

## CASA 2012

Open your hearts in welcome! Last Fall I spoke with you in a recorded message about changes taking place in the Church in Arkansas and I listed four priorities for our diocese for the next 18 months: opening our hearts to welcome the New Roman Missal, to embrace Natural Family Planning, to welcome newcomers and to open our heart to welcome God's call in our lives. Five months have now gone by and I can report to you that:

1) We are already experiencing the spiritual fruits of the New Roman Missal.

2) Young couples are opening their hearts to welcome Natural Family Planning training and we continue to recruit more training couples. We now also have an interactive computer home-study version of NFP training for those who live in remote locations.

3) One issue that we encounter continually in our parishes coincides with my third priority: How can we do a better job of welcoming newcomers--those whom move here in retirement or because of their job, inactive Catholics and those preparing to enter the Church at Easter, and above all immigrants, who constitute the largest group of new Catholics in Arkansas. I have provided our priests with a DVD on immigration which I helped to produce. It is called "*Gospel Without Borders*" and I hope that it will be used for adult education in every parish of the diocese this Lent.

4) And then my 4th priority: vocations. I am very happy to report that we have twice as many seminarians as 10 years ago and I will be ordaining 4 priests this year. I am very grateful for your strong support for vocations--encouraging young people to open their hearts to a possible vocation to the priesthood or religious life. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are our Knights of Columbus, our Serra Club, vocations prayer groups and our cloistered Carmelite Sisters who pray constantly for priests, seminarians and those discerning a religious vocation.

And it also takes money--hence CASA, our Catholic Arkansas Sharing Appeal. Your donations to CASA support many diocesan and parish programs that would not be possible without your support, for example: youth and campus ministry, the Clergy Welfare Fund, used to support our retired and infirmed priests who are no longer in the active ministry, and grants to schools and religious education programs. CASA also pays part of the education of our seminarians. Last year we spent \$1.15 million on seminary education, which was also supported by last year's "*Taste of Faith*" events in Springdale and Little Rock, the Holy Thursday collection and our Seminarian Endowment Fund. The exact figures are in this week's Arkansas Catholic.

I also want to update you on our House of Formation, which was founded in 2009 for seminarians and discerners doing basic coursework and language studies at UALR. It also serves as a home for all our seminarians when they are in the diocese. Three seminarians and three discerners currently live at the St. John Center while we build a permanent House of Formation on the grounds of Good Counsel parish in Little Rock. The estimated cost of this project is \$900,000 and we are actively seeking grants and donations to pay for it...and we have already received \$200,000! The exact figures can be found in the Arkansas Catholic. Once construction is completed, we will borrow from our Seminarian Endowment Fund whatever amount we do not have in cash, which will then be repaid over the course of the next few years from money you donate to CASA. This was the method we used to renovate our Catholic Charities building. Three years ago we borrowed three-quarters of a million dollars from our Catholic Charities Endowment to pay for that construction. This loan has now been repaid from money you donated to CASA these last three years--without us having to borrow money from a bank.

And by the way, part of the money in our Seminarian Endowment Fund and in the Catholic Charities Endowment came from bequests left to the diocese. Every one of us should have a current will to indicate how we want our possessions to be distributed upon our death. I encourage you to make sure you have a current will and to remember the Church as you make your decisions. If you have questions about how to remember the Church in your will, please contact the diocese--there is more information in the Arkansas Catholic.

I appreciate all of these ways in which you support the mission of the Church--and I want to thank you for your generous response to CASA last year...especially because we are in uncertain economic times and I know that some of you have been hit hard. The Bible tells us to return 10% of our income to the Lord, regardless of whether that income has grown or shrunk, most of which you should give to your parish and other charities--but I do ask you to give 1% of your income to our annual CASA appeal. 1% is easy to calculate: take your Adjusted Gross Income, drop the last 3 zeros and then donate the remaining amount to CASA every month for the next 10 months--for instance, if you earn \$50,000 a year, donate \$50 a month for the next 10 months.

I've asked your pastor to give you time to fill out your pledge cards during this Mass and to provide subscription envelopes to those who are not yet receiving the Arkansas Catholic, which is my principal vehicle for sharing with you the exciting things occurring in the Church in Arkansas today. And then I have asked your pastor to collect these completed pledges and subscription forms so that they can be brought up to the altar in the Offertory Procession today.

Open your hearts in welcome! And open your wallets too! That too is part of the welcome the Lord is asking of us--that we welcome him with all that we have and all that we

are--as faithful servants! The Lord has many blessings in store for us in the coming year and he cannot be outdone in generosity or fidelity...open your hearts in welcome!