

## **Fostering Empathy** *By Deacon Tim Sullivan*

Empathy is having a deep appreciation for others, for what they are experiencing, what they are feeling, and putting ourselves in their place.

So empathy begins with understanding that every person has a basic human dignity that must be respected, no matter who the person is. The next step is to be curious and open to learning what is going on in the life of each person we encounter.

Pope John Paul II wrote about what he called “the peace of the interior gaze.” What he meant by this is that when we meet someone, we look at them, not casually, but to see what is happening inside them. So we look into their eyes, observe the look on their face and even their posture. Are they happy, sad, anxious, tired, peaceful? We go out of ourselves with a concern for the other.

Empathy begins in the family. Husbands and wives model empathy by displaying a sensitivity to each other. They extend this sensitivity to their children. The children share this sensitivity with each other, and then every member of the family takes this empathy outside the family to the broader community.

Empathy is far more than feeling sorry for someone. It’s treating every person you meet as more important than you. It’s being truly happy for them if they are happy, regardless of what we are feeling for ourselves. And if they are sad or in need, if they need a lift, we offer that to them.

*“If one part [of the Body of Christ] suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.” 1 Corinthians 12:26*