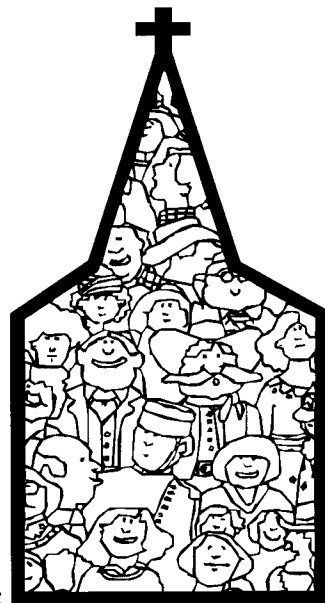


Putting Faith into Action



One aspect of Jesus' job on Earth was to show us how children of God should live. He asked us to put God first, to pray daily, but he also gave us very clear directions about how to treat each other. When we do good works for the people around us, Jesus regards that as having done it for him.

"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."
(Matthew 25:34-36)

Jesus spent all of his time on Earth serving others. He didn't just serve the important or powerful; the ones who could make a big impact. Jesus served the very poor, the outcasts, the sick, those in jail. In other words, he served those who needed it most.

In fact, the Church teaches that we must do what we can to care for one another, especially those who need it most. "Faith, if it has not works is dead" (James 2:17). Following Jesus' instructions and Church tradition, Catholics are called to practice "Corporal Works of Mercy."

Feed the Hungry.

Throughout Scripture, God feeds the hungry. He provided manna for the Israelites in the desert after leaving Egypt. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed thousands of his hungry followers. Here are some of the ways we can feed the hungry today.

- Go grocery shopping for someone who finds it hard to get around, such as an older person or someone who is sick.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen in any capacity – even just visiting with those who come.
- Invite those new to your neighborhood or workplace home for a meal.
- At holiday time, make extra breads, cookies or cakes for the residents of a local nursing home.

Not only does this feed physical hunger, but such attention helps others feel the love of God through our actions.

Give Drink to the Thirsty.

Water is a gift from God, without which no life is possible. Yet many people all over the world lack clean drinking water. Treat water with reverence and respect, and as an act of love share it with those around you:

- Conserve water at every opportunity. Don't let the faucet run while you brush your teeth. Shorten showers, take baths sparingly. Regularly check your plumbing fixtures for drips or leaks.
- Offer something to drink to everyone who enters your home, guests, workers, visitors.
- Regularly give drinks to children. They need fluids – and kind attention – even more than adults.
- Help ensure that the sick or elderly have enough to drink.
- Give to organizations such as Catholic Relief Services that have programs to enable villagers to design and construct safe and clean drinking systems.

Clothe the Naked.

Can you imagine dressing for work in the same soiled clothes you wore yesterday because you have nothing else? Or sending your children to school without a warm winter coat? That is a way of life for many people in our country. Here's how you can help:

- Clean out your closet twice a year and share the extra clothes with the needy. As a special act of love, replace missing buttons or repair raveling seams.
- Give maternity and baby clothes to pro-life groups who help pregnant women and the poor.

- Cut back on your clothing purchases and donate the excess money to the poor.

Not only will you meet the material needs of people who need it, you will help them feel cloaked in love and respect.

Shelter the Homeless.

While Jesus may not have had anywhere to lay his head, Catholic Church recognizes that one of the most significant contributors to human misery is the lack of a safe home. You can work to provide homes for others, but you can also help others to feel at home with you. Here are some suggestions:

- Consider working with Habitat for Humanity in your area, an organization that builds affordable homes for those who wouldn't otherwise be able to own one.
- Welcome into your home those who are new to your neighborhood, church, or workplace.
- Support organizations that provide safe housing and help for unwed mothers or families in crisis.
- Visit the elderly who are no longer able to live in their own homes.
- Volunteer to keep watch over a neighbor's house during the owner's absence.

Visit the Sick.

There can be nothing more isolating than a serious illness. Sometimes a quick visit and a short prayer can be the best medicine to someone who is sick and alone. Here are some other ways to help:



- When someone doesn't show up for work or a usual activity, make a quick phone call to see if she is okay or if there's anything she needs. (It's also a great way to let her know she was missed.)
- Visit people in nursing homes. You can read the newspaper to them, help them write letters, or even just listen to their stories. (Lively company from small children or animals can be very uplifting, too.)

- Call or send a card to someone who is homebound with an illness.
- Bring simple meals to someone who is ill and can't easily leave the house.

Try to make extra efforts during holidays when being sick and alone is especially hard.

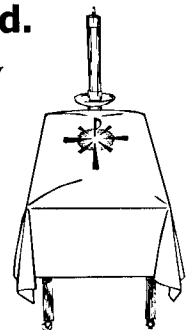
Visit the Imprisoned.

While we want to do all we can to support victims of crimes, the offender often loses sight of what he has left behind or why he needs to change. Reaching out to those imprisoned helps them feel part of the community they've harmed and gives them a reason to want to amend their lives. Try these tips for reaching out:

- Help the families of those in prison to visit their loved one. Provide transportation or help make arrangements for visitations.
- Donate books and tapes to prison libraries.
- Write letters to prisoners.
- Arrange for tape recorders and children's books so inmates can record bedtime stories for the children they've left behind.
- Join a prison ministry that visits prisoners and offers spiritual counseling.

Bury the Dead.

While we no longer have to physically bury our dead, we are called to show respect for the body even though deceased. Since Catholics believe in the dignity of the human person and the resurrection of the body, "caring for the body grows out of a reverence and concern for the person whom the church now commends to the care of God," according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.



So not only are we called to comply with the guidelines of the Catholic Church for burying our dead, we are expected to help the dying receive God's grace during their last minutes of life. And, supporting those who have suffered the loss can help them bear their pain a little easier. Consider these activities:

- Visit patients in hospices and arrange for them to receive the Sacrament of the Sick or the Eucharist, if appropriate.
- Attend wakes, funerals and funeral dinners to offer support to the bereaved.
- Take care of young children of families suffering a loss or anticipating a death.
- Continue to visit after the funeral flurry is over. Bring over meals, or just be available to listen.
- Help widows or widowers handle the details of practical life that their loved one used to handle.