

PASTORAL PLANNING

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*"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."*¹ The Lord is the giver of every good gift,² and he has ordained certain gifts for each member of the body and for the building up of the body, for the good of all. Ordained ministers uniquely bring the presence of Christ by their ordination. They must trust in the Lord to provide for all their needs,³ especially the grace of making them other Christ's (in Persona Christi). Although God does provide for all their needs, it is important that each knows himself - strengths and weaknesses - in order to better utilize the gifts the Lord has given him. More than simply knowing one's gifts, it is more important to know one's vocation - who is a priest? And how does this ontological reality determine how a priest daily lives out his vocation? We will look at the dilemma of this certain priest, and see that the answer lies first in the identity and essence of the priestly vocation. Knowing who he is will allow him to order his priorities, first which is his care for souls. After this, we will look at some ways that can help a priest carry out more effectively his administrative duties well, but without over-prioritizing them.



Considering this certain Pastor, let us first examine the role of the priest. As previously stated, the priest is to be another Christ's, and he is to shepherd the flock of the Church entrusted to his care. The priest acting in Persona Christi allows Christ the Good Shepherd to minister to his flock through him. The origins of the word 'priest' or 'pastor' come from the word 'shepherd,' referring to Christ the Good Shepherd; this task is uniquely for the priest. The priests who are pastorally guiding their sheep need to take time to be with and hear the voice of the Good Shepherd; then they listen to the needs of the sheep in their flock. To the Austrian Bishops, Blessed John Paul II said, "Your first duty as pastors is not projects and organizations, but to lead your people to a deep intimacy with the Trinity."⁴ This is the priest's most important task: to give their flock Jesus through the sacraments and lead them to union with the Blessed Trinity. Although it is not the only task that the pastor is entrusted with, it is his primary one.

With such great responsibility it is helpful for the Priest to have a plan. Having realistic goals and sticking to them will allow the Priest to see his priorities and not allow him to be caught up in things that detract from his main mission. His main mission is being available to his flock; therefore he needs to be able to manage his time effectively in order to be able to do this. "Pastors need management not because they should manage, but because it is the only way to get the time, thought, and freedom for the real job."⁵ The goal in management is not simply being the boss, but rather freeing oneself to be a minister of souls, rather than only a manager of tasks.

This certain priest that we are discussing is not the first to encounter this problem. In the early Church, the distribution of food to the widows was taking the Apostles away from their pastoral ministry of the Word. Let us consider how they handled the situation:

*"About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom, to whom we can hand over this duty. We ourselves will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.'"*⁶

Therefore, this certain Priest cannot abandon any of his tasks, but he can make an appeal to the Bishop to send him a Deacon to assist in the administration. This would allow him more time to shepherd the sheep entrusted to his care. The administration of the parish must be overseen by the pastor, for he is ultimately responsible to the Bishop and God for the workings of the parish; but he is allowed to delegate the tasks to those appointed by the Bishop: to the deacons, for example. The role of the deacon is service in many areas: "Deacons are ministers ordained for tasks of service of the Church; they do not receive the ministerial priesthood, but ordination confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance, and the service of charity, tasks which they must carry out under the pastoral authority of their bishop."⁷ In this case the deacons could assist in the pastoral governance, therefore freeing the Priest to be more available to counsel his sheep. The priest would still need to make a pastoral plan for the Deacons or Parish Council to follow, which would still involve him in all the decision-making and spiritual guidance of the parish.

As well, a priest should also call upon trusted laity to help him in the administration of the parish, regardless of whether not he has a deacon to help him. This is important for a number of reasons. First, the priest simply cannot do everything himself, and the delegation of administrative responsibilities is simply necessary. If not, he will be overwhelmed and consumed with secondary tasks. Second, lay people are precisely those who are well equipped for administrative tasks. Due to the nature of their vocation to be leaven 'in the world', they have often been educated and formed in various administrative skills necessary in the world. Therefore, they are usually able to better understand and carry them out. Of course, each priest must take care in choosing lay people who are not simply skilled in these areas, but who are also virtuous, spiritually upright, and faithful to the Church they serve.

In conclusion, the priest must first learn who he is as a priest. This in turn will order his tasks according to his vocation and the will of the Lord. Then he is called to find faithful people to help him in the parish, especially in matters of administration. This will allow him to live more fruitfully and faithfully his vocation as shepherd and guide of souls.

¹Holy Bible, New American Bible, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, USCCB.org/Bible

²Cf: Holy Bible, New American Bible, James 1:17, USCCB.org/Bible

³Cf: Holy Bible, New American Bible; Phil 4:19, USCCB.org/Bible

⁴September 10-13, 1983, message to Austrian Bishops, text taken from Deep Conversion, Deep Prayer, by Fr. Thomas Dubay, Ignatius, 2006

⁵Berkley, James, Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration, Baker Books, Grand Rapid, MI, 1994, p. 105

⁶Holy Bible, New American Bible, Acts of the Apostles, 6: 1-6

⁷The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, St. Paul's Publishing, 1994, 1596

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