

Pastor's Column

May 4, 2014

Priest Transitions

Greetings in the risen Christ!

As you heard last weekend, the Archbishop is transferring me to Holy Redeemer Parish in Vancouver, Washington at the end of June. This news came as a surprise to me and has been difficult for me to process, not because of where I am going: out of 80 pastorates in the Archdiocese, Holy Redeemer is in my top three at this time ☺. Rather the move was unexpected in that the Archbishop and I had a conversation a couple of years ago, when things were perhaps at my roughest, in which he made clear to me that he wanted to keep me in Clallam County for many years to come. Surprises aside, it's a difficult move for me to make *at this time* because the pastoral councils and I have been working for one to three years to identify and launch initiatives and projects that would go a long way to evangelizing the parishes and making disciples. These were ready to be rolled out; an important corner didn't get a chance to be turned and so I feel badly for the parishes in this regard. That work will simply be passed along to the next pastor for him to discern.

Because of the vow of obedience, perhaps most Catholics assume that priests can be moved at any time by their bishops; this is not true for pastors. Parochial vicars (associates to the pastors) such as Fr. Jean Pierre Kasonga can be moved at any time without any recourse to Church law; ditto for priest administrators who are pastors except that they lack stability of office. Depending on the diocese, canonically installed pastors actually have a term office for a period of years that in theory they can refuse another assignment until that term of office expires.

Prior to 1983, pastors could stay in a parish for life, if the bishop asked them to move they could turn him down. In 1983 the Code of Canon Law was revised and in that revision, dioceses could establish how long a pastor had a 'right' to stay in a parish; for the Archdiocese of Seattle that is six years, renewable as many times as the bishop would like; ideally twice for a 12 year term but this rarely happens. Usually it's shorter but on rare occasions longer. Of course the Archbishop can ask (insist) that a pastor move on a year that doesn't coincide with a six year term (most cases). I am not aware of a case where a pastor said 'no' because his six year term wasn't up. He may ask the Archbishop to reconsider for various reasons (they better be good) but the final decision rests with the Archbishop.

There are many dynamics that go into placing priests especially pastors. In my case, I do not know all of the dynamics that went into the decision to move me but have some insights such as: the priest placement board felt unanimously that Holy Redeemer would be a great fit for me and them; and that Fr. Dennis Robb, your new pastor as of July 1st, has a home here and nearing retirement age would love to return (he pastored St. Joseph Parish in the 1980's). There are either 14 pastors being moved or priests becoming pastors this year: every one of them represents a domino. As one leaves a parish, another comes in to fill it; and the parish that pastor left, has a pastor coming in behind him to fill it; and so on and so forth. If any one of them says to the Archbishop: "that won't work for the following reasons", then the dominos have to be reset (potentially 14 this year) and that is a very difficult thing for the Archbishop to do. At times we find ourselves needing to have faith (blind at times) not only in Jesus, but in His popes, bishops, and pastors; or the Church will be torn apart one community at a time.

It is still two months before I go so please don't say your goodbyes yet, there will be a time for that in June. At that time I will write another Pastor's Column saying my goodbyes and welcoming Fr. Robb.

May God Bless You,



Fr. Thomas Nathe