

*From -- Conformed to Christ*

## Pastoral Strategy and Standards

A task of pastoral care and parish revitalization is to establish the climate, structures and processes which both love and accept people with each type of faith and enable and nurture growth in the Christian life. We love people where they are now and we invite them into a deeper, broader, more purposeful life in Jesus Christ.

In practice there is a tendency for parishes to move toward one extreme or the other. Some become almost sectarian in the high expectations they set forth for everyone. There is a strong invitation and challenge but frequently little empathy or patience. Initially this may appear to be the result of a distorted "Apostolic Faith". More commonly its source is people of "Sacramental Faith" who are experimenting with forms of prayer, ministry and life that are new and exciting to them and who want others to have the same experience.

The other extreme, which is more common, is the parish that settles for a tone of bland acceptance. Little is asked of people. Those in power are likely to come from the immature or tentative edge of "Sacramental Faith".

We might note that in this paper we are focusing on the role of standards. Most of what provides the dynamic we seek comes from acts of worship, learning, stewardship, service, evangelization, the building of community life, and spiritual guidance and coaching. Any act of self-offering, or invitation to give oneself more fully, plays a part. Standards are just one small, yet essential, part of this larger fabric.

In order to maintain or establish a dynamic of faith in the parish that both accepts people as they are and invites them deeper, there need to be standards: 1) that place leadership, oversight and governance primarily in the hands of those of "Apostolic Faith" and the more mature end of "Sacramental Faith" and 2) that provide pathways (choices) for people to take the next step.

The standard of "faithful attendance" might serve as an example. Most of us would not accept attendance at worship two or three times a year as faithful. It would strike us as a reductionist understanding of faithfulness. We might at least think in terms of frequent and regular attendance. Better yet we might adopt the standard of joining with others for corporate worship week by week. Or to go even further, we might understand the standard as participation in the Holy Eucharist every Sunday and major feast and the use of some form of the Daily Office. The Apostolic and Catholic tradition of the Church would obviously set the norm at the higher end of the scale. That serves to inform the parish church with the understanding of the wider church.

For those of vicarious or Christmas and Easter Faith, the standard of faithful attendance exists. It is not hidden from them. Most know that the Church expects it. It does not cut people off. They are welcome to come just to the potluck dinner or to the Christmas Eve Mass.

