

CATHOLIC CHARITIES - THEIR WORK AND OURS

At the end of masses last weekend, we heard about all the wonderful services provided by Catholic Charities. We're being asked once again to help them continue with that good work through your donations which, for several years now, have been among the largest of all archdiocesan parishes. But as I listened to Mary Ellen Brabec tell a story about a homeless woman who was helped recently by a Catholic Charities social worker to find temporary housing, I remembered something our Parish Council suggested I do some time ago which had slipped my mind in the midst of other things.

As I hope everyone knows, we offer assistance here in the parish on fairly regular basis through our own St. Vincent de Paul Society to both parishioners and non-parishioners who come to us in need. But what we can offer is limited to Jewel gift cards or, in some cases, a check to cover heating bills, electric bills, overdue mortgage payments or rent. But in many of those cases, there is an underlying need for help we can't provide or for which we don't have the necessary skills. Fr. Dan and I aren't social workers and neither are any of the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. So it would be a great help to have one or more parishioners with a background in social work who could be available from time to time to make contact with those who come to us for financial assistance but who really have deeper issues that need to be addressed, whether it be housing, employment or family problems that make life challenging.

A recent example was a woman—not a parishioner, a Catholic or even a Homewood resident—who came here because of domestic abuse. She arrived with a black eye and a bruised jaw after her husband had beaten her up on Easter Sunday because she gave candy to a neighbor's children. She said that she had phoned other churches closer to her home, but no one ever called her back. Fortunately, she had the courage to call the police, have him arrested and, because this was not the first abuse she had suffered at his hands, he was put in jail where bond was denied. Because he had never allowed her to have access to their checking account, she needed money to pay the mortgage, which we provided. In the end, she was fortunate to locate an old friend on the west coast who needed a full-time caregiver and so she moved as far away from her abusive husband as she could. But if that had not been the outcome for her, a social worker might have been able to help her find other options for escaping the abuse she had suffered.

Bottom line: if you have that background in social work and would be willing to offer your services from time to time, please let me know. It's not terribly often that we encounter a situation like the one I've described, but it would be good to know that there was someone here in the parish we could call on when people come to us with a need where a Jewel card is little more than a bandaid for a much deeper wound.

Fr. Bob