



Parish Times

OCTOBER 2018

Living the Faith Together

FREE

Mountain of Work

By Chuck Short

Autumn is a delightful time of year, filled with heartwarming and memorable activities. As a father and grandfather, I fondly recall my children's CYO soccer games and now enjoy these beautiful October days cheering for my grandchildren during their CYO games. For decades, CYO and its dedicated volunteer coaches have enabled and taught children to play together in Christian spirit. Thanks to coaches, patient referees, parishes, and especially parents for keeping CYO vibrant.



The Montgomery County Catholic community lost a great leader last month when Jim Sullivan died. I have often referred to PCR (Potomac Community Resources) as a model parish initiated program for people with disabilities. Jim and his wife Joan were among a small group of Our Lady of Mercy parents of young adults with disabilities who founded PCR three decades ago. While Jim's daughter Patricia passed away just as PCR was getting started, Jim Sullivan remained a dedicated leader at PCR until his death. Jim helped other parishes throughout the Archdiocese to establish programs to serve people with disabilities using the PCR model and was an effective advocate and advisor to the Archdiocese of Washington. Jim will be remembered as a great example of Christian service and as a responsible and respected business leader.

Jim Sullivan's life reminds us that even as our Church is shrouded in the worst of times, there is brilliance in our local parish communities. Montgomery County is home to more than one hundred thousand Catholics, a vast potential force for love and good works, larger than the total population of most cities. Imagine the impact for justice and goodness Catholics could have if we ever got our act together! Our local Church will heal faster

and more meaningfully when enlightened people like Jim Sullivan work and pray together recommitting our parishes to the basic teachings of Christ. It is said that time will heal. I prefer another adage, service to others brings healing to those who serve.

October provides two related themes upon which to reflect. Designated as both Respect Life Month and National Disability Employment Awareness Month, we are reminded of our obligations to respect human life from conception to natural death, and that respecting human life includes honoring the dignity and quality of each person's life. People with severe disabilities often live in the shadows of society. Intentionally or not, they are deprived of opportunities to fully participate in the life sustaining and dignifying blessings of social, educational, and economic endeavors.

The basic lessons of our faith are found in the Sermon on the Mount. Like so much of Christ's life, the Mount is an instructional metaphor. Speaking from atop the Mount, Christ illustrates a steep hill for those who wish to follow Him. It's not enough to love others, we must love our enemies. It is not enough to help the poor by sharing some of our possessions, we must give all to them. It's not enough to tolerate a slap on the face, we must offer the other cheek. Living Christian is a loftier hill to scale. Respecting life includes rejecting abortion, the death penalty and euthanasia, but refraining from killing a person is not enough. The steeper hill is our obligation to assure an inclusive and abundant life for others especially those who vulnerable and not comfortably or easily included among us.

People with severe disabilities have made progress toward community inclusion in the past half century. They live in neighborhoods, attend schools, churches and are included in social activities. Catholics have helped through Victory Housing, the Kennedy Institute at Catholic Charities, Rosario Communities, PCR, Upper County Community Resources, and enlightened Catholic schools aided by the Catholic Coalition for Special Education. But these are not enough. More than sev-

enty percent of people with disabilities are unemployed. It's a steep hill. In American society, among the most dignifying and essential elements of life is work, our jobs. Since work is a major part of life, lacking work greatly diminishes life. Catholics have affirmed dignity and respect for life making our way up the Mount by welcoming people with disabilities more fully into our lives. To reach to top, that place where Christ sits and from which He promises abundant life for all who seek Him, we must help those with disabilities engage in dignifying employment.

Here are a few ideas for parishes to consider. 1) Each parish could add a ministry for human dignity and opportunity. Perhaps several parishes could work together to promote employment for people with disabilities. Every parish has members who are potential employers. 2) Parishes may want to collaborate in establishing a Project Search, a local job internship and placement program for young adults transiting from school to work, www.seeonline.org/project-search-montgomery. Several organizations including NIH, Montgomery County Government and National Geographic have Project Searches. 3) Every parish should employ at least one individual with disabilities. Full and part-time jobs are needed. 4) Parish volunteers could offer job readiness and mentoring for potential employees and employers like the way some parishes offer English as a Second Language to immigrants.

There are of course other ideas for action. Here are a few resources if you and your parish are interested in scaling the Mount. Transcen, Inc, www.transcen.org/; SEEC, Inc, www.seeonline.org/employment-opportunities; MD Dept of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) <https://dors.maryland.gov/Pages/default.aspx>; Catholic Charities, Kennedy Institute, www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/kennedyschool/.

Together, let's respect the fullness of life.

God Bless!

Chuck Short,

cshort5@verizon.net