**NEWSLETTER – SUMMER 2018**

**Welcome to Summer**. This is the time when a significant number of our ministers take extended vacations - like all summer in a number of cases, plus long trips to Europe and other semi-exotic places.

Which means, of course, that those of us left must pick up the slack. And this means, of course, as it does every summer, that a number us will find ourselves assigned occasionally to Masses we ordinarily do not attend. So please check your schedule carefully for a possible assignment to a Mass other than your preferred service. Also a number of us will be serving three consecutive weekends.

**What the Mass Coordinators Say**. I had an idea. I would ask a number of our Mass coordinators to give me some ideas about what would help them. I asked for other observations too. Here is a report on what I received:

*No Shows*. The top concern –probably sharing that spot with late comers – are ministers who do not appear for their assignments or who did not get substitutes. This is hard to understand. It is particularly hard when you are serving Holy Communion and a minister assigned to that Mass appears in your line. I have a theory about this: that some folks don’t pay attention to their emails. In other cases they likely do not transfer information from the assignment schedule to their personal calendars. Or maybe they don’t look at their calendars.

*Late Comers*. By this we mean ministers who do not check in early enough. When there is only 10 minutes before the entry procession and you are not there, the coordinator is forced to start searching for a substitute. Imagine what it is like when the organ starts playing and you are missing four people. I’ve had coordinators quit because of the pressure this causes.

*Doing the Dishes*. Mass ends. Sitting out there on the altar and on the credence tables (note: we have two) are all manner of items used in the Mass – chalices, the gifts bowl, the hand-washing bowl with its cruet and towel, a number of corporals, the missal and anything else that might have been involved in the service. All this has to be collected and returned to the sacristy and put away. Items that have contained consecrated material must be purified and washed. Who is going to do this? All too often it falls to the Mass coordinator and perhaps a thoughtful Eucharistic minister. Please note that it is everybody’s duty to pitch in.

**Dress Code**. For men it is quite simple – coats and ties. For women summer requires some special considerations (mentioned here based on experience): no bare shoulders or near-bare shoulders (spaghetti straps); anything that is out of the mainstream for church.

**Better to Light One Candle**

“Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.”

How well I remember those words from my youth, the creed of Father Keller’s Christopher movement. How they did motivate and energize thousands of us, and probably had considerable influence on our choice of life’s work.

Years later came the sobering word. The story of Christopher, he of the familiar medal portraying a sturdy man carrying the Child and His burden of a sinful world – was a myth. Holy Mother church had removed Christopher’s crown of sainthood.

As years passed, I forgot about Christopher. Then he resurfaced in memory as I approached the home of my friend, Gene, to bring him the Eucharist.

It struck me that although the concept of the “good saint” was gone; the idea of the Christ-bearer was very much with us. I was the Christ-bearer. Literally. And so were all my fellow Eucharistic ministers who found their way to homes and hospitals and hospices bearing the bread that links shut-ins with their brother Jesus.

I said that Gene was a friend. In fact I did not know him until I was assigned to take the Eucharist to him. I did it almost daily for four months. Each day we read the scripture and prayed. And after he received Holy Communion we talked.

And what does a terminally ill man, who practiced law in the nation’s capital, and his “Christ-bearer,” who once worked for NASA, talk about?

Our interests were catholic in every sense of the word: The possibility of teaching morality in the public schools without reference to religion; his illness in cold, analytical terms; Pope John Paul’s strength of character and ability to inspire; allowing married men to become priests; the morality of laissez faire economics; the debilitating influence of modern mass communications; the quality and purpose of sacred art and music; Newt Gingrich and his revolution; the Latin prayers at the foot of the altar when we served; the meaning of Christ’s declaration: “So I say to you, ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you” and so much more.

And as we talked and discovered the values we share, we became friends.

One morning I knocked on his door bearing, as usual, our brother Jesus in my pocket. This time there was no shout from the sitting room “It’s open!” This time his daughter answered the door. “Dad passed away two hours ago.”

As I drove away, I realized that at last I understood the responsibilities of the Christ-bearer. It is not only to bear Christ but also to be a companion on that final journey. When it is done you, the Christ-bearer, are far richer for it.

Yours in faith and service,

Jim McCulla