

Win-Win! (Part 2)

In early 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, millions of people's lives changed unexpectedly, including Katerina in Montreal. This is her story...

2021-08-07

Part 2

Follow-up and new initiatives

In 2018, I was asked to expand faith education to all adults in the parish. So, I organized monthly C.A.F.E.s (Catholic Adult Faith Enrichment)

with different speakers. The topics very varied: sex education, end-of-life care, prayer, evolution, happiness, Mass, John Paul's II New Evangelization, Pope Francis' *Gaudete et Exultate*, etc.

A few years earlier (2014), many parishioners had attended the first Parish Vitality Conference organized by the Archdiocese of Montreal and begun very enthusiastically getting more involved in the parish. At that time, I was Chair of our parish pastoral council. We created new initiatives and improved existing ones. We organized many community-building events. We made sure that our liturgical celebrations had the beauty and dignity that true worship deserves. As a member of the Liturgy committee, I also became an administrator of our parish Facebook page because I realized the importance of social media.

The field hospital. Our wounds.

My work in the parish definitively expanded my heart. Pope Francis talks about the Church being a *field hospital* and my many contacts help me see our wounds more closely. For example, it is a challenge to talk about the joy of being a daughter of God and of the Father's love for us with someone who didn't have a good relationship with his or her dad. Or about the beauty of the sacrament of marriage with someone whose marriage fell apart. Or about the beauty of Mass with someone who doesn't believe in the True Presence.

At one point, I realized that catechism classes and talks have their benefits but also their limitations. They can never replace personal friendships. My work in the parish helped me see my own wounds and limitations. Don Bosco

famously said: "It is not enough to love the young; they must know that they are loved". And this is exactly my fear: that even though I love my fellow parishioners and I pray for them, I fail to show them how much I care - because of my shyness, miscommunication or misunderstanding, or just a lack of individual attention.

Of course, my involvement deepened some of my friendships and introduced me to new friends. My parish became not only a place where I attend Mass, but also a place where I enjoy being part of a community. I hope that it has helped me to be less selfish and more universal in my prayers; I do pray more for people around me, for our pastor, our bishops and for the Pope. And I have come to a deeper understanding of our faith.

I would even say that it has helped me see my defects and limitations in a new light, and to grow in certain virtues. For example, it is one thing to meditate on charity and quite another to live out that charity with people from different backgrounds. Of course, meditating on charity in front of the tabernacle is the first and necessary step. But living it out is definitively a lesson in humility for me because of my limitations.

All of this I write in the past tense because everything was put of hold in March 2020 when the pandemic began. Very quickly, we realized how much we miss the Sacraments and how much we miss our friends. My hope is that this time of trial will make us all grow on the inside – as St. Josemaría used to say, just like seeds growing inside the soil – and that we all come back and fill our parishes with renewed eagerness,

enthusiasm for apostolate and
hunger for Sacraments.

Let me end by sharing a beautiful anecdote... I recently encountered two women who, from their own initiative, volunteered to clean our Adoration chapel at the end of each day and I thanked them for their important work. One of them just smiled and quietly said: "We are doing it for Him". This is the essence of work in the parish - whether we give classes, chat with fellow parishioners or wash dishes after a potluck supper - we are doing it out of love and it is a **win-win!**

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