



DEUS CARITAS EST magazine

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Compassion as the heart of charity

The theme of our 2021 animation programme was ‘In the Mission of Charity’, where we elaborated on the third part of the theme of the 23rd General Chapter, ‘Be radical in prophecy as consecrated men in the mission of charity’.

We explored in depth the various motions addressed under this heading: our preferential care of the poor, our Christian identity, the importance of professionalism, financial sustainability, and the protection of the integrity of children and vulnerable adults.

Since charity is truly at the heart of our charism, we have chosen to elaborate on this theme and to focus on what is at the heart of charity: compassion. Without compassion, charity would simply fall into the trap of philanthropy. Compassion, therefore, must be the golden thread of our care for our neighbour and must never fade.

There are many misconceptions about compassion suggesting that it stands in the way of a more professional approach. This is completely unjustified, as we can only describe charity as a triad of love, compassion, and service, and allow it to unfold in our professional actions. This is the full meaning of charity as we, Brothers of Charity, intend to live it and must live it. We can

see it as the affective translation of love that will further transform itself into the effective translation of service. Both Francis de Sales and Vincent de Paul have repeatedly described these two expressions of love and have always linked them to each other. “Let your affective love blossom into effective love, and let your effective love retain the quality and the warmth of affective love,” is one of their phrases. Compassion alone is indeed insufficient and must pass into concrete service, but this service must retain the warmth and closeness of compassion and be nurtured by it.



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For 2022, we have chosen not to publish a separate animation guide but to dedicate a theme issue of our periodical to compassion. And, at the same time, we asked brothers, associate members, and co-workers in the apostolate to testify what concrete compassion means in their mission of charity. May these testimonies inspire us in the new year to focus our attention on the heart of our charity: the compassion with which we join our neighbours whom we help, support, and teach in our apostolate. With an invitation to write our own story about it.

Let us end with a word from our beloved Founder, the Servant of God Peter Joseph Triest, and how he spoke of the importance of compassion.



“To attract the attention and compassion of someone to a poor unfortunate there is nothing more powerful than love which is at the origin of everything. Love, I say, has a particular capacity to drive someone and to control the mind; love speaks so eloquently that it penetrates the most secret recesses of the heart.” “This love must be a love that is tender, filial, sincere and lasting, a love that is totally perfect, which has compassion for those who suffer and shares in their joys.” ❧

Bro. René Stockman



Compassion at the heart of our care for one another

Some time ago, a nursing intern was told at the start of a new internship that the unit was not about compassion, but about professional help. What was the motivation for asserting this? What was the perception of so-called compassion and why was it placed in opposition to professional help?

I fear that it is a grave error to dismiss compassion as standing in the way of professional help. It is like saying there used to be a lot of charity and fortunately now there is a lot of professionalism. As if charity would get in the way of professionalism? If one disconnects professionalism from charity, and more broadly from the basic loving attitude, only technicity will remain. And by basic loving attitude, I mean the general basic attitude from which we approach the other. Compassion is the emotional component of the love for the person in front of us, which culminates in actual help. It is the affective love for the person that provides the nourishment to proceed to effective love, which will then manifest itself in professional help.

1. Compassion and the 'Golden Rule'

The word 'compassion' comes from the Latin *patiri* and the Greek *pathein*, from which the word 'pas-

sion' is derived and refers to the experience and endurance of suffering. Compassion means enduring the suffering with and of another person. One feels the pain of the other as if it were one's own pain. One allows oneself to be affected by the suffering of the other; one is moved emotionally by the confrontation with the suffering of another.

Compassion appears as a central virtue in the great religions of the world and is linked to the so-called 'Golden Rule', first formulated by Confucius (551-479 B.C.): "Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself." Or, in more positive terms: "One must always treat others just as one would want others to treat oneself."

It is like the antidote to selfishness and egotism, which neuroscientists link to our so-called 'old brain' and refer to as the four Fs: feeding, fighting, fleeing, and fornicating. It is our 'new brain', the neocortex, that enables man to look beyond his own survival and the struggles he faces to ensure it. It allows him to take some distance from his instinctive, primitive emotions and leads him to an unselfish altruism. But the inner struggle between the selfish striving for survival and opening oneself up to the well-being of the other is a fact that every human being continues to feel in the depths of his being and carries with him as a constant tension.

In the great world religions, this is described as the fight against evil and the search for ways to lead a more altruistic life.

Within the Judeo-Christian religion, there is a special focus on the development of compassion. In the Old Testament, we get to know God as a God who has compassion on his people. This is quite unique in comparison with the surrounding faiths where polytheism was practised and a great distance existed between gods and men. Israel, on the other hand, gets to know a God who is unique and who turns to his people to show compassion. At the same time as the proclamation of the Decalogue, which would eventually consist of 613 commandments and which sought to curb the four Fs, the stories of the Old Testament contain a gradual revelation of God, and it is here that God calls himself the merciful one, a God of compassion, in a very special way. It is this compassion that he desires from mankind. The whole Torah can be condensed into the commandment of love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” To love one’s neighbour as oneself is another way of expressing the Golden Rule: “Treat others as you wish to be treated, love others as you wish to be loved.”

Already in the first pages of the Bible, attention is drawn to set a clear limit to the four Fs, when God asks Cain what he did to his brother Abel. Cain’s reply is telling: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gn 4:9). The killing of another in order to survive is clearly condemned from the very beginning, and later on all human sacrifice will also be forbidden. From respect for the other, one must grow towards love for the other, and vice versa, how love for the other must lead to unconditional respect for



the other. Very well known is the word of God to Moses: “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them” (Ex 3:7-8). It is the compassion that God feels for his people that propels him to set them free.

Christ will not only proclaim this call to compassion but will also live it in a way that he allows himself to be specifically touched by the suffering of his neighbours. Several times, the New Testament reads that Jesus is moved by the sight of the sick and those who suffer. It is expressed very strongly when he weeps at the tomb of his friend Lazarus (Jn 11:36). We will see later how, within the Christian tradition, compassion is elevated to the highest value together with love, and how it is completely purified by love from all forms of selfishness and egotism.

2. How does one become a person of compassion?

Compassion is something that one carries within oneself as a closed fruit, but for which one has to create the right climate so that this fruit may open up and spread its beneficial influence in the environment. So, everyone has the capacity to be compassionate towards their neighbour, but they have to make an effort and resist the impulses that make them turn in on themselves again and again. God’s question to Cain: “Where is your brother?” is essential here. Cain is his brother’s brother, he cannot change that, but he has the

freedom to add being his brother's keeper or not. The philosopher Levinas states that man has the freedom to isolate himself in his individualism and thus close himself off from his neighbour. He can regard this neighbour as a competitor and, if he feels threatened, he can even eliminate him. That is what happened between Cain and Abel. But by doing so, Cain denied that besides being a human being he was a fellow human being, as well. This restricts the absolute freedom to close oneself off from our neighbour, to see him as a rival, and to eliminate him, and it deprives freedom of its absolute nature. As human beings, we have only a situated freedom, a freedom limited by my humanity, my responsibility for my neighbour. My humanity precedes my freedom.

This is the basis on which compassion finds its fertile soil. It is a precondition for compassion to grow. Taking each other into account as neighbours is not yet compassion, but it is a prerequisite for compassion to grow.

It is within the upbringing, within the family, that the child, the human being will learn what compassion is, by receiving compassion itself and by receiving examples of compassion. Initially, the child will experience first-hand what compassion means in the loving care it is given. When it has to go without this loving care, later on the child will find it very difficult to show compassion to others. It is like with validation: when a person does not receive enough or any validation as a child, he or she will later on go through life frustrated and not be able to offer validation to others either. The beneficial effect of loving care is something a per-

son carries with them for the rest of their life as an important building block for showing compassion to others.



Compassion is something that one carries within oneself as a closed fruit, but for which one has to create the right climate so that this fruit may open up.

Subsequently, it will be important for the child to be able to witness effective acts of compassion during his or her upbringing. It should see how people care for each other, how they are concerned for the suffering of others, how they allow themselves to be emotionally affected by the suffering of others. If the child only encounters callousness, where every form of emotional concern for the other is pushed away as a sign of weakness, it will have great difficulty learning what compassion is. If, on the other hand, in the daily events of the family, the child witnesses mutual concern, the ability to listen to each other, to tolerate and forgive one another, this concern and tolerance will become a basic attitude. Of course, it is very important how the family looks at people who are suffering, at people who are growing old and deteriorating. Are they considered useless and therefore avoided and forgotten, or are they approached with more respect and concern? The encounter with a fragile life, with people who

are severely disabled, with people who are deteriorating, is therefore very important for the way in which one will later deal with this fragile life oneself. Personally, I learned a great deal when, at a very early age, I had to take care of an old great-uncle and great-aunt who lived nearby and who had remained childless. When other children went to play football, I went to see them to be with them and to help them with the housework. Later on, I had the opportunity to go on holiday camps with children with severe intellectual disabilities. Again, I learned the importance of taking care of others, particularly those who could not take care of themselves. I even remember the time when I was in nursery school and a little boy with Down syndrome was one of my classmates. We got to know this boy in a playful way and I kept a photo of us all sitting around a nativity scene and little Henri, as the boy was called, was sitting there in his underwear, because he had wet his trousers for the umpteenth time. It is a picture that exudes tenderness and still moves me emotionally to this day. These were real lessons in compassion!

