

Why We Do What We Do

Why do we move the spiritual fathers, mothers, and brothers of our parish families? Why do we move the priests, religious sisters and brothers?

This question comes up any time there are transfers. Any time there is change. And there are no perfect or easy answers.

This time, the move of Sister Beatriz Taneco, MAG, who leaves us to become the Superior General of her religious community, raises the question. Especially for our Hispanic Community that calls her Mother Beatriz.

Christ promises us He will never abandon us. He will always send us people to lead us, to care for us, to embody His presence in the Church and thru the Church in a special way.

He promises Shepherds and for 2,000 years there have always been bishops and priests. The word pastor comes from the Latin word for Shepherd. Christ is the only permanent Shepherd. He is the only one who is always with us.

Christ gives His mother to the Church and even before her Assumption, sends other holy women to serve as spiritual religious sisters and brothers. They serve wherever they are sent for however long God wants them in a specific place. Hopefully the Church listens to the Holy Spirit when a decision is made to move someone.

Historically the decision making and reasoning behind transfers and moves has changed as the Church has changed. During transient times (times of great movement), the Church has sent forth missionaries and ambassadors to meet new needs, new opportunities, new challenges. From 1492 to the 1900s, Europe sent missionaries to the New World. Today the New World sends missionaries to Europe, Ireland, and England.

Currently one in six people in the world is migrating. In the Archdiocese of Atlanta mass is celebrated in 12 different languages each Sunday. We have priests and nuns from all over the world.

In times of stability, there are historically less transfers and moves. In the United States, there was relatively less migration movement from about 1929 to the late 1960s. During that time cultures and groups were in fairly established locations. Parishes and dioceses were more settled.

Church philosophy also was more in the direction of stability. Father so and so stayed in Parish X for 30 years. Sister Mary Perpetua stayed at St. Mary's School of Perpetua (forever).

The priest who baptized my mom also officiated her wedding. He came as an assistant, moved across town for a few years, and came back as pastor for many years after.

The blessing was stability. The problem was stagnation. No fresh perspective. If Monsignor did not want it, it may not happen in your lifetime. Some 30 year pastors did great things. Others built fiefdoms (personal kingdoms). It became Father X's parish rather than the people's parish and the focus was on Father X rather than Christ. No one who followed could change anything as it became a shrine.

Loving our priests and nuns is excellent. Developing friendships, personal connections, etc., all to be encouraged. Thinking that no one can replace them-that you can't survive without Father X or Mother Mary Perpetua-that's not good. That borders on idolatry-putting anyone or anything before God. Believing that a particular priest or nun (or anyone) is your only connection to God is a sign of an unhealthy relationship with the person and with God. We are instruments and servants, not replacements or the only way to God.

As far as the Father Joe Shrine.. hmmm.