

# State of the Parish

**T**he possibilities are endless; Fr. Mac's dream is as relevant today as it was in 1940; and I am thrilled at how far our six month journey has taken us. In the pages of this State of the Parish, your priests and Pastoral Team members share the "good things," the successes, and our hopes for the future. Many truly wonderful things are taking place in each ministry. We want you to know what they are, and hope they will fill you with pride because they could not have happened without your support and love of our Catholic community. For that, I could not be happier. As you read our individual stories, here are the things that give me joy and the belief that a wonderful future awaits us.

Over the past six months, as a team, we looked at the "best practices" at St. Thomas and St. John that were identified by the Transition Teams. In this report you will learn about the strengths we now have in our united formation programs for parishioners of all ages offered at both sites. I am particularly proud of the strength of our marriage preparation program and our growing RCIA program. Our new youth ministry program is evolving and has a great deal of potential for the high school students of our parish. By combining the resources at both churches, we are now able to expand what we offer through St. Vincent DePaul Society to serve the range of growing needs in our community. It is very rewarding to see more of our youth trained as altar servers and more of our MSU students getting involved in our music ministry at both sites. Our goal is that they will become active participants in other ministries and our outreach activities.

There is a growing appreciation among parishioners that we offer them an opportunity to find the religious home that meets their needs. In many ways, parishioners are becoming more engaged in the parish as a unified whole, and this includes our college students. Many parishioners are stepping forward and becoming involved in parish life, and we are working to create new opportunities to engage others to volunteer.

As a Pastoral Team, we regularly discuss what we would like to accomplish for the future. We hope what we do will help increase vocations. We value deacon interns and hope to grow that experience for others joining the priesthood. We would like to expand programs at both churches for faculty to attend. We will continue to share information with parishioners to help them understand where we are financially. We will keep using our communication tools (bulletin, newsletters, letters, website) not just to share information, but to help better understand our faith. There are untapped resources and expertise in our parish. As pastor, it is very exciting for me to bring those resources and energy together and build this Catholic community. To make that happen, the Pastoral Team will engage people in their ministry and focus more on what we do as a whole, and less on what we do individually. To that end, we will collaborate more with each other and with parishioners. This is a new way to do ministry at St. Thomas and St. John.

The processes taking place over the past six months were not without flaws, and my "do-over" would be in the ways parishioners were involved in the process and the ways in which changes were communicated. I would have had meetings with every stakeholder group (organizations, committees) in the parish, in addition to the priests and Transition Committees. The committees did good work, but we needed direct input from all stakeholders in the fall of 2008. That involvement would have alleviated a lot of the fear and engaged more people in the process. It would have also given a better insight into all that went on at both churches and our parish school as well as religious education program.

Now, I am asking each parishioner to help us as we move forward. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey in this report. Give us your hopes and be part of the future our dreams hold.

In my 28 years as a priest, I've never felt the hand of God as much as now.

Blessings,

*Fr. Mark Inglot*

Fr. Mark Inglot



# STUDENT CENTER

**T**his fall has been a season of remarkable achievements in campus ministry. We began the semester with MSU's 2009-2010 Academic Orientation Program. All 1,763 incoming freshman who checked "Catholic" on their Religious Preference Form received our New Student Welcome Packet. MSU's Sparticipation '09 was a huge success, as were our All Student Bash and New Student Welcome Party.

We are fortunate to have many MSU faculty and administrative staff involved in our programs. They serve as mentors for student retreats, the Alternative Spring Break program, and service programs, serve side-by-side with students in our music ministries, and as Eucharistic ministers and lectors. We are truly blessed to have their involvement in our vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century campus ministry.

St. John continues to offer very distinct Spiritual Formation programs (Catholicism 101, Theology on Tap, Women's Group, Men's Group, and Vocations), social programs (Sunday Suppers, dorm outreach, intramural sports, and special events/programs), and service and community volunteer programs. Our International Student Group and our Graduate Student and Young Professionals Group continue to grow. This fall, 80 undergraduate students attended their November retreat, and 30 graduate students and young professionals attended their October retreat. In March, 100 students will spend their spring break helping others in Guatemala, Mexico; Jonestown, MS; Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, PA; Decatur, AL; Cincinnati, OH; rural Kentucky; and Nashville, TN. Four students sit on our Parish Council, Parish Finance Council, and Development Council. Because of all we do, this year we will offer 1,030 Catholic MSU students the opportunity to serve their peers, church, community, country and their world.

