

Pastoral Planning Begins With Parish Mission Statement

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As we continue to discuss the formation and development of Parish Pastoral Councils, we are reminded that they will have a key role in the Parish Pastoral Planning process. This process will begin with a series of April workshops on developing or revising a Parish Mission Statement in light of the Diocesan Mission Statement.

Every organization or community has a purpose for its existence; the parish mission statement will give a succinct focus, direction and motivation to a parish community. In general, the parish – like the Church itself – has an evangelizing mission that finds expression in every aspect of pastoral care, and in the cultivation of an awareness of the vocational dimension of life as a response to the call of God.

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI noted, “The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God..., celebrating the sacraments..., and exercising the ministry of charity. These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.”

The Parish Mission Statement will provide a focus for the Parish Self-Study and the development of a pastoral plan by the pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council that will lead to the possibilities of spiritual renewal and a more effective evangelizing mission. The Pastoral Council will help the pastor in drawing attention to the universal call to holiness, the Eucharist as source and summit of parish life and its importance together with prayer in pastoral planning by the way it conducts its meetings.

Pope John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* noted: “It is necessary therefore to rediscover the full practical significance of Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, dedicated to the ‘universal call to holiness.’ The Council Fathers laid such stress on this point, not just to embellish ecclesiology with a kind of spiritual veneer, but to make the call to holiness an intrinsic and essential aspect of their teaching on the Church...This as it were objective gift of holiness is offered to all

the baptized. But the gift in turn becomes a task, which must shape the whole of Christian life: 'This is the will of God, your sanctification' (1 Th 4:3). It is a duty which concerns not only certain Christians: 'All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.' "

The late pontiff continued: "At first glance, it might seem almost impractical to recall this elementary truth as the foundation of the pastoral planning in which we are involved at the start of the new millennium. Can holiness ever be 'planned'? What might the word 'holiness' mean in the context of a pastoral plan?"

"In fact, to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: 'Do you wish to receive Baptism?' means at the same time to ask them: 'Do you wish to become holy?' It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48)."

In his last encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the late pope also connected pastoral planning with the Eucharist: "Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church's mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience and love of the Father. Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency?"

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II also identified seven pastoral priorities. These need to be studied by each Parish Pastoral Council. He emphasized the importance of prayer in pastoral planning in these words:

"If in the planning that awaits us we commit ourselves more confidently to a pastoral activity that gives personal and communal prayer its proper place, we shall be observing an essential principle of the Christian view of life: the primacy of grace. There is a temptation which perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral

work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan. God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that 'without Christ we can do nothing' (cf. *Jn 15:5*)."

John Paul II reminded Catholics that pastoral planning that is not rooted in the Eucharist and in prayer, in a response to the call to holiness, will lead to frustration and failure. In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, he cautioned: "It is prayer which roots us in this truth. It constantly reminds us of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. When this principle is not respected, is it any wonder that pastoral plans come to nothing and leave us with a disheartening sense of frustration?"

Both the parish mission statement and parish pastoral planning must begin from the perspective of the Diocese, the evangelizing mission of the Church, and the spirituality of communion, and catholicity. The Diocesan Mission Statement and the passage from *Acts 2:42-47* that inspired it can help a parish develop a mission statement and guide parish pastoral planning

Study is important in developing a Parish Mission Statement. Study can lead to prayer and prayer can lead to insights that can be expressed in Church structures, laws and activities. In the Vatican II document *Christus Dominus*, we read: "A diocese is a portion of the people of God which is entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbyterate. Thus by adhering to its pastor and gathered together by him through the Gospel and the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, it constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative."

Study of this statement has led to prayer. It inspired an opening prayer in one of the Masses for the local or diocesan Church: "God our Father, in all the churches scattered throughout the world you show forth the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Through the gospel and Eucharist bring your people together in the Holy Spirit and guide us in your love. Make us a sign of your love for all people and help us to show forth the living presence of Christ in the world, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever."

Another example that shows how prayer and study can lead to an examination of structures, laws and activities is found in the new *Code of Canon Law*, where Canon 369 repeats the definition of a diocese given in the Vatican II document *Christus Dominus*, quoted earlier. These three examples are meant to demonstrate how prayer can lead to study and how study can lead to prayer and practical application to the structures and life of the parish.

If these gifts, qualities, or marks of the Church are to be present and operative in every diocese, they must also in some fashion be present and operative in every parish of the diocese. How are they present and operative in their parish is an important question for every Parish Pastoral Council to consider. How are these gifts also responsibilities and tasks for every parish?

In a homily he preached as Archbishop of Munich, then Cardinal Ratzinger (now our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI) reflected on the prayer after communion for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul: "Lord, renew the life of your Church with the power of this sacrament. May the breaking of the bread and the teaching of the apostles keep us united in your love. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord."

This prayer was inspired by *Acts 2:42-47* and is another example of how the praying Church expresses its faith and teaches what it believes. Prayerful study and reflection of the Scripture leads to prayer, and prayer leads to further insights and action. In his homily, then Cardinal Ratzinger reflected on this prayer: "It asks that the Church today, and ever anew, may be again the way she was then in her beginning. This corresponds to the original intention of this passage, which was to draw an ideal picture of the Church for all time and to say at the same time that the Church springs ever anew from prayer, that she needs ever anew to be asked for in prayer from the Lord."

In his homily, then Archbishop Ratzinger gave an example of how we are to proceed when he shared his insights and gave us a model of prayerful reflection on the scripture that can generate insights that lead to action: "Now, what is being said here about the Church? It says: 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers' (*Acts 2:42*). We can see in this sketch of the primitive Christian service of worship, which starts with the teaching of the apostles, that is with the proclamation and hearing of the faith of the Church, of

the word of God that is alive in her and that thus becomes the basis for liturgical and living fellowship: it reaches a climax in the Eucharistic encounter with the Lord, who gives himself to us as bread, and resounds in songs of praise.”

People who don't understand this, or don't have time for prayer should not serve on Parish Pastoral Councils, nor should they get involved in pastoral planning. Pope John Paul II repeatedly cautioned that without prayer, the only thing to be expected is frustration and failure.

Our Diocesan Mission Statement can inspire a sense of a common diocesan mission and a common diocesan spirituality that will provide unity, focus and direction for spiritual renewal for all parishes and institutions of the Diocese

In an *Ad Limina* address to bishops from the provinces of Detroit and Cincinnati in May of 2004, Pope John Paul II encouraged developing a diocesan spirituality: “A spirituality of communion will naturally bear fruit in the development of a diocesan spirituality grounded in the particular gifts and charisms bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of each local Church. Every priest should find ‘precisely in his belonging to and dedication to the particular Church a wealth of meaning, criteria for discernment and action which shape both his pastoral mission and his spiritual life’ (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 31). At the same time, an authentic ‘diocesan spirit’ will also inspire and motivate the whole Christian community to a greater sense of responsibility for the fruitful carrying out of the Church’s mission through its rich network of communities, institutions and apostolates (*cf. Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10).”

Pastoral planning must begin from the perspective of mission and communion, not from the perspective of the maintenance of present structures, facilities or activities. With an understanding of mission, communion and “the development of an authentic diocesan spirit,” parishes will be able to deepen the awareness of their evangelizing mission and see themselves more clearly as members of the diocesan Church.

Hopefully, they will become more eager to cooperate and collaborate with other Catholic parishes, sharing their gifts and resources. In doing so, they will give practical expression to an important aspect of Catholicity, by acting for the purpose of the common diocesan mission in the spirit of the *Acts of the Apostles*.

