

A Priest Tells the Simple Truth About What Being a “Parishioner” Really Means

by [Fr. Bill Peckman](#) - Jul 13, 2017

Some might differentiate between a “parishioner in good standing” or not. I do not ascribe to such a notion.

*Parishioners must share in the responsibilities that are part and parcel of belonging to a parish. Why? Because the nature of a parish is that of a family and not a business. **A parish is not a business that offers holy stuff.***

*Some parishioners, by virtue of infirmity or advanced age, might well be parishioners in the fullest sense of the word even though their physical limitations prevent their fully living the life of the parish. From these individuals, their prayer is so very important. It is not a second class offering, but their way of connecting to the life and mission of the parish. **Hence, not all of the following applies to them.***

Here’s what it means to be a parishioner:

1) Mass attendance on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

Catholic Mass attendance is the center of the Catholic life. By Mass attendance, I do not merely mean being present in a building where Mass is happening, but being engaged in thought, word, and action in the worship Of God. When a Catholic willfully exempts themselves from the Mass, they gut the very means of growing in faith.

*The Church considers this so important that it mandates that all Catholics go to Mass on Sundays (Saturday night is fine as well) and considers it **mortally sinful when one chooses to not go to Mass.***

2) Support of the parish and its ministries

*Support is twofold. First there is the financial support of the parish. Support comes predominantly through the thanksgiving sacrifice. This is what the collection is properly called. **The collection is not a cash register where we pay for services rendered, but a place where we make part of our thanksgiving sacrifice to God.***

This is why I do not look at giving records. The tithe is between you and God and it is to God that you will be responsible. The tithe is your giving thanks to God for the blessings He has given you. The tithe is to be used, according to Scripture, for the mission of the Church and care of the poor. I will talk about the tithe once a year as I do not want to use time set aside for the worship of God to talk about money.

*Money is only part of the equation. We also contribute by **giving of our time and energy to help execute the responsibilities Parishes depend on volunteers for many things.** I know everyone is busy. It is fact of life for most people. That said, as the old saying goes, "Many hands make for light work."*

Whether it being in teaching, youth, Mass, shut-ins, school, and various other aspects of parish life, giving of some of your time helps to build up the parish and continue its mission.

3) Participating in the Mission of the Church

The Mission of the Church is geared towards its growth. Parents do this in the raising of their children to be faithful followers of Christ. We do this by evangelizing the fallen away and the unchurched. We do this by being a faithful beacon in the community around us. This is why prayer, Mass attendance, educating ourselves on what constitutes the faith, and teaching our youth to correctly prioritize life are so important. The Church is not a museum for the 99 sheep who don't stray, but is geared to the 1 who does.

I will not change the teachings of the Church. That would be irresponsible. The goal of any parish to 'go make disciples of the nations' and to 'teach all that Jesus taught us.' This is the commission of the Jesus Christ at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. This is dominant message in my preaching and teaching.

My Duty as a Pastor

Having said what is the duty of being a parishioner, let me now say how I see my duty as pastor. First and foremost I understand my role as a pastor of souls. I am called 'father' for a reason. I am to look to the good and care of those placed under my pastoral care.

As parishioners, you belong to God first, you are members of His flock. You are not my subjects, but the portion of God's family assigned to my care. I have the responsibility of looking to the good of every parishioner even when they are not looking to their own good. As I see myself as father of the parish, I do not see myself as predominantly a CEO, CFO, storekeeper, or absentee landlord. My goal is to incorporate all the good traits of a good dad in how I guide the parish.

*Furthermore, I am bound to teach what the Church teaches in the way the church wants. I am 'by the book' in many ways in that I will follow my duties as is prescribed by such documents as Canon Law, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the Catechism, and the Scriptures. I believe that if **I do not respect the authority placed over me that I have no right to expect anyone to respect the authority I have as a pastor.** If I make changes, it will be to bring us in line with the teachings of the Church. Truth is to be applied with charity. My goal as pastor will be to fix what can be fixed, grow what can be grown, and protect my flock whatever would prey on them.*

I believe that parishes are not merely meant to survive, but to thrive. This takes our cooperation with Christ. This takes the grace of the sacraments.

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