

Jan. 18-19, 2014

Thoughts from the pastor,

Last weekend I was mentioning some of the aspects of the Archbishop's *Ignite the Faith* Campaign. I gave just a few thoughts on the schools east of 72nd Street. There are two groups that are receiving significant funds from this campaign. The one I know the most about is the three schools the work in the toughest situations that Fr. Tom Famgman and the CUES organization is working with. Sacred Heart is in the poorest area of Omaha. All Saints and Holy Name are in poor areas but their biggest issue is working with the new immigrant populations that are especially poor. The children in these families have had no access to computers and their parents are experiencing language barriers and financial issues as they try to assimilate into our area. Some are Catholic and some are not but both are groups are struggling with culture shock. The more sheltered and smaller environment that these schools provide gives them a far better chance. In case you have not been following the news reports the North Omaha Schools have a 50% high school graduation rate. Those three Catholic elementary schools have a 97% graduation rate even if the students don't go on to Catholic high schools. Of that 97% who graduate over 80% go into college. This is their opportunity to become productive citizens at the best level. Here in West Omaha we take those things for granted.

The other group is the Consortium Schools of South Omaha. This group was just founded after the Meitler Group studied the shifting demographics of South Omaha. This study found that the Hispanic population in South Omaha was terribly underserved by the Catholic Church and Anglo populations within the existing schools and parishes were diminishing. So some schools and parishes are closing and others are being beefed up. But that means these schools still have that small Anglo population to fund those schools from even less parishes, which will actually help because they will have less buildings to maintain. But this is why the Archbishop wants to set up a fund to help this Consortium of Schools to get off the ground as they work to serve the actual South Omaha population.

Another one of the struggles is that the Hispanic populations are not used to paying for education in their native countries so, even though they want their children to grow in their faith in an environment that is not as strongly Catholic as they are used to, they really need some coaxing to come into the Catholic Schools. This reshuffling of resources seems to have been helpful in solving some of those struggles. The extra funds will help with promotion and building costs until this system has a chance to get off the ground, for again this is not a population that can afford much what they need to get out of poverty, even though they are working very hard to get there.

Another part of the campaign is to help fund extra education formats for teachers in the non-five-day religious education programs in our parishes. As important as our Catholic Schools are, there are still many of our children that do not attend them. Funds for training for their teachers have been limited in many situations.

As I mentioned at Mass you will be receiving a letter from the Archbishop asking for you financial help. There will be a target amount on that letter. That amount is a guess and a hope based on how you have contributed to different Church operations in the past. But the Church does not have drones out checking on you every minute so these target amounts can be way off. Just do what you can. Those of you who have a high target amount will probably receive a call from a parishioner to check to see if you had a heart attack or anything similar when you see that number. They will ask about your intentions. Don't be afraid, they are not hit-men. They are simply part of the team to help make this campaign a success.

God bless you,
Fr. Frank