

It's amazing what the church can do

One story that may never be fully told is the story of all the good that the Catholic Church does. The big ticket items are obvious for all to see - the tremendous contribution to education at the primary, secondary and college and university levels; the service to the poor and needy by Catholic Charities (a tip of the hat to Hal Smith); the worldwide service to 100 million people around the world by Catholic Relief Services.

Flying below the radar screen, however, are the myriad services provided by parishes. The daily sacramental life of the church is taken for granted. In addition, most parishes have a sister parish in some Third World country, and often a sister parish in some poor section of the United States. There are countless collections throughout the year for victims of hurricanes, drought, famine and other natural or man-made disasters.

There are thousands of volunteer hours by organizations within the parishes - peace and justice groups, pro-life groups, religious educators, altar servers, choir, Knights of Columbus, sodality, Holy Name and ministry to the sick and shut-ins.

Also, Scouts, athletic teams and leagues, service projects, casseroles for Beans and Bread and Our Daily Bread, parish plays, concerts, travel groups and on and on. A prodigious amount of good energy is poured into each community where a parish exists. And most of it goes unheralded and unnoticed.

A line from the movie, "Angels & Demons," sums much of it up. The head of the Swiss Guard says to Professor Langdon: "My church ministers to the sick and the dying. We feed the poor. What does your church do?" Then, after a pause, he continues: "Oh, that's right. You have no church. You don't believe in God."

To say all of this is in no way meant to convey an elitist attitude. Countless churches and organizations do wonderful things. I'm simply trying to hint at all the good our church does that goes unrecognized.

Curiously, whenever I think I've heard of everything, I hear of something new! You, no doubt, have heard of "bleeding hearts." Well, there's a ministry known as "Beading Hearts." To put it simply, they buy beads at a fair market price from Uganda. This is a direct help to poor people in the Third World. Then a group gathers to turn these beads into beautiful jewelry.

I was introduced to this ministry by a wonderful couple, Marge and Ron Mazzone. They're parishioners of Resurrection parish in Ellicott City, where I did a parish mission over the Memorial Day weekend.

Marge mostly works with the youth. She teaches young girls how to make jewelry. Sometimes they make jewelry for their own proms. Sometimes they make jewelry for family and friends. Mostly, they make the jewelry to sell in order to fund service projects. They've raised more than \$9,000 just from making jewelry. They've provided transportation for their youth group, which this year will go to Fargo, N.D., to work on projects to help the poor there.

As Marge explained this work to me, I mentioned that I bet other parishes would be interested in doing similar things, as well as some people in the retirement communities. Marge has indicated a willingness to go to any group to explain the process and to teach the art of jewelry making. Obviously, she is only a volunteer, and only one person, so if you call her, it may take her a while to get back to you. The number is 410-465-4249.

We live in a world in which the news is largely the bad news. Sin and scandal are highly publicized. Goodness goes largely unreported. I've often said that the devil has a better publicity agent than God. Yet, while bad news grabs the headlines, good news is still the norm. Good overwhelms evil millions of times each day. Evil is real. But good is "more real." So just a word of thanks to the countless priests, religious and lay people who reveal the face of God through their service to humanity.