

imagine ONE

CONGREGATION OF THE
SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

SPRING/SUMMER 2016
VOL. 8 ■ NO. 1



*“It made a
difference
to that one.”*

Our mission as Sisters of St. Joseph flows from the purpose for which the congregation exists: We live and work that all people may be united with God and with one another.

We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, living out of our common tradition, witness to God's love transforming us and our world. Recognizing that we are called to incarnate our mission and charism in our world in fidelity to God's call in the Gospel, we commit ourselves to these Generous Promises.

- ⊕ We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to take the risk to surrender our lives and resources to work for specific systemic change in collaboration with others so that the hungers of the world might be fed.
- ⊕ We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to recognize the reality that Earth is dying, to claim our oneness with Earth and to take steps now to strengthen, heal and renew the face of Earth.
- ⊕ We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to network with others across the world to bring about a shift in the global culture from institutionalized power and privilege to a culture of inclusivity and mutuality.
- ⊕ We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to be mutually responsible and accountable for leadership in the congregation.

WE CARE ABOUT ALL CREATION

In awareness of our mission, the Congregation of St. Joseph is pleased to present this issue of *imagineONE*, which has been produced in an environmentally sustainable way through the use of recycled paper manufactured by windpower and printed using soy- and vegetable-based inks.



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By Sallie Latkovich, CSJ



On the cover:

We offer this well-known story for your reflection and as an illustration of the theme of this issue – Mercy – which is also the theme for the Holy Year 2016 as declared by Pope Francis.

A man is walking on a beach when he happens upon thousands of starfish washed up on the sand. He notices another man picking some up and throwing them back in the water. The passerby asks him "Why bother? There are too many for you to save. What difference does it make?" As the man is throwing another one back in the ocean, he replies, "It made a difference to that one."

imagine ONE



7th grade students from several local Chicago area schools gathered in the Chapel of our LaGrange Park center for a youth retreat hosted by CSJ sponsored Nazareth Academy. Here, they are blessing personal hygiene items they collected which will be donated to charity.

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Reflects on . . . mercy



This Lent, I'm trying to focus my efforts on ways of creating and applying new disciplines and practices that will bring a deeper dimension to my celebration of Easter and the joys of the Resurrection. This issue of *imagineONE* calls me to examine myself and consider what mercy truly is and what mercy looks like in our lives. Mercy, despite being the cornerstone of living a life of love, is such a tough quality to define. It is easy to let the

concept of mercy be grouped with forgiveness or compassion, which are certainly aspects of it, yet, there is more to mercy.

My thinking about mercy was recently enriched by a friend who shared with me that she believes that in order to be truly merciful we need to be willing to consider how we use our personal or positional power in both our relationships and in how we choose to "be in the world." Mercy is a strong virtue, one that invites us to use whatever power we have in a compassionate and loving way. When Pope Francis speaks of the Year of Mercy and encourages the forgiveness of sins, he is acknowledging that the Church has the power and authority to grant mercy. And the challenge he issues to all of us with this Year of Mercy is to acknowledge the power each of us has and to use it to make things right in the lives of those we encounter – whether in our daily lives or in how we allow the stories of our neighbors around the globe to become part of us.

So, I ask you to join with me and read this issue of *imagineONE* that includes stories of mercy. Maybe you will find it reflective; or, perhaps, you will use it as a discipline of learning what motivated others to mercy, where mercy can be found in everyday life, and as a challenge to look at mercy in our own lives. Where can each of us grant mercy to someone? What could it mean if we each acknowledge the authority that we have in

our relationships and then act with mercy and forgiveness and compassion? What have I learned from these stories about the many types of mercy and how can I be a more merciful person?

The great parable on mercy, The Prodigal Son, is not just a story of a father forgiving a wayward son. Limiting ourselves to that understanding just scratches the surface. One of the most astounding things about the father of the Prodigal Son is that he is outrageous! He is not just forgiving, he is crazy. He runs out of the house towards his son which, given the son's recent bad behavior, could be viewed as totally inappropriate. He forgives the son without the son even asking for forgiveness, and the father celebrates the restoration of the son to a birthright that his son had squandered! As the paternal head of the household, the father uses his personal power to break all the social protocols of his day and age to restore his relationship to his son, to make things right. And the great tragedy of the parable lies with the eldest son who is resentful and bitter in the face of such mercy. And even in the face of this resentment, the father chooses again to be merciful and offers the eldest son, not just his "rightful share" but everything. But, that mercy is too much for the eldest son to accept. And this too is part of the message of this parable. God is always merciful, God IS mercy, but our ability to recognize and accept God's merciful love does not always happen immediately and, sadly, sometimes never happens. We, like the other son, can choose to stay 'stuck' in our own egos and weaknesses and insecurities. We can use our personal power to turn away from the love, forgiveness and mercy that we are offered.

