

It appears that when you are young the days go by so quickly and the years seem to take forever to get through; then when you are older the opposite is true. The days drag on while the years fly by. For me that is very true in that this past year at St. Benedict's has come and gone. Because of that I would like to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you.

We, as a community, have been reading from and hearing proclaimed the stories from the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter Season. They tell us of the beginnings of the early church, and so on this Pentecost day I propose an addendum to the Scripture, not in that we will add to the revelation of Jesus the Christ, but that we will tell the story of the building up of the local church here in our little corner of the world.

As you may know vision and mission statements are important not only in churches but in many other organizations as well. I have been trying to listen and discern all the things that have been said over the course of the year. While I do not believe I am qualified and cannot truly speak for all, I believe the true place to start is with what I found coming here.

Community-Service-Prayer-Blessing

Community

Over the last several weekends we have been asking you to fill out a census form to update our records. This is not going to be used to ask you for money, nor will it be just another thing started that sort of fizzles out and dies. The parish council and others that I talked to, felt that it would be a good starting point in order that we can see who we are. Not merely over the course of the last year, but for several years change has occurred in the community and before we can move forward we have to look at the here and now.

With the information gathered from the forms and the follow-up calls, we hope that we could invite people to share of themselves in building up the community. I do not want you to feel that because you have a particular occupation, or own a business, that you will be hit upon incessantly for time and resources, but I would like to utilize your wisdom so that when something is needed or the inevitable repair arises we will assess the situation and not merely be open to being taken advantage of in this for-profit minded world.

Now that you know what might be expected of you I hope that you will continue to see the Parish of St. Benedict as an integral part of your life. If we truly live up to the ideals of community, we will be able and open to turn to those around us and see how they are doing week after week. We will know when they face an upcoming doctor's exam and reassure them, we will know if their spouse is away on business and invite them for coffee or dinner. We will look around when we gather and see a new face coming to worship with us and we will go over there and welcome them, and find out who they are and where they are from. Yes, there is no doubt that this is already done, but could you imagine if those that did this doubled, tripled or grew one hundredfold. So many more people would feel welcome and realize that they are one with us in our journey. There is no doubt that at the present moment we are limited with space issues that may make this

difficult, but it is not impossible if we are creative in using the gifts and resources we have to best gather, and reach out to those around us.

Service

The true call of the church is service and that is our ministry. I would hope that we never lose sight of that. Unfortunately, I know that the organizational matters of the church can sometimes squeeze out the pastoral aspect of the church. Hopefully, we will not get drawn into that scenario and to help I would propose that first and foremost that the parish staff and I are your servant. You should be able to go to anyone and be listened to, respected and given a response that shows your concern has been addressed. Obviously, not everything that is asked for is possible, but respecting and listening to each other is always possible. I would ask that we work towards reconciliation from situations that may have occurred and be willing to once again try to work with one another. I will promise you that if you tell me that you were not given the respect you deserve I will do all I can to rectify the situation, so that it hopefully will never happen again. Then we can seek out the true collaboration between all of us, since all of us, not just a few are instrumental in building up the Body of Christ.

In the spirit of service, not only will you be recipients, but you will also be asked to be of service to others as well. Whenever you have been asked to help out with St. Vincent de Paul, Andre House, the Angel Tree, the recent Sanctity of Life baby shower and so many other opportunities you have responded most generously. There is an innate desire in all of us to want to reach out to serve others. The best exercise of the heart is to reach down to our brothers and sisters and help them up. With this in mind, I would hope that we continue these wonderful outreach ministries, but also add some more as well so there will be something that excites every member of the family.

It would be wonderful to have a sister parish here in the area. I cannot say that this is happening here, but I know that for decades this has been a practice in the Archdiocese of Chicago. A parish that has financial resources would find a parish that could benefit from the generosity of the community. However, to make this a two-way relationship the oftentimes poorer parish gives of its time and personal gifts to the other parish. How many times African-American choirs from the inner city raised the roof during a liturgical celebration in suburbia. At parish festivals, a group from the parish would come and prepare ethnic cuisine to be sold at the food booth. This not only provided food that is better than a restaurant, but more importantly it provides a means of opening up a relationship not only on a parish level but on an individual level as well.

