

From the June 6, 2021, Bulletin

St. John Neumann's Mission Corner

Our Parish Mission: To make disciples by encountering Christ, growing in Christ, and being sent by Christ.

The Only Constant is Change

Life has always been constant change. Even in the “good old days,” technical, societal, political change was inevitable. And don't get us started on the change of the last pandemic year. The Church is not exempt from the impacts of change. The importance of religious affiliation and engagement has fallen across the board in Christianity and in Catholicism over the past decades. The statistic is that, for every one adult who converts to Catholicism, 6.5 adults leave the Catholic Church. A sobering statistic. Catholicism has the distinction of leading other religious groups in net loss of devotees, according to Pew Research.

There is also a deeper change in how people come to be engaged in parish life if they do eventually become engaged. In those by-gone days, the progression known among Church leadership was that people first came to believe and then came to belong. In other words, faith preceded a sense of belonging. We came to believe in Jesus first and then followed that with investment and engagement in a community of believers. Sociologists now say that we have reversed the progression. Overall, we first need to come to a sense of belonging before we allow ourselves to trust enough to come to belief. This has changed how ministry needs to be done at all levels, including on a parish level.

We acknowledge our current state – which is really a state of constant change – to reflect better on the reality of the Catholic Church's current situation. Monetary giving to the Catholic Church has gone down. Mass attendance has gone down. We truly have no idea how the present dispensation from weekly Mass attendance will impact the faithful once the dispensation is lifted. The number of volunteers has gone down. The number of hours that current volunteers can devote to the Church has gone down. Treasure, talent, time – the hallmarks of Christian Stewardship – are all falling.

We, the faithful, are also in a battle against dark forces in society pulling us from faith, pulling us toward an attitude that there is no objective Truth or standards. We now have phrases like “your truth” and “my truth.” Our grand narratives – the things that we believe about ourselves and our place in the world – are rejected by the post-modern culture. We see families who are faithful struggle to keep faith a priority amidst a society



that calls faith in objective Truth at best irrelevant and at worst misogynistic, bigoted, and discriminatory. And the very harshest thing to many Catholic faithful is when we battle amongst ourselves.

We have weathered an incredible amount of change on a societal, parish, and personal level. We dare to ask, because Christ asks, for more change. Not only must we continually be growing closer to Christ, attending to our own discipleship. We must also accompany others on this journey. The hallmark of a Christian disciple is change, surrender, and humility. All tough stuff.

Although we all want and need to return in numbers to our parish, we must remember: Our mission is not gathering people together in the Hermes-Media Center; it is not drawing large numbers to our programs and studies. We hope we do see this, but these things are not the end goal, nor are they necessarily effective ways to meet our mission.

Converting hearts to follow Christ – discipleship – is a slow, behind-the-scenes, intimate process. It takes accompanying people, getting involved in their lives, building relationships, talking faith. It takes you and us doing this work in the trenches. When we ask, “who will you invite?” we are asking: Who are you accompanying in faith? Who are you discipling? We are partners in mission. We need your help. The Church needs your help. Jesus needs your help. We believe that we all want the same thing. We all are “all in” on making disciples.