We are challenged twofold by this issue of *imagineONE*. First, we need to be people of mercy and compassion in every way possible. And, second, we need to accept the mercy that is offered to us by the love of God, and sometimes, some very special people in our lives.

Sr. Nancy
Sister Nancy Conway, CSJ

Sister Helen meets with *Pope Francis*

"Today was the highlight of my life," said Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, on Twitter. Two decades after her anti-death penalty work was transformed into an Oscar-winning movie, "Dead Man Walking," Sister Helen's campaign continues with the backing of Pope Francis. She met with the pope on January 21, 2016, and shared with him a thank you letter from Richard Glossip, whose execution was halted in September after an intervention from the pope. "He really feels for people on death row," said Sister Helen.



Francis voiced his opposition to capital punishment while addressing Congress in September. "Recently my brother bishops here in the United States renewed their call for the abolition of the death penalty," he says. "Not only do I support them, but I also offer encouragement to all those who are convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation," Francis told lawmakers.

Sister Helen said Francis' influence and support are never far away. "The pope's like a little lighthouse, and he keeps sending out that beam. This is what it's about." ●

For more information on Sister Helen Prejean's work, please visit www.sisterhelen.org.

"The pope's like a little lighthouse, and he keeps sending out that beam. This is what it's about."



This painting by artist Kimberly Brady is her take on the famous "Jesus in the Breadline" wood carving by German born artist Fritz Eichenberg. It hangs in the Hunger Center dining room.

Sister Corita feeds *body and soul*

It is 30 minutes before the noon meal on a clear, cold New Year's Day in Cleveland, but already the St. Augustine Hunger Center is almost full. Good smells of food being prepared and friendly chatter among the volunteers and the guests who are poor and homeless fill the room. Sister Corita Ambro, CSJ, is circulating and greeting everyone with a smile and a hug, as she has done for the past 46 years. Most she knows by name, all she treats like family.



Sister Corita visits with a center regular whom she knows only as Alonzo.

The St. Augustine Hunger Center serves three meals a day, seven days per week to anywhere between 250-500 men and women, most of whom are surviving on the streets. During the holidays, the center expands to 16 sites across the city to meet the demand. On Thanksgiving alone they serve 20,000 meals, Christmas 17,000, and Easter 10,000, which includes meals brought to shut-ins and senior complexes throughout the city. "It's a hectic day," said Sister Corita with a chuckle, "but I'm sure you can tell that we are not just individuals working over there, we are a family and it's our volunteers who make it all happen."

In Cleveland's Tremont neighborhood where she serves, Sister Corita is known as both the Mother Teresa of Tremont and the Angel of Tremont, nicknames she seems embarrassed by. She is, after all, only fulfilling the calling to religious life and service she heard as a teenager so many years ago.

"Only in heaven will we see how much we owe to the poor for helping us to love God better because of them."

- Mother Teresa

Seeing their faces here means they have survived another frigid night on the streets, a blessing for which she is always grateful. "In so many of the people who come here you see the suffering Jesus," she explains, "and at other times in their lives you get to see the resurrected Jesus. They go through so much and they share everything with you." Her eyes well as she tells of a man, one of the regulars to the center, who told her that he is not homeless, he is houseless, because the center is his home.

Sister Corita has served many ministries through the decades. With a master's degree in deaf education, she works extensively with Cleveland's deaf community. Many times as she is speaking, her hands, as if on auto-pilot, begin signing. She has also raised many children in the convent over the years - some orphaned, some abandoned, some runaways.



Those sometimes tough years taught her to be patient, compassionate and forgiving, she says. They are lessons she draws on every day, while ministering to the population she calls critical to her spirituality: homeless people.

Over the years, Sister Corita has steered many Hunger Center patrons to detox and drug treatment, and has helped them find housing and clothing. "I can't solve all of their problems," she says. "Some I've lost to drugs. Others to crime. But I can love them, and I can help them experience love."

During 2016, the Papal Year of Mercy, Sister Corita has a quick answer for what mercy means to her. "Accepting the person where they are, working with them, having compassion, and suffering with them." As she talks, it becomes clear that food is only a part of what the Hunger Center offers. "One day a man came in whom I hadn't seen before," she said. "I came up to him and greeted him and gave him a big hug and he started crying and told me he just got out of jail and that was the first time in 20 years anyone hugged him. Isn't that mercy? When we can do that for another person - make them feel welcome, loved, and accepted?"

John Bebko (right), a Hunger Center regular, shyly approaches and seems set on conveying what Sister Corita means to him and all who come to the center. "Sister Corita is an angel to the hungry in this area," he says. "She sustains us and cares for us as we struggle to make it under very harsh circumstances." ●



With a portrait of Mother Teresa in the background, John Bebko calls Sister Corita an angel for all she does for the neighborhood and for its people.

