

## GEORGE

There was one thing I did not know when I opened a letter addressed to me from St. Germaine Parish in Oak Lawn, IL; that single act would change my life forever.

The form letter asked me to volunteer to minister to the sick or confined members of the parish. In my opinion, being asked to do such a thing as this is an honor. All of the people who accepted the invitation were required to attend a series of classes offered by the Chicago Archdioceses. These classes were held on Monday nights for eight weeks. Altogether there were several hundred people enrolled in this course and nine were from my parish. This was the first time these classes were required; a change made under the direction of the new Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. Some of these classes were excellent and some were an insult to one's intelligence.

The best class was the night the speaker had us perform a telling exercise. We were not to move until the speaker finished giving all of the instructions. This exercise would have us separated into five groups of people. First he told the oldest children, but not an only child, to go to the northwest corner of the gym with their chairs. The next group was to go to the northeast corner and that consisted of all those present that had older and younger siblings. Next, the youngest of each family was to go to the southwest corner of the gym. The fourth group was the only child and they were sent to the southeast corner. As he was talking, the speaker did point to the appropriate corners so that the less gifted or lost people in that gym could find the correct location. At last he tells us to move to the appropriate spot. Meanwhile, he takes care of some business with a nun who was at the podium with him.

Everyone began to move and was in full motion for several minutes. I went to my corner. Without anyone speaking, we formed two circles with our chairs. A woman in our group asked: "Who are we going to have speak for our group?" and a man asked: "Who will keep the minutes for whatever we are to do?" All were agreed that these two could perform these tasks, seeing as they thought of it. I was thinking that they were never in the military. Volunteer for more work for free? Forget it! At this point we were all moving our chairs, unconsciously, to form neater and tighter circles with an empty spot in the center.

"Do not move! Do not move anymore!" came the request over the P.A. system, louder than before. We all turned to listen and see him speak. The speaker had removed the microphone from the stand and continued to speak while facing away from us. "I have this good sister next to me for only one real good reason tonight" he said. "She is here to confirm that we have never met before tonight and that I have been turned away from all of you good folks since giving out the directions." The smiling good sister (or nun) confirmed this as he put the mike in front of her and turned around to look at us. He then told her she could go and join her appropriate group, if she could remember what that was. She left the stage and went to her group, although I do not remember which one.

The speaker repeated his command to not move anymore and told us we would soon see why. There were still a few people left standing in front of the stage. He asked them publicly why they had not moved to join any of the groups. Before anyone had a chance to respond, he answered his own question by saying they must have been adopted. We all laughed. The sad part was we laughed because they all looked lost. The fact is, however, that being adopted is not a laughing matter. They were not laughing. In fact, several adults were crying. Of that group, several were orphans that had never even been adopted. Their loneliness at that moment was very real and upsetting to me. "Where did they belong?" was my only selfish and thoughtless question. I thought he was only talking about natural families. It never crossed my dumb mind that these good people were suddenly outsiders with no identity in this place.

"OK, this is what I want you all to see tonight. We are all different and we do not all have the same perception of the same event. Do not move unless standing is a problem for someone and if it is, sit down in your chair where you are." Some people did sit down at that point. "OK, if you will all look to the N.W. corner of the gym at the oldest children, what do you see?" Everyone saw two neat circles of chairs with people in them. "Did you people elect a chairperson yet?" "We have a spokesperson and a secretary so far," our chairperson yelled. "Wonderful, wonderful" came the retort. "Look over here. You people are not even seated yet. Can anyone guess who these people are and what they represent or do not represent? My good people, do you all see that we come from different backgrounds? Look around the room at everyone. These groups are all different and at different stages of organization. But look! Each group is of all colors of skin, some thin, some heavy set, some older, some younger, some nuns and some nurses. The ones of you who will administer to the sick must remember this above all else: never try to figure out why you are there or why they are in the bed/hospital. Your day will come also. Just be a friend to them above all else. We are all of the human race." This was his last remark and we all applauded as he left the stage.

There was a small group of people in front of the stage that night that did not go to any corner. They were standing with tears in their eyes. They were adults who had never been adopted as children.

Several months later, my first Sunday as an auxiliary person (or lay priest), I went to see this man George who was dying. He was over eighty years old. Some of his relatives from around the country had arrived at his small apartment. I offered to come the next day, Monday, and they said, "Please do." I took communion to him daily for what turned out to be the last four days of his life on this earth. I do not know why I did it, but I just did. I was moved and just glad to help for the days that I could.

His sister asked me to attend his wake. While there, I was asked many different questions by different relatives. These are the questions asked that night. "Do you know who his best friend was all of his life?" Do you know who was with him in the

trenches during WWI in France?” “Do you know who was his best man at his wedding?” “Did I know who had just died a week earlier?” “WHO SENT YOU?” I was getting very uncomfortable with these people. Not knowing what they were looking for, I answered, “How would I even know the answers to these questions?” The relatives could see that I was starting to become annoyed, based on my tart answer to their questions. Then they would walk away after asking these questions. I could only guess they wanted another answer or that I had bad breath or smelled funny. One more question: “Did you know about the sign?” Finally, my friend and my pastor, in 1984, Father Godert came into the wake. Upon inquiring about these strange questions, I got a response. “Didn’t they tell you? You have the same first, middle and last names as his lifelong best friend!” The “sign” was to be from his best friend, sent from heaven.

When you stop to think how long the Lord was working on this, what a miracle it seems. The Good Lord had one last earthly gift for George Quane; a very happy death thinking his best friend came to give him communion for those last four days of his life.

FYI: It would appear the relatives felt a cruel joke was being played on them, hence the interrogation. They were finally convinced of the authenticity of my identity and that there was a slight case of mistaken identity. The other perk to this story is that a relative returned to the church after a long absence.