral council, along with our Business Manager, Mrs. Elva Gonzales.

I am not a believer in doing things "on the cheap." I think it is wise to spend money on higher quality work, workmanship, products and service. If we spend money wisely and not miserly our parish will benefit in the long run. My hope is that we will become a stewardship parish in that we will look at the parish campus as being an extension of our inner spiritual life and treat it accordingly. We want the best for our inner spiritual life so why wouldn't we want the best for our parish campus? This means that we will have to make sacrifices for the good of the parish and why it is my hope, that if we decide to move forward with a capital campaign, the *entire* parish will lend significant support to accomplish our goals.

I hope you have found that this letter is a pledge of my commitment as your pastor to being transparent. I also hope that we can begin to move forward with a spirit of trust and respect, knowing that when we work together as a functioning parish community, we can get to work on our primary mission: bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ and his Church to the people of Killeen and beyond.

God bless you!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Chris Downard". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Fr. Chris