Opinion

Guest Voices



Volunteer Walter Rogers, 83, helps Merrill Hancock, 87, load the groceries he received May 12, 2025, from the Eastside Community Ministry pantry in Zanesville, Ohio. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)



Thomas Reese

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @thomasreeseSJ

Religion News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

July 23, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A scholar of the law tried to trip up Jesus by asking him, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Like any good teacher, Jesus turned the tables on him and asked, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"

The scholar gave a good answer: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." He then asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In response, Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Today, we still ask, "Who is my neighbor?"

Is it the student having trouble in school? Is it the senior citizen near where I live who does not have any family or friends? Is it the homeless person who cannot afford housing? Is it the mentally ill bag lady I pass on the way to work? Is it the unwed teenage mother on welfare? Is it the undocumented Hispanic man working in the underground economy? Is it the cancer or AIDS victim slowly dying in hospice?

Related: Good Samaritans are everywhere today

Jesus would answer, "Yes. All the above." All of them are our neighbors. We see them every week as we pass through their neighborhoods.

But these are only our local neighbors. The late Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan reminded us that with modern communication systems, we now live in a global village. Today, we see our neighbors in the newspaper, on cable news and on social media. Our neighbors are the victims of floods in Texas and New Mexico. They are immigrants being imprisoned and deported. They are victims of war and hunger in Gaza. They are being persecuted for their faith in China. They are refugees from wars and climate change in the Middle East and Africa.

Jesus wants us to be good neighbors to all these people.



Alejandro Campos sweeps the floor at a makeshift donation center at Center Point High School in Texas July 7, 2025, in the aftermath of deadly flooding. (OSV News/Reuters/Sergio Flores)

The church used to make us feel guilty every time we had a dirty thought. Now, it is making us feel guilty every time we look at the news because Jesus is looking over our shoulders and asking us what we are going to do for those in need. It is enough to make you want to cancel your newspaper, turn off the TV news and bury your

head under your blanket.

Despair is easy for anyone who takes seriously the call to love your neighbor as yourself. But hope can come in two ways.

First, it is important to see each of these neighbors as an individual — not as a statistic.

There is a story about a man walking along the beach after a storm stranded thousands of starfish up on the shore. The starfish were dying. The man saw a small child picking them up one at a time and putting them back in the ocean. He asked the girl why she was doing it since she could make so little difference. The girl responded, "It makes a difference to the ones I put in the water."

Advertisement

While we may not be able to help everyone, it makes a difference to those we do help.

Second, we are not alone, like the child on the beach, in trying to save the world. Jesus' words are addressed to all Christians, and we respond not just as individuals, but as a community that works together and supports one another in our efforts. That is what it means to be members of the body of Christ. When we work together, we can accomplish so much more.

How do we become good neighbors? There are at least three ways. First by being a good citizen, second by being a volunteer and third by opening our pocketbooks.

Being a good citizen means taking an active part in determining the priorities of the community.

Related: Trump's 'big, beautiful bill' is a huge, ugly disaster

Some people believe government should only provide for law and order, and leave everything else to the marketplace and private charity. But Catholic social teaching from the popes reminds us the state is also responsible for making society more just and peaceful. Not just as individuals, but through our government, we must express our concern for the poor and powerless. Being a good neighbor means working for racial justice, for understanding among peoples and for the preservation of the

environment.

How to best do that requires study and research, but government is our way of working together for the common good, justice, peace and environmental protections.

We as Christian citizens should be ashamed when Medicaid and health care for poor Americans are cut back, when the United States Agency for International Development is closed down and programs helping victims of AIDS in Africa are eliminated, and when funding for scientific research and climate change are gutted. Christian citizens must demand better of their government.



A volunteer collects rubbish during a beach cleanup campaign organized in conjunction with the Earth Day celebration in George Town, Malaysia, April 22, 2024. (OSV News/Reuters/Hasnoor Hussain)

Second, being a good neighbor means being a volunteer. Not everything can or should be done by government. Catholic parishes and other organizations have

numerous programs where volunteers can help the community.

Finally, being a good neighbor means being like the good Samaritan who opened his wallet and gave money to a person in need. This is not a pitch to give money to the church. This is a pitch to give money to the desperate and the powerless. Catholic Charities facilitates this in the U.S., and Catholic Relief Services does so outside the U.S. Every parish has local projects it supports. And there are non-Catholic charities doing much good that you could support.

We are one of the most blessed communities in the richest country in the world. Those who have been blessed must be more generous.



A village woman greets a Catholic Relief Services worker in Ipwizi, Tanzania, as CRS celebrates its 60th year of presence in Tanzania in March 2023. (OSV News/Catholic Relief Services/Carlos Barrio)

How much should you give?

Some people say we should tithe, or 10% of our incomes. Others talk of sacrificial giving, or giving until it hurts. I don't know what the right answer is. I would ask you to think about how much you spend on beer and cigarettes, concerts, movies and streaming services, eating in restaurants, vacations and your summer wardrobe. Then ask yourself how much you gave to your neighbor in need.

The parable of the good Samaritan is a challenge to us all. It is the challenge to be a good Christian. It is a challenge to put our time and our money where our mouth is when we claim that we love our neighbors. The love of the good Samaritan is not an abstraction; it is a practical response to someone in need.

Jesus went beyond the command to "love your neighbor as yourself." He loved us more than he loved himself; he laid down his life for us. When we gather as a community to celebrate the Eucharist, we unite ourselves with his love. We renew the new covenant, which is a covenant of love: God's love for us, and our love for God and our neighbor.