With everything we offer, from Masses through programs, St. John serves an average of 2,800 MSU Catholic students each week.

This fall we partnered with 5 other campus ministries and MSU student service programs to bring MSU alumnus Sam Singh to talk on the importance of community service. We are partnering on a second initiative, "Health, Wellness and Spirituality," for the spring semester.

We ended the fall semester with a Final Exam Week that surpassed recent years, and our own expectations. Thanks to the generosity of members of our permanent community, we spoiled the students with breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks throughout the day. We provided stress relief in the form of chair massages and yoga. Every staff member was energized taking care of at least 100 students each day throughout the entire week!

We were honored that Linda Pivarnik, Director of Advancement, received a 2009 Exemplary Program Award from the Catholic Campus Ministry Association for the booklet *"Keeping the Faith in Your New Home Town."* The booklet connects our graduates to parishes when they move, so they can become vital participants in their new Catholic communities. The award acknowledges *"Keeping the Faith in Your New Home Town"* for best exemplifying campus ministry in the area of Facilitating Personal Development.

We are pleased to announce that Denise Waytes, Campus Minister, received the Level III Basic Certification as a Catechetical Leader and Pastoral Minister. This certification was awarded by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, through the Diocese of Lansing.

We are honored to have been invited to apply to be a pilot site for the "Engaging Students To Enliven the Ecclesial Mission!" (ESTEEM) project co-sponsored by the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management and Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel & Center at Yale. The project begins in fall 2010, and we will find out in early spring if we are selected as a site.

**F**iscal responsibility, financial transparency and faithful stewardship are the hallmarks of our Parish operations. The last six months, while financially challenging, have afforded opportunities to streamline and improve overall operations of our churches and school. We continue to make necessary adjustments to ensure our financial viability for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2009-2010 and beyond.

As of December 31, 2009, the total Sunday offertory for St. Thomas Aquinas Parish and St. John Church and Student Center is \$1,184,579. Our budgeted offertory for the period July 1 through December 31, 2009 is \$1,241,682. Last Fiscal Year's actual total Budgeted Offertory for this same period was \$1,307,267. As a result, even though our budgeted offertory is lower this year, the parish has a deficit in Sunday offertory collections of \$57,103. However, with several very generous donations and recent staff reductions, we are pleased to report that the parish budget is currently balanced.

We all join in hope that the generous support from parishioners during the first six months will continue through the remainder of our parish fiscal year ending June 30, 2010. Please remember, an important component of maintaining budgeted offertory is consistency in giving. Please consider making contributions through our Electronic Giving Program. It is easy, and it helps us be good stewards of our environment by reducing waste from envelopes and checks. Page 6 contains the form to enroll in this program. If you have any questions or concerns about parish finances, please contact Keith Tharp, Director of Operations at [keith@elcatholics.org](mailto:keith@elcatholics.org). Thank you for your generosity!

## Advancement, Communications & Special Events

**A**chieving dreams in challenging times requires creative thinking, changing the old ways of doing things, and most of all, patience. In Advancement, Communications and Special Events, we take great pride in what we achieve to further the dreams for St. Thomas, St. John and our school.

This summer, we saw improving financial performances for The Legacy Endowment for Catholic Spartans and The American Catholic Thought and Culture Endowment. Both funds suffered during the market downturn, but they are gaining strength. The Legacy Endowment's assets are almost \$70,000, with regular gifts coming into the Endowment and to Fr. Jake's fund. The American Catholic Thought and Culture Endowment assets stand at almost \$91,000, getting closer to our goal of \$120,000.

In October, a small group of women from St. Thomas, St. John and our school gathered to share ideas, think outside the box, and talk about a special women's giving program that women of our parish would design and lead. A second, larger gathering is planned for February. An Annual Pledge Program, "**A Promise to Give**" will be introduced to parishioners in February.

Thanks to the creative genius of Rod Murphy, we invited everyone working at St. Thomas, St. John and our school to take part in a special program to meet the needs of future generations of STA Tartans. Thanks to the generosity of our priests and staff we have funded one *Gift of Knowledge Scholarship* for this school year.

