

PARISH and FAMILY LIFE at GOOD SHEPHERD PARISH
Fr. Dave O'Leary, S.T.L., D.Phil.
Parochial Administrator

After teaching in higher education, seminary and university for 18 years, it was a transition to go back to parish ministry. But since last December I have been the Parochial Administrator of Good Shepherd Parish in Wayland and have discovered some key points on both parish and family life. These brief insights and reflections just might help you to appreciate both your home parish and family more.

One does not choose one's family, but one can choose one's parish. Both parish and family should be life giving, nurturing and dynamic. Family and parish both take daily commitment, self-sacrifice, work and forgiveness. A family is rooted in the mutual love and respect for its members. Family members willingly give of themselves for one another and support one another. The celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism for infants, calls the parents the primary educators of their children. Lessons learned around the dining/kitchen table are the same lessons that are learned and lived in the parish.

In the collect prayer for the Feast of the Holy Family, we pray:

O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards.

So what are those virtues of family life that we should be practicing?

- **Welcoming!** Families spend many weeks and months getting ready for a newborn baby to arrive. Preparing the baby's room, getting supplies and most importantly talks with the soon to be older brother and sister. At Good Shepherd Parish we welcome all visitors and everyone that has come out for the liturgy at the very beginning of Mass. Occasionally, we even invite people to shake hands or greet those around them. We have good nametags on lanyards so people will get to know each other's name. We have a welcoming Mass for all new family members at the beginning of the year. During the school year, each religious education class takes a turn in being greeters at the doors of the church and handing out the bulletin or liturgy aid for the Mass. Being welcoming as a family and a parish is how we imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother, who proclaimed in her welcoming with Elizabeth, (Luke 1:46-56) that her soul, her entire being proclaims the greatness of God!

- **Respect!** Families need to be rooted in love and respect for all members. All family members take time to attend the shows, performances, events of the younger brother and sister. Attending a siblings' event is a way of showing respect. As a parish family we show respect and love by remembering all people are created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Yes, Good Shepherd Parish prays for the unborn. Our Knights of Columbus pray the Rosary for Life once a month after the first two Sunday morning Masses. Also, parish members go into Boston Common on the first Saturday of

the month to distribute socks, coats, gloves, hats, sunscreen and clothes to the street people. Parish members donate all goods and material. Both the Knights of Columbus and the Boston Sock Exchange members are showing respect to those people on the fringes of society. Again if all people are created in God's image and likeness, then all people deserve love and respect. The Eighth Commandment says not to bear false witness against another. Many people are committing an act of calumny and breaking the 8th Commandment by acts of discrimination and racism. Both families and the Parish need to teach love and respect for all people from conception to a natural death.

Time around the table! Both family life and parish life is rooted around the table. Families gather many times during the week to share a meal. Saying Grace before a meal and saying thank you to God is a great way to pray together as a family. When we share an important meal, we take great care. We spend time with one another even before we move to the table. Families tell their stories of past events and future hopes. Once at table people we tend to stay there. An empty chair is a troubling sign. At Good Shepherd Parish we see the celebration of the Mass as a gathering around the table. We greet one another at the start of Mass, our very well prepared Lectors proclaim the stories of our Faith, we pray for the parish needs in the Prayers of the Faithful, and we are nourished and strengthened by the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ that we receive. Many people have worked to make liturgies at Good Shepherd parish up-lifting and welcoming; volunteer cleaners who pick up and clean the church, volunteer lectors, Eucharistic ministers, musicians, singers, the volunteers who clean and press the linens used at Mass, and the great people who support the parish by their time, treasure and talent. Just like a family the parish needs many people working together to witness and proclaim God's love in the world.

Forgiveness! Every family has had its moments of melt down, crisis and trials. Bad days lack of sleep, not eating right, all lead to short tempers and little patience. Words are said in moments of pressure and stress. These words can cause great hurt and lasting pain. But families who ask forgiveness of one another, families who take a moment to say sorry to one another, these families grow stronger. Admitting weakness is also showing a willingness to change and do better. Saint Paul had a problem and weakness that he prayed to God asking for help. What the problem was we do not know, but Saint Paul received the answer from God; "Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you you, for in your weakness, my power reaches perfection" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). At Good Shepherd Parish, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered every Saturday afternoon and any time by appointment. During the seasons of Advent and Lent we had additional hours every Wednesday night and Saturday mornings. Many people came out to receive the Sacrament of God's love and mercy. Forgiveness is key to good family life and great parish life.

Parish and family do overlap, both are meant to be life giving and both can learn from one another. The picture we have in the Gospel of Luke of the Holy Family is very brief. The story of Jesus lost in the Temple is a great insight on relying on extended families, both parish and blood line. Jesus was thought of being with extended family members,

but Mary and Joseph could not find him. But he was back in Jerusalem in the Temple. Mary and Joseph found him in the midst of the teachers in the Temple. The story ends with: “And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Luke 3:52). May your family and your parish family also advance in wisdom and age and favor before God and man by practicing virtues of family life!