

Pastor's Pen: Pitching in as Parishioners

What makes a parish a parish is more than it is a place where we receive stuff; whether that stuff be the sacraments or education. The Church is a family. It is supposed to be. The use of familial terms to describe the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, between us and God, and between us as members of the Body of Christ is not some sappy hallmark sentiment, rather it is the reality of the consequences of God's interaction in our lives. Sacramental grace is to the Body of Christ what blood is to us. The spiritual DNA of Jesus Christ runs through our spiritual lives like our parents' DNA runs through our every cell. What Christ gives us through His life in our lives in the sacraments binds us together,

This must have practical consequences in the dynamic of how we live together as a parish. Like a loving family, we look to the good of each other. We support one another. We give something of ourselves to support the good of the entire family.

Finally, it gives us a chance to see our parish in a different light. It gives a chance to see that the upkeep of our spiritual home is pretty much the same as the upkeep of our family homes. Most of us clean our own homes. We might well ask our kids to pitch in with the upkeep. I can remember having chores for which I did not receive an allowance when I was kid. It was my part in helping the family as a whole. Why are we asking our families with school aged kids? Simple. It is a way of parents working with their kids to serve the parish. It is a powerful teaching moment. It gives a powerful example of service by which the child can model their own connection to the parish.

Helping With What Needs to Be Done

For a parish to work, there are four pillars that need to be holding us up as a family: prayer, service, formation, and hospitality. These are the pillars of stewardship. For the next year, our parishes will be focusing on these things. We have been doing some of these things, maybe not calling them these things, but we have a solid base to build from.

Prayer is the foundation of all things. It can come in the form of sacramental prayer and worship such as Mass. It can be supplemented by our coming together to pray as we pray the rosary and, as at SS Peter and Paul, 1st Friday Eucharistic Adoration. It also comes in praying together as families. It also comes in forming small prayer groups to pray for each other and keep each other on the right path. The more we pray, the stronger we become. The more people that join us in prayer, the stronger we become. We will be looking to build on what we do, join forces as parishes to strengthen each other (as we did for Holy Week this year), and expand upon what we do. Praying together as a family, whether it be in our homes in parishes, is akin to sitting down for dinner as a family; it nourishes the whole person.

Formation is about learning about who we are as members of the family that is the Body of Christ. Catholicism is a reasoned faith. We believe in an integrated whole. The family is the first and greatest place for that learning to happen. Whatever a parish offers in its various programs and educational apparatus, will pale in comparison to what is taught in the home. If the parents are on board with the faith, so will their children. If the parents are not, especially the dads, then no matter how strong our teaching is in our classes, they will overwhelmingly fail. Part of what needs to happen is our creating a better partnership of home and educational opportunity to strengthen this whole-person formation. Both parishes have developed some very promising venues in the last couple months to reach out to the parents. St. Joseph has started up a wonderfully successful Bible Study based in a good, solid, and Catholic program. SS. Peter and Paul has started a men's group also started on a good, solid, and Catholic program. There are other examples. To stretch out the opportunities is a goal for the coming year.

Service is essential to a functioning family. The more everyone pitches in, the stronger we become. If service is lived well in the home, it will be well extended beyond the home. Loving service is a powerful sign of gratitude for what is given day in and day out as a consequence of belonging to a tight family. A heart well-trained in service hears God's call and bravely acts upon it. Sometimes a parish can treat service as cheap labor. Then again, I accused my parents of that when I would get my chores list. It is part of being in the family.

Finally, hospitality opens up the doors of our families to those orphaned by life or who are seeking a family to be with. It grows parishes. Families expand either by birth, adoption, or marriage. Families extend. The more welcoming a family is, the more it grows. My home was the house my brothers' and sisters' friends came to hang out at. It wasn't because they could do anything they wanted. No, it was because there was structure at our home. Kids were able to find a hot meal on our table that they might not find at home. That made them family. So much so that when my grandmother was dying, my siblings' friends helped my siblings and my mom to keep 24 hour vigil during the last week of Grandma's life. When we open our family to others and give them what they cannot get elsewhere, it builds all of us up. When our parish becomes a fully welcoming and hospitable place, it grows the parish and gives it exactly the reputation it needs and is appropriate to Christ and His Church.

So I ask each parishioner to ask themselves, how can I and my family expand in these areas and help build up our parish?