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The love of Jesus ... the soul of service

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his first encyclical letter *Deus caritas est* (God Is Love), "Love of neighbor ... consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know.... Love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility of each individual member of the faithful.... Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community. The awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the church from the beginning: 'All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need' (Acts 2:44-45)" (#20).

To minister through our commissions is the way 'love is organized' and is constitutive of our church family. "The love of Jesus" is expressed and experienced in our commissions.

The Servant of God Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte* ("At the Beginning of the New Millennium"), on January 6, 2001, called for us not only to open our hearts to the love of God, but also to the service of all our brothers and sisters – especially the least, the last and the lost.

The late Holy Father then reminds us that relationships in the church "must all be clearly characterized by communion." For this reason "the structures of participation envisaged by canon law ... must be ever more highly valued." Quite naturally, there must be a "fruitful dialogue between pastors and faithful."

The universal and particular laws of the church provide the means for pastoral actions that are fundamentally just. Beyond the just treatment of all without any arbitrariness, there is room for "...promoting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the people of God..." according to Pope John Paul II.

Such attention to justice coupled with a true spirituality of communion supplies the institutional reality of the church "with a soul" as the late Holy Father put it.

The purpose of the commissions established in our parish family is to make possible greater pastoral service. Our parish is "the soul service" precisely because of the work and ministry of our commissions.

"Commission":

This word is carefully chosen. Each area of pastoral concern is assigned to a specific commission. The members of each commission are commissioners. The commissioners of each commission are commissioned to serve by the pastor. This is more than a mere play on words!

The "great commission" was given the church and each member by Christ himself:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am

with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18 - 20).

The pastor's sacramental commission is to confect the sacraments. His pastoral commission is summed up in the following canons quoted from the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

"Can. 515 §1. A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church [diocese], whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor [*parochus*] as its proper pastor [*pastor*] under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

"Can. 519. The pastor [*parochus*] is the proper pastor [*pastor*] of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing with the cooperation of other presbyters [priests] or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law.

"Can. 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 faith, especially by means of the 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 a 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.

"§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 by 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, including prayer even as families, and to 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.

"Can. 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 their 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.

“§2. A pastor is to recognize and promote the proper part which the lay members of 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 with the presbyterium [other priests] of the diocese, also working so that the faithful have concern for parochial communion, consider themselves to be members of the diocese and of the universal church, and participate in and sustain efforts to promote this same community.

Can. 532. In all juridic [legal, banking, investments, etc.] affairs, the pastor represents the parish according to the norm of law. He is to take care that the goods of the parish are administered according to the norm of cann. 1281-1288.

A parochial vicar shares in the ordained ministry as a brother priest of the pastor and has a sacramental commission joined with his pastoral commission that is circumscribed as follows.

“Can. 548 §1 The obligations and rights of a parochial vicar are defined not only by [universal law], but also by the diocesan [law], and by the letter of the diocesan Bishop; they are more specifically determined by the mandate of the pastor.

“§2 ... [A] parochial vicar is by virtue of his office bound to help the pastor in the entire parochial ministry... and to substitute for him if the situation arises according to the norm of law.

“§3 A parochial vicar is to report regularly to the pastor concerning proposed and existing pastoral endeavors. In this way the pastor and his vicar... can by their joint efforts provide pastoral care of the parish for which they both must answer.”

A parochial vicar never assumes the governance of the parish even temporarily unless the pastor is gravely impeded, in accord with canon can. 549 and the norms of can. 541 §1.

“Group-Person”

A commission shares in some aspect of the pastor’s responsibilities, but not his strictly sacramental duties. It is the pastor who commits or entrusts a particular portion of his pastoral rights and duties to each commission by authorizing each group to act in his name and place.

To undertake their group responsibility, the commissioners of one commission act together as though they were one physical person through their prayer, visioning and deliberation. Once the group-person has conceived an idea and decided on an action, then it is carried out through an agent or agents. The agents are not necessarily members of the commission. Some commissions may actually employ volunteer or paid, full or part-time agents.

