



MSGR. RALPH KUEHNER

"I BENEFITED A LOT FROM PEOPLE HELPING ME, SO I WANTED TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS IN THE SAME WAY."

The soup kitchen So Others Might Eat serves up 1,200 meals a day along with job training, housing, and medical services. Without Ralph Kuehner, it might not exist.

Victory Housing develops affordable homes for the frail elderly, hundreds of them, all over the area. Without Ralph Kuehner, it might not exist.

The Fair Housing Council of Greater Washington, the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, the Lorton Job Training Program—without Ralph Kuehner, they too might never come to be.

"Monsignor Kuehner is able to articulate a vision, to motivate, and then to delegate while continuing to be a supportive presence easily accessible to everybody and anybody," says one of his many fans.

The former scriptures teacher and parish priest was summoned out of retirement a few years ago to become secretary for social concerns for the Archdiocese of Washington. He oversees all local Catholic agencies that serve the poor and vulnerable.

Kuehner grew up poor himself in Depression-era Scranton, Pennsylvania. After seminary, he studied for three years at

Catholic University. Though intending to teach Latin and Greek, he started learning even more languages here—the languages of race, class, and religious and ethnic diversity.

A bumper sticker in his office reads IF YOU WANT PEACE, WORK FOR JUSTICE. Kuehner has, for decades—mainly by connecting individuals, groups, and funding to effect change. In just eight years, his travels have put 160,000 miles on his trusty Cutlass Ciera.

"I don't usually do the work myself, just bring people together," he says modestly. But consider his quiet effectiveness in court the day he sat with a District woman who'd been discriminated against twice by the same real-estate company.

Needing cash, she was tempted to settle with the company. The priest urged her not to: "If you can hold out and win, we'll get publicity—and you'll end up helping a lot more people." Together, they decided not to accept less than \$200,000. The company's lawyers refused, the case went to trial—and the woman won \$2.4 million.

"Justice is a lot harder than charity," he says. "But I want to do everything I can."