

Evaluating Our Ministry in Light of Pope John XXIII's Mission

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“...To make the human sojourn on earth a little less sad.” This was the answer that Pope John XXIII gave when asked why he had convoked the Second Vatican Council in October of 1962.

The work of the council, its meaning, its challenge, of course, never ends. Some Church historians say the effects of the council haven't even really begun to be understood today.

Pope John XXIII said he called the council “to make the human sojourn on earth a little less sad.” In the last decade our world has changed. 9/11 has changed us. The sexual abuse crisis in the Church has changed us, the Church. It also is an example of the interdependence of all of us, because it has affected many more people than just people in the Catholic Church. And, as if those unthinkable events weren't enough, we have been/are at war. Unemployment and the economy has changed people's lives, has touched everyone's way of life.

“...to make the human sojourn a little less sad.” What have we/are we doing as a Church to help all people live with the questions, to find the answers in the midst of these challenges? How have we gathered people (children, youth and adults) for prayer? Have we/are we providing adult faith formation opportunities so that people can talk about their feelings, their fears, their hopes about all these issues? Are our parishes open places of listening and healing?

“...to make the human sojourn a little less sad.” Each of these events may have opened for some people the memories of past events in their own personal lives which

evoke feelings, questions, and the need for support. Can our parishes provide the environments, the support groups, the resources needed for people to cope with and heal from the grief, abuses, tragedies, losses, and violence?

“...to make the human sojourn a little less sad.” What about all that we do in our parishes? As we come to the end of each program or the end of each year and spend time evaluating our parish policies and all our programs, could we not evaluate each and every one of them using this as one of the standards: does this _____ (parish program or policy) help to make people’s faith life journey a little less sad?

“...to make the human sojourn a little less sad.” One smile or one sentence can change someone’s day. How are people greeted at our parishes? How are people made to feel welcome – for it is their parish, their home? When a young parent calls to inquire about Baptism because they have a brand new baby, are they greeted with, “Are you registered in the parish?” or “Do you put in your Sunday envelope?” Probably, though, that only happens in other dioceses! In your parish the greeting is probably, “Wonderful! Congratulations! Do you have a little boy or little girl? How is everyone doing?”

“...to make the human sojourn a little less sad.” How do we pray together? Are our prayers joy-filled? What do our prayers say about God – that God is all-loving, ever-compassionate and rejoices in us – creatures that God made -- that sadness is the furthest thing from God’s will for us?

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