

From the PA's Desk

The role of the Parish Pastoral and Finance Council:

Now that "summer vacation" has ended and school has begun, the life of the parish is really going to return to normal, and certain programs like faith formation, both of adults and children, will be picking up steam again. That means that there will be a lot of activity, meetings, functions and so on, which further means that we are going to need a lot of help as well. That brings me to a very important thing to think about – ministry in the parish.

The simple truth is, that whenever you have an organization, there will always be those who step up to help and those who do not. No matter what group you have, it always seems that the same people are the ones who are doing all the work. I would like to share my theory on why that is.

Parishes lately have been invited to evaluate themselves as either **maintenance** parishes or **mission** parishes. One reason we are being asked to evaluate this might be because we have not been good at bringing people into the church, or perhaps because the reality is that a church that is healthy grows, and a church that is not healthy dies. Would you say honestly that our parish is growing? I really don't know the answer to that question because I've only been here for two months, but you probably know the answer.

We all have been invited, mandated really through our baptism, to help grow the church, which statistically is growing smaller and smaller in the United States (like Western Europe) every year. Such a task seems strange to us since we have never felt the urgency to do it before now, or perhaps we don't know how to do it or where to begin.

The time has come for us to do things differently. We cannot just do things for the sake of doing it the same old way. We must invite people into the process from the start, recognizing their gifts and talents and calling them to use their skills for the betterment of the whole community.

I do understand that your time is valuable, so our approach to the mission of the parish must seek to be respectful of people's time. That means that the work we do must be worthy of their time. We should never meet just for the sake of having a meeting, and if people have volunteered their time, their time should not be wasted.

A lot of Parish Councils and Commissions in many parishes have what I would call a "reporting and receiving" format. In other words, people on the council or commission come together and listen to a monthly or bi-monthly **State of the Parish** address. They passively sit and listen to what is being done around the parish, and occasionally offer their feedback or suggestions. This "reporting" type of format is not necessarily being respectful of their time or what their talents, gifts, and interests are. Last week I met with the Parish Pastoral Council and I gave them a vision of what could be, if we (the Pastoral Council) function the way we're intended to operate. Rather than them having a "reporting and listening" role, they need to become **the Leadership Team** and **Brainstorming Group** of the parish. That is why they were nominated and why the Holy Spirit chose them for that role.

I've asked them to begin to study our current parish situation, and begin to come up with a vision for where we would like to be in five and ten years. We will then implement a strategic plan for our future. Once the Parish Pastoral Council begins to create a plan, they will ask the various Commissions (Evangelization, Worship, Faith Formation, Christian Service, and Stewardship) to begin the work of implementing their vision. Again, we need to move Parish Leadership (this includes the Finance Council) from a "reporting" role to one of "brainstorming" and "creative leadership." The Parish Pastoral Council is the brain of the parish, and the various Committees are the working arms of the Council.

I'll be asking the Finance Council to come up with a similar plan for reaching our yearly CSA goal. As of right now, we are a little over \$8000 short of our target, and rather than me beat people over the heads with that number week after week at Mass, we need a better plan that will run from now until the beginning of the holidays.

One reason people do not volunteer more is that when they do volunteer, the people who have been doing it for years are not open to new ideas; they are not welcoming. Simply saying, "this is the way we have always done it," is not in the end a

valid reason for still doing it. Sometimes things need to die for a while before new life takes over. Is that not the pattern that farmers know so well during the fallow times? If our "group" is struggling to find members, maybe we have to ask ourselves if what we are doing supports the mission of the parish. Do people know what we do and why we are doing it? Does our role need to change and does it still serve the same need? Do we need to adjust or change our focus? I know that the Food Pantry volunteers have begun to ask some of these same questions.

We have to ask ourselves, do we want more people to join so that we can keep doing the same things or do we want more people involved so that we can serve more people? Someone once said that the Church is the only organization that exists mainly for the sake of those who do not belong. **This is the difference between a church and a club.** A church or parish that functions as a maintenance parish is only a club of likeminded insiders, but that is not what mission parishes do. Mission parishes see their goal as reaching out and bringing new people in.

Another reason people do not get involved comes from themselves. Even if we invite people, even if we are welcoming and we are open to new ideas and new ways, even if we do everything right and have everything in place so that people will be engaged in the process because it is worthy of their time and effort, they still may not want to get involved. We can only do so much, but that does not mean that we should stop trying to reach out, to evaluate what we are doing, how we are doing it or even why we are doing it. Just because some people will not come to events or join our parish, does not mean that what we are doing does not have value. We are never going to get everyone, but just because we don't attract everyone does not mean we have failed. The biggest danger we have is the fostering of an attitude of fatigue, failure and irrelevancy. These attitudes are recipes for disaster. As we start off a "new year" of parish activity, let us move forward with a renewed sense of mission in what Jesus asked us to do: "Go out and make disciples."

Along with the Parish Pastoral Council and all the Commissions, I want to invite you into building up the kingdom in our little piece of Mid-Michigan. No matter if you are young or are older, no matter if you've been here forever or have just arrived, you are welcome in this parish and you are valued. If there is something you are called to do, that you have a real passion for, then we want to work with you to see how we can do it. It is a new year with new opportunities for mission ministry. The future of our parish does not depend ultimately on the bishop, priests, or pastoral leaders, but on you embracing the mission and making it your own. I am here to help you to have the parish you want and that will mean that all of you will need to assume roles within the community to help it grow. I invite all of you to pray about what you are doing at the parish and others to pray about what you are not doing and what maybe you should be doing.

Most people today (even non-Catholics) have fallen in love with the humility, compassion and inspiration that Pope Francis has brought to the face of the Church, and he recently said this: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security."