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DISCERNING AND DEVELOPING TALENTS IN THE PARISH

Welcome. It is wonderful to have you on our campus.

Fr Vladimir and I have been asked to begin this conference by discussing the topic – DISCERNING AND DEVELOPING TALENTS IN THE PARISH. Let me begin by making some observations and reflections about these two vital areas of parish life. Fr Vladimir will discuss the practical applications of this topic. Then, we will ask you to break up into groups of 10 for a workshop session that we will explain after our presentations.

DISCERNING TALENTS –

- I. Let me share with you some fundamental premises
 - A. Scripture instructions (Romans 12:3-8, Eph. 4:11, 1 Cor.12: 8-28....
 1. Each person has a talent to offer. Every talent has its source in God. He is the author and giver of all of them.
 2. Each person has been given a talent.
 3. Each talent has been given for the purpose of offering it.
 4. Each talent offered confirms our dependence on one another
 5. Each talent offered has three overarching goals
 - a. They are to be used to the **benefit of the other**
 - b. They are to be used for the **building up of the unity of the church**
 - c. They are to be used for the purpose of **witnessing to the love of Christ and the truth of his Word to the outside community.**
- II. Given these premises, we must confirm and remind ourselves again and again that:
 1. Each person is needed, AND
 2. Each person needs to feel needed
 3. We must discern where each person's God-given gifts and talents are best used for His Glory

What are some of the ways to accomplish this?

- A. There are some typical, but unproductive ways to fill ministry positions:
 - Sadly, our usual mode of operation is to corral any warm body and employ it indiscriminately, despite the consequences. **(Plugging holes just to plug them)**

- More often than not we ask for volunteers which usually don't come, and if they do, are not the right fit for the ministry
 - We often use the same people over and over again because we know that they will produce. The result is that we create burn out, exhaust good people, and create dissatisfaction and frustration.
2. These methods may be necessary at first, either in a large parish or in a small mission, but we must move beyond this haphazard mode of operation to one which is more thoughtful, deliberate, and methodical.
3. Instead, we need to take time to **know our parish members**, to speak with them, to get to know their strengths and their weaknesses. We need to know them and encounter them as unique persons in whom God has planted a unique gift. Example: former parishioner who, besides performing other functions in the parish, immersed himself in reading what the Church Fathers wrote about prayer and was asked to produce a synopsis about for use in the parish.
4. We need to consider some of the following questions when we approach people:
- Who do I see in front of me? What am I hearing?
 - What kind of spirit or motivation do they demonstrate in regards to ministry? Is it based on their own ego? Is it based on just "getting things done?" Is it based just on achieving a parish life that prides itself on being progressive or on being successful, and "better" than the competition?
 - Instead, do they have a sense that they wish to serve Christ? And if not, how can I help them develop this?
 - Do they show that they can be committed to the ministry?
 - Will they be inclusive or will they have an unhealthy sense of ownership of the ministry, and an unwillingness to share their gift? ("This is my ministry")
 - Are they inspired, even though they may be anxious?
 - Do they exhibit leadership skills or are they followers?
 - Do I detect pastoral skills, skills such as the ability to listen, to solve problems, to respect others and respect other's ideas.
 - Do they have the ability to work with others?
 - Do they see their ministry as serving the larger vision of the church? Again, if not, how can I help them?

5. In other words, we need to look beyond what is the obvious, to be sensitive to and attuned to that which is often overlooked.
 - a. By the obvious, I mean, if they are a CPA = parish treasurer, professional teacher = church schoolteacher, caterer = parish cook. Some people may relish in this, but some may want no part of it, and consider it as a limitation of their real talents
 - b. I encourage you, then, to look not only for “ability” but “being”, the interior talents (leadership qualities, pastoral skills, conflict management, gift of hospitality).
 - c. *Abilities are easy to spot; inner talents, latent talents, require discernment.* (Italics mine – DK)

6. It goes without saying that every person must be encouraged to use his or her talent. This includes:
 - a. **The young** – young people need to have a sense of healthy ownership in their parish. They need to know that they have something to contribute and that they are valued.
 - b. **The elderly** - We must never forget that a parish ministry that does not include those whose gift is to pray, or to hand down a parish “tradition” through intergenerational activities, is an impoverished one. Our parish ministry is not complete without them.
 - c. **The infirm** - We must never forget that even the infirm, those who are suffering, also have a ministry. In their suffering they witness to the long-suffering of Christ.

7. Further, ministry must be connected to and is an incarnation of the mission of Christ. How can we engender this in those whom we enlist?
 - We need to encourage those in ministry, and ourselves, that their own spiritual life is vitally important (daily prayer, daily scripture reading, etc.)
 - Each ministry meeting needs to begin with prayer and a scripture that helps set the tone and the spirit.
 - We need to remind others and ourselves that ministering to others is accomplished with Christ, through Christ, and for Christ.

8. Most importantly, it is in our own connection with Christ that empowers us to DISCERN the talents of those around us.

That brings me to the second aspect of this talk:

DEVELOPING TALENTS: Not many people are ready-made for ministry. It is church leaders who have to EQUIP people for ministry.

- I. The word “equipping” (read text) found in Ephesians 4:12 means to:
 - i. Make fit
 - ii. Prepare
 - iii. Train
 - iv. Make qualified
 - v. Set a broken arm

- A. As I have stated before, this word implies that we cannot simply “fill holes” and hope for the best. This is recipe for disaster. This word is the best argument against “filling holes indiscriminately.”

- B. **Equipping implies and requires** us to fulfill some important tasks to assure that the ministries are functioning with those people who have the talents to do them, AND who have been trained to minister, AND who will be content with what they are doing.

- C. Where should we start? We need to assess the following:
 - * What ministries already exist?
 - * What are the ministries that need attention?
 - * Who is working in these areas now?
 - * How well are they doing?
 - * What help do they require?

- D. Having assessed this, we can proceed to help and support those areas that need help, and perhaps can and should be used as normal procedure for every ministry in the parish.
 1. A mission statement for every ministry is a very helpful tool. It can be a very simple document that helps each person to feel that they are on the same page as those requesting their talents.

 2. Within each ministry, particular responsibilities need to be delineated with clear, manageable, and reasonable outcomes. In other words, what are the parameters of the ministry?

 3. Those with the right heart and motivation but not possessing all the skills, need direction and encouragement. They need to be mentored and not left alone to “figure it out by themselves.” Some will need others to model for them what their responsibilities are.

4. Those we ask to ministry need to be positively challenged and stretched. They need to know WHY we have selected them to a certain ministry.
 5. Those possessing skills but not the right heart or motivation need help in developing the right spirit. Positive and regular reinforcement about the purpose and mission of the ministry and mission of the church is paramount.
 6. Those with experience in a particular ministry can and should be encouraged to act as mentors.
 7. Everyone needs someone with whom to confer. We need to have an answer to the question, “Whom do I go to when I have a question or a problem?”
 8. Are we (the parish) providing the resources that are required to fulfill the ministry or do we have expectations that are too high, and at the same time tie people’s hands without providing resources.
 9. Do we encourage cross-pollination between the ministries? Do we encourage ministries to communicate with each other? Where is collaboration possible?
 10. Where leadership skills are apparent, do we challenge those who have those skills with further responsibility.
- E. Without these supports in place, those in ministry can easily become frustrated and demoralized.

QUESTIONS FOR THE WORKSHOP

1. Identify 3-5 barriers that exist in your parish which hinder the discernment and development of talents?
2. Having identified the barriers, develop a clear strategy to overcome them and affect change in the way your parish deals with members of your community and the healthy use of their talents.