

# The View from Blackwater Bluff — Charles LaFond

Two queens will arrive at the farm this month. They will each arrive in a small cage with a door made of candy. Really! Candy. If my door were made of candy, my house would be drafty rather quickly. Self-control with candy is not my strong suit.

The small royal apartments in which the queens are housed for travel will be attached to the frames in the bee hives – one queen per bee hive. The hives are placed in the back of the pasture where the morning sun will hit them as soon as it clears the trees. They face off the bluff so that when they launch on their forays for pollen and nectar they can simply fly off the bluff and over the Blackwater River and into the local fields and pastures and orchards.

Once the queens are placed in their respective hives, I will open the bee colony boxes and each colony will swarm towards the hive which houses their queen. They will be attracted to her by the ferimones she puts out – a smell which is distinctive to each queen – sort of like body odor but scientifically considerably more regal. Once the colony is in the hive they will find the queen (with much rejoicing!) and eat through the candy door to release her into their midst – into the hive and there will be much rejoicing in all the realm! But rather soon the bees then get to work. There is much to do. The bee population of a hive is largely female and the workers are – as is so often the case in our churches, mostly female also. The wax needs to be built up and the Queen needs to plant her eggs and the eggs need to be kept warm and fed so that the hive grows. It will grow in just a few weeks from 3,500 bees to more than 10,000 if all goes well.

This time in the church year is not unlike the time in the life of a new bee hive. The King of Peace has been through the resurrection and come out of his tomb to the great rejoicing of the people of God. We have our Saviour and we have been reunited to Him. We even got some candy in the process (though I think one of the candy eggs I hid for myself is still under some



tree – I am sure I am short one!). There was much rejoicing in our Christian land – trumpets, anthems, the Great Easter Vigils that turn our waiting to rejoicing and to which no other liturgy can come close in majesty, beauty, and drama – and yes- length.

But now that the initial Easter rejoicing has subsided, it is time to get to work. Just as in the bee hive, there are things that need to be done now that our royal leader is freed from his cave and among us. Like the queen bee who sets about creating a colony, Jesus continues his work through the Holy Spirit to encourage our co-creativity with God's mission to heal the sick, lift up the marginalized, and spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. That is a big job. And we have much work to do.

Sometimes, as I wander the church preaching and teaching and facilitating the difficult conversation about money and God, I have bad news to deliver. On occasion, I come across a parish that has plenty of people and plenty of potential but is inspiring only enough pledges to pay the priest, pay the bills and shave off a bit here and there for a meager outreach effort. They say to me "We need people to give more money to our parish!" The hard news is that some parish visions simply do not deserve the money! That is a hard thing to say to a parish. This is hard news just as it must be hard for a doctor to say to her obese patient, "If you do not start eating and exercising, your

obesity will kill you – possibly slowly and painfully."

The bee hive seems to have a huge mission in mind! The bee hive is genetically programmed to find its queen and then get to work making bees and making honey and spreading pollen so that humanity can eat. The bee hive's mission is to keep the world alive. Impressive. Humbling. Each healthy hive will produce 90 pounds of honey more than it needs each year. In other words, each hive will feed itself, grow, facilitate farmer's produce, and still make much more honey than it needs – to share with humans who love baklava and honey on carrots and honey-flavored ice cream.

Our churches could be like that. Rather than budgeting to keep the lights on and tip God with 10 or 12 or 18 percent towards outreach, what if we had parish strategic plans that were so inspiring, so risky, so big-thinking that the vision inspired the giving – and then the dramatic new giving made the vision possible?

Stewardship is a circular thing: the vision of the parish is set and inspires a "WOW!" in the people's hearts; the people then give to participate in such an inspiring vision; then the vision becomes a reality; then the reality is inspiring; another "WOW!"; then people give even more. It's not a management thing; it's a human heart thing!

The other day I was with a parish that is working towards a goal to spend 50 percent of their pledges on their parish and 50 percent on the poor in their neighborhoods and in the Sudan. Wow!! Now that is so inspiring that I would increase my pledge to that mission in a heartbeat! That kind of thinking is worthy of my making a financial sacrifice.

Jesus is risen! Spring is here. Having made a big fuss over the arrival of our King, it is time to be the worker bees we are in God's church and produce; God being our ever-present helper in the power of the Holy Spirit!