

Doing it for the Right Reasons

By Tim Glemkowski, L'alto Catholic Institute, 2018

I talk with a lot of pastors who are motivated to make changes to the way their parish functions because they see a need for renewal. Some begin a conversation with me because they see an aging population in their parish or have read statistics about decline in church membership around the country or have less volunteers or less money, etc. etc.

While experiencing these "pain points" can be great for getting us out of our seats and awakening us to the need for renewal, they can only get us so far.

At the end of the day, the courage to make real changes to a parish stuck in maintenance mode has to come from a deeper place. Being in this game for the right reasons is so important. As with anything in life, the intention that we bring to our work of parish renewal is crucial.

This past Sunday, we heard this from Jesus, "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them." I think the same is true of us in ministry if we aren't motivated by the right reasons. In my opinion, there are really two fundamental reasons that we should gather around in working to renew our parishes around a vision for evangelization and discipleship.

1. Love of God
2. Love of Neighbor

Love of God because Jesus Christ Himself gave a single mission to the Church and that was to make disciples of the entire world. We exist fundamentally for the salvation of all. Obedience to Jesus Christ is the primary reason that we work to make disciples.

Love of neighbor is more commonly my personal motivation in evangelizing, though. When I was eighteen years old, I encountered the personal love that God had for me in a new and profound way. From that moment, everything in my life changed. Having known the darkness, loneliness, and emptiness of a life lived not in relationship with Jesus Christ, my heart breaks for anyone who has to walk through this world not knowing that love. Furthermore, I believe that it is possible for people to eternally reject the love that God holds out for them. In other words, Hell is real. If a relationship with Jesus Christ is the happiness of my neighbor in both this life and the next, how much would I have to hate somebody not to work patiently so that they might know Him?

Only these reasons will help us plow through the frustration and confusion of attempting to bring about culture change. If we're just in this because we want to be in charge of the

most vibrant parish in the area, then we will just want to please everybody and won't make tough decisions that might offend people. If we want to form disciples just because we want more butts in the seats, then we'll be tempted to look for silver bullets instead of the long faithfulness of walking with people as they become fully mature missionary disciples. Only love, of God and neighbor, can truly propel us forward in becoming the life-giving parish that God is calling us to be.