

Jim Ahern – Mission Reflections

When I am asked about my faith and if I am a practicing Catholic I am reminded of an old joke. A tourist just arrived in New York City and he stops a man in the street and asks him “Excuse me Sir, how do I get to Carnegie Hall?” The man looks at him and says “Practice, practice....”

Well like most humor there is an element of universal truth in this story. Anyone who has ever competed in a sport or played an instrument knows that to achieve perfection in either endeavor is nearly impossible. But through discipline and practice you can continually expand your knowledge of your craft and experience the joy of discovering talents and an inner strength you did not know you possessed. The same is true with our faith.

Twenty-one years ago my wife and I were married and moved to Wollaston. I joined the parish here at St Ann. Early on, my only involvement in parish life was limited to attending weekly Mass.

When our children were born my wife and I brought them here to be baptized. As we met the other parents our sense of community began to grow. Many of those babies grew up to become classmates, teammates and fellow youth choir members of my children.

As families, we witnessed their first Holy Communion and Confirmation. We spent Christmas Eve together listening to our children celebrate the birth of Christ with their gift of song. And we all experienced the joy of Easter, which was always culminated with a mad dash across the rectory lawn in search of chocolate morsels.

About four years ago I had seen notices in the bulletin for several weeks asking for volunteers to become Eucharistic ministers, especially for the 7 a.m. Mass. One Sunday Sister Pat spoke at each of the Masses about the importance of Eucharistic ministers in helping others participate in the spiritual life of our parish.

This personal call to action was enough for me to get off the bench, or in this case the pew, and volunteer to become a Eucharistic Minister. After a thorough review of the duties required to prepare for the Mass, several training sessions and a written set of instructions in hand I was prepared to serve my first 7:00 a.m. Mass.

What I wasn't prepared for were the number of people who were there in attendance. As we entered the church the number of nurses and policemen, young people in various soccer and baseball uniforms and the old guard of the Catholic faith waiting to participate in the Mass and receive the sacraments humbled me.

When I first volunteered, I selfishly thought, what a great gift of time I was giving to the parish. Little did I realize that bearing witness to this devotion to faith on a weekly basis was a gift the parish has given me.

As with most things in life, the choices we make lead us in directions we did not anticipate. Through my work as a Eucharistic Minister I became friends with other members of the church community. Four years ago some of us men in the community joined together to form a group to read and discuss the liturgy.

We began to meet on Saturday mornings and we would review the readings for the upcoming Sunday. We would take the time to read and reflect on each of the readings. The readings took on new meaning for me as I listened to the shared thoughts of the other men in the group. Each of us viewed the readings through the prism of our own life's experiences. It was interesting to hear the different nuances wrested from a single reading.

These weekly meetings helped me to reflect on what my faith means to me and to develop the patience needed to allow the word of God to be revealed to me.

Little did I realize that these activities in faith building would be sorely tested. Three years ago I received a call at work that my brother, who just turned 50, had died suddenly in his sleep. While my family was still recovering from that blow, my Mother passed away three months later.

As devastating as these events were for my family we were comforted by the strength of our faith. As we gathered for the rite of Christian burial, the promise of everlasting life that our faith in Jesus provides helped sustain us.

So life goes on and with it new joys and sorrows. I continue to listen for opportunities to strengthen my faith. Sharing the good news by teaching CCD challenges me to examine my faith and provide an example for the young people in our parish. Visiting the sick shows me the power of faith in bearing the cross of infirmity.

My journey through life continues. I know the destination where I would like my odyssey to end. To achieve that goal I must take the advice of that wise old New Yorker and practice, practice....