The St. Augustine Hunger Center survives solely on private donations. To learn more or to make a donation, visit www.staugustine-west14.org and click on the 'Contact Us' link.

CANDIDATES TAKE NEXT STEPS TOWARD

Profound Love

Erin McDonald *Professes First Vows*

Upon making her first vows, Sister Erin McDonald, CSJ, pictured at right with leadership team member Sister Nancy Conway, CSJ, entered her signature in the congregation's book of professed sisters. "On October 11, 2015," she recalls, "I publicly promised to live poverty, chastity and obedience and I promised to move always towards profound love of God and love of neighbor. Surrounded by our family, friends, and sisters, I promised to courageously live our charism as a Sister of St. Joseph." In her remarks, she had a special prayer: "I thank you God for all the love that I have known and for all the blessings that fill my heart." ●



We Welcome New Candidate Jennifer Berridge

Jennifer Berridge (left) with Sister Judith Minear, CSJ, who accompanied her during the inquiry phase of her journey, was welcomed as a new candidate for vowed membership in an Entrance Ceremony on January 23, 2016. Originally from Canton, Ohio, Jennifer now resides near our Wheeling center, and works as a registered vascular technologist at Wheeling Hospital. When asked what is next for her, Jennifer replied, "I am excited to see what God has ready for me. I don't know where this journey will lead, but I'm on my way!" ●



Sister Rosie (center) and Lemkin House Executive Director Maia Justine Storm (right) welcomed one of the first residents to the house that is now home for refugees.

Sisters provide *a home for refugees*

In the Nazareth, Michigan, area, we've recently been blessed with the opportunity to welcome a Rwandan refugee family who survived the 1994 genocide. This came about because Sister Rosemary Tierney, CSJ, and Sister Maria Josepha, herself a survivor of the Rwanda genocide now living at Nazareth Center, knew Maia Justine Storm, JD, an immigration attorney who helps refugees seeking asylum. Maia, a good friend of the congregation, is executive director of Lemkin House: An Asylum Community. Lemkin House has several sites, including this new one called "Rosie's Place" in honor of Sister Rosemary.

When they learned that several of our sisters were moving out of an area house, the sisters suggested the house they were vacating would be ideal shelter for some refugees in need of a place to live and the Congregation agreed. In addition, Maia will invite groups to help farm some property near the house to generate income to support not only this family, but other asylum seekers as well.

Asylum seekers are men, women and children from all over the world who are afraid of being persecuted, tortured or murdered because of their politics, race, religion or sexual orientation should they return to their

home countries. While they are seeking asylum, they are not considered undocumented and cannot be deported, but they are not able to seek employment for months, and are therefore in need of support.

Additional services Lemkin House provides include physical, legal, social and spiritual support with the help of many social service agencies, legal clinics, private attorneys, religious groups and academic communities. ●

For more information or to find out how you can help, visit www.lemkinhouse.org.



Sister Chris Schenk, CSJ, happened to be in Rome leading a tour on women's roles in early Christianity when Pope Francis was elected. "I am greatly encouraged by Pope Francis since he is opening doors to renewal and reform that have been closed for many years," she said. (Photo courtesy of www.radicalgracefilm.com)

Love of Church feeds one sister's mission and ministry

Sister Christine (Chris) Schenk, CSJ, one of the most widely known women's voices in the life of the Catholic Church today, is a regular columnist for the *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)* online news. She is also one of three women religious featured in a film called *Radical Grace*, which many religious communities and faith groups are screening for varied audiences across the country. Sister Chris will be on hand to meet audiences at many of these showings.

In the film, she comments on the public outcry over the Vatican's hastily closed doctrinal assessment that accused the Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR) and American women religious of radical feminism. "What?" she asks incredulously. "That women are equal? What a radical thought!"

Today, Sister Chris is often a featured speaker to Catholic groups: This year, she will be speaking to a

Voices for Renewal group in Dallas/Ft. Worth and to CSJ Associates in Wheeling, West Virginia, about women's leadership in early Christianity and advancing women's roles in the church today, and she is scheduled to appear at *Radical Grace* screenings in Boston, Cape Cod and our Congregation's general assembly in Chicago. Co-presenting a workshop on women's roles in early Christianity at Xavier University in Cincinnati is also on Sister Chris's agenda later in the year.

As a nurse-midwife, Sister Chris served low-income women and their families in Ohio for about 20 years. She was instrumental in organizing a statewide coalition that, after a five-year struggle, succeeded in expanding Medicaid for poverty-level pregnant women in the late 1980s. During that time, she also was completing her master's degree in theology at the Cleveland diocese's St. Mary's Seminary and beginning to work for church reform in the spirit of Vatican II.

