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Pastor's Column

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Ministerial Leadership in the Church—The Role of the Pastor

In the last number of years, we have experienced great changes in ministerial leadership in the Church. The shift from priests and sisters providing the majority of service to the community to lay women and men, in the majority, ministering along with priests, deacons, and sisters has created an entirely different “face” to Parish leadership. This new “face” is very evident here at St. Thomas More.

With this in mind, I want to share some thoughts on the role of a pastor taken from Canon Law and then some thoughts on lay leadership and collaboration with clergy.

This week I focus on the role of the pastor. Next week, there will be thoughts on lay leadership.

Canon 528.1: A pastor is obliged to make provision so that the Word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the Parish; for this reason, he is to take care that the lay members of the Christian faithful are instructed in the truths of the faith, especially by giving a homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation and by offering catechetical instruction. He is to foster works through which the spirit of the gospel is promoted, even in what pertains to social justice. He is to have particular care for the Catholic education of children and youth. He is to make every effort, even with the collaboration of the Christian faithful, so that the message of the gospel comes also to those who have ceased the practice of their religion or do not profess the true faith.

Canon 528.2: The pastor is to see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the Parish assembly of the faithful.

He is to work so that the Christian faithful are nourished through the devout celebration of the sacraments and, in a special way, that they frequently approach the sacraments of the Most Holy Eucharist and Penance. He is also to endeavor that they are led to practice prayer even as families and take part consciously and actively in the sacred liturgy which, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, the pastor must direct in his own parish and is bound to watch over so that no abuses creep in.

Canon 529.1: In order to fulfill his office diligently, a pastor is to strive to know the faithful entrusted to his care.

Therefore he is to visit families, sharing especially in the cares, anxieties, and griefs of the faithful, strengthening them in the Lord, and prudently correcting them if they are failing in certain areas. With generous love he is to help the sick, particularly those close to death, by refreshing them solicitously with the sacraments and commending their souls to God; with particular diligence he is to seek out the poor, the afflicted, the lonely, those exiled from their country, and similarly those weighed down by special difficulties. He is to work so that spouses and parents are supported in fulfilling their proper duties and is to foster growth of Christian life in the family.

Canon 529.2: A pastor is to recognize and promote the proper part which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the mission of the Church, by fostering their associations for the purposes of religion. He is to cooperate with his own bishop and the presbyterium of the diocese, also working so that the faithful have concern for parochial communion, consider themselves members of the diocese and of the universal Church, and participate in and sustain efforts to promote this shared communion

—From the Code of Canon Law (1983)

F. n. Mike