

Pastor's Pen:

Creating A Stronger Stewardship Parish: Service

The fourth pillar of stewardship is service. In response to one the many times the apostles were bickering about who was the greatest among themselves, Jesus said of Himself, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for the many." On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus washes the feet of His disciples and instructs them to do for each other what He had done for them.

Service is central to who we are as Catholics. It is in our DNA. Christ said about Himself that He came to serve and that as He did so should we. Why? Service is love put into action. The love Christ calls us to live, a share in the love that binds the Trinity as One God, is supposed to bind us together in mutual service.

Strong families serve one another within their homes. Growing up, the children in my family were expected to contribute to the household chores on a daily basis. There were gardens to be kept, floors to be swept and mopped, food to be cooked, laundry to be done, and many more. We weren't given an allowance as kids for such things because it was seen as just being a part of the household. Despite the fact we were poor, our house was always clean, our yards always kept, and our belongings well taken care of.

A strong parish operates like a good family. The more we willingly give of ourselves, the stronger we become and the more effective we are at our mission. We know parishes can also be dysfunctional families where the members want to be served without serving or giving only a minimum of service. These are parishes that struggle, stagnate, and eventually fall apart. How well a parish serves tells me how healthy a parish is.

Give a little bit

Many hands make light work. Many hands also gives us the ability to serve more people. It is the norm that 90% of the work done in a parish is done by 10% of the parishioners. That percentage of people helping goes up substantially in smaller parishes. What doesn't get done by service has to get done by paying people to do the work. That increases the budget which necessitates greater calls to financial giving. If everyone were able to contribute time, we would be able to do much more without increasing budget.

As a kid, being part of family meant I had to give part of my time for the good of the family. We did not have the means to hire a staff to cook, clean, and do yardwork. Those were done by of age members of the family. Being part of a parish means the same thing. For example, instead of

having a housekeeper, I take care of the entire rectory myself. Anyone who has been in the rectory knows I keep it clean. It is part of the way I contribute to the parishes on top of tithing and the hours of ministry I do in the parishes.

I am not asking others to do what I myself don't do.

There are multiple ways we contribute to the well-being of the parishes and school. Some serve by giving their time on one of the committees in the parish. Some are faithful in showing up for fundraisers and socials. Some give their time through teaching and or coordinating in CCD, confirmation, or by leading youth groups. Some give their time by cleaning our church. Some give of their time in outreach (Legion of Mary, Daughters of Isabella, and Knights of Columbus) and charity. Some give of their time in ministries during Mass. Some give their time taking Communion to our sick and shut-ins. Some give of their time by prayer for the parish. I am deeply grateful to those who give of their time.

In any of these areas, we have not exhausted what can be done. In our plans for our parishes, we hope to do more with youth, outreach, college students (especially in Fayette), and evangelization. We hope to do more for young parents and change how we do marriage and baptismal preparation.

Givers and Takers

For a family to function well, the children have to learn to be givers and not merely takers. An infant cannot do chores. A toddler cannot. However, as a child grows, there are more responsibilities they can take on for the good of the family. A well balanced adolescent is able to do chores without expectation of compensation; they do it because they belong to the family.

In stressing that each parishioner becomes serious about giving some of their time and energy, all we are asking is that everyone learns to be a giver. There will always be some who are very comfortable with being only takers or giving as little as humanly possible. These become parasitic entities who take advantage of the goodness of others. To be honest, sometimes their giving comes in the form of endless complaints used to justify their inaction. I am much more interested in conversion than expulsion. That said having people who deliberately take advantage of the goodness and generosity of our parishes must be dealt with.

The idea of stewardship in any of the four pillars I have written about in the past month, is that each member of our parish past the age of reason (1st Communion age) find ways through prayer, formation, hospitality, and service find ways to help our parishes become stronger. Most of us can claim we are busy or even too busy.

In the end, being a giver or taker matters. It figures into our eternal judgement. It is the difference between being with the sheep or the goats. As Jesus described Himself as having come to serve and not be served, can we as His Body expect anything less of ourselves?