

## **VOLUNTEERISM**

WE LIVE IN A TIME OF EXPANDING SOCIAL PROBLEMS, INCREASING COSTS AND DECREASING RESOURCES. THE "HANDS" OF OUR LOCAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS SEEM TO BE TIED IN THE FACE OF THESE GROWING NEEDS. THAT'S THE BAD NEWS.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE GROWING GAP BETWEEN NEEDS AND RESOURCES IS STEADILY BEING FILLED THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM. STATISTICS SHOW THAT PEOPLE ARE VOLUNTEERING MORE OF THEIR TIME, THAT MORE YOUNG PEOPLE ARE VOLUNTEERING, THAT MORE SINGLE PEOPLE ARE VOLUNTEERING, AND THAT MORE COMPANIES ARE IMPLEMENTING VOLUNTEERISM PROGRAMS FOR THEIR WORKFORCE.

EVERY DAY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE – ALL VOLUNTEERS – ENGAGE IN ACTS OF HELPING, REACHING OUT TO ASSIST IN SOLVING LOCAL PROBLEMS, AND MAKING THEIR CORNER OF THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE.

VOLUNTEERS ARE PEOPLE WHO – USING A COMBINATION OF IDEAS, ORGANIZATION, HANDS-ON EFFORT AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES – MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS. THESE VOLUNTEERS HAVE A "SPECIAL SOMETHING," NOT

NECESSARILY A COLLEGE DEGREE OR A LIST OF CREDENTIALS AFTER THEIR NAMES, BUT A VISION OF HELPING TO MEET HUMAN AND SOCIAL NEEDS AND AN ABILITY TO MAKE THAT VISION A REALITY.

IN OUR COMMUNITIES VOLUNTEERISM IS GROWING. CERTAINLY THAT IS TRUE IN OUR OWN KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS COUNCILS.

BUT VOLUNTEERING IS NOT NEW TO THE KNIGHTS. OUR ORGANIZATION WAS FOUNDED IN 1882 UPON THE IDEALS OF FRATERNITY AND SERVICE AS INSPIRED BY THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR CATHOLIC FAITH. BY BEING CALLED "KNIGHTS" IT WAS THE INTENTION OF OUR FOUNDER TO EMBODY KNIGHTLY IDEALS OF SPIRITUALITY AND SERVICE TO GOD, COUNTRY AND FELLOW MAN.

FROM ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS, THAT SMALL GROUP OF MEN GATHERED IN THE BASEMENT OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, HAS BLOSSOMED INTO AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF 1.9 MILLION CATHOLIC MEN IN 15,000 ACTIVE COUNCILS. THESE MEN AND THEIR FAMILIES HAVE DEDICATED THEMSELVES TO THE IDEALS OF COLUMBIANISM: CHARITY, UNITY, FRATERNITY AND PATRIOTISM. COLLECTIVELY, THE ORDER

REPRESENTS MORE THAN SEVEN MILLION CARING PEOPLE – ALL WORKING TOGETHER AS VOLUNTEERS FOR CHURCH, COUNTRY AND FELLOW MAN.

THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS HAS A LONG AND PROUD TRADITION OF HELPING PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES. EVERY DAY, FOR MORE THAN 135 YEARS, WE HAVE SERVED OUR CHURCH, COMMUNITIES, COUNCILS, FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE. LAST YEAR ALONE, FOR EXAMPLE, KNIGHTS AND THEIR FAMILIES GAVE MORE THAN 70 MILLION HOURS OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE TO A BROAD RANGE OF CHURCH AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS. IN THE LAST DECADE, KNIGHTS HAVE LOGGED MORE THAN 700 MILLION HOURS OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE.

"VOLUNTEERISM" IS SIMPLY ANOTHER WORD FOR OUR "FAITH IN ACTION" PROGRAM. TODAY THROUGH THIS PROGRAM, MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, KNIGHTS ARE TOUCHING OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES BY SOLVING PROBLEMS, WHILE EXPLORING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL GROWTH.

