

Ending or Beginning . . .

It's that time of year when students don caps and gowns, wrap up classes and tests, say good-bye to school mates and teachers and move ahead in different directions. (See the story about St. Leo graduates on the front page.) Surely it is a time of transition; but is it a graduation—a completion of achieved goals—or a commencement—a beginning of a new stage of life? I believe it is both. And we all continue to have these kinds of experience until we take our last breath.

Each stage of life builds on the one that preceded it and it's important to do the needed work to grow and move ahead. Jesus talks about building a house on a good foundation and sowing seed in fertile soil. Life then is a pattern of both graduations and commencements that invite us to ongoing growth that is exciting though it is sometimes painful and takes us places beyond our comfort zones. We always have the choice to be like the student who complains that he'll never use algebra in "real life" and then shuts down in math class, fails, and learns too late that "real life" does require math. But what opportunities await us if we are willing to do the work and welcome change! Let's look at just a few examples:

Nearly 80 people made the choice to grow in their faith this Easter season as they came into the church, were baptized, received Eucharist, or were confirmed. It took a lot of preparation and prayer but the effects of the Spirit at work in them are almost palpable.

Just a few years ago St. Leo's food pantry moved into a larger space and had the ability to become a "choice" pantry where patrons are able to choose a specified number of items of food based on family size and the preferences of their families. It was new, different, and uncomfortable for some people. Leaving the old ways that are familiar is always a challenge but can also be opening a door to something new. The pantry building will soon have more space available for programs that will benefit the community. It's exciting to think about the possibilities.

St. Leo's was founded by German and Italian immigrants over 130 years ago and those traditions continue to run deep but it has also welcomed immigrants and refugees from Latin America and Africa in recent years and is growing and evolving into a wonderfully diverse community that still has the family spirit of its original parishioners.

The North Fairmount neighborhood is also in the process of renewal with increased community involvement and goals of improving the current housing stock, rehabbing abandoned houses, and possibly bringing in new housing. Working in Neighborhoods (WIN) has hired a full-time person to collaborate with housing efforts in North and South Fairmount and English Woods. A previously closed public school is now open as a Spanish language school, and community gardens are springing up in the neighborhood. For the health conscious there is exercise equipment in the Carll Street Park. There is a water park and free lunch there in the summer and it is a great place for families and friends to gather.

Change, like the sprouting leaves, is "busting out all over." It is exciting and sometimes scary. It can feel like the lump in the throat that graduates feel when they don their caps and gowns and leave the place where they grew and felt safe for so many years. It's not going to be the same, they realize. In fact when they return years later even that building that once seemed such a big part of their lives, will feel smaller, the halls narrower. That place—that experience had grown comfortable though there had been many ups and downs along the years. It was predictable and the next steps whether it would be another school or entering the work force will take them into unknown territory with new demands, new people, and mounting challenges—at least at first. And then the familiar pattern of graduation and commencement will surface and gradually they will realize that all will be well. In fact the best is yet to come.

—Angela Anno



"The Church must be open to change while rejecting a "controlling, hard, and prescriptive" style.

"... It is not useful to search for solutions in conservatism or fundamentalism," the pope said. "We are not living an era of change, but a change of era."

Christian doctrine, he added, "is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, queries, but it's alive, and able to unsettle, animate." Doctrine, Francis said, "has a face that isn't rigid, a body that moves and develops, it has tender flesh: that of Jesus Christ."

~ Pope Francis

