

REFLECTION

The Love of Christ Inspires Work to Meet Basic Needs

THERESA VITHAYATHIL EDMONSON

*My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.*

ISAIAH 32:18

I can't make the claim that I have experienced housing or transportation as an unmet need. I have been blessed my entire life in that I have had secure and stable housing, had access to transportation, education and healthy foods. I can take care of my health needs — all those elements of life that allow a person and community to flourish.

I pray that I'm sensitive and aware that many around me don't have these common goods in their lives. I believe that my experiences have given me insights into housing and transportation needs. I worked with homeless youth in Washington, D.C., in the early '90s. I've been involved with urban parishes, whose members came from all over the city, but mostly from the streets and single-occupancy residences of the downtown areas. My service on the Board of Directors for Catholic Charities of Oregon also has increased my awareness of these needs and nurtured a hunger and passion to address the needs for secure and stable living. Does that qualify me to write this reflection? No, nothing really does except my baptism.

My responsibility as a Christian baptized in the Catholic tradition obligates me to embrace the fullness of the faith, with both Scripture and the teaching tradition as my guides. The Bible is rich with stories and examples of God's grace in

action for those seeking stability and security in their lives, such as the Holy Family or Ruth and Naomi, who banded together in loving, supportive households. And these situations, both the needs for safe, affordable housing as well as reliable transportation, continue today, as evidenced in some of the articles written for this issue of *Health Progress*.

It is my hope that we continue to gain awareness of opportunities to address our housing crisis and the transportation needs in our own communities, and that we are inspired to advocate and do something about it. Get involved with the social services arm of your local diocese or a similar organization that embraces the dignity of all people in the community. This can even be a simple act, such as helping one person or family. My daughter inspired me when she tutored a local refugee family, encouraging the mother and only daughter and providing moments of quiet



and relief to them. She taught the boys in the family, which created a safe space for learning and fun during her weekly visits.

It may appear, at first, much simpler and easier for us in health care to keep our time and resources focused on the health of those who encounter our health systems. But if the goal of health is to provide stability and comfort to the person in need (even if it's for the final life journey toward death), then it stands to reason that we can't ignore that secure and safe housing contributes toward this holistic healing. The gift of our tradition is that we don't have to do it alone, nor do we have to be experts in this area. As a part of the body of Christ, we can and should work with other organizations so that we each can contribute toward the common good. Our responsibility, as those engaged in ministries of the church, obligates us to embrace the tradition that calls us to live out all the Corporal Works of Mercy, such as feeding the hungry and sheltering people who are homeless. And sometimes the best way we can do this is in collaboration with others.

As I said, it is my baptism that compelled me to share some thoughts on aiding others. And it

is the gift of faith that inspires me. However, it is something much simpler that keeps me going — my love for Christ as experienced in my family, friends and the people I meet every day. Artist Timothy P. Schmalz captures the image of Christ so beautifully in sculptures portraying Jesus, for instance, as a homeless person sleeping on a bench. Just as his work reminds us, Christ is present in every person I encounter. Hence, I want to experience this love of Christ in the encounter with another. I'm not always my best self and do fail to see Christ in myself and others at times, but I aim to always be in conversion and in growth toward the fullness of God's love. I believe the love of Christ provides our inspiration as ministries of the church and as a part of the body of Christ. May we collaborate and support communities that provide housing, transportation access, nutritional access, education and health so that Christ is served and loved.

THERESA VITHAYATHIL EDMONSON serves as the system director – spiritual care and mission integration at PeaceHealth, Vancouver, Wash.

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