In addition to one's upbringing, the experience of one's own suffering is very important in order to achieve compassion. I once heard someone say that he found it difficult to feel compassion because he had never really been ill, so it was difficult for him to empathize with the illness and suffering of another person. Again, it is from one's own personal experience that one becomes more sensitive to what suffering means in another person's life. Both the negative experience of suffering and the positive experience of being treated

lovingly by others can contribute to the growth of our own capacity to become compassionate fellow human beings. When we think of the negative, we tend to think of the loneliness, hopelessness, and distress that one can experience when struck by suffering. It is the memory of our own suffering that we carry with us and that can make us more sensitive to the suffering of others. The suffering of the other makes us remember our own suffering and the need we felt for help, for understanding, for support, for being treated with compassion. But above all, being allowed to experience the presence of loving and comforting fellow human beings will help us even more to become these loving and comforting fellow human beings ourselves. This is where the importance of the Golden Rule becomes clear. One will act towards others as one has been treated oneself and as one wishes to be treated now.

Upbringing, personal positive experiences of compassion, and personal experiences of suffering make a person grow in compassion.

3. How is our capacity for compassion further purified?

The basic assumption is that everyone has the capacity to become a compassionate neighbour. But there is a distance between just respecting one another as fellow human beings and really loving one another and allowing oneself to be moved by that.

First of all, there is the question of who will re-

ceive our compassion. It is normal for a mother to show compassion towards her child. It is normal for a child to show compassion towards its parents and its close relatives when they are in need. It is normal for friends to show compassion towards each other. But what about people we do not know, people we dislike, our so-called enemies? And what about the other direction, what about ourselves? Does our compassion extend from ourselves to everyone we come into contact with?

Let us begin with ourselves. Perhaps it sounds strange at first that we are invited to have compassion on ourselves. We are referring to the commandment of love, which says that we should love others as ourselves. Consequently, we, too, are subjects for our love. In order to be capable of truly loving the other, we first have to accept and love ourselves. Accept ourselves as we are, with our positive and negative qualities, with our striving



Saint Vincent de Paul

for self-preservation and our ability to work for the good of the other. We must come to a healthy and balanced knowledge of both our strengths and weaknesses. If we get bogged down in a stubborn fight against our negative impulses and put all our energy into that, there will be no energy left to allow the positive in us to develop. People who are hard on themselves are usually also very hard on others. This does not mean that we should not make an effort to control our negative impulses and ensure that we do not become slaves to our passions. If we can truthfully acknowledge our own weaknesses and develop a certain leniency towards ourselves, we will be able to identify them more easily in others and be gentler in judging them, as well. In the previous part, we indicated how important it is that one can grow from one's own experience to have compassion for the other. Therefore, it is important to remember our own grief, to face our own struggles against our impulses, in order to be able to develop great compassion towards others. So having compassion for oneself and being allowed to experience the beneficial effect of this is in itself a learning experience for feeling compassion for others.

It is easy to develop compassion for our closest neighbours, people we live with and consider friends. The emotional connection is already there and will translate into spontaneous compassion. It is more difficult to be compassionate towards strangers and extremely difficult to be compassionate towards people we label as our so-called 'enemies'.

Here, we are invited to learn from Christ and

the way in which he purifies the commandment of love to the core. It is an essential part of the Sermon on the Mount, which can be seen as a completion of the Decalogue, and of which Christ says that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfil it (cf. Mt 5:17). “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:43-48).

This is the most radical message that Jesus Christ left us and it meets with enormous inner resistance. How can I love my enemy and be perfect like the heavenly Father? Trying to respect the enemy may seem acceptable, but loving him is contrary to what we spontaneously feel: hate! Trying to control this hate and thus trying to master our emotions still seems acceptable and doable with some effort, but allowing this hate to emotionally evolve into love seems a superhuman task.

This is why the commandment of love must always be read in its entirety: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Our love based purely on our human capacities will always be limited and emotional-

ly only for our friends. This is *philia* or the love of friendship that we can practise without much effort. But the development of a love that is able to replace spontaneous feelings of hate is not within our purely human capacities. For this, we need God's grace, we need God's love, which can raise our human love to a divine level, so that it becomes unconditional and without measure.



Saint John of God, Manuel Gómez-Moreno González (1880), Granada, Spain

When we now pass on to compassion, it is precisely about this emotional love that we show towards a suffering neighbour, and it is from and with this emotional love that we allow ourselves to be affected emotionally by the suffering. I deliberately repeat the word 'emotional' here, which in the definition of love actually only applies to *Agape* or divine love and *philia* or love of friendship, which is like a natural reflection of divine love. By placing this emotional love at the very heart of compassion, we are actually asking that compas-

sion be given the quality of *Agape* and *philia*, even towards those for whom we feel no emotional love at all and even towards those to whom we tend to feel aversion and even hate.

That is why compassion in its purified form can only be understood within the commandment of love of Jesus Christ and especially where Christ introduces the commandment to really love even our enemy and to be perfect just as the Father is perfect. Compassion then becomes a logical extension of this love and must find its emotional component in love. For Christ, there is only one love that he gives the predicate of a commandment: the love that has the quality of divine love with the instruction to show it even in our love towards the enemy. Only an emotional love is able to negate the spontaneous feeling of hate. Only a powerful antidote is capable of replacing hate with love. And this antidote is not found within ourselves, but is the cure offered to us by God. So, only when we open ourselves to God's love will we receive the capacity to love like God: unconditionally, without measure, for all in every circumstance, even our enemy.

Here, we arrive at a very important point: How can we create a space within ourselves where this love with its very power will be able to influence and direct our innermost feelings? For there must be a real reversal, a *metanoia*, within us to transform the emotionally charged hate into an equally emotionally charged love and compassion. The only way to achieve this is the way of self-emptying or *kenosis*. Just as for the whole development of a

spiritual life, for compassion in our lives to grow into compassion for all without exception, this self-emptying is essential. As long as we are full of ourselves, see ourselves as the centre of our existence, and take ourselves as the only reference, we will never be able to overcome, redirect, or even set aside our spontaneously felt emotions in order to give space to opposite feelings.

Saint Paul teaches us what this self-emptying or *kenosis* entails, referring to Christ himself, who, from his divine status, completely emptied himself in order to assume the condition of a human being, and continued this self-emptying as a human being by acknowledging himself as the servant of all, and ultimately sacrificing his life for the ultimate good of his neighbour: salvation. Saint Paul expresses this quite eloquently in his letter to the Philippians.

“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:6-11).

The Hymn of Love, also written by Saint Paul, provides us with a checklist of what our love, and thus our resulting compassion, should look like.

Once we know how to empty ourselves in order to give room to God's love in our lives, this divine love will further purify our human love and bring it to the level of divine love. This purified love will have the following attributes according to Saint Paul: "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Cor 13:4-8).

From this love, our compassion must never fail either! ¶

Bro. René Stockman

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Reaching out to a person in fragility

Charity has a centuries-old tradition in our Church. The early communities already paid special attention to those who were small and powerless. In the late Middle Ages, faith mixed with science and great strides were made in the field of care. Just think of Peter Joseph Triest, who literally took psychiatric patients out of their dungeons to give them medical care together with Dr. Guislain. There were also schools, orphanages, hospitals... Or the many missionaries who went where nobody had gone before: Father Damien, Father Constant Lievens, Father Roger Vandersteene, Mother Teresa... Most of them never to return. Over time, manuals and books were written on how best to deal with people with injuries – physical, psychological, psychiatric, social... We do not want to and cannot duplicate the valuable work of these authors here. But we will look for the different facets in which the *agape* of Jesus, his all-encompassing and selfless love, is released when he meets people. His attitude should continue to inspire us.

When I acknowledge that my suffering and my fear are the result of injuries, my eyes can open to see people all around me who are also sick and living with half-forgotten wounds. I can see them with sympathy, with commiseration. Instead of

isolating myself, I can stand with them in solidarity. I can come to understand that 'my' situation is more than just 'my situation', so I can stop navel-gazing. I can become Catholic in the original sense of the word: all-embracing, universal. My suffering offers me the key to love. Which is not to say that there is no more fear or self-doubt, or that my hurts have disappeared. I remain limited and lacking. But there is the wholeness of compassion, the catholicity of sympathy, where one knows one's own imperfection in a way that reaches out to the imperfection of others.

Is that possible? Can my hurts, my doubts, my emotional wounds, instead of being disfiguring and diminishing, be transforming? Can my trauma become a meeting place for others? Can it? It is only possible through my faith in Jesus Christ. He makes our wholeness possible because He transformed violence and rejection into an absolute gift of love, to His Father and to us. We belong to His company when it comes to shared suffering! He has entered into our poverty and limitation and turned them into an understanding compassion, in which people try to live by giving themselves to each other.

We believe not because our scars have been erased by a magic trick, but because our emptiness has received love and abundance. This is how we can stand up for each other, with all our fear, our distorted self-image... our inner self that is so twisted.

In this way, you can preach the good news not as a condescending encouragement, but as a new way of living together: a community of poor men and women who work to enrich and humanize

one another, as Christ did with his people... We can give each other at least what God gave us first: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God” (2 Cor 1:3-4).

The story of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-17) leads us step by step into the disposition with which Jesus approached people.



Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain, Unknow author, 1873

Going instead of running

Jesus is on his way to the city of Nain with quite a following: his disciples and a large crowd. He wanted to enter the city gate, but at that moment

a dead person was being carried out. He could continue on his way, which was actually easier than stopping the crowd. But he sees the widow, the mother who is weeping for her only son, and he stops. He sees her and goes to her. Jesus does not run from the pain, he faces it.

It would be so much balm for the heart of those who suffer, that their pain is seen, acknowledged, and not avoided. As Christians, we need families and convents, parish communities, places where people can be who they are, where they can go with their endless sorrow, without it causing anyone to run away. Certainly, sometimes the sorrow is too much for one person to bear: that is why the bond between Christians is so important, so that they can form a 'safety net'. Running away from the pain 'because you already have so much to deal with' often only makes your own and other people's misery worse. Of course, you have to be aware of your limits. However, we tend to underestimate the love of our hearts. And Christian solidarity involves the conviction that the other who comes your way, needy or not, is given to you by God as a gift for each other. There is no one beggar, no one generous giver - we are each other's equal in fragility. We have so much to learn from each other, with our hurts, overcome or not... No one should have to beg for attention, everyone should know that they are loved, by God and by people: that is Jesus' message. That is why it is so important that attention is not only given at times when it is requested (almost embarrassing for both), but also spontaneously, as a free movement of the heart. The other fragile human being should not only experience:

'If I ask for help, I will find someone.' It is just as important to have an experience of spontaneous friendship: 'Someone finds me worthwhile without me asking for attention.' People with generous hearts are wanted, with an overflowing cup of love...



Raising of Widow's Son at Nain, Master of the Darmstadt Passion, ca. 1445, Munich

Seeing instead of watching

Jesus *sees* the woman. That is quite different from simply watching with curiosity what is going on. How annoying are the traffic jams caused by rubbernecking drivers? How many people are dead? Is there any blood? Are the cars wrecked? That is not Jesus' way of looking. There is no curiosity in him, he allows the woman's misery into his heart: she is a widow, moreover she has now lost her only son... He sees her tears and acknowledges what they mean. He has so much to teach us about true 'seeing'. About observing what the naked eye cannot see. Contemplative living comes from the verb *con-templari*, to observe something, whilst showing great reverence. It means that you do not immediately pin down a person by what you see, but that you want to get to know the whole person step by step and with great respect. You do not only see them in their misery, but you also keep an eye on the creativity, the talents, the humour, the strength in the other person. This way of seeing enables you to stay with the other person, to be with them.

Empathizing instead of ignoring

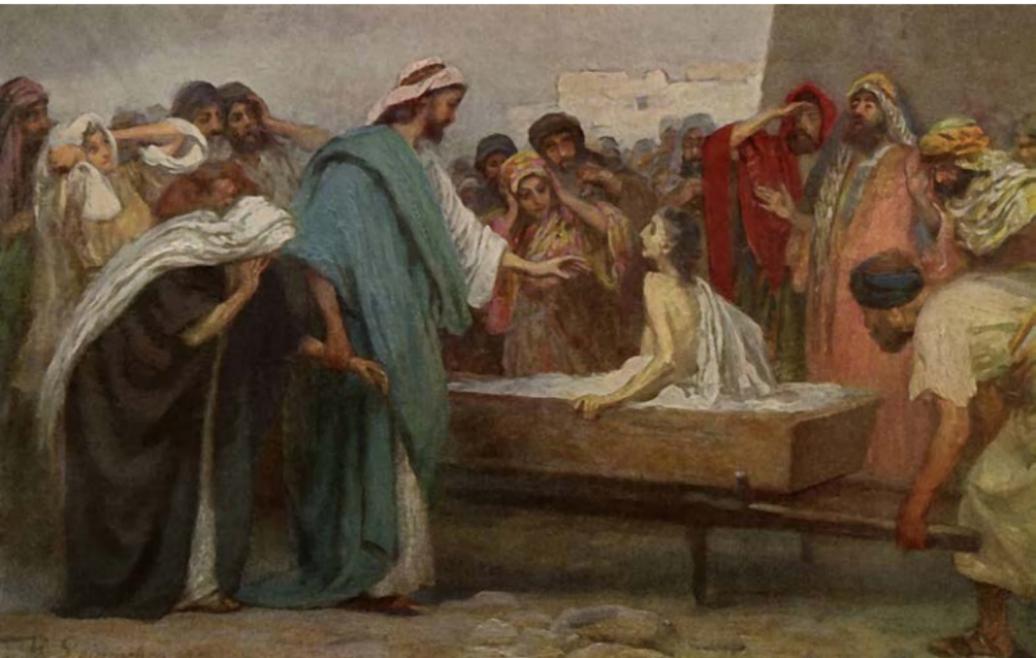
There is more to Jesus than just 'seeing', however full this seeing may be. "When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her." He was moved to the core, suggests the Greek word. A word that is also used in the story of the Good Samaritan, who is moved with compassion, and, precisely because of this, becomes the victim's neighbour. The Hebrew equivalent for this 'core' is '*rchm*',

womb. Jesus cannot ignore this woman; he allows her to touch his innermost being so that he can feel her hopelessness. That is how much he opens up. That is real compassion, commiseration: looking into the eyes of hopelessness together. It is daring. You must not drown in it, but you are challenged to change it. You need an inner strength for that, a space in you that only God's Spirit can give you, to go so far, so deep, so wide. Strength not to ignore everything you can sense in the tears of your neighbour, but to make space and time for it.

It is so much easier to ignore, to look the other way, and just go on your way. Your heart is armoured against pain. The world keeps on turning anyway, even if you leave people with tears in their eyes behind you. Ignoring this is deadening and the opposite of a Christian attitude.

Consoling instead of discouraging

“Do not weep,” Jesus says. These are words of comfort spoken by a mother when she feels that her child has shed enough tears, that it is time for a change: it is time for reversal, for encouragement. It is time to see life again. You have to get a sense for it, which, again, can only grow if you live an ‘inspired’ life. Then, you will speak these words at the right time. Then, you will be able to understand in such a way that you can feel: now the time of crying is over, come now, take a step closer to life. Of course, you can also join the suffering man in his groaning, moaning, and sighing, and affirm that there is no hope. But in God, there is always hope, no matter what.



Jesus raising the son of the widow of Nain, Anton Robert Leinweber (1845-1921)

Even if it seems that we have lost everything that could have made us happy. True consolation is to bring the other back to his powerful self, the self that is linked to God and that is much stronger than any loss – or even death.

Stopping instead of burying

Jesus walks up to the coffin and touches it. The bearers halt. Jesus tenderly but firmly puts an end to the march of death to the grave. He does not want the woman's suffering to increase; he does not want her to lose this child completely. Can we stop suffering? Yes, we can. First of all, we can stop the suffering from increasing, for example by being indiscreet about the other person's pain, by intensifying their suffering, or by forcing them to repress their pain because you are tired of listening to them. That means burying someone: they are silenced and the only way out is to retreat back into themselves, into the

grave of their fears and hurts. We can also slow down the suffering that would lead to a deathlike hopelessness by being gentle: a gentle attitude towards those who are hurting, but above all by teaching them how to be gentle with themselves. This is often the most difficult thing to do when you are burdened by pain, guilt, or fear: to be gentle with yourself...

Touching instead of turning away

Jesus does something that is not common: he touches the coffin. Just as he touches the pure or the impure, the paralytic, the blind, the leper, the sinner, the disciple, or the betrayer in numerous healing stories. His heart is not coldly distant, nor is his body. There is strength in his touch because it comes from a heart that wants the absolute best for the neighbour, that wants healing, and life. Jesus does not turn his back for fear of being 'contaminated' by the impurity of the other, by the deadness, the suffering. Nothing human is beyond him; he allows it all and embraces it as he embraces all that is good. It is the only way to transform that which leads to death into something that leads to love.

How afraid we are... to touch, to be judged in the same way as the other person, to be talked about, to be identified with a minority in our society. We still have so much to learn from him. And certainly this: you cannot be close to people and heal them as long as you remain untouchable... That is the risk of love. In any case, it gets under your skin. Even if you limit and moderate your strengths and your efforts, even if you respect

your limitations. The moment you actually carry someone from the fullness of your heart, you are affected. You become a leper among lepers, you become a crucified person with the Crucified One, your heart becomes available 24 hours a day. But you can trust that even the cracks that are formed in you as a result will become sources of life in the hands of God. Here and now still.



You can trust that even the cracks that are formed in you will become sources of life in the hands of God.

Calling instead of keeping silent

“Young man, I tell you, arise!” says Jesus. We know these powerful words of Jesus from other stories: “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”, “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home”, “Come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house”, “Come out!” Jesus always has the right words with which, in a clear and concise way, with the authority of God himself when he created the world, to summon back to life the human being who stands or lies before him. We underestimate the power that our words have unto life. In a situation where death really is imminent, you can become very quiet, speechless and discouraged, and silence anything that still has a chance of living. Or, in imitation of Jesus, you

can continue to encourage, challenge, bring out or love the best in the other person. Cherish the little bit of life that is left. As long as it is possible, no human being should be lost, no creativity or capacity left unused. As long as it is possible, we should offer the best of ourselves to make the life of the other more human.

