What is Happening in Our Church?

A Letter from Monsignor Manuel Simas

The miracle of spring has unfolded in all its beauty and splendor; reminding us daily of the glorious resurrection of our Lord and His promise to us of everlasting life.

Jesus speaks to us in today’s Gospel with seemingly simple words that carry the true meaning and significance of our faith and purpose. “Love one another.” How much simpler can it be? We may even say to ourselves, “Of course I love others. I love my family, my friends, and the people who are close to me.” But we know that is not what Jesus means: He is asking us to do something more.

Jesus is telling us that we need to reach out to others and live the Gospel. Jesus isn’t asking us to only love those we are already close to. He wants us to love those we don’t know. Those who are underprivileged, oppressed, burdened, and in need of care and attention. He also asks us to love and show compassion to those we may not feel deserve it. Can we love those who have hurt us with their words or actions, accused us, betrayed our trust? Now these simple words, “love one another” don’t seem so simple anymore.

As a parish family, our goal is “to build church” both physically and spiritually. To help us do this, I have emphasized the three elements of stewardship, asking everyone to give at least one hour a week in worship, ministry and financial contributions. The positive impact of one of our parish ministries was recently shown to me in a special way.

As many of you know, my sister passed away two weeks ago. I experienced firsthand the compassion and care shown to my family and to me by our parish Bereavement Team. Though I have watched the team in motion many, many times, this encounter was on a personal level. What a significant gift this ministry shares with those who are so vulnerable! I was touched deeply and could not help but think what a beautiful way to love those we don’t know, just as Jesus taught us to do.

To help us build up our parish family, I have created the position of parish development director and asked Don Kaefer to serve in this role. The diocese has encouraged parishes to designate a parish leader to focus on stewardship and I am pleased that Don has agreed to do this. Don will be visiting each of our parish ministries to gain a better understanding of what they do and how all the members of our community can better participate and be included. Don also plans to develop a “Welcome to the Parish” Committee and phone tree and mailing teams to assist our ministries.

A vital part of building up our parish family is getting to know one another better. Our parish-wide social activities provide enjoyable ways to build community and appreciate each other’s gifts and talents. As your pastor, I was delighted to see so many families and friends get together for our recent Pizza and BINGO night and the Men’s Club St. Patrick’s Day dinner.

Our next event, “Taste of Asia,” is coming up next weekend and my wish is that all of you will attend and enjoy the special foods and traditions of the members of our parish family of Asian heritage. I also look forward in joyful anticipation to hear the talents of our Mother’s Day men’s choir next weekend. They have been practicing diligently. I am thankful for the time, the dedication, and the devotion of all our ministry leaders, our parishioners and those who contribute financially to the operation of our parish here at St. Joseph.

This is our faith. This is our home. It is what we make it. Now go out and keep up the good work. Love one another.

Peace and love,

Father Manny
Monsignor Manuel Simas
Environment for Catholic Worship  
Part 4  Assembly Seating and the Presider’s Chair

Assembly Seating and the Presider’s Chair

American visitors to the great cathedrals of Europe are often surprised to notice how few of them have pews or fixed seating of any type. In fact, fixed pews in Christian churches came relatively late in our history—not until the 16th century and generally in the Protestant tradition where extended sermons became a central element of the service. They evolved from rows of chairs, to benches, to pews with sides, and finally to box-pews with doors to the aisle often “purchased” by a family for its exclusive use.

Today, there is a wide variety of seating choices for a parish when considering what is best. Flexible seating (chairs) allows the configuration of the assembly to be shaped according to the numbers expected and the rites to be celebrated. However, the demands of the physical rearrangement of the chairs between liturgies or seasons must be taken into consideration. Fixed benches with some flexible seating at the front is often a compromise that allows for some adjustment without the need to reconfigure the entire space. Because our liturgy has always included processions and movement, some congregations may choose benches with open ends instead of pews with sides that tend to restrict the flow and give a sense static enclosure.

The configuration of the seating should allow everyone to take part in the active participation of the rites. The worship space is neither a concert hall nor a theater. We do not come as spectators. We come as the Body of Christ to join ourselves more fully to Christ in the Word and the Eucharist. There is no stage. Although we give prominence to the place for the Altar and Ambo, we are not passive onlookers to a performance given for our benefit. Instead, we join with Christ in offering ourselves in a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Next time at Mass, notice that when the presider speaks the words of the Eucharistic prayer, he always uses the pronoun “we”, never “I”.

The priest celebrant presides at the Eucharist from a location where he can be seen and heard clearly by all present. Because in his person and role we acknowledge another presence of Christ in our midst, his chair should reflect the dignity of his role in the assembly, but it should not be distant or extravagant.