**My priest used to be a good priest**

**Happy Clergy Appreciation Month! (And “Clergy Family Month”)**

Every October, when I realize that it’s now “Clergy Appreciation Month” I take time out to pray for the bishops, priests, and deacons who have helped to shape my life. This appreciation, I might add, includes my earliest memories of a kindly Swedish Minister (today we say “Evangelical Free Church”) who lived in our neighborhood by Jenny Lind Street. In those days we never knew the first names of our Clergy, but out of respect for his Swedish Heritage he was called Prast Hanson. He and his precious wife set a tone, and although there were four Swedish churches in our neighborhood, he distinguished himself as a man of God who truly was a pastor to the people, although being a pastor wasn’t his only gift. He was also a gifted preacher and a gentle evangelist.

When I pray for the Clergy, I think about all that they often must endure, especially in situations where they cannot even defend themselves, either because their accusers do not speak with them or because they cannot betray a confidence. It can be a very lonely life, and anyone seeking ordination must be prepared for having his heart broken...often. It often occurs when the clergy “open up” with people about their thoughts or feelings only to discover later that their words were used against them. As a result, many clergy who have been broken “crawl into a shell” making them appear to be aloof. This, of course, does not mean that clergy have not been guilty of many things...things that I shall not put in print, but what about the conscientious Clergy who simply want to make a difference and yet feel as if they are being evaluated? Here I must mention Clergy wives: It is possible that I have ministered more with Clergy Wives and Clergy Families than I have even ministered to bishops, priests, and deacons individually. As one clergy wife told me when I visited her, “Welcome to my goldfish bowl.” If I could rename this month, it would be “Clergy Families Month.” You deserve our love, respect and prayers. You have heard harsh things said about yourselves and your Husband/Dad, and yet you continue to be faithful.

I remember consoling a priest years ago who had been very cruelly treated. I discovered a short paper written and placed in a book which was a type of “Lament book”. I will try to reconstruct it, understanding that I have not seen it for about 40 years!

MY PRIEST USED TO BE A GOOD PRIEST:

I was so excited when our new priest arrived.

He was well dressed

He was an amazing preacher

He was an incredible pastor

He dazzled as a youth worker, and he

Was the joy of Nursing Homes.

But, then, one day, he crossed me - how dare him - and he changed.

Now he looks like a slob

His sermons are long and pointless

He neglects his flock

He spends too much time with the young people and

Doesn’t visit our shut-ins enough

I can’t remember all of it, but that is the gist of it. But it teaches laity a lesson and it teaches clergy a lesson. All of us are imperfect and all of us minister with imperfect people. How then can we expect perfection from the imperfect?

As the old saying goes, “I looked everywhere for the perfect church and finally I found it, but ever since I’ve been there it’s not perfect anymore.”

Clergy: love your people.

Clergy Wives: There ARE people who understand, and that includes your bishop and his wife.

Clergy children: Trust me on this… your bishop is your pastor and he really cares.

Laity: We bishops keep looking for the perfect priest for your parish, but unfortunately, they were brought up in a parish that may not have been perfect.

But in the end…all of us…clergy and lay…are usually doing the best we can, and daily we ask God’s grace that we not judge each other since we know that there is only One Judge.

**So happy Clergy Appreciation Month. — And even if you don’t get a present or a card, you are not forgotten or appreciated.**