

THE MOST IMPORTANT WORD: WE

Ask anyone who is in recovery from addiction what the most important word in the 12 Steps is and they'll answer, "The word WE—I can't do it on my own." Millions of people have found new life, healing, and hope in those meeting rooms through relying on and being in community with others. They've learned their actions have consequences not only for themselves but also for others and this has broadened their understanding of the impact of their choices on family, friends, and even on society as a whole. It leads them to act out of a concern for what we used to call "the common good," the awareness that as a people we are to consider what is good for everyone, not just for me.

It seems to me that many of us are moving in the opposite direction with an emphasis on my likes and needs only as evidenced by an irritating (to me) commercial—"I want it all and I want it NOW!" It's about home delivery of restaurant food but it whenever I hear it I'm reminded of what it seems we have become as a society today—everything is about me. I'm the center of the universe and no one else's needs or desires matter.

I remember as a young child hearing my mom and dad talk about sharing and doing what was best for the whole family. This was especially hard for me when I was awarded a scholarship to an exclusive high school and I couldn't go because we couldn't afford the uniforms and extras. Dad worked very hard but there just wasn't enough money for me to go that school. Others in family also had needs that had to be considered. I sulked for a while and moaned that I had to go to "that common school." (I was not an easy child) Later I realized that without going to that "common school" I might never have discovered my gift for writing that led to a career in journalism that I loved.

Later, as a parent I found myself repeating my parents' words—we were a family. We had to consider everyone's needs. Sometimes that meant not getting what one person wanted so another family member could have what was needed.

I heard that again at a recent funeral for a long time parishioner. Her children and grandchildren talked about how on one Thanksgiving she invited a family in need to join them for dinner. "I remember what it was like to be hungry so I invited them to join us." She was never wealthy but she was rich in the things that matter," they told me.

I see the same pulling together for the common good in our immigrant and refugee parishioners who have very little but are

always willing to share and help each other. When, our seminarian was ordained a deacon, we had planned a simple cake and punch reception. I got a call from one of our Burundian parishioners who told me, "He is African. He needs African food." She organized others to bring food and all who came got to share in a taste of Africa. When I called to thank her, she replied, "It is my privilege. After all, we are all brothers and sisters in Jesus."

We experienced the same thing at my daughter's wedding. We were told that when one gets married there are no invitations—everyone comes. And so they did. It was a wonderful celebration of her and Mike's commitment to each other and to our beautiful diversity. Though from different backgrounds and nations, we were all family—and that family keeps growing.

Though I don't always succeed, I do try to consider the common good in my daily decisions. I choose reusable bags when I shop. When I replaced my furnace and air conditioner, I chose energy efficient models. My next car will be a hybrid. I'm concerned about climate change especially as I see my premature grandsons struggle with asthma due to poor air quality and miss the outdoor play time I enjoyed as a child. I know that they aren't the only ones suffering. These are small

steps I can make and often they cost me more money but others' health and safety are values for me. I try to focus on Catholic social teaching and how that impacts policies on such issues as abortion, immigration, health care, racism, poverty, education and the environment and I often call or write my congressman and senators and share those views. I especially find that when it comes to voting, I need to consider what is best for all, not just for me and that's not always easy. Like my not being able to go to that exclusive high school, some things that seem good for me may be detrimental to others. I have to consider that before I mark my ballot.

Surprisingly, there is peace and even joy in considering the needs of others as our own. When I focus only on me and what's in it for me, I have to exclude the other and sometimes even demonize him in order to protect what I think is mine. It's an angry stressful way of living—and not very happy or peaceful.

What if we would try living by the principle of the common good. I think that's what Jesus meant when he talked about loving one's neighbor as oneself.

What if we tried? What if?

— Angela Anno



LOVE one another, As I have LOVED you.
John 13:34

"Preach and serve, but do not make use of others. Serve and give freely that which you have received freely. May our life of holiness be permeated by this openness of heart, so that the gratuitousness of God – the graces that He wishes to give us without cost – may enter our hearts."

~Pope Francis

