

Lackner, Paul M.
The Corporal ---

ADT 4558

826954



THE
CATHOLIC
HOUR

*The Corporal
and Spiritual Works
of Mercy*

REV. PAUL M. LACKNER

JULY 12, 1959

Deacidified

“Apostolate To The Blind”

Blindness is a very severe handicap. It is severe for those who are born without sight, or who lose it in childhood. It is severe for those who are deprived of vision, whether suddenly, or slowly, in their adulthood. For these, it means the end of a life of sight, and the beginning of a life of blindness, with all that such a life implies.

Blindness is accompanied by certain losses. Some of these are quite obvious. Let me dwell on three of them for a moment:

First, there is the loss of mobility — a loss that makes one unable to get from place to place, one that fixes the blinded person to the spot where he stands, causing him to be a very dependent being.

Second, there is the loss of the means of intellectual growth. The blind man cannot pick up the newspaper and turn to a favorite sports column, or take a monthly trade magazine, or a monthly religious publication and read them from

cover to cover, as does a person with sight. And, of course, the world of books, a very enjoyable pursuit for many, is a world closed for the untrained blind.

Third, there is the loss of the techniques of daily living, such as, dialing a telephone, personal hygiene, eating and drinking, dressing and personal grooming — this is indeed a loss that brings in its wake a thousand frustrations and embarrassments.

There are other losses, but it is not within the scope of this address to enumerate or analyze them. But all is not lost when vision is lost. It is possible to restore or replace many of the losses through rehabilitation. Here I mean the rehabilitation that is given and experienced at a center where the staff is professional and competent. Indeed, there are many blind people who have gone to such "institutions" and have profited very greatly from the training they have received.

I have spoken briefly, very briefly, on three losses. They were chosen because volunteers can be of very great service to the blind in those particular areas as I shall explain a little later on.

Anyone wishing to become a volunteer to help the visually handicapped

should offer his services to a recognized agency engaged in work for the blind. A prospective volunteer may be put to work as a staff assistant in the office — in addressing envelopes, typing letters, or in helping in fund-raising campaigns. All of these chores are important in helping the agency perform its general over-all program for the blind.

Or, the prospective volunteer may be assigned to a blind person to help him for any number of reasons. We sincerely hope that agency officials will do the proper screening before such an assignment is made. Certainly motives should be questioned and analyzed, and this should be followed by a period of indoctrination on the nature of blindness, and the losses that come when blindness occurs after the age of reason. During such a period, the director of volunteers will be able to measure the ability of all who are being trained and assign each to his area of specific competency.

Such a period of study will give the teacher the opportunity to erase many mistaken notions commonly held by many about the blind — notions, for example, that blind persons are different than other people; that in compensation for the loss of sight they are endowed with a sixth sense; that all blind people

are geniuses, or that all are morons; that most blind people are good musicians. And, I repeat all these notions are false.

Once assigned to work with the visually handicapped, the volunteer should remember this important rule. It is his primary duty to be "eyes for the blind." This cannot be stressed too much. He should not assume the role of mother, or father, or protector. He should not seek in any way to dominate or direct the life of the person to whom he is assigned. But, I repeat, he should "be the eyes for the blind."

The Catholic Guild for the Blind of the Archdiocese of Boston has composed a pledge for the volunteer. It contains a philosophy to which I fully agree. Permission for me to read it to you was graciously given by officials of the Guild. It is as follows:

"I pledge myself to be the eyes of the blind.

I will try with all that lies within me to be free of false feelings about blindness — feelings that blind persons are strange or different — feelings that they have a sixth sense, or a miraculous compensation — feelings that they are geniuses, or that on the other hand, they have warped or twisted personalities.

I will attempt to know completely what I am now beginning to recognize, that there is no common personality pattern among blind persons. And I will try always to see each individual blind person with whom I come in contact as an individual human person with an individual human personality.

I promise in speaking of my work never to attempt to raise a false pity for the blind — but only to teach people the truth about blindness, a most severe handicap to which human beings react in their own individual ways.