Her forthcoming book, *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, will be published in 2017 by Fortress Press. It's about 4th century women's tombs depicting them in iconically authoritative poses – according to experts in Roman iconography – with codices, scrolls and gospel stories arrayed around them.

"It's not as much of a leap as it seems," she said, "since I conducted clinical research as a nurse-midwife and my theological studies focused on equal dignity in our world but probably never more so than after learning about Jesus' women disciples and the female leaders in the early church – such as Prisca and Junia, who no one knows about."

"In 1990, my parish asked me to co-chair a committee on church renewal," she continues. "Our pastor, Father Paul Hritz, introduced us to the pastor of the Church of the Resurrection, Father Lou Trivison. His parish council had just passed a resolution asking to open ordination rather than lose access to the Mass because of the priest shortage.

"We organized for about a year before holding our first fundraising dinner. We thought about 300 people would come. When nearly 700 showed up, including many priests, pastoral ministers and parish councils, we knew that the Holy Spirit was calling us to something new," Sister Chris believes. "Three years later I became the founding director of *FutureChurch* and have tried to be faithful to the Spirit's leading ever since."

FutureChurch is an organization that seeks changes that will provide all Roman Catholics the opportunity to participate fully in Church life and leadership. "Our Congregational Generous Promises (See page 2 of this issue.) are also great inspiration to continue working for systemic change in the Catholic Church and in society," Sister Chris adds, "so that the voices of women – indeed all the people of God – are brought to bear on decisions that affect all of us."



This is a 4th century portrait frieze and tomb inscription for Crispina who cradles a manuscript book engraved with an early symbol for Christ. She was an early Christian leader memorialized for her preaching and teaching. (Photo by Sister Chris Schenk, CSJ, from the Vatican's Pio Cristiano Museum.)

Although now retired from *FutureChurch*, Sister Chris said she continues to support its mission by speaking and writing and working with concrete projects related to preserving parishes in a time of fewer priests.

Her lifelong passion about God and about women's issues is what feeds her present day work. In her columns for NCR online, she doesn't hesitate to tackle challenging issues, such as:

- The Synod on the Family: "True defenders of doctrine uphold spirit, not letter of the law;"
- Unearthing the gender balance at the heart of our Catholic tradition;
- India's roadmap for gender equality in the church; and
- Finding creative ways to keep parishes open.

Sister Chris emphasizes that she is very grateful for more than 20 years of Catholic education, especially Jesuit education at Georgetown and Boston College and theology studies at St. Mary's.

"The Catholic Church made me the woman I am today," she makes clear, "so I remain invested in helping the Catholic Church be all it can be." ●

If you would like to receive an email alert when Christine Schenk's column, Simply Spirit, is posted, go online to this page and follow directions:
<http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup>.

StepStone ministry partners *to expand housing* for domestic abuse survivors

Increasingly, our Congregation has been partnering with other nonprofit organizations to accomplish what neither could accomplish alone.

Our Wichita Center's *StepStone* ministry partnered with Mennonite Housing and broke ground last November to build 28 units of transitional housing in the nearby low-income Hilltop community for survivors of domestic violence. Named Bluffview Place, the \$5-million project includes one, two, three and four-bedroom units, plus a community building with kitchen facilities, offices and meeting spaces. The project is being financed through a combination of tax credits from the state agency Kansas Housing Resources Corp. and financing from Midwest Housing Equity Group, Horizon Bank and FHLBank of Topeka. It is due for completion this summer. Mennonite Housing will serve as property manager once the complex is completed.

According to Sister Janet Fleischhaker, Executive Director of CSJ ministries, "Transitional housing typically comes after the emergency shelter that gets the survivor and any children to a safe place. The next place is usually bridge housing, which typically is for up to 90 days and provides support to help stabilize their situation."

During that time, critical prevention services are provided to the adults and the children to help break the cycle of abuse by working with all those in the family on life skills, and understanding healthy relationships and emotions.

Byron Adrian, President of Mennonite Housing, noted that "Working together, we were able to secure all the necessary financing to make the project a reality. We are so appreciative of their support because this is not a



These groundbreakers were on the team that is making the transitional housing possible: Riley Williams, Chair, Mennonite Housing Board; Byron Adrian, President/CEO, Mennonite Housing; Marcia Wood, Chair, StepStone Board; Theresa Denton, Associate Director, CSJ Ministries; Fred Bentley, KHRC, Kansas Housing Resource Corp.; Kit Lambert, Executive Director, StepStone; Pat Michaelis, MHEG, Midwest Housing Equity Group; and Rich Kerschen, Chairman, Law Company.

typical project due to the specific focus of survivors of domestic violence."

For 40 years Mennonite Housing has provided affordable multifamily housing, new home construction and home repair services for individuals and families who need assistance. The nonprofit Mennonite Housing is a chartered member of NeighborWorks America, a network of more than 240 nonprofit organizations in the fields of affordable housing and community development.

