

My dear friends,

The word, “accompaniment,” is one we have been focusing on for several months now as a priority in our Archdiocese. We have done this by way of following the lead of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who has called us to accompany others in their journey of life, and in this process, to help them find Jesus in their midst. The work of accompaniment is summed up by Jesus when he tells his disciples “anyone who wants to be first among you must be the last, and the servant of all.” (MK 9:35)

You are volunteers. You give of your time and your human skills to accompany others, often in difficult circumstances. I know you don’t do this for recognition. You do this as a matter of the heart – of your heart touching the heart of the Lord, who then moves you as an instrument of His grace. None of you has come here tonight, nor shown up tirelessly at your ministry or service day in and day out, for the purpose of recognition. But you do so because your heart is open. And this is good.

However, tonight I want to take this opportunity to thank you! In the name of the Lord who has called you, and in the name of the poor or needy whom you serve, I want to say thank you! You give meaning to the word, accompaniment, by your very presence! You are the Church, alive, and carrying forth the mission Jesus has given to us. It is not a burden! It is a gift! For, surely, we are the ones who are blessed by our encounter with others, especially the poor! Pope Francis refers to accompaniment as an art, because it involves a deep listening to the other person – a willingness to open one’s self to the reality of the other.

Among those of you here this evening, and the ministries and services you participate in are:

- **Institute for Lay Ecclesial Ministry and Services**
- **Criminal Justice Ministry**
- **Music Ministry**
- **Campus Ministry Volunteers**
- **Hospital Ministry Volunteers**
- **Young Adult volunteers**
- **Family Life Initiatives**
- **Pastoral Ministry Ambassadors serving in gatherings like the Assembly**
- **Priests celebrating televised Mass and Priests confessors**
- **Other Priests involved in missionary work connected with Pastoral Ministries**

And many others I haven't had time to meet, yet! All of these ministries and services are related to our Department of Pastoral Ministries and the Pastoral Center of the Archdiocese in some way. I am so deeply grateful to each of you for pouring out your time and your hearts for the good of others. I pray that as you accompany others, Christ also will accompany you, so that you may know the depth of His love, compassion, and grace for you.

May God bless you!