

Helping Parish Communities through Change

With the completion of pastoral plans for all the parishes in the diocese, we are now implementing those plans. The sharing of pastors, the linkage, clustering and at times the cessation of mass at a beloved church has challenged pastors, staffs and lay leaders in unexpected ways. "What happened to that loving community of Christians I thought I was part of" – is a common question being asked by leaders in midst of leadership changes.

Parish leaders need to be prepared to help their parish deal with the expected resistance to change, and the emotions associated with the grieving process that each person in the community will have to face before the community can find peace once again.

The typical stages of grief that a community must come to grips with include;

Denial – initial disbelief that proposed change will actually ever happen. Leaders can be misled thinking everything is fine concerning the proposed change since no one is saying anything when in fact the community is in denial.

Anger – attempts to block the change, anger at the pastor, parish staff, lay leaders, diocesan staff, bishop and Holy Father is common. Help people to express their anger and love them through this stage.

Bargaining – seeking alternatives to the anticipated change – many unrealistic. Help people brainstorm alternatives, help them to see why they won't work. It's hard to accept change if you believe there may have been a better alternative.

Depression – lack of energy or belief that anything good can come of the current state of affairs.

Acceptance – sometimes after the change has been implemented and things aren't as bad as feared.

All individuals and communities move through these stages in different times and schedules. As religious leaders we must walk with our people through the paschal mystery of death, time in the tomb and resurrection. If you need help on your journey, don't hesitate to give us a call at Pastoral Services