Giving back instead of keeping

Jesus gives the boy back to his mother. He has no intention whatsoever of claiming the young man in whom he has awakened so much life for himself. He does not make him dependent or keep him for himself: he lets go and gives back. That is an art in being near to people. When you lose your heart to someone, you always run the risk of offering help for the wrong reasons. You want to care for someone so much that you bind them to you completely and they become dependent on you, sometimes without you even noticing. This flatters your ego, you become indispensable, the other person idolizes you. Who among us does not need this? But it should never come to that. Helping someone else in order to benefit from it for your own self-image, or in order to command respect because you actually have little self-respect, has a disastrous effect on you and on the person you want to be close to. You cannot keep that up: the other person will take such a hold of you that you can only let them fall so that you remain standing, and that makes the shared suffering much greater. The other person's trust is hurt, and you end up feeling guilty. The way of Jesus is different. Yes, the deep sym-

pathy and touch do create a bond, but Jesus points out to the hurting person where his possibilities had remained hidden until now. He opens the eyes or the ears or the heart of the other person, not to have him look at him, but to make him see how much life and love still flow through him, how much the Father in Heaven is still the source of all power. Jesus raises up the person he meets, so that he can stand up and go on, amazed at the possibilities that have come to light in him. He gives him back to himself, to his family, to his daily life.

That is what every Christian must do: not go to bed without having affirmed someone, without having said: “You did so well!” Or, “You’re so talented!” There are a thousand variations of these words by which you ultimately say to the other: “It’s so good that you’re here!” Thus, you become the arms through which God himself can raise up his fragile people.

Then shall happen what was already foretold by Isaiah and repeated by Jesus when he calls his first disciples (Mt 4:16):

“The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen.” ¶

Cardinal Godfried Danneels & Iny Driessen

Source: Cardinal Godfried Danneels & Iny Driessen (2008), Richt ons weer op: Als leven pijn doet (pp. 307-316), Lannoo.



Compassion and sympathy

A sensitive compassion from a seemingly unexpected source

For many years, I worked as a psychiatrist in a psychiatric hospital. One particular occurrence that stayed with me was that of a fellow psychiatrist who contracted a malignant brain disease. This doctor became seriously ill and had to go on sick leave. He disappeared from the psychiatric centre and was rarely talked about. A single patient, however, regularly asked his doctor about the ailing psychiatrist's state of health. This patient was severely mentally ill, that was clear, but he was more than that: he was also a kind human being, one of the few people in the psychiatric centre who still regularly thought of this doctor, who sympathized with his suffering and who concernedly asked about his condition. Of course, this patient could not do anything tangible for the suffering psychiatrist, but he sympathized with the suffering psychiatrist. However ill, this patient showed a sensitive compassion.

'Seeing' another person: a basic condition for compassion

To be able to feel compassion for another person, it is necessary not to pass people by in a hurry, but to really 'see' the other person. A statement from

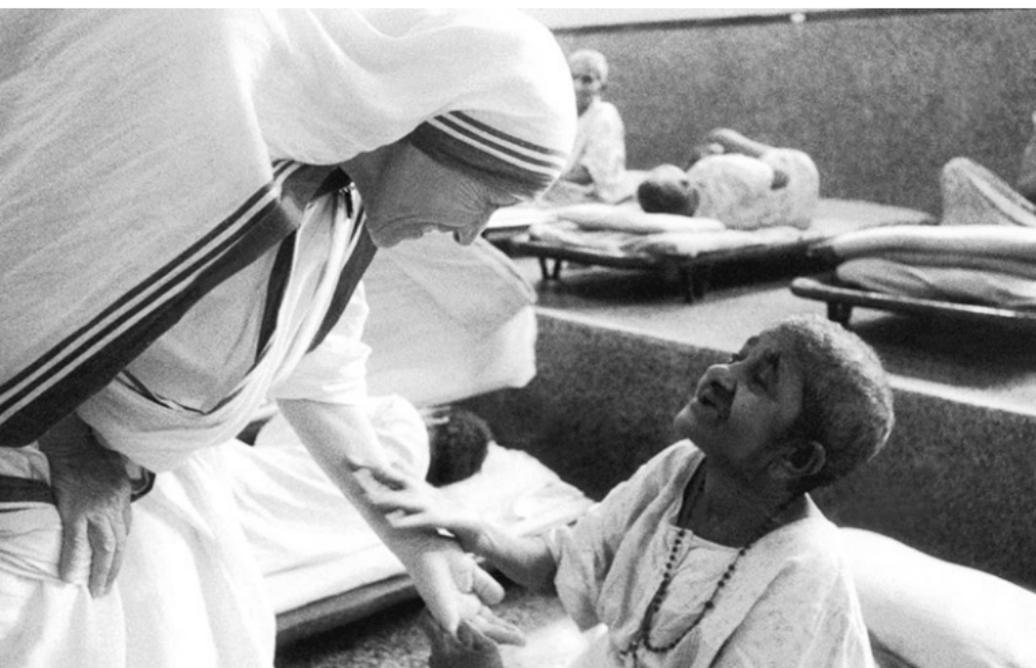
patients about their caregivers has left a strong impression on me: “They’re constantly looking after us, but no one sees us.” What a poignant comment! How can one empathize with people’s feelings and share in their suffering if one does not stop and see these people in the reality of their lives? Most of the time, it is about the caregivers ‘seeing’ the patients. But on several occasions, I have experienced the opposite: how patients saw me, their care provider. For example, one of my patients came into my office just to tell me to have a nice day. Another patient, a severely mentally ill man, came to ask me specifically how I was doing. He explained his question to me: “As part of your job, you have to ask people often how they’re doing. But do they ever ask you how you’re doing? That’s why I’ve come to ask you how you’re doing.” What a beautiful gesture that was coming from those patients. They had seen me and had expressed their sympathy with me in a lovely way. We can learn a great deal from very vulnerable people.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep

Compassion is defined as ‘the emotional involvement in the emotions of another’. Usually, the meaning of compassion is limited to an involvement in another person’s misery or something unfavourable. The *Lexicon van de Ethiek* (Ethics Lexicon) states the following in this regard:

“However, compassion is also akin to empathy: the ability to identify with the emotions of another person. These emotions can be bad or unfavourable as well as pleasant or favourable, and, in this sense,

compassion is not limited to sharing pain and sorrow, but also joy.” Compassion, then, is sympathy with the feelings of another, both positive and negative. Bear in mind that the literal translation of the Latin word ‘com-compassion’ is ‘sym-pathy’ in Greek. In Dutch, we tend to associate the word sympathy with pleasant feelings. All this reminds us of what Paul exhorts us to do in his Roman letter: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). At first glance, this may not seem so difficult. After all, according to some biologists, compassion is something natural, a loving instinct, which also occurs in other mammals, such as great apes, elephants and whales, especially - but not exclusively - between mother and child (*Lexicon van de Ethiek*). Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep: we do this with our own children, our families, our close friends. But what about compassion towards people with whom we have a more difficult relationship, who bother us, whom we might see as competitors or towards whom we might even harbour



hostile feelings? Are we still rejoicing with those who rejoice if something good happens to our competitor? Or do we feel regret, envy, or resentment because a good thing befalls them? Are we then, in a sense, weeping with those who rejoice? And if something tragic happens to our adversary, do we not take pleasure in it sometimes, or do we gloat, for example in the sense of: “Now they know what it’s like”? Are we not tempted at times to ‘rejoice with those who weep’ then? Weep for those who rejoice and rejoice for those who weep: the opposite of what Paul urges us to do. These are feelings that we do not like to talk about, that we feel ashamed of, but that certainly occur to us, human beings. Nothing (in)human is foreign to us. The Gospel calls on us to Christianize the natural spirit of sympathy, of compassion, that we have towards our own people, and to cherish it towards all people, even those who are not our own, but foreign, or rival, or even hostile. Jesus teaches us that if we are only kind to our friends, we are in fact doing nothing special (cf. Matthew 5:46). To sympathize and feel compassion, even for those with whom we have a hard time, is certainly not easy. This is not an instinct; this is really a choice we are asked to make if we want to live as Christians. A difficult choice, yes, but if we try to live it, it brings us great joy. We can then, in the words of Pope Francis, experience the *Evangelii gaudium*, the joy of the Gospel. ¶

Dr. Marc Eneman
Associate Member



IN THE MISSION OF LOVE

An experience of compassion in a clinical setting

Before I was asked to write the following lines, I never realised how central compassion was in our clinical practice. Working at the psychiatric hospital is putting compassion into action. Working with compassion simply means to work with care and kindness while thinking about the needs and the good of others and ending up being moved by it in every action we take.

One does not need to be a Christian in order to practise compassion but being a Christian gives us more reasons to be compassionate – it may have different names but still it is the heart of every human interaction and clinical practice in particular. Every health practitioner is moved by compassion and where compassion is lost, the essence of humanity is gone and we become heartless.

I was watching the news from a country where a lifeless body of a woman was lying in front of a hospital and the helpless husband standing right next to his dead wife was inconsolable. This woman was still alive when they reached

the hospital but could not be admitted for lack of financial means, and while the man was figuring out where and how to find the money to pay the bills, the poor lady breathed her last; in the hospital, in front of nurses and physicians who did absolutely nothing to attend to her; she was poor, she had no money, she did not deserve to be admitted; she did not deserve to live.

