

## Home At Rainier

By Fr. James Boyle

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*Editor's note: 2011 ended on a sad note with the passing of longtime Rainier School Chaplain Father James Boyle. One of his last endeavors, just two weeks before his passing, was a piece he did about the meaning of **home**. Fr. Boyle was a Catholic Priest at the Archdiocese of Seattle for 50 years. He was the priest in the small town of Buckley, WA where Rainier School [ICF/ID] is located. He served as the Chaplain at Rainier School devoting 35 years to serving the spiritual needs of the developmentally disabled, their families, and care providers. He also served as Chaplain for Fircrest School in Shoreline WA [an ICF/ID and Skilled Nursing/ID facility] and L'Arche Homes [a group home organization]. He cofounded REX, an educational program for people with developmental disabilities. In 2006 he was given the prestigious Hunthausen Humanitarian Award in recognition of his ministry to serve the poor and suffering.*

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*Persons* with developmental disabilities are above all else human beings. Society often sees their disability first and the person later, if at all. Because they are persons first, we must **respect** their individuality and their **gift** to the community of persons. We can model our concern and care for them in ways and circumstances which allow them to grow and be free enough to bring their gift as human beings into the greater society.

Respecting the individuality and complexity of persons with developmental disabilities allows for multiple approaches to care. Some can flourish and very well in the greater community setting. We welcome and support such settings. Our experience also gives great credence to giving some persons a more supportive, more structured setting in which to live. What follows are ideas from observations about Rainier School as a **home, a community, and a place of mutuality**.

The word **home** has many meanings according to our experience. **Home** is a place of **belonging**. Home is a place to be **treasured** as an individual. Home is a place of **security** which enables us to **grow**.

**Belonging** is crucial to being human. To be in a place where you have **identity** is to belong. Belonging allows the individual to **nourish and share** his or her gifts, indeed their very beings, with others. Rainier School is a place of belonging. To live at Rainier is to have people **treasure, respect and honor** you **just as you are**.

**Home** is a place of **security**. Some persons have **complex** disabilities. Sometimes the **combinations** of disabilities adds to complexity. Physical disability may be combined with deep emotional or mental illness. Such complexity requires great **expertise** of care with a very **secure environment**. Persons living at Rainier are often very complex and need a place of security so they can grow and share their gifts without harming others or causing fearful reactions.

Rainier School is a **home** for many persons. Many have lived there many years. The school is a place of **belonging**. It is a place of security where they have grown and shared their lives.

As humans we all need a home, a place of belonging. We also need a **community** around us. To be in a community means to be in a place where we share our lives with many. A community gives us identity not only with family but with our **culture** and greater society. To be in communion means we are free to live the to and fro of care and love. Community often favors the more capable, embracing the more powerful. Persons who are less capable, more involved in their disabilities, sometimes burdened with certain behaviors can be shut out of or shunned by greater society.

For those carrying very complex disabilities Rainier School provides a very **accepting community**. Rainier is a place of greater security where violence is not allowed. An environment where people learn to respect others and be respected. Expertise and security **enable freedom** for each individual to grow, be respected, nourished, and be part of a vibrant community.

Lastly, a place of **mutuality** is where we can freely exchange the gifts of life which exist in all of us. **Each life is precious** . When we share the richness within ourselves we truly live. This sharing of our lives, with all the complexity and uniqueness fulfills us and brings us joy.

Rainier School is a place where lives are shared. **Staff** bring **care** and **compassion** to people. Great and meaningful relations come forth. When persons with disabilities are respected, cared for, and loved, they are free to enter relationship. They often bring to their relationship great unconditional affection and love. They love from a place of weakness and vulnerability so they can love freely and without reservation. To be loved just the way you are can be so disarming and so beautifully human. To be allowed to bring the gift of your very self into such a relationship brings great bonding and deep friendship.

Such relationships of life **need time and consistency**. Both exist at Rainier School. A place of **mutuality of gifts and love** gives true human life to each who share such a relationship.

**Rainier School is a home, a community, a place of mutuality in friendship.**