



# ST. VINCENT DE PAUL REGIONAL SEMINARY

OFFICE OF THE RECTOR

10701 South Military Trail ~ Boynton Beach, Florida 33436-4899

Tel: 561.732.4424 ~ Fax: 561.737.2205

## RECTOR'S CONFERENCE

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### “Munus Regendi: Good Leaders Good Shepherds”

A father, husband, or guardian's calling is to provide for his family: house them, fix leaking roofs, balance the family budget, pay the bills, and look after all of the affairs of life. Of course, there are also some men incapable of such responsibility and who have gravely failed their families – we all have seen both kinds. But let's stick to the man who lives up to his responsibilities; you will not hear him say, “This isn't why I got married! I just wanted marital bliss and to play with my kids not to take care of all of their temporal needs.”

The *Munus Regendi/Gubernandi/Pastorale* - this is our third dynamic of the reality of our lives as heads of a household. Do not be afraid of this dimension and aspect of your future ministry. There is more that can be said of this office, but tonight I am going to address how the pastor handles the temporalities of the parish. Like any new father, you certainly have a lot to learn, but with time, age, and experience you will gain knowledge of how to care for the temporal needs of your family.

I can remember my own father going back to his desk after dinner several nights a week saying that he had to go pay the bills – I thought this was just an excuse to watch the sports highlights. As I grew older I realized that there was actually a great deal to take care of, and in fact it wasn't until he died and I had to tidy up all the loose ends that I realized he actually did it all pretty expediently. Similarly during my first priestly assignment at St. Frances Cabrini with Msgr. Cippel, I can remember him staying at the office late after appointments and getting home around 10:30 PM. I'd ask him what he was doing and he would tell me that there was diocesan paperwork and financial matters that he needed to attend to. I remember telling him, “just come home and relax you're working too hard.” When I was made pastor in 2010 and realized all of the necessary desk work that needed to be done, I picked up the phone and called Msgr. Cippel and apologized for all those times that I did not understand what he was doing. I said with a shock in my voice, “John, I had no idea!” And as a true spiritual father he replied lovingly, “how could you have known?”

The key to living this pastoral office well is having a team around you whom you trust and who know a great deal about worldly affairs. The reality is that within 4 to 6 years most of you will be given your first pastorate. Thus, from day one start learning and ask the pastor to invite you to attend the finance council meetings, the parish pastoral council, the school board, etc. – ***listen and learn in order to one day lead.*** There is so much to learn as an associate; take advantage of the time you have and really ask to be mentored. Be deliberate in sharing your deficiencies and your desire to learn with your pastor and other business men and women whom you respect and trust. Don't put too much pressure on yourself, no one is expecting you to have an MBA from

Harvard or to read a spread sheet the way a CPA does. As a pastor you need a good bookkeeper, a trustworthy parish manager, and the diocesan office of human resources on speed dial, in a word you need a good team around you that supports your pastoral ministry. We are not the experts in the financial field, but we *are* surrounded by men and women who truly want to help us, so invite them in to sharing in this beautiful ministry of leading our household.

In addition to having a good team (which I have been blessed to have) rely upon your spiritual life to fortify you for difficult decisions, sleepless nights, and the struggles that you will encounter. The worries of the pastor are the five L's: leaks, locks, lights, lawns, and loans. There will be times you will be the only person left at the parish to mop up the overflowing toilet, or pick up the paper towels that are spilling over, or to lock up the doors late Saturday night, and don't forget turning out the lights. You will probably be the one to notice when the lawn isn't being cared for as well as it could be and maybe even pick a weed or two on your way to the office. You will be the one who has to work with your finance council when a loan needs to be taken out by the parish to fix an aging air-conditioning system or even to build new dormitories! Trust me, it takes a lot of grace to balance out the three *munera* in our lives, but it is important to realize that this in fact is a part *of* our life which need not be feared or shunned. You will be called to be a priest who exercises the sanctifying office, the prophetic office and yes the governing office. You will be an employer with all of the difficulties of managing persons with different backgrounds, personalities, and quirks. Our parishes are not immune from the all too human office politics and HR concerns. There are hard choices to be made regarding staff and personnel and the pastor must try to remain objective and always ask what the greater good is for the parish. This often means "biting the bullet" and letting people go who are hindering the mission, growth, and effectiveness of our parish offices. These moments really stink, but we are not alone. These are moments when we really need our brother priests to bounce ideas off of, a good mentor who can coach you through the challenges, and a good diocesan HR office who is there to watch your back (examples given).

One of the keys to understanding this particular role is that of abandonment and trust in God. When we approach these situations with hands opened up in poverty before the Lord, he can do amazing things through us. Every time Mother Teresa would accomplish some great work or open a new house she would say: "See what God can do with nothing!" This is the littleness and the humility which distinguishes the priest-employer and pastor with someone working in the secular world (example of my experiences of abandonment and prayer following Mary's' example of turning to Jesus and saying, "They have no more wine!").