We can continue to collect gifts for people, but instead of someone from their parish picking them up we can pack up our cars and take the gifts to them. In this way we can not only give, but we can see the amazement on the faces of the ones we touch and we can feel the love that they extend. It would not end there in that they can then provide us with something they can give. They can send a mariachi band to play at our celebration to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, or they may come and have a booth at the fest in which they share their cuisine or handicrafts. The possibilities are endless, and will only be limited by our desires. Hopefully, then after starting locally we can reach out to parishes

or groups both nationally and internationally as well. We can change the world for that is our commission as followers of Christ on this Pentecost Sunday and everyday.

Prayer

There is no doubt that we are a spirit-filled community. It is evident when we gather to celebrate the Day of the Lord. As such we shouldn't become complacent and contented about where we are at, as a worshipping community. We are nourished and fed at liturgy and it is the Sacrament that fills us to carry out not only our daily rituals of work and play, but more importantly it is the sacrament that allows us and challenges us to fill the world with the Good News of Jesus. Because of this we are all servants of liturgy. It should be a place of reverence and joy, laughter and solemnity, shout-filled praise and life-filled silence. Thus, we need to remember that no one person or thing should shine more boldly than Christ present in Word, Sacrament and all of us gathered. All of our gifts and charisms should be of service to our communal action. With this in mind there will be some opportunities beginning to be a part of a liturgy committee that will have input on upcoming celebrations, and look back over what we have done to make each new opportunity an even better moment of praise to our God.

On this note, we have this place to worship in. Ideal is probably not the word some would use to describe it as a church, but as a place that houses us, the true and living church it serves a purpose. Some of your voices have been heard in the recent study and it seems that many of you stated you wanted us to work towards a permanent sanctuary. We will move forward in this, but realize that it will take some time get there. I ask you not to be disheartened because I do not want us to be like so much of the secular world and just move forward and accumulate debt. I would hope that we can work to make this building, whatever we may call it, ours. After all, gathered here we are sheltered from the elements and seated in comfortable chairs. All of this is blessing compared to what other communities within a short distance of here, call their home.

This is blessing because as we gather we find a sense of community, a place where the service as disciples of Christ is stirred up in us, a place where we come to worship, and a place where we move forth from and become blessing to the world. There are simple things that we can do to serve the people who want something more from this space in the time we are here, and this is where I turn to you and will ask for your help in community days in which we gather and then work to make this space more serving of its purpose to be a place to worship our God.

Blessing

Filled by the presence of our God in Word and Sacrament we are then called to be blessing to others. For this we need to look at the community as if we no longer existed. If tomorrow the Parish of St. Benedict no longer was here, what would others say about us? How would we have made a difference? How would we have been blessing to others? These are not merely simple questions that call for one word answers, but are questions to plumb the depths of our being. We cannot truly serve our God if we look only at ourselves, but look at that which we share with every other person in this world, the Spirit of our living God.

There are no easy answers and anything I say is not law, but a stepping off point to bring about discussion, brainstorming, transformation and then action. All the words that I have thrown at you today can be summed up in the simple call to work together. I will do whatever I can to serve you. We are already working to give you a fuller history of our story. Yes, the dates and persons, but the financial reality as well. You will know how we came to be in debt. Hopefully, by being more transparent with the workings of the parish you will know that you are called to take ownership, share of yourself, and be an important part of our tomorrow.

In the next few months you will be presented more information than maybe you even want, but I would be remiss in not giving you the opportunity to question, to voice concern and maybe to become impassioned with the vision of Jesus as shown in our actions and words.

As I said I am not using this time to ask for money and I will not go back on my word, but I will tell you some ministries continue to grow as well as our needs. We will do what we can to enhance present ministries, create new ones that organically come from the community and we will join with other groups in which we will continue building bridges with all of our sisters and brothers. We will respect the traditions of our faith and celebrate them, and allow those newer ways to become a part of our traditions. We will risk because ultimately I truly believe God will provide when we use ourselves and our resources to welcome and care for others. We will continue to write our stories to be included in the continuing story of salvation of how this community continues to build up the Way of Christ in our world.

In Christ's Peace,
Fr. Gary