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My Glass is Half Full

Mark Pickup is a disabled man (triplegic) with advanced multiple sclerosis. He is also columnist for the Western Catholic Reporter in Edmonton, Alberta. He tells of his experience of finding out for himself what the message of Opus Dei was all about

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I was having a telephone discussion with American author and bioethical thinker, Wesley Smith. At one point during our conversation, he asked

me if I had ever considered joining Opus Dei. As a matter of fact, I have flirted with the idea; I've been receiving their electronic newsletter for a few years.

The Opus Dei website says, " Opus Dei is a Catholic institution founded by St. Josemaria Escriva. Its mission is to spread the message that work and the circumstances of everyday life are occasions for growing closer to God, for serving others and for improving society" (see www.opusdei.ca).

Negative publicity

That sounded pretty good to me so I decided to attend an Opus Dei meeting. I did not know what to expect, and I was a bit hesitant with all the negative publicity given to the organization recently. We are living in a time where the Catholic Church is under increasing attack - fuelled by hostile secular media bias - so I

decided to give Opus Dei the benefit of the doubt. That was good, as I would soon discover; the negative publicity is unfounded.

The church where the Opus Dei meeting was held had a number of people quietly praying before the Blessed Sacrament. There were no sinister monks (albino or otherwise) lurking in the shadows. That was the bigoted anti-Christian fiction of Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*.

Spending time

A priest delivered a half-hour reflection. He spoke about time: The difference between wasted time and time well spent serving God, our families and communities. It was good stuff. I could relate to the message because I have so often been guilty of idly wasting time when I could have put it to good use serving God or others around me.

When the priest finished his reflection, there was opportunity for Confession for interested participants.

In an adjacent room to the chapel, an Opus Dei member gave his insightful thoughts about prayer. Again, his reflections spoke directly to me. I need to adopt a disciplined approach to my prayer life. So often I have neglected serious prayer time in favour of wasting time with frivolous diversions that do nothing for my spiritual life.

Then we made our way back to the chapel for meditation before the Blessed Sacrament and a final reflection by the priest to assist those present with their Christian walks.

I think I might join Opus Dei. Granted, I have been unable to work for years because of multiple sclerosis. But my circumstances of everyday life - relegated to a

wheelchair and plagued by fatigue of a degenerative disease - have proven to be fertile ground for growing closer to God. Already in my personal disability journey spanning more than two decades, I have been able to serve others facing the consequences of catastrophic disabilities or chronic illnesses.

In my small way, I hope I've been able to serve society. Perhaps that service to society takes the form of bearing witness to inviolable dignity of all human life - even imperfect human life, like me.

Valuable presence

Do the disabled and chronically ill have worthwhile contributions to make to our families, our communities and to the greater society? Yes, I know we do. We are not lives unworthy of life, as some have asserted by their words or deeds. We have contributions to

bring to the table of the human community, even if it is only by our presence.

We can challenge society to include those who may be difficult to include, or those who bring discomfort to sophisticated or polite company. We call those around us to a higher standard of love and friendship.

We can knock at the door of mainstream society and demand admission and reasonable accommodation so that we can find our rightful places in the world.

We are worthy

If the disabled and incurably ill despair of life, we need people to lift us up as indispensable members of society and worthy of life. We do not need the abandonment of a utilitarian society eagerly agreeing to assist with our suicides, or

euthanasia of those who can't communicate to defend themselves.

Contrary to what bioethics may promote, our rightful places in the world are not graves or crematoriums. That is not inclusion. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are nothing less than abandonment of the profoundest nature. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are ways of telling people that their lives are unworthy to be lived.

A person like me is increasingly viewed as a liability to society. I need an organization like Opus Dei to encourage and mentor me to use my circumstances of everyday life for "growing closer to God, for serving others and for improving society."

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