Our St. John Parent Appeal and Fall Newsletter Appeal continue to be successful. Our goal for this fall's Parent Appeal was \$4,500. To date, we have received \$6,425 in gifts. Donations from our Newsletter Appeal reached \$10,357, which surpasses our annual goal for all three newsletters we publish.

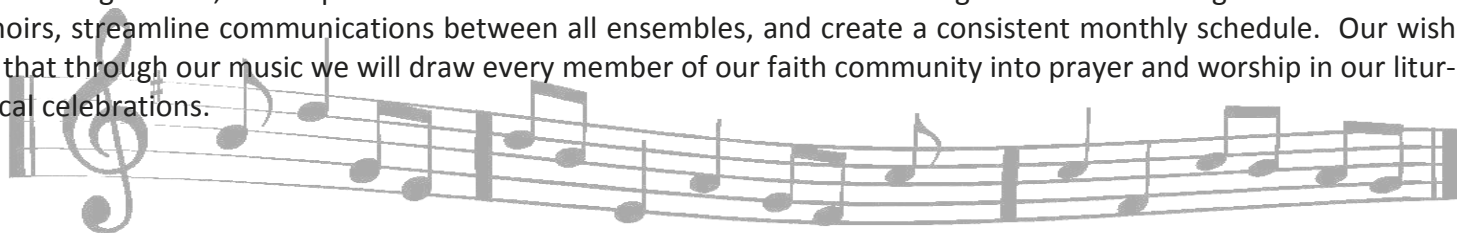
We are very excited about our 2010 Friends Dinner Dance and Auction on January 30<sup>th</sup> at Spartan Stadium. This new venue has generated much excitement and should entice many "first time guests" to this signature fundraising event for St. John.

**R**ich traditions and tremendous talents are the foundations of our Music Ministry. We continue to develop a musical repertoire that captures the essence of the worship styles at St. Thomas and St. John. Our large and active music ministry spans the generations from children to adult choirs. Our brass ensemble is amazing! And, we now have eight fully staffed ensemble-based Masses each weekend. Our special high school women's ensemble during the Advent and Christmas season was astounding.

The Music Ministry highlight of the past six months was our Advent Service of Lessons and Carols. A special thank you to everyone who took part in what we hope becomes a long Advent tradition in our parish. By drawing on our musical talents and members of our East Lansing Catholic community, it brought St. Thomas and St. John together in a wonderful celebration of faith, and united the City of East Lansing and MSU's spiritual communities.

With our enhanced sound system at St. Thomas, our music will ring with a new clarity and joy throughout the worship space.

As we begin 2010, our hope is to increase the number of children and high school and college students in our choirs, streamline communications between all ensembles, and create a consistent monthly schedule. Our wish is that through our music we will draw every member of our faith community into prayer and worship in our liturgical celebrations.



## *Worship and Outreach Ministries*

**I**t is comforting and strengthening to serve in our **Worship and Outreach Ministries**. More parishioners are serving as lectors and extraordinary ministers, and cross-training will become more commonplace as we encourage our ministers to regularly go between both churches. This fall we held several sessions for students to prepare to be altar servers, and more sessions will be scheduled for the coming months.

Consistently, parishioners visit seniors in retirement and assisted living centers, and those who are hospitalized or receiving care at medical and rehabilitation facilities. Our priests regularly say Mass and bring spiritual solace to residents of 6 nursing care facilities in our community.

The tabernacle at St. Thomas and the presider chair at both sites were moved to be more in line with Church traditions. Our enhanced sound system at St. Thomas will allow our voices to resonate throughout the church.

Parishioners, our school, Lansing Catholic students, MSU students and faculty, and the Knights of Columbus, participated in the national "Make a Difference Day" event by raking leaves for parishioners unable to do so, and distributed food to seniors on fixed income. It was an amazing day and an honor to make a difference in the lives of others.

A special thank you to the following groups who regularly go above and beyond in giving their time and talent: Knights of Columbus, Art & Environment Committee, Altar Society, Samaritans, The Society of St. Vincent DePaul, and Dresser Drawer Ministry.

