

September 11, 2020

Dear Friends,

When people describe their dreams about the future, I must admit that at first, most of it feels outside of my now limited and pandemic-restricted imagination. In those moments I often recall the words of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Like those disciples in Luke's gospel, I stand still and my face is downcast. I think to myself, "Are you the only one visiting who does not know the things that have happened in these days?" I am tempted, as were those disciples, to despair, resignation, and fear. I wonder how much longer this can go on, and how much longer we can live with pandemic protocols and the gnawing sense that life isn't quite right, no matter what we do or say or try. How much longer can we read more bad news or witness more injustice? How much more of the fabric of our common lives can be torn?

The exhaustion is real, we are all feeling it. Yet there are also experiences like the Parish Leadership Retreat that was held over Zoom on August 29th. Well over 120 of your fellow parishioners came together to share and reflect. It was a moment of intense grace for many. We hadn't gathered together on a scale like that since the pandemic began. The yearning that we have to be together was given a space to be expressed. We heard witness talks and testimonies that stirred that groaning in our hearts. We touched that place where the Spirit is urging us and reassuring us, speaking for us at times in ways we haven't fully comprehended.

Our theme was **active discipleship**. It was born out of the listening sessions and strategic planning that have been ongoing for many years now. It was a chance for the parish staff to share the hard work they have been engaging in, even in the midst of a pandemic. A chance to put our prayer, planning and restructuring into concrete actions. It was a chance to open the scriptures with each other and to feel our hearts burning within us. It was a much-needed jolt in the middle of a long marathon, right as we were about to "hit the wall."

I want to share some of those fruits with the entire parish in this letter, because I know we all need it. I can't capture everything, but I am excited and I hope you are too. Active discipleship is not complicated, and yet it requires work. It is not new; it builds on work already happening in our homes, our parish community, and the wider world. It is not finished, and it will push and encourage us all.

In the coming months you will notice new initiatives and shifts in how the parish staff operates. If you have ideas, we will welcome them as we always have. You can expect the parish staff to encourage you and guide you in your active discipleship journey. They aren't going to do things for you, but rather they will do things with you. They will get you involved and connected.

They will empower you to lead and to be the change you hope to see in the church and the world. So please continue to come with your ideas and desires for change, and get ready to be invited into action with us.

If you're already looking for somewhere to start, you might begin by joining one of our service efforts like St. Vincent de Paul or one of our issue-based action teams (see our [Social Mission Newsletter](#) for details), or by participating in our hospitality efforts and liturgical ministries too. In mid-autumn, we are planning our first Contemplation and Action Day for the parish, a socially distanced opportunity for families and parishioners to come together for a morning of service and reflection that will introduce you to several of the parish's ongoing ministry efforts.

In our Ignatian tradition, action is always supported by prayer and reflection. Our shared worship is the core of this vibrant community. Each month we will incorporate lay preaching and witness talks into our Sunday liturgies. On September 17th, you can join us via livestream for the first of many evening prayer services that will highlight the role of laity, especially women, in both presiding and preaching. You can join your fellow parishioners to pray an Examen together every Tuesday and Thursday evening. There are several groups forming (see the bulletin for details) to offer an 8-week experience of praying The Spiritual Exercises.

The rich history and spirituality of the Society of Jesus has inspired this parish since it began in 1927. The parish staff is carrying on this rich history, working explicitly to invite each of us into personal experiences of prayer and action that follow the Ignatian Paradigm. Action leads to reflection and reflection invites us to new action. They work in an ongoing and ever renewing cycle.

If you've come to Bellarmine because of the commitment to social action, we invite you into experiences of prayer and reflection on those actions. If you've been drawn to Bellarmine by the rich history of liturgy and prayer, we invite you to live out the fruits of those experiences in service to our neighbors, especially the most marginalized among us. You can find resources to support you in both at www.bellarmineschapel.org/activediscipleship

Our goal, our plan, and our hope is that through these increasingly interwoven experiences we will all get that jolt described in Luke's account of the "Road to Emmaus." We want everyone to "get up at once and return" to wherever you came from, be it work, home, or school, and like those active disciples, to proclaim, "It is true! Christ has risen."

With gratitude,
Fr. Eric