

Getting to know Matt Palkert and Outreach Ministries

Matt Palkert is the Coordinator of Outreach Ministries for St. Mary of the Lake. In early June, Matt sat down with parishioner John Brock for an interview. The first half of the interview ran in our last issue. This is the second half of the interview.

By: John Brock

What are some of your long term goals for the Outreach Ministries?

One aspect of the Parish vision is ensuring that St. Mary's is a welcoming and hospitable community. To that end, we have started developing the structure that will help us grow into the welcoming experience we all want it to be. The recent establishment of the welcoming and hospitality committee is one important step in this direction.

Secondly, we want to build meaningful relationships with parishioners so they turn to us in times of need. We know many people feel like they are bothering us with their needs, but quite the opposite is true, we sincerely want to help.

It's sad when we hear that a parishioner needed support we could have offered, if only we had known. It can be hard to ask for help—as a human being, as a Minnesotan—and yet we want to continue to grow a culture where St. Mary's is viewed as a resource when our parishioners are in need.

In terms of serving the senior community, it is important to Fr. Talbot to help seniors plan for end of life, to answer any end of life questions that might be on their mind. It is also a priority to help seniors get to church and other gatherings that they would enjoy. So transportation is on our minds.

Are there any goals for the broader Parish community?

We are a very generous parish in many ways. This is something to celebrate because it is a sign of our love for those in need. As we serve others, I think it's important to ask ourselves two questions:

1. How can we, as a Parish, develop a sense of kinship with the people we serve? To see those who we serve as brothers and sisters, as people we share a connection with. Pope Francis routinely reminds us about the importance of relationship and encounter. It strengthens our love for those in need.
2. In addition to our charitable responses, how can we address the root causes of the needs we are addressing? How can we prevent and work towards ending the grave situations that many find themselves in – living in poverty or without a home, feeling like abortion is the only option, falling victim to sex trafficking, etc.?

These are challenging questions, but important to be asking as a people of faith seeking to respond as fully as we can to our community and beyond.

Well, those goals will keep you busy for a while. I know that you were recently in Latin America for the beatification of Oscar Romero. Can you share a little of that experience?

The beatification took place during Mass on Saturday morning with an estimated 300,000 people in attendance. There was a huge stage and we stood slightly behind it, watching the Mass on a jumbotron screen. We were standing close to the procession pathway for the 1,500 priests, bishops, and cardinals that came from all over the world for the beatification.

The Rite of Beatification took place within the Mass, and was rather simple. Relics of Romero were presented, including the shirt he was wearing when he was shot on March 24, 1980. The Mass itself was beautiful. The people participated with such enthusiasm and spirit. It was certainly a privilege to be there with so many from Latin America who were celebrating their hero and honoring this man who embodied the love, compassion and justice of the Church.

We were also able to visit some of the places associated with Romero, including his apartment and the chapel where he was killed. His apartment has been preserved as it was on the day he died. Monsignor Romero lived so simply: he had one pair of shoes, three shirts, and a small number of books. This was truly a man of the people, and most of the people he served were poor.

I first learned about Romero when visiting San Salvador in college. Romero inspired me then and has ever since. On this trip, the thing that stood out to me the most was Romero's staunch commitment to both prayer and social justice. His prayer reminded him what the struggle was all about. It renewed him, and gave him the courage to seek justice while many were threatening his life for doing so. And his commitment to seeing Christ in the poor and standing up for their concerns led him to a deeper relationship with God, which he nurtured in his prayer. I have to ask myself, as a follower of Jesus, as someone who looks up to Romero, do I have this same commitment to both prayer and social justice? Do I see them both as integral to my faith?

St. Mary of the Lake has a strong commitment to both prayer and social concerns. We come to Mass to renew our relationship with God and one another, to give thanks, and to be sent forth. And we bring God's love to the world, especially where healing and justice are needed most because we believe this is our call. Romero is a model for me to live my faith fully, and I am blessed to work for a Parish that encourages us all to do the same.