

Monday evening a group of our parishioners got together to talk about needs in our neighborhoods. This is our Church Community Organization, or CCO. These parishioners have conducted 100 interviews one on one with people who live in our neighborhood, to ask about their concerns. The results won't surprise you. They're concerned about the loss of businesses on Blue Ridge Boulevard and the kind of businesses which have replaced them. They're also concerned about the youth; it seems that young people in our community don't have enough positive entertainment opportunities. There are other concerns: the safety of homes and property values, for example. But the group wanted to commit to one goal and they decided to focus on youth. We've got a city-owned public park between Little Sisters and St. Regis, could we get some equipment installed? Could we challenge the businesses which we suspect are selling tobacco products and alcohol to minors? It was a good meeting Monday night. A lot of helpful ideas came to light. What struck me most, though, was the level of commitment. Here are some people who live in our neighborhood, love our neighborhood, and want to improve our neighborhood. They have established a relationship, and they feel committed.

Commitment sometimes sneaks up on you. You may have no idea it's coming. You may suddenly realize that you're committed to a cause you didn't even know you cared about, like crossword puzzles, soap operas, line dancing, gun control, or a neighborhood. Other times you go into a relationship fully intending a commitment. Marriage is the best example and I'm grateful to Billie and Helen today for manifesting that kind of commitment here in front of all of us. Parents will also commit to a child, and a child will commit to parents.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul talks about another commitment, the commitment that Christians make to Christ. He says that commitment begins in baptism, and ends with eternal life, and in the middle we should be living out the commitment we've made. To illustrate his point he chooses the dramatic example of baptism. "We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death." Paul's community probably baptized by immersion as we do here in this font at the easter vigil every year; in fact, today's passage from Romans is also proclaimed at the easter vigil. Catechumens go down into the water; they are buried in the water, but they are buried with Christ. So that they may rise with Christ. For Paul it's this "with Christ" business which is the hallmark of Christianity. Baptism gets us going; we go through this ritual down and out of the water to show death and resurrection with Christ. But there's more. Once we have died with Christ, Paul says we must consider ourselves dead to sin. We must give up whatever pulls us away from Christ and dedicate our entire lives to him. Baptism is the symbol of what follows in resurrection, and in the middle we commit to Christ.

That commitment to Christ will be manifest in many ways. In how we spend money, in how we pass free time, in where we choose to work, in how we behave at the workplace, in the way we pray, and in how we repent. Our commitments to marriage, family, church, and Christ, will fill our lives with meaning and our days with peace.