

14th Sunday of the Year - Year C
July 7, 2019

“The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few. So, ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” In growing up, the religious sisters who taught us in Catholic school would not hesitate to use this scripture passage to speak with us about becoming a priest, sister, or brother. Often during the years of priestly formation in the seminary, I would reflect on these words or have them presented again and again in retreats, homilies, and spiritual conferences.

Those words were true when Jesus spoke them so many centuries ago; true when you first heard them, and true when I heard them....and even more true in 2019. The application of these words would refer to different people in different ways in different times....but their truth never fades.

Yes, Jesus was exhorting his first disciples to preach his message to the world. But who are the laborers? Well, really the laborers are all of us. Sure, when I heard those words spoken in the context of a religious vocation, I took them to mean an invitation to priesthood. But the invitation is not exclusive to priests and religious, but is addressed to all according to their own vocation, their own state of life.

For us, specifically, we are speaking about a “harvest” located in the towns and villages of Antwerp, Philadelphia, Theresa, Evans Mills, Black River, Deferiet, Wilna, Calcium, and LeRay. This harvest presents even a greater challenge because at one time there were resident pastors in Antwerp, Evans Mills, Black River, and Deferiet.

Yes, things have changed. The geographical area of the harvest has not changed. The number of people to be served has dramatically decreased for many reasons too numerous to address right now. That decrease has occurred even though there are substantial increases in housing in the area, not to mention Fort Drum. In addition, we have gone from six places of worship to two.

We may want to run away from these disheartening facts, but we must face reality. These changes only highlight the need for more laborers, in other words all of us.

To survive as parishes, many people need to step up to the plate, and, speaking of plate, if I can play with words, we need to be consistent in

our weekly financial support of the parishes as well as increasing our support of the parishes.

St. Paul's and St. Mary's are two parishes in the larger reality known as the Diocese of Ogdensburg. A unique characteristic of the Catholic Church is that each person, each parish, each diocese, each country, each continent is part of a larger reality known as Church. As Church we stand in solidarity, looking out for the needs of one another and never focusing solely on the individual needs of person, parish, diocese or country. We stand together.

As you know, one of our priests, Fr. Douglas Lucia, has been selected as Bishop of Syracuse, NY. Fr. Lucia is currently pastor in Madrid and Waddington, but also holds several other responsibilities in the diocesan Church of Ogdensburg. His leaving the diocese creates an unexpected gap in our parishes and in the diocese. Losing a priest forces the bishop to find a way to continue the ministry provided by that priest.

Bishop LaValley has asked me to take on the responsibility of Madrid and Waddington as well as some other additional duties in the diocese. This change, which will take place at the end of July, surprised me and probably likewise surprises you. Fr. Vicente Jazmines, currently chaplain at the Psychiatric Center in Ogdensburg, will become pastor of St. Mary's and St. Paul's.

Ministry and planning must continue no matter who is pastor. Thus, I am committed to working with you and assisting Fr. Jazmines in the transition. The feel of any transition resembles presiding at one's own wake. The month of July cannot be a wake, but must be part of an ongoing process.

Many of you have volunteered to assist in various ministries in the parish. Your desire to volunteer and to serve is a clear indication that the Catholic Church in this area is alive and well. Your ongoing support of the parishes indicates your clear desire to live your faith on a daily basis.

Each priest is a little different....just as each parishioner is a little different. These differences provide opportunities of growth for all.

As a community of faith, we now do what Jesus asked us to do, to celebrate the Eucharist, our source of peace, both now and in eternal life.