The notion of group-person is almost identical to a not-for-profit corporation. The only difference is that the church-parish itself has the status of a corporation in law, but its commissions do not. In other words, commissions are similar to little corporations established to carry out portions of the pastor’s total ministry.

In the non-profit sector this methodology is found in the literature on “social entrepreneurship”. Websites and other research sources are available.

Each commission is to have its own charter approved by the pastor. These charters will vary according to the area of responsibility undertaken by the commission.

Within the parameters of the charter, each commission is to function on its own initiative without the prompting of the pastor. The charter will govern the leadership and membership, rights and duties, agents and procedures to be followed in specific circumstances. This document is not etched in stone; it will change with the pastor’s approval as a commission grows and develops.

In general, each commission in its proper area of concern is free to do whatever is legal and moral. This is freedom within limits and not license to do anything imagined. No commission should think, much less act as though it can do anything it wishes. It would be immoral to infringe, without leave, on the responsibilities of other commissions or the prerogatives of the pastor himself. An example of impermissible activity would be the Salt and Light Commission deciding to plan a Sunday liturgy without collaborating with the Worship Commission.

The pastor should always be consulted when there is doubt about the wisdom of a project or the competence of a commission to make a commitment on behalf of the parish family. Commissions are not islands; they are part of an overall collaborative ministry. A commission’s charter should reflect its on-going learning about its collaborative responsibility with other entities in the parish family.

Note below that the Parish Manager and the Stewardship/Administration Commission has a special role in leading the other commissions, also.

Insofar as each commission learns to assume and exercise real pastoral responsibility, the pastor, with his parochial vicar, will be more and more free to do what he is uniquely qualified to do: administer the sacraments reserved to a priest; preach, teach and counsel more in-depth; attend to special ministries without too many preoccupations; and govern the parish by coaching the commissions.

As the commissions and their agents develop more and more competencies, the pastor, with his parochial vicar, will then be less and less solely or uniquely capable of being called upon to minister to the specific needs of the parish family, but he will never be dispensable. The result will be more and more ministry that directly touches the lives of a growing number of people with increasing intensity.

Each Commission

Worship Commission

Since this commission is responsible for the Eucharist, the source and summit of our lives, it enjoys a primacy of honor.

Its members see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the parish assembly of the faithful. They are to work so that the Christian faithful are nourished by the devout celebration of the sacraments, and in a special way, that they frequently approach the sacraments of the Most Holy Eucha-

rist and penance. They are also to endeavor that their fellow members are led to practice prayer, including prayer even as families and to take part consciously and actively in the sacred liturgy that, under the authority of the pastor, they must direct and are bound to watch over so that no abuses creep in contrary to an authentic understanding of the current liturgical laws, both universal and particular.

Art, music, environment and everything that touches upon the worship of this community is the rightful concern of this commission. Commissioners are responsible for the coordination, training and recruitment of all laity who take their rightful role in the liturgy. They are concerned that no one lords his or her authority over others. Together they do not fear change, are not rebels, are not robots; they are gentle, discreet, wise; they avoid battles, but do not settle for mediocrity.

They also are constantly vigilant for the protection of children who serve during the liturgy in any way.

Stewardship/Administration Commission

The chair of this commission is the **Parish Manager** or chief operating officer (COO) of the parish family.

The day-to-day operation of the business administration, property management, construction, repairs, fund development and finances of our church are the responsibility of the members of this commission. They are to take care that the goods of the parish are administered according to the norm of law.

This commission bears responsibility for the proper functioning of each of the other commissions and for the pastoral and finance councils. It works as a catalyst to initiate, coach, plan, execute and evaluate the actions that characterize good stewardship in all the endeavors undertaken by the lay leadership of the church community so that the mission of the universal and diocesan church is achieved in this local area.

