



Finding hope in unexpected places

BY JEFF VONKAENEL / jeffv@newsreview.com

I am writing this column on Easter

Sunday 2019. Today, in churches all across Sacramento and, for that matter, all over the world, ministers are delivering a special message on love and hope.

I heard such a sermon at Trinity Episcopal Church. The core message was that where there is love, there is also hope—hope that things can and will get better.

Over the last several years, I have been regularly hearing a similar message in unexpected locations—gray, functional government offices. Gathered around a conference table, I will meet with a dozen or so government employees, to brainstorm the content for their upcoming eight-page publication.

The N&R Publications division has produced more than 450 publications for government and nonprofit agencies. At our preliminary meeting, we ask them many questions to understand what they are doing and why, to get to the heart and soul of what they are doing.

When we worked with Sacramento County Child Protective Services, we produced a publication about the department's innovative "resource families" concept, in which CPS recruits foster parents who will work together with the biological parents for the benefit of the children. Because most foster children eventually go back to biological parents or family members, the primary goal of the resource family is to provide love and support to the child going through a rough time. Talking with the CPS staff, it was clear how much they cared for the kids. They were happy for the kids' successes and took their setbacks hard. Without love, and without hope, there would be no reason to do such a challenging job.

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Last week, in Ventura, I met with The ARC of Ventura County, which has been providing services for people with mental disabilities for 65 years. A young man told us that his disability had often made him feel inferior, but that his thoughts and feelings were taken seriously while working at ARC. It was a joy to see the faces around the table light up as they listened to his story.

In Riverside last week, I met with Riverside County Department of Child Support Services, which arranges to have separated parents pay for child support. Agencies like this are conducting some of the most important anti-poverty work in the country. As I heard from each person around the table, they all were so proud of how their work is helping families, especially the kids.

N&R Publications has produced publications on suicide prevention, Medi-Cal, food stamps, veterans services, recycling, mosquito control, education and more. At so many of these organizations, we find a core group of people who care and bring love to their work.

Meeting these people has given me hope—that we can make things better, that with love and determination we can provide better services, more housing, improved schools and that we can safeguard the environment. I have spent more than 1,000 hours packaging up the love of human beings who happen to be government and nonprofit staff into eight-page publications. It has made me a believer.

I believe that we can solve problems. And that this process begins with love. □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.

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