

In the Peace of Christ

SAINT JOHN VIANNEY

CATHOLIC CHURCH

Archdiocese of Galveston — Houston

625 Nottingham Oaks Trail
Houston, TX 77079

Tel.: 281-497-1500

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www.stjohnvianney.org

PARISH CLERGY

Rev. R. Troy Gately
Pastor

Rev. Charles J. Talar
Rev. Daniel L. Warden
Priests in Residence

Deacons

Dale Steffes
Al Vacek
Fred Kossegi
Randy Graham
Louis Provenzano

PASTORAL STAFF

Adult Formation
Yvonne Gill

Youth Formation
Daniel Marcantel

Music Ministry
Michael Madrid

**Pastoral Care/
Spiritual Life**
Louis Provenzano

**Parish Life/
Activity Center**
Richard Fairly

**Social Service
Ministries**
Deborah Montez

Business Office
C.J. Pete Prados

Dear Friends in Christ:

Each year, the directors and associate directors of the various parish departments and I go on a staff retreat. We pray together, look at issues facing the parish and spend some time strengthening our bonds as co-workers and friends. Every year the retreat is a little different. Additionally, several times a year, we have a gathering of the entire staff along with our regular directors' meetings and department meetings. I know that this sounds like meetings, meetings, meetings, but they are important and useful. At our most recent directors' retreat, we looked at our *Parish Vision* and tried to briefly re-examine and evaluate, over the course of a few days, how we were doing in making the vision a reality. Our vision for St. John Vianney Parish is really very simple, in fact it is on the mast head of our webpage – *Living Faith, Changing Lives, Making a Difference*. Everything that we do as a parish is directed towards this call from God. It is not just my vision or the directors' vision, or the staff's vision or those on Pastoral Council or in CCE or who serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. It is *our vision* as the people of St. John Vianney Parish. In our personal lives, professional lives, at home, work, school or church, we strive to be a community of *Living Faith, Changing Lives and Making a Difference*.

To be honest, it is sometimes easy to lose sight of this vision. We can easily get caught up in many different things, good and important things and sometimes in things that are not so good or important. The Book of Proverbs says "People without a vision perish" (Prv 29:18). How true! The church calls heaven – the Beatific Vision. It is what we are called to and what we aim for. Interestingly, "Beatus" can be equally translated as 'blessed' or 'happy'. God calls us to blessedness, happiness. Our goal of course is the blessed happiness of heaven, to have the vision of God, to see Him face to face, to live with God forever in eternal happiness. How we get there is important. We have to have a vision to do that. *Living Faith* is the first step. This of course is twofold. We have to *live* our Catholic Faith concretely in our specific actions and choices, but our Catholic Faith has also to be *alive* within us. It is not something that we possess or proclaim on Sundays or just at church. It is a part of us, animating our lives, our perspectives and shaping our values. Likewise, our faith is not just personal, it is also communal. We live our faith together. Nor can faith be reduced exclusively to a set of doctrinal or dogmatic statements. Yes, as Catholics we are blessed with a content of that which we believe and adhere to. Ours' is not a "do or believe whatever you want" church. Our dogmas and doctrine express what we believe and how we should live. But faith is also a living relationship. Faith is the relationship between God and each one of us and each of us with one another. To have a living faith is not just an '*I go to church on Sunday faith*' or a '*calling on God when I am in trouble faith*' nor is it an '*I'm a Catholic but I don't let it tell me how to live my life faith*'. To have a living faith means that it is 24/7 proposition. A living faith is part of everything that I do and informs and forms everything that I do and every choice I make. A living faith is that without which our lives would be totally different and not for the better! A living faith does not make our lives automatically perfect but it helps us to be perfected! A living faith is not just something we have, it is something that we live daily. A living faith is work.

We participate in the life of the church not merely out of obligation, but because the Catholic Faith is so much a part of our lives and our identity that we cannot help but live our faith in the Catholic Church. To be outside or away from the Church is like trying to breathe without oxygen! The way we love God, love our families and love one another is by living our faith each day, week after week, year after year. Faith isn't a badge, where we can pin it on or take it off at will depending upon the circumstances. A living faith is part of the very essence of our being. It is like the marrow in our bones! We can't be without it! Everything that we do, every day that we live is a chance, an opportunity, to deepen our faith, to become more alive in God and have Him become more alive in us.

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Dear Friends in Christ:

Our parish vision is summed up in *Living Faith, Changing Lives, Making a Difference*. To have a living faith is different from having no faith or believing, but not fully living what we believe. Faith matters and a living faith changes things, namely lives, our own lives, our families' lives and the lives of others. By living our faith we grow in our love and relationship with God and one another. Our lives are different because of our faith in Jesus Christ. To be a Catholic means something, it is not the same as not being Catholic. Our Catholic faith determines and influences our choices. Too often people attempt to trot out the erroneous notions of "well, it doesn't matter what you believe or where you go to church as long as you are a good person" or, as is commonly heard today, "Jesus-yes; church-no" or "I am spiritual, but not religious". These assertions are quaint, but they fail to adequately express reality or truth. For indeed, faith forms people and their values and dictates their actions. As Catholics, we want our faith to be real and have real consequences, namely we want lives to be changed, our lives and the lives of others. We do not want to be the same people the entire time we are alive on this planet. We want to become better people, happier people, and holier people! We know that change is often painful, but we are willing with God's grace to grow. As people of faith, as parishioners of St. John Vianney, we see God's blessings all around us and we to use those blessings for ourselves, our loved ones and those around us, especially those in need.

