

## St. Michael's Church – Speech on 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – November 13, 2011

When Father Pater asked me to speak on the 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Michaels, I was not sure what to talk about. What could I, a member for only 6-years, talk about to people whose family's sweat and blood built the foundation of this church? Then it hit me.

At this time last Sunday, I was boarding a plane to go to an interview in upstate New York, where I was considering a position managing global integration for a multi-billion dollar corporation. They had facilities in Germany, Japan, Singapore, Texas, and New York ... and they wanted to know how I planned to manager projects in different countries with different cultures and different languages. I explained that I do that know, and outlined my strategy. As far as I could tell, the interview went well, and I expected a positive response in the next couple of weeks.

As I reflected on the interview in the empty airport – apparently upstate New York is not popular on a Monday evening – it hit me. If I can manage projects over thousands of miles with 4 different languages, I could certainly find a connection to the church I am a member and leader of. See, we are no longer a typical neighborhood church. We have members who live nearby, of course, but over 90% of our members live scattered throughout the Chicago-land area ... over 150-miles separate most of us, and there are even a few scattered throughout the United States! It's tough to serve a neighborhood that large when using the skills developed for the typical neighborhood church, and we need to chance a few things at St. Michaels.

We need to focus on three things:

First, we need to redefine our mission, our vision, our plan ... Where are we going? What do we see our church community looking like? What does St. Michaels look like in another 100 years?

Second, we need to communicate differently and communicate more effectively ... How can we reach out over hundreds of miles and build a strong community? How can we make each person feel like they know everything, everyone, and contribute as if they were next to us? What technology can we employ that brings people together yet does not alienate people who are not used to technology?

Third, we need to find our passion again. I don't feel the passion like I did the 1<sup>st</sup> year I was with St. Michaels ... Where did our passion go? We have pockets of passion, how do we use those to get everyone excited about the St. Michaels community again?

What is St. Michaels mission today? Where are we going? Who are we when we say, 'we are parishioners of St. Michaels Church in Aurora, Illinois'? In 2 Samuel, Chapter 5, Samuel recounts David's vision for Jerusalem, how that vision inspired people to join David in moving forward as a united kingdom. We as the people of St. Michaels Church need to find that strong of a vision, that clear of a destination as we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can be the neighborhood church, but we have to

recognize that the neighborhood has changed, so we have to change with it. We can be a Romanian church, and we should hold strong to our heritage, but perhaps our mission is to reach out to the new community that surrounds St. Michaels, serving their needs. The vision, then, becomes one that leads us for the next 105-years.

The next piece is communication. We don't have strong communication. The bulletin has not changed format and content in the 6 years I've been with the church. We briefly had a newsletter (4 editions?) that communicated some information, but it's no longer sent out. We have a website ... do you know the web address? Why do we need better communication? As mentioned above, many of our members live 20, 30, 50, even 100 miles away from the church ... some live in other states! Without strong communication, they are left out of the community. In Ezekiel 1, verses 1 – 3, Ezekiel communicates his vision of God, using creative, motivating words, encouraging and exciting the Israelites to action. How can we do this, be more creative and motivational?

My grandparents live in the middle of nowhere, Wisconsin and have been home bound for over 10 years. Yet they have never missed a day of church. How? Well, they get dressed up in their Sunday best, plop down on the couch, and dial into the church service using their phone! Why can't we do this? We have the technology, we just need to learn how to use it. How about recording the Sunday service, either audio, video, or both? Then post it on the website for those that cannot attend on Sunday due to work constraints. These are just two creative ways to reach out to our members, and there are certainly more ways to do it.

And last, but certainly the most important, we have to find our passion again. Passion for St. Michaels Church. Passion for the congregation, for the community, for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Passion to build something more than just the sum total of brick, mortar, and money. In Deuteronomy 4, verses 32 – 40, God – through Moses – encourages His people to have purpose, to have passion, to have a fire within them to do whatever it takes to get the job done, His work done. Nothing less than their best would do for God.

What about us? What gets you passionate about St. Michaels Church? Why do you still come to church when it's an hour drive one way? Why pay your membership if you only attend once a month or once a quarter? Something must drive it, as many of us do make that 1-hour drive and make that financial pledge when our lives make it a struggle to attend regularly. We all have time constraints in the ever accelerating 21<sup>st</sup> century, and many of us have had to scale back our lives due to the financial situation that grips not only the United States but the world.

The St. Michaels Church community is at a critical point in her maturation. Financially, the church does not bring in enough money to pay the monthly bills. We were lucky in 2011 that a few large donations allowed St. Michaels to finish with a small amount of money in the bank, but without those large donations, we would be turning off lights and reducing the heat and air conditioning usage. This financial situation also does not allow us to easily expand our community, as newsletters and websites cost money to run ... but here we have to get creative and find ways if we want to not only survive, but

thrive. Community-wise, we are divided. Some parishioners would argue there are those among us that do this on purpose; I hope that we all recognize we are brothers and sisters in Christ and thus find patient ways to understand each other, but I also recognize we are human, and sometimes we get in our own way through old habits and misperceptions ... we need to break through these and find our hearts and our passions again. Personally, I think the divisions we see are a simple lack of communication due to geography and can be remedied through consistent reaching out, patient listening and active understanding, and softening our hearts.

In the end, to really drive to our future, we need a clear mission, a clear vision, and passion. Why give more money to a church that does not excite us with its future? Is the only goal to sustain brick and mortar? If we ask everyone to double their contribution, what changes would occur, what future would that bring? Why volunteer to teach our children, collect money at service, fix the church grounds, or cook and serve a meal to a community that does not have passion? We have no clear answer ... the committees of the church own finding that mission and future, clarifying it, communicating it, and driving it. And we don't do a good job of that right now. We as parishioners own sharing our thoughts and ideas with the committee members, inundating them with how things were done in the past (some of us just were not around to know) and how those things could be implemented now; we cannot bring back the past, but what worked then might work now, with a few minor changes.

So I challenge all the congregation, both the individuals and the committee members, to reflect on our 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary and answer 3 questions:

1. What is our vision of St. Michaels Church and where should we be going?
2. Where can we communicate better, how do we do it, and are you willing to steward that communication?
3. What makes you excited and passionate about St. Michaels and are you willing to bring that fire and fight, as the Israelites did in the Old Testament?

Share the answers with me, someone on the committee, Father Pater. Bug the leaders of this parish to act on them when they come in.

The best we can do is effectively and passionately communicate with each other a shared vision ... and God will take care of the rest.

God bless