

## Peace in Our Parish

Peace and tragedy within a parish would seem to be poles apart. But are they really?

This past July, 2007, within the space of twenty-nine days, three separate tragedies happened in our parish, any one of which was enough to make us question our faith. In early July, the mother of one of our seventh grade students passed away unexpectedly. She was only in her mid-thirties. Fifteen days later, our parish pastor fell at his home, tore the ligaments in both knees, and injured some bones in his left foot. This was followed by surgery, immobilization, and two months of rehabilitation. And, as if that was not enough, nine days later, a mother and her two youngest children (second and fifth graders) died as a result of a murder/suicide situation.

Tragedies yes; it is impossible to think of each or all of these events as anything but that. The entire parish community was devastated by each event. Grief, sadness, shock, anger, and questions with no answers were everywhere.

So where does peace in our parish fit in with all of this tragedy? One cannot begin to imagine how the entire parish community responded in so many positive ways to support the parish pastor and the affected families. Thoughts, prayers, memorial displays, food, gifts, Masses, etc., came from everywhere. Everyone was waiting to do what they could to help, to be compassionate, and yes, to bring peace to the families and parish community at large.

It was very moving to experience the entire month of July and to see so many respond in such a positive way. One would expect that to happen whenever a tragedy happens, as in the case of the hurricanes several years ago. Something automatically triggers within each of us telling us to do something, to reach out, to help, to pray.

But what about peace in our parishes when there is no immediate tragedy? What are we as parents and educators doing to bring peace into our parish community every day? Does this effort only take place at Sunday Mass, when we turn to those few people around us and half-heartedly shake hands and mumble "*Peace of Christ*"? Do we really mean it? What do we do the rest of the day on Sunday and, for that matter, the other six days of the week?

Peace in our parish communities will happen when we think positive thoughts of others, when we pray, when we do not gossip, when we seek the full story about incidents which concern us, when we step up to the plate and really get involved in the parish and/or school, when we coach from a Christian perspective, and most of all, when every family (parents and children) attends Mass every weekend and really means "*Peace be with you*" at the Sign of Peace.

Do not let tragedy be the only time when you take the opportunity to reach out to others to bring a little peace and comfort into their lives. May the peace of Our Lord be with all of you.



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