



December, 2017

To: Saint Joseph's College Community

Dear Fellow Pumas,

As the end of the year quickly approaches, I write to give you a short wrap up of what has been happening around here since the suspension of activities in May. Even though we all felt the sadness of the suspension, we who are still here have been busy with work and hope in our future. Let me give you a quick rundown of what has been achieved over the past seven months.

Once the decision to suspend was taken, the faculty and staff graciously dedicated themselves to helping students find their pathway to another college or university. The professors also helped many students with teach-out so they could graduate in May. The response from numerous colleges and universities was very positive, expressing a real sense of solidarity with us. The great majority of our students were able to continue in other institutions.

Our second goal was to secure funds in order to offer our faculty and employees their severance pay. First our Chief Financial Officer, Spencer Conroy, worked diligently with our lawyer in order to solicit both the attorney general and individual donors for the release of endowment funds to achieve this goal. After months of hard work, sufficient funds were released that made it possible in September to offer all the professors and employees their severances. This was another very important goal that was achieved.

The Phoenix Team works each day with dedication and hope for our future. The team consists of administrative, academic, institutional advancement, IT and physical plant personnel. I am proud of their dedication and grateful for the collaboration of every team member. Many alumni who have visited here over the months are impressed with how well the campus is kept up. Kudos to Dennis Black and all his team.

On the academic side, the Team has vetted many different proposals that have come across our desk and others that we have sought out. We are researching and working to find a pathway for the new SJC that is faithful to our mission and Catholic identity, is sustainable, meets the challenges facing higher education across the country, and responds to the needs of the student population we wish to serve. We are seeking partnerships to assure that we will have accreditation. We've reached out and discussed possibilities with several colleges and universities and have had numerous discussions with the local community including agricultural, business and corporate leaders, economic development entities, the chamber of commerce and rotary club, and diverse Latino populations in the Diocese.

Our discussions and research continue on a daily basis. We are housed in Drexel Hall and you are welcome to drop in and share your dreams and concerns with us. The door is open. We thank those who have come and spoken with us.

In October members of the former Board of Trustees resigned so as to give rise to a new Board of Trustees which is in the process of being populated.

Br. Tim Hemm has kept alive several initiatives of SJC in the spiritual/social realm, such as the Trick or Treat for the Hungry, the online Book of Remembrance of our Deceased in November, and the Gallagher Charitable Society. On December 23<sup>rd</sup> he will conduct a candle light service by our reflection pond, which is beautifully lit up for Christmas. This is part of an initiative of the Jasper and Newton County Chamber of Commerce. Thanks, Br. Tim, for your dedication and to keep the St. Joe spirit alive.

So there is much to be grateful for as we end this year, a year filled with sadness, loss, anger, disbelief. But in the midst of it all, we have been working day after day facing the difficulties and challenges with hope and trust.

As we look forward to the New Year, we hope to see a settlement with the bank for our debt and approval of a pathway for the new SJC. Let us unite around the hope that the phoenix will rise from the ashes. I invite each one of you to contribute to achieving this goal. Your prayers are always appreciated.

May the Christ Child whose birth we celebrate next week, the Wonder-Counselor, and Prince of Peace, with the Emanuel, God-with-us, help us to face the New Year with renewed hope and energy to build a future for our beloved Saint Joe's.

I would like to conclude this message with words of Archbishop Blessed Oscar Romero:

"It helps now and then to step back and take the long view.  
The reign of God is not only beyond our efforts.  
It is beyond our vision.  
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction  
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.  
Nothing we do is complete,  
Which is another way of saying the reign of God  
always lies beyond us.  
No statement says all that could be said.  
No prayers fully express our faith.  
No confession brings perfection.  
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.  
No program accomplishes the church's mission.  
We cannot do everything  
but there is a sense of liberation in realizing that,  
because this enables us to do something and do it well.  
It may be incomplete but it is a beginning,  
a step along the way,  
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. Amen."

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your families!

*Fr. Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.*

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Rector

Puma Forever