It is unfortunate to notice with consternation that this is the direction our world is taking: where the very tiny population of rich people become richer and the majority becomes poorer, thus eliminating any middle class and creating a gulf between the two classes: the famous scissors that sociologists talk about. I do not want to dwell on this question; it only takes two minutes in front of a screen to understand the current world, which marginalises all those who are not productive and/or useful in the eyes of the modern society: from abortion to euthanasia, from castes to the indifference of all those who are different from us, up to the rejection and discarding or even the physical elimination of them.

All these observable realities, which should alarm us all, seem to be the result of the emptiness that lies in the heart of Man in general from the moment he has decided to detach himself from the very Essence of life: Love, for God and neighbour. This love, being the very nature of God: Merciful and Compassionate – as it is written in Exodus 34:6: “God’s character: compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, overflowing with loyal love and faithfulness.” The compassionate

nature of God guides us in a special way as Brothers of Charity in responding to our call with our motto: “*Deus Caritas Est*” (God is Love) and characterises us by becoming our *modus operandi*, our way of life.



Icyizere Psychotherapeutic Center, Kigali, Rwanda

God’s compassionate nature imagines compassion as a mother’s tenderness for her children, which does not only limit Himself on His words, but moved by His emotions, God is compelled by His compassion to save them: when they are hungry, he feeds them; when they are thirsty, he gives them water, we see in Exodus. Compassion is the opposite of self-centeredness, selfishness. Compassion pushed God to enter into human suffering. Jesus is God’s compassion. Jesus is moved by compassion to enter into human suffering. Jesus entered into death in order to bring humanity to life. He invites us to do the same; that is, feel the suffering of the other, then relieve them and by doing so, transform the world.

We too can embody the compassion of Yahweh in answer to Jesus' words: be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Compassion is the first word God uses to describe himself. That is why, when we are in pain and see others suffering, we can be certain that God is deeply moved to respond and is there to meet us with his deep compassion. Let us be God's compassion to the suffering people. "The Lord is compassion and love," Psalm 103. Love is God's nature through his mercy and compassion.

I am sure that anyone who comes across a similar experience like that of the woman who died in the hospital facilities without being attended to for lack of financial means, will be moved with sadness for her death but at the same time with anger at anyone who has been insensitive to her suffering. This woman is just one of multitudes, billions of other people who die every second that passes because they are poor, mentally or physically disabled; or millions of people who flee from their respective countries in search of a better life. The list is long and inexhaustible and I limit myself here by asking why?

And the answer that I gave myself that day, or that I have always given myself since I met the Brothers of Charity, is that when we start putting ourselves at the centre of the attention in everything we do, we end up pushing the others out of the world; we take away the only thing that we all share and that was given to us by Our Creator: his image and likeness: our human dignity.

I understand that no one would suffer from indifference if we thought less of ourselves and if we gave a little part of our time, of our belongings, of our pride, of our security for the other who probably needs it more. This is exactly what Jesus did when he gave his own life for us. A wise man once said that no one is so poor that he cannot give anything and no one is so rich that he cannot receive anything, and it is in the same spirit that our Holy Father Saint Vincent de Paul said that the poor are our masters. They teach and/or remind us to be human again but they also give us the opportunity to become God's children.



In the years that I have been working in a psychiatric hospital, I have come across different categories of people with different problems arriving day and night in search for help: young people, adults and the elderly with mental illness, substance abuse or co-occurring disorders.

Sometimes the problems they encounter are due to their particular histories, each with his or her own, to their different fragilities, many of them out of their control, or for many young people due to their wrong choices caused by ignorance, curiosity, peer pressure or self-medication, a way for them to deal with life's problems.

Meeting them in both individual and group and/or family sessions made me understand one thing that unites them all: they are human beings who are suffering, distressed. A suffering that is often fuelled by the judgmental or rejecting attitude of others: stigmatisation. Mental illness still being a reality little known by many becomes a subject of laughter and shame for the family having a sick person in their midst. But some health practitioners are likely to make the same mistake and approach them with the same attitude and make the client feel no difference with the outside world's view of mental illness.

These people arrive having lost all hope because not only are they disfigured by suffering, but also, they end up feeling or being convinced that there is no perspective for their future: a double suffering that needs nothing more than a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and a person to receive them as they are; without any prejudice.

This attitude is not only acquired on the school bench, but by developing the art of listening with the heart, which requires us to empty ourselves in order to remain, with a neutral heart, capable of receiving, like an empty basket, everything that is offered to us; it is a kind of *kenosis* which creates room for the suffering Christ in the person of every patient we meet. This relationship transforms despair into hope, and, to put it simply, it is the beginning of a restored dignity; a way of giving to them the joy of the resurrection, as Father Triest would put it.



Developing the art of listening with the heart, which requires us to empty ourselves in order to remain, with a neutral heart, capable of receiving, like an empty basket, everything that is offered to us; it is a kind of kenosis which creates room for the suffering Christ in the person of every patient we meet.

In psychotherapy, healing comes from the client – therapist relationship. Obviously without deluding oneself by setting very high expectations, what motivates me every morning when I enter my office is to think that I am going to meet human persons with whom I am creating

or living a therapeutic relationship or alliance based on their nature - image and likeness of God - and not cases to be treated. In this sense, every encounter becomes an encounter with Jesus himself for me. But it is not limited to me meeting the suffering Christ, but I try to make the other - the patient - meet Christ in me: the Christ who listens without judging as he did with a woman caught in adultery: "Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, 'Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?'; 'No, Lord,' she said. And Jesus said, 'Neither do I. Go and sin no more.'" (John 8:10-11).

Christ healed without discriminating but was always there for those in need. Christ never had an overloaded agenda, especially in front of the one who cries out to Him: he is always there. When I meet a client who is late or cancelled a session without any notice, I try to be as flexible as possible and find time, because I believe that I am there for them and not the other way round. In this way, I try every day, in my little way, to bring Christ to the clients. This is, in my opinion, what makes my practice different from any other mental practitioner.

As said before, this attitude in clinical practice is also underlined by scientists: when talking about what therapeutic environments the therapist has to create in order for the therapy to be successful, humanist Carl Rogers emphasises 3 core conditions:

1. **Empathy:** trying to see the world through someone else's eyes; trying to see and feel their

feelings as they feel them.

- 2. Congruence or being genuine:** being yourself and not trying to impress or play a role; no facades. In other words, we just need to be humans in front of the other human person. As French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas states in the face-to-face relation (*rapport de face à face*) that the human face “orders and ordains” us. It calls the subject into “giving and serving” the Other.
- 3. Unconditional positive regard:** non-judgmental attitude - separating the behaviour from the client, in other words separating the sin from the sinner. (Corey, G. 2006. *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. 8th ed. p. 6).

Our mission of love, of charity is always accompanied by mercy as Christ always did with those he healed: he looked at them with compassion, then had pity on them, adopted a non-judgmental attitude and healed them.

It is exactly at this level that the challenge is found: it is easier to love the one who loves us; to listen to a nice or calm client, but when this same client becomes aggressive, or shows his anger, his frustration towards us, lacks respect or, by his attitude, reminds us of our own weaknesses, linked to self-esteem or inadequate management of our own emotions, this confronts us with our own weakness and, in the face of every threat, everyone tends to defend themselves for their survival. We are not spared. At the end of a therapeutic contract, or termination, I always give thanks to God, not only for the nice and calm

clients that I managed to help but especially for those who confronted me with my own weaknesses: the hardest, the most complicated, the most aggressive, the least motivated and even those who have poured out their anger towards me, perhaps deserved or by projection. I pray for them often and, as a professional, I congratulate myself but, as a Brother, first of all I give thanks to God for this kind of opportunity, which often puts me to the test but which turns into an opportunity to live the essence of my vocation as a Brother of Charity.

The aim of our work is to restore the human dignity lost by the blindness of man through greed, self-centredness, egotism and indifference.

Is it still possible to practise compassion in a challenging environment? If so, how? When we are surrounded by various currents that are far from preaching *kenosis*, emptying ourselves to leave room in our heart for the other? How is this possible when we ourselves are suffering? We have all, more or less, tested positive for Covid, and I hope that this experience has made us much more compassionate with those who are suffering.

We must always have in mind that whatsoever we do to the least of our Brothers, we do it to Christ, to paraphrase Mt 25:40, because we see, meet and love Jesus in the poor, the suffering. We are the hands of the crucified Christ. There is a statue of Jesus without hands in the corridor of our General House in Rome that is a constant reminder of the necessity of extending Jesus' love

into the world.



I “believe in the intrinsic value of every human being, even of the most abandoned and afflicted one” (Rule of Life, n° 16). This is what fills me “with sympathy for men touched and disfigured by suffering” (Rule of Life, n° 13). I also try not to limit myself to the professional practice; when I come across a difficult situation with regard to a client, I do pray for them and abandon their situation in God’s hands.

The experience every Brother probably has is that, anytime we meet clients, they feel at ease and happy around us, and they do not hesitate to confess that to us. Not because we are the best, but because they see in us a Brother who is also a professional, someone who understands them, who feels them, to use the colloquialism.

The Dalai Lama said: “Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive.” Compassion is an inherent human quality but the conditions for compassion to be activated, aroused, need to be created in our institutions. Our health professionals need our good example, our teaching and our service in order to warm up the seed of compassion in them. In this way, we will be transforming all our apostolic environments into hubs of compassion, love and mercy. I personally understand compassion as my mission as a Brother of Charity – as it is clearly stated in our animation guide of 2021.

