

## **Traditions: Cherishing decades of history**

Bishop Timothy L. Doherty

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I wish I could remember which religious nun suggested a “moving out of the house” tradition. My parents were relocating, selling their home of 30 years. Much of it was built in 1859. They added to it their married history which included raising seven children. The nun suggested that before leaving the last time, we should walk from room to room with a candle, say a short prayer, and everyone present would reflect on a personal memory related to each room. That was the whole box of instructions! I was a priest for about 15 years at this point.

Not everyone was able to be there. So, in the twilight of the chosen day, I joined mom and dad and my sister Kristen in this homemade ritual. We moved through the various spaces in the downstairs. Nothing was rehearsed, but clear memories were recited. No one was trying to say anything profound, but as we progressed the heartfelt scenes weaved around us.

Over decades there was painting and decorating, Sun-day dinners, Thanks-giving and Christ-mas. Cheese, crackers and root beer on Saturday nights, watching Lawrence Welk and Gunsmoke in black and white. The cultural tremors from the Beatles and Woodstock. When we moved there in 1960, the kitchen telephone had no dial or buttons, and you lifted the receiver to tell the live operator which number you wanted.

We processed to the second story through a pocket door that guarded the bottom of the stairs. Or did we go up the rear stairs in the newer addition to the house? We started in the boys’ room, the bedroom I shared with two brothers until I went to college; then the girls’ room where three slept, and there was a bedroom room which the oldest daughter had to herself. The younger girls could hardly wait for the eldest to move out and move on!

I remember a bit of apprehension as we neared the last two spaces, the one full bath and my parents’ room. I started to walk past the bathroom, but mom said we were going in. “Why?” I asked. And she replied, “This is where I took care of my sick children.” (I still get *verklempt* recalling this.)

The last space was my parents’ room. With a candle and a prayer, we said our memories. Does every child sneak in on a Saturday morning to watch their parents sleeping? My folks shared memories of recuperations and conversations in the dark. Anxieties about job security. Concern about one or another child’s decision making. The light of that candle illuminated, at that moment, a true partnership. Talk about a holy moment!

It was a great goodbye, a liturgy. As we later thought about it, we learned something. While we all resided under one roof, it was a different house for each of the nine who had lived there.

Before hard drives placed data in segments, the ancients had devised their memory palaces. A person could remember an amazing range of things by parking events in imaginary individual rooms, courtyards, porches. Particular types of memories were catalogued in specific spaces. Later on, one simply returned to that space to retrieve a particular memory. Nine people each had 30 years of experiences in our house, making for 270 total years. That house heard a lot of praying across three decades. At the end, with Glory Be’s and Hail Mary’s as keys, we unlocked a precious treasury.