

People of Goodwill

“Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth among people of goodwill.” (Lk. 2:14)

This is the song the angels sing at the birth of Christ. They give glory to God in the highest because, paradoxically, God has not stayed in the highest. God “has visited and redeemed [his] people.” (Lk. 1:68)

Those who grasp this revelation, either implicitly or explicitly, know how to celebrate Advent/Christmas. They become people of goodwill bringing peace into the broken and estranged ways of the earth.

Catholic Health Care has long acknowledged people of goodwill and recognized them as essential to its mission. The message of Catholic Social Teaching is that people of goodwill are the targeted listeners for its teachings and the carriers of its values of dignity and common good. Advent/Christmas is their time of year, a time when people of goodwill “do their thing.” abounds.

People of goodwill reach out to make things better. They find themselves in situations that are not what they should be. It may be a situation of needless division among people working together, a situation where hardness of heart has replaced compassion, a situation where overlooking the poor has become a habit, a situation where the mediocre is accepted as the norm, a situation where not speaking the full truth is rationalized as self-protection, and all other situations where they sense a “rightness” is missing.

In these situations, people of goodwill begin a process of repair. Goodwill is more than an internal desire, a wish that things were not so bad. Goodwill is the art of entering into situations and discerning the path of greater peace. It sees a way forward that brings reconciliation and a fuller sense of life. Then it gently yet adamantly walks toward that desired future.

Second, people of goodwill give thanks whenever they see the good emerging. They do not have to be the main actors. Just the opposite. The glory of God is present in situations, and it will be mediated by many factors. But, whenever the good is emerging, it needs to be named and praised. People of goodwill are long on gratitude. Thanking is something they learn to do in many ways. As the spiritual saying has it, “There are a thousand ways to bow and kiss the earth.”

People of goodwill better situations themselves and thank all those who better situations. We may know many of these people of goodwill. More than that. In the depth of ourselves, Advent/Christmas tells we are those people of good will.