

Last week I gave the kids in our special education program a tour of the church. They sat in this pew. I said, "Tell me what you see, and I'll tell you what it means." These kids are grade school age; they have many different handicaps, mental and physical, but no handicap of the heart. So I asked them, "What do you see?" Susan said, "I see a cross." "Do you know who's on the cross?" She said, "Jesus." "What else do you see?" They saw the font and looked in at the water. They saw the candle and imagined the size of a cake it could sit on. Then they saw this tree. "What's hanging on the tree?" I asked. They came up, stared, and their eyes grew big. "Eggs!" I said, "Do eggs grow on trees?" And, oh, they laughed, they thought this tree was the funniest thing in church. The cross, the water, the candle, and the eggs proclaim new life in Christ.

My sisters and brothers, every week at St. Regis in hundreds of ways we proclaim that message: new life in Christ. Today I'm asking your financial help toward that mission.

Among the new parishioners who registered with us this year was a young woman who told me in our first meeting she wanted to help kids in special ed. She's been a member just a few months, and now she's a regular volunteer.

There's much she could have picked from. You saw the slides last week. We provide food and money for the needy in our area and at St. James in the Central City. Our school of religion and grade school form children in the Gospel. Our crafters handmake items for sale to help us buy office equipment. Our staff has grown this year to serve the youth and the liturgy. We support Bread for the World--we work with congress on behalf of hungry nations around the world. We are considering a plan to twin with a parish in El Salvador. We commission ~~pg~~ Stephen Ministers this weekend--members who are now trained to help other members. Seventy-two parishioners serve on councils and completed our parish plan this year. Almost 80% of our members contribute money to us each year. This is a marvelous place, a marvelous place. We preach new life in Christ, and we live new life in Christ.

When the risen Jesus appeared, his disciples thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus laughed, "Does a ghost have flesh and bone?" Then he ate with them. When I look at this congregation, and think of all you do for this parish, I think, "This can't be real. I must be seeing a ghost." You are real, you are the risen Jesus. You're no ghost, and when we eat together from this table we preach new life in Christ. As your pastor, I am in awe. I told a group of scouts this week, "I don't know how you can beat this job."

I want you to know that your contributions mean something. They benefit 5000 people in our neighborhood; they benefit the hungry in Africa. Please bring your pledges next Sunday, and help us continue this work. We are trying again to bring our salaries to a just level, so the families of those who work for the church will not be deprived. We want to help you thank God for the blessings he's given you.

Some of our special ed kids are ready to make first communion. Soon, they'll have new life in Christ. When they do, I hope you take pride, for you helped the Body of Christ.