

# What's In a Name?

By The Rev. Richard E. Grant



Among the Thursday morning regulars at the Union Rescue Mission are (left to right) Dr. Tom Bates, Bernice and Norman Dockery. Not shown: Fr. Dick and Amy Grant, Randy and Nancy Blue.

**W**HAT'S IN A NAME?" QUERIES Shakespeare's Juliet, as she ponders the meaning of "Romeo" apart from the name. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." It was their family names that made Romeo and Juliet mortal enemies against their will. For better or for worse, our names are part of what makes us who we are.

There are other tragedies that come when our names are unknown—when, in effect, we have no name.

We name a person "homeless" by the way he looks, is dressed, ambles down the street, or approaches us for help. We can see by the vacant gaze and resigned despair, by the hopelessness that comes after days, months, even years of having no place to call "home," that the person before us is "homeless". We think of him as a pariah in our society.

What would such a person call himself? First, a homeless person has a name and a history. "I am Joe Doakes from Oklahoma. I was born there fifty years ago and worked as a roofer, supporting my wife and children. A year ago I lost my job, and then my car, and then my home. My wife took the kids to live with her people. Now I have nothing except what I wear or carry in this paper sack. Last month, I lost my driver's license."

Secondly, such a person would identify himself as a human being, with feelings, intelligence, aspirations and dignity. The last two are pretty

much gone while the feeling of abandonment and the danger of the street are ever threatening. The weather can be hot, cold, humid, rainy, or a combination. The nights are scary and lonely. No ID, no shelter, no drinking fountain, no toilet, no place to wash hands, body or clothes. Nobody knows he can think. Nobody seems to care. That hurts.

IDignity calls these people "clients." IDignity is a coalition of five downtown Orlando churches trying to help restore some measure of dignity and hope to the city's homeless. Once a month we meet with representatives of the Orange County Health Department, Homeless Services Network, the Florida Division of Driver Licenses, and the Social Security Administration to help our clients secure a license or birth certificate so that they can access shelters, food and health resources, and jobs, to get off the streets.

My wife Amy and I, along with other volunteers, sit and take down names, birthdates, and histories so that we can begin the process. I can't describe the look of hope that comes into many of these faces as someone asks questions and bothers to listen to their responses. Nor can I describe the feeling of fulfillment we feel when we call these brothers and sisters by name, and see dignity lift their heads and fill out their frames; we offer them a "hand up," not a "hand out."

Is your name "Christian"? A Christian should be no less than a "neighbor," I would think. And who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:29-37) PR

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