



# Hearts Speak to Hearts

Good afternoon (morning) I'm Bob Smith and I have been given the privilege to speak before you, as a witness to God's Grace in our ICC community about the *Hearts Speaking to Hearts* Commitment Program.

My wife Mary and I and are truly blessed to have discovered and been embraced this community at Immaculate Conception Church. We began attending Liturgy here in 2003 while vacationing in Carolina Beach then became parishioners when we moved down from Summerfield, NC full time in 2005.

With the Holiday Season quickly approaching, I'm reminded about my childhood Christmas Holidays with my parents and siblings. I reminisce about the excitement and splendor of the preparing for the Christmas season as a youngster. As a youngster, I thoroughly enjoyed the Season of Receiving!

When I was older that I learned that my "receiving" was made possible through the generosity of my family's "giving"! I came to experience the joy of giving again when I fell in love with and then married my wife Mary. We grew together through the gift of giving to each other and then through our own children at Christmas. The point is: Someone must give before others can receive and that giving freely, is gift of God's grace.

I feel privileged because I came from a very loving and close Catholic family. My parents were always involved with our parish life. At parochial school, I went to Liturgy before class every day, I sang in the choir and learned the Liturgy in Latin to become an alter server. My father served as an usher and was also a member of the parish financial planning committee. My mom volunteered at the schools and was always active in the parish fund-raising activities. Their time talent and treasure gifts were a positive influence on my participation in this parish.

My wife, Mary, volunteers as a receptionist for the parish office. Shortly after she began volunteering, I called the office and she proudly answered the incoming call just as Father John had instructed: "Good morning. Immaculate Conception. This is Mary. How may I direct your call?" I couldn't help bursting out laughing which prompted her to ask in a curious voice: "What's so funny?" I said: "Really? Immaculate Conception! This is Mary?

I have served as a member of the Parish Financial Council and am currently the Chair for the Inreach Commission which is responsible for 6 separate ministries: Welcome/Orientation/Registration Ministry, Hospitality Ministry, Adult Singles Ministry, St. Martha's Meals Ministry, Visitation Ministry, and Lazarus Ministry. We are truly blessed with the volunteers that serve each of these ministries and thank them for their service to the parish community.

Father John mentioned last week in his introduction of *Hearts Speak to Hearts*, that during our Covid-19 experience a group of ministry chairs became concerned for the needs of the parishioners who were impacted by the stay-at-home order. Through the parish website, we sent a request asking for volunteers to deliver groceries and medicines to those who needed it. Within four days, we grew the team to 32 volunteers willing to risk their own health to help their fellow parishioners. A truly remarkable display of their commitment to our parish community!

The friends that Mary and I share within this community are a wonderful blessing and we have witnessed the gifts of others far beyond fellowship. We have gained inspiration watching other parishioners'

charity. Their service, prayers, and their endless support of optimism give us hope.

Also, in his introduction to the commitment weekend, Father John quoted St. Francis de Sales saying: *“Our words must be enkindled, not by exaggerated shouts and actions, but by an inner love; they must come from the heart rather than from the mouth. Say what you will, the heart speaks to the heart; the tongue speaks but to the ear.”*

In the book by St. Francis de Sales; “Introduction to the Devout Life,” he dedicated almost half of his writing to virtue. In the literal sense of the word, virtue is power. He said: *“It is especially the ability to accomplish the good joyfully, even in the face of obstacles to that good.”*

St. Francis also wrote: *“Charity is the only bond between Christians, the only virtue which unites us absolutely to God, and our neighbor. Charity never enters a heart without bringing with it all the other virtues, empowering them, and marshalling them as needed, just as a captain does his soldiers.”*

We all ache to return to the social aspects of our community but must wait until the threat of this pandemic is under control. Right now, every aspect of our faith-life has been impacted. Every ministry has been hit hard, there are no exceptions! This is a critical juncture in the history of Immaculate Conception parish and in the Catholic Church.

We could not gather and celebrate Liturgy for 13 weeks! 13 weeks... that’s over three months! 25% of our entire giving year! Even now we are mandated to limit the available seating and many of our parishioners do not attend due to the potential health threat. Because of these conditions, our offertory collections have been reduced significantly.

This is our Special Commitment Weekend at Immaculate Conception and our parish needs our continued financial support.

All registered households have received in the mail a package with a brochure, a commitment card, and a return envelope. For families already giving, **please** use this as an opportunity to review, confirm and **prayerfully consider increasing** your generous donations. Your e-giving will continue as authorized and no action is necessary. If you wish to increase your contribution or change the frequency, please take this opportunity to update your contribution.

The commitment card has a place to make a onetime gift in addition to your regular Sunday offertory. You can select the amount you wish to give and the frequency of your gift; weekly, monthly, or annually. There is also a place to indicate you wish to participate in our e-Giving through the electronic funds transfer program.

E-giving is an automatic way to give to the parish without writing checks. It saves you time and effort and helps the church stabilize its budget. An e-giving form was included with the Annual Stewardship Report: Time, Talent, Treasure all registered households received in the mail. If you are not currently using e-giving, I encourage everyone to consider this preferred method of contributing. I confess that we have not been e-givers and are using this weekend to begin doing so immediately. Just fill the commitment card out, place it in the envelope and return it. You can put it in the mail, drop it off at the Parish office, or place in the offertory basket.

In closing I want to mention a speech given by Mother Teresa of Calcutta (now St. Theresa) to the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC 1994, when she spoke about giving. She said and I quote: *“give until it hurts, with a smile.”* While I do not disagree with her, I would like to offer another way to look at giving. That is to: *“Give until it feels good.”*

Thank you for your generosity and for listening with you heart.

