



An open letter from a "grateful founding Pastor" who remembers when!!

It only seems like yesterday, but actually it was 30 years ago, June of 1956, that Cardinal Mooney called a nervous young priest named Leo Sheltreau into his office.

"What did I do now?" was my first reaction (something any of you might feel when called into the boss' office for the first time).

Well, the good and gracious Cardinal immediately set me at ease by warmly greeting me with a smile and friendly handshake and immediately stating simply, "I want you to be a pastor in a new parish in South Redford Township." After catching my breath, I asked "Where is South Redford Township?"

Well you know by now that I did find South Redford Township — and let me say emphatically that your History Committee and your Anniversary Committee and Parish Council have done a remarkable job in researching and reporting St. John Bosco's 30-year history.

In retrospect, I realize now how good God was to allow me so many wonderful years, working with such beautiful people. And I was greatly honored to attend the anniversary activities and thrilled to have the activities hall dedicated in my name!

After so many years, it is not easy to single out individual experiences. But I shall never forget how excited I was to spend my first night in my "very own home and rectory." There was some delay in the furniture delivery — but that didn't phase me — I slept on the floor in a sleeping bag.

The next morning I was greeted by a crew of men from the parish carrying ladders and paint brushes to decorate my new home. What a great and gracious way to make a "lonesome pastor" feel welcome!

Any attempt at recalling the salient events in St. John Bosco history would be shamefully inadequate if it failed to make reference to my "one claim to fame" — the famous "missed Christmas collection." To fully appreciate the full impact of this episode, you must know that it was the policy of the diocese in 1956 to allow the pastor of a parish to retain the Christmas collection for his own personal use such as buying food for the rectory, paying housekeepers and secretaries' salaries, purchasing clothing, maintaining automobiles, etc., etc.

Well, admittedly, it was with a little bit of greed that I looked forward to our first Christmas Mass.

First thing that came to mind: We have got to have more seating room — so I rented the huge basketball gymnasium instead of the smaller auditorium facility at Thurston High.

Second thing was to provide good music. We didn't have an organ, so I rented one.

Our choir was not yet organized, so I appealed to the diocesan Palestrina Music School to provide a group of well-trained singers to enhance the quality of the traditional Christmas hymns.

We borrowed and carted the altar from U. of D. stadium that was used for outdoor masses and set the altar in the middle of the gym, elegantly bedecked with flowers and poinsettias.

We vested our deacon, Fr. Burroughs, and our sub-deacon, Fr. Varty, in exquisite borrowed vestments. Let the show go on!!

At the conclusion of this momentous liturgical affair, a young couple dropped back in the sacristy and asked, "Where do we put these collection envelopes?"

"Why," I said politely, "you should have put them in the collection baskets as the ushers passed."

"No baskets were passed" was the startling reply! "What is that?" I almost fainted.

What happened, I soon found out, was that the newly elected president of our young and inexperienced Ushers' Club was suddenly called to the hospital to assist his wife in the delivery of their first-born child — a nice healthy baby boy — and in the excitement of this blessed event, no one thought to take on the job of taking up the collection. Needless to say, I didn't get much sleep that night!

But in retrospect I can honestly say that the birth of that baby boy, upstaging the birth of the infant Jesus, was a truly blessed event in more ways than one. It gave me sermon material for many Christmas Eve's to come and made me famous among my fellow priests throughout the diocese as the one who forgot the collection!

I shall thank God every day of my life for making me the "founding pastor" of the greatest 30-year parish a happy memory!

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