Changing Lives starts with our own lives and our families. We see our lives as rooted in our relationship with God and the community of the church. Like St. Paul, we proclaim, "it is no longer I who lives, but Christ Jesus living in me!" That changes the way we normally do things and how we see things and what we value. We want what Jesus wants, souls on fire in love with God. That changes things. It changes how we spend our time, raise our kids, treat our spouses, spend our money, do our jobs. It is not a onetime change either. Every day, every new situation is open for us to live our faith more fully and to make our lives different and better. *Changing Lives* does not extend only to ourselves and our families. As Catholics and as parishioners of this parish, we desire to change other people's lives by the way in which we live our faith. We want others to know God's love for them. We want others to experience the joy and beauty of the truth of the Catholic Faith. We want others to experience the graces that God has so generously poured into our hearts. We want others to have their lives changed too! When we live our faith, we change the dynamic of those around us by being better friends, neighbors, co-workers. We can affirm that which is good and stand up as witnesses to the truth, even when the truth is hard to accept. By living our faith enthusiastically and joyfully, we can change lives by inspiring others to faith and challenging others in charity to look at their lives. We change lives when we invite others to share in the gift of faith that we have been given and that we share as a family, as a community of faith.

Changing Lives means growing in Christ and His love for us and our love for Him. It means saying "yes" to the good and the true, but not necessarily the easy or the popular. *Changing Lives* means that we have to be willing to let go of past hurts and failures and be open to forgiveness and peace. *Changing Lives* means that we want God to help us change and live according to His will for us for we know that His will is our ultimate happiness.

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Dear Friends in Christ:

Our parish vision of *Living Faith, Changing Lives, Making a Difference* is part of everything that we do as a parish. When we celebrate Mass or host Coffee & Donuts, build a Habitat House or teach a religious education class it is directed to *Living Faith, Changing Lives, Making a Difference*. For nearly fifty years St. John Vianney parish has been doing just that. In fact, from the very beginning in 1966, the people of our parish have worked to be a catalyst for our parishioners and the larger community. The parish has worked to make a difference in people's lives by sharing our Christmas with Gift Giving Sunday, by assisting those in need through our Social Services Ministries, by home building and medical missions, by the grants given to schools and sister parishes, our prison ministry, community garden, food pantry, Joseph's Coat, tutoring programs, Respect Life activities, The Gabriel Project and so many other efforts. Yet the biggest difference that we make is by each one of us loving God more and more each day. Growing in the life of grace enables us to help folks in Eagle Pass on the Texas/Mexican border have a roof over their head. *Making a difference* is when parishioners spending hours in adoration and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament so that our parish can help people pay their electric bill, deal with a difficult illness or make a life decision. *Making a difference* is when our catechists teach in Religious Education and enable children to grow up knowing the faith and learning right from wrong and desiring to do good with their lives. *Making a difference* is when our liturgical ministers serve at Holy Mass and offer reverent and beautiful praise to God. *Making a difference* is when we welcome newcomers from across town and from the other side of the globe to their new family of faith. *Making a difference* is when a neighbor or a co-worker asks us for help or for prayers because they know that we care because of how we live our Catholic Faith.

Jesus has called His church to a mission. There is no maintenance program proposed in the gospels. Jesus gives us a mission to go out and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). Jesus wants us to change the world. He does not want the world to stay the same. He wants us to make the world something different than what it is. Here of course, the Lord is not merely referring to progress or technological advancement. The difference that the Lord wants us to make in the world is to make it more "human and more holy". God wants us to help each other to be the best persons we can be. And the best that we can be is for him to live in us and for us to live in him. Jesus wants us to have life and have it abundantly! (Jn 10:10) As St. Ireneus declared, "The glory of God is man fully alive!" (Gloria Dei homo vivens). The difference we make is living in God's love and bringing God's love with us wherever we go.

One of the biggest challenges that any church faces is that if we ceased to exist tomorrow would anyone notice? Would it make a difference in our lives or in the lives of those around us? Our vocation, our mission to make a difference, is not because of some inflated notion of self-importance, it is not hubris, it is love! We want to make a difference, we want *to be* the difference in each other's lives and in the lives of even those we do not know because we desire all to know the joy of the love of Jesus Christ! We want St. John Vianney to be a parish where people love to come and be a part of because it makes them better people, happier people, holier people! We want people in West Houston and beyond to know God's love for them through our love of God, each other and for them! We want to make a difference by giving ourselves to God and letting God touch others through our lives. We seek, with God's grace, to make St. John Vianney a parish, a people, where every day we strive to be a community of *Living Faith, Changing Lives and Making a Difference*.

In Pace Christi,

