Is the Field of Mercy Growing in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati?

On many weekends, I drive to my aging parents’ home in northern Indiana. My route takes me through the northern reaches of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, and having grown up in rural South Dakota and Wisconsin, I enjoy watching the vast fields of corn and soybeans as they grow in the early days of spring and the hot days of summer. I like keeping track of the corn’s height, assessing if there will be a fruitful crop in the fall. In a similar way, I’ve been assessing our success at “cultivating” mercy here in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati as we celebrate the Year of Mercy. We are just past the halfway point, and I wonder if we are any different, if we have grown in mercy personally and corporately as a Church? Are our efforts fruitful?

There are many examples of parishes and diocesan offices that have worked hard at cultivating mercy over these past several months. Parishes have proclaimed mercy and shown mercy through reconciliation services, days of prayer, social action projects, homilies, bulletin reflections, intercessory prayers, and much more. Similarly, the Archdiocese has provided many opportunities, programs, and resources to cultivate a deeper understanding of mercy and an active doing of mercy as we seek to live up to our motto: “Know Mercy, Show Mercy.”

One recent ecumenical event, “Outpouring of Mercy,” took place on Pentecost weekend and provided a variety of opportunities to participate in doing corporal and spiritual works of mercy. One of the works of mercy that stands out in a particular way was a “Pentecost Party” celebrated at the Lebanon Correctional Facility. About thirty volunteers joined nearly sixty Catholic men living at the Lebanon facility to pray together, to share and listen to stories of faith, to get to know one another, and to share a lovely meal. A generous donor provided a meal from the Olive Garden, an unexpected delight that touched the hearts of the inmates. The volunteers’ hearts were also moved, and their eyes were opened to the dignity of these human persons, despite their situation in life. Many volunteers were able to connect in a profound way with these men who had all but thought they were forgotten. Mercy was cultivated and the love of Christ became far more evident than any sin committed. There are many mercy stories that have enriched the lives of Catholics across the Archdiocese.

Even with this good news, we are reminded time and again that the field is ripe for cultivating mercy: as we mourn the loss of life after the brutal murder of forty-nine innocent people in Orlando in mid-June; as political rhetoric instills hate and violence; as disrespect for human dignity and building walls of fear and protectionism flourish; as young people seek to find their way in a culture that perpetuates sexual violence, drug addiction, and racial injustice. We can never grow weary of cultivating mercy, nor can we let this responsibility rest solely on the shoulders of others. Each of us must find ways to love more deeply, to grow in mercy and compassion, to show in tangible, concrete ways the love and mercy of God. With five more months to celebrate the Year of Mercy, let’s persist in finding ways to be people of mercy, to live mercifully, and to cultivate mercy here in the Archdiocese and beyond! How will you cultivate mercy?

Karen Kane - Director, Office of Worship, Archdiocese of Cincinnati
Catching Up With Pope Francis on the Field of Mercy

On July 25-31, Pope Francis will make pilgrimage with hundreds of thousands of young people to World Youth Day (WYD) in Krakow, Poland. There will be two gatherings with Pope Francis at Campus Misericordiae (translated: Field of Mercy) at Brezgi, Poland: the prayer vigil on Saturday evening and the closing Mass on Sunday morning.

However, the Field of Mercy at Brezgi will be far more than a venue for WYD. One of the largest warehouses in the world, named The Bread of Mercy, has been built there to gather and store food for the poor. After the WYD throns depart, Campus Misericordiae Home will remain, dedicated to care for the elderly. The buildings and their respective missions of mercy will be blessed and launched by Pope Francis just prior to the closing WYD Mass. How wonderful that the people of Brezgi had the vision to make the temporary WYD Field of Mercy into a permanent brick-and-mortar mission of mercy!

The theme at WYD Krakow is “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Mt 5:7). At the last WYD in Brazil, Pope Francis asked the young people “with all my heart” to read the Beatitudes and make them the action plan for their lives. If asked the location of Campus Misericordiae, would we reply, “Somewhere in Poland,” or we would point to our own hearts?