And my actual relationship to the person to whom I am assigned will be the relationship which is assigned to me. I accept these volunteer opportunities in order that I may assist persons who are blind. Generally speaking, the very best assistance is that in which I am only 'substitute eyes.' This will mean that I will refrain from any attempt to influence the life or actions of the person who is blind — leaving this to others whose responsibility it may be. I will not try to be mother or father or sister or brother to the person who is blind. I will not allow myself to be financial benefactor to him. Nor will I own or possess him. Nor make him dependent on me — nor myself dependent

on him.

I pledge myself to be the eyes of the blind — and not to attempt to be something more. If this I do and this I do for God — then my time is indeed well spent — no matter what other problems there may be that I myself would wish to solve."

The volunteer, the eyes of the blind, can be helpful in many, many ways. He can act as a guide, thereby helping to restore the loss of mobility. To perform this service intelligently requires that he walk about a half step in front, while the blind person holds his elbow, or holds his forearm, just in front of the elbow. This method prevents the blind person from being propelled, or pulled by the volunteer. Rather does it mean that he is being guided, as he should be. The trained volunteer can be of great service in going with the blind for a walk, on a shopping trip, to church, to visit a friend, to a baseball game — yes, to any one of the hundreds of places that sighted persons are accustomed to go in daily life.

The volunteer can serve as a reader, not just to read a book — but whatever that person wishes to be read to him. It may be an item in a newspaper, an article in a magazine, a recipe from a cook book, the schedule of Masses in a Church

bulletin, an advertisement that came through the mail, the Dick Tracy comic strip.

Again, our volunteer may be needed to help in some household chores. This may be true for the aged blind, especially those who have lost their sight very late in life and who have had no training in adjustment to the years of blindness that lie ahead. There will be assistance in the preparation of meals, the mending of clothes, the writing of letters, the repair of a screen door.

In all these acts of kindness and charity, the volunteer should realize all of them are important, even the little things.

When they are done out of love, they are reminiscent of the love shown by Him Who when He walked the earth gave sight to the blind. "Caecus Venit, Christus Venit." This is a Latin expression which loosely translated means: "Whenever the blind person comes and is aided, then Christ is present and our charity is charity to Him in the person of one of His members".

Since many within the range of my voice are members of the Catholic faith, I should like to make a strong appeal that their kindness, not only to the visually handicapped, but to all who may be

served by them, be not confined to Catholics alone, but be given regardless of race, color or creed. This, I believe, is the true Christian spirit, symbolized by the arms of Christ extended on the cross to embrace everyone.

There are many volunteers working with the blind in this country, not only through state and local agencies, but also through the some twelve Catholic Guilds for the Blind that have been organized in the last twenty-five years. These guilds provide volunteers to act as guides on retreats, as guides for attending Mass and the Sacraments, as instructors of Catechism classes for blind children. Of special note are the hundreds of volunteers who braille Catholic literature for the Xavier Society of the Blind, an agency under the jurisdiction of the Society of Jesus. This institution, with headquarters in New York City, has been in existence more than fifty years, and is rightly considered the pioneer Catholic agency engaged in work with the blind. It provides Catholic literature through its lending library, as well as makes available missals and prayer books. And in recent years it has arranged for the recording of the New Testament, The Lives of the Saints, and the Catechism for those who prefer to

use the talking book.

Many of you listening to this broadcast may never have the opportunity to engage in volunteer work for the blind. Yet, sometime during your life, you have or will, meet a blind person. Here are a few helpful hints to follow — hints that will avoid unpleasanties for both you and him:

HELPFUL HINTS TO EASY STEPS WHEN YOU MEET A BLIND PERSON

DON'T BE EMBARRASSED ... When you are introduced to a blind person, don't assume that you are meeting someone odd or different. He's the same as any other stranger. After you get to know him, you may like him — or you may not. But at least give yourself a chance to make a new friend.

DON'T KEEP EVERYTHING TO YOURSELF ... Don't take it for granted that a blind person won't be interested in the book or magazine you're reading just because he can't see it. If it appeals to you, it may be interesting for him. Give him a chance to find out. Try discussing the contents with him.

