Dear Carrollton Community,

As we continue to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, let us not forget the wisdom of the words from Proverbs 15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." In our current environment of anxiety and exacerbated emotions, too often our reaction when confronted by conflict is neither kind nor gentle. Texting, tweeting, and other tools of social media make it easy to fire off words that justify our actions or beliefs and challenge those who disagree. With this in mind our theme words for this year are Compassion and Dignity.

Compassion is not just an emotional reaction. **It is more than empathy.** Compassion is a thoughtful and deliberate desire to help those in need or distress. The definition of compassion is often confused with that of empathy. Empathy (as defined by researchers) is the visceral or emotional experience of another person’s feelings. It is, in a sense, an automatic mirroring of another’s emotion. **Empathy is impulsive. Compassion is deliberate.** Compassion often does involve an empathetic response. However, compassion is defined as the emotional response when perceiving suffering and involves an authentic desire to help. **Empathy is inert. Compassion is active.** Jesus embodies the very essence of compassion and relational care. His example challenges us to forsake our own desires and to act compassionately towards others, particularly those in need or distress. **Empathy is draining. Compassion is regenerative.**

Dignity is the right of a person to be valued and respected for their own sake. Our faith insists that the dignity of the human person is rooted in his or her creation in the image and likeness of God. All human beings, in as much as they are created in the image of God, have the dignity of a person. Human dignity calls us to respectfully and ethically treat even those with whom we may disagree. Some may say that to feel attacked and not fight back is not natural. But this is exactly what Jesus asks of us. In the Gospels, Matthew reinforces twice the teachings that **blessed are the peacemakers,** and to **turn the other cheek** when done harm.

The last few months have been filled with many challenges and difficulties, and it is unclear what our future will hold. What is clear is our ability to work together to ensure that our words and actions always show the love of God for each of us. This year, may we be blessed in renewing our commitment to kindness, compassion, and peacemaking.

Olen

"Claim only the present, for it holds God’s will. Let’s try not to be exacting with other people, but rather to pass over in silence those thousand little annoyances that tend to irritate us. For we know that no one is perfect in this life, and we must put up with the defects of others as they put up with ours.” - St, Rose Philippine Duchesne