StepStone has provided transitional housing, plus a full array of support services for 20 years to nurture lives of stability and hope. A collaborative ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, *StepStone* currently has 14 single family homes in the Hilltop community where survivors can stay for up to two years while they also receive family counseling, support services and low rent and utility housing so they can become self-sufficient. ●

Partnership in Wichita expands options for homeless people and domestic abuse victims

The Mount at Catholic Charities, in partnership with our Wichita Center, began accepting homeless people and families and victims of domestic abuse last October in renovated space that formerly housed some of our sisters. The availability of this space frees up room in Catholic Charities' two existing shelters that until now had to turn away up to 50 families and 130 individuals each month.

In its first three months of operation, the Mount at Catholic Charities served a total of 86 clients including 29 families. Of those, 22 clients including nine families have moved on to more permanent housing. At the beginning of this year there were 65 clients living at the Mount and the program was operating 26 rooms with another 32 rooms becoming available in stages through 2018.

The intent of the housing is for residents to establish their independence. The residence is staffed at all times and offers classes on such topics as financial management, parenting and professional skills. Residents are allowed to stay for up to 90 days, while staff members assist with finding housing and employment and evaluate residents' progress every 30 days. ●



Nicole and her children received services from Catholic Charities that included emergency, crisis shelter at St. Anthony Family Shelter, counseling and parenting help through Pregnancy Support Services, and housing, financial and employment assistance at The Mount in Wichita, Kansas. Nicole said, "I plan to return to substitute teaching soon and eventually get my degree to teach. These programs really helped me get back on track during a time when I was very alone." (Photo courtesy of Catholic Charities of Wichita)

For more information or to find out how you can help, visit www.catholicdioceseofwichita.org/catholic-charities and click on 'The Mount'.

“I really believe miracles happen before my eyes”

Last summer, Sister Ann Letourneau, CSJ, PsyD, received her doctorate degree from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology. Today, she works with a nonprofit pastoral counseling center in Chicago’s western suburbs, an ecumenical Christian setting for people seeking personal insight, healing, spiritual enrichment and compassionate support.



Doctor Ann Letourneau, CSJ, searches books as well as professional literature for anything “that will help me to understand my clients more fully and serve them better.” (Photo by Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ)

In her early years as a Sister of St. Joseph, Ann taught elementary grade students, and she especially liked working with the students who were difficult. “Working with them taught me the value of relationship and really listening to my students,” she noticed. “Once they realized that I was interested in them and not just the quality of their work, they felt respected by me and enjoyed coming to school. In turn, they respected me and wanted to do their best.” When Ann moved on to working with the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph formation ministry and young women considering taking vows, she again saw the value of building relationship and actively listening to individuals.

“I believe God used these two ministries to prepare me to return to school to become a clinical psychologist,” Ann said. “It was a bit scary going back to school when I was in my mid-40’s, but my sisters supported me wholeheartedly and doors just kept opening.”

“It is difficult to put into a few words what a clinical psychologist does,” Ann said, “but basically, I help people change patterns or ways of thinking that are no longer helping them to grow or be happy. I also give them support through difficult times until they gain the stability they need to take the next step.”

High school counselors tell Ann that more students than ever are suffering from anxiety and depression, due to today’s relentless academic and social pressures.

Students feel intense pressure to take the very best combination of courses in order to be accepted by just the right college or university. They have to be active in extracurricular activities and do volunteer work, and possibly hold down a job as well.

One high school student Ann counseled had so much anxiety that, “he was shaking when he came to see me,” she said. He reported that he could not remember a time when he did not feel anxious, and that his anxiety was most intense when he prepared for school each morning.

Ann taught him how to ground himself with a breathing exercise and make himself mindful of being in the present moment – not anticipating being in class. In addition, she suggested he change his morning pattern so that he had less downtime in which to worry and allow his anxiety to grow. After applying these small changes for only one week, the client reported he felt a real difference. “And I could see it,” she confirmed. “Having decreased his day-to-day anxiety to a manageable level, we could begin looking at the deeper issues that were connected to it.”

Ann feels that each of us has to make a conscious decision to be fully present when we are with people we care about. “As a counselor, my role is to be truly present to the person sitting before me,” she said. “We all need to have witnesses of our joys and struggles in life.” ●

SPIRIT OF GIVING

A shared relationship and mission lead to a gift of support to the sisters

The Sisters of the Congregation of Saint Joseph are blessed and profoundly grateful to have so many friends and supporters who share in our mission and vision. One such friend is Judy (Hocking) Higgs, whose journey with the Sisters of St. Joseph began early in life, and led to a 13-year commitment of being a vowed member. "What drew me to the Sisters was their deep and ever-present concern for the *dear neighbor*," she said. "I have always shared in the mission and values of the Congregation."



