

## CHANGES ARE INEVITABLE AND NECESSARY

By Fr. Orlando J. Addison, Vicar

Holy Faith has begun the process to prepare the congregation to meet the next generations who will continue the ministry and work of God's church in Port St. Lucie. It is our responsibility to reach out to new generations in our community, to instruct them in the Word of God, to equip them, to make disciples, and to send them out into the world to share the Gospel of Christ. However, this process is not easy to achieve in a short period of time due to the fact that many of us love to cling to events of the past.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians 5:17, "*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*"

Leaving the past behind is difficult for many, especially for congregations. We love to dwell on events of the past because we are unwilling to give up what worked for us, and by not giving up what worked us, we fail to realize that most of the things that worked then are no longer relevant to a society that is constantly changing. The fact is that congregations that fail to embrace changes around them are destined to die! Their communities diminish due to dying members, relocation of members, and most importantly, for not recruiting and teaching new generations to take over the leadership of the church.

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2010, Port St. Lucie had a population of 164,603, but in 2014 the population grew 5.7%, an estimate of 174,110. Furthermore, the percentage of people under 5 years of age in 2010 was 6.2% and the percentage of those under 18 years of age was 24.4%. Thus the questions are how many people under 5 years of age, living in our community, are attending our Sunday School Ministry, and how many people under 18 years of age are participating in our Youth Ministry, Acolyte Ministry, and Young Adult Ministry? The number is very small! Imagine if Holy Faith would have had in place vital ministries for these people in 2010; today, we would not be struggling with low membership, poor Sunday School attendance, and low youth participation in our Youth Ministry. A good percentage of these children and teenagers would have been receiving proper training, and the congregation would have been forming future leaders to continue the work of ministry.

However, we cannot go back to fix the past, nor dwell on events of the past, nor point fingers to blame others because this is very destructive. Instead, what we need to do today is create a Christian environment that will reach out to children who are being born today so they may feel comfortable and welcome in our congregation when their parents bring them to worship Christ with us; we also need to create an environment to reach out to those who were born five years ago in the city of Port St. Lucie so we may begin the process of training future leaders for the church. This process, given to us by Jesus, will bring new life and new perspective into our Christian community.

The new generation growing up in our city is very different from our generations. This is a generation that learned to use computers in their early years, know how to navigate the Internet, obtain their news online, and manage social media and many of the new gadgets that are foreign

to many of us. Therefore, in order to reach out to this new generation, Holy Faith is working hard to bring our congregation to the 21<sup>st</sup> century by installing television screens in the sanctuary to project our worship and music; a Wi-Fi system in the church to have access to the Internet and in the future broadcast the service to shut-ins through the Internet; we are improving our communication system to help keep the congregation informed, by using the most advanced electronic communication methods available; we are restructuring the Choir area for the purpose of providing traditional as well as contemporary music; we are giving members and future members the opportunity to donate online by using credit and debit cards; and we are planning to renovate the Parish Center with intention to make it more attractive and functional for future rentals for weddings, birthdays, and many other social events.

The purpose of these changes is not to turn our congregation into a contemporary church, but to bring life into the congregation with the understanding that living things grow and living things change. We can always celebrate the past by honoring the people who made it possible for us to be the church we are today, and the people who left behind a legacy. However, we also need to keep in mind that society changes, life circumstances change, and if we want our church to strive in today's world, we need to be willing to incorporate some of these changes in our worship and in the way we do business in order to bring in, equip, and send out the new generation of Christians who will continue and will improve the work you and I will soon be leaving behind!