

Prescription for caring

was Jake, an Eskimo boy who hadn't spoken for three days. He had been flown down from a village in the far north because his kidney problem couldn't be treated there.

My questions met with stony silence. He looked at me gravely, then at his intravenous bottle. "Everything here is junk," he said. "What would he rather be doing? 'I'm missing the walrus hunt,'" said Jake, "My dad was going to take me with him."

I realized this 12-year-old boy was in a strange place without family. And he didn't understand what was wrong with him.

After a few days Jake started to play with the other children. I knew I could meet some other patients.

A nurse took me to Sophie's room. "We don't know what's wrong with her," I was told. "She doesn't react to people — at all. We're doing tests now. It could be a brain tumor or a severe personality disorder. Just sit with her."

After a few visits with the 16-year-old I could see a glimmer of recognition in her eyes. Then she managed to smile. Once she called me by name. But the next time I came she didn't seem to know me and trembled with fear. Her parents asked me if there

was a chance of curing her. I explained I was only a volunteer, not a doctor.

They needed hope that the daughter they loved would get well, that Sophie had a future.

It was when I met Joe, 19, that I really learned about needs. He had leukemia and lay weakened in bed. He wanted someone to read to him.

He could picture every sentence as I read. "When I get out of here, I'm going to be a poet," he said.

Joe was facing the biggest questions of his life and needed to share that with somebody. But he still wanted to create a world of beauty and truth.

He wanted someone to share his dream.

I found I needed to share too. When I left the hospital at the end of the evening, I was troubled by the sick children.

Talking with a friend helped put things in perspective. "Continue serving at the hospital," he said. "The children need you."

My work with the children was teaching me something: the importance of living day by day with others — and as much as possible for others.

(George Tombs is a free-lance writer in Montreal, Quebec.)

Uncompromising message

on your own." (Isaiah 58:5-8). Long before Isaiah, Amos lashed out at those who trampled on the weak and forced the lowly out of the way (Amos 2:6-7).

From beginning to end, the Bible insists on the fundamental necessity of caring for the needs of others.

The prophets, God's spokesmen, were uncompromising on this point.

In the New Testament period, James gave similar advice for Christians: "Looking after orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself unspotted by the world make for pure worship without stain before our God and Father" (James 1:27).

Of course, James was echoing Jesus, who preached the message his Father had given the prophets before him. Clearly distinguishing false from true religion, Jesus said, "None of you who cry out, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21-23).

In his story about the rich man "who dressed in linen and purple and feasted splendidly every day," and the starving, sore-infested beggar named Lazarus, who lay at his gate, Jesus made a telling

point. It wasn't that the rich man deliberately harmed Lazarus. Instead, the rich man and his friends, who stepped over the beggar on their way to a banquet, simply ignored the wretched fellow. As far as they were concerned, he didn't even exist. They blinded themselves to his needs.

Jesus tells us that the beggar was welcomed into eternal happiness while the heartless rich man doomed himself (Luke 16:19-23).

The well-known parable of the Good Samaritan is an open denunciation of people who refuse to help brothers and sisters in need. The story's hero is one who had every reason to hate the mugging victim and yet responded to his need, most generously and thoughtfully. (Luke 10:25-37)

Jesus made it abundantly clear that one grows rich in God's sight by sharing generously with those in need, out of love and not just for a tax write-off. "If I give everything I have to feed the poor...and have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3).

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FOOD...

...for thought

Plans for the couple's 50th wedding anniversary were well under way. One son, a priest, was charged with planning the anniversary Mass. Children and grandchildren prepared to travel to Ohio for the occasion. Invitations went out to friends and relatives to attend a festive banquet.

But as the day approached and the couple's excitement mounted, the wife indicated she had a pressing concern: She wanted to arrange for someone to carry banquet dinners to a couple of homebound parishioners. Though the parishioners were neither relatives nor part of her regular circle of friends, she didn't want them forgotten.

Father Herbert Weber identifies that couple as his parents in "The Parish Help Book" (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 1983). He explains that his mother wanted "to share her celebration of life's blessings with those who were alone and all but forgotten."

Father Weber believes Christians will find many needs of the human family close at hand. He adds: Reaching out to those in need often requires a personal touch. It means establishing a "helping relationship," which requires much listening and visiting.

"Helping is a process that

must be learned and practiced," the parish priest adds. His book is full of practical advice on how to help.

The pastor of St. Thomas More University Parish in Bowling Green, Ohio, writes: "Most individuals have something to give whether they believe it or not."

Take the gift of cooking, for example. People gifted in this way have a splendid talent for teaching "someone with a low income or poor homemaking skills how to create tasty and nutritious meals for less money."

An important first step in reaching out to others, Father Weber says, is establishing "a connection with the person in pain." This means "entering into another's life" somehow.

This shouldn't be too hard, the priest continues, since "we all suffer." Reflecting on one's own pain is a "simple reminder that pain is very real" and helps when it comes to treating others with compassion.

Father Weber identifies many human needs. Sometimes they take the form of physical suffering, he notes. But much pain is not physical. Instead it can grow from "a serious disagreement with a close friend or the feeling of abandonment by a colleague."

How broad is the scope of human needs? What are some of the neglected needs of people close to you?

...for discussion

1. What are some needs of people in your community — needs that are important even though they often are not recognized by most others?

2. Do you think it is important for Christians to be able to identify — to name — many of the needs that exist in their community? Why?

3. Father Herbert Weber identifies isolation as a fundamental need of human beings. He tells the story of a woman who didn't believe anyone could care about her. What does Father Weber mean by "isolation"?

4. After reading the story in Joe Michael Feist's article about the elderly man who needed to continue visiting his river place, do you agree with the author that this sort of impulse can be described as a true "need"?

SECOND HELPINGS

"New Parish Ministries," Series 2, edited by Jerome Herauf. This book is intended for lay people and Religious interested in parish ministries, the editor writes. A section on hospitality examines ways to make the parish community a welcoming place. The book states: "Community is born of hospitality." Another section, dealing with youth ministry, suggests that ministers need to be "sensitive to the young themselves, to their anxieties, their fears and their inconsistencies." It is valuable for youth ministers to be as democratic as possible in planning programs, the book suggests. Other sections discuss ministry to the separated and divorced, adult education in faith and children's liturgies of the Word. (Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, Minn. 55403. Paperback, \$8.95; orders under \$30 add 5 percent shipping and handling and must be prepaid.)