Thanks for Your Gifts Now and in the Future

By Patrick Winn

Charitably Speaking

Our Catholic View

When addressing a subject about which one has limited knowledge, it’s great to have qualified experts available. For instance, Catholic Charities’ program directors compare well with their faith-based counterparts across the diocese. It’s not a competition, but in order for our clients to succeed, we need professionals dealing with hunger, child care, family crises and immigration. The elderly, refugees, new parents, the unemployed, survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking need attention. Functional experts also need money to run their programs. Even though we’ve helped plant community gardens, we have yet to find the seeds for a money tree. Instead, we turn to experts for advice, those within the diocesan framework, and others whose insight and experience are invaluable for long-term sustainability.

The Diocesan Annual Appeal, institutional awards and generous individual donations allow us to provide a variety of services across 11 counties. There is still enough time in this calendar year to seriously consider how to help Catholic Charities finance our programs.

Among the available systems is the QCD, the Qualified Charitable Distribution, a choice that offers the best of two worlds, supporting qualified charities and saving on taxes. Last December, Catholic Charities was the beneficiary of a couple of generous year-end QCD’s that allowed us to provide significant services for refugee children’s educational needs within our Catholic schools. QCD’s helped us prepare for further services in Elgin, DeKalb and Aurora, and begin planning for rural health initiatives in the western part of the diocese.

They also supported our Long-term Care Ombudsman program. In a nutshell, a QCD is a distribution from an IRA that is sent directly to a tax exempt organization, e.g., Catholic Charities. It is restricted to individuals aged 70½ or older at the time of the donation. A taxpayer can use what must otherwise be withdrawn from an IRA as all or part of the required minimum distribution (RMD), and instead have it sent to a qualified charity. Rather than simply making a tax deductible contribution, an eligible individual can have the IRA money paid directly to charity and consequently do good while reducing taxes otherwise due next April.

Taxpayers can transfer up to $100,000 per year from an IRA to any combination of qualified charities, and none of that money is taxed. Catholic Charities is in the service business, not accounting or tax planning, and we don’t play tax advisors on TV, so please, consult with competent attorneys, accountants or financial planners. Some generous supporters did that last year, and the results were significant to the successes we were able to achieve for the people we serve.

We can do more. With your help and willingness to participate in how your donation is spent, we will fulfill our mission statement’s promises to work for the common good, treat people with compassion, dignity and respect, and advocate for justice throughout our diocesan communities.

At Thanksgiving, your Catholic Charities offers “thanks” for supporting us all year. We are privileged to serve on your behalf.

Food for Thought

Christian Unity

Our search for Christian unity commenced over a century ago. The World Missionary Conference in 1910 is generally considered its beginning. Protestant and Anglican representatives gathered in Edinburgh, Scotland, to discuss missions.

Their problem, which is still our problem today, is the question of ordinary people: How can Christianity be the true faith if it has so many competing voices?

A long letter of support for the conference from Bishop Geremia Bonomelli (1831-1914), of Cremona, Italy, was read in entirety to the whole assembly. He was a Catholic presence at the beginning of the ecumenical movement. In January 1959, Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council. One of his purposes for the council was the pursuit of Christian unity.

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Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican observers were invited to the four sessions of the council (1962-65). At a 2016 congress attended by Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan, president of the Lutheran World Federation, the directors of the Lutheran and Catholic international relief organizations committed themselves to increasing their work together.

The ecumenical movement is experiencing a new springtime. Recent theological agreements bring hope.

The one necessary ecumenical change is deeper conversion to Christ. This grace is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

— Father John Crossin, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, is a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

St. Oscar Romero, the Saints and the Dead

On Oct. 14, 2018, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was officially declared a saint of the Catholic Church. Millions of people of Latin America, Hispanics in the United States and countless others throughout the world had already referred to him as a saint for decades. The institution confirmed what the people of God, moved by the Holy Spirit, knew intuitively. We are now in November, when Catholics contemplate more closely the saints who inspire us. During this month, when addressing a subject about which one has limited knowledge, it’s great to have qualified experts available. For instance, Catholic Charities’ program directors compare well with their faith-based counterparts across the diocese. It’s not a competition, but in order for our clients to succeed, we need professionals dealing with hunger, child care, family crises and immigration. The elderly, refugees, new parents, the unemployed, survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking need attention. Functional experts also need money to run their programs. Even though we’ve helped plant community gardens, we have yet to find the seeds for a money tree. Instead, we turn to experts for advice, those within the diocesan framework, and others whose insight and experience are invaluable for long-term sustainability.

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I have encountered people who met St. Oscar Romero. And I have read some good books that share his story and the circumstances in which he lived and died.

If anything, I can gather from the handful of people who have written about the institution and the faith tradition to which he dedicated his life, he loved the people he served. He brought the best of his energy to make sure that the God-given dignity of these people was affirmed at all times.

One can read — and hear — in many of his homilies that were preserved for posterity that he was profoundly in love with Jesus Christ and wanted others to live likewise. The risen Christ was his hope.

Many would see all this as rather ordinary, actually expected of someone who would self-identify as a Christian. We learn again that saints are ordinary women and men of faith who live ordinary lives while being constantly open to being formed and transformed by God’s grace. That makes them extraordinary.

Like everyone else, St. Oscar Romero died; but his was an untimely death. Someone decided that his life was dispensable. The saint was assassinated while celebrating Mass on March 24, 1980. It is tempting to romanticize the death of the martyrs — or death in general. I have heard pious comments from good people saying that it was moving that he died while celebrating Mass. I cringe at those comments.

Nothing justifies taking away human life at any time. Period. Nothing justifies the creation of circumstances that would shorten people’s lives by hastening, directly or indirectly, their death.

In November, we remember relatives, friends and many others who already died. We remember them with the hope that they are enjoying the promise of eternal life in God. We pray to them and for them, trusting that they do likewise for us.

We all are in communion through prayer.

Remembering the dead while thinking about how St. Oscar Romero died demands that we pause for a moment and think of those who died before their time; those whose lives were considered disposable; those who lived in circumstances created by our own society that shortened their existence and hastened their deaths.

Too many people have died because of violence, war, poverty, lack of access to basic health care, corruption, racism, addictions, abortion, endangering their lives by crossing borders and seas, and similar other realities that should pain us. Death is not glorious under these circumstances.

The memory of St. Oscar Romero compels us to live ordinary lives open to being formed and transformed by God’s grace and to denounce with prophetic voice the actions and circumstances that shorten people’s lives. In doing this, we will be extraordinary.

St. Oscar Romero, martyr and saint, in this month when we honor our saints and remember our dead, pray for us.