Joan Halifax said: “Why don’t we train our children in compassion? Why don’t we train our health care providers so that they can do what they’re supposed to do, which is to transform

suffering? Why don't we vote for people with compassion, so that we can have a more caring world?" (TED Talk). ¶

Bro. Bienvenue Kiyombo wa Nyembo



Compassion, an essential component of humanization in mental health care

Often, the word compassion is a term linked to feeling pity or sorry for a person. Also, some people say it from the top down almost with disparaging contempt. So, this misused term is unpleasant for those who receive it, and from that position we could not help the person in their suffering. One of the definitions in psychology according to Paul Gilbert (2015) is that compassion is “the deep awareness of the suffering of oneself and other beings, together with the desire to help avoid it”.

The current research suggests that compassion fosters states of well-being and helps people to cope better with suffering. Today, we know that the attitude of health professionals, especially mental health professionals, has the power to increase or decrease distress in users and anguish in their families. However, not all professionals are aware that compassion is a skill that can be developed through practice, but that requires conviction and personal work, as well as a well-founded spirituality from our history of salvation, placing humankind at the center.

Therefore, in the Specialized Center for Mental Health – COSMA, an apostolate of the Brothers of Charity in Peru since 2010, with each of the members of the professional team, we strive to incorporate this essential attitude as Christians in the style of our founder Father Peter Joseph Triest, day by day. This is strengthened because, several times a year, as a team, we reflect and pray to act compassionately when interacting with our users who come to us with different needs, symptoms and sufferings. This is a value



that makes us identify with the charism of the brothers. We learned not to *see* the user as a statistic or a group of symptoms but to *look* from his inner self with *love*, encouraging and continuously strengthening the compassion that involves observing and recognizing Jesus in him as a human being who suffers. Therefore, during the intervention, we strive to be sensitive to the suffering of the person. That motivates us to act with openness and welcome them from the love of God to alleviate their suffering and bring well-being to them and their families through various actions such as good treatment, empathy, respect, active listening, showing interest in their health problem and delivering the best of our being, knowledge, and skills.



Several times a year, as a team, we reflect and pray to act compassionately when interacting with our users who come to us.

Here is a recent testimony, as a sample of the relief we provide to our users:

“For me, COSMA means support, family, affection, because they are composed of specialized and trained professionals. I am truly very grateful to COSMA, because it helped me tremendously to turn my life around. I still remember the

situation in which I arrived and all that I have been through, what they have helped me with, and today I have a better life, I live better with my family and emotionally I feel great and I always thank COSMA and the Brothers of Charity.”

“I came to COSMA with problems of self-esteem, insecurity, panic attacks, but now I feel much better. I have learned many techniques to control my anxiety and be more stable emotionally. I would highly recommend COSMA because the specialists are very kind, they know how to listen, understand, provide solutions and give through care with love. I thank COSMA for their concern for our mental health especially at this particular time of COVID.”

Finally, in this time of crisis, I would like and hope that compassion, in the style of the Brothers of Charity, would be like the “virus” that spreads without limits throughout the world, and then we would surely be a different society. ¶

Mrs. Cristina De la Cruz

Associate Member



Educate their children

The Father of the Nation, the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere was once confronted and asked by journalists in an interview, “What is the best way to help the poor?” His answer was, “The best way to help the poor, is to educate their children, give them the best education, that’s all, and the rest will come.” This also reflects Fr. Triest’s response to the reality he faced in his time after the French Revolution in Belgium. Mwalimu Nyerere’s vision to empower poor people through education was evident in his administration. He instilled this spirit and asked religious institutions to invest in education, and so many religious did so, and are still investing a lot of resources in building different schools, colleges, and universities to heed this call. In Tanzania, it is believed that if you want to get the best education you have to study at one of the religious institutions, especially those run by Catholic entities. Many influential people, including the former heads of state in Tanzania, went to Catholic schools. For example, Mwalimu Nyerere himself was educated by the Maryknoll Fathers, the late President Benjamin William Mkapa studied with the Benedictines, and even a Muslim, former President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete studied in Tengeru School in Arusha that is run by the Spiritans.



The best way to help the poor, is to educate their children, give them the best education, that's all, and the rest will come.

Catholic education seeks to impart not only knowledge but also Gospel values, and the Brothers of Charity in Tanzania were not left behind in fulfilling this vision. It is also in line with the dream of the late Mwalimu Nyerere to empower the poor through education. Several initiatives were taken from the beginning when the Brothers of Charity first arrived in Tanzania in 1994. From the start, the first pioneer brothers, such as the late Bro. Gabriel Subiyanto, Bro. Marcellinus, and others from Indonesia, were involved in the school for the deaf in Tabora. Then came education for the youth in Kigoma with the foundation of the famous Maendeleo Youth Centre by Bro. Stan in 1997. From there, other doors were opened, e.g. the taking over of Newman High School, the start of the Newman Institute of Social Work by Bro. Johan Bruers, and Ahadi Institute, which was dedicated to the education of refugees. All of these initiatives are still aimed at improving the quality of life of the people we serve and meet every day, through education.

Today, the Congregation of the Brothers of Charity owns and manages the Kigoma Training College, born from the then Newman Institute of Social Work. The name had to be changed to accommodate the emerging of new needs and courses. At the moment, Kigoma Training College has a total of four courses, namely Social Work, Community Development, Clinical Medicine, and Law. All these courses are in high demand, and a good number of students are enrolling every academic year. This is because once they finish their studies, they are competitive for the job market and can easily be employed to earn a living and build a future.



Many of our students come from poor families. Despite the affordable tuition fees, many students can still not manage to pay, and they have to rely on a special bursary or the college has to waive some of the amounts so that they can realize their dreams. We try not to send away students based on their inability to pay, but we

also stimulate those who are capable of paying to do so, for the programs to continue. This is how the dream of the founder of the nation is lived in our region. To ensure that a good education is delivered to these young people so that their tomorrow can be full of hope and they can be responsible citizens in their country.

As we notice that the college is growing so fast and the demands are many, we realize a lot has to be done to respond to the many needs. For example, we need to expand classes, hostels, acquire didactic materials and furniture to accommodate the growing number of students. It is very important to improve all these aspects to have a conducive environment for learning. What has been realized so far comes from the generosity of people of good will who are touched by the efforts made and the commitment of the brothers and the co-workers, who are working devoutly to realize this dream. We are still hopeful that Kigoma Training College will excel and become a center of education par excellence, where professional skills and values are imparted for a systemic change. ¶

Bro. Chrisantus Rwehikiza



The ability to enter into the feelings of another with love

In October 2017, I got a phone call from the late Brother Kaunda, our then regional superior, who, before saying thank you, told me: “Congratulations, Baba Pasco.” I wanted to know what the congratulations were for or rather what the compliments were for? I went on and asked him. He said that he was attending the ‘Joint Witness’ meeting, which was a meeting of the major superiors in Southern Africa together with the Southern African Bishops Conference members, which takes place twice a year. He went on by saying that the late Bishop Sandri announced during the plenary that if you want to learn how to run a boarding school you should go and learn from the Brothers of Charity at Pax College. Then, the late Brother Kaunda told me that he was asked to stand up during the meeting. He was congratulated and given a round of applause for Pax College being the best Catholic boarding school in South Africa. He told me that he was really humbled and felt honored. “Wow!” I said, “that’s great, Baba Kaunda. We thank God and we give glory and praise to Him, for He is the one who has enabled us to do what we do.”

After that phone call from Bro. Kaunda, I started thinking about what could have made us the

best Catholic boarding school. Surely, it is not the buildings, because our buildings are old. So, what could it be? I was puzzled. Maybe the experience of 94 years of Pax? The same statement was made during the Third Catholic Schools Congress on Education, which took place in Randburg in September 2019, and the same call was made by the Director of the Catholic Institute of Education of South Africa Anne Barker, who said that if you want to learn how to run a boarding school or you want to establish a boarding school, go and learn how to do it with the Brothers of Charity at Pax College.