After leaving the Congregation as a sister, Judy wanted to maintain her connection so she became a CSJ Associate, as did her late husband, Harry. "I have been an active associate for many years, and from 2009-2011, I served as co-director of the Wheeling associates," she said (see photo above of Judy's commissioning ceremony). In addition, Judy feels connected to many of the peace and justice issues to which the Congregation is so closely committed. "I am particularly motivated by the Sisters' concern for the environment and care for Earth," she said, "as well their anti-death penalty and anti-trafficking efforts."

Because her relationship with, and commitment to the sisters and their mission runs so deep, it was a natural progression for Judy to choose to support the Congregation financially. "Over the past decades, I have maintained a close and significant relationship with the sisters," she said. "I have been involved in congregational life and ministries all along."

For those reasons, Judy has been a regular supporter over the


years, but made the decision that she wanted to do more. "I decided to start giving from my assets in the form of beneficiary designations," she said. "It was a simple process and I feel confident that my wishes will be handled."

What does Judy hope to accomplish with her generosity? "I hope that my gift will help support the elder sisters and contribute to the continuation of congregational ministries," she said. "The benefit to me is the peace of mind that my assets will be well used." ●

If you are interested in designating the Congregation of St. Joseph as a beneficiary of one of your assets, please contact Gary Mulhern, Gift Planning Specialist, at (304) 232-8160, ext. 148, or via email at gmulhern@csjoseph.org. Or visit www.csjgiftplanning.org and click on *Bequest Language* where you will find the congregation's full legal name which you will need in order to name the sisters as a beneficiary.

Congregation Invests in New Orleans with *innovative flood management project*

*A*s a Congregation, our land, lives and history in New Orleans hold deep meaning for us. After Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath destroyed our provincial house there, we were determined to honor and respect that history and our land while also responding in some way to the needs of the New Orleans community.



This chunk of concrete showing the shield of our former Medaille Sisters of St. Joseph is one of the only things that remain from our cherished provincial house in New Orleans.



Artist's rendering of completed Mirabeau Water Garden.

We are thrilled to tell *imagineONE* readers that the New Orleans City Council and Mayor Mitch Landrieu have approved plans for transforming our now vacant 25-acre property there into a beautiful multi-purpose garden park and storm water management system.

"When we formed our new congregation nine years ago and promised to surrender our lives and resources to work for specific systemic change, we could not have imagined this," leadership team member Sister Pat Bergen, CSJ, said. "There isn't a sister in our congregation who is an engineer or architect, but that hasn't stopped us from tackling truly one of the most innovative engineering projects in our country: the Mirabeau Water Garden Project."

Mirabeau Water Garden will be an innovative space of parks, playing fields, green space, circulating water and space for children and adults to rest, learn, and play. Along with an education center about New Orleans and its relationship with water, the project will transform the character of the neighborhood, elevating property values and providing new economic opportunities.

But the project's powerful larger purpose is that it also will be an entirely innovative storm water management system that will protect 3,800 acres of neighbors' properties in the surrounding area during periodic torrential rains and flooding. Located on Mirabeau Avenue in the Filmore (Gentilly) neighborhood, the property remains one of the only large parcels in Greater New Orleans under single ownership.



Ed Sutoris, Manager of Property and Projects for the Congregation, with Prisca Weems, Stormwater Manager for the City of New Orleans.

“Although there were offers from folks who wanted to buy our land, we refused that option,” said Sister Pat. “We knew that what we did with this precious land needed to contribute to systemic change and that would only happen in relationship with water in New Orleans and with collaboration among diverse groups. Our land in New Orleans stood for something over the last 150 years, and stands today as a pledge by the Congregation to claim our oneness with Earth and to strengthen, heal, and renew the face of Earth.”

According to Architect David Waggonner, Principal at Waggonner & Ball, The Mirabeau Water Garden Project offers a series of storm water management features and rain gardens that will allow storm water to be contained within our acreage and diverted from community sewers in order to avoid flooding in the surrounding areas. “The Mirabeau Water Garden can become both an example of sustainable water management for the lowlands, as well as an educational destination for the region’s residents to learn about water filtration and ecology,” said David.

Rather than fighting the realities of weather in New Orleans, David’s plan has a way to manage the massive amounts of water that accumulate during storms and allow the levees to function more efficiently. “We met David a few years ago and were committed to his vision of how water could be better controlled and how we could share information about water management with others,” Sister Pat recalls. “We decided we would seek out partners who could join us in putting Waggonner & Ball’s plans into action.”

