

Learning to Be Good Neighbors

by Julia Occhiogrosso

He lay sleeping in our alley in front of our back gate. When I approached him, he awoke and stood up, "I need to speak to the manager."

I recognized Tom from our food line and our mobile shower project. He had a gentle demeanor and spoke with the candor of a child, "I need some Milk of Magnesia." I did not have any to give him. He took this fact in stride but went on to explain his disappointment in missing Friday's shower service. Feeling at a loss of how to respond, I invited him to continue resting in a safer spot than our driveway. Appreciative of the offer, Tom curled up under our olive tree away from our back gate.

I walked away from the scene thinking about the story of Lazarus in front of the rich man's gate and the Good Samaritan, both of which speak of who our neighbor is and how we treat them.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus suggests we are neighbors because of our shared humanity and we are "good" neighbors when we recognize this reality. The Samaritan was "good" because he was able to see beyond cultural or social differences to the humanity of the man lying wounded in the road. Seeing in this way enabled him to act with mercy, to love his neighbor.

With the story of Lazarus, the rich man fails to recognize Lazarus's humanity and does not act with compassion. In the end his failure to love his neighbor became his suffering. In the parable of Lazarus, the rich man was indifferent to the beggar's plight and didn't act compassionately. His failure to see Lazarus's humanity, to love his neighbor, was also a loss for him not only in life, but death.

Following the mandate to love your neighbor as yourself requires a capacity to see and understand them, yet most of us, like the priest and the Levite in the Samaritan parable and the rich man in Lazarus's, allow our fear to distort our perception. Fear is often what justifies and limits our ability to act with compassion even if our hearts want to.

This era is marked by reductionistic judgments of groups of people we don't know nor take the time to know. To love our neighbor requires searching out an authentic and truthful experience of them.

People who volunteer with us on our food line come to know the poor and marginalized differently than those who rely



Nevadans for the Common Good (NCG) lead organizer Anna Eng (third from left) met with Pope Francis last October in his residence for 90 minutes along with 19 other leaders and organizers from the West and Southwest IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation, NCG is an IAF member). The Pope referred to the IAF as "Good News for the United States." The Las Vegas Catholic Worker is a member of NCG.

on the media or general public's interpretation. Dorothy Day reminds us that; "We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other."

With the Vatican's initiative of the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis is inviting us to participate in a process of deep listening that will help us know and understand our neighbor. Synod means to journey together. The emphasis is on the journey more than the destination. Together in this case includes clerics, laity and all others.

Pope Francis hopes to inspire a new way of being church together. This Synodal process provides the opportunity for insight and metanoia. In contrast to the polarizing practice of characterizing people by their political, social or cultural affiliation, this process opens space to hear each other's stories and concerns with receptivity and respect to soften our hearts of stone and find the Christ among us, despite our differences.

Pope Francis in *Let Us Dream* also emphasizes the importance of going to the margins to listen to the neglected and ignored. He asserts that we forget that the poor and marginalized have something to offer us. We can be enlightened and transformed; we can learn how to be good neighbors.

These conversations are occurring globally and are ongoing through October 2024. These efforts to listen, understand and know each other better have the potential to create a church more capable of healing action in the world, a church that

is more in line with the Gospel mandate to love each other.

Catholic Worker communities are often located in the margins of society. We meet our neighbors while sitting in the yard or working in the garden. They approach us with requests for food, water, a blanket. They are the people who have pitched a tent down the alley or wander the streets pushing a grocery cart full of their belongings. They can be seen sitting in a vacant lot for hours, searching a dumpster for items to recycle, and even resting on the pavement by our back gate. Each encounter invites me to see with new eyes, to reflect on the question, "Who are my neighbors, and how do I treat them?"

Donation Information:

Checks: Please make checks payable and send to:

Las Vegas Catholic Worker
500 W. Van Buren Ave.
Las Vegas, NV 89106

PayPal Giving Fund:

<http://lvcw.org/giving>
(No fees taken out)

Credit / Debit Card:

<http://lvcw.org/donate> Click the Donate button above the credit card icons, enter the amount, then click the bottom Donate with a Debit or Credit Card button.

