

October 1, 2020

Dear St. John Fisher families, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends,

These past six months have been trying for all of us. Learning to safely and confidently move forward in a pandemic-impacted world has required us to adapt to new realities in just about every aspect of our daily lives. This has required flexibility and open-mindedness as it relates to how we work, play, educate, and pray. It has also required a continued commitment to our mission – operationally *and* financially – on the part of so many to ensure St. John Fisher continues to be the vital cornerstone of our faith, education, and social lives we strive to be. To none of our surprise and in keeping with the SJF community's long-established tradition of rallying together in times of need, we are happy to report that, all things considered, we have successfully withstood the *initial* impact of COVID-19. With many thanks due to our talented and dedicated staff and the generosity and support of all of you in our parish community, we have now re-started in-person schooling and continue to grow our options for mass attendance. We are excited to have these important energies back on campus, and we are doing everything in our power to make sure these and our many other ministries can continue to successfully operate and improve going forward. That said, these are no small undertakings, and they will require the continued sacrifice and commitment of our community to make happen. In that spirit, we thought it was a good time to provide a short financial and operational update to highlight the many actions already taken to address the effects of COVID on SJF and to ask for your continued support as we move forward.

First of all, as already noted, so many thank yous are in order. At the risk of leaving someone out, special thanks to the following individuals and groups for your efforts over these last six months:

- Mrs. Maura Nash and our school leadership team, faculty, and staff, for working tirelessly all summer long to prepare our school buildings, curriculum, and themselves for both a return to in-person schooling and also back-up remote learning options as needed
- Our parish pastoral team and our church re-opening volunteers, for similarly training themselves to be able to safely welcome us back to the public celebration of sacraments
- Our generous parishioners who continue to support our weekly offertory
- Our SJF Pro Labore Dei team and the many donors who consistently provide grocery goods and/or financial support to our neighbors in need in Robbins, Posen, and Blue Island
- Our Manna team who creatively worked through COVID restrictions to continue to provide opportunities to purchase Manna and who have now fully re-opened their regular hours
- Our dedicated "Falcon Flower Growers" who quietly volunteer their time to keep our grounds maintained and continue to beautify and diversify the campus's foliage
- Rectory staff and school board members who are working to enhance coordination and communications across parish organizations and have recently established a monthly newsletter

More detail will be provided with the parish's formal annual report later in the year, but as it relates to a parish and school financial update, we would like to share the following highlights of steps taken and results achieved over the last six months:

- The parish and school, with support and guidance from the Archdiocese, applied for and received a government loan (for which a forgiveness application will be submitted) from the federal SBA Payroll Protection Program in the combined amount of ~\$600k
- The PPP loan allowed the parish to end its 2019-20 fiscal year ending June 30th at approximately break-even; it would have otherwise finished the year with a deficit of ~\$85k

- Parish revenues, without the PPP loan, are trailing last year's amounts by ~20% on a weekly basis; we will also have the challenge of making up \$50k+ from not hosting FisherFest this year
- On the school side, the PPP loan allowed the school to end its past fiscal year in a surplus position; this primarily allowed 2020-21 tuition increases to be kept at a minimum
- School enrollment this year is 540, which is down 14% vs. last year and has come in 8% below our original budget; we are confident we can work through the ~\$250k financial impact of the unexpected drop this year, but we would note our longer-term goals and current financial model will be at risk without stronger community support for and attendance at our school
- Nonetheless, our strong school balance sheet and belief in the school's mission and future, as articulated in our recently published strategic plan, have allowed school leadership to confidently hold the line on class size caps and limit late-entry enrollments in consideration of our children's and faculty's health, safety, and overall classroom learning experience
- The strength of the balance sheet on the back of recent years' positive investment performance has also allowed us to dedicate specific reserves to a tuition assistance fund to ensure financial difficulties are not holding back families from selecting SJF for their children's education
- We are planning for church and school cleaning and maintenance expenses to increase by 50% or more over budget as we have implemented twice-weekly deep cleanings of our buildings
- Finally, we continue to work through several revisions to our annual budget process in response to feedback and recommendations made in our strategic plan, including seeking of operational and maintenance efficiencies, better coordinating our third-party grant and title money requests, and working to establish dedicated use of fundraising proceeds for each of our parish organizations

