

The Lone Ranger Builds a Church

In the movie “Lilies of the Field” (1963), Sidney Poitier plays Homer Smith, an unemployed construction worker. When he happens upon a group of nuns who are working a farm and serving local people, in the American southwest, the Mother Superior sees him as an answer to her prayer for a chapel for the people who have no place to worship. Homer is eventually persuaded to do the work, supplies are obtained, and the work begins.

When the locals show up to help build their chapel, two problems come up that are common to all of us in the church. The solutions work for us, too.

1. In his conversation with Mother Superior, Homer justifies his refusal of help and his insistence on “building it myself” because of his life-long desire to “build something.” What other good desires can we have that result in shutting others out?
2. Mother Superior is not sympathetic in her reply: “God is building the chapel. You sit here feeling sorry for yourself because you are not Him?” How did she change the focus? Why does that change our perspective from “me” to “we”?
3. Homer then begrudgingly accepts their help, but refuses to provide leadership. For what reasons, some of them good reasons, do we also leave volunteers to figure things out of their own? What does a group of workers lack without leadership?
4. Homer finally took his place as leader of the team when his friend reminded him of the purpose of the chapel. How often have you reminded the teams you lead of the purpose of their work? What difference does it make when we keep our purpose front and center?

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