



Cultural Values and Your Warm Body

By [Charles Vogl](#)



Every community leader that I meet with wants to tell me about the values of his or her organization.

There's nothing wrong with this.

But I know that what people say their values are, and what the most prominent values prove to be, don't necessarily align. They rarely actually do. The stated values are often aspirational.

Nothing wrong with this, either.

So how do you know what the real values are?

One of the things I look for is, Where do members put their "warm bodies"? Where we actually put ourselves says far more about our values than anything else.

In my early 20s, I volunteered full time at the Catholic Worker house in Orange County, California. The Catholic Worker Movement was started in the early 20th

century by the now famous social justice activist Dorothy Day. Today's Catholic Workers do many things, including feeding and housing homeless people.

One afternoon at the house, I remember, volunteers and homeless guests were sitting in one of the common rooms. One of the homeless gentlemen mentioned that he was unable to cut his own toenails because of his poor health and limited flexibility. Without hesitation, worker Dwight offered to take care of his toes on the spot. With permission and in just a few seconds, Dwight was on the floor taking the man's shoes off.

This man had been living on the streets for months. I don't know when he had last had a real home. His clothes were deeply soiled and his feet were seriously neglected. The smell alone made me uncomfortable. But if any of this mattered to Dwight, he gave no sign of it.

In other words, Dwight put his warm body next to the homeless man who had casually mentioned his limitation.

From that moment, and many others like it, I understood that the Orange County Catholic Worker house actually valued service, dignity for all guests, humility, and more than a little bravery. Whatever is written on their website doesn't matter.

When I visit a church, as I do around the world, I notice if parishioners and or clergy approach me to greet me. I'm looking to see if they put their warm bodies near visitors because they value welcoming strangers. Nothing wrong if they don't value strangers. It is also hard to include strangers when you don't welcome them.

When someone in your group shares having a time, goes to the hospital, is stranded at an airport, do you notice where members put their warm bodies? Are there warm bodies near people in difficult times?

If your leadership complains that new folk don't want to get involved and stay around, have you noticed who puts their own warm body near them when they visit?

When you consider the communities important to you, perhaps those you aspire to grow, I wonder what you will see when you notice where you and your fellow leaders put your warm bodies?

[Read more articles here](#)