

PASTOR'S PONDERINGS . . .

"All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27,28)

"This means that you are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are fellow citizens of the saints and fellow members of the household of God. You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus, himself as the capstone. Through him, the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22)

"How is it that each of us hears them in his native tongue? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites. We live in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the regions of Libya around Cyrene. There are even visitors from Rome – all Jews, or those who have come over to Judaism; Cretans and Arabs too. Yet each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the marvels God has accomplished." (Acts of the Apostles 2:8-11)

Each of the above passages from Scripture is truly Good News for us at St. Leo the Great. These passages are played out in the lives of our parishioners daily, although I am not certain that we are always aware of it. Our wonderful diversity of parishioners is such a great gift but I worry sometimes that it is more "us" and "them" and "my parish" and "your parish" instead of "our parish". Does our diversity divide us into separate camps and groups alienating us at times from each other instead of uniting us as fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God? And what about language? When we speak in our own languages, do we hear God speaking about the marvels of the kingdom in our own tongue? I cannot say that I always feel that this is true when I am preaching in English on Sunday. How well do the Burundians, Guatemalans, and Congolese understand? How well do the Americans understand when the songs are in Kurundi or Spanish? Since our main concern is to grow spiritually and to enhance our relationship with the Lord, we are most concerned here at St. Leo with connecting to the Lord and one another and all others especially through the prayer of the church.

In twelve years, we have seen beautiful signs of how the Lord is bringing us together to be the church. More ministries have formed. Our two weekend liturgies are consistently full. Parents are still bringing their children for baptism and some adults are inquiring about the faith and/or seeking to complete their initiation

into the church. Parishioners want to be included in our parish ministries and contribute to them as well as benefit from them. We are benefitting from

the spiritual and corporal works of mercy and participating in them also. Our children benefit from attending good Catholic and non-parochial grade schools and high schools. We are training parish catechists for sacramental preparation and teaching religion to our children and adults. Our new youth ministry is off to a great start and our youth are learning to pray together and be parish together. **We are truly alive and growing! Thanks be to God.**

Twelve years ago, our staff made a pledge to each other and to the parish that we would learn to pray together. This would be one of the first things we would do to understand how we can be so diverse and yet so united. We believe that if we learned to pray together then we could learn to do anything together. The Lord has been blessing our pledge with truth. Our main liturgy on Sunday is truly a multi-cultural experience now. The entire diversity of our parish is represented in our prayer from the congregation to the liturgical ministers to the readings, songs, music and choir. It is not just "your parish" or "my parish" but our parish together and everyone is always welcome to pray with us any Sunday without exception. We do not have to just see ourselves as the Guatemalan Community or the Burundian Community or the American Community. We are St. Leo's the church of God, the Body of Christ in Cincinnati. No other distinctions are necessary. Thanks be to God!

This past June our parish staff attended *The Amazing Parish* conference that the Archdiocese of Cincinnati hosted. We now have a PLT, Parish Leadership Team, that is dedicated to meeting once a week for prayer and discussion. We have redefined and strengthened our mission statement and vision for the parish work and ministry that the Lord has been giving us to do. We are in the process of bringing clarity to the mission and the purpose for ministry and communicating this with parish council and then to the parish. We have been aided by the wonderful growth of our parish and the obvious fruits of learning how to pray together and discerning why God has brought us together and what dynamics are needed to keep us healthy and growing with a promising future.

— Fr. Jim

