

How the Parish Works: Part 2

Last week, we looked at the definition of a parish, mission, and diocese, as well as the ordained offices of bishop, priest, and deacon. This week we continue to explore the workings of our dual-church parish of Holy Disciples (Puyallup) and Our Lady of Good Counsel (Eatonville), guided by questions some of you have asked.

We have one *priest-pastor* (me) responsible for the pastoral care for our two church communities here in East Pierce County. Our households total about 1150, and are increasing. We also have a *deacon* (Rod McGuire) assigned to minister to us, mainly at Our Lady of Good Counsel.

What do our priest and deacon do? Priests and deacons have liturgical, sacramental, evangelical, and other duties of service to the Church—the People of God.

Our dual-church parish has four Sunday Masses (including Saturday’s vigil) and four weekday Masses. Only a priest (and bishop, since a bishop is the senior priest of a diocese) can lead the celebration of the *Eucharist* (Mass), since *only a priest can consecrate* the elements of bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Christ.

Priests and deacons have the faculty to *preach* (give the *homily*) at celebrations of the Eucharist. The pastor determines the preaching schedule. A *homily* reflects on the Sacred Scripture proclaimed at Mass, while a *sermon* can be on any topic the speaker wishes to address.

Both priests and deacons conduct *funerals*, a priest being necessary for a funeral Mass.

Additionally, parishes have a number of other sacramental needs, including Baptisms, Confirmations, Marriages, and confessions/Reconciliation, and Anointings of the Sick.

Only a priest can confer *absolution* and thus effect the sacrament of *Reconciliation*. Because absolution is part of *Anointing of the Sick*, a priest is the minister of that sacrament as well.

Baptisms and *Marriages* can be conducted by either priests or deacons, but if the baptism or marriage occurs in the context of Mass, then a priest is necessary to celebrate the Mass.

The bishop is the normal minister of *Confirmation*, but pastors are delegated the right to confirm if someone is being received into the Church at the Easter Vigil or another time of the year, and in other specially granted circumstances.

In addition to these sacramental ministries, priests and deacons teach the faith, offer spiritual guidance, visit the sick, shut-ins, and imprisoned, and serve the needy, the latter being one of the deacon’s special responsibilities.

As ordained ministers of the Church, deacons and priests have promised before God to pray the *Liturgy of the Hours* throughout *each day* and are expected to spend an *additional hour each day* in prayer.

Why isn’t the pastor (Fr. Matthew) at our Sunday Mass every weekend? We have three weekend Masses at Holy Disciples and one Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel—also on Sunday morning at the same time as Holy Disciples’ Masses. Since the pastor can only be at one place at a time, the pastor rotates between Holy Disciples and Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Our practice has had the pastor at Our Lady of Good Counsel the 2nd and 5th Sunday mornings of the month, and at Holy Disciples the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Sunday mornings. A special event for one community might mean the pastor’s spending more of a Sunday at that particular community.

This schedule is entirely dependent on other priests’ availability to cover for us. The fact is that there are fewer priests available to meet our needs in this current configuration.

Why don’t we have Mass every day of the week? Church law directs that a parish priest take one day off each week; a priest may also have other duties which require additional study, work, and time away from the parish. If no other priest is available, then Mass cannot be celebrated in the parish.

Church law further directs that priests are to have four weeks’ *vacation* each year (increasingly difficult to schedule, given the shortage of priest-substitutes), that priests are to make an individual annual week-long *retreat*, and that priests have a week’s worth of mandatory *continuing education* each year.

Why doesn't the priest live on site? Owing to history, zoning issues, and financial realities, previous pastors have lived in homes rented by the parish. With the assistance of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Holy Disciples acquired a parish house in late 2009, just prior to my arrival as pastor. The motive was to start building equity, rather than spending the money on rent. (Over \$214,000 was spent on such rent—rather than building equity—between 1996 and 2009.) Our parish supports the basic upkeep of the house and pays appropriate taxes on it.

The pastor, as occupant of the residence, pays federal income tax—yes priests pay income tax—on the amount for which the house would rent (annually) on the open market (this is treated as personal income), and on his total annual food allowance (which is also treated as taxable income). Contrary to popular belief, diocesan priests do not live for free or tax free.

NEXT WEEK: parish staff, finances, decision-making, councils, and committees.

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