

Managing the Challenges of the Priesthood continued from front cover

flock, to help them grow closer to Christ and share the love of God with them. However, without a healthy balance that incorporates quality time with spouse and family, the stresses of ministry (including compassion fatigue) will take their toll, leading to burnout, disillusionment, and even despair.

When we are not respecting our own or others' limitations and boundaries, we need to hold each other accountable in a spirit of love, care and concern. How many priests have heard from their bishop or parish council, "Father, you didn't take all of your vacation yet this year. Please do so-?" If you see a priest who is overwhelmed, instead of judging his character, consider that he might be struggling with a life that is out of balance and that he needs your help. Having a healthy priest is not a guarantee for having a healthy parish community, but it's a really good start.

Yours in Christ,

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A Reflection by Rev. Dr. Fr. Richard Andrews

"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." – 1 Corinthians 12:26

The ministry of the parish priest is central to the life of the Church. If married, the support of his presbytera and children are essential to his effectiveness. The health of their marriage and family life is equally important to the vitality of his work. Priestly ministry is simultaneously challenging and immensely fulfilling. It is a calling, grounded in a deep sense of purpose, and sustained through prayer and serving others— but it can be threatened by a lack of healthy boundaries.

Dysfunctional boundaries can come from both sides. From the priest's side, an inability to separate himself from his ministry may cause him to project issues onto his spouse, children, bishop, and parishioners. This can lead to alienation and conflict. These issues can also lead to a workaholic lifestyle, leaving little time for family and eventually causing burnout. Parishioners and church leadership can also cross boundaries with unrealistic expectations and conflictual behaviors. This can lead to feelings of isolation and desperation for the priest and his family.

What can be done to help? Each person, both laity and clergy alike, must strive for health of body, mind and soul. We must encourage one another to achieve this goal. Specifically, bishops, parish councils and parishioners can help their clergy be healthy by respecting and encouraging their priest to take at least one day off per week; to take regular vacations each year; if his jurisdiction offers it, to take a sabbatical leave whenever one is afforded; to attend conferences, retreats and seminars for spiritual and marriage enrichment and ongoing education; and to provide fair remuneration and benefits. Likewise, they can support him and his family by celebrating birthdays, name days and ordination anniversaries. Hierarchs can further help by building up the order of the diaconate to assist the priest in the liturgical and ministerial life of the parish. Can we imagine a time when every parish has a deacon who is remunerated by the parish? Bishops can also help by developing diocese-wide initiatives to ensure the long-term viability of parishes, simultaneously relieving pressure on priests from having to do so much for their communities.

Thankfully, many hierarchs and parishes are supportive of their priests, but clergy also need to take responsibility for their self-care. They need to relinquish a measure of control in the parish and plan ahead to participate in the offerings mentioned. They must exercise self-discipline in establishing and maintaining regular personal habits of prayer, healthy diet, and physical exercise. All priests begin their ministry with a strong commitment to serve their

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