

Pastor's Pen: Why I Do What I Do as Pastor:

As we come to the end of the school year and look to planning during the summer and to the long term of our parishes, I want to say something about my motivation in how I run parishes. I hope this explains why we are moving in the directions we are moving in.

Not the Boss

When I first arrived in these parishes two year ago, my first Pastor's Pen gave the understanding that I saw my role as pastor to do what I was asked to do by the Diocese and Bishop, whose representative I am to the local parishes. I don't see my role as pastor as a position where I am running my own kingdom, but a position in which I am accountable to the diocese, the parish, and ultimately to God.

To that end, I am constantly asking myself whether we as a parish are aptly addressing the needs of the parish, the local community, the diocesan Church, and the Universal Church. Parishes are so much more than a place to go to Mass. The Catholic life is much more than going to Mass. We exist, as the Church reminds us repeatedly, to evangelize to the world in which we live.

This task involves several aspects that are guided by the diocese and the universal Church. First, I am to look at effectiveness in our programs and outreach. I do not get to decide what we will do and what we will ignore. If the Church tells us we have obligations as a parish to the formation of our parishioners (regardless of age), to making sure that access to the sacramental life of the Church is adequately given, that outreach to the larger community is done, that those most in need are helped, then is what we do. This is why in the two years I have been here, I personally got involved in religious curriculums on all levels, I established cares funds to help address aid to those in need, led adult education programs, and continued to build up diocesan endeavors such as Camp Maccabee. These are all responses to what the Church asks on my part. It is also why SS. Peter and Paul has been part of a self-study in this last year to determine to a great degree our responses to the above mentioned groups and the effectiveness of those responses.

Coach...Not Owner

If I were to try and equate how I view my role as pastor to a secular example, I would say that I model so much of what I do after effective coaches. A coach does not go out on the field of play during the game but he does monitor everything that happens on the field, makes constant adjustments based on what is going on, makes sure that his team is well prepared to engage, and seeks to not merely coach a team to survive or break even, but to win.

I know that strong coaches have to make unpopular decisions in order to push their team to play at the next level. I know that being momentarily hated by elements of the team is a necessary part of making great teams. It is like being a good parent. Sometimes you have to make decisions to the good of your children that they won't like.

To use the analogy, as a pastor, like a coach, I am aware I do not own the team. The team, in this case, belongs to God. The local bishop might well be compared to a General Manger. I and my staff might well be compared to the coach and his staff. My job (and the job of my staffs) is to raise championship teams. That takes work, dedication, discipline, and teaching the team to operate as a team. My motivation as a pastor is to raise the equivalent of championship teams in whatever parish I am assigned to pastor. I keep looking for the tools necessary to make this happen. Understand this and you'll see it repeatedly in my homilies.

It Takes Effort from All

A parish operates best when it operates as a team that wants to win. If it seems I harp some issues like Mass participation and attendance, financial support, outreach to community, it is because they are concrete measures of whether the parish wants a parish that weakens, merely survives, or thrives. As a good coach pushes for appropriate engagement, so must a good pastor. If we read the Gospels, Christ consistently pushed for engagement from his disciples. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, just before He ascends, He gives what we call the "Great Commission" to go and make disciples of the nations.

As I wrote earlier, this is why we are in the process of self-evaluation at SS. Peter and Paul. In talking with Bishop McKnight, both parishes will also be among a small group of parishes who will be the first wave of parishes to institute a new way of stewardship commonly called the "Wichita Model." It is a particularly effective model for addressing not just the financial aspects of stewardship, but the personal involvement of each parishioner in the mission of the Church. I will be attending classes to come to understand the model. I would imagine that we can expect in the next fiscal year that both parishes' finance committees, the SS. Peter and Paul School Advisory Board, and other committees will be trained in this model with an eye to the rollout being the beginning of fiscal year 2020-2021.

I have us engaged in this because I believe we have the people and ability to not just pull this off, but to hit this out of the park. I look at the people in our parishes and think that we have the makings of a championship team. I believe in your good will, your abilities, and your commitment to the Catholic faith. I know it is not going to be easy. I do ask you to look how we are doing in the last few years. Our attendance is up on both parishes. We are better at engaging our communities through the Cares Fund. I am seeing younger men and women stepping up in both parishes to help. There are many positive signs. I am also aware where further work needs to be done. Like a good coach, if I have a strong offense but not defense or special teams, then we bolster the other parts to help the whole win.

Bishop McKnight has adopted the phrase, "Better Together", to be how he wishes to see the diocese operate. It is true on all levels that when we are working to same common end and will stretch ourselves even when doing so takes increased discipline; we end up being the winning team we as a Church were created to be. This is why I want our youth engaged this summer with as many aspects of formation as possible.

Being that winning team is my modus operandi. Victory is measured in the salvation of souls. As we head into the summer, how might each of us work to that end?