



Catholic Social Teaching

BEYOND OURSELVES

Many years ago, Mr. Sellars served on the staff of a Cathedral parish on the east coast. The front doors of the cathedral opened to a view of the city park where many homeless gathered during the day and slept on park benches at night.

During the time he worked at that parish, a major renovation was done. Walls were repaired and painted, a new Blessed Sacrament chapel was built, new sacred art was commissioned, and a two-story building was built between the Cathedral itself and the parish offices. The lower level of the new building had several classrooms used for religious education, and the upper level was a large gathering space for parish events.

It was the Cathedral's custom to house the homeless for the two weeks that included Christmas and New Year's. It was Mr. Sellars' job to schedule the hundreds of volunteers needed to prepare and serve meals, stay overnight with

the guests, provide a simple breakfast, and clean and prepare the space for the following night. But in that first winter following the renovation, some parishioners asked whether the Cathedral parish should continue this tradition. After all, they now had a brand new building with new restrooms, freshly painted walls, and a brand new kitchen, Wouldn't the floors be scraped up? Wouldn't the walls get nicks and scratches? Wouldn't the restrooms get dirty? Everything was so clean and new!

Mr. Sellars will never forget what the pastor said. "If we cannot use the building to serve the poor, we should not build the building."

The pastor understood the meaning of the common good. Everything we have comes from God, belongs to God, and is to be used for the glory of God. What we have—talents, time, money, clothes, food—is to be shared with others. The common good takes us beyond ourselves, our families, our parishes, and our communities, to the world.

Solidarity

In defining *solidarity*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops writes: "We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, [and] economic . . . differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be."