In his official WYD 2016 message to young people, Pope Francis said, “I meet so many young people who say that they are tired of this world being so divided, with clashes between supporters of different factions and so many wars, in some of which religion is being used as justification for violence. We must ask the Lord to give us the grace to be merciful to those who do us wrong. Jesus on the cross prayed for those who had crucified Him: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). Mercy is the only way to overcome evil. Justice is necessary, very much so, but by itself it is not enough. Justice and mercy must go together. How I wish we could join together in a chorus of prayer, from the depths of our hearts, to implore the Lord to have mercy on us and on the whole world!”

Let us pray that our hearts might be fertile fields of mercy, not temporary, but with lasting and lifelong missions of mercy. With Pope Francis and the young pilgrims to Poland, let us pray the prayer of St. Faustina: “Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I will never be suspicious or judge by appearances, but always look for what is beautiful in my neighbours’ soul and be of help to them; that my ears may be merciful, so that I will be attentive to my neighbours’ needs, and not indifferent to their pains and complaints; that my tongue may be merciful, so that I will never speak badly of others, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all; that my hands may be merciful and full of good deeds; that my feet may be merciful, so that I will hasten to help my neighbour, despite my own fatigue and weariness; that my heart may be merciful, so that I myself will share in all the sufferings of my neighbour” (Diary, 163).

Sean Reynolds, D.Min. – Director, Office of Youth Ministry, Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Sharing God’s Mercy with Others

The call to share God’s mercy is answered by more than 100 people and groups nominated to be Champions of Mercy, in honor of Catholic Charities Centennial Celebration. They will be recognized for serving the poor, protecting the vulnerable and welcoming the stranger at an awards dinner Saturday night, October 1 at the Cintas Center. Five Champions of Mercy will receive $1,000 each to further their good work.

Maria Dunlap is one of the Champions of Mercy. Her husband, Rod, nominated her. Their daughter, Vivian, was diagnosed in the womb with a congenital heart defect. During Vivian’s 59 days of life, she taught her parents the true meaning of love. Now, nearly four years later, Maria is the founder and executive director of Vivian’s Victory, where she supports 100 parents of babies presented with poor prenatal prognosis or a prolonged diagnosis. Support ranges from gas cards to assist with trips to the hospital, to someone to listen and referrals to social service agencies. “Our children are our gifts. Vivian is touching so many people now. Our experience makes me realize how significant every life is,” Maria said. “Christ is helping us. He is so close to us in our sorrow. As we cling to Him, we’re able to share His love with others. It is a huge honor to assist these families.” Sue Menke will also receive a Champion of Mercy Award. She just turned 80 and has hinted at slowing down, but for the last 10 years at St. Anne Parishshas visited the sick, coordinated the ministry for shut-ins, made sure the sick received Sacraments, led the bereavement committee and volunteered with RCIA. Fr. Tom McCarthy nominated Sue. “My goal is to serve the Lord with all my heart and soul. I enjoy doing what I do. I feel privileged that God has called me to follow Him,” she said. “We just have to ask and trust.” Next, 17 fifth-graders from St. Catharine Siena School wrote cards, letters and created art for a parishioner who was fighting cancer for the second time. Roberta Ackerman said the parishioner felt hopeless and down, and didn’t feel like fighting anymore. Then the words of inspiration arrived from the fifth-graders and she felt she had to get better for the students, so Roberta nominated the fifth-grade class at St. Catharine. Other recipients are organizations like the Over-the-Rhine Kitchen, which was started by Fr. Tom Bokenkotter in 1976 to ease hunger in the community in a respectful, caring and hospitable environment. It started with two people and has grown to a staff of six, powered by 9,000 volunteer hours from 46 secular groups. About 230,000 meals are served a year and 5,600 families receive groceries, said Patricia Wakim, executive director. “It changes your attitude when you’re serving people who have so much less than you do. They come in with a smile on their face. God has His hand on this place,” Patricia said. “Our mission has stood the test of time by the Grace of God.” For Celebration tickets call (513) 241-7745. Event is open to the public.