

Us and Them

The Catholic Review

Last week, I wrote about the various vocations that are crucial to the fulfillment of the Church's mission, focusing on the Sacrament of the Holy Order of Deacon. The vocations of our permanent deacons, as with priests, are visible to the Catholic community. You see their generous labors at Masses, Baptisms, funerals, weddings, hospitals, prisons and elsewhere in the community. The work of these men on behalf of the Church and God's people is an impressive and holy example for others in our community to witness and emulate.

There is another vocation alive in our Church that is also important, though less obvious and sometimes taken for granted. However, if it were to disappear tomorrow this local Church would come to a grinding halt.

I have the privilege of witnessing on a daily basis the dedicated ministry of the employees of the Catholic Center, located at 320 Cathedral Street in downtown Baltimore, across from our inspiring Basilica. As with any central organization, our central services offices are occasionally spoken of by those "in the field" with a hint of cynicism—as downtown, 320, and the power tower- or, perhaps worst of all, just simply "them."

More than a face-less level of bureaucracy, central services is a ministry zealously lived out by dedicated people—Catholics and non-Catholics alike. They make real and sometimes painful sacrifices to support the valuable work that is being done on the "front lines": in our 153 parishes, 70 schools and countless Catholic Charities-related outreaches throughout our communities. Approximately 200 women and men come to work every day in offices called Respect Life, Evangelization, Vocations, Clergy Personnel, Development, African-American Catholic Ministries, Hispanic Ministry, Child & Youth Protection and Schools. And there are others.

Though you may not be aware of their labor, they offer valuable resources to our parishes and schools. For example, thanks to the work of our Child & Youth

Protection Office the word “STAND” (the name of our safe environment training program) has a new meaning to anyone with children in any of our schools. And those eye-catching posters of the development of the fetus into a child in the womb that you see on parish and school walls are the result of the creativity of the director of our Respect Life office. And nearly 1,500 Catholic young people march in downtown Baltimore in a show of faithful unity each year just before Easter thanks to the enthusiastic work of our Youth Ministry office.

As well, resources for the preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage as well as for entry into the Catholic Church come from our newly created Department of Evangelization. This Department will guide our Church’s implementation of the new translation of the Roman Missal over the next year.

Likewise the critical services provided by my committed colleagues in offices like Human Resources, Information Technology, Fiscal, the Tribunal and the Chancery. From supporting the work environment and technological needs of some 5,000 priests, teachers and other employees in our Archdiocesan system, to the deft handling of the canonical affairs that come along daily in the management of an Archdiocese.

Like our teachers, our employees choose to work for the Church not, surely, for economic advantage but because they are committed to the mission. They also sacrifice in their personal lives, foregoing some of the freedoms enjoyed by people in other lines of work, simply because they labor for the Church and, therefore, are the face of the Church regardless of the day of the week.

And over the past year, Catholic Center employees have been asked to give even more, having had to endure furlough days, a salary freeze, layoffs and now a revamped pension plan—the consequences of a broken economy and other factors outside of their control.

During a recent employee meeting, I shared with them my gratitude and respect for their ministry of sacrifice, and voiced my concern for them and their families. Too often we take for granted the people in our lives who work behind the scenes for the betterment of others, including ourselves.

Hats off to our colleagues in ministry here and those they represent throughout the far reaches of our Archdiocese. In your next encounter with someone who works at the Catholic Center, you might thank them for sharing their gifts on behalf of others. After all, “them” is “us.”