Under Fr. Michael's guidance, we will strive to involve more students in worship and outreach. Look for more cooperation and collaboration between churches, and the involvement of new parishioners in our ministries. We will continue efforts to increase the number of homebound reached through the Outreach Mass.

Moving forward, our hope is that we all worship and feel at home at both of our churches. If you have not done so, we encourage you to experience the joy of worship at both St. Thomas and St. John.

**T**eaching Catholic beliefs, traditions and values to enrich, educate and form the faith life from childhood through adulthood. Our Religious Education Programs provide faith formation so our children grow in love, knowledge, appreciation and desire to become active members of our Church. Currently 84 catechists and assistants share their time and talent guiding 419 students on that faith journey. The parents, grandparents, young adults, MSU and high school students find this teaching experience extremely rewarding. We are supporting 39 families through our Religious Education Home Study. Our Catechesis of the Good Shepherd class, rooted in the Bible, church liturgy and Montessori principles, is available for children in preschool and primary grades. We are proud of our class for special students that offers a more hands-on religious education experience. We also offer 5 additional sessions of classes based on a more traditional approach.

We are pleased be preparing 106 children for the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. This fall, we trained 75 adults from around the diocese through the Protecting God's Children seminars. Two parishioners are being trained to become certified in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

We continually work to improve our religious education program and welcome your feedback. If your child is enrolled, we would like to know how the experience is for him or her. If your child is not enrolled we would like to know what we can do to encourage participation. Contact Annie Kitching at [akitching@elcatholics.org](mailto:akitching@elcatholics.org) or 351-5460, ext. 334.

Our Youth Ministry Program provides resources and faith experiences to help lead high school students closer to Christ. We accomplish this through a vibrant Eucharistic spirituality and widespread opportunities for 67 students registered in our program. We offer weekly youth nights which combine catechesis with social and other issues concerning teens, monthly service projects, "All Things Eucharistic" which combines contemporary praise and worship music, and events with other parish youth groups. MSU students serve as Core Team members of our youth group, and "Teen Leaders" only help plan youth events, but also serve in leadership roles within youth ministry and with Confirmation. Eighty five 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students are preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation this spring.

We would like to know if your teen is having a positive experience through the Youth Group, and if you would like more events in which parents are included. Dave McHugh at [dmchugh@elcatholics.org](mailto:dmchugh@elcatholics.org), or 351-5460, ext. 327.

Through Adult Faith Formation people consciously grow in the life of Christ through experience, reflection, prayer and study. Parent Baptism Seminars are held every six to eight weeks and we have celebrated 54 Baptisms over the past six months. We anticipate celebrating 19 additional Baptisms this year. We held one engaged seminar for 13 couples since July and 21 couples have registered for the two upcoming seminars this year. Twenty– three married couples assist us as mentors in our FOCCUS marriage preparation, and four more couples will be trained to mentor.

Several special topic programs took place this fall: Scripture studies on the Psalms, the Parables, and on Paul; a social justice series on war and terrorism; and an Advent Evening of Reflections attended by 160 people, led by Fr. Andrew Wisdom, OP. Fr. Wisdom will lead our Lenten parish mission this year. Ninety-five of Fr. Wisdom's Advent book, "Advent and Christmas Wisdom from St. Thomas Aquinas were sold in November and December, and we distributed more than 450 little blue Advent Books.

Let Al Weilbaeher know the types of formation offerings you would be willing to attend and that would be most helpful to your growth in faith and spirituality. Contact Al at [aweilbaeher@elcatholics.org](mailto:aweilbaeher@elcatholics.org), or 351-5460, ext. 329.

At its heart, the **Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)** experience is about growing in faith, coming to the awareness that each of us makes up the Church, and committing one's life to Jesus Christ and the Church. Our RCIA team consists of 12 members from St. Thomas and St. John. Currently we have 35 adult catechumens and candidates meeting weekly in our RCIA process. Five children and teen catechumens are in regular faith formation as well as meeting in additional RCIA sessions tailored specifically for them. Thirty-eight sponsors are assisting these people on their faith journeys. We are very pleased that a new group of 15 to 20 inquirers will begin the RCIA process in January. Contact Pete Ries at [pries@elcatholics.org](mailto:pries@elcatholics.org), or 351-5460, ext. 328 if you would like more information about the RCIA program.