Since then, we received a lot of people and groups from other boarding schools, even public schools, coming to us to ask us how we do it. Some do come and stay with us for a few days and see what we do or how we do it. Some bring their staff members and others bring the prefects along to come and see and learn. Some schools call us to ask us about the recipe we use to run a boarding school. Unfortunately, we don't have such a recipe. Both public and Catholic schools do come to learn as they were told to. When they come, the first thing we tell them is that the best way for them to learn is for us to do what we do with them, such as when we go to wake up the students early in the morning, we go together, and mind you; some of us sleep in the boarding houses, I mean we run the program together with them for the duration they will be here. After a few days, they will start complaining, saying that this is too much, it's too demanding. They will start asking us questions, such as, "Don't you feel tired?" and "When do you rest?" From

this point of view, we started realizing that most of the things we do could be the same, but what makes us different from them is first of all our presence as Brothers of Charity. From there, we came to learn that the difference is about the care we give to our students because we live with them. Therefore, out of 365 days, students spend 273 days with us, which means they are only at home with their parents for 95 days a year and



in most cases for those students' parents work very far away, so they only see them during the December holidays. However, we need to step in and play the parental role, as well. It's all about parenting, hospitality, mutual care and availability. When a boy is sick, we take him to the hospital, sometimes very late at night. The brothers wait by the bedside or on a bench in the waiting room till the parents arrive to take over. If the parents are very far away, we stay until the boy has been discharged. Therefore, we have developed the ability to tune ourselves into their feelings with love and compassion. We share life

together, happiness, sorrows, etc. When we are called when a student loses one of his parents, for example, we are always asked to break the news to the boy, which is a very difficult task, but, we do it and stay with him till they come and take him home. On the day of the funeral, we go there to accompany the boy. Our presence together with the presence of other students from school that we go with brings a lot of comfort, not only to the student, but also to the family. We join them for their prayers, we eat together and we give them a shoulder to cry on when they are going through problems, such as academical, social, psychological problems, etc. I think the latter is one of the definitions of compassion. We have learned that compassion is like a key opening a stiff door: it invites you to be yourself and to share yourself, to experience that nobody is alone in our school and that joys and troubles shared become moments of grace and growth. Otherwise, “if your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete”. In his letter to the Colossians, Saint Paul said that we should be clothed in sincere compassion (Col 3:12-15). What do we do then that makes a difference in our school, which makes Pax different from other Catholic boarding schools? It is very simple. First of all, we are Brothers of Charity and therefore we are obliged to live charitable lives with those whom we serve and at the same time we need to show them compassion. A pocket Oxford English dictionary defines compassion as “a concern for the suffering of others”. For us, these “others” include the students in our schools. You may agree with me that compassion could

be one of the handiest values for an educator or a teacher to live in a school set-up and more especially in the boarding school set-up. Why I am saying this is because, in schools, we usually operate with rules and regulations, codes of conduct, time tables, school policies, etc., and the understanding of many is that, in schools, students should not make any mistakes, everything has to go according to school policy, regulations, rules and codes of conduct, and, if you are not careful, you may lose your human side when you don't look at students with a compassionate eye or don't put yourself into their situation, because they have to follow rules and regulations, then everything is fine even when nothing is. For example our school financial policy says that each student is supposed to pay the boarding fees at the beginning of each term. Suppose the parent who pays for this particular student dies or loses their job in the middle of the term, and the students need to come back to school after the holidays with a slip showing that they have paid before being admitted in. What should we do? Chase the boy from the school? Or see how to help him? These are the areas where we do look into with compassion and this is what makes us different from other boarding schools. Of course, we need money and students need to pay but there are some circumstances where you need to enter into the feelings of the other. A student has been with us for 4 years and they don't have any money to pay for him... Should they go and start looking for a new school for him, whereby he needs to start afresh, make new friends, etc.? Or do we find a way to ensure that this particu-

lar student completes his studies here at Pax, because this is the only school he has known all this time?



Compassion is like a key opening a stiff door: it invites you to be yourself and to share yourself, to experience that nobody is alone in our school and that joys and troubles shared become moments of grace and growth.

One or two years ago, there was a boy here who was in the boarding school from primary school, and when he went to secondary school, the mother lost her job or stopped working due health issues. She came and removed the boy from school saying that she could not afford it. One day, in the early hours of the morning around 03:00, I was awakened by a phone call from a boy who was just crying on the phone. The cry on the phone was like someone who really needed help. I tried to ask what the problem was. But he couldn't utter a word, he was just crying. I had to wait for several minutes in order to get the reason why he was crying. After waiting for long time, he told me that his mother had just died in the house and he was alone with the dead mother. It was very early and I really wanted to sleep, but I realized that the boy was

alone. I called him again and asked him if he was able to call the police. He indicated that he didn't have a phone number of any police station. I wanted to ask him if I could send him the number of the nearest police station but I realized that the boy was alone with a dead body. After a few minutes of silence on both sides, I told the boy that we were coming. I asked him if he could send me his location, which he did. I got up and went to knock at the door of another brother, who asked me what was the matter at that hour. I told him that Junior had just called me to say that his mom had just died and that he is alone in the house. I asked the brother if he would come with me, but because it was very early in the morning and he wanted to sleep, he asked me several questions, saying why can't the boy just call the police or one of his relatives. I told him that if he wanted to do that, he would have. However, after long discussion he asked me to give him a few minutes to get dressed and go and get a car from the garage. When we left the house, we didn't tell any other brothers because it was too early. We did tell the whole story to the security at the gate, who also tried to discourage us, saying that it was too early and not safe, but we had overcome our fear, knowing very well what the boy was going through. When we got there, we went to the police station first, and together with the police we went to the house. We went inside and found the boy. We calmed him down and the police asked him if he had any relatives and their numbers. He told them that he had his grandmother's number. She lived several kilometers away. She was called and she indicated that

she would arrive no earlier than the afternoon as it was very far, so we had to wait for her to leave the boy in her hands. Meanwhile, the police had taken the details of how his mother died and asked if she was sick. The boy indicated that she had headache, so the police called the forensic unit and the funeral parlor to come and take the body, which they did several hours later. We wanted for the grandmother and other relatives to come and when they arrived, we left the boy with them. We went there again and we were there on the day of the funeral, but from that moment on we didn't hear anything from Junior until early this year when a student who lives close to him came by and told me that Junior



was not looking good. When I asked him why, he told me that he was really going through a lot of problems. I asked for Junior's phone number and I called him. I asked him what the problem was and how his grandmother was doing. He told me that his grandmother and his aunt, whom we saw at the funeral, has passed on last

year in 2020. I told him that I was so sorry to hear that, and that he could count on us if he needed anything. However, he never communicated. One day, we went to a funeral of another student's parent and, on way back, we went to see Junior. The state in which we found him was not good. I suspected that the boy was on drugs. So, I asked him but he denied it and said only that life was tough on him. After Easter break in April, the student came to me again and told me that he was afraid because Junior was talking about suicide a lot. We had to go and look for him and bring him back to our school.

Therefore, to live this value of compassion is easier if you have ever experienced it. You will know that it is one of the essentials of any good relationship, either in a family or in a school set-up. Because it is the ability to profoundly know the joys and troubles of another and to enter into them. You might sometimes ask yourself what is really going on inside the people I am close to, my students, my co-workers, my brothers in the community, etc. Because, sometimes, we may live close to people and yet be unaware of how they are really doing.

The other day, some boys carried another boy into the office. This boy was crying; he was in pain. When I asked the boy what the problem was, he indicated that he had stomach pain. I stopped what I was doing and I took him to our dining room and made him some tea. Then, I gave him some medicine, took him to the guest room and asked him to rest. At lunch, I brought him some food. But then, I completely forgot about the sick boy sleeping in the house. Later

in the evening, I was in the dining room and he came to me and said: "Thank you, Brother. I'm going to the dormitory now. I'm feeling better." I apologized to him for completely forgetting that he was there. I said I was so sorry, but then he started crying. I asked him why he was crying because he just told me that he was feeling better. He told me that he was suffering like that because he had HIV/AIDS since childhood and his parents are dead because of HIV/AIDS. I felt very bad and I calmed him down and said that he mustn't cry. Moreover, he asked me several questions why was he suffering like that and he said that he prayed a lot at school, so why wasn't God answering his prayers. I had no precise answers to give him, instead I said: "I do not know what to say or what to do, my boy, but I want you to realize that God will not leave you alone and I will not leave you alone." I asked him about the lady who brought him to Pax and who comes to see him and comes to parents' meetings. He told me that she was his aunt, so I said that that's how God is answering your prayers, by giving you such a loving aunt who takes good care of you. And we, the Brothers of Charity, are here, as well, and we will be always there when you are not feeling well. I could see that the boy realized that he was not alone in his sufferings. Such students, who are terminally ill, sometimes keep us up all night, when they feel sick and there is nothing we can do. We can't take them to the hospital because they have medication, so we have to sit with them till morning when we call their parents or guardians to come.

I am very sure these are some of the contribut-

ing factors to why Pax, our school, has become the best Catholic boarding school, where other schools can come and learn. We also build on the experience of many years of running a boarding school; Pax is 94 years old this year. According to others, we have tried to become the best boarding school, where other schools can come and learn or invite us to come and help them to establish a boarding school. Why? Because we have learned to live very close to the students and serve them with love and compassion.



The other area which is a big challenge for us as educators and Brothers of Charity is that 75% of our students are from single parent homes, mostly mothers. Moreover, we experience a lot challenges with their growth, especially when they reach the stage when they want to know who their father is. Sometimes, when the mother remarries, for example, it becomes a problem to them. This mostly leads them to start misbehaving in school or they end up using drugs. These misbehaviors sometimes lead them to be

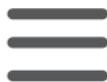
expelled from school. But before it comes to that, we always tune into their feelings, and try to see if there is any other possible way to help the boy instead of just reading what is stipulated in the code of conduct. We try to sit down first and find out what could be the problem that causes the boy to behave in such a way. This helps us a lot to sometimes find an alternative way of punishing the boy rather than throwing him out. This doesn't mean that we want to condone what the boy did, but we want to give him a chance.

As teachers or educators, youth ministers, youth animators, brothers, etc., we have come to realize that when we talk about compassion, what matters most in the lives of young people such as our students here, is not really when we teach them how to write, count or think. What really counts is that, in moments of pain and suffering, someone stays with them and listens to them. More important than any particular action or word of advice is the simple presence of someone who cares. When someone says in the midst of a crisis: "I don't know what to say or what to do, but I want you to realize that I will not leave you all alone."

