

Thoughts and Ponderings - No. 3

In this Thoughts and Ponderings I reflect on the importance of our mission as Catholics. Actually, **the mission of the Church must drive the organization of its members, not the reverse**. In other words, we should structure ourselves so as to serve the mission rather than to force the mission into a structure.

Moreover, no one person can say all that can or should be said about the mission of the Church. Consequently, the thoughts that I now present are only a beginning for what I hope will trigger many additional ideas, from all who read this document, about our mission. Thus, I hope that you will help to develop the list of the “mission items” that Archbishop Dolan should keep in mind as he prepares his archdiocesan pastoral plan. Please, let me know your thoughts.

To facilitate reflection and discussion, I present my thoughts in four groups. They are: Pray and Worship, Proclaim the Word, Build Community, Serve Those in Need. Again, as I have done in the prior Thoughts and Ponderings, no order of priority is intended.

Pray and Worship

1. Providing for the sacramental life of the Church, especially the celebration of the Mass, will always hold the central position in the mission of the Church and not be an option. Also, related language and cultural considerations are part of the mission.
2. Celebrating the sacraments, whether for the first time or after many years of celebrating them, should affect each person spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. Hence, we should see as part of our mission the preparation of people for this fruitful experience.
3. Over the years, various Church documents as well as writings by respected authors provide wisdom and insight concerning liturgical celebrations. To provide high quality public worship, local faith communities should heed these documents.
4. Prayer, the raising of one’s mind and heart to God, establishes the relationship with God that can be both personal and communal. In addition, prayer provides the seedbed for a person to come to meet, know and live Christ. Thus, prayer also is not optional but rather is integral to the mission of the Church. Of course, prayer styles can be very diverse, just as relationships can be very diverse, but the various prayer styles should be welcomed and respected. Moreover, we should strive to provide many and varied environments for prayer.
5. Some people have wisely pointed out that many non-churchgoing persons who approach the Catholic Church looking for something that is spiritual are not ready to participate in the celebration of the Mass. Rather, they need other forms of prayer and study. Hence, an element of mission for us nowadays is to provide opportunities for prayer and studying the faith that are comfortable and informal, and perhaps not located on a parish campus.

Proclaim the Word

6. The Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, is the one whom we proclaim by our words and actions. Needless to say, before we can proclaim the Word, we need to know the Word. Thus, our mission includes providing lifelong faith formation so that all the members of the Church may grow in their capacity to live their faith.
7. In this regard, the use of modern teaching techniques and communication devices can contribute to the success of the effort and should be seen as part of the mission.
8. Helping adults to learn about the faith is an important step in helping children to learn about the faith because seeing the example of the older people might provide a stronger influence on the younger ones than can spoken words. Consequently, our mission includes the establishment of creative, informative and challenging formation programs and activities for adults.
9. Our mission must include the construction of high quality youth programs to assist parents in their responsibility to raise their children in the faith.
10. Catholic schools continue to provide an outstanding opportunity to develop future Catholic leaders. At the same time, however, persisting challenges to maintaining these jewels continue to cross our paths. Consequently, our mission includes having unceasing efforts to determine how we can best preserve and expand this treasure of our faith tradition.

Build Community

11. Personal relationships create the sense of community that is integral to a group of parishioners being a community of faith. Our mission, therefore, expects that steps are taken for community building so as to enrich the vibrancy and dedication of the faithful.
12. Our mission should encourage and welcome creative initiatives and associations of the faithful that would enhance the virtuous living of the faith on the local or archdiocesan level.
13. Inter-parish collaboration can expand our ability to live the faith and thus stands tall in our mission.
14. Praying and working for vocations is a never-ending responsibility. So, too, is the training and formation of those persons who receive vocations to ministerial service. These responsibilities are part of the mission.
15. Ecumenical and interfaith relations serve Christ's desire that we all might be one and, thus, are part of what we should be doing.

16. National and international inter-diocesan communication and assistance help us to appreciate the universality of the Church's mission. For example, we should encourage mission trips or volunteer commitments outside of our archdiocese, welcome missionary speakers who seek financial assistance, be open to twinning relationships with parishes elsewhere in the world.
17. Providing for sound and responsible administration of Church activities and operations can help to build our faith communities.

Serve Those in Need

18. We are taught in sacred scripture that Christ equates service to those in need actually to be service to him (cf. Mt. 25:31-46). So, our faith tradition embraces service to those in need as central to our Church's mission.
19. The list of ways to serve the needy is as open-ended as is the sensitivity and awareness of those who want to serve. Yet, three classifications of service merit comment.
 - Education – informs parishioners about the needs that exist and ways in which the parishioners can assist.
 - Advocacy – pleads the case of the needy so that root causes of the problems might be addressed by those who have the capacity to effect change.
 - Direct service – provides the specific assistance to the person in need.
20. Certain persons in society today are in positions of acute vulnerability and deserve special attention in our mission. These include but are not limited to: the unborn, the sick and the elderly; the poor and those who are victims of economic injustice; migrants and refugees; those who suffer because of a natural disaster; those who suffer because of racism and prejudice; the imprisoned; those involved in troubled families; and this list could go on.

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What else should be added to more accurately identify the mission of the Church now and into the foreseeable future? Of course, the related question continues: how then should we organize ourselves so as to address and serve all of the components of our mission?

Please give prayerful reflection to these comments and then let me know your thoughts. I can be contacted at vicarforplanning@archmil.org.

Sincerely in Christ,
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