

Parish Communications

Ordinary Time Is Not Nothing: A Short Reflection for the Parish Secretary

A SHORT REFLECTION FOR THE PARISH SECRETARY

For whoever has been carrying the weekly newsletter for years, often alone, and is tired.

PAGE 1: THE FATIGUE, AND ITS LEGITIMACY

It is a Tuesday afternoon, probably in July or October. Or late January, in the stretch between the Epiphany octave and Ash Wednesday. The parish office is quieter than it was in Advent. The priest is on retreat, or visiting his elderly mother, or just on his day off. Your tea has gone cold.

You have the newsletter to put together for Friday. You have perhaps four items. Three of them you ran last week in slightly different form. The fourth is a reminder about next month's finance meeting that you have already included twice.

You are tired. You have been doing this for some years. The temptation, which is almost overwhelming, is to pad the newsletter. To find something, anything, to include so that it does not feel thin. To ask the priest for a "word of reflection." To repurpose something from social media. To search online for a suitable prayer or saint's quotation to round out the second column.

Please put the newsletter down for a moment. This reflection is for you.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TODAY

You are tired. That is not a failing.

The parish is quieter. That is not a failing.

The newsletter has less in it. That is not a failing.

You are in Ordinary Time. The Church is exhaling. You are allowed to exhale with her.

The temptation to pad the newsletter is not a sign that you are conscientious. It is a sign that you have absorbed, somewhere, the assumption that your value to the parish is measured in the volume of what you produce. That assumption is false, and it is wearing you down.

The parishes that communicate well over decades are not the parishes whose newsletters are always full. They are the parishes whose newsletters breathe with the year. They are generous and rich in Advent. They are warm and careful during Christmas. They are weighted in Lent. They are quiet, reliable,

pastorally attentive in Ordinary Time. And they trust their readers to understand that a lighter week is not a failing week.

You are doing that work. It is in you. This afternoon's smaller newsletter is not a problem to solve. It is correct.

PAGE 2: THE THEOLOGY OF ORDINARY

Ordinary Time is not "ordinary" in the sense of unimportant. The English word is a translation of the Latin *tempus per annum*, which means something closer to "time through the year." The Sundays of Ordinary Time are numbered because each one is counted, noted, meaningful. The Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time is not the same as the Fourteenth. Each has its own readings, its own collect, its own place in the rhythm of the year.

Ordinary Time is ordered time. Counted time. Time given its proper shape by the Church. It is not a filler between the high seasons. It is the longest and most characteristic stretch of the Christian year, and its register is real.

The register of Ordinary Time is fidelity. The register of Advent is anticipation. The register of Christmas is joy. The register of Lent is penitence. The register of Easter is radiance. The register of Pentecost is fire. The register of Ordinary Time is fidelity, quietly, to the ordinary life of discipleship.

Fidelity does not announce itself. It shows up for the Tuesday funeral. It keeps the parish office open. It sends the newsletter on Friday. It does not need the drama of the high seasons to justify itself. It is the fabric of parish life, and the fabric is worth everything.

THE ASCENSION, BRIEFLY

There is a moment in the Acts of the Apostles, right at the beginning, where Christ has just ascended and the apostles are still standing there, staring up into the sky. Two angels appear and ask them, gently: "*Why do you stand looking up into heaven?*"

It is a good question, and it is the question for this afternoon.

The apostles' work was not to stare at the sky waiting for the drama to continue. Their work was to return to Jerusalem, and wait, and then receive the Spirit, and then go about the long ordinary business of being the Church. The drama had not ended. It had moved into its ordinary form, which would last two thousand years and is still continuing.

A parish secretary who manufactures intensity during Ordinary Time is a bit like the apostles staring at the sky. The work is to return to ordinary tasks, do them well, and trust that the Spirit is at work in the ordinary, which is the mode the Spirit has most chosen to work in for two thousand years.

Your newsletter, slightly shorter this week, sent on time, with clarity and warmth, is participation in that ordinary work. It is enough.

Some things you are allowed to do, specifically, in Ordinary Time:

A week without a newsletter is not a failure.

If there is genuinely nothing new and nothing needed, a week without a newsletter is better than a padded one. You can tell readers, once, that during Ordinary Time you will produce the newsletter when there is something worth sharing, not automatically every week. Almost nobody will object. Many will quietly be grateful.

A shorter newsletter is not a failure.

Four items, well written, with white space around them, will land harder than fourteen items crammed together. You know this as a reader. You may have forgotten to apply it to your own work. Apply it now.

Reusing a reflection from last year, with light editing, is not a failure.

The Gospel of the Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time is the same every three years in the lectionary cycle. A reflection you wrote three years ago on that Gospel may be better than one you write under deadline pressure today. Reuse it, with light editing to bring it forward. That is stewardship, not laziness.

Not posting on social media for a week is not a failure.

If the parish Facebook page goes quiet for a week in the middle of August, nothing breaks. The parishioners who see it will not notice. Those who do notice will usually think it is fine.

Communicating less when the Church is exhaling is participation, not abdication.

You are not abandoning your post. You are doing the correct work for the season. A parish secretary who has internalised this is a parish secretary who will still be in her role, and still loving the work, in ten years' time. A parish secretary who cannot give herself permission to exhale is one who will burn out, usually without anyone noticing until it is too late.

WHAT TO HOLD ONTO

The next deep breath is coming.

Advent will arrive, as it always does. Your readers will be grateful, in a way they cannot quite name, for the quality of your Advent communications when it comes. That quality depends on your not having exhausted yourself in mid-Ordinary-Time producing fifteen items about nothing.

Lent will arrive. Holy Week will arrive. Easter will arrive. Your work in each will be richer because you rested in Ordinary Time.

Trust the rhythm. It has been there for two thousand years. It will hold you, if you let it.

NOW, THE NEWSLETTER

Go back to it now, if you want to. Publish the four items. Do not pad. Send it on time.

Then make a fresh cup of tea. The parish is in good hands.

It is yours.

This reflection is part of the Pillar 2 reflection library within the True Light Digital Formation framework. For the cornerstone essay on which it is based, see truelight.digital/formation/rhythm-and-restraint/.

Other reflection guides in this family may also serve you, depending on the moment:

- *When Silence Serves (R4)*
- *Forming a Champion: A Short Guide for the Priest (R1)*
- *Invitation, Not Buy-In (R3)*

True Light Digital publishes these reflections as part of its free Formation library. If your parish would value support in building a wider communications system, please contact us at sean@truelight.digital. If not, we hope this guide serves you well on its own. That is the goal.