Always assuring that Sacred Heart is the Church in Pineville, the commission makes certain that the parish family is also truly the Church of Pineville. We are an authentically Catholic Church and do not resort to gimmickry but live in the moment. In the spirit of Lenten scrutiny, commissioners ask themselves the most elementary and embarrassing questions to keep the parish on the edge, to keep a saltiness or vibrancy in its life. This commission is a barometer that makes certain that the parish programs and activities are meaningful, spiritually rich, God-centered, other-directed, compassionate, community enhancing and fun. The demeanor of warm, open and 'easy to get along with' characterizes the parish's life and is engendered in each commission. Informed pragmatism, unassailable integrity and a balanced approach promotes healthy unity without mandated uniformity in thought and action. We are about relationships with God and one another in smaller communities in the larger parish family. There is a superabundance of prayer, ministry and money -- and a great need for all. This commission is all about quantity and even more about quality -- that is stewardship (Paul Wilkes, *Excellent Catholic Parishes*, Paulist Press, 2001).

Evangelization, Initiation, Formation Commission (EIF)

The commission makes provision so that the word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish; for this reason, they are to take care that their fellow members of the Christian faithful are instructed in the truths of faith by

offering catechetical instruction for all ages. They are to foster works through which the spirit of the Gospel is promoted, even in what pertains to social justice. They are to have a particular care for the Catholic education of children and youth, especially fostering the role of parents who are the first and best teachers of their children. They also are constantly vigilant for the protection of children.

They are to make every effort, with the collaboration of their fellow 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.

Catechetical formation of all children and adults seeking the sacraments of initiation is a primary responsibility of this commission. They see to it that the gateways to full membership are opened and crossed by those who are rightly prepared, properly disposed and ask for these sacraments at a proper time. Their hallmark is hospitality, not hoops to jump.

The total faith-formation of adults is an on-going experience. As such, challenging and engaging programs are developed that attract various age groups. Attempts to form small faith-communities that develop into life-long friendships are an integral part of the activities fostered by this commission.

This commission promotes Catholic schools and the parish's policy of paying the differential between "in-parish" and "out-of-parish" Catholic rates for our parishioners who go to Catholic schools. As our families learn to tithe, this commission promotes free tuition to our children who choose Catholic schools that is paid to the schools from parish funds.

Salt and Light Commission

This commission reaches outward. Members engage in works through which the spirit of the Gospel is promoted especially through actions that foster social justice according to the teaching of the church. They seek to cooperate with the civic and ecumenical communities in such undertakings. At the same time, they do not hesitate to embrace a prophetic response when the civic and ecumenical communities fail to respond as Christ taught.

Non-partisan political activities and educational efforts are an important aspect of their work.

This commission strives to know all people in this locality. Therefore, they visit them, sharing especially in their cares, anxieties and, griefs. With generous love, they are to help the sick, particularly those close to death. With particular diligence they are to seek out the poor, the afflicted, the lonely, those who suffer from prejudice and similarly those weighed down by special difficulties.

Families and Adults Commission

This commission reaches within our parish family. In order to fulfill their role diligently, commissioners are to strive to know church members who are young adults, those who are married or preparing for marriage and those who are single and single again through divorce or death. They are to have a special care for those who have reached "the third age." All of these are entrusted to the care of this commission. Therefore, commissioners are to visit homes, sharing especially in the cares, anxieties and, griefs of the faithful, strengthening them in the Lord. They are to work so that spouses and parents are

also supported in fulfilling their proper duties and are to foster growth of Christian life in the family in all its fullness and joy.

By caring for the various segments of these faithful, the commission seeks to enhance their spiritual, social and psychological development. They reach out to the lonely and all who have encountered difficulties in their journey. This commission also puts the FUN into our community life. They throw great parties and have a wild streak (albeit a strictly legal and moral one)!

