

## PASTORAL AVAILABILITY: MINISTRY AFTER MIDNIGHT

Ever wonder what it's like to be suddenly **awakened** in the middle of the night? Ask any young parent and they'll tell you. They get used to it. For me...not so much. Nothing startles me quite like a 2:00 a.m. call on the emergency line! Availability in priestly ministry is vital, especially in situations of life and death. A few years ago, I received a **Midnight emergency anointing call** in a suburb more than 20 miles away. There was no discernible connection to the Cathedral—perhaps they googled Catholic Churches? I arrived and administered the sacrament. While visiting with family immediately afterwards, suddenly I walked the local pastor. Awkward...he just glared at me! But during the initial phone call, I had inquired if they had called their local parish and was informed that they never heard back. So, I got dressed and headed out the door.

It turns out that another family member continued to call the nearby parish, oblivious that another priest (me!) was on his way. Suddenly we had two priests, one of whom evidently felt the Cathedral pastor had “zeroed in” on his parishioner. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Pastoral availability is often a judgment call and no one bats 1,000. Like many of you, we priests become overwhelmed with e-mails. Occasionally, we receive emergency calls while in Mass or confessions. In a pinch, the Archdiocese even sends out e-mails to priests who live near hospitals in response to emergency requests phoned in to the Chancery. I never want to decline an emergency anointing call, irrespective of parish affiliation. With three hospitals nearby, you might be surprised how often the emergency line rings.

The lay faithful have a **right to pastoral care**, and we priests have a duty to respond, including in the middle of the night for a dying patient. While I may drag the next day, it remains a singular privilege of my ministry. I am well aware that parents are “on” 24/7 within their homes— it goes with the territory. But I do wonder if **unreasonable expectations** have crept into the Church today? We live in a society in which people desire closure with a sense of urgency that is as difficult to describe as it is easy to understand. It is never pleasant turning away a penitent which—though rare—is necessary when approaching the start of Mass. Is it fair to begin daily Mass five minutes late, just so the last penitents do not have to wait until after Mass to confess? In an era of empty confessional lines in too many parishes, this is a welcome conundrum to have here. Still, I have received pained looks when turning off the light at 5:13 p.m. Despite beginning 15 minutes early and staying as late as possible, I honestly can't shake the gnawing feeling that I have disappointed someone.

We must guard against approaching the Church with a mentality that it is a **service provider** in the same sense in which we call Comcast to report a problem with our Cable TV. The overwhelming majority of lay faithful understands and respects this. However, most Catholics do not understand—nor would I expect them to—the **reality of the clergy shortage** and its effects across our country. In rural dioceses, priests shuffle and rush between mission churches on Sundays, affording them little contact time. Even if the total number of parishioners is reasonable, the fact that they are spread out over several small parishes creates unique logistical challenges. Securing outside assistance in order to make a retreat or attend a conference is increasing difficult. I know priests who have called up to a dozen priests, just so they could get away for a few days. I have experienced something similar myself.

Last Sunday, I preached about disappointment and how we all have to be prepared to deal with it in faith. **St. Jane De Chantel**, co-foundress of the Visitation Nuns, faced disappointment in her life. She married Christophe, the Baron de Chantel, whose title was accompanied by enormous debt, a fact she discovered only after the nuptials! Later, he was killed in a hunting accident. She initially struggled to forgive the man who accidentally killed her husband. Slowly, her heart was warmed and she forgave him, even becoming godmother to one of his children before embarking upon her second vocation as a nun. She did not let disappointment crush her.

Priestly ministry is a joy and a sincere blessing, even though at times the demands seem impossible to adequately fulfill. Many Catholics are **disappointed in Church** leaders these days, and justifiably so. We priests are all too aware that sometimes we too have disappointed our parishioners. In some cases their disappointment is

justified, while in others it is impossible to be present at everything, especially when competing goods are at play. I have a hard time picturing myself doing anything else with my life, because the priesthood simply “fits” me in so many respects. Still, each priest must continually strive for a **holiness of life**, begging God’s grace to live his priesthood **authentically** and **selflessly** every day. This alone will do more than anything else to restore trust and confidence in the Church.

- “Batter, batter, batter...swing!” This is how we “chattered” from the bench to opposing batters in 7th grade baseball. Not exactly the classiest move— our coach told us to knock it off. **Pittsburgh Pirates** starting pitcher and Knight of Columbus member **Trevor Williams** has a better approach. He quietly prays “Jesus, I trust in you” before every game, and keeps a Saint Benedict’s crucifix in his locker. He even has Catholic tattoos, including the Jesuit motto A.M.D.G. (*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*), “for the greater glory of God.”
- **Ash Wednesday** is just around the corner on March 6. It is time to start thinking about how you may wish to engage the Lenten season this year. It takes careful planning to get the most out of our annual spring retreat. Would you consider **attending daily Mass** this year during Lent? I do not believe that you will regret your decision to give it a try!
- Did you know that there are about 13,500 square feet of marble in our chapels, altar areas and Narthex? Our **maintenance staff does a great job** keeping them as clean as possible in the winter. The Tennessee Pink marble you see in the Narthex and Saint Joseph Chapel was used at the turn of the century widely in the State Capitol, the Hamm Building & mansions around the Twin Cities.
- Every second, **6000 tweets** are sent on Twitter, corresponding to 500,000,000 per day worldwide! None comes from me, though, I assure you. I’ve made it this far in life without ever smoking. Somehow, I think I can resist tweeting. I truly hope some others would begin to follow suit!
- Thank you for your prayerful consideration of the **Catholic Services Appeal** this weekend. Your support of the CSA allows the work of the Church to extend far and wide in 20 different ministries.
- Due to the recent snow/road conditions for our volunteers, we are **postponing the Lemon Pie Sale** until after Easter. Trust me, it will be worth the wait!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel  
Rector