

June 29, 2020

One of the most difficult tasks that I have these days is talking to wedding couples and explaining how different their wedding ceremonies will be, how unlike what they anticipated and planned for, how masks and social distancing are the norm.

Some couples have decided to look for other churches that are not requiring masks and social distancing and that is okay with me and I will do all that I can to help them be validly married in the Catholic Church sooner or later.

We have cancelled all events in our hall at least through Labor Day as Bishop Mc Clory and his team have not had the time to develop policies for non-parochial use of diocesan property. We cancelled a wedding reception in Casa Maria scheduled for mid-August and we gave the young couple a \$1500 cancellation compensation as I did not feel it was fair to just call them up and tell them they were out of a wedding reception.

I have said previously that our young people are being given burdens to carry the cost of such carrying not to be known for years, maybe, generations. There are those who believe in the resilience of youth but while I do believe in that as well, the burdens of these months, maybe years, will take a toll on young people.

I think especially of the high school graduates and college graduates and the rituals and rites of passage that they have been denied. Those experiences may seem to be superfluous to the rest of their lives but no matter how they observed them before this year, they were rites of passage.

Not being able to undergo some ritual acting out, some ritualistic marking of that moment in time, such as leaving high school or college and entering what comes next, is going to leave scars on some if not all.

This is an observation not a criticism but most of the schools in our community, overburdened in so many ways, do not have the high poverty and social disorder and violence to contend with as so many other schools must include in their "lesson planning" so our children while generally are conventionally well educated and athletically proficient, do not have the experience of facing obstacles and overcoming adversities as other kids in

other schools have in educating and preparing for the future young minds and hearts.

I know that all public schools are expected to handle all kinds of human and social and community problems without adequate resources but some schools because of economic, racial, and historical issues just have more on their plate.

All schools are facing daunting tasks as they plan for the future and if they open will have to face all kinds of obstacles and oppositions and unknowns in their long- and short-term planning. I do not envy educators on any level.

My hope is that “reopening” is more than a mechanical process as I think we have made it in the Church and that teachers and schools will find new ways to teach that include the recognition of limits and an intentional recognition of our shared vulnerability and not just adopt an “anything is better than nothing” approach to what may be a very rough ride into the future.

I think our kids will need supports and people that address the realities of growing up in a world afflicted with a plague, a real plague and the resulting death and suffering so arbitrarily visited upon us as will our parishes and parish leaders and members.

I offer some thoughts that in my mind relate to the tasks ahead for both schools and parishes that I found in the Dream Yard Project.

The Dream Yard (www.dreamyard.com) project is a multi-faceted collaboration between students, parents, and teacher/artists of the public schools in the Bronx, a neighborhood of New York City, the most densely populated county in the United States. In their own words:

“DreamYard programs develop artistic voice, nurture young peoples’ desire to make change and cultivate the skills necessary to reach positive goals. We believe that young people in the Bronx need a continuous set of supports to help them towards positive outcomes as they navigate their educational pathway. We have every expectation that through offering sustained and meaningful supports our youth will develop the necessary tools to become creative and engaged citizens, life-long learners and the leaders and innovators of the 21st century.”

If and when we are allowed to offer adult faith formation programs, our first programs will be about beauty and how beauty is not a luxury but a necessity for truly human living in an authentically Catholic manner.