

Last week it was a joy to share with you that we made our final payment to eliminate our debt. Thank you for helping to save the parish almost \$1.5 million in interest. Additionally, we are caught up in paying our back assessments to the Archdiocese. Finally, we are able to remodel our school kitchen, which was in pretty rough shape.

By now you should have received a letter with details of how campaign dollars were used. Additionally, a donor made it possible to bring in an independent consulting firm to assess our campus and facility needs over the next 20 years. This was included as well.

Let me summarize some of the big items: We still need to finish upgrading our HVAC system, which we started last fall. Given the extreme cold this week, we certainly want to have heat! This will be over \$300,000. At some point in the near future, we will need to replace our school roof, which could be around \$400,000. We need to upgrade our campus security system (safety) and enhance the lighting in our parking lot and inside the Church (help reduce utilities).

We had a facilities meeting on Thursday to discuss the needs of our campus. Overall, it will take about \$1.2 million to address the needs of our campus. When we finished with that meeting, I wondered if there was a monastery nearby that I could apply to where I just get a little room, a table and chair, and a few books to read. Then I could just write a dear a "Dear John" letter (Dear St. Therese).

In all seriousness, I cannot express enough my deep gratitude for your generosity in eliminating our debt. To give you an image, we got the ship off of its side because it was sinking pretty badly. Now we need to begin fixing the hull of the ship so that St. Therese continues to be a place we enjoy calling home. In this light, I express the importance of fulfilling your pledges.

We have had some superb staff members and volunteers who have gone above and beyond with what little they had to work with. However, because of the debt, we have quite a bit of deferred maintenance to address. I am confident that as God provided through you in eliminating our debt, by His grace, we can meet the challenge of taking care of our campus and facilities.

In my short time as a pastor, I have quickly learned that taking care of a parish means taking care of the sheep and caring for the campus (the sheepfold).

One of the great strengths of our parish is that thousands of families have called St. Therese home over the years. Thousands have been baptized here. Hundreds have been married here. Thousands of sins have been forgiven. We sing together. We gather together to share meals, laughs, stories, and support one another. Of course, we pray together and build a warm, joyful, and faith-filled community together.

For some of our families, you can literally say, "My grandparents and parents helped build this community." The generosity of the families of yesterday made possible the parish we have today. Now it is our turn to do our part so that our children and grandchildren can also call St. Therese "home" – a place to worship God, grow in their faith, build friendships, and serve our brothers and sisters in need.

As with all homes, the heart of our home here at St. Therese is love. Love and self-sacrifice are what founded community, build it, and keep it together.

St. Paul, of all people, knew well that sin selfishness tear a community apart, but love and self-sacrifice unite it.

In our second reading, he writes to address the many divisions, factions, and unhealthy competition that existed in the Corinthian Church. Paul sees a teachable moment. As their head and shepherd, he reminds them that they are all on the same team. We're in this together. We are all body.

And just as the body has a heart, so the Church has a heart that burns with love. Like a heart that moves our blood, so love is at the heart of a parish. St. Thomas Aquinas, the great thinker and theologian of the 13th century, said that love is to will the good of the other as other.

At every moment, you can ask, "What is God asking me to do for this person? For my family? For the parish? What does love ask of me?" One can think of countless examples of seeing love in action – this willing the good of the other: A mom reading to her child; a young man preparing meals for the poor; a parishioner donating his/her time for the parish; a dad helping with homework; a child with dishes after dinner, or a priest sitting by the bedside of a sick parishioner.

In our school, one of our core beliefs is that "little things make big things happen." Little acts of love make big things happen – they make parishes great places to be, a place we call "home."

In closing, know that what you do makes a *big* difference! In just 16 months, you eliminated \$4.3 million dollars of debt! Whether you made a very generous contribution or a small contribution, every little bit helped. In the end, it made something big happen, no more debt and a young priest who can sleep at night. May the good Lord bless you for the *many* ways you bless St. Therese, a blessed parish community many have and we pray that many more can always call "home."