



Servant of the Servants of God

Servus servorum Dei

Jesus said, "...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:26-28

In the Archdiocese of Washington, our acts of charity and justice are conducted in our individual parishes in communion with the universal Church; and in solidarity with organizations whose mission is to serve all people in need. Some examples include the St. Vincent de Paul Society, parish food and clothing pantries, Catholic Charities, and Catholic Relief Services. But service is not limited to charitable works. At times we must speak up on behalf of the vulnerable and we do this through the Legislative Network and Justice and Advocacy Councils. Lately, we are being called on as citizens to publicly advocate for life, marriage, and religious liberty. By reaching out in love to serve the poor and vulnerable, individuals, through parishes and charitable organizations of the Archdiocese of Washington, serve Christ himself.

Our model for serving others is rooted in Jesus' own example and his commandment to serve others through sacrificial love. In the Church, service is grounded in the teaching that we are all children of God, created in his image and likeness with the call to reflect his glory and participate in his Divine life. As human beings possessed of body and soul, we have both spiritual and physical needs. Through our service to others we seek to meet temporal needs for the sake of the eternal. We call this Catholic Social Teaching. The principles of that teaching include:

- Defending the **Life and Dignity of the Human Person** from conception to natural death;
- Serving in **Communion and Solidarity** with local parish initiatives and charitable organizations;
- And striving for the **Common Good** through legislative advocacy in defense of the poor and vulnerable, and promoting religious liberty.

In his first homily in the Mass in the Sistine Chapel, Pope Francis said, "Our only glory is in the cross of Christ crucified." This rich and timeless teaching defines our one and only purpose and calls on all of us to pursue our social, political, and cultural commitments from the perspective of faith. We cannot say that our work of charity and justice is truly charitable or truly just if we are not motivated and in union with the truth of God's love which is shown to us on the

cross. The Pope, whoever he is, is in himself a witness to this act of love, this form of Christian service is recognized in the title used for the Pope for 1500 years: Servant of the servants of God. The call remains for all of us as disciples of the Lord to take up our cross and serve others in imitation of Christ.

For Pope Francis, Servant of the servants of God is not just a title. You have already heard it reported in the media and seen the attention drawn to his humility. We read that Pope Francis cooked his own meals, used public transportation, visited the sick and fed the hungry. In addition, Pope Francis, when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires, was also known for taking unpopular stands on issues relating to human sexuality and abortion. But we must not think that there is in him a contradiction. Because Christ is the source of all our good works and is himself the truth of our faith, there is an indissoluble union between truth and love. It is the truth of our faith that guards our charitable works from becoming empty philanthropic endeavors. Our faith makes our charitable works building blocks of the Kingdom of God here on earth, blocks that can be used to build the Church on the cross of Jesus Christ. Our charitable work, on the other hand makes our faith visible and a real part of the world in which we live. The living truth of faith makes our works really good, and our good works reveal a true and living faith.

Although his papacy has just begun, we can give thanks for Pope Francis's witness and example of the truth of faith and the costly requirements of discipleship. At the same time, we can also see his example as a call to each and every one of us to examine how we not only confess our faith with our mouths but also show it forth with our lives. We can rejoice in all the good works being accomplished throughout the archdiocese in our parishes and charitable organizations, but there is still more work to do. While we strive for justice and peace, the challenge to encourage more people to serve in Christ's name remains. Of course, some just aren't aware of the need and are waiting for someone to ask them to help. While we all have busy schedules, the sacrifice of service means giving sacrificially of ourselves, or in the words of Mother Teresa, loving until it hurts. Encouraging greater participation and inviting others, including teens and young adults, to actively engage in the vital area of service by putting their faith in action is a primary concern for the New Evangelization.

If you would like to learn more about the Church's Social Teaching the Catechism of the Catholic Church is very easy to read especially paragraphs 1877-1948. You can find a searchable online Catechism at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website www.usccb.org If you would like to know more about the works of service that the Archdiocese of Washington undertakes visit our website <http://site.adw.org/service-and-justice> or check out Catholic Impact <http://site.adw.org/pdfs/CatholicImpact2012.pdf>