Youth Commission

In order to fulfill their office diligently, commissioners are to strive to know the youth from about the age of 5 through high school. These young people are entrusted to their care and the commission is to be constantly vigilant for their protection. They are to collaborate with parents who bear primary responsibility for the spiritual, social and psychological development of their children. With generous love they are to seek out youth who are poor, afflicted, lonely, those who suffer from prejudice and similarly those weighed down by special difficulties.

The commission is to arrange activities for the youth in age-appropriate groupings. All activities are always to be in accord with Catholic teaching. Youth themselves are also to be members of this commission and, as they acquire some competence and maturity, are to be encouraged to be members of other commissions and councils.

Councils

The pastoral and finance councils of our church are of counsel to the pastor and each commission. Commissions seek the assistance of each council just as the pastor does in accord with the following excerpts from diocesan regulations that are in accord with the universal law of the church.

Pastoral Council

“§1. ...In the parish pastoral council, which is presided over by the pastor, Christ’s faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action. The parish pastoral council has a consultative voice, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the Diocesan Bishop....

“§2.... 3° Recommendations of the parish pastoral council shall be submitted in writing to the pastor. He in no way is obliged to accede to its recommendations, but he should not lightly disregard its counsel nor act contrary to a consensus unless there be a reason that in his judgment is overriding....

“§4. The council’s on-going agenda:

- 1° Update written parish mission statement (long term);
- 2° Evaluate and change goals, objectives and priorities in service (short term);
- 3° Review the annual budget and make recommendations to the pastor;
- 4° Promote meaningful dialogue and decision-making among the priests, religious and lay leaders of the parish;
- 5° Identify and encourage the use of gifts and talents of the members of the parish;
- 6° Assess, at least annually, the function and performance of the parish pastoral council itself.” (Diocesan Policy Art. 1000)

Finance Council

“§2. The day-to-day operation of the business administration and finances of a parish/mission is the responsibility of its pastor and staff. A parish finance council deals primarily with those matters of greater moment as defined in law. It also assists the pastor in his supervisory and budgetary role as well as his overall fiscal needs and responsibilities.

“§3. The term “pastor” refers to the one directly entrusted with the management of the parish including one who is appointed administrator, lay or clergy, with due regard for the rights of the one who is the proper pastor or endowed with the faculties of the proper pastor.

“§4. A parish finance council is an agency of the parish pastoral council. The chair of the parish finance council or one of its members shall serve as an ex-officio member of the parish pastoral council’ (Diocesan Policy Art. 2000).

From the Appendix:

“§9. *FUNCTIONS:*

- 1° Assists in preparing an annual budget and submits it to the pastor and parish pastoral council
- 2° Submits a complete financial report at the end of the fiscal year to the parish pastoral council and parishioners
- 3° Develops guidelines for parish business manager, salaried or volunteer, if there is one
- 4° Provides guidelines, job descriptions and assistance for the employment or termination of the parish business manager
- 5° Reviews financial reports of various parish organizations, projects, activities, etc and assists in offering financial and management advice and ensures adequate and practical accountability and audits
- 6° Offers the pastor and the business manager counsel in the significant financial issues
- 7° Provides oversight in the administration of assets, especially their disposition and acquisition
- 8° Together with the pastor, oversees all projects of construction, expansion and reconstruction or demolition, referring all extraordinary administrative acts to the office of the Diocesan Bishop with a recommendation
- 9° Offers counsel and monitors all the parish’s investments, savings, special funds, and wills and bequests
- 10° Offers counsel and assists the pastor in conducting the fund raising activities needed in the parish so that its members can fully participate as stewards
- 11° Assists the pastor with helpful information pertaining to contracts, warranties, taxes, personnel policies or practices, bidding procedures, security, etc
- 12° Cooperates with the diocesan legal counsel in instances of civil litigation” (Diocesan Policy Appendix C).

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~~ *Virtus training is a must for every adult and child in our parish family. For our children’s sake!* ~~