

I want to review with you the creation of the New Bethlehem Center, because it's been an amazing ride and it's reinforced a spiritual lesson I continually need to re-learn. Just over two years ago there was nothing but a small committee meeting in our library, called together because our Pastoral Planning listening sessions had voiced the desire for greater serve in the community. From our parish name and the lack of a shelter for families on the eastside an idea began to grow, and with it a name, "New Bethlehem." Just as Jesus and His family had been homeless in Bethlehem, so many families are homeless here today.

The committee started growing slowly. There was interest from St. Louise, Northwest University, and other people. We wrote a mission statement. We decided to focus on creating a 24/7 365 days a year emergency shelter for homeless families. But how could we get the land and raise that kind of money?

And then God intervened. Two of our staff visited Salthouse church, the Lutheran church just across the high school from us, and

shared the New Bethlehem vision with the Salthouse pastor, and she showed them an unfinished basement in her church. Could it serve as a beginning? We brought Salthouse on board, and it was decided that we would begin with just a day center where the homeless could eat a hot meal, wash their clothes, take a shower. Then we came to all of you to see if you would share in our vision. You came forth with almost \$500,000 and 300 volunteers! We received more than we dreamed of.

This past November we opened the New Bethlehem Day Center five days a week from 2–8 PM, when the families would have to go sleep on the floors of local churches because we didn't have space for them to sleep yet, although even those over-night shelters would close May through October. Then came another providential moment, the Kirkland City government noticed our passion around this topic and decided to partner with us to build a permanent shelter for homeless women and families on a piece of property Salthouse has given them. Our whole dream seems to be coming true in only a couple years.

Now to my lesson. This past month the New Bethlehem steering committee met to consider our next steps. We have enough money to finance our current operations for three years. But should we just sit where we are, or should we take another step forward in faith? The homeless families right now are still out in the cold two days a week, and sleeping outside four months of the year.

We could fund a year-round night shelter and open six days a week right now if we're willing to spend all our funds more quickly. But I started to get cold feet. I doubted we could keep raising the necessary funds. But the rest of the committee called me on that. This whole project seems guided by the Holy Spirit. Why not trust the Spirit to see us through? If God is already doing more than we ever expected, and faster, why stop Him now? So we decide to go forward, and trust that God will provide for us as long as we're giving what we get to the poor.

I mention that decision because it's a recent example in my own life of the way I can limit what I hope and expect Jesus to do. I think of

the Pharisees in our gospel story. They can't believe that God could, or would, really heal the eyes of a man born blind. Again, and again, they ask him, "What did this Jesus do to you?" "How did He do it?" In the end, they remain unconvinced, and even blind, to Jesus' power and ability to change and heal. They can't get outside their assumptions.

What about us? What limits do we each place on what we expect and assume Jesus can do in our lives? I know from my own life that there have been times I didn't trust that Jesus lift a sin from my life, give me the strength to face a confrontation that needed to be faced, or heal me from past hurts. A big part of why so many of the Pharisees failed to follow Jesus was their lack of imagination of what the Messiah would be, and do. Our own limitations of imagination in divine possibilities also restricts what Jesus can do for, and in, us, because He won't force us to trust Him.

I wanted to trust in my own financial instincts in planning for New Bethlehem's future. And Jesus would have let that happen. And it

wouldn't have been a disaster. In fact, it would have been smart, if the only other option for New Bethlehem's future course was to trust in our own powers. But we're not trusting in my, or the committee's, wisdom. We're trusting that God will continue to guide and provide for us -- if we continue to trust that He will do great things. And I'm not talking just about self-confidence. That's a great. But self-confidence limits us to our own gifts.

I'm talking about Jesus-confidence. I'm talking about going beyond what we can do on our own. In the end, we Christians can either trust in ourselves, or we can trust in Jesus. We can hold tight to our own assumptions, or we can hold on to Him. But just know -- Jesus gives the most to those who limit Him the least.

Where, in our own lives, are we making false assumptions about what Jesus can, and can't, do? Are we limiting our change and growth by doing so? Let us hand over to Jesus all our expectations and assumptions, so He can raise them higher.