



What's God Up to Now?

By Mike Prus

It's safe to say that you won't catch me doing whitewater rafting anytime soon. I have a lot of respect for those with the courage and skills to perform this difficult adventure sport, but the idea of my rushing down a roaring river in a little boat at breakneck speed with no idea of what's ahead is just a bit too much for me.

But recently, I have been drawn to this sport as an image of the situation we all face these days – a world as turbulent as the rapids faced by those rafters. Our society's boat seems to be going faster, with more confusion and more danger than we know how to handle. Our sources of security of times past – job security, national security, even Social Security – seem rather shaky these days. Many economists believe we just avoided a major waterfall, a Depression, within the last 18 months. We have perhaps averted disaster, but much has already been lost – lost jobs, lost businesses, lost dreams. And consider the Church: many faith communities, including our parish, have experienced declines in participation, with accompanying financial stresses during recent years. It is easy to get discouraged in this environment. Many ask: What's going on? What can we do? Whitewater indeed.



This year, we as a parish are reflecting on our theme "In God We Trust: Discerning Our Call". We are exploring the meaning of trust in God, and our capacity to enter more deeply into this trust. What does trusting in God mean for us now? I suggest that trust in God means developing the capacity to see a larger whole – now just how some things are going wrong, or how evil is present – but also how God has been active and what God is doing here and now. The Holy Spirit is working with us, and is often ahead of us, in the midst of the whitewater, in places where we might initially think God is absent. The Bible often

tells of God surprising people, of God being active in new and unexpected ways (*"See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"* – Is. 43:19). In a world of rapid change, we the Church are called to open our minds and hearts to what God is up to now. I would offer that we are called as a parish to the ancient practice of discernment.

Discernment is the conscious effort by a community of faith to identify the activity of God in the complexity of current life, and to envision God's intended future for them. Discernment is not only for individuals, but for us together as a faith community, in conversation with each other and with Christ. In conversation, we speak what is deep in our hearts, and we listen deeply to others. In conversation, a dialogue emerges between our personal experiences, our cultural influences, and our religious traditions – especially the Scriptures. Christ might then lead us to see beyond our own needs, and into God's needs - into God's dreams for St. Margaret Mary and for the whole world.



Of course, discernment is challenging, for a variety of reasons. First, the practice of discernment cuts against the grain of our individualized culture, by inviting us to spend quality time and attention with each other. Second, when we speak and listen to each other, we will soon see how diverse our viewpoints are, and then significant disagreements will arise. So we will have to learn to work through disagreements, and find new ways to live in unity within our diversity. Third, in discernment God often leads us out of our comfort zones and into new ways of thinking and acting – and that can be scary.

The attitudes and skills needed to live faithfully in our whitewater world are different than those of less turbulent times. Paying attention to God is always important, but is especially needed during periods of great change. And God asks us to do so together. Because we are all in the same boat.

This is another in a series of reflections on our parish theme written by our parish pastoral ministers. All published staff reflections can also be found on our website, www.smp.com