

Corporal Work to Shelter the Homeless

"For I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35)

Familiar sights in many cities worldwide are growing numbers of homeless men, women and even children sleeping in doorways, train stations and under bridges. Causes of homelessness are many and varied: the lack of permanent, affordable housing; overcrowded, temporary shelters; unemployment and underemployment; breaking up of families; mental and physical disabilities; and, on a major scale, wars and natural disasters that displace families and whole communities. Despite our abundant resources to aid the homeless, we still have an estimated two million "street people" in the United States. In addition to helping our own locally, we have a moral responsibility to reach out with aid to people made homeless by disasters and conflicts in poverty-stricken countries. Bear in mind that counted among the homeless are not only "street people," but also "migrants, refugees, orphans, and foster children Providing shelter entails fostering a sense of belonging." (*The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*)

As God's hands on Earth, we can help the homeless. Here are some suggestions:

- Understand the need for group homes for homeless and disabled people in your community.
- Donate to our St. Vincent DePaul Society that provides money for basic needs to the poor.
- Support national and international disaster relief programs such as for Japan.
- Volunteer your services to organizations that build affordable homes for the poor.
- Advocate for legislation to provide housing for poverty-stricken and disabled persons.
- Offer your love and home to an orphan, or consider becoming a foster parent.
- Welcome newcomers to your school or community; help them to feel at home.
- Remember, to provide someone with a sense of belonging is to fulfill a basic human need.

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Spiritual Work to Instruct the Ignorant

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

For some this spiritual work of mercy carries a negative stigmatism. Outside the work environment, we are often reluctant and fearful to inform someone of what they are doing "wrong" and lack the confidence in how to instruct on what is "right." However, as Catholics it is more in *what we do than in what we say*. We must teach by example! We live this authentic Catholic life when take to heart the words of St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words." When true Christian discipleship permeates our lives, people take notice...they become intrigued and start asking questions. Therefore, teaching by example requires the knowledge of our Catholic faith and the ability to accurately articulate that faith. We learn this ability to articulate our faith with confidence through reading Catholic authors and theologians, participating in bible studies, reading papal encyclicals and documents, and taking adult formation classes. Serving as a parish companion to someone who is considering joining the Catholic Church or teaching Religious Formation classes to children is an excellent way to both learn more about the faith and be a living example of what it means to be Catholic. We are also very fortunate in Elkhorn to have the resource of the radio station Spirit 102.7 to listen to Catholic theologians and teachers. Parents are the primary educators of their children. If they want to sincerely pass along the faith to their children, they must have a firm grasp of it themselves. St. Patrick's School mission to "Teach as Jesus Did" doesn't just apply to our school educators, but to all of us. The USCCB pastoral plan for adult formation entitled, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, clearly states, "An adult community whose faith is well-formed and lively will more effectively pass that faith on to the next generation. Moreover, the witness of adults actively continuing their own formation shows children and youth that growth in faith is lifelong and does not end upon reaching adulthood." Know your faith, live out your faith, don't neglect future generations by not passing it along.