

I would be stunned if any of you have ever heard of Bob Quam. There's no rhyme as to why your paths would ever cross. There's no reason that your lives should intersect. Bob Quam, for all you know, is a refrigerator repairman in Syracuse, or a bank executive in Kansas City, or a doctor in Tucson, or a retiree somewhere in Florida. And because you've never met Bob or heard of him, you might think that his life has never impacted your life. However, you'd be wrong.

Bob Quam was the director of the Christian Bible Camp--Christikon--in the Absaroka-Beartooth mountains of southern Montana that I worked at for three summers. His impact on you is unimaginable, because his impact on me was nothing short of profound. Indeed, I suspect that I would not be a priest were it not for Bob Quam. My initial summer at Christikon was deeply moving, as well as a major influence in considering seminary and, thus, ordained ministry. Though, this is not saying much when you know Bob. Of the staff that worked with him over his 36 years at Christikon, there are easily a few dozen who were ordained to the ministry thanks, in no small measure, to Bob.

Bob also taught so much of what I draw upon even to this day in engaging in ministry. "Life Together" is the title of a work by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What that looked like and meant came to life in the summer community of staff members at Christikon. What liturgy looks like and how it is enacted was developed in morning prayer and evening services as much at camp as in a seminary liturgics class. That life is grace and faith is a gift were tenets that continually washed over you like the flow of the Boulder River over the ageless rocks in its bed. "Perceiving the need" of the "other" was not just a dinner ploy to develop community, but it was a spiritual muscle to develop for the bettering of oneself and the larger world. For me, the Easter Vigil started in the wee hours of the morning with a primal fire, an Exodus recreation, a baptismal remembrance in the creek that ran through camp, and with the first Eucharist of "Easter" as the sun peaked over the snow capped mountain at the southeast end of camp. And on and on I could go with examples of how community is shaped, the import of Word and Sacrament, creating quiet time to enter more fully into who we are and are to be, and the miracle of being and the gift of creation.

Indeed, Bob influenced so much of how I see the Christian tradition and live it in the community at St. Francis. It's like we all carry around in us the ghosts of those who have shaped our thinking, formed our character, and influenced our worldview. There are a lot of ghosts shuffling around in each of us. And we can't escape the ghosts. Nor should we try when the wisdom and the insight are solid bedrock. There are other ghosts that we should happily exorcise. Holding onto those that display more that is true and good is salutary for us and an honor to them.

Thus, I honor Bob.

Sadly, he died this past Monday. His death was much too premature. Former staff around the country and the world have offered similar reflections on the impact that Bob had on their life and their ministry. When I think about all of those individuals serving in various parishes and ministry endeavors, I am overwhelmed by the far reaching impact that Bob had not only on the lives of those with whom he worked but, by extension, all those who never knew him, never heard his name, and would surely offer condolences for his loss but would not feel a connection.

Think of the thousands of baptisms, the myriad weddings, innumerable funerals, and all the work that is done within a parish to enrich, inspire, and enhance the lives of people. All those whom Bob influenced reaching and influencing scores more. Without their knowing it, he changed their lives as well. What stuns me is the incredible reach of a simple and complex man born on the highline of Montana, educated at a small liberal arts college in Minnesota, inconspicuously guiding young people for 36 years in the mountains of Montana. “How could this change the world?” you might think. And then, in moments like this, you discover how it does.