

Pastor's Pen: Maintaining our Heritage Part 2

Last week, I wrote that we have a duty to pass on the heritage we have been given to the next generation. We are the current stewards of that heritage. That heritage goes back to the day Masses were first said in this area. It became the duty of those early settlers to found parishes where the work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the worship of God could take place. Last week, I wrote on how we have a duty through our tithing and careful upkeep of the physical plant of our parish to hand on in better condition the heritage handed to us. I remarked on how by using sound financial planning, particularly sinking funds, we could upkeep and expand our plants to meet the needs of those present and those who will come after us. I ended with observing that this part of our stewardship of the heritage, though absolutely necessary, is only part of our overall stewardship.

The Mission

The heart of our heritage (and hence our stewardship) comes not in dollars and cents or buildings, but in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our buildings facilitate this mission to be sure. However, the people who occupy those buildings for worship, education, and for social necessities are the primary reason the buildings exist. Our investment in them is of great importance as well. Empty well-maintained buildings are only useful for being sold.

Our investment, fiscal and otherwise, cannot be merely in buildings but in the services rendered in those buildings. As with our building, minimalism and deferred maintenance is not the goal. It is in the area of the mission that the other aspects of stewardship, time and talent, become truly central and important.

Investing in our Parishioners

Part of stewardship is looking to the various goods of our parishioners. Some of the obvious goods are education and religious formation. It is our job as a parish to make sure good, solid, and true materials are used in these ventures. We should make sure that staff, paid or volunteer, are afforded the means necessary to lead our youth beyond minimalism and mediocrity, but toward excellence! It also means that we sink time, energy, and resources into the formation of our adults. We know that we suffer collectively when our adults don't know their faith.

We must also look to other needs as well. Our parishioners will have times when needs stretch beyond spiritual and educational. There are times when those needs will be fiscal. There are times when those needs will be emotional support for the grieving. Using our buildings towards these ends as well as for worship, educational, and social is important. Sometimes this can be done by volunteers. Sometimes these have to be done by paid staff. There are times the pastor can do this. We should be aware that not all of this can be done by the pastor as his time and energy are being split by several entities.

We must look especially to our youth. Anything we do in regard to our youth is essentially an incubator for our future leaders and the next caretakers of our heritage. Not only should we afford

them a worthy heritage, but they need to be trained to be better stewards than we for with God's help, the mission of the Church will expand under their tutelage. Part of the stewardship we teach them is not merely giving them educational and devotional tools, but to help them make this heritage a priority. We do a grave disservice to them and to our ancestors who gave us care of this heritage, when we train our children to put their parish as a low priority. For our youth, the training of stewardship comes not first in the giving of resources, but in the giving of time and energy. To train them such is to ensure that they will dutifully hand on our heritage to the generation after them.

Investing in our Community

Parishes rise because the Catholic population rises. They rise because participation rises. They rise because the proclamation of the Gospel rises. Any parish must be a presence in their community. Any parish should be known as a friend of the sorrowing, the needy, and the poor. A Catholic parish should be known a positive and active force in the communities in which it finds itself. Why? Those communities are our mission fields. Its schools, colleges, and universities, its prisons and jails, its nursing homes, its institutions of help and aid, even its very streets are the places where we find those who need to hear not only the Gospel of Christ, but who need to know that in a very concrete way the Real Presence of Jesus Christ can be found in our Church and all it does.

Those who are searching should find a people aware that they are there and who want them with us. Our charity and our service should be the calling cards of the Gospel we profess. Once they have crossed the threshold of our various buildings, they should know that we seek union and call to conversion. Regardless of their age, past, socioeconomic condition, and any other factor, those in our community should know that we are here, who we are, and what we stand for.

We don't do these things to brag. We don't do them to shame others. We do these things because that is the mission of the Church.

With a Sense of Hope

In all of this investment of our time, energy, and resources we show our hope. So many entities act as if decline and diminished expectations are the best we can hope for. I strongly believe that as long as there are mission fields teeming with those searching, we plan for growth and expansion. To plan for the future means we diligently tend to the present. Here and now we invest for the present needs of our congregants, our youth, and our community. Here and now we make the necessary investments to the future so that the heritage we pass on to the next generation will continue to grow through the generations until Christ comes again. Let us do our part to be careful and wise stewards of the heritage passed on down through previous generations to us and pass it on as a birthright to our children and their children. In our mission, as in our buildings, we cannot afford 'deferred maintenance.' The call and mission are upon us now.