

Thoughts Along the Way

How the Parish Works: Part 1

Parishes are microcosms of the universal Church, and as such are complex entities. I am often asked questions, as pastor, about how a particular aspect of the parish works, or how the relationship flows between communities such as our which share a pastor and some staff between them. This is the first in a series to offer some explanation of how our Parish of Holy Disciples and Our Lady of Good Counsel works. First things first: the parish, its pastor, and deacon.

What is Holy Disciples Parish, and how does it relate to Our Lady of Good Counsel? A *parochia* is an old Latin designation for a set of dwellings next to each other, hence a neighborhood of Christians. Holy Disciples Parish includes the people of the parochial community of Holy Disciples, which also includes the mission of Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Following our recent census update, Holy Disciples' community presently has 1000 households, while Our Lady of Good Counsel has 135 households. Parishes are financially self-sustaining with a pastor; missions are not, usually because of size. Parishes are groupings within a diocese.

What is a diocese? An archdiocese? A *dioecesis* was a Roman legal term for territorial jurisdiction. The early Church applied the Roman term to designate a group of Christians under the care or jurisdiction of a bishop. Holy Disciples Parish (including Our Lady of Good Counsel) is part of the Archdiocese of Seattle, under the care of Archbishop J. Peter Sartain since late 2010.

An **archdiocese** is an honorary designation of a diocese's having a regional importance, such as serving as an historic or geographic center. Seattle serves as such a center for the region of Washington State. The Church's territorial organization often parallels that of a country, largely for practicality.

Where do bishops come from? An *episkopos* was the ancient Greek word for "overseer" or "elder" and *biscop* ("bishop") was the Old English pronunciation of that Greek word. Early Christians applied the Greek *episkopos* to describe the successors of the Apostles, who continue to oversee care for a local Church in an "area" or diocese. An archbishop is the overseer of an archdiocese.

Bishops are successors of the Apostles, and share in the Apostolic Ministry. To Peter and the Apostles, Christ gave the commission to make disciples of all nations, to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 16:18-19; 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:47; Jn 20:22-23).

Apostles spread the Gospel, gathered believers, and established churches. Apostolic Succession maintains the bond of unity and the unbroken link with Christ and the Apostles, by which a bishop continues the Apostolic leadership, which is passed on through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Potential bishops are priests who are recommended to the **Holy Father**, in his capacity as Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter. These recommendations come from other bishops, priests, deacons, and laypeople. The Holy Father is popularly called the **Pope**, a term of endearment for "father" (*papa*).

Just as the Holy Father entrusts care of a specific diocese to a bishop, the bishop entrusts care of a parish to a *pastor* (Latin for "shepherd"), the priest responsible for shepherding a specific community. In early 2010, Archbishop Brunett appointed me pastor of Holy Disciples and Our Lady of Good Counsel.

What is the purpose of a priest? A *presbyterios* was the Greek word for the one who offered the sacrifice in the temple—a priest. As the Church grew rapidly in the ancient world, the presbyter (priest) was the person whom the bishop appointed to stand in his (the bishop's) place to administer the sacraments, especially to preside at the celebration of the Eucharist.

What role do deacons play? As the Church added to its numbers so quickly, the Apostles wanted to make sure that they did not neglect care of widows, the poor, and orphans. The Apostles designated seven men for *diakonia*, Greek for service at the table, hence charity (Acts 6:1-7). The *diakonos* is the one who provides the Church's charity and proclaims the Word of God. Deacon Rod McGuire serves at our parish, with the balance of his ministry centered at Our Lady of Good Counsel.

NEXT WEEK: the Pastor (me), Deacon, and Staff in our dual-church parish.

Blessings,
Fr. Matthew L. O'Leary,
Pastor