

Parish Talk from Tom Soccio

the dictionary defines parish in several ways but consistently it's a body of individuals united with a commonality. In a church sense, it is an ecclesiastical area committed to one pastor, comprised of members creating a community of caring for one another bonded by a spiritual relationship with God.

My introduction into the Sacred Heart of Jesus parish began in 1956 when I started Mrs. Houser's kindergarten class at Sacred Heart School, the beginning of a 9 year experience of fundamental and religious education and an everlasting community of friends. I was truly blessed to have an education taught by teaching nuns, deep in knowledge of the Catholic religion and broadly educated in the core curriculum subject areas mandated at that time...including writing with proper grammar...yes, grammar

The in-classroom religion sessions were the building blocks of my spiritual awareness, moral behavior and the understanding of the parish's purpose to promote Catholicism in our lives and thus in the community in which we lived. Learning about the Mass and its meaning was very special to me, inspiring me to become an alter server which meant learning Latin. That was really special. I don't remember us going to Mass weekly as they do now, but I know we went on the Holy Days of obligation. The religious education is what I believe kept all the students focused on the parish life by going to Mass every Sunday, volunteering as helpers in the classroom, at the bazaars, fund raising for projects and charities and most of all, being instilled with compassion for the needs of others.

My mother benefitted greatly from my attending SHS. She became a cafeteria volunteer, made new friends and had a social life within the parish...something she hadn't had before as a stay at home mother. I loved attending Mass with my mother but when I started to drift entering my senior year in HS, I'd ask her why she always went...she'd always tell me that her problems were off her mind and peace was found when she walked through the doors of the church and I think I finally "get it" now

One thing about our parish that is constant is the door is always open. You are always a member of SH Parish, whether active or inactive. I left the parish pretty much when I left for college. Let me re-phrase that, I left being a practicing Catholic but I never left Christianity due to the Christian foundation solidly entrenched within me . during those years as an active parish member

When my future wife and I prepared for our marriage, we came to the parish for guidance because I was Catholic, she was not and worse, she was divorced. Father Schmolhoffer was welcoming with open arms but explained the annulment process she would have to do for us to be married in the Catholic church. We even went to the diocese's marriage encounter weekend to prepare us for married life, regardless of any religious affiliation. That tribunal process ended without an annulment due the lack of cooperation from her former husband and in-laws. I surrendered my Catholic religion access to the sacraments and Mass for her sake. Father Schmallhoffer felt our relationship was strong and I'd say his intuition was correct as we are still married 38 years later.

Married in the 1st Methodist church across the street was our fate but attending for several years didn't sustain us, so we stopped attending church altogether. I mention this because until you stop including church in your life, especially with young children, and have been away from the Catholic church, in particular, you cannot imagine the

emptiness in your soul and life that you experience and how much you miss the sacraments. My brother Rocco urged me many times to attend Mass with him but I always had an excuse, sometimes it was fear. His sudden passing stirred me to move, as God does with us, and I became determined to return to Sacred Heart. My wife and I discussed my return and she knew I wouldn't be whole without the sacraments and her love for me turned into the gift of going through the annulment process 30 years after our marriage. I know it was difficult for her but she endured. I spent nearly 2 years coming to Mass without access to the sacraments, which can be embarrassing always not going in line to receive Communion, but I was at least now at peace inside the walls of Sacred Heart again; welcomed by old friends and introduced to new ones.

so, you can always come back to SH parish, because it is a parish of people who welcome you as you are now and encourage you to be even more. That encouragement has led me to be a active member of the St. Vincent DePaul Society, a lector and greeter, both of which I honor and cherish. Sacred Heart is a prodigal parish, just as God is the prodigal Father of us all, extravagant in giving to those in need, compassionately holding close those in their time of desperation and grief and sharing themselves in the name of Christ to strengthen and grow our parish..

Thank you Father Bill for inviting me to speak. I support the committee's initiative to improve parish facilities, allowing more parishioners to participate in the parish's activities and spiritual offerings, as well as, enticing others to return to the parish while giving our youth reason to stay active beyond high school.