

## FRONT YARD MINISTRY

It has been a few years since the Parish Council creatively offered us yard signs to place in our front yards right before Easter. It was an acknowledgement that Jesus is risen and we were standing with Him. I loved seeing those signs as I drove into the neighborhoods.

Today, I invite all of the ministries to look at how we move from putting a sign in the front yard to praying on our front lawns or on our driveways. While we have responded to the safety precautions in the buildings of the church, nothing holds us back to wear a face mask or shield and pray with others. It is a time that with remote learning we do not have to be remote from God.

The God of creation invites us to explore the opportunities to interact safely outside and allow the spirit of our faith to be strengthened. We are not alone in this. We can be creative while being safe. Picking a time to FaceTime with others and say a prayer for the upcoming school day, greet a neighbor and let them know you are praying for them.

Our front yards can become holy ground by our testifying to our faith in Jesus Christ. Just as I have invited the Parish Council to reflect upon this idea, I invite all parishioners to do the same. It is not about what we cannot do, it is about what we can do. We can pray, we can read Scripture, we can spend time in silence breathing in a meditation. Remote praying is not just for YouTube; it is for our front lawns. Be creative, connect wisely and reclaim these moments for the Lord.



Fr. John

## LOVE DOES NO EVIL TO THE NEIGHBOR

St. Paul is writing to the people of Rome in uncertain times yet his message is clear, love is the fulfillment of the law and we are called not only to love our neighbor but our enemy as well. I really believe we are in an exciting time to revisit Church, our faith and what we are called to do. Living out love involves sacrifice but it also doesn't need an organized committee to hold a meeting about it. Common sense tells us how mercy and love can be transforming.

This past week I was invited to a special gathering. A priest friend and mentor Fr. Tom was celebrating his 85th birthday. He invited 4 priests to an outdoor patio to have a late lunch. I was honored to be one of the four. He will celebrate his 60th anniversary of ordination this spring. At the table was a college classmate of mine who serves in the Archdiocese of Chicago, a retired priest who was one year ahead of Fr. Tom in the seminary and a pastor with one more year until retirement. As we spoke and as we listened, it was joy to see Fr. Tom thrilled with the conversation. As the three of us in active ministry shared concerns and stories, it was the retired priests who spoke of how when a gathering of priests comes together, there is a respect and a love. They spoke of one of the hardships of this time are priests' funerals. At those gatherings the fellow priests typically all come together, despite some jealousy and competition, despite some disagreements of philosophy and theology. In those priestly gatherings, we all gather with a sense of respect and overcome any differences we might have. On my drive home I reflected deeply on this realization. The only priest funeral I have attended at the Cathedral of St. Raymond was for my great friend and mentor Fr. Vytas during the shutdown. I was selected because I was the one Fr. Vytas had pre-chosen to give the homily at his funeral. The church had only 6 people in it. His own sister could not even attend due to the reality that she would not be allowed back to her retirement facility for two weeks if she left it. Some of Fr. Vytas' best priest friends were in the same situation. It was just two of us representing the entire presbyterate surrounding the bishop. That reality sunk in as I listened around the table. Love is lived and seen in simple ways.

St. Paul invites us to reflect on how love is lived. It is a gesture or a bow to our neighbor who might or might not be wearing a mask. It is thanking our health care workers and calling them heroes. As the fatigue of the virus has challenged every effort to go back to school, how we move past numbers and statistics to engage in life is essential. Divisions occur, but love is deeper. Our efforts to be thankful and realize the pressure and burden of others is a starting point. Listening is also essential. Wisdom is shared when we listen and integrate what is being shared. It may not mean we agree, but it means through thought and prayer we can find a place to respect the other, even when we disagree. That is not just reactionary rhetoric.

Love is possible; love is the fulfillment of the law. May we do no evil to our neighbor even when we disagree.



Father John Ouper