



Alive in Christ

When it comes to the work of priests, people have many questions. Do they get paid? If they get paid, what do they spend their money on? Can priests retire? If a priest retires, are they no longer a priest? I could go on with the questions that arise about the lives of priests. I sat down with retired priest Father Patrick Zabrocki and had a lovely conversation specifically with him about why such a young, active priest decided to retire. In a nutshell, because he could.

Father Pat and I enjoyed an afternoon talking about the life of a priest. I knew some basic information about what a diocesan priest was and did, but not to the depth that he described. Father Pat became a Diocesan Priest for the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings in 1988 under Bishop Anthony Milone.

A diocesan priest belongs to the diocese, or territory of an area overseen by a Bishop, by being a member of the presbyterate, another term for the body of priests. Some dioceses are incredibly large, like ours, while others are small and included just a city. This is different from a religious order priest or brother. Those men belong to a community of men who live together and all take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They all also do not have to be priests. Men who are not priests, but live in the collective community are called brothers. They owned everything together, and do not own private property. Their work can be similar to diocesan priests, in they minister to students, and the sick and the poor. Religious brothers also focus on foreign missions.

Diocesan priests comparatively live more like the people within their parishes. They are paid a salary by their parish. They may even have an expense account from their parish. Most have their room and board covered by the parish provided rectory. They do have to pay taxes on their salary. They can buy cars, own private property, and buy things like everyday people. While they do not take a vow of poverty, diocesan priests within the Latin Rite take vows of chastity. They also make promises to their Bishop of obedience. Since diocesan priests receive a salary, pay taxes, and can invest their money in savings like the people in their pews, the money wise priest does just that. Diocesan priests also can work in a school, hospital, or prison. They are not bound to just serve at a parish. Some even serve for a time in the military ministering to the armed forces.

Diocesan priests have many tasks and obligations when serving their parishioners. They celebrate Mass on Sundays, and weekday for and with their parishioners, while baptizing, anointing the sick, witnessing marriages, hearing confessions, praying for the dead, and overseeing the administration aspects of the church.

Father Pat, the older brother of our beloved Father Steve Zabrocki, graduated from MSU in 1979 and went to work as an accountant for four years, before deciding to enter the seminary. After graduating

from Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon in 1988, Father Pat, being the good math whiz he is made sure to live the simple lifestyle that is expected of diocesan priests. "I am frugal," he stated. "I have managed my finances to afford to retire, as one of a small minority of diocesan priests who manage their finances well enough to retire," as he explained about finishing his twelve-year term for the people of Scobey, Plentywood, and Medicine Lake.

"I'm receiving a monthly pension payment," he told me. Father Pat was able to retire at the age of 65, when priests are allowed to request the Bishop's permission to retire. Some priests decide to not retire at 65, because they want to keep working still; some have to retire due to health reasons; some can retire, due to good financial management. Each reason is their own.

Father Pat also wanted to come down and help his brother. "I supplement my income with substituting for other priests; covering Mass intentions," he explained as to why he helps Father Steve concelebrate, or covered for Father Steve during his vacation. A priest is still a priest even in retirement. As for helping his brother during Mass, "its who I am. The type of ministry I like doing from the start is prayer and liturgy." For Father Pat the quote that sticks out to him is that the Liturgy is the Prayer of the Church.

Father Pat has started to sing in the funeral choir when he is not needed by his brother to concelebrate. The concelebration helps to ensure that all of our parishioners Mass intentions are being covered. As Father Pat enjoys his retirement helping his younger brother, Father Steve, here at St. Thomas, we thank him for his thirty-four years of being Alive in Christ, and know that his presence will help to keep our parish growing in being Dynamic Disciples!

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