# St. Thomas Aquinas Parish School

**S**t. Thomas Aquinas Parish School Dream Team: Principal Extraordinaire, World Class Teachers, Awesome Students, Fantastic Parents! The start of this academic year saw many changes. We have a new principal, several new teachers, building renovations, a preschool and, of course, many new students in our classrooms. Here are some of the highlights:

## In the School:

Our preschool program is up and running superbly with 16 students as of January of 2010, and there are 323 children enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 8. We are most pleased that more families are realizing that our school is the place for their children's education. This fall, six Catholic Houses (each titled by a saint's name) were established in the middle school, introducing new traditions of community building within the larger school community. Two significant new pieces of religious artwork now grace the main hallways, both of which were supported by giving opportunities. Along with building renovations in the preschool, a new and improved library was unveiled when students returned this fall. We brought a Special Olympics team into our facility as a school team, and we hired 2 Catholic Spartans to serve as outdoor education specialists during lunch recess periods. Also new this year is an improved lunch menu. We established relationships with St. John's Catholic Student Organization and its Graduate Student and Young Professionals Group. Through the Tuition Assistance Program \$51,000 in financial assistance has been awarded to 39 students this academic year. Our parents play a vital role in the life of our school. Close cooperation between two of our parent groups, both committed to merging into one parent group, as a Catholic Board through National Catholic Education Association, add to the success of the parish school.

## For Our Teachers:

Our teachers are a key element in our success. They create a positive educational atmosphere and their dedication is without equal. Professional development and mentoring are two important components that keep our teachers at the top of their profession. A mentoring program is in place for teachers in their first three years with us, complete with professional development activities for all new teachers (site visits, conferences, workshops). Our teachers and staff attended the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools Conference, along with our invited guest Danielle Casavant, President and CEO of Greater Lansing Catholic Education Foundation. Teachers also take advantage of catechist classes offered by the Diocese.

## For our Finances and Fundraising:

November's Faith & Fundamentals was another fun-filled evening that met all financial and social goals, raising the \$65,000 required by this year's budget. We sold all 500 golf balls, got Fr. Mark up in a helicopter, and had all three priests in attendance. "Fund a Need" proceeds allowed us to purchase 20 Sony E-Readers. Priests, deacons and parish-wide staff began donating to the Gift of Knowledge Scholarship Fund via payroll deduction, which to date is set to raise more than \$3,000 this year for the Tuition Assistance Fund. Rod Murphy shared this idea among regional principals. In addition, we gratefully accepted a \$50,000 donation from an STA School family of alumni to replenish assets in the Rhynard Fund and nearly \$7,000 in additional gifts to the school during the first months of the 2009-2010 school year.



**For everything accomplished during the first semester,  
St. Thomas Parish School gets an A+!**



### Survey

Please take a few moments to tell us how you think we're doing and how we can further enhance our ministries.

Please place your completed survey in the boxes located in the gathering space at St. John or in back of the worship space at St. Thomas, or place them in the collection baskets at weekend Masses. **Please place your numerical response in the box following each question.** Thank you very much.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Uncertain	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply
1	2	3	4	5	NA

1. The music and elements of liturgy invite me to participate more fully at Mass.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

2. I am satisfied with the types and content of religious education programs offered for children.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

3. I am satisfied with the types and content of religious education programs offered for youth.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

4. I am satisfied with the types and variety of programs offered through Adult Faith Formation.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

5. I am satisfied with the types and variety of outreach ministries offered to parishioners.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

6. I am comfortable inviting a non-Catholic who is interested in our faith to our RCIA program.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Reuniting St. Thomas and St. John has made a difference to faith life at both churches.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

8. There are effective lines of communication within the Parish.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

9. I feel obligated to financially support St. Thomas and St. John.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

10. There are things that could motivate an increase in my financial support. \_\_\_No \_\_\_Yes

What are they? \_\_\_\_\_

11. I normally attend the following weekend Mass:

_____ Saturday, 5 pm	_____ Sunday, 8 am	_____ Sunday, 9 am	_____ Sunday, 10 am
_____ Sunday, 11 am	_____ Sunday, Noon	_____ Sunday, 5 pm	_____ Sunday, 7 pm

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_