DON'T "CARRY" A BLIND MAN ... If

his only handicap is blindness, he is perfectly capable of walking on his own two feet. Let him take your arm — the movements of your body will guide him. He'll walk along with you so naturally that most of the people who pass you won't realize that he is blind.

DON'T LET YOUR SYMPATHY SHOW

... Most blind people have learned to live with their handicap. Openly expressed pity is a sign of bad manners. Of course, you may meet a martyr type occasionally; you meet them in all walks of life. They're not much fun to be with, but thank goodness, they're not typical.

DON'T "GEE" WHEN YOU MEAN

"HAW" ... A blind person can't see the way you're pointing — so don't say "left" when you mean "right". A wrong turn could lead him into danger — at the very least, it could make him lose his way.

DON'T INVITE A BLACK EYE

... Half-open doors can be very dangerous. A blind person could injure himself seriously by bumping into one. Keep all doors which may be used by the blind either fully closed or opened flat against the wall.

DON'T BE MUM ... When you enter a room which is occupied by a blind person, or he comes into the one you're in, speak to him. If he doesn't recognize your voice, tell him who you are. You'd do the same for a sighted person, wouldn't you?

DON'T STAND LIKE A STICK ... Always shake hands with a blind person when meeting or leaving him. Remember, a cordial handshake and a word or two are the same as the friendly smile he can't see.

DON'T MAKE A PRODUCTION OF IT ... You needn't be too obvious, but try to see that a blind friend meets the people around him — at a party or in any group. If you can, identify each person by a word or phrase and don't fail to mention each name.

DON'T BEHAVE LIKE A KEEPER ... A blind person can make up his own mind about what he wants to do — where he wants to go — what he likes to eat. These are things he can decide for himself. Give him any help he asks for, but don't try to assume responsibilities which are rightfully his.

USE YOUR COMMON SENSE ... Many blind people can do most things for themselves, and some of them, like many sighted persons, don't want help unless they ask for it. Use your common sense and give each blind person credit for being a normal, intelligent person.

DON'T OOH AND AAAH ... Take it in your stride when a blind person does the ordinary thing in a routine manner. Don't gasp with audible wonder when he consults his watch, dials a phone number, or signs his name. He's learned to do these things by study and practice, not by a miracle.

DON'T SLAM THAT DOOR ... A blind person depends on his fingers. They serve as his eyes for reading, to tell the time, to do any number of things. So don't slam doors of rooms, or buildings, or automobiles, if there is a blind person around. In fact, it's rude to slam doors at any time.

DON'T CLOSE THE WINDOW ON LIFE ... A blind person doesn't necessarily lose his interest in life when he loses his vision. He still knows what is going on in the world, and he's probably still keenly interested in many of the things

he used to do.

DON'T PUSH ... Never push a blind person ahead of you into a strange place. In fact, don't ever do it whether the place is strange or not. Let him take your arm. When he "sees" what you are doing, he'll follow without hesitation.

DON'T SHOVE ... Tell a blind person where the seat is, or put his hand on the arm or back of the chair. He can sit down without your help. Pushing him might make him fall, an embarrassing situation for both of you.

BEWARE OF THE DOG ... That is, beware of diverting the attention of a guide dog. He is a working dog, doing a very important job. Patting him or offering him food might distract him.

DON'T FADE OUT OF THE PICTURE ... Never leave a blind person so quietly or so abruptly that he doesn't know you've gone. He might find himself talking foolishly to the empty air. And you know how silly you'd feel doing that.

DON'T SHOUT ... Just because a blind person can't see you, don't make up your

mind that he can't hear you — or doesn't understand English. He is probably a very normal person except for the handicap of blindness.

DON'T EXPECT THE IMPOSSIBLE ...

Remember that each blind person is an individual — with individual characteristics. He has his own likes and dislikes — his own capabilities and limitations. Treat him as you would anyone else. It is a fallacy to believe that all blind people are either geniuses or morons.

ADDITIONAL COPIES
ARE AVAILABLE FOR \$.10 EACH.

BULK LOTS MAY ALSO BE
HAD AT THE FOLLOWING RATES:

10 TO 99 COPIES.....	\$.05 @
100 COPIES AND OVER.....	.04 @

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC MEN

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Presented by

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC MEN