

The Times They Are A'Changin . . .

I've been at St. Leo's for more than 40 years and though I'd like to convince myself that I haven't changed much in that time, the mirror and my energy tell me differently. The vigor and energy at St. Leo's, however, are on the upswing. It seems to be a manifestation of one of my favorite scriptures: "To God whose power now at work within us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine... (Ephesians 3:20)—And Wow! Is God ever doing amazing things!!

Excuse me if I might be a wee bit prejudiced, but I've always thought St. Leo's was a pretty amazing place. We've always had a strong commitment to social justice and to the community. It has always been a mix of people from different races and economic strata. My children learned a lot about diversity and what it means to be church growing up here. . . Life at St. Leo's often made its way into essays and projects for school. My oldest son recently told me that his own faith commitment and sense of church came from his experience at St. Leo's.

But God seems to be doing something more recently. Attendance is up primarily due to an influx of Hispanic immigrants and African refugees and as sign of God's great love and grace we are celebrating our diversity and coming together as one family to pray together. Who could have ever imagined this when I first joined the parish? I think God chuckles when I write this, for God knew this even then. All we had to do was to say "Yes" like Mary to the new life that was being born in us. And somehow with abundant grace and mercy we were able to do that.

These blessings have brought new needs and we have responded with new programming like ESL, RCIA (with the help of Our Lady of Visitation), a new youth ministry, deeper involvement in

the community, and a myriad of interns. The building is almost always busy. It is wonderful—but sometimes we have more months left over at the end of our money. And so we have to ask for help. We know well the meaning of the word "eke." It's not glamorous to help pay for lights, and water, and heat, but it's essential to our ministry. And God always does provide although we joke that it may not be until the last nanosecond before the bill is due.

So we choose to live in trust that God's plans will continue to unfold in and through us and ask for grace to say "Yes" to the changes that will be required of us. What will we have to let go of to make room for the new? Often it's that favorite, "but it's always been that way." Perhaps it's stepping aside and inviting others to take leadership positions we've held for years or learning to pray and sing in a language not our own. Sometimes it's asking for help and support when we can't do things by ourselves. Letting go of old roles and ways of doing things and admitting we need help are difficult and painful but as Jesus said, new wine needs new wineskins. (Matthew 9:17) And like the guests at the wedding feast of Cana we want to celebrate, dance, and drink deeply of the fine wine God wants to offer us.

So, bring on the change. Invite us to stretch and grow and embrace the new that is occurring. Open our hearts, minds, and spirits to receive and celebrate it. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18-19)

Praise God for grace. Praise God for growth. Praise God for the courage to say "Yes. Thy kingdom come" right here—right now!



"Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead." (Misericordiae Vultus, No. 15)

These Reflections on the fourteen works of mercy are meant to help us understand what is going on in our own heart, and give us the fire to be more merciful in our prayers, thoughts and actions. Each work of mercy is not simply a thing to do but also a way to strengthen our spirituality. Spirituality is not simply the things we do when we are at church, but the way we let God seep into every aspect of our lives so that we can be channels of divine mercy flowing out to the world."

—Pope Francis

