

This is a true story of how God works in our human condition, the year was 1998, and the place was College Park, Maryland. My neighbor, a hard working tradesman and a devote Methodist, one day asked me if I would be interested in helping him with some church work. He had noticed that I was active in my own Catholic community and dared to risk and reach out through the human-imposed veil of separateness that we set up between our Christian communities.

Michael had offered to help his United Methodist Church of College Park with a landscaping initiative that was to stop the rain water that overflowed from the church roof gutters and ended up running under the bottom of the wall at the foundation. He arranged to have three dump trucks full of clean fill dirt dumped at strategic points around the church building that housed a meeting room and kitchen area as well as the sanctuary. The men's' group agreed to wheel barrow and shovel the dirt up against the base of the building and by so doing – provide a slope for the water to run down away from the walls. Seventeen men signed up to help on Saturdays and week day evenings.

On the first Saturday in May, I showed up with my gloves, shovel, and wheel barrow. Three other men arrived in separate cars, none had work gloves, one had a shovel, and all three worked for about two hours and excused themselves (never to be seen again as far as the landscaping project went). Michael showed up around 3:00 p.m. and said he had to attend to a critical matter at one of his home improvement sites (he did contracting work as a licensed home improvement contractor). I never saw Michael again at the work site; but saw him often around our backyards. He always asked how the work was progressing, but nothing more about his intention to help. He was working 16 hour days.

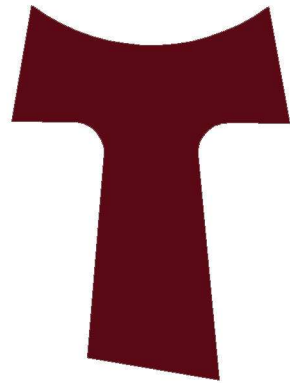
During the two months of working Saturdays and evenings when I could, I alone, moved three dump truck loads of dirt and raked it into a gentle slope away from the church building walls and spent my money for grass seed and spread and watered it. There were church events on many of the evenings when I was working, and people from the church would stop and talk with me, offer me water, or food from their church

dinner tables where meetings were accompanied with good food and merriment.

When the project was completed, I met with the Pastor and gave him a tour of the areas where the sloping landscaping and new grass had already stopped recent heavy rains from getting into the meeting hall and Sunday school areas; he was very impressed and thankful. It was then that he discovered that I was not a member of his church. He was greatly saddened to find that the Methodist Men's Group had not helped at all. We laughed about the saying that many are called, but few are chosen. Later, he organized a Thank You writing campaign by his whole church. I received over 50 cards, many with prayers offered for me and in some cases, money for repayment for the grass seed. I even received a coupon from one of the congregation for a dinner for two for my wife and me. Later that year, Michael helped me make repairs around my house. We are good friends.

Submitted by Robert K Smith, SFO
rkisok@gmail.com

*Let them
esteem work
both as a gift
and as sharing
in the creation,
redemption,
and service of
the human
community.
Article 16*



for

Unity

Landscaping