Many of you have asked me how I have dealt with the temporal affairs of my different assignments when I worked in Washington, or as a pastor, or especially now as a rector. First off, we remember that we are always Christians and priests first and foremost. I try to always begin meetings with prayer, whether it is with a parishioner or a plumber! While in the middle of a construction meeting I might *want* to really fly off the handle at times, but the Christ-like way of dealing with frustrating situations is always the correct way. This doesn't mean that we become doormats, but that we always operate out of a place of faith, love, and gentleness to the extent that we can. This of course is balanced with our call to be good stewards of the temporal goods of the church. Obviously what is entrusted to our care must be guarded and protected to provide for the needs of our people. If we are good stewards of the parish's goods, the people can very easily see that lived out in us and will in turn be even more generous in providing for the needs and the opportunities and projects of our parish ministries.

When we ask for money for our parishes, we are not asking for ourselves and this gives us confidence because it is for the Lord and not for us. Believe it or not, there is a spirituality to fundraising. We are called to invite people into the mission and give them an opportunity to share in the graces occurring in our parish and diocese. We are simple beggars who have very little ourselves but even still must lead by example. The pastor is to be the first to make his pledge to the parish or diocesan campaign. I have done this over and over and it makes a profound impact on the faithful when they see us making our own sacrificial gift; it is a sign that we will not ask them to do what we ourselves are not prepared to do. I would recommend a very small little book by Fr. Henri Nouwen entitled *A Spirituality of Fundraising* (given to me by Fr. Stephen Parkes). This easy read gave me great courage at a time when I needed it in the parish. Asking for money and support is definitely a part of our life – be not afraid, it is for Christ and His people that we make such asks. You will not need to do it often; in fact, I hope you only have to really do it once a year on stewardship Sunday. If the people see you as a good steward and a credible witness to what you preach, they will be generous quite naturally and God will provide.

In addition to being concerned with paying the bills of our own parishes, we must always keep before us the needs of the poor and marginalized: support your local St. Vincent de Paul Society, food kitchens, shelters, and even the opportunity to twin with a parish in need (local or abroad). The Lord blesses those who are generous with His poor and that includes our parish who like all of us need to tithe and support the needs of those on the peripheries.

Brothers, parish administration is simply part of the priesthood, not an add-on or an appendix. I pray that your 4<sup>th</sup> year course on parish administration begins to “prime the pump” for you as you prepare for parish life, and that opportunities for leadership workshops like we did last year or our inclusion of Good Leaders Good Shepherds help you to gain some confidence and skill-sets that will begin to prepare you for the time that you will be named pastor. The *munus regendi* is part and parcel of our spiritual fatherhood: paying the bills, maintaining and caring for the Church and its surrounding, staff management and human resources. We are managers! Learn how to lead! Do not be tricked into the lie that you were not ordained to do such things – this is what a father does for his family.

However, we must be ever vigilant not to become merely businessmen. Remember all three *munera* work together: sanctifying, teaching, and shepherding. Pope Francis recently said: “When those who are in the Temple – be they priests, lay people, secretaries, but who manage the Temple, who [do the] ministry of the Temple - become businessmen, people are scandalized. [...] It is interesting: the people of God can forgive their priests, when they are weak; when they slip on a sin ... the people know how to forgive them. But there are two things that the people of God cannot forgive: a priest attached to money and a priest who mistreats people. This they cannot forgive!” (Homily on 21 November 2014).

We cannot serve God and mammon (cf. Mt. 6:24) and must not allow ourselves to become greedy and worldly priests. Most importantly be kind – the worst thing we can become is an unkind priest who mistreats people – that they have trouble overlooking. The Council reminds us in the section treating the *munus regendi* that: “In building up of the Church, priests must treat all with exceptional kindness in imitation of the Lord” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6). The *Catechism* states: “The ordained ministers exercise their service for the People of God by teaching (*munus*

*docendi*), divine worship (*munus liturgicum*) and pastoral governance (*munus regendi*)” (CCC 1592).

You may be sitting there asking yourself, why would I do all of this? The answer is simple, love! Pastors do all of this because they love Christ and His people; they love being spiritual fathers and providing for their needs. A great pastor I know said to me without hesitation “I would do anything for my family. I love these people and that’s why I do it.” God will always be there for us and He will give us what we need. Being a priest and ultimately a pastor is a privilege and a joy - spiritual fatherhood takes on a whole new meaning when you are *the* shepherd of the parish. Being an associate is a great experience, but you do not know what it really means to be a father until you are the pastor (example of Fr. Joe Pellegrino’s letter).

We have reviewed these three *munera* of the priesthood in order for you to deepen your understanding of the calling of the diocesan priest (*cf.* canon 519). “*Understand* what you do, *imitate* what you celebrate, and *conform* your life to the mystery of the Lord’s cross.”