

STATE OF THE PARISH & SCHOOL

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

Dear STA Family,

Welcome back and HAPPY “FALL”! I know it’s still entirely too hot to feel like celebrating, but we have much to be glad about as we finish the summer and welcome home all our vacationing parishioners and students back to Saint Thomas. I spent some of the summer overseas, traveling through Europe and as great as my adventures were, it is GREAT to be back, together with all of you.

I want to kick off our new fiscal year and school year with general updates on the state of the parish and school.

SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE CONTINUES TO GROW!

It can be difficult to determine a “metric for success” in church life because we don’t evaluate growth in the same way a “normal” business might. Our success is found by spreading the Good News and by all my counts, I think we are making great progress! **We have 1,829 registered parish families that call Saint Thomas home.** In 2017, we registered a total of 190 new families to the parish; already by July of this year, we have grown by 115 families which means year after year, we continue to see an exponential increase in our registered parish base. **Our school enrollment is up to 542 students, 82 of which are new!** Thanks be to God! Our preschool (which we developed two years ago, as the first project of Phase I of our capital campaign) is full and we even had to turn some families away this year for lack of space. Though it is with a heavy heart we were not able to accommodate everyone seeking a Catholic education this year, I am comforted by how the preschool proves to be such an invaluable asset to our community and our Catholic mission. I thank everyone who participated in the *Building Virtues Capital Campaign* for helping make the preschool happen.

As the STA family continues to get bigger, I am excited to see the gifts of time, talent and treasure that emerge—we have many great ideas for new events and programs, so more hands on deck means we can turn these possibilities into realities. We have some great ministries for you to join; there is something for every age and every stage at Saint Thomas. Each one of you is important and necessary to fulfill Our Lord’s mission!

PROGRAMS BRINGING US TOGETHER

Speaking of the school’s success, one very obvious proof of how much good we can do when we come together, is what we’ve accomplished with Fund for ALL STA. Many of you have answered the call and redirected your tax dollars to support Catholic education and **last year we awarded approximately \$1.4 million in tuition scholarships.** All I can say is, WOW! **Our goal for this year is \$2 million.** Fund for All STA is so special because low, middle AND high income families are eligible. It isn’t far off to imagine we could have tuition fully funded for every student at STA! We have set up a website just for *Fund for All STA* and I welcome you all to visit or pass it along: FundForAllSTA.com

In terms of other resources we are devoting this year to the benefit of our parish and school youth, I am excited to announce we have re-launched Catechesis of the Good Shepherd here at Saint Thomas! We had this program years ago and have brought it back with overwhelming anticipation and excitement from both parish and school families. CGS caters to children ages 3-Kindergarten with Montessori-based formation that helps our younger children intimately develop their unique relationship with God and “fall in love” with Him. I encourage you all to visit the parish website for more details about this program that starts in September. This program will have classes available to both parish and school children.

For children in grades 2-5 we offer Young Apostles on Wednesday evenings, preparing kids for First Confession/Confirmation and First Communion. Our **Junior Apostles** meet the same time and is geared for youth in grades 6-8. **And teens: don’t miss out on Teen Apostles which meets Sunday evenings following the 5pm Mass!** All these groups reconvene for the new year in early September.

For all the adults out there, our formation team has put together some fantastic events and conferences for the upcoming year to help you grow in faith and fellowship. Be sure to check out our various Bible Study Groups, Covenant of Love Date Night to enjoy with your spouse, First Saturdays with the Saints, the Southwest Biblical Conference, and Wine & Wisdom which we kicked off this past Spring to a great turnout. Mark your calendars too for December 9th-11th to join this year’s transformational Parish Mission with *Grace That Reigns*. For those looking to grow in faith from the

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comfort of your home, don't forget that Saint Thomas' own Institute of Catholic Theology offers an incredible online course catalog you can delve into from your personal computer. **To kick off the "new year" we are offering a special three-course combination package FREE to all parishioners and school families called, "Every Catholic Needs to Know This".** Just visit the ICT website at www.ictphx.org, click on **Course Catalog** and sign up for the package using the code **happynewyear**.

If you would like to receive email updates about upcoming events, email us at: events@staphx.org

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

We recently had a couple of our Parish Council and Finance Council members "retire" after serving their terms so graciously for so many years. We are in the process of instating replacement members for these open spots and I will announce the assignments in the near future in a separate letter. **The School Board has also accepted new members this year** that bring diverse perspectives and guidance to our school administration. **Thank you all who have served on these councils in the past.** We are better because of you!

As most of you have now heard, we also had to say goodbye to our Parochial Vicar, Father Thomas Kagumisa this summer. **Fr. Thomas has been reassigned to Resurrection Parish in Mesa** and we will miss him greatly but I am confident that his new parish will welcome him lovingly. I am grateful to Fr. Thomas for everything he devoted to Saint Thomas. **Please join us for a farewell reception after the I AM Mass on Sunday, September 16th in Parish Hall.** We will be joined by two new priests in the near future and Father Jovi is here with us through August.

