

The NEEDS game

By Joe Michael Feist
NC News Service

Out his back door the old man walks, past the pecan tree he planted when his hair was black and his step was jaunty, to his pickup truck. He drives out of the small town to a plot of land beside a river — his farm, his "river place."

Long retired, the man doesn't visit his farm to work. He simply has a fundamental need to reach down and grasp a handful of the reddish-brown dirt he had watered with the sweat of 50 years, the soil from which he coaxed an unimaginable number of cotton bolls and sorghum grains.

He needs to see a sky uninterrupted, nature uncorrupted.

Human needs. What do they have to do with faith? Quite a lot as it turns out.

Even a casual listening to the Gospel on Sunday mornings will reveal a Jesus who placed great emphasis on the needs of others. But before any need can be met it must be recognized.

And trying to comprehend the scope of human needs is, in itself, a demanding task.

Some needs are so basic that failure to meet them will result in injury or even death: the need for rest, food and water, shelter and clothing.

Less visible, perhaps, but just as real, are psychological needs. When a 2-year-old insists on dressing himself or getting his own cereal, he is exercising the need to achieve and the need to be independent. When he puts everything he gets hold of into his mouth, he is demonstrating his need to satisfy basic curiosity.

Closely related are the needs to create, to acquire knowledge and to find meaning in life. The need to understand one's world continues unabated throughout life.

Then there is the need to feel love and affection. Numerous studies have shown that, deprived of love, a person's psychological growth will be severely stunted.

In recent years, scientific research has demonstrated that love and affection even

affect physical development. Infants who are not stroked or caressed will not develop physically, even if they receive adequate nourishment.

And the need for affection does not diminish over the years.

Members of the human family experience a need to belong to some form of family or group, and a need for companionship. They also need to be accepted, understood and respected, despite shortcomings.

This whole gamut of human needs acts like an ocean tide for an individual, with needs rising and falling in intensity over time.

Likewise, the importance of each need varies from person to person. No two people have exactly the same needs.

Even in a developed society there are those who are malnourished, homeless or ill-clothed; those who are lonely and have little sense of belonging.

So parishes and dioceses assist the poor; establish support groups for the elderly who are lonely; foster ministries for the teen-ager who longs to belong.

In a mobile society, more and more parishes strive through various small groups to substitute for the "extended family" that is missing from many people's lives.

In parish renewal groups, the unique ways individuals search for happiness and fulfillment gain recognition and respect.

When Pope John Paul II visited Canada this fall, he addressed lay leaders in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Serving others, the pope said, "is at the core of every vocation in the church."

But human needs take many forms and challenge the church's people in many ways, he indicated.

Said the pope: "The diversity of human needs requires a diverse response on the part of the church." And the church "counts on the diligence of her members to discover effective ways to face new problems and new needs."

(Feist is associate editor of Faith Today.)



Prescrip

By George Tombs
NC News Service

When I started as a volunteer at a Canadian children's hospital, the job looked easy. "Spend time with the adolescents," I was told. "Listen to them, play with them, bring some cheer into their lives."

As I walked along the ward patients called out to me. "Come and stay with me," said a girl in traction waiting for a badly broken leg to heal.

"Don't forget me," said a boy who'd fallen off a horse and injured his back.

I chatted and played cards, and could see the smiles lighting up their faces. Helping them made me feel good, even important — until a doctor stopped me in the corridor. There were big circles under his eyes.

"Have you been here long? No? You should try spending time with the really sick patients," he said.

"They won't ask you, but they need you."

The doctor referred me to a nurse who gave me the names of a few children. Suddenly the ward looked completely different. Sure there were rooms ringing with the laughter of visitors. But there also were painfully quiet rooms.

My first patient from this group

An uncom

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

The people of God were baffled. Nothing was going right, even though they were doing all the right things — or so they thought.

They felt they were a religious people, faithful to the liturgy, keeping all the rules. They even had taken up fasting.

Was God blind? Couldn't he see how good they were?

God sent a sharply pointed answer through the prophet Isaiah:

"Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance, that a man should bow his head like a reed, and lie in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?"

Isaiah then described what kind of response the Lord wanted:

— "Releasing those bound unjustly,

— "Untying the thongs of the yoke...

— "Sharing your bread with the hungry,

— "Sheltering the oppressed and the homeless,

— "Clothing the naked when you see them,

— "And not turning your back