Venmo:

@LasVegasCatholicWorker



On Saturday, February 11, Confirmation students and their parents from St. John Neumann came to help us assemble and serve 300 meals for our monthly Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast for the homeless.

Diocese of Las Vegas Synod Results

Pope Francis invited the entire world Church to participate in a Synod, or "listening sessions" to take place from 2021 to 2024. There were about 1,000 respondents from our Diocese. The complete Synod of our Diocese is available at:

dioceseoflasvegas.org/2021-2024-synod
Below is an excerpt from page 4 of the Synod Synthesis Submission, Diocese of Las Vegas:

Respondents identify works of charity as a concrete way of living out their Catholic faith while fostering communion with others. They acknowledge the contributions of large numbers of volunteers who generously give their time, talent, and treasure on behalf of those in need. Such active, "hands-on" engagement was cited repeatedly by respondents as a way of fostering communion. Many of those engaged in our synodal process also acknowledged, however, that works of charity are not enough. "Journeying together" with those who are in need also means speaking out against injustice and becoming more engaged in the public sphere. Significant areas of concern that were viewed as disrupting/damaging the communion of the church were also voiced by respondents, in many cases with tears, heart-felt pain, and anger ... but always in a spirit of true sincerity. There was wide-spread consensus that communion is weakened by the exclusion of groups that they believe is evident in the Church today. Three primary examples were repeated consistently: exclusion from the sacramental life of the church of those who are divorced and have remarried outside of the Church; exclusion of members of the LBGTQ community; and exclusion of women from real leadership roles in the Church, including the diaconate and priesthood. As regards those who are divorced and remarried outside of the Church, great pain and frustration was shared from the personal experience of respondents about the poor treatment, lack of charity, and misinformation they received from priests who themselves did not adequately know church teaching. As regards the LBGTQ community, some respondents felt that they should be excluded from the life of the Catholic community. The vast majority of those

participating in the synodal process, however, voiced the need to accept all people as Jesus did. Church leaders, they said, need to be more attentive to the real experience and struggles of Catholics in the world today and be more supportive and less judgmental. As regards the role of women, a small minority of respondents voiced the opinion that women should be excluded from any liturgical or ministerial roles, up to and including female altar servers. The vast majority of respondents, however, strongly opposed this attitude and urged Church leaders to recognize the "unique charisms" and "pastoral gifts" women bring to the Church. Broad support for ordaining women was voiced by those participating in the synodal process as were calls to include women in leadership positions, discussions, and decisions at all levels of the Church. Several other concerns were also voiced by respondents that are perceived as damaging the communion/unity of the Church. First, specific mention was made of the large number of youth and young adults who are leaving the church. While "pockets" of active youth ministry exist in the diocese, the absence of youth and young adults actively engaged in the life of the larger parish community is distressing to respondents, many of whom are parents or grandparents.



Touro University medical students offered free clinics on Dec. 23 and Jan. 27. They plan to return monthly and are able to see folks waiting to take showers in the Clean the World shower trailer.

We need underwear, socks and t-shirts for our Friday shower program, please contact Julia: julia@lvcw.org or (702) 647-0728

Nuclear Stations of the Cross

Good Friday, April 7 at noon

At the Mercury Gate of the NNSS (former Nevada Nuclear Weapons Test Site) presented by the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, call (702) 647-0728 for more info and directions.

Sacred Peace Walk

April 1 - 7

Pilgrimage during Holy Week
 65-mile walk from Las Vegas to NNSS (formerly Nevada Nuclear Test Site)
 (773) 853-1886

NevadaDesertExperience.org

PLEASE JOIN US

Volunteer Scheduling:

(702) 647-0728

or mail@lvcw.org

Thurs.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker

Thurs.-Sat., 6:15 a.m.

Over 300 "To-go" Meals served to poor & homeless people (6:15 a.m.: meal assembly, 7:00 - 7:30 a.m.: meal distribution)

Friday, 8 a.m. - Noon:

Clean the World Foundation shower trailer in our empty lot, up to 40 showers given

Second Sat. of the month:

Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast (In December the Pancake Breakfast will be Sat., Dec. 23rd, none in Jan. 2024)

We are a Participating

Member of: Nevadans for the Common Good

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