Last summer, through Ed Sutoris, Manager of Property and Projects for the Congregation, we were connected to Prisca Weems, the Stormwater Manager for the City of New Orleans. Prisca helped coordinate efforts from the City’s side to fund the project and bring it to fruition. “The Mirabeau Water Garden project is the flagship pilot from the Greater New Orleans Water Plan,” said Prisca. “It sets an important precedent for the public and private sectors working together to address the limitations of our existing drainage infrastructure, and illustrates the City’s evolving approach to water management. This is an important project for us as a demonstration of large scale water retention, and will be the first of numerous such interventions throughout New Orleans.”

Sister Pat concludes that “We wanted to find a solution for the use of this land that was in relationship with water, not fighting it. David’s design allows water to be managed and integrated back into the storm management system in an organic and moderate way. Mirabeau Water Garden will be a haven for education about water and our relationship with this precious resource.”

We are proud to be part of leading this innovative and inspiring project to reality! Stay tuned for updates on the construction of the Mirabeau Water Project. ●

We knew that what we did with this precious land needed to contribute to systemic change and that would only happen in relationship with water in New Orleans and with collaboration among diverse groups.

For more information on this project and the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan please visit: www.livingwithwater.com.



Architect David Waggonner, who designed Mirabeau Water Garden, and Leadership Team member, Sister Pat Bergen, CSJ.



Sister Pat Bergen delivering remarks at the news conference in January as Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards (left) and New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu look on.



Mayor Mitch Landrieu spent time after the news conference visiting with our sisters in the south, including Sister Anne Ramagos, CSJ.

Exciting news announced!

On a blustery but bright Monday in January, a news conference was held on our Mirabeau property in New Orleans to announce more good news for the region.

The City of New Orleans and State of Louisiana were named as two of the winners of the National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which awarded over \$230 million to the city and state. The Mirabeau Water Garden project, with its vision, replicability, and potential systemic impact on water management in New Orleans, was instrumental in their success.

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu and Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards were on hand, as were representatives from HUD, NDRC and others from the city of New Orleans. Sister Pat Bergen, CSJ, a member of our leadership team, spoke and offered a heartfelt benediction. Many of our sisters in the south who once lived, ministered and prayed on this land were in attendance.



'I was a stranger, and You Welcomed Me'

Matthew 25:35



January, 2016. Arriving on the shores of the Greek island of Lesbos, refugees from Syria wait to disembark their rubber boat under guidance of helpers to avoid a frantic stampede. (Photo by Etienne De Malglaive/Getty Images)

Today, one of the greatest tests of courage for people of every faith is our response to the largest worldwide refugee/migrant crisis in modern times.

The number of migrants and refugees who arrived in Europe over the past year fleeing war, persecution and violence in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and other countries has exceeded one million. Of those, more than 800,000 people crossed the treacherous Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Geneva, Switzerland, the number of these refugees and migrants who die on their journey has reached nearly 4,000 and is rising – many of them young children.

“I don’t understand why people are insisting that this is a European problem. This is a global issue,” Michael Moller, director of the U.N. office in Geneva, told a news conference. “At the end of last year, the U.N. refugee chief Antonio Guterres called for a “massive resettlement” of Syrian and other refugees [from] Europe, “to distribute many hundreds of thousands of people before the continent’s asylum system crumbles.”

The U.N. has humanitarian workers on site in Italy, Greece, Serbia, Hungary, Turkey and other countries in Europe to protect refugees and provide life-saving assistance at every point in their journey. At the same time, the agency provides desperately needed aid and services in Jordan, Lebanon and across Africa where refugees are facing food shortages and other critical human needs.

The dire situation prompted Guterres to conclude, “Never has there been a greater need for tolerance, compassion and solidarity with people who have lost everything.”

How are Americans responding to refugees and migrants? Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Migration, issued a statement which said, in part, “I am disturbed ... by calls from both federal and state officials for an end to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the United States. These refugees are fleeing terror themselves ... They are extremely vulnerable families, women, and children who are fleeing for their lives. We cannot and should not blame them for the actions of a terrorist organization.”

On his remarkably courageous visit last November to a mosque in Bangui, Africa, Pope Francis insisted unequivocally, “Those who claim to believe in God must also be men and women of peace!” The mosque he visited is located in an area so known for frequent violent inter-religious clashes that U.N. forces consider it a “no man’s land” and are afraid to enter for fear of harm or death.

“Together, we must say no to hatred, to revenge and to violence, particularly that violence which is perpetrated in the name of religion or of God himself,” Pope Francis

continued. “God is peace, *salam*,” he said, using the Arabic word for peace.

We have all seen, via world media, some of the profound suffering the refugees have endured. It is impossible to obliterate from our minds the picture of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi’s body washed up on the shores of Turkey. Since then, at least 100 more

*As Sisters of the
Congregation of St.
Joseph, we live and work for
peace and unity among all
people. That is the mission
of Jesus Christ, who said
“May they all be one as
you, Abba, and I are one.
May they be one in us... so
that the world may know
that you love them as you
loved me.” (Jn. 17)*

children have drowned in the Mediterranean because of the unseaworthy boats greedy traffickers jammed them into, valiantly trying to cross treacherous seas. News accounts reported so many boats capsizing, one killing all 400 people aboard, another leaving its 800 passengers to drown.

