

## MISSION V. MAINTENANCE

What vision do you have of Our Savior? How do you see us, on Cody Road, embodying the “Great Commission” to preach the Gospel? What would you think are the top 5 priorities for our parish? Most importantly, by what criteria would you make the assessment?

The title of this essay gives the direction for the answer to the last question I asked above. Should the Church (locally or corporately) be primarily oriented toward “mission” or “maintenance”? Obviously a crucial component enabling us to answer the question is missing: how do we define these terms? I want to offer you one take on the process of definition; the result will allow you to come to your own conclusions about the priorities, the vision, you have for Our Savior.

A church that is primarily “maintenance”-based is one that is concerned more than anything else with the well-being of its members. To this end, its major points of focus are programs like counseling outreach, day-care, social opportunities for many different demographic segments (divorced, widowed, single, young married...), children’s activities (e.g., “Upward Basketball”), and so on. The attractiveness of this model is its having “something for everyone.” Slogans like “every member in ministry” often mean “every member in an activity.” What is important to understand is that unless one takes care of business at home, to support, tend and strengthen, one will not have a strong vanguard to advance the Gospel. The danger is that the church can easily become a social services center that has less to do with Jesus Christ than it has to do with convenience.

A church that is primarily “mission”-based is one that sees its call to preach the Gospel (using words only if necessary, as St. Francis is reputed to have said) in all ways and in all places. This church will be strong in supporting overseas “sister-churches,” be heavily involved in programs like soup kitchens, Habitat for Humanity, Food For The Poor, and so on. The attractiveness of this model (admittedly, more limited than one might like) is its commitment to social justice as the core of the Gospel of Jesus Christ who came “not to be served but to serve...” (Mk. 10:45). What is important to understand is that unless one seeks to evangelize, to advance the Gospel, one will have far too much time for “navel-gazing” and self-congratulation. The danger is burnout; how can one give what one has run out of?

Clearly, there must be a balance of the two senses of church: one vision cannot be the 100% approach of any community. But I think it will not be a surprise to anyone to see that the Gospel’s claims on us require us to be mission-oriented first (with maintenance as a way of sustaining mission), rather than maintenance-oriented first (with mission as a way of justifying or rationalizing our self-focus).

It is for this reason that things like Catholic Charities, or Temascalapa, or Food For The Poor, are central (in fact, crucial) to our self-understanding as Christians. It is also why excellent liturgies, Ministry of Care, religious education opportunities, and so on are also crucial: they give us the “training table” wherewithal to be able to engage in the struggle to advance the victory of the Cross of Christ.

Where are you in your own desires for a model of church for Our Savior? How

maintenance-oriented are you, or how mission-oriented do you want to be (always remembering we can never have all one or all the other)? How badly do you want our parish to become like the model in your mind? The answer to this self-reflection should lead you to a re-consideration of your Time & Talent stewardship. It's not too late—Lord knows we need many hands!

Think, pray—then act!