

EMBRACING A CHILD'S LOVE FOR ALL!

Today, I am in awe of the loving example of children. They amaze and humble me. They make me realize the significance of finding joy in each and every day.

For the next five minutes, I want you to do me a favor. Imagine what it felt like on Christmas morning when you woke up to twinkling lights and an evergreen tree lined with gifts left by Santa. Try to envision the ecstasy of a Christmas that was accompanied by snowflakes on the tip of your tongue. Please refrain from allowing thoughts of shovels or snow blowers to creep into your flashback! I'm sure you will agree that the wonder of Christmas still brings out the child in you and me.

I still get that tingling feeling up my spine as I walk down Michigan Avenue in Chicago with family by my side at Christmas. The lights, the smells of fresh popcorn and roasted chestnuts, the sounds of carols in the air, a hot chocolate in my hand—I experience that same joy I felt as a child.

Yet, that feeling of excitement is nothing compared to the feeling of elation I experience when I hear “O Come All Ye Faithful” at midnight mass and when I kneel in front of the crèche before heading into that winter wonderland.

After reading an article recently that stated many wise scholars professed the Messiah would be recognized only if he was wise as Solomon, charismatic as David, and had the military genius of Joshua—I smiled thinking that the Messiah arrived as an innocent baby; just a helpless little one, who at first glance looked like an ordinary child.

You and I are assured that we are able to follow in Jesus' footsteps because we can envision him as a helpless child in that manger. We are reminded of both his humanity and divinity as he moved through each developmental stage of life. He crawled as a child, he struggled through those teen years, and he was challenged as he reached adulthood. He is one with us---we are children of God.

The challenge comes as you and I reach adulthood. But, unlike Jesus, we tend to drop those childlike qualities that are meant to stay alive within us as children of God: trust, innocence, abandonment to God's will, forgiveness, a love for all, and joy!

Jesus repeatedly told his disciples to let the children come to him. He always embraced a child's love for all! He reminds you and me that trust in the Father and a childlike love for our brothers and sisters is clearly the path to joy and peace in this life and it is our way to heaven. “I assure you, unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of God.” `Matthew 18:3

I have a feeling Jesus knew that “change” would stretch you and me out of our comfort zone. As we reach adolescence and adulthood those negative experiences, disappointments, and unfulfilled dreams often burn us out. Those experiences often leave you and me jaded. We begin to see less of the beauty within individuals and notice more of their flaws.

On the other hand, children look at



people and they just see people. They don't see labels or stereotypes. They see beauty where you and I see imperfection. Children embrace a love for all. And, that love for all is exactly what Jesus calls you and me to embrace.

At Catholic Charities, we are reminded to let that inclusive love of a child guide our choices daily. We strive to embrace complete trust in God's grace and guidance as we serve people of all ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and faith traditions. And, that is precisely what you do when you embrace our mission with a child-like faith and your compassionate support of the seventeen programs of Catholic Charities.

You see the potential in a single parent who needs help pursuing post secondary education in order to obtain gainful employment and a hopeful future for her child. You feel empathy for a grandmother who cannot afford her medication and longs to regain her health in order to create lasting memories with her grandchildren. You feel the pain of a young couple in need of counseling as they deal with family struggles that have them question their commitment to each other and their ability to cope.

With the love of a child—you see the poorest of the poor and the vulnerable as part of your family needing a helping hand in order to reach their full potential. In fact, last year because you embraced a child's love for all, you helped transform the lives of over 7,900 individuals. You not only embraced joy—you created it for those in need.

This Christmas when you hear the lyrics echoing "Oh come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, come adore Him born king of angels..." I hope you envision the love of the Christ child—I hope you feel that tingling up your spine as you are reminded that Jesus is calling us to change and become like little children again and to embrace the loving example of a child. I hope you feel an overwhelming joy.

Our board members, staff, volunteers, and all those you serve through our hands, hold you close to our hearts this Christmas. We are forever grateful for the blessing of you in our lives.

May this Christmas bring out the child in you and me! May the wonder and joy radiated that first Christmas stay alive within you and me. May we all change and embrace the love of a child.

Joyous blessings,

Mary

Mary Alessio

Director of Advancement

