

Pastor's Ponderings . . .

The idea for a St. Leo Cultural Fest was born several years ago when the Guatemalan Community at St. Leo the Great wanted to invite the entire parish to an outdoor concert of spiritual music in order to thank the parish for welcoming and accepting them to St. Leo. Different Latino groups from various parishes shared their music in praise of God and the crowd feasted on fruit and tacos.

It was great for our parish because it was a party for everyone hosted by the Guatemalan Community. The diversity of St. Leo Parish was well represented – Burundians, Guatemalans, African Americans and Americans – dancing, singing, sharing Mexican/Guatemalan cuisine and thanking God for bringing us all together.

This year the festival was July 14. It is mostly a festival of prayer: singing, dancing, preaching, praying and sharing good food. We take our faith to our parking lot and the sound of our praise and worship echoes throughout the neighborhood.

The theme of the Fest was: "We are all one in Christ."

Like the Good Samaritan and the victim in the gospel story, St. Leo Parish depends so much on the help of Good Samaritans. We have to beg a lot for others to share their time, talent and treasure with us and we pray that people won't pass us by. Our Cultural Fest is an indication that people do not pass us by, parishioners and non-parishioners alike, and we give thanks for their generosity and for the healing and growth that we receive.

It is also clear that St. Leo Parish is being called to be Good Samaritans to others. Certainly, some of our Burundian and Guatemalan parishioners have been treated horribly in the past. Some bear the beatings of an oppressive government and some have witnessed killings of their family members. St. Leo is a new home for them where they can have some of the freedoms that they have been denied and rightly deserve.

St. Leo has always been a beacon of light and hope in the North Fairmount neighborhood that has suffered from economic depression for years. As a Good Samaritan, we provide assistance with rent and utility bills when we are able. We are actively involved with planning and development of our neighborhoods for affordable and diversity housing. Our food pantry serves around 900 people, 325 families with a lot of children each month and our parish nursing program is the number one source of health care for many. Our parish has come to new life by focusing on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to which the Good Samaritan is a great example. We want to bless and love others as we have been blessed and loved. This year's culture Fest was a prayerful celebration of God's love for all of us and our love for God and neighbor.

It doesn't matter where someone is from, or what they look like or the color of their skin; we are all one in Christ Jesus. We are

all one family. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. We find our home in Him here at St. Leo with each other and for all others, serving the needs of all with the love of God. We are all one in Christ.

This is our blessing. This is our salvation. This is our joy and thanksgiving. This is our continual prayer for the church and the world.

And since you are all an important part of our unity, identity, support and ministry, I want to inform you of two upcoming events. The first is August 18, Noon to 4pm. It is our annual Day of Hope. St. Leo joins with other churches and faiths and District Three of the Cincinnati Police Department in sponsoring this day. It is at Wayne Park by Mr. Gene's Dog House on Beekman St. in South Cumminsville. There will be free food and supplies and agencies that provide services to our neighborhoods in a friendly atmosphere of faith and religious music. There will be things for the children also.

Also please mark your calendars and save this date, September 9, 2018 and plan to join us. Bishop Binzer, Auxiliary Bishop of Cincinnati, is coming to St. Leo for our 10:30am, Sunday Mass. Immediately after Mass, we will proceed down the side walk and across the street to our nearby food pantry for a blessing, dedication and open house. Since the

food pantry opened for service not quite three years ago, renovation has continued to include six office/meeting rooms and a spacious open area that can be used for large meetings or a classroom. St. Leo will certainly benefit from this additional space since we are growing and becoming more active but our hope is to work with other agencies to provide social services such as job opportunities and aid to immigrants and refugees. The Food Pantry and now this additional space are the work of many volunteers and the generous donation of time talent and treasure by individuals, groups, businesses and agencies including Catholic Social Services of Southwest Ohio. We are so grateful to everyone for helping us feed the hungry and for helping to take many of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to deeper levels. Our joy is your joy! Our celebration, dedication and open house will not be the same without you. Please join us for 10:30 Mass on September 9 and/or the dedication/open house afterward about 11:45am. Bring others with you. Everyone is welcome.

— Father Jim