Related to this last point, it is important to share that our financial investment in our school and parish operations has not ceased despite the challenges COVID has presented. In fact, quite the opposite is true – proper investments in our future remain our #1 financial priority. Especially as it relates to our school, Mrs. Claire Larmon, in particular, has done an incredible job coordinating our immediate needs and quickly pooling available government resources in the form of more than \$100k in Title 1 and ESSER Funds to make the following available to our faculty and students without any additional costs to our families:

- Nearly 150 new iPads and over 100 new Chromebooks and related licenses, access points, and security to enable 1:1 technology infrastructure is available for all grade levels from K-8
- 10 new SMART series interactive “whiteboard” panels for our 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms
- New supplementary teaching manuals for our resource department
- A number of pop-up tents to provide more welcoming entrances and covered outdoor classroom space to address several aspects of our new COVID-related protocols
- Decals, signage, PPE, and other materials required to safely reopen in accordance with Archdiocese and Illinois Department of Health guidelines,
- Falcon-logo face masks for all of our students and staff

We have also recently purchased and rolled out a new reading curriculum and science lab materials this year and have plans to update our math curriculum next year.

These investments certainly address a number of our previously-identified spending priorities. As always, there remain other important initiatives and expenses that cannot be ignored, however, and we anticipate that there will be additional unknown expenses due to the ongoing effects of COVID. **We are asking for your continued financial support**, so we remain prepared and able to keep moving forward in our mission. First and foremost, please do your best to continue to support the parish's weekly offering.

Even if you are not yet comfortable returning to in-person mass, you can do so by dropping donations off at the rectory or by enrolling in e-giving at <https://giving.ncsservices.org/App/Giving/stjohnfisherparish>. We also would ask you to consider the following sponsorship and donation opportunities. These have been prioritized in conjunction with parish and school leadership. Specific needs and fundraising targets for each will be detailed at later dates, but if you have the ability to make a down payment on any or provide volunteer support or trade services that could ease their completion, please send an e-mail to [sjfspc@gmail.com](mailto:sjfspc@gmail.com), and one of us will set up a time to discuss:

- **St. John Fisher Grand Holiday Raffle:** Our annual parish raffle will soon be launched with the final drawing tentatively planned for December 6, St. Nicholas Day; especially with the cancellation of FisherFest, please consider purchasing tickets in support of SJF's overall mission
- **School/Building Improvement Fund:** In an effort to lessen the impact of variable and often large one-time maintenance costs on our operating budgets, we will be seeking sponsors for over \$100k of targeted infrastructure improvements throughout the school and church buildings; most immediate on the list are roof and ceiling repairs and the replacement of traditional water fountains with touchless water bottle refilling stations as well as additional investments in grounds safety and landscaping, including parking lot improvements, and playground space upgrades
- **Tuition Assistance Fund:** Our school leadership team, with the support of Fr. Ken and the School Advisory Board, has recently dedicated a portion of our long-term savings specifically to future tuition assistance for families in times of need; donations here are always welcome
- **Other Areas of Need:** Support for our various organizations and service projects is also always welcome whether in the form of event sponsorships like for the recent and upcoming Women's Club and Holy Name Society golf outings or through continued drop off groceries or financial donations for Pro Labore Dei in the SJF parking lot on Saturday mornings from 10:30-11a or via <https://pldchicago.org/make-a-donation>

As this letter hopefully illustrates, we are all working hard to ensure SJF continues to have the resources available to vibrantly serve the community as our collective home away from home. The work does not and can not stop if we are to be successful in our efforts. We want and need all of us to feel welcome, safe, and recognized supporters of our shared mission and values, so that we are prepared to both deal with the challenges we face and also celebrate the many successes that undoubtedly lay ahead. We again thank you for your continued generosity to St. John Fisher Parish and School and always invite your feedback and input as we strive to serve you and each other.

The St. John Fisher Parish and School Board Finance Committees