



On so many fronts the question which recurs in my consciousness is “*When am I going to get any traction on this?*” or “*When are we going to get traction?*” Here the word “traction” is just a substitute for “forward movement.” It can be specified when thinking about evangelization, youth ministry, the parish hall project, diocesan renewal, Cathedral Camp overhaul, and so many other matters which have left me feeling, at times, languishing.

My leadership skills are certainly wanting; I will be the first to admit this. And, through my recent conversations with professional consultants to the diocese and the parish, I am coming to suspect that a piecemeal approach to renewal and revitalization is probably not the way to go. Drawing on experiences with many large organizations and successful Church communities, the professionals insist on the need for a process of “visioning;” a process meant to arrive at a vision for a Church of the near future.

A question which may be characteristic of this sort of visioning is “*Where do you see St. John Neumann Parish in the next five years?*” In addition, we may ask, “*Will it be a Church that has grown in size, spiritual vitality and community influence?*” “*Will we have made some real, meaningful effort to engage the youth of the community more fully into the life of the Church as disciples?*”

It is all well and good that, indeed, we have gotten some modicum of “traction” on the frustrating process of rehabilitating Neumann Hall. But before any hammers start banging nails into the wood, we are engaged in a bona fide visioning process to ensure that what we are about is more than wood and windows and kitchens and bathrooms. We

need to think about the buildings in terms of the opportunities they afford for becoming an even better manifestation of Christ’s Church than we are now, (as good as it may be). If I have overseen the successful rehabilitation of a building without promoting this sort of visioning, I will account it a failure

Of course, the overriding “vision” is that of the Holy Gospel wherein Jesus leaves us the “Great Commission, “*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit!*” (Mt.28:19). I think that we are just at the level of ‘baby steps’ toward an adequate response to this commission. We have been emerging from a very long period of “automatic” population of the pews through immigration and strong family traditions of faith. But, as you are all well aware, this has been in slow decline for decades, and we have all been groping for a response.

The massive challenge is to help the average Catholic layperson prioritize their faith above other pursuits and to overcome the timidity to stand for the faith in the public square, (in some sense of the phrase). Through efforts at Adult Faith Formation and small groups, we have made some efforts at addressing this challenge. Generally, however, we experience ourselves as “preachers to the choir.” Vast swaths of the congregation are too busy for any more than the Saturday/Sunday Mass experiences. I don’t say this to make anyone feel guilty but, rather, to promote an examination of this “busyness:” Why? For what? Is it a purposeful, meaningful busyness or is it a form of madness?

**Finally**, at both the level of the diocese and the parish we have reached the threshold of a moment which holds for the possibility of real “visioning.” After a year-long hiatus for our Pastoral Council, it is something I hope to engage with them in some meaningful form. “*Where do we see ourselves in five years within our shiny new building?*” “*What process do we need to engage to becoming a missionary disciple church which is truly ready and able to respond to “the Great Commission?”*”

I have covered all of these matters before, one way or other, in homilies and in articles. I’m just dying to get some traction! “*Lord, give me faith! I believe. Help my unbelief.*”