OUR VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE THEIR TIME AND ENERGY, THEIR IDEAS AND IDEALS. KNIGHTS INCREASE THE ABILITY OF OUR CHURCH AND COMMUNITIES TO BENEFIT MANY PEOPLE. THEY

RESPOND TO HUMAN PROBLEMS BY DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. THEY EXPAND THE DELIVERY OF HUMAN SERVICES IN WAYS THAT BENEFIT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY. AND THEY DIRECT HUMAN RESOURCES TO PROVIDE HELP WHERE IT'S NEEDED MOST.

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS VOLUNTEERS ARE EXAMPLES OF "PEOPLE POWER." THEY WORK TO ENRICH PROGRAMS BY OFFERING THEMSELVES – BLOOD AND SWEAT, TIME AND TEARS – WITH ABSOLUTE FREEDOM OF WILL.

IN THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS, VOLUNTEERISM IS IN FULL FORCE FIGHTING ABORTION; BATTLING DRUG ADDICTION; AIDING REFUGEES, THE FRAIL AND THE ELDERLY; LIFTING THE FACE OF THE COMMUNITY; PROMOTING VOCATIONS; SERVING THE SICK, HANDICAPPED AND DISABLED.

*(MENTION SOME OUTSTANDING LOCAL COUNCIL VOLUNTEER EFFORTS IN YOUR JURISDICTION HERE.)*

WHEN IT COMES TO VOLUNTEERISM, PEOPLE CAN EITHER CLOSE THEIR EYES OR OPEN THEIR HEARTS. AS KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS, WE ARE PROUD OF OUR VOLUNTEERISM. BUT THE OPPORTUNITIES, LIKE THE NEEDS, ARE LIMITLESS.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE? DO WE SIT BACK AND REST

ON OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OR FORGE AHEAD, WORKING EVEN HARDER FOR CHURCH, COMMUNITY AND FELLOW MAN?

THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE. WE MUST ALWAYS BE READY AND WILLING TO PROVIDE HELP, RESPONDING TO NEEDS WHEREVER THEY EXIST, WHILE BEING BOTH HAPPY AND THANKFUL THAT OUR GOD-GIVEN TALENTS AND ABILITIES CAN BE USED TO HELP OTHERS.

FROM THE SUPREME COUNCIL TO THE STATE COUNCILS TO THE LOCAL COUNCILS, OUR MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES PROVIDE THAT STRENGTH IN NUMBERS NEEDED FOR THE NEW CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES THAT WE WILL ADDRESS. KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES EVERYWHERE WILL USE THEIR TALENTS AND ABILITIES TO CONTINUE TO MAKE US THE VITAL AND STRONG ORDER THAT WE HAVE BECOME IN THE LAST 135 YEARS.

THROUGH PERSONAL COMMITMENT AND DIRECT INVOLVEMENT, WE MUST ALWAYS PROVIDE THAT DAY-BY-DAY SERVICE. WORKING TOGETHER, KNIGHTS AND THEIR FAMILIES MUST CONTINUALLY USE THEIR TALENTS, ABILITIES AND FAITH IN GOD TO "RIGHT THE MANY WRONGS," TO "DREAM THOSE

IMPOSSIBLE DREAMS" AND TO "FIGHT THE UNBEATABLE FOE."

IN THE PAST, OUR VOLUNTEER EFFORTS RAISED BARNES. TODAY, OUR PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHEN OUR CHURCH, BUILD CITIES AND IMPROVE THE LIVES OF ALL PEOPLE. AS MEMBERS OF THE MOST DYNAMIC FRATERNAL ORGANIZATION IN EXISTENCE TODAY, WE MUST CONTINUE FOREVER TO PUT OUR "FAITH IN ACTION" IN ORDER TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE.

VIVAT JESUS!