

August 29, 2016

Dear members of St. John the Apostle Church:

It has been exactly two months since Fr. Killian and I arrived here in the parish: and what a busy two months they have been! I thank you all for the warm welcome and the many acts of kindness and support that have been shown to us since our arrival...most appreciated to be sure! Necessity required us to hit the ground running, but despite the chaos, we have both found it a great pleasure to be here and have begun to settle into this beautiful place of worship, as well as into our new living and working space; all the while being rooted in the continuity of our priestly ministry now exercised here at St. John the Apostle. We have enjoyed meeting so many of you, and it has been a great spiritual joy to have celebrated the Sacraments with you, and for you, over these past two months. Already, after just two months, I am feeling more and more "at home" ... spiritually, emotionally, and physically...in this my new parish home and in the lovely town of Leesburg!

As we continue to move forward, there are a number of items that I would like to draw your attention to:

- 1) As you all are, no doubt, aware...the Sound System in the Church continues to present some challenges (and apparently has done so from the very opening of the Church). With the Diocese's approval and recommendation (along with that of numerous Pastors who have utilized their services) we have engaged Monte Brothers Sound Systems, Inc., to evaluate the present system in the Church and Fellowship Hall and to make recommendations for improvements/changes. Monte Brothers is a highly regarded, nationally known, company of "experts" in the field of Sound systems for places of Worship. They have done work in a number of parishes in the Arlington Diocese, and in numerous Dioceses throughout the country. One of their most recent jobs was to install video & audio upgrades to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Cathedral...in time for the recent visit of Pope Francis. We look forward to Monte Brothers helping to correct the deficiencies and improve the quality of our sound system in the Church...which will, of course, have a great and positive impact upon all of our masses and other liturgical celebrations! We will keep you informed as to the progress of their work...but, hopefully, you will soon be able to hear it for yourselves!
  
- 2) I am sure most of you are aware that, while I was away on vacation, Rebecca Ostermann, the Music Director, rather suddenly and quite unexpectedly, submitted her resignation...in order to accept another job in Philadelphia. I trust that, in light of this, you will be patient with our cantors and organists, etc....as they work to keep the music in our liturgies going....and I thank them for all their present and future efforts in this regard. I am currently working with a former Music Director from St. Bernadette Parish, who worked for me for a number of years but then had to relocate out of the State, to see if he might take the position: if this does not pan out I will then begin the hiring process...so I ask for your continued prayers for success in filling this very important position in the parish.

- 3) Deacon Gillispie, our permanent Deacon here at the parish, has informed me that his schedule, over the remaining months of this year, is going to be greatly challenged by family, work, travel and study commitments....in light of these constraints we agreed that he would take a brief hiatus until after the 1<sup>st</sup> of the coming year; please keep him in prayer. We will not be “deacon-less”, however, during this period... as I am pleased to welcome Reverend Mister Andrew Labenz, a transitional Deacon from Wichita, who will be coming to us from Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary from now through April, 2017: please join me in giving Deacon Labenz a warm welcome and keep him in prayer in this his last year before ordination to the Priesthood.
  
- 4) The final item I want to give you information about concerns our beautiful 166-year-old Rectory...which is a remarkable place to call home, as I am sure you can imagine! The building is feeling its age however, and this will require us to engage in some much needed repairs and upgrades in order to make it both safe and more livable. For a good number of years now the priests have not been able to drink the water coming into the Rectory...due to the age of the pipes (some of which are 100+ years old...and are an array of galvanized steel, iron, copper, etc.) ...the water is heavily metallic in both taste and content (little bits of metal come out from time to time...and it often has a brownish hue and leaves a brown residue when left to evaporate). Bottled water has been used for many years, for drinking and cooking; unfortunately, when it comes to our bathing and laundry we have no choice but to use the water. We need to completely replace all the plumbing throughout the Rectory.

In addition to the water, the electrical supply and wiring also present some challenges and safety issues. The current 200amp panel box is insufficient for the needs of the house and overloaded...and we often experience blown breakers, etc. Much of the original knob & tube wiring (from when electricity was first put into the home) is still in place.....with unknown parts still live and active. Other parts of the original wiring were bypassed, some 30 years ago, with a whole series of external wiring conduits, etc.... (this was done to try and make things safer by attempting to bypass as much of the unsafe wiring as possible) ...with the result being an odd mix of wiring that is both unreliable and unsafe. We need to upgrade the electrical panel box and completely rewire the entire house.

There is, at present, no central HVAC system in the rectory: we rely upon 10 window air-conditioning units (of varied ages and effectiveness) to cool parts of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors, and in the winter we rely upon a 130+ year old boiler-fed radiator system.... many parts of which have failed...hence, so they tell me, inconsistent and ineffective heating is provided to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors in the winter. The entire 3<sup>rd</sup> floor is, at present, uninhabitable due to a complete lack of heating & cooling and safe electrical supply...along with a lack of sufficient insulation and roofline/attic ventilation. To make the entire building more livable we intend to install a central HVAC system into the rectory; this, along with some other upgrades and improvements, will allow us to make the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor usable and livable space. There are also a couple of structural integrity issues that have to be addressed in a few of the bathrooms (indoor plumbing and bathrooms were likely added around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century): when they created the bathrooms they compromised some of the floor joists to fit in the pipes, etc.....and over the many years some of the floors have begun to sag and drop.

In addition to the aforementioned interior work, we also have to address some necessary repairs and improvements to the exterior of the rectory. Many areas of the masonry on the building are experiencing crumbling mortar.... which will have to be addressed. In addition, areas on the wood gutters, as well as portions of the extensive wood fascia are damaged and rotten...and will need to be repaired and replaced. There are many windows in the residence...but very few can actually be opened due to the fact that the pulley systems are broken.... these need repair...as it would be nice to be able to open the windows and get fresh air from time to time. In addition, all of the exterior woodwork (old and that which will be repaired and replaced) needs to be painted.

These aforementioned repairs and improvements are rather extensive in nature and will require us to move out of the rectory while they are undertaken and completed. The plan will be for us to move into a furnished short-term rental home for the duration of the repairs/improvements. At present we are working with the Diocese to engage architects and contractors who can undertake this work...thus a timetable for start and completion has yet to be determined: we will keep you informed going forward.

In closing, let me apologize for the length of this letter.... but there was a lot to inform you about...and I felt this was the best way to accomplish that goal. Please continue to pray for me, and Fr. Killian, and know of our continued prayers for all the people of this great parish!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Kevin

Pastor, St. John the Apostle