

The Least of These: Spiritual works at work

Tenth in a Series

The Least of These Prayer Ministry

Editor's Note: Inspired by Matthew 25:40-45, which concludes " ... What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me," each month in 2017 the Review will provide an in-depth look at the Catholic Church's response to those in dire need.

By George Matysek Jr. and Paul McMullen

Janet Mercado sends plenty of messages while behind the wheel of her Honda Odyssey on her morning commute, but they are not in the form of phone texts.

Mercado is part of the Prayer Ministry sponsored by the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

"If I can't remember the specific petitions, there are general prayers I've memorized," said Mercado, a parishioner of St. Bernadette in Severn. "I pray for the sick, and the guidance of caregivers. I pray for the repose of souls, and a second chance for the incarcerated. ... Jobs for the unemployed, homes for the homeless, help for those with financial need."

Mercado is among 200 in the organized ministry who respond to specific requests for prayer. Across the archdiocese, countless others engage the power of intercessory prayer - remembering their own needs as well as those of people in the wider community and around the world.

Their words are not wasted, according to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized the importance of prayer, noting in 2013 that when we don't pray, we close the door to the Lord.

“On the other hand,” the pope said, “prayer, in the face of a problem, a difficult situation, a calamity, is opening the door to the Lord so that he will come.”

Early this year, the pope added that people should not feel unworthy to pray.

“God knows our weakness,” the pope said in January. “He knows that we remember him to ask for help and, with the indulgent smile of a father, he responds graciously.”

Rewarding job

Pat Nadolny coordinates the archdiocesan Prayer Ministry, gathering and sharing requests that are submitted via the Catholic Review, Facebook, a telephone hotline, email and other smaller prayer groups.

A parishioner of St. Charles Borromeo in Pikesville, Nadolny came to the Catholic Center 40 years ago as a volunteer, and never left. For more than 30 years, she worked for the office of the archbishop, and in March 2014, was asked to lead another task by Sean Caine, director of communications for the archdiocese.

“In her many years working in the Catholic Center, especially handling calls to the archbishop’s office, she performed this ministry in an unofficial capacity,” Caine said. “Pat is a wonderful listener, a woman of deep faith and someone who believes very much in the power and importance of prayer.

“It was a natural that she make this an official ministry of our archdiocese.”

Nadolny calls it “the most rewarding job I’ve ever had.”

The outreach began with organized prayer meetings at the Catholic Center. While Nadolny and 25 other employees there still “continue to pray at their desks,” the effort has expanded even beyond the archdiocese to involve many who first came to her seeking not to help, but for help for themselves.

“When people ask for prayer, I follow up with a note,” Nadolny said. “I want to know how they are doing, and to keep me updated. I also invite them to join the prayer group.”

Mercado, a program manager for Northrup Grumman, was among those who answered that call. Going through a difficult divorce, she “went online and found the prayer ministry.”

“My anxieties were driving me insane,” said Mercado, who has found peace. “Trust in the Lord. He has plans for all of us. He never leaves us.”

For her, that included finding happiness in a second marriage, and leading, along with Ron Hassan, a ministry at St. Bernadette for those going through divorce or separation. “Rebuilding” is a year-round ministry, meeting weekly for 13 sessions.

It includes not just those from St. Bernadette, but some who were directed to the Anne Arundel County parish by Nadolny.

“I’ve had the opportunity to work with those approaching Pat with prayer requests about their marriages or the marriages of their family members,” Mercado said. “I’ve offered my (phone) number and had the opportunity to stir their sorrow into hope and faith.

“It’s a beautiful thing. There are no limits to God’s ways. When he is in charge, you can’t help but to smile.”

Rosary Congress

Just as Nadolny enlists every corner of the archdiocese, the first **Our Lady of Fatima Rosary Congress**, set for Oct. 7-13, will be held at seven sites, from Hancock to Annapolis to Fallston.

The rosary will be prayed on the hour, every hour. Perpetual adoration, special Masses, spiritual talks, opportunities for confession, processions and other events will also be offered.

The event comes 100 years after the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared for the sixth and final time to three shepherd children in central Portugal and offered an extraordinary proposition: if the world would repent, follow Christ and pray the rosary daily, peace would follow.

The children – siblings Francisco, age 9, and Jacinta Marto, 7; and their cousin Lucia dos Santos, 10 – promised to do as Our Lady of Fatima requested. Many believe that World War I came to an end as a result of their prayers and the prayers of others who heeded Mary's call.

Kristin Bird, one of the members of a lay board helping the Department of Evangelization organize the congress called by Archbishop William E. Lori, prays that thousands will participate.

"This is a public opportunity for us to come together and pray as a church as a whole," said Bird, a parishioner of St. Joseph in Sykesville who is helping with congress events at St. John in Westminster.

Father James Boric, rector of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore (one of the congress sites), said his goal with the Rosary Congress is to "take the Blessed Mother seriously."

"She's not going to lead us astray," he said.

Perpetual adoration

It is fitting that St. Mary in Hagerstown is among the parishes involved in the Rosary Congress, as its members contribute to the enduring witness of a perpetual eucharistic adoration chapel now in its 19th year in the Hub City.

What began as a small group of gathering at St. Ann for overnight adoration on First Fridays took on a greater commitment June 26, 1999, in what had been a chapel in the convent of the religious women serving St. Maria Goretti High School, which sits on the same Catholic campus.

Gary Smith, a local gynecologist, and his wife, Maggie, have been there from the start. He coordinates a team of four shift supervisors, who take turns covering gaps there, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every week of the year, professing their devotion to Jesus Christ.

The shift supervisors, all members of Hagerstown churches, are Mary Graves, a parishioner of St. Joseph; Margret Pontzer, of St. Ann, and Josef Ott and Dr. Michael

Winslow, both of St. Mary.

Ott's wife, Romula, can be found there Fridays at 10 p.m., for an hour, or as long as she is needed.

"I call it my Date Night," she said. "It's my personal hour with our Lord, our creator. It's my favorite hour of the week. I talk over my problems with Him. I pray, I meditate. When I leave, I feel as if there is a load off my back. I don't understand why more people don't do it."



OUR LADY OF FATIMA ROSARY CONGRESS OCTOBER 7-13, 2017

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