

Situating administration and planning

“Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then, mighty deeds; then, gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28).

Father Donald Senior, an eminent Scripture scholar, asks how administration got tagged as the evil twin of real ministry. He reflects on some religious groups in the United States who assert that any institutionalized church has parted ways with the true Christ. From this start, he introduces a 157-page book titled “The Gift of Administration: New Testament Foundations for the Vocation of Administrative Service” (Liturgical Press, 2016). As I mentioned last week, the love of God is central to Catholic life. This week I want to highlight administration as it enables missionary discipleship.

The book was mailed to each of our priests. More recently, it was distributed to the parish business managers who meet regularly. The school principals received theirs at the end of August. The members of the Diocesan Finance Council will have copies by the time you read this. It is an encouraging biblical survey about how administration relates to our baptismal mission.

There are many New Testament citations that treat the stewardship of money, property and priorities. While Senior’s is not the first book on the subject, it accounts for contemporary social influences that shape ministry, the secular workplace, finance, fund raising and mission planning.

I have my own administrative functions to fulfill in our “local church” which is the diocese. My responsibility is to our overall activity, and to assisting everyone, with the expert and wise counsel of others, to express the diocesan mission. This is the Catholic textbook understanding of the Church. We are one church on more than 65 campuses. (There are scores more locations when we number, for example, St. Vincent de Paul sites and Catholic health-care ministries. These are not directly administered by my offices.)

Decisions about how we go forward are rarely simple, necessarily requiring the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, brave commitments, and the sacrifice that missionary discipleship requires. Our Tradition gives us life, but we are not mere conservators. The history of the Church in Indiana is one of migrations. It is a chronicle of forward-looking leaders, ordained and lay, whose lives were pilgrimages through change. Today, our best efforts focus on the mission to preach Christ, and to care for neighbors as the Lord wills.

In the past few years, there are two documents that express these goals. The first is the pastoral statement by the Catholic bishops of Indiana called “Poverty at the Crossroads.” The second is our diocesan statement on pastoral planning, “Uniting in Heart.” These are not records of past accomplishments, but statements of a living church. When people ask about my vision for our local church, I refer first to these before other documents or encyclicals. They are accessible at our diocesan Web site (www.dol-in.org), and they harmonize with Father Senior’s stated outlook:

“... I believe our biblical heritage has a lot to say to us. Planning is not just a necessity imposed by common sense, but like the notion of mission itself, has deep roots in our biblical and theological heritage. The whole Bible tilts toward the future. In fact, the entire ethical teaching of the Bible could be summed up in the formula: striving to live now by the future we most earnestly desire to see. ...

“To move an institution and its resources toward the future required by its mission takes great effort and is one of the most demanding of administrative responsibilities” (p. 59).