

EPIPHANY WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY

Today as we reflect on the historic gifts and the journey that made them famous, I would like to take the time to thank those whose journey might be hidden, yet their gifts are to be cherished. This year, our staff has had to persevere just like everyone else and overcome obstacles just like everyone else. Tough decisions did not come easy, new challenges like never before brought all of us out of our comfort zones.

Religious Education and High School Faith Formation first had to be certified by the diocese and then communicated to all of you. I am thankful for the gift of perseverance found in Cathy, Julie, and Deacon Duane. They have gifted us with their creativity in a time of obstacles. As a parish, we celebrated First Eucharist, Confirmation, and just recently, First Reconciliation. These are amazing accomplishments. I am grateful for their teamwork with the reopening leadership that has gone the extra mile every week to keep us safe and focused.

These times uncovered real needs and real hunger. Adult Faith Formation led by Sister Margaret Anne used wisdom to reconnect with the electronic platform FORMED. Baptismal Preparation transitioned to an online experience and our service and outreach adjusted to the new protocols to follow. In all of it, I am grateful to Sister and those who worked with her to keep food going to Hesed House, finding a new way to continue our Giving Tree and for helping parents of newborns to stay connected with their faith. While it looks different, at its core it remains the same.

Our deacons have been an incredible support to me and our faith community. They have visited the homebound in a safe way when it is allowed. They have faithfully proclaimed God's Word and have made it a priority to stay safe in their ministries. Deacon Jim has helped those planning funerals. Deacon Gary has assisted at most of the funeral liturgies held in the church. He has also kept St. Vincent de Paul focused, as well as has assisted in updating Art and Environment when no one could be in the church. Deacon Dave has overcome new obstacles with Marriage Preparation and most importantly, our RCIA program. Listening to where the journey has taken individuals, he has met them where they are and has responded to their needs. While it is so different, a welcoming spirit is the hallmark of all our deacons.

Liturgy is different and the parish has risen to the challenge. While I miss the choirs and I miss the way music can enhance celebrations, Rich has stood patiently, waiting for some of the restrictions to be loosened. We do our best and Advent and Christmas filled our hearts in new ways. I am thankful for his patience in the process.

Our doors would not be open if it were not for the leadership of Jan. As we assembled a reopening team, her knowledge and gift of attention to detail allowed us to assemble a group, get through the tedious process just to open doors for ten, and then maintain the organizing of reopening volunteers. Where we are is a testimony to her dedication to St. Anne. Our resilient staff and dedicated staff have continued to share their gifts with us. Their ability to connect with our faith community in the essentials that matter make them the servants of God they are called to be.

I am incredibly moved by our reopening team's show of force to be here week after week. They open the doors, check-in our assembly, and direct them to their spots. I realize none of us can sit where we would like and we all wish it would be different. Yet in the forefront, each and every week are our reopening volunteers. Our doors would not be open or open as many times if it were not for them. It is very humbling to see the dedication and persistence of this new team. They saw a need and responded so completely to the one aspect needed most, to re-open the church. I am so thankful to them.

This Epiphany let us give praise to our God for the gifts presented in a time like no other,



Father John

GIFTS GIVEN, GIFTS RECEIVED

This year has been like no other. We as a parish have had to find access to spiritual growth in new ways. The search echoes the journey of those following a star. The journey, like all journeys, starts with excitement. We get weary along the way and as new obstacles arise there is a search for help. The Magi ask for help from King Herod himself. This year as we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord we can choose to enter this narrative in many ways. We can look at the gifts given. They are precious. We may not have gold or frankincense or myrrh to give, but what we have to give is something more valuable, our time. We all have precious gifts to share and many have uncovered them with more time in the house and repurposing the living space to become an office, school and home. Uncovering has led to an awareness of the art of listening. We can also enter the narrative by the response to the gifts received. Each of the kings went home in a different way. We can easily focus on how we are different for having lived in a pandemic. We are changed by this encounter. We are changed by how we have been challenged to access our encounter with Jesus. But this year, being like no other, we can enter the narrative through the journey itself. Miles within ourselves have allowed us to see a transformation. We were shut down with doors locked during Lent. Palm Sunday found no processions and Easter was all electronic, but faith did not end. The star at its rising still found an empty tomb. The star at its rising also found a desire in us to make this work. We have all grown weary and yet now during this Christmas season, we are open to some extent and faith has flourished. Lights have been hung and the mystery was proclaimed. It has been harder for us to make connections, but the holiness of God receives our gift and our journey, just as the Holy Family welcomed the Magi, kings, and astrologers of the past. It is good to pause and reflect on how far we have come and how long the journey has been. Our efforts will not and have not gone unnoticed. Becoming alive at doing all we can, whether we have been back to Mass in the church or have stayed in vehicles; whether we have watched electronically or searched the World Wide Web to be fed, God is receiving our gift of desire.

This changes us, and we are to return to our hearts forevermore blessed knowing our God received all we could give Him.



Father John Ouper