

THE CALL TO SERVE

CHALLENGED TO SERVE

By Joanne Sequeira



Over the past few years we have been hearing Fr John talk about growing as faithful disciples. This inspired me to make inquiries about how I could be more involved in the parish. I was offered the

opportunity to serve as a minister of Holy Communion to the residents at a nursing home and to the homebound. In both instances, I was reluctant. It was outside of my comfort zone. I am an introvert and I did not know anything about praying out loud, let alone with those I didn't know.

With the nursing home, I have to admit, I felt like I failed the first few times when I went out on my own. None of the residents would receive communion from me. I took the rejection personally. I felt like quitting. I reported back that this ministry was not for me. I was encouraged to pray on it. I realized that I was not doing this for my fulfillment but rather to serve God.

I prayed each time before I went and perseverance paid off. I finally connected with one resident by offering to fold socks with her. I began to form a relationship with her and had the privilege of helping her return to her faith. I helped give words to her prayers when she didn't know what to say. She started to receive communion again just before she passed. I eventually figured out how to connect with different residents. It is still a difficult ministry for me. Each time I want to give up, something happens the next time I go that makes me realize God wants me to stay with it. All I have to do is make myself available and provide the residents the opportunity to pray and receive communion. The rest is up to God.

Taking communion to the homebound was easier, and personally more rewarding for me. I have been blessed that the wonderful ladies who I have met appreciate receiving the Eucharist in their homes. I have been blessed to learn about their lives and to participate in their faith while sharing my life and faith with them. All I had to do was listen attentively and God provided the rest. Upon reflection, my initial worry about praying out loud was such an insignificant

part of this ministry. The bigger part was forming a connection, an encounter. Once I formed a connection, God did the rest. I am not sure I would have ever met any of these ladies. We come from different cultures, walks of life and generations, but we have our faith in common. Bringing communion to the nursing home residents or the homebound is an opportunity for them to encounter Jesus. Forming the connection with them was my opportunity to encounter Jesus.

DID I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

By Cathy Anderson

Imagine...

You are a young mother that needs to flee
from your homeland to protect your children (and yourself) from threats and danger. You travel thousands of miles to a foreign country where you don't know anyone, don't have a job, and have little or no money in order to ensure your children's safety.

You have a great job, life is going well and one day it all changes. You fall and hit your head resulting in a head injury which ultimately results in the loss of your job, income and home.

Over the last few years I have had the opportunity to meet and work with these people and many others living in similar scenarios through St Vincent de Paul and the Helping Hands - Christmas Hamper Program. Mary Catherine approached me and asked if I would write a piece sharing how working with these groups had put me 'out of my comfort zone'.

First I must say that writing this has put me out of my comfort zone!! I am just one member of a team or community of amazing people in these ministries that give their time and gifts to make a difference in the lives of others. I would like to share a couple of stories about some of my experiences.

I have briefly experienced what some individuals' encounter daily, living on the streets. On one of the coldest nights of the year we gave out coats, boots, socks, and blankets in the downtown area. Our 'Cover Me with Love' group were quite cold even in our multiple layers while many of our recipients wore only light coats and running shoes. I offered one gentleman an extra blanket but he would not take it, stating 'I don't want to take too much. I want to make sure that everyone gets a blanket'.

In another situation the facilities at St. Joseph's Hospitality Centre were unavailable for our monthly free breakfast, so we 'took it to the street'. On that cold, wet fall day, we handed out hot drinks, muffins and donuts. One gentleman I spoke with said he had been on the street for 6 months and was not sure how he was going to manage over the winter, while I wasn't sure how I would survive the next couple of hours in the cold and rain!



As a member of the team contacting families about the Christmas Hamper Program I hear many very sad stories. I have learned to have a box of tissues available for these calls!! We start our calls in early

November and sometimes learn of families who have recently moved to Canada and have no winter coats, boots, hats or mitts. This calls for... 'emergency shopping trips', if we are unable to resolve this issue through other sources.

One lady chatted with me for a long time sharing her story of raising her granddaughter and supporting her daughter through some major health issues all on her very small pension. At the end of generating a list of potential gifts for her granddaughter she asked, "Now what can I do for St George's?"

While some of my experiences have been difficult and uncomfortable, both physically and emotionally, they have helped me to grow in my understanding of the challenges faced by so many in our community. I share this with you in the hope that you will continue to and seek out opportunities to "be the light in someone else's darkness" (Mission.org, July 13, 2018) even if it puts you in situations that are uncomfortable. It can be simply a smile to a homeless person, verbal encouragement, or physical support (like putting together a JYSK bunk bed, which is even more complicated than IKEA!). I have gained so much and hope that I have helped to make even a little difference.

While preparing this I came across a song by a group that have summarized some of these ideas in one of their songs; Did I Make a Difference by the Oak Ridge Boys. (You can listen to this on YouTube.)