Therefore, we strive to live this value of compassion every day. As brothers, we are able to show compassion to our students, by spending time with them, either in Church, in the dining hall, on sports fields or in the classrooms, and listen to their personal problems and try to help them by all means to overcome all the difficult situations in their lives so that they are able to excel and reach their goals in their lives and, more importantly, to be their father figures. By living

as a family we are able to show kindness, caring and a willingness to help them in their time of suffering. Through this, we have created a loving environment in which students are able to express themselves and are able to open up and be helped in all aspects of life. ¶

Bro. Pasco Chola



People with different abilities

Our Special Education School “CEPETRI” for children with different abilities, is an apostolate founded by the Brothers of Charity in 1998 in Peru, after several experiences of service to children and young people with different physical and intellectual “disabilities”, and their families in the north of Lima. The literature refers to people who have acquired or have been born with some characteristic that does not fit the standards to adapt to what society has to offer, or to the globalized world, where production, worth and efficiency are not only measured in indicators such as “the years lost due to a disability”, or in the promotion of a “throwaway culture” as the Holy Father Pope Francis often points out; where the essentials of the human being are left aside; and so an atmosphere of prejudice, suffering and anguish develops around the person and their family.

On the contrary, CEPETRI has adopted an educational model inspired by other experiences where the person is not seen from his disability but from his abilities, and that is why he/she is a *person* with different abilities, in the way they will express his/her needs and full development as children of God.

By placing the person at the center we recognize

that suffering is inherent in everyone, and that we need to develop compassion for both the giver and the receiver, to feel cared for and at the same time aware of our nature as children of God, otherwise we would be indifferent and it would lead us to forget the dignity that is enclosed in every person: we would look at the suffering of others with indifference and with the tendency to increasingly ignore that reaction that is awakened in every human being when he/she meets the other and that is called “compassion”.



As we read in the Gospel, we come across the following: “Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate” (Luke 6:36). This is not part of the commandments but an invitation, it is the other side of a coin to love, to discern our condition as children and not as masters. This invitation to compassion is the great lesson of Jesus to humanity, especially to those whose humanity is not recognized or valued, or as it is pointed out in our Constitutions *Moved by Charity*, No. 13:

“disfigured by suffering”.

We have learned life lessons from many experiences in the work and care of our children and their families at CEPETRI. We must learn to look at the concrete face of people. To recover the experience of welcome, closeness, accompaniment: Compassion. To be responsible for others, to be able to educate, to love and to feel compassion, are essential verbs that we can constantly see in the attitude that our founder Peter Joseph Triest had, and it is not by coincidence that our school bears his name: School of Special Education Peter Joseph Triest, in short (Spanish): CEPETRI.



We must learn to look at the concrete face of people, to recover the experience of welcome, closeness, accompaniment: Compassion.

That is why in CEPETRI we strive to make our identity and the commitment of each team member not only rely on their science and technical competence, but to make hearts move beyond sympathy; mainly towards a compassionate and loving attitude because we are together. How important it is then to strive to create truly human bonds, to support children and their families, to open them confidently and serenely to reality, to

be an authentic meeting place, where the true
and the good are given in their right harmony as
a result of true *compassion*. ¶

Bro. Jimi Huayta-Rivera



Compassion in the apostolate

It is sometimes said that compassion is easy. The hardest task is to really help. This is true in a sense, but real helping often comes from compassion. Helping can be the expression of a powerful inspiration coming from compassion. I recall the story of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel. Without his compassion, there would have been no help at all. And yet, being moved by compassion can also be very difficult and troublesome, especially if you have to look on powerlessly or if there is little that can be done. But the purest and most powerful love of compassion is to be found in standing by others powerlessly and with compassion.

For many years, I was responsible for a small support initiative of the Brothers of Charity in Knesselare, Belgium and every year I saw dozens of people come by my office with a story filled with struggles. I was moved hundreds of times by compassion, but also by powerlessness. People quickly sense whether you are listening to their story with true compassion or whether you are just doing your professional duty. Often, you have to acknowledge your powerlessness based on your compassion and/or refer people on, but people feel strengthened because they are being heard, because they feel the compassion. Often, they come back later just to talk or to thank you for your heartfelt sympathy, your compassion.

Sometimes, you are not powerless at all and then you embark on a journey together. The following two testimonies are such stories of journeying together, moved by compassion and driven by professionalism.



1. There is a man in his late 40s sitting in front of me. He is about to be discharged from hospital and is looking for a place to stay, as he can no longer live at home. While he was in hospital, his wife filed for divorce and the justice of the peace ruled that the woman could stay in the house with the four children. The man is completely shattered. He is also showing signs of physical suffering, as he can no longer see very well out of both his eyes. The latter is the result of a wrong combination of medication following his treatment for a psychosis and a muscle disorder. I hear a very complex story of much willingness, powerlessness, mental and physical suffering, and a marriage situation that has become impossible. The story grabs me by the throat and makes it painfully clear how life can take very unwanted turns. The man's hands

are not exactly clean, but his request for help is more than justified. It is not for me to pass judgment, but I do see the dire situation in which this well-meaning man finds himself. I listen patiently to his whole story of ups and downs, and his hopeless search for a place to find peace and to be able to put everything in order so that he can make the right decisions for the future. I can only acknowledge his painful situation and his request for help as being justified. From my professional point of view, I inquire about the medical support that is already in place, and it appears to be very well structured and actively present. I tell him that his story is important to me and that I will look into what we can do for him.

A few days later, I ring the man to tell him that he is welcome in our small shelter initiative and that, together with the resident brothers, we are going to see what we can do for him. If only to offer him a place to rest where he can look forward to a new, more permanent home. However, something in me says that there will be considerable unrest, as well. I do not know where to start with this support and relief, but it is good that compassion is taking over from reason in this case. His story, grief, and struggles have affected me too much to stay on the sidelines. My faith and trust strengthen me to simply set off with this man, together with the brothers. The road ahead is going to be very long.

A lot of pain and sorrow from the past and from the marriage comes to the surface. The divorce turns into a very messy dispute and the worst

fight of all is to be allowed to see his children on a regular basis. The counselling consists of offering support for many grieving processes and at the same time keeping hope alive for a better future. My involvement ranges from listening to all the problems to helping write letters to all kinds of authorities, seeking legal support, and managing financial affairs. Once I am inside this man's whole story, it is impossible for me to stand idly by with advice from afar. We share every step of the way together and I go through both progress and setbacks with him. And yet, I remain a stranger to the story, because it is not my story, but my compassion helps me to take steps with him sincerely and actively. Of course, there are limits, because I am only human, but we accept each other's limits, because we are aware of how valuable we are to each other.

Commitment and compassion lead to a form of Love that gives powers beyond what nature can give you; as Father Triest would have written. Together, we are building a new life for this man, even if it is temporarily without the children or it seems to be a rather bleak life.

After more than a year in our shelter, he now has his own studio, finds a sense of purpose in volunteer work, and has contact with one of his children. Afterwards, he looks at himself with a compassionate heart, at what has happened, and at his past marriage. To this day, we regularly meet to talk about the ordinary things in life or the more serious ones, but in both our journals, compassion and gratitude are at the top of the agenda as we contemplate and plan

our journey together.



The purest and most powerful love of compassion is to be found in standing by others powerlessly and with compassion.

2. There is a woman in her early 50s sitting in front of me. She is completely exhausted and despondent. After a successful life full of dedication, and a family of four, she is left utterly exhausted and isolated. For several years, she has been struggling with pain, fatigue, and a frantic search for the meaning of her life. From the very first time we spoke, I noticed her dependence on medication. After numerous treatments and procedures, she has reached the end of her tether and is looking for a place to rest and not be alone anymore. I am subjected to a torrent of words about not being understood and bottled-up anger. But I also notice her fighting spirit and her struggle with both God and man. She has no lack of material possessions, her own house, her own car, some savings in her bank account, but she is consumed by being misunderstood and rejected. Her cry for help cuts through me like a knife, but I shy away from her dependence on medication. I am gripped by her woeful story, her obvious distress, and her physical appearance.

All this affects me deeply, my heart cries, but I am concerned about her medication dependency to allow her a place in our relief initiative. She is willing to come off this dependency and is almost clutching at the straw that she could possibly stay at our shelter to recover and find new breath to live. I feel this woman's deep pain and recoil, but again, compassion wins over reason. The night before she comes to stay with us, I hardly sleep and I pray to God and all the saints to help me. I receive her with an open mind and my compassion gives me strength to start the journey with her. It will be a long road and a very intense grieving process, starting from the rejection of her own mother to being exploited by her husband. She always used all her strength and a lot of effort to be accepted, but now she is drained. With her remaining strength, we search, we fall, and we get up again and again. But she lives from the stability she has with us at the shelter initiative. After an initial long period of stay, she regularly returns for one or two weeks at our shelter. It continues to be a difficult story with permanent physical exhaustion and deterioration, but also with spiritual and mental growth. She gets psychological support from professionals and keeps coming back to us, even today, years later. She appears to have found something with us that she can hardly find anywhere else: compassion, intense involvement and spiritual guidance in her search for meaning. Her dependence on medication is long gone. Much suffering has remained, but it is contained and surrounded by compassion. The search

remains, but the companions are more sincere,
more real, and in helpless moments they do not
run away. ¶

Mr. Hans De Weirdt
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