

Planning for Mission – Oklee, Goodridge, Grygla
The Most Rev. Andrew H. Cozzens. S.T.D., D.D.

- I. Tonight is not just about a practical issue – what are we going to do with one less priest?
 - A. It is about a spiritual issue: How can we change and grow so that we can fulfill the mission that Jesus gave us.
 - B. That mission? Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:18-30).
- II. John 15: 1-11: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
- A. This is an image of the Church.
- B. This is what we receive in the Eucharist as Jesus says in John 6: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me” (John 6:54-57).
- C. Only if we are connected to him will we bear fruit.
- D. Sometimes for the vine to bear fruit we have to prune.

III. Pastoral Vision for the Diocese of Crookston: New Life through the Tender Compassion of Our God.

- A. The missionary moment in which we are living in our world today.
- B. The most telling statistic is that in the last 10 years in the diocese of Crookston we have seen a 30% drop in mass attendance.
- C. We are living in missionary times – sometimes called “apostolic times” because it is like the time of the apostles when the world did not know Jesus Christ.
- D. What this means is that a “maintenance mode” of Christian life is no longer viable.
 - 1. We can no longer just presume that if we offer it they will come.
 - 2. We need to find ways to become more missionary – like the early Christians were when they lived in the Roman empire that was against them.

IV. Here is the key: It will require change.

- A. Right now we are organized for handling decline. This is what we have been experience for more than 25 year and it is what we are used to.
- B. If we want to engage the mission that Christ has given us we will have to change.

V. To do this we have developed in our pastoral vision three priorities, which I want to briefly explain.

- A. Revive the people who come to become authentic disciples.
- B. Plan to use our resources well.
- C. Evangelize those around us who don’t yet know Christ and his Church.

VI. Today we are gathered to begin planning for mission.

- A. “God what are you asking us to do in this moment?” “God where are you asking us to focus?” “God what do you want me to do?”
- B. To do accomplish this – we must be willing to look at everything. “I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, *a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation*” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 27).

VII. We need to prune and discern what to do and what to let go of and what to do.

- A. What are the principles that we will use?
 1. **What will help us to make authentic disciples?**
 2. **What will allow us to reach those most in need of the Gospel?**
 3. **What does a mission centered parish look like?**

VIII. Now we are going to enter into a time of prayer. We are going to go into the church together for adoration for about 20 minutes.

- A. I am going to invite you to read this scripture passage that I started with and to answer three questions.
 1. **How have you encountered Jesus at your parish?**
 2. **What is the greatest challenge you face as a parish?**
 3. **What would need to change for your parish to grow?**
- B. These questions will allow us to begin to discuss how we might begin to address the mission.