

Dear Friends,

This weekend our parish participates in the Diocesan Mission Appeal. Deacon George Dardess, who was scheduled to speak, is battling some health concerns so he cannot come; however, I know he will appreciate your prayers as he focuses on healing. I was looking forward to reconnecting with him as Deacon George and his wife Peggy are parishioners of Blessed Sacrament parish in Rochester where I previously served. We immediately became friends because of our shared passion for the Faith. He sends this message:

*"Our diocese's Catholic Migrant Ministry offers pastoral and sacramental care to migrant farm workers and their families primarily in three areas: Western Monroe and Livingston Counties, Yates and Ontario Counties, and at our main site in Wayne County, at Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission Church in Marion. ** The People of God whom we serve are hardworking and devout, and labor to provide us each summer with the delicious fruits and vegetables we so much enjoy and upon which our local economy so much depends. But their material needs are such that we cannot sustain our care to them without your help and support. Any contribution you can make to our ministry today will be greatly appreciated."*

*Sincerely,
Deacon George Dardess*

With such short notice, finding a replacement speaker was not possible, so I will gladly assume the task. This gives me the opportunity to tell a bit more about some of my experiences, in particular two that are related to mission work. During my first few years of priestly formation, I was assigned to a juvenile prison in Cook County, Illinois (north of Chicago), a tri-lingual parish on the Northside of Chicago (1/3 English, 1/3 Polish, 1/3 Spanish!), and an inner-city parish on the Southside of Chicago, as well as to a mostly Spanish-speaking urban parish in the city of Rochester, St. Frances Cabrini. These experiences, certainly outside my comfort zone, challenged me in ministry. One parish, St. James in Chicago, where I lived, was once a prosperous parish along the Lake Shore near downtown. When I arrived, the area was riddled with crime, drugs, and poverty. Our biggest ministry was to a local Tech School and a food pantry which served more people than anywhere else in the city. We lived in solidarity with those we served by eating the same food that was distributed to our friends in need. It was a humbling experience. As a preparation for my time at St. Frances Cabrini, I spent six weeks in the city of Medellin, Colombia to learn Spanish. I can count on my fingers the number of times I heard or spoke English during that experience. What a challenge it was, and yet it was, for certain, a profound moment of growth. When I returned, my time there made it much easier to minister to the people of our diocese, and in a parish where most of the residents spoke Spanish.

I could not be the priest I am today without these experiences. Both affected the necessary transformation from self-seeking interests to service of those in need. So much of the transformation we seek for our own lives and an increase in peace and hope in the world is based on personal witness to the power of Jesus Christ in our lives. As Catholics, we know that service must be rooted in the celebration and participation in the Eucharist and the sacraments. Our participation in the prayer of the Church gives us the grace and courage to depart from the confines of the pews to do something about the broken world in which we live. That response is formed by the faith we profess and believe in. We have much to be thankful for, and much to generously give back to God. The point is, we all do this together, no matter what the amount may be. No single contribution is greater than another, especially in amount.

No matter what our needs are, no matter how little we might have, we are still summoned to give generously. Several scenes from the Old and New Testament tell us that. I was reminded of this via a moment of fraternal correction a few months ago when the parish was asked to tithe 10% to the Diocesan Building Fund. This fund assists parishes that are not financially able to make necessary improvements to their facilities do so. My reaction was to withhold contributing (which is requested, not demanded) as we have so many needs in our parish, but I was reminded of the call to be generous without counting the cost. I was grateful for that humbling reminder.

Next week, we will welcome Brian Mizzoni, a deacon candidate from our parish, who will give the annual Steuben County Catholic Charities summer mission appeal. He will also speak to us about the process of becoming a permanent deacon.

And, the closing ceremony for Immaculate Heart of Mary Church will be on Saturday, September 7th at 10:30am. It will be followed by a parish picnic, which has typically been held on the first Sunday after Labor Day, to kick-off the new Faith Formation year. It will be an opportunity to welcome our new Faith Formation director, Mike Denz, and to gather our parish together for a proper farewell to IHM as well as a celebration of new beginnings.

In Christ,
Fr. Jones

***One of my chalices comes from St. Gregory (now Our Lady of Guadalupe) in Marion, which closed several years ago; it was given to the Diocese to be passed on to a newly ordained priest.*