

Pastor's Pen: Maintaining our Heritage Part 1

In 1834, the first Mass was said in our area by Fr. Ferdinand Helias at a private home. Over the subsequent years the Catholic Church grew, parishes were formed. In 1856, the parish of SS Peter and Paul was founded to serve the needs of the local area and in 1956, the parish of St. Joseph was founded to serve the needs of central Howard County. At their foundings, a heritage was given to subsequent generations. Part of the heritage can be seen in physical plants of each parish. The greater part, though, of our heritage handed to us first by Jesus Christ through his apostles and their successors: the heritage that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We, the current holders of that heritage, have a responsibility to hand this heritage to succeeding generations. As the current holders, we hand on just not the principle of this investment, but the growth that comes from that principle as well. As the current holders of this heritage, we are to hand on a greater, not lesser, gift to our children and grandchildren. There is a word for this maintaining and expanding of the heritage given us: stewardship.

Taking Care of the Physical

The work and monies of our ancestors led to the buildings we have today. In these buildings we worship, gather to celebrate, be educated, and carry on the work of the Church. The buildings and grounds are the physical body we are given as an inheritance in which to do the work of the Church. As the current caretakers, we have a responsibility to see to it that that the buildings are maintained, improved as necessary, and are something we can pass on with pride to the next generations. Buildings, like all things, age. My dad used to say about our home, "Whatever isn't falling apart on its own volition is being actively destroyed."

It is easy to fall into a trap called 'deferred maintenance' whereby we kick needed repairs and replacements down the road until we simply run out of road. This is foolish in that the costs of repairs and replacements do not go down, generally, with time. Systems within our buildings have shelf lives. Because it belongs to a church does not mean they magically remain unscathed by time and use. Eventually things like HVAC systems, windows, roofs, parking lots, flooring, and such run their course and need to be replaced. Eventually brick buildings such as what we have in both parishes, need to be tuck-pointed and sealed. If we plan for growth (which any parish should), use of property and new buildings might become necessary. Furthermore, part of the payment of the priest is the rectory. This building too needs to be kept up.

When we get into the habit of deferred maintenance, the costs go up and capital campaigns become necessary once we have reached critical mass. More often than not, this requires concentrated fundraising and the taking out of loans. This means that in addition to spending more money that didn't have to be spent had we kept up on maintenance, we now are paying money in interest on top of a loan that would not have had to been paid had we simply kept up the maintenance in a timely manner. This is one of the reasons I hate carrying debt.

I have asked our Finance Committees and Administration Committees to come up with long range plans in the maintenance of our physical structures. I am asking them to figure out when we can expect to have to repair or replace elements of the structures. I want to set these on schedules to

where we are being proactive instead of deferring. I am asking the Finance Committees to set up what are called sinking funds. A sinking fund is monies that are set aside for a specific end. To give an example: If we know that in 5 years we will have to replace HVAC systems in a particular building, then let us set aside funds to that end in an interest bearing savings account so that when the time comes, we have the monies to do this. This is sound financial planning. This way the monies are earmarked for these specific things. By the end of this fiscal year (June 30) I wish to have these in place. I plan to have an envelope added to our envelopes that allow each of us to contribute to these sinking funds. If we take this long approach, we can avoid the necessities of capital campaigns and taking out loans.

Stewardship and our Heritage

As the current caretakers of our heritage which is meant to be passed down, we must be good stewards. You will notice that I keep using the 1st person plural (we, us, our). This is not a rhetorical device, but to make plain the truth that each of us have a stake in the maintenance of heritage. That stewardship comes in the form of the giving of our time, talent, and resources to maintain and expand the heritage we will hand on to our children and grandchildren.

Stewardship is an attitude. It comes from an understanding of thanksgiving. It staves off the deadly poison that is the sense of entitlement. Stewardship reminds us that we have been given a great gift that we are expected to use wisely. Stewardship is an understanding of the existent blessings God has given us. Stewardship is the giving of a portion of those gifts so as to benefits others. This is an act of thanksgiving to God.

When it comes to money, this is simple. The tithe, also known as thanksgiving offering, was the giving of the first fruits, not the scraps. That first 10% went to the ability of the work of the Lord to continue, to pay those whose lives were dedicated 24/7 to this work (the Levites and priests), and to be given to the poor and those in need. The thanksgiving offering is between God and the giver. It is not my responsibility to tell you how much you should give, only to say that you should give. To withhold the thanksgiving offering for one's own use is a profound lack of trust in God and an act of thanklessness than builds entitlement. My job is threefold: A) To tell you that giving is part of following God, B) to be sure that I am also giving, and C) to use wisely and to the ends for which the tithe was given. I am answerable to God for what I did with what is given.

To this latter end, I believe in full transparency and disclosure. With the exception of releasing information on staff's individual salaries (and I can assure every single one of us makes much less than what our counterparts in other faiths or in the public sector get paid), I believe you should know where your tithing goes. Be clear, though, if all of the members of a parish are tithing, we should not only have few problems with maintaining our buildings, but we should be able to invest deeply in the formation of our people and the ability to worship.

It is to these latter ends that I write next week. The biggest part of our heritage isn't measured in buildings, but in the people who use them.