

## Walking In Someone Else's Shoes



Christopher News Notes

*“All of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”*

—1 Peter 3:8

**WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORS?** Do they ever get on your nerves? Maybe the couple in the apartment above you vacuums at 5 a.m. Maybe a family down the road has a dog that won't stop barking.

Or maybe the woman next door never returns your misdelivered mail.

Perhaps the better question to ask is: what do you *not* know about your neighbors?

What you don't know is that the couple vacuums early because they work nights, and it's their only free time. The dog down the street is a rescue from an abused home, working on being rehabilitated. And the husband of the woman next door is ill, so there is little time to drop off the mail.

Our irritations, disagreements, and differences with others may be understandable, but sometimes there is more than meets the eye. We don't know the details of another's life until we spend a day walking in their shoes. This requires both humility and courage. But if we are called to act as Jesus did, we must strive to love and understand one another. We must strive to walk in another's shoes.

## Walking with the Homeless

For nine years, Molly McGovern has been walking with the homeless in her community. Executive director of the Friendship Room in Steubenville, Ohio, McGovern operates a 24-hour haven for homeless locals and addicts in need of a safe space. The Friendship Room also provides clothing items, food, water, and a listening ear from staff.

Importantly, The Friendship Room was supposed to be temporary. In 2014, with a blizzard approaching, McGovern and her husband Bill felt called to turn their home into a temporary "warming center" for those living on the streets. But as time went on, the McGoverns came to understand the plight of their guests and truly care about them. By walking in the shoes of those struggling in their community, the couple knew they wanted to do more.

"It's not on our merit that those things haven't happened to us," McGovern said in a video on their website, *FriendshipRoom.net*. "That could be any one of us. But we have a chance to comfort Christ when we comfort one another."

Since that blizzard, The Friendship Room has grown to include an initiative that helps female victims of violence and trafficking. Employee Alex Taylor said that working there has helped her understand another perspective. "We're used to seeing people on the streets and making assump-

In the final moments of their section championship game, California's Trinity Classical Academy led Desert Chapel High School by more than 20 points. With such a lopsided score and so little time left, Trinity High's coach subbed in Beau Howell to give him some playing time. The 5-foot-6 freshman with autism made two consecutive shots, but missed both. It was clear he was trying, but he had yet to score a basket that season. Then, the unexpected happened.

Desert High's coach called a timeout. Afterward, Desert High senior Taner Alvarez passed the ball to Howell, encouraging him to shoot. When he missed, Desert High's team guided Howell—who, remember, is on the opposing team—closer to the basket, telling him to shoot again. Following several attempts, Howell scored his first-ever basket. The arena exploded with cheers, and both teams embraced at the end of the game. "That will always be in my heart," Alvarez said in an interview with *Parade*. "That kid scoring, and for me to give him that shot, felt pretty cool."

Instead of holding a grudge against the team that won the championship title, Desert High put themselves in Howell's shoes and saw a higher purpose. It was worth losing by a few more points if it meant Howell got to enjoy his very first taste of success on the court.

tions," she said in an interview with the *Herald Star*. "You have this idea of what homelessness looks like in your head...what an abusive situation might look like in your head, but...what we see is very different in reality."

McGovern adds, "When you sit and share with another person, one-on-one in friendship...it's two people, sitting down, sharing truths about ourselves. That's how we cultivate relationships and make an impact."

## Walking With Families Battling Mental Health Issues

For people who don't have mental illness, walking in the shoes of those who do can be a great challenge. For instance, some people get depressed occasionally, but snap out of it in a few hours or days. A person with clinical depression, however, can't snap out of it on their own and may be prone to deep despair and intense loneliness.

Deacon Ed Shoener of the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, aims to enlighten all Catholics about mental illness and make sure that those who struggle get the help they need. In 2018, he launched the Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers, following the death of his daughter,

Katie, who took her own life after an 11-year battle with bipolar disorder.

In Katie's obituary, Deacon Ed wrote, "In the case of mental illness, there is so much fear, ignorance, and hurtful attitudes that the people who suffer from mental illness needlessly suffer further...We need to support and be compassionate to those with mental illness, every bit as much as we support those who suffer from cancer, heart disease or any other illness."

In addition, Deacon Ed helped spearhead a suicide remembrance and healing Mass in his home diocese. He told *Busted Halo*, "People long to be able to publicly mourn in a liturgical celebration in the church...It was just so moving. You'd see entire families coming up in memory of a loved one." Deacon Ed added, "People affected by suicide have a lot to offer us...with their deep understanding of empathy and suffering."

Deacon Ed's ministry offers spiritual support and resources to parishes and dioceses so they can start their own mental health ministries. This is especially crucial at a time when suicides are on the rise. He is absolutely convinced that Christ wants His Church to walk with those enduring mental health problems.

## Finding Faith in a Field

Bishop Joseph J. Tyson of the Diocese of Yakima, Washington, is sending seminarians to the apple fields. The Diocese requires all its future priests to work alongside the approximately 100,000 migrant workers who travel to the area for work each harvesting season as part of the H-2A visa program for temporary agricultural workers.

Bishop Tyson, who started the program in 2011, hopes this service will help those preparing for Holy Orders understand the lives of the population they will be serving. "It's important that our future priests know in their bones the labor of the bread and the wine," Tyson said in an interview with *Catholic News Service*, "and know the lives behind our agricultural workers."

The seminarians rise at 4 a.m. at the Yakima rectory and meet for morning prayer at 4:45 a.m. The group leaves at 5 a.m. for the hourlong drive to their assigned apple orchard. Seminarian Jacob Sevigny believed the migrant ministry would help him and his fellow seminarians become better priests, because, "in the words of Pope Francis, it's important for us to smell like the sheep and share our lives and understand the lives of our people," he told *CruxNow.com*.

The benefits should go both ways, however. Bishop Tyson said, "I'm hoping that the migrant workers come away with the sense that they are part of the Church no matter where they are at. And that we love them and care for them and

they are always welcome."

Since all priests in the Diocese are required to be bilingual, the immersive experience also helps seminarians to practice their Spanish. "About 60 percent of the Catholics in the diocese attend Spanish Mass," said seminarian Matthew Ockinga. "You have to know how to speak the language of your people."

Added Tyson: "This is reminding the (seminarians) that the parish isn't the building. It's the area, and they are responsible for all of the souls in that area and not just the Catholic souls."

## Walk a Mile in His Moccasins

Mary Torrans Lathrap (1838-1895) donned many hats in her day. She was an American preacher, suffragist, temperance reformer, and poet. In 1895, Lathrap wrote "Judge Softly," a poem discussing compassion, empathy and understanding. The poem later came to be known by its most famous and quoted line: "Walk a Mile in His Moccasins." The poem highlights the importance of trying to understand what others are going through rather than judging them. A section of the poem can be read below:

*"Pray, don't find fault with the man that limps / Or stumbles along the road. / Unless you have worn the moccasins he wears / Or stumbled beneath the same load. / There may be tears in his soles that hurt / Though hidden away from view. / The burden he bears placed on your back / May cause you to stumble and fall, too..."*

*"...Just walk a mile in his moccasins / Before you abuse, criticize and accuse. / If just for one hour, you could find a way / To see through his eyes, instead of your own muse...Remember to walk a mile in his moccasins / And remember the lessons of humanity taught to you by your elders. / We will be known forever by the tracks we leave / In other people's lives, our kindnesses and generosity."*

*"Let us be kind to one another, for most of us are fighting a hard battle."*

—Ian MacLaren

  
**"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."**

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