

A Call to Serve



“If I, then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

— John 13:14-15



On the night before he entered into his Passion and death, Jesus gave all of us a compelling model to follow. Serve as Christ serves; give as Christ gives, freely and fully.

Jesus asks us — priests, deacons, religious, married, single — to follow in his footsteps. We know that Jesus' footsteps led him to the Cross and to resurrection. As members of Christ's body, we must give of ourselves as Jesus did: care for others with compassion, offer hospitality, share food with the hungry, clothing with those who have little. Surely, we will experience crosses along this way — but we know the way also leads to resurrection, to renewal, of both our world and our selves.

Will you follow Jesus by being a person who gives of him- or herself in service to others?

Responding to the Call: Service

Whoever wants to follow Christ will have much work to do on his behalf — announcing the Good News and serving others as Jesus did. Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now — at this moment, in these circumstances.

— *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 14

We are shown the depths of God's love in Christ, who came to bring us the fullness of life, and to show us God's way of living. The more we come to know Christ, the more we recognize that all we are, all we have, and all we will be is purely a gift from God. Our response to this generosity, as we follow in Christ's footsteps, is to give freely and generously to others.

Sometimes what's possible for us to give, and do, seems insignificant. Giving of ourselves in ministry, in service, in help to those who need it the most — while rewarding in and of itself — can seem to be like trying to "bail out the ocean with a teaspoon."

But those of us who become involved in voluntarily service, be it at church or for a nonprofit entity or organization of some other kind, soon learn that that's not the case. We see with our own eyes evidence that one person really *can* make a difference. Jesus knew this when he called us to serve others; even more important, he knew that when we respond to his call, our service, offered with a generous spirit, changes not only those we serve but those who serve.

Consider serving in your parish, neighborhood, or city, and you may find yourself being enriched in ways you would never have thought possible.

Serving with Joy

Where is your service needed?

Making the decision to offer service is an important step for us. It is the moment in which we say that our faith really does guide us, and that Jesus' way is the most important priority in our lives. This decision brings joy — but it also brings questions with it. No doubt, the need for your service is great. But where can you best serve?

That's a question you can best answer with honest self-examination and prayer. Is there a ministry in your parish that could use your talents and abilities? A non-



profit service organization near your home or work that needs helping hands? Are there particular causes to which you feel a sense of commitment? Answers to these questions can provide clues for you of where you can do the most good.

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another; as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies...

— 1 Peter 4:10-11a

What talents do you bring to service?

Each of us has been given talents, ways of interacting with information or with people that come naturally to us. We have a responsibility to develop those talents and use them throughout our lives, particularly in service. Indeed, countless people have learned through the years that the best way to find passion and purpose is in using their God-given talents in service.

- What talents have you been given?
- What kinds of activities seem to come naturally to you?
- What do other people say you do well?
- What skills do you use at your place of work or in your family that you could offer to your parish?
- Do you have a hobby, or a skill you've developed "just for fun," that could also be offered in service?
- How might you apply your talents to the areas of service to which you feel called?

What time will you offer? Each of us has been given a particular span of years by our God, and how long a time we have, we don't know. What we do know is that time is a precious gift — not to be taken lightly, nor hoarded or wasted. We need to remember to stay balanced, to allow for the many other commitments we already have:

- What responsibilities do I have in my life, and for whom?
- What time do I set aside for nurturing my family and my relationships?
- How much of my time is committed to work?
- What commitment do I make to caring for my spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional well-being?
- What portion of my time am I prepared to give in service of others?

Making the Commitment to Action

Once all the questions have been asked, and the answers discerned, it's time for action. Often, it helps to put your commitment in writing. You might want to post your commitment in a place where you will frequently see it, or make a note on your calendar that periodically reminds you to evaluate your progress on that commitment. We are less likely to excuse away inaction when we see our commitment from time to time; placing your signature at the conclusion of your commitment is like saying "Amen!" "I will do this!"

Some people find that sharing their commitment with another builds in additional likelihood that they will follow through. If you are new to volunteering or to offer-



ing yourself in ministry, or if you know yourself to be a person for whom accountability is beneficial, invite a family member or friend to witness your commitment, perhaps while sharing his or her commitment with you. Pray for each other and ask God to give each of you the strength and wisdom to act with love and compassion.

Many parishes have an annual opportunity to sign up for a ministry or organization. Whether you take advantage of that opportunity, simply talk with a staff person or a parishioner who coordinates service in your parish, or get in touch with a local organization or service agency, the important thing is to act without hesitation. Someone is waiting for your service . . . in Christ's name.

The Corporal Works of Mercy

(found in Matthew 25:31-46):

- + Feed the hungry
- + Give drink to the thirsty
- + Clothe the naked
- + Shelter the homeless
- + Visit the sick
- + Visit the imprisoned
- + Bury the dead

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

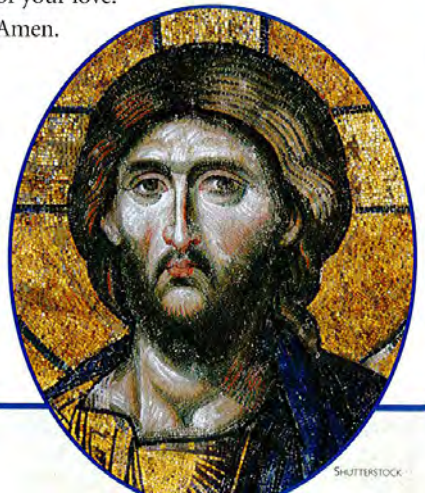
(based on Christ's teachings and early Christian practice):

- + Counsel the doubtful
- + Instruct the ignorant
- + Admonish the sinner
- + Comfort the sorrowful
- + Forgive injuries
- + Bear wrongs patiently
- + Pray for the living and the dead

Works of Mercy

A Prayer for Those Who Serve

Jesus, our savior and brother,
you teach us that to serve others
is to act in your name.
Send your Spirit to guide us;
give us your wisdom and strength
as we reach out to those who need your care.
Fill us with compassion,
and give us your peace
so that we may be faithful witnesses
of your love.
Amen.



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For Further Reading

Books:

Langford, Joseph. *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2008).

Phelps, Owen, Ph.D. *The Catholic Vision for Leading Like Jesus* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2009).

Pamphlets:

Duquin, Lorene Hanley. *Discerning Your Gifts* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2005).

———. *Six Ways I Can Make My Parish Better* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2009).

Mahan, Rev. Daniel J. *What Catholics Believe About Stewardship* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2008).

———. *What Catholics Do: Stewardship* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2007).

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