

[7/6] Toward Becoming One Parish (V)

By Fr. Steven Lewis, Parochial Vicar

This past week, we celebrated our Independence Day. While its name emphasizes a separation of the 13 colonies from their originating nation, we should not lose sight of the collective action declaring our independence and fighting for it. “United we stand, divided we fall” was a slogan that bound us together in common cause. The constitutional republic which we enjoy today better reflects that union than our first attempt at a national government.

In a similar way, the history of Catholicism in this country speaks to the diverse way that one faith found different cultural expressions. In big urban areas, you could often find different Catholic churches founded by Irish, German, Italian, and Polish immigrants in close proximity. Different nations tended to hold different saints dear; there were diverse ways of celebrating the same holidays; public processions and celebrations common to the more Catholic countries were unheard of in places where the faith had been persecuted or even underground for a time. In short, it was hard to get along with all our differences.

Reflecting the custom of the pastoral council of St. Maximilian Kolbe, we have decided that our joint discussions will take a pause during July and August. It is difficult enough to plan family travel without the additional worry about making church meetings. So far, we have discussed matters under the Pillars identified as Attracting Parishioners / Youth, and Music / Liturgy.

The Catholic Leadership Institute produced a whitepaper earlier this year titled *Reaching, Engaging, and Inspiring the Next Generation*. It was based on an 18-month survey of The Millennial Generation (born 1981-96) and Generation Z (born 1997-2012). A recent study reported 85% of young people stop practicing the faith between Confirmation and reaching age of 21. We are somewhat reassured that many churches are struggling to reach this age group. The survey helped us recognize that many parish celebrations and office hours are during the typical workday. Offering services like weeknight confessions (which we have offered for some time on Mondays and Wednesdays) and a weeknight Mass (recently started on Wednesdays at St. Patrick) can help us reach this community. It also invites us to think: when we discuss matters like the time of Mass, do we consider “what do I want” or “what would be best for the community?”

We also note there are merits to scale, here. We noted the efforts in churches in eastern Monroe County to engage these young adults through efforts called Converge (www.converge-roc.com) and Elevate (elevate-roc.com) that we are aware of, and hope to periodically advertise in the bulletin to raise awareness.

Fr. Symon will resume alternating bulletin columns next week. I will speak about the Pillars of Music / Liturgy in a future column.