OUR HOUSE IS IN ORDER

Over the summer, we transitioned to a new parish database called *Parish Soft*. This software enables us to manage parishioner records more dynamically, evaluate how parish resources are utilized (including facilities), and it syncs with our new *Faith Direct* e-Giving platform for even more effective financial planning.

I want to encourage everyone to get familiar with the *Faith Direct* platform. Not only can you use *Faith Direct* to set up auto-tithe, make one-time gifts or contribute to recurring collections, but you can also use it to register for most of our parish and school events. Go to: www.faithdirect.net, click on **Give Now** and our **church code is AZ878**.

In September, we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of our very own Saint Thomas the Apostle "La Torre" Gifts and Book Store. Stop by and see the store's new layout that Mary Gibson and her team completed over the summer! And, to take us even further into the future, we recently upgraded the POS system to be more customer and store-management friendly.

OUR BUILDING VIRTUES CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

We have entered the final year of a three-year redemption period for our *Building Virtues Capital Campaign*. **Of the \$3.29 million pledged, we have redeemed \$2.14 million** (or roughly 65%) so far and have **\$1.1 million outstanding** we are still waiting for people to make payment on in this final year of the campaign.

Some of you have asked, **"When we are going to start construction?"** **The short answer is, we already have.** The first project of the campaign was to develop the preschool. In 2016, when we launched the campaign, we made renovations and improvements to the school campus to expand our preschool offerings from one Pre-Kindergarten classroom to three classrooms that now include a 3 year-olds program. This was no small effort and it was transformative for our school in its ability to stay relevant and competitive in the marketplace. We can now offer families a one drop-off/pick-up school solution like what other Catholic or competing private schools offer. Even more, the expanded preschool has allowed us to increase our enrollment capacity and acts as a feeder program to the upper grades, helping our long term financial sustainability.

The longer answer: While I know many of you anxiously await a new gym, a new library, a new social hall, classrooms or community spaces—we are not ready to start construction just yet. It unfortunately isn't as simple as "build now with the funds we've redeemed so far." We need to wait until the end of this three-year redemption period to see what our final tally will be. Not everyone will make payments on what they pledged. This happens for various reasons and with every campaign. Too, we could receive an unexpected gift or a large donation and end up with MORE to spend

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than we anticipate! The main point is that we really need to know what we have to spend before we commit to how we move forward but **WE WILL MOVE FORWARD!** Our Master Vision incorporates everything we've needed or wanted since the parish first came about in the 50's. Masterplans are meant to be "living" in that they are flexible and adapt to what becomes priority or feasible at a given time. While I want to see each piece of our Masterplan constructed, it is going to take time, phasing, more fundraising than just this campaign, a lot of patience and prayer. We must stay resolute in our fundraising efforts, as weary as we may become, and know that we are building something for Saint Thomas' future much like what we have now was built by those who came before us.

You have entrusted me as your Pastor with your treasure and I take great care in this job. I will not put the parish or school in financial jeopardy. I am not comfortable (nor are we really able) to take out big loans we may not be able to pay long-term in order to start construction "immediately". I want to make sure that what we decide in the near-term is beneficial for the long-term. Of additional concern is that we are on a rather complicated site and in order for parish and school to stay "up-and-running" during construction, we have to be incredibly sensitive to project phasing (what gets built first and the "musical chairs" that follow by moving students and resources around; how parking will be affected by anything we do; how to be least disruptive to church and school life and income ability, and more). I am not averse to taking out a loan in some amount to be able to move our projects forward, but we need to be conservative and realistic about the size of loan the parish can support. I continue to consider the many ideas for campus planning and construction phasing that come my way for us to be able to build as soon as possible. **Be sure that any donations to the campaign are kept in a restricted account. This money is not used for anything other than our masterplan.**

Let's FINISH STRONG and make good on every pledge we've received to date. For those of you that have not committed to the campaign yet, there are a few ways you are able to do so and we need you! No gift is too small. Visit the campaign website to learn more: BuildingVirtuesSTA.com; pick up a pledge card by the church exits; visit us in the school or parish offices; or go online directly to our *Faith Direct* portal to make a contribution by credit card: membership.faithdirect.net/givenow/AZ878

Frankly, I am amazed at how much we have raised so far without a lead gift. When we started this campaign in 2016, I was told stories by other parish and school leaders of how they received very large donations to "jump start" their own fundraising efforts. Before the great recession, some parishes started their campaign with as much as \$5 million in lead gifts! We are still seeking our "lead" donor that can make a significantly large donation to Saint Thomas but I want you all to understand the power of every gift at every size. Together, with just over 42% of the community participating, we have been able to raise over \$3 million! Imagine what we could do with 100% participation from every parish and school family.

Please join us in our campaign prayer which will be published in the bulletin for the remainder of the campaign. I will continue to give news when there is news to give and we will report financial progress as progress is made.

THANK YOU FOR MAKING SAINT THOMAS YOUR HOME.

The parish and school continue to thrive because of you and the grace of God. Let us give thanks to Him in all we do and as this year's school theme says it best, from Psalms 37:3, **Trust in the Lord and do good.**

In All Things May Christ Be Glorified!



Father Steve