



## Strategic Directions



This, our third installment of Strategic Directions, focuses on Relationships. It would be a challenge NOT to think about relationships in February. After all, it is the month when we celebrate Ash Wednesday, Valentine's Day, and Family Day – religious and secular occasions that lead us to reflect on our most intimate relationships.

Paradoxically, February is also when the persistent cold of winter can creep into many a bone or psyche, tempting people to cocoon or disconnect from others. Sometimes, this isolation is brought on by factors beyond our control, such as inclement weather. Sometimes, however, it is brought on by the settling in of a less-than-pleasant reality. Loved ones are missing. Friendships lack lustre. Families feel fractured. God seems distant. We have become strangers to our own selves.

The temptation this month might be to bemoan such things, if they are indeed our reality. But to do so would be short-sighted. This time of year can boldly remind us of our human need to be in close relationship with others. Despite how strong we may think we are, in the face of obstacles and difficulties, we can be abruptly reminded that we cannot make it alone. We need the support of God and others to survive. There is a strange comfort and strength in admitting to this vulnerability.

A few months ago, I had the pleasure of attending a class mass with a group St. Mary's College students. During the homily, Fr. Ron Ambeault asked the students to reflect on the connections between relationships, intimacy, and time spent together. He observed that intimacy – what another priest once cleverly referred to as “into-me-see” – is most likely to occur when we spend time with a person or people. By contrast, relationships are hard to form or solidify if we rarely take the time to see, listen, communicate, or spend time with someone. This includes God, family members, friends, co-workers, community members, even ourselves. Fr. Ron's message was clear: relationships do not build themselves. They require constant attention and effort, choices and sacrifice.

I must say that Fr. Ron's homily pushed me to do some reflection of my own. With whom – or on what – was I spending most of my time? Was that where I should be spending my time? Was I guilty of avoiding someone I should have been seeking? If someone were to observe me from afar, to whom or to what would they say I was closest? Was I proud of this? Was this a pattern I wanted to continue?

Amid this reflection, I thought of a passage from a church bulletin, commenting on how easy it was to love people who are far away. The passage, paraphrased roughly, suggested it was easier to raise funds for strangers overseas than it was to buy a coffee for a challenging co-worker. Easier to glorify a deceased relative than to endure their repeated stories and odd habits while they were alive! Easier yet to idolize a celebrity for their talents than appreciate the small efforts of the students we serve daily!

For me, Lent has always been a challenging time because it invites me to see things as they are, not as I want them to be. It is an opportunity to take a hard look in the mirror and beyond and to make efforts to repair what I can in my relationships, particularly those I have neglected or abandoned. I hope you will join me in this exercise this Lenten season, and place your energies into strengthening relationships with others, particularly those with whom you rub shoulders on a daily basis.

God bless,

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Quoi de neuf!



What's New!



Minwajjimo!



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