

Christmas Corporal Works of Mercy

Visiting the Sick and the “Santa Selfie” Project

Christmas is a joyful season full of magic and festivity, but for many it is a time of great loneliness and sorrow as well. With so many activities and items to check off our lists for holiday preparations, we often forget to slow down and take a look around in our community. There are many who may not be feeling the love and joy that this season can bring. One thinks especially of those living in facilities such as nursing homes, treatment, long-term care or assisted living facilities, where they are geographically isolated from their family and loved ones and socially isolated due to their health, stability, age or wellness.

One DOWR man fills this gap, exercising the Corporal Works of Mercy (Visiting the Sick), in a unique and creative way. Cue the Christmas magic and holiday cheer:

It all started when Roger Mach was asked to play Santa in a production of *Miracle on 34th Street* being put on by a ballet studio in Mankato, where his niece is a member. That year Roger had decided on a whim to grow his beard long so when the call went out for a "bearded man of a certain age with a twinkle in his eye - no acting experience required" he was a perfect fit for the role, and really enjoyed playing Santa. A friend who came to see the ballet then asked if he would play Santa at a nursing home where her parents lived, and hand out presents to their grand kids. After seeing the reaction of other residents in the nursing home when Santa walked in it seemed natural to start visiting with them too, and since Santa happened to have his tablet computer along, soon he was taking "Santa Selfies" of himself with the residents. Once he saw how nice the photos came out he just had to get them printed, and then signed "Love, Santa" and make a return visit to hand out the pictures. Each year this "Santa Ministry" has expanded to include more senior living facilities and nursing homes and spreading the Santa spirit to more and more people especially those who might not have anyone to visit them.

This unique take on the "Visiting the Sick" really targets those who might be physically sick, but more so those who may be "sick at heart." Being lonely and feeling forgotten is difficult at any time or stage in life, but it is especially hard for many during Christmas. Like Roger shows us, living out this Work of Mercy doesn't take extensive training or education, just an open heart and the willingness to share Christ's love.

People living in social isolation are all around us, all it takes is for us to open our eyes and hearts and look for them...often just around the corner or across the street...many are even members of our own parishes and families. In the spirit of the season, reach out to those around you. Ask your parish priest or staff member if there are parishioners that they know of who might need visitors or volunteer for a program like Meals-On-Wheels or other groups who deliver goods to the homebound and bring along your smile, Christmas cheer...and maybe a camera for a selfie!!

Be creative...Be loving...Be Christ like this Christmas season!