It’s all about Teamwork – Parish Style!

I recently had the good fortune to attend a fantastic meeting. If you know me, the words “fantastic” and “meeting” are rarely juxtaposed, so regain your composure and read on.

Many people may wonder about the inner workings of a parish church. Over years of working in various capacities at my church, I have learned the secret to success: teamwork.

Over a decade ago, we built an addition to the church. One goal was to create a facility that would be in use seven days a week. I was on the team that worked with our architect. Working to achieve a quality facility of the proper size and at a reasonable cost was challenging. The team sorted through the many options over the course of several years and we got a fine building at half of the originally proposed price, yet still the size we wanted.

The church has a strong focus on youth and a dedicated team of teachers. Fortunately, we also have a wonderful and driven woman, Pat Owsiany, who has dedicated her career to working with younger children. She was instrumental in creating the Sunday school program for our younger children, partially based on Montessori principles.

Pat helped assemble the team of teachers and was instrumental in overseeing their training. Proving her openness to all possibilities, Pat allowed me to be a teacher in her program. The training was fantastic and I learned a secret that all teachers know: you get as much out of it, and sometimes more, than the kids. The teachers met periodically to support each other and a strong bond was formed.

On a sad day, we faced the retirement of our beloved rector (priest in charge of the church), Reverend Canon Calvin Adams. What to do? A search committee was formed to find his replacement and recommend that person to the church vestry (governing board). Due to the unavailability of a person we wanted to co-lead that process, I was asked to be the co-leader of the search team. This was an exciting and sometimes grinding endeavor.

Throughout the search, the team met as often as twice-a-month. We created a detailed description of our church, needed to inform prospective candidates about who we are. Throughout the highs and lows of the search, the team bonded. The passion for success, love of our church, and a large helping of humor kept us going. In the end, we were very successful and called the Reverend David Green to be our new rector.

As the Senior Warden, I have the responsibility of working with Father Green and the governing board. Again, we have a team of people motivated by their love of the church, driven to make the best decisions possible in support of our many and varied ministries. The meetings are held in the context of a church service. It is very interesting conducting a business meeting in this format. Decisions are made about the finances and health of the church with an extra dimension of guidance from above. The team reaches consensus on church matters, approaching issues with love, respect for each other, and humor.

Back to Pat. Pat’s vision was to create a learning center for children. The decision to support the Good Shepherd Learning Center (GSLC) was an easy one, helping to achieve our goal of seven-day-a-week space utilization and serving the community. Things have not always gone smoothly but on balance the trip has been well worth it. The center is on financially sound footing and provides a loving environment for the kids. The learning center is also one of the most important ministries of our church.

The staff consists of a total of 19 people. Some of them have worked there for many years, while others are newer. As is unfortunately typical of our society, the people we trust with our most important asset, our children, are not highly paid. They are a great team.

I serve on the board of the learning center, a Keystone STAR four-star facility. I find the board discussions concerning salary and benefits to be painful since, if possible, I would approve raises that would simply break the bank. There is a constant balancing of how to properly recognize the work that these people do with the recognition that prices must remain competitive and as reasonable as possible for the parents.

Back to the meeting. The board members were attending the staff’s monthly meeting to discuss some new benefits that were being made available. Pat led the meeting in her usual style, serious and caring, with a dry sense of humor.

The team is a strong one and the meeting featured much banter. In my opinion, you can tell much about the quality of the team by the quality of the humor, and the room was overflowing with fun. The exchanges among the employees evidenced respect for each other and a shared history. These loving and dedicated women shine with enthusiasm and you can’t help but be elevated in their presence. Just think of this scene being repeated all over the country and you can’t help but be enthused.

The next time you are laboring though a “two-hours-of-my-life-I-will-never-get-back” meeting, remember this little tale and focus on your team. Your shared history, respect for each other, and the humor of your approach can make all the difference. It’s all about the teamwork!