

CALLED TO BE CARING

A family received notice that a distant relative in Scotland has passed away leaving them all his property. The family is excited to learn that among other holdings, this relative had a wool business that turned a little profit every year. They decided to go to Scotland to investigate whether they should continue the business. Upon arriving they find a farm with a flock of 400 sheep grazing on the hills. All seemed well until they began going over the business ledgers where they learn that five years previous, there had been a thousand sheep. They asked the business manager about this, and he said that a lot of people have moved recently. It's hard to find good help. "But why have the number of sheep gone down." "Well, the manager said, there was a flood one year, another year we had trouble with thieves, and basically speaking, there aren't a whole lot of people willing to go into the hills and risk life and health for the animals."

Good shepherds are hard to find. A good shepherd has to recognize the value of the sheep. A good shepherd has to be willing to take risks to protect the sheep. A good shepherd has to care.

When I was in education I used to come upon teachers who did little to nothing. A history teacher would have a kid read the chapter. On test day he would circulate a test prepared by the textbook manufacturer. During his classes the kids would fool around, their noise often drowned the reader. The teacher would just sit there. He knew many would fail the test. Big deal. He didn't care.

As a priest I have found some parents behaving the same way. High school children come home anytime of night or morning. These parents don't want to be bothered with a fight. If the kid gets in trouble, that's the kid's problem. As parents, they just don't care.

I have found priests behave the same way. A person needs help getting their marriage fixed. Father, is not going to be bogged down with the detailed annulment work, or saying Mass in a nursing home, or giving special convert classes to people who can't attend the organized class. They just don't care.

Along with shirking their responsibility, the uncaring teacher, parent and priest also communicate something to their subjects. They tell them that they have little value. They are not worth being concerned over.

Jesus cares. He is the Good Shepherd. He values each of us. He goes whatever extra distance each of us needs to bring us back into his flock. His care for us gives us value.

And he calls us to give value to his people by caring for them. We can't close our

eyes to someone who needs help. We have to empower them to stand on their own two feet, but no matter what their situation, no matter what hard words or feelings may have been expressed, we can never cut them off from our care. Not and at the same time claim to be followers of Christ. Your daughter ran off and moved in with someone. You are still furious. You still move from sorrow to anger. But you can't cut her off. She's pregnant now and the guy dumped her. Or she's living in a small apartment. You have got to be sure she is getting proper food and medical care. You have got to care, not just in your heart, but in your actions.

As Christians we have to be like our Good shepherd.

He has made us his children. Now we must bring the love of our Father to all, just as Jesus did. We have to care. It is in the definition of who we are. We are Christians.