

TRANSITIONS

Most transitions are difficult. That is because they involve some type of a death, a parting with someone or something. They represent a change of some sort in our life. Yet, transitions are not only normal but also necessary. Why? They are part and parcel of growth, even though we do not see it that way. It is a part of God's continually recreating his world.

A very important part of God's world is Christ's Church. It has seen numerous transitions over the span of its two-thousand-plus year history. While the Church remains the same, it adapts the way that it serves in an ever-changing world, so that it might remain effective in doing the work of the Lord.

Because of the changing demographics of our area, our Diocesan Church had to make adjustments in its parish structure some years ago. That was a major transition for many. Other dioceses are currently doing so. Those are not easy times, as parishioners see their beloved parish merge and the church building (which played such an important part in their life) closed. No bishop takes pleasure in having to oversee such necessary steps, even though they are for the overall good of a Diocesan Church.

The priests of this Diocese just elected a new Priests' Personnel Board to assist me in making the difficult decisions that will have to be made this coming Spring. Four pastors are scheduled to retire due to age. One already has, due to medical issues. There are no ordinations of new priests. That means that five priests will need to be taken from five parishes. Which ones? I do not know. There is a diocesan committee studying the matter. They will be recommending criteria of parish vitality on which the Priests' Personnel Board can base its considerations.

We need to take care of the few priests that we have. Relieving them of unnecessary burdens is one way of doing that. Years ago, I made the rule that no pastor is to serve more than two worship sites. Another would be to have the two parishes, which a pastor may be serving, merge into one. That eliminates the duplication of parish pastoral councils, parish finance councils, sacramental records, financial records, and a host of other meetings and events. There is only so much that a priest should be expected to do.

Some feel strongly that priests are ordained to serve them in the way that they wish to be served. Yet, they have not encouraged their sons and grandsons to accept a possible call to Christ's priesthood. If we had the priests, we would not be called to make the adjustments that we are being called to make. Priests come from our own families. I have been told by a number of individuals that I should ask bishops in Europe and elsewhere to send us priests. The truth of the matter is that they, too, have need of them. But, the sad note in that suggestion is that we are willing to ask parents somewhere across the ocean to give up their sons for us when we are not willing to give up our own sons for ourselves.

Rather than looking at it in a negative vein, we should strive to see in challenges such as this the hand of God. Have we not yet gotten the message? Christ's Church is not a building. It is people. Buildings, the same as human persons, serve over a period of years and, then, give way to others. It appears to be easier to bury a person than it is a building. And, yet, it is through these deaths that God continues to recreate his world and give it new life.