Corporal Works of Mercy—Visiting the Sick

When we think of doing works of mercy, we often think in terms of charity—giving money to a worthy cause or starting a big project like a food shelf or a homeless shelter. These are good and necessary things, but they are not the starting place for mercy or charity and, if we’re not careful, they can even work against charity. The place to start is with individuals, each human person. To truly love as Jesus loves, we must practice the art of seeing people and of being present to them in their weakness and their strength. This is why visiting the sick is such an important work of mercy. Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical God Is Love notes how vital it is for the Christian to practice love of neighbor by seeing Christ in our neighbor. He writes, “Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave” (18). When people are sick, especially if they are chronically sick or mentally ill, they begin to feel less than human because they fall out of the mainstream of life. Your presence, for whatever time you can give, reconnects them to the Body of Christ and to the active life of the world. You don’t have to be a skilled caregiver; you simply have to be yourself and be present.

~ Reflection by Deacon Chris Walchuk, Parish Social Ministry Director, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Winona