

Pastor's Pen: Parish as Family Part 1

Last week I wrote on how we have to have a fundamental shift in how we view what it means to be a parish. The fundamental shift would help us regain the sense on family and communion that many parishes enjoyed in centuries past. It really wasn't until the late part of the 20th century that a loathsome shift of parish from family to business happened. It has been particularly harmful in successfully raising the next generation of Catholics.

In the next four weeks, I want to focus on four groups that will benefit greatly from a shift back to seeing the parish as a family: youth, young families, the suffering, and the fallen away. There is an old saying that when the water rises all the ships go up. Even if we do not belong to one of these four groups, when we succeed at these things, we all succeed.

The Future in our Midst

At SS Peter and Paul we have 365 parishioners from newborn to 18 years old. 150 or so are in SSPP parish school, 32 in PSR, and 46 in confirmation. In St. Joseph we have 42 parishioners from newborn to 18. 24 are in PSR and 10 are in confirmation. Some of those not accounted for would be pre-school and seniors. Given that the October Count for 2019 was 635 for SSPP and 139 for St Joseph and that none of our masses have that many children in it, many are not getting what they need to spiritually grow as a Catholic. Regular participation in the sacraments is absolutely essential to a lively faith as we need that regular contact with grace to be what we are called to be.

However, sacraments and education are part of and not the totality of the solution. Understanding that their parish is more like a family than a school or business is important to retaining these young men and women as they enter into adulthood. While we try to give ample opportunities for our youth to grow in faith through service and social events, we can always do more. Service should be seen as helping the family as opposed to jumping through hoops to get a desired reward. In a healthy family, all members contribute to the good of the whole family. As a child and teen, I did chores to contribute to the well-being of the family and then contributed part of my money (a nominal amount) to help with the groceries. I started taking on some fiscal responsibilities for myself (buying my own clothes and entertainment) as I got into my late teens to help the family finances as a whole and to stave off any sense of entitlement.

Two things I would like to see develop with our youth are our getting into the game earlier and having some social family activities. In regard to the first, I easily acknowledge that sports, dance, and such end up reaching out to our children almost a decade before most parishes do. By the time we have groups for them in most parishes; your children have invested in sports for most of their lives. We then come in as latecomers as wanting to commandeer their time for us too. That must change. We are trying to do this. Secondly, coming up with family activities that are social in nature (not every gathering need be a fund raiser) helps to build up the bonds that make us a family.

I have asked Theresa Krebs, our Director of Youth Ministry/Development/Director of Religious Education to lay out some the things she would like to see as well. So....Here's Theresa...

Since Father Bill's arrival at SSPP nearly two years ago, we have had the goal of casting a wider and deeper net in terms of the faith enrichment and community-building activities and programs we offer to all demographics in our parish community, but especially to our youth. It's a big challenge. Not only are we late to the game in getting onto the children's schedules, we're late getting onto their parents' schedules, and even their grandparents'. It's slow-going to create a mindset where faith activities are a priority, when, as Father said, other choices have been the priority for generations of families.

So, each baby step in this new direction is a victory. It takes a lot of people with a common mindset and goal, working together, to make this happen. It's not easy. I'm grateful to all who have stepped up to help make new things happen in our parish that are both faith-enriching and community-building.

Because of people who've shared this priority, we've been able to build upon established programs and present some new offerings such as:

- Craft Sessions for "littles" and other attempts for K-4 aged students
- New programs for teens (our girls and boys groups). Many thanks to new leadership from Sally Gaines, Jennifer Spears, Mariah Smith, Bradley Nave, Steve Teson and Richard Woodson for stepping out of their comfort zone to take this on. Also, many thanks to the Daughters of Isabella and K of C Ladies Auxiliary for supporting these efforts by providing snacks.
- Love and Logic parenting program. Again, thanks to those who volunteered to help coordinate and to provide child care so parents could attend these classes.
- Financial Peace University
- Choice Wine

Our vision includes multi-generational activities as well as those geared for specific ages. One thing now in the works is encouraging our Confirmation students to assist with our First Communion retreat and reception. The Confirmation Team loved the idea of combining elements of the two sacraments into a parish celebration. In the same vein, we are working to build more older student involvement in Totus Tuus. This program, offered by the diocese, is rich, deep, well-planned and well-led. Also with this Confirmation class, we are planning purely social, fun gatherings, simply for community-building in our parish family.

There are an endless number of ideas that we could do to create stronger parish family bonds, and to be a light of our faith in the community: a monthly faith-based cooking class for elementary children led by older parishioners; a mentoring program for families baptizing their first child, matching them with seasoned parents; a monthly community meal aka "Our Father's Table;" exercise groups; prayer shawl ministry; mommy and me groups; faith studies using the resources on Formed.org; a community breakfast on the opening day of deer season; providing Thanksgiving meals to those in the county jail, etc. It just really depends on the willingness of each of us to make faith, family and parish a primary, and not secondary — or lower — priority.

Out of this we hope to see more families and young people at Mass, at Adoration and discerning vocations to religious life. We hope to see them actively engaged in parish life as a priority, and leading their friends and family to Christ. We hope to help them "be in the world but not of the world" so they can help others do the same. We want them to be on fire with their faith. We hope and pray they see their parish as family.