

The Poor and Needy Among Us - You May Have Noticed

In recent weeks you may have noticed from time to time, people in need standing outside of Mass on Sunday, with signs requesting money. It seems to be a more recent phenomenon at the church and is happening more and more frequently. I thought it might interest you to know some of my insights as to why this is happening and how you might best be able to respond charitably in these sad and difficult situations.

A few years ago I began to realize that the poor and needy of this area are on the rise. It seems odd to think that we have “poor and needy” people right here in Buckingham and the Doylestown area, if only passing through, but we do have both residential and mendicant poor and needy people. We may choose to ignore them or the situation, but they do exist and the need is real. In responding to this otherwise inconspicuous situation on the rise, I decided to seek the assistance of the members of the Health and Wellness Committee. We were able to formulate a sub-committee which is named The Life Help Group.

Through the generous donations of some parishioners and foundations, assistance from the poor box and moneys from the Stewardship Collection, we were able to develop an infrastructure to properly help these people. It involves cooperation from local government agencies and private organizations. We have been able to assist a number of people who would otherwise have nowhere to turn.

Word is out, that Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish is a caring and welcoming parish family, and so an increased number of people have been coming to us in response to our outreach. I think this is a compliment to all of you as a vibrant, welcoming parish family, growing disciples and making Church matter. Over the past year we have developed an appropriate policy which includes guidelines and procedures in coordination with the local private organizations and government agencies to appropriately assist those in need. This policy also includes recognition of our responsibilities according to the law as well as insurance guidelines.

Regretfully, some who are in need will, in their desperation, try to circumvent the properly established procedures, which are meant for their protection, our protection and the true need which they have, but at times are unable to acknowledge or properly express. In some cases, one of the challenges we encounter is a language barrier, which admittedly can be daunting, but with the patience of our team and assistance from others, we are usually able to get to the bottom of the true need.

When you see these people outside of Mass on Sundays or any other day, may I suggest a few guidelines, which you may find helpful:

- Do be cordial and welcoming to those you encounter not only in the parking lot but everywhere.
- Do invite them into the church to worship with us and become a part of our worshipping community.
- Do make known to them the assistance that the parish can offer at a more appropriate time during regular office hours at the Parish Office. You may also direct them to the

welcome booth in the narthex of the church, where someone could give them the information they need to get assistance.

- While I could never counsel you not to give money to them, most often the true need they have cannot be met in that brief encounter. The persons could be avoiding the real needs that they have. For example, when children are involved, proper housing and education are required in addition to food. In your eagerness to help in the immediate moment with a monetary gift, whatever the size, could exacerbate the situation and delay the real needs. Additionally, you may be placing yourself and the parish in a situation which you have not followed the law with regard to reporting abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. The members of our Life Help Group are fully aware and trained in following Archdiocesan policies and procedures as well as government laws and guidelines.
- You may want to consider giving your donation to our poor box or directly to our parish by designating where you want the money to go on the check. 100 percent of those monies go directly to helping those local poor and needy. No amount is kept for processing or administration fees. You may also want to donate money to our annual Stewardship Campaign Appeal in which monies are set aside for the infrastructure of our parish organizations and ministries which make it possible to reach out and evangelize the poor and needy, locally, in the area and abroad.
- Do consider signing up to be a volunteer for this Life Help Group or any of the other organizations of the parish or local area who help the poor. We have a wonderfully committed group of parishioners who are always in need of more volunteers.
- Lastly, do pray for those you encounter and those you may not, but who are there in our community and in need of our prayers and our help. God bless you for all your efforts to respond to this most basic foundation of responding to the Gospel challenge, by acting upon these particular corporal and spiritual works of mercy: feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless and counsel the doubtful.

I offer you here these thoughts for further reflection. Saint Teresa of Calcutta responded to a question referencing the overwhelming nature of trying to feed all the poor and needy in the world. She said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” Pope Francis in summarizing importance of the Holy Year of Mercy, “Let us remember the Golden Rule: do unto to others, as you would have them do to you.” We are able to draw some salient lesson from the story of the Last Judgement told by Jesus Himself as recorded in Gospel of Matthew (Chapter 25: 31-46): “as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it to me....and as often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it to me.”