6/14/2013

Your Excellency,

I have been blessed. I have a comfortable pension, a home, and a reliable vehicle. I will survive the closing of my church building. I have all the emotions associated with these hierarchical decisions. I am hurt, angry, confused, sad, befuddled. But, I’ll be okay. I can get to a new church building. I can experience the Eucharistic Presence at any church building. This is not going to ruin my life.

What I fear for is the loss of the presence of the Catholic faith in Frankford for the people, who are the body of the church, part of the body of Christ, who minister to each other in this neighborhood community.

We are told our churches are unsustainable because our baptism and wedding numbers are very small. However, Frankford is full of half way houses and group homes. I’m told more than in most Philadelphia communities. The people living there are former prisoners, former prostitutes, recovering addicts, the otherwise homeless. The people Christ told us to minister to. They come to the neighborhood church for spiritual renewal and sustenance, to reconnect with other Catholics and their faith. These are people that don’t stay here and get married and start families. These are people that are working to get their lives together. But while they are here they need a Catholic church to help them in that process. They are poor and have low incomes. They have little disposable income to travel on public transportation after they have used their small welfare or disability incomes on housing, utilities, food, and medical. There is no money for them to spend on SEPTA to get to a church out of their neighborhood. They need the church in Frankford because they know us, they trust us, and they become our friends and brothers and sisters in Christ. They have a safe, nearby place to ask for help and get real, personal faith filled relationships with people who live here. **They are Christ.** I fear for them.

There are also many senior citizens in Frankford and many physically and emotionally challenged people. We have Jeannie, a women who begs outside Church for beer or cigarette money. She is also a woman who we talk with and care about, who we worry about when she doesn’t show up to daily Mass, which she rarely misses. She was very happy when someone bought a ticket for her to our Spring Tea fundraiser. She wore the same clothes she wears every single day. She acted as strangely as she always does, but she sat with us, contributed to the conversation as best she could: she took her tea sandwiches from the same plate as us. No one cringed, no one balked. We enjoyed her company and her presence. We haven’t seen her for a while and we all worry about her and pray for her. **She is Christ.**  I fear for her and the other Jeannies of Frankford.

There are the poor in Frankford who find it devastating and life threatening because they can’t fill a prescription for $5.00 because they might have to skip a meal; or they have to have a medical procedure and can’t pay for it; or they can’t turn the heat on because they can’t pay for it. These are the people that we get to help. Someone will say; “Here is $20.00 or $200.00. I know so and so needs this. I want him or her to have it, so give it to Father to pass on. Don’t tell him who gave it to you.” The person is unburdened and happily and gratefully reports what someone has done. The poor are in Frankford. **They are Christ**. I fear for them.

The lonely are in Frankford. One of our elderly gentlemen, who I imagine doesn’t have much other interaction with others, walked up and down the streets of Frankford crying on the day of the announcement that our church would close. Another elderly woman, who has had her husband, son, and closest friend all die in the last two years looks forward to two things in her life-senior citizens club at St. Joachim’s each Thursday and Sunday Mass each week after which she joins other ladies for breakfast and companionship. She says, “I don’t know what to do with myself. I just sit and look at the four walls.” She says that she wouldn’t know what to do without these women who also help with some shopping and doctor’s appointments. God sent her to them. **These lonely people are Christ**. I fear for them.

The lost are in Frankford. There are so many people who have been estranged from the Catholic Faith and have found their way back through this Church or who have become Catholic because of this Church community. The fallen away are in Frankford. They find Christ again. **They are Christ**. I fear for those still looking for a way back.

I could go on and on but I’ll just say, I’m not worried about me. I worry for them. I fear for them. They have given the people of St. Joachim more than we could ever give them. They have been Christ for us and they let us love them and care for them. We can continue to help those we can, but without a church how will the others find us?

Archbishop, please seriously and prayerfully reconsider this decision. Contrary to remarks attributed to you in the National Catholic Reporter, the inner-city parishes **do** pass on the faith, even with financial shortfalls.

Yours in Christ,

Tina Dambach

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