

On Becoming a Parish, I

Think of it like citizenship. If a man comes to this country to live, then ideally he (and our country in assistance) should do all in his power to become a citizen, unless there is some agreement between him and the country that he may stay for a limited time to accomplish some work or education. There are alternatives of course...the man could remain here illegally, or receive a visa or a green card. But citizenship remains the goal. It is the goal for the common good first, and then the individual good. I say the common good first, since someone here illegally might accrue much benefit unto himself, but at a cost – and sometimes a great cost – to the host country.

The rights and privileges of full citizenship are at the heart of this common good. Most Americans to be sure do not think this way – they think first about what’s “in it” for themselves, and usually in monetary terms. The guest – legal or otherwise – often says to himself, “Why should I become a citizen? I’ll just have to pay taxes.” And citizens often think of this as “How much does this cost?” Certainly the money is a factor, and we should not ignore it. But it should be thought of as down the list. That is, a man can be an excellent citizen; fully participating in civic duty from being involved in the political process to serving in the military, but perhaps having little ability to give money in taxes.

I say all this because the last week the Presbyterial Council of the Archdiocese voted for Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Latin Mass Community to become a full, canonical parish in the Archdiocese of Denver, and this has been approved by the Archbishop. The date of our canonical elevation to a parish is July 1st. This comes after many meetings, letters, emails, phone calls, reports, etc., especially to make sure that the wording of our parish statutes are correct, which are a kind of constitution that states clearly what our parish will be and what it will do.

A parish is called a “juridical person” in the Code of Canon Law. It is like being given full citizenship in the Church. You might be wondering what our status really is at this point, and the plain answer is, we really don’t know. The rectory is canonically erected as a house of the FSSP (this was done by the Superior General of the FSSP), but the church and its people were in a kind of limbo, since no record of the agreement between the Fraternity and the Archdiocese existed. What follows is a list (not exhaustive) of what this will mean for us:

1. Grace. When a man fathers a child out of wedlock, he is a father, but without civil marriage he has no real rights to the upbringing of the child. If he gets married civilly, he receives legal rights to do the things he should do as a father. If he is married in the Church, he will have all that plus he will receive the Grace of State, grace which will enable him to do his fatherly duties as Christ would have him do them. We currently do not have the graces which go with being a parish. I don’t have the graces of being a Pastor, and Fr. Hearty doesn’t have the graces of being a Vicar. But there will be an infusion of grace for the whole parish, priests included, when our elevation takes place.

2. The advancement of the Traditional Mass. When Archbishop Lefebvre first began his society, the original idea was to put tradition somehow back into the normal diocesan life. For many reasons this did not occur, since his society separated itself as much as possible from the dioceses. But the idea stayed with the FSSP. No one has really known how to do this, so we and various bishops and even two popes have been making it up as we go along. But with our elevation to a parish, the old ways are ever more introduced into the Archdiocese as a normal, acceptable way to practice the Faith.

3. Changing our name. This is significant. Our patronage will not change. The patronage of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel which was determined by Fr. Salgado has proven to have been perfect, with countless blessings. But we will no longer be a community; we will be a church. OLMC stays then,

but it will be Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church. Nothing against the fine word “community”; it has been accurate up to this point, but “church” is higher and better. Some have pointed out that there is already a parish by this name in the Archdiocese, but that is not a problem. Many dioceses can have dozens of churches dedicated to our Lady.

4. Receiving the full rights of a parish. This means things like keeping our own registry and sacramental records. We have been doing so by privilege so far, but we will now do things by right.

5. Permanence. Up unto this point, our privileges were granted temporarily. With our elevation to a parish we become permanently established. A parish can be suppressed (as for example an inner-city or country parish where people have just moved away and it is no longer viable), but this is rare, and very hard for a bishop to do. Up unto this point, we could have been suppressed easily, since we had no real canonical status. Becoming a parish changes that.

6. Status. In the eyes of other pastors and faithful of the Archdiocese, our elevation will not only help with the status of the Old Mass, but the other sacraments as well. All four of the liturgical books of the traditional liturgy, the Missal, the Breviary, the Pontifical (contains the things that bishops ordinarily do, such as confirmation) and the Ritual (contains the ordinary sacramental conferrals, such as baptisms or weddings, and also all the traditional blessings) will have a status in the Archdiocese that they have not had in 40 years. This is significant.

7. Paying our fair share. We have essentially been mooching off the Archdiocese since our inception. This is understandable to the extent that it is hard to start, and get going. But all the other parishes have been paying for the services we receive. You might wonder what these are, but I’ll just mention a few:

- a. The services of the Archbishop or his auxiliary for Confirmation.
- b. The services of the Archdiocesan Tribunal for marriage cases.
- c. The services of the archivist to back up our registry, and make sure that our faithful have good access to their sacramental records.
- d. The services of the Finance Department. Their excellent guidance has been a real blessing to us.
- e. The legal services of the Archdiocese. The attorney for Drinkwine Mortuary was very impressed by the work done by the real estate people at the Archdiocese. All that legal work was given to us free.
- f. The building commission did our bids, the legal contract work, the insurance work, and had someone out every day to supervise the labor on our roof and parking lot.

I could go on and on like this, but you get the point. It is not right that other parishes should be paying for all this for our benefit, and we pay nothing.

8. The formation of a Parish Council. This is an advisory board to the Pastor, with whom he should consult before pursuing any initiatives which really affect the parish. More information on this will be forthcoming.

When the final copy of the Parish Statutes is ready, I will publish the Statutes with comments and explanations as to what they mean. These should be ready before too long.