Continuing streams of refugees have faced weeks of migrating on foot to overburdened countries in Europe that began closing borders, making the journey much longer before they could reach help. And then, the freezing elements of winter came to add even more misery. How can we possibly think these people are to be as feared as the ISIS terrorists who drove them out of their homelands?

What more compelling case could there be for acting on our Congregation's charism, mission of unity and Generous Promises (See page 2)? *"We the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to take the risk to surrender our lives and our resources to work for systemic change in collaboration with others so that the hungers of the world might be fed."* Right now, it is about the hungers of the famished, homeless, unwanted, hated and feared Muslims in exodus, along with many Christians and others among them.

There are a couple of important points to emphasize here: 1) The refugees are desperately fleeing the same enemy we Americans fear; and 2) Those who help the refugees have a tremendous opportunity to bond in solidarity with them, and they with us.



Migrants and refugees walk after crossing the Macedonian border into Serbia, near the village of Miratovac, on January 29, 2016. More than one million migrants and refugees crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Europe in 2015, nearly half of them Syrians, according to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. The International Organisation for Migration said last week that 31,000 had arrived in Greece already this year. (Photo by ARMEND NIMANI/AFP/Getty Images)

As with so many other issues facing society today, our country is divided on how to respond to taking in 'our share' of the world's refugees," notes Sister Marilyn Nickol, CSJ, a member of our Congregation's Peace and Justice Team. "More than half of our states said they will not accept any Syrian refugees. There are those who are proposing legislation to accept only the Christians among them, and those strategies are all so unnecessary and can play on people's fears. We cannot let fear be an excuse for not welcoming our sisters and brothers. The U.S. has always been a sanctuary for the world's refugees, and members of our Congregation have and continue to play a large role in that welcome. The United States can continue to welcome refugees while also continuing to ensure national security."

According to the U.S Department of State, all refugees go through intensive security screening with multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI Terrorist Screening Center, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State, and Defense. For most cases the process takes an average of 18 to 24 months. Syrian refugees go through additional screening, but details of further enhancements are classified. The department prioritizes admitting the most vulnerable Syrians, including female-headed households, children, survivors of torture, and individuals with severe medical conditions.





The State Department and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) vet all available biographical and biometric information against a broad array of law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases to help confirm a refugee's identity, check for any criminal or other derogatory information, and identify information that could inform lines of questioning during applicants' interviews with DHS. They screen applicant fingerprints not only against watch list information, but also for previous immigration encounters in the United States and overseas, including cases in which the applicant previously applied for a visa at a U.S. embassy.

But many Americans are still so fearful of taking refugees into our communities, and that's a hugely difficult test of our faith and how to respond to the crisis.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the largest receivers and resettlers of refugees in this country are the U.S. Catholic bishops and Catholic Charities, expanded by other religions, such as the Quakers and Lutherans, among others. Nor is this a new phenomenon. Catholic

churches and schools always have been at the forefront of welcoming immigrants.

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Migrant Resettlement Services (MRS) is the largest refugee resettlement agency in the world. In the 50 years since its founding, MRS has assisted more than one million refugees to begin new lives in the United States through its nationwide network of affiliated partner agencies. Catholic Charities USA affiliates are already working to resettle hundreds of refugees from the current crisis in various American cities and communities.

Bishops, parishes and congregations of religious men and women across the country are responding to Pope Francis' request to support refugee families. People throughout the country have also been collecting household daily necessities for "welcome packs" for families, and some are providing housing and others donations to help pay rent for refugee families. ●

If you would like to do something to help alleviate refugees' suffering, please contact Catholic Charities in your diocese or another nonprofit you trust.

We are deeply saddened by the tragedies that continue throughout the world and we stand in solidarity with all victims of violence wherever they may be. We know that borders and divisions are not of God and that violence cannot be overcome by more violence. We reject hatred, bigotry and racial profiling in the name of religion or freedom or as a solution to our problems.

We view each person as a child of God, worthy of dignity and respect. All-inclusive love is the only answer.

We offer this Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi here along with some questions for your reflection.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; (Can I overcome fear and stand for accepting all people as brothers and sisters, looking not to the past, but to a future of reconciliation?)

Where there is hatred, let me sow love; (Do I have the courage to make it clear to family, friends, neighbors and my government that I choose love, compassion and support over widespread fear of the beleaguered refugees?)

Where there is injury, pardon; (Can I internalize the belief that hate cannot ever overcome hate? Only love can overcