

They picked someone else to be pope, so I'm still here. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger served as head of the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith. He was one of Pope John Paul's most intelligent and experienced advisors. He has chosen the name Benedict XVI. Immediately after a pope is elected, the cardinals ask him what name he chooses. Originally, popes went by their baptismal name, but later they started a different tradition, based on how Jesus changed the name of the first pope from Simon to Peter. Saint Benedict is a patron of Europe. He lived in the 6th century and founded communities of Benedictine monks and nuns like those at Conception and Clyde. Of the 264 previous popes, 15 of them were named Benedict. Benedict XVI is the first pope from Germany in over 1000 years. I expect he will fill John Paul's shoes very well.

Today's first reading tells about the choice of the first deacons of the church. When the 12 apostles realized they needed help, they looked for "reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom," and they chose 7 to be deacons. We still need reputable people, filled with the Spirit and wisdom to serve our church at every level, and we are grateful to the Holy Spirit for giving us a pope who also possesses these qualities.

As we announced last week, I'd like to make my annual appeal today for contributions to the parish and the diocese. It's exciting to have a new pope in Rome, but at home we Catholics have bills to pay.

I'd like to thank you for your many gifts to our parish and diocese. When you support the bishop's annual appeal, you help Catholic Charities serve farmers, the poor and the brokenhearted; you help the vocation office encourage men and women to consider the religious life; and you help the New Wine program educate our parish leaders.

When you give to our parish, you help us pay for salaries, utilities, and repairs on our buildings, as well as the materials we need to praise God each Sunday and to care for those in nursing homes. This past year we spent over \$30,000 to replace the boiler in St. Rita's.

We need your help again. Our expenses go up, just as yours do. If you could increase your gift this year, it will help us spread the word of God.

I will be making another appeal to you in two weeks, asking your support for a capital campaign to improve our church building. But before I ask you for that, I need to ask you for this. Please don't cut back on your weekly gift in order to give something to the next campaign. Your weekly contributions are essential. They keep us going; we can do something extra as long as our weekly gifts remain strong.

You received two pledge cards in the mail this week – one for the parish and one for the diocese. When you fill these out you help us project a budget for next year. You may place those cards in the collection today or next week in gratitude for God's many blessings. Thank you all.