

RECTOR'S LETTER

April 11, 2021
A Parish Paradigm

Dear Friends in Christ:

Anh chị em thân mến trong Chúa Kitô:
Estimados Amigos y Amigas en Cristo:

Last Sunday, we unveiled our new parish bulletin design, which is structured upon a paradigm for the parish that I first publicly mentioned in my first Facebook Live “Night with the Rector” event last fall. As I promised in this space last week, I want to use this week’s space to present and explain this paradigm as a model not only for our bulletin but for parish life at the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart.

In some parishes, like in many organizations, it is *en vogue* to formulate mission statements. I have never been a fan of this for parishes as we should not need to invent a mission statement—we have already been given one by Jesus. Before he ascended into heaven, he commissioned his disciples (us!) saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always until the close of the age.” (Mt 28:19-20)

The Church (and a parish which is a particular community within it) is not an institution with members, but it is the Body of the Christ—a dynamic reality. Nonetheless, too often we can fall into institutional thinking in parishes that results in a phenomenon like a big circus tent: a circus tent under which all kinds of things happen in different spots without a unified theme or mission or even common interest.

Instead, we want to see our parish as a place where we live out the commission given to us as disciples of Jesus. Therefore, in this paradigm, all activity is captured in terms of active verbs that underlie all that we do. I have visually modeled the concept on that of the Jerusalem Cross, which is featured so prominently throughout the Co-Cathedral. This paradigm can be summarized as **WORSHIP, BELONG, GROW, GIVE, GO** (see image on adjacent page).

WORSHIP is the beginning and end of all things for a Catholic. It is the source and summit of Catholic life, including that of a parish. We receive from God, we make offering to God, and so on, with our joint participation with Christ in the ultimate offer-

ing to God the Father in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. For many, this is all that there is to Catholic life—go to Mass—but it is merely the beginning.

By the grace of baptism, we **BELONG** to the Body of Christ, the Church. We are adopted sons and daughters of God who are built up as a family through the Body and Blood of Christ. This is true in a mystical sense and also in a very human sense as we belong to the Church and to our parish family.

Incorporated into the Body of Christ by the grace of baptism and the sacraments, we are called to **GROW** in virtue, prayer, and knowledge. God continues to sow the seed and asks us to nurture what has been sown so that we can grow and bear fruit.

The more we grow, the more we realize how much we have received from God and how in turn we are called to **GIVE**. We are called to give of ourselves in true stewardship of time, talent, and treasure.

Finally, the authentic Catholic life leads us not to membership and disjointed action, but to discipleship and to mission. The act of divine worship ends with the dismissal to **GO** forth. We are sent, as another dismissal formulary says, to go and glorify the Lord with our lives and to make disciples of others. Of course, all of this leads us back to **WORSHIP**.

Any aspect of parish life might fit under any one or several of these dynamics. If we cannot relate something happening in the parish to a part of this paradigm, there is something wrong—it is not consistent with our mission. We still have traditional categories of parish life: Faith Formation, Outreach, Music, etc., but these are not the parish itself—they serve the mission. As you can see, this paradigm isn’t always going to be categorically clear, but it is meant to be a dynamic, organic model that is rooted in **ACTION**—human action, yes, but most especially divine action by the living God who has first loved us.

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, we place all our trust in You. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Very Reverend Jeffrey L. Bame

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Rector & Parish Administrator

