



October 4, 2018
Feast of St. Francis of Assisi

RENEWING THE HOUSE OF GOD FOR YEARS TO COME

My dear parishioners:

"I rejoiced when I heard them say. Let us go unto the House of the Lord." *Psalms 122: 1*

Sometime in the early 11th century an unknown Umbrian artist, probably of Syrian origin, painted and installed a Byzantine/Romanesque-style Rood Cross in a tiny little church outside of the small town of Assisi in Italy. It was for all practical purposes an unassuming and out-of-the-way little structure, which over the years had fallen into rack and ruin. The walls of the little Church were crumbling and the roof over the main nave was all but gone. Yet, amazingly, still hanging in the transept above the old stone altar was the image of Christ crucified surrounded by Mary, the Apostle John, Mary Magdalene and others present at the crucifixion.

In 1205 C.E. a somewhat bedraggled and confused young man, by the name of Francis, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wandered into the abandoned holy place. It was there, that he chose to pray and meditate upon what direction the Lord desired for him to take in his life. As he knelt, quietly in prayer, seeking to find Divine Guidance; suddenly, he heard the voice of Jesus speaking to him from the image of the crucifix. The voice said: **"Go repair my Church, which as you can see is in ruin."** St. Francis of Assisi would later recount, on several occasions, that the miracle of the cross awakened in him a deeper faith and a newfound love and zeal for the Church.

St Francis, initially, concentrated his efforts on the rebuilding the little Church at *San Damiano*. He would then go on to rebuild several other small sanctuaries in the Umbrian countryside, which had fallen into misuse. St. Francis received Christ's command during a difficult time in history. It was a time when the Church was fraught by internal scandal; poverty abounded; and political factions were, viciously, sparring with one another. Under these circumstances and at God's command, St. Francis would be commissioned to rebuild Christ's Church. He would do it, as he said: **"day by day and stone by stone."**

Because of this one, singular, miraculous event, St. Francis would later go on to change the very direction of the Church. Eventually, this distant moment in Church history would bring to future generations of believers a deeper witness to their own faith. Over the past nine centuries and until this day, thousands of pilgrims of all faiths and denominations, continue to journey to this holy site at *San Damiano* bearing witness to the miracle of God working through this one, humble and obedient Servant of God.

We, here at Mary Help of Christians, like so many others are truly inspired by the example of St. Francis. We may never encounter to the same degree the voice of God speaking to us, as clearly



and emphatically, as He did to the little beggar from Assisi. However, just as our Lord chose to speak to St. Francis, imploring him to **“Go repair my Church,”** so we are commissioned to accept a similar call.

Today, we like St. Francis live in a time fraught by Church scandal, poverty, and a divisive political world. Christ directed St. Francis to rebuild a Church, which would become an icon for a renewed, life-giving, vibrant and beautiful place for the worship of God. That tiny unimpressive Church at *San Damiano* would become a beacon of light to scatter the darkness in this world and to become a place of refuge and comfort for those who would seek solace in prayer and the gift of the sacraments.

As we are all aware, our little Church here in Chester is in need of extensive repairs. Although our walls may not be crumbling, many safety features, including: plaster work, electrical and structural issues have required serious attention for several decades. In addition, we realize that after twenty-eight years, there are many cosmetic issues which need our attention, including: extensive painting, a resurfacing of the flooring and an improved bathroom facility. Finally, in compliance with Post-Conciliar liturgical directives promulgated by the Church; we are called to implement prescribed liturgical norms, including: repositioning of the altar and the baptismal font with flowing water and the repositioning of the Rood Cross.

These projects should, properly, be viewed in light of Christ’s commission to St. Francis to **“Go repair my Church.”** What we are asked to do is similar to that of St. Francis in securing a Sacred Space for worship not only for our present edification, but, also, for the countless others who will follow us in the Catholic faith. We are the blessed recipients of generations of the those who have preceded us in faith. Through their many sacrifices, we have been bequeathed a Sacred Space in which to worship Almighty God. As wonderful as this gift of spiritual heritage may be to us; we are, also, called to a debt of responsible stewardship in seeing to its continuance for future generations. Every generation of Church-goers is called upon to restore and rebuild the legacy it has inherited. We are that next generation. Now is our time of stewardship. Now is our opportunity to do the work of the Lord. Now is our moment to heed the Lord’s call to **“Go repair my Church.”**

Like St. Francis **“day by day and stone by stone,”** over the past four years, a carefully prepared an exhaustive study and evaluation has been made of the physical needs of our Church building. Hours upon hours of preliminary studies, countless Parish Council, Finance Council, Building Committee and Town Hall meetings, attended by a myriad of dedicated and knowledgeable parishioners and professional consultants has produced a, carefully, executed proposal to begin work on the renovation of our Church. It is our, sincere, hope that this extensive renovation project will begin on the Monday following Divine Mercy Sunday, (which is the Sunday after Easter). That particular Sunday, April 28, 2019, will also, be the day on which we will celebrate our parish First Communion. Then after a six month absence from the building, we will return to our Church for the Consecration of the new altar and other blessings by the bishop. This will occur on the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year, when we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe on November 24, 2019.

To achieve this goal and to enable us to begin this most significant renovation project; it is of utmost importance that we be able to, properly, fund the costs incurred by the repairs. Thus, today with this letter, we together will embark on this fund raising project by enjoining all of our fellow parishioners and friends to participate in a Capital Stewardship Campaign. We are seeking to achieve by the end of this campaign our goal of raising \$250,000.00.

As I have stated, so often, in the past. It is never easy, for me as pastor, to ask for funds to cover the expenses of such an important project as this renovation. Over the years, your generosity to the Church and its ministries, have been a truly humbling experience for me. Not unlike St. Francis, whose Italian nickname was *il piccolo beggar*, the little beggar; I, once again, seek your generous stewardship of time, talent and treasure for this project. I would never, in a million years, compare myself to the level of holiness that St. Francis possessed; and, certainly, I can never be mistaken for being "little." However, I do come before you as one who is called to the service of Christ, as a beggar, pleading with you to help repair the House of God.

I know in my heart and in my belief in God and in you, that your loving response to the Lord's call for us to **"Go rebuild my Church,"** in this Capital Stewardship Campaign will be successful. I know that it will, truly, reflect, as it has in the past, your continuing generosity and gratitude for the many gifts our parish has received in the past.

Enclosed in this mailing you will find a pledge card, please, carefully, read and fill out the card. When finished, please, return the completed card in the prepaid envelope, which has been provided for you. I ask that you, prayerfully, consider the questions contained on the pledge card.

You will probably notice, that I have written this letter on October 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. It was not by chance or accident that I have chosen this particular date. It was for me the perfect day to begin our campaign and to seek the guidance of St. Francis. I have, also, included a Holy Card bearing the icon or image of St. Francis; on the reverse side of the card is printed one of his most endearing prayers. I encourage you to say this prayer often; but, particularly, now, so that he may intercede, on our behalf to the Lord, for the success of our Capital Stewardship Campaign.

May the good Lord continue to pour out His blessings upon you and your loved ones. And as the psalmist has instructed us: let us rejoice, when we hear them say. "Let us go unto the House of the Lord." I remain.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Very Reverend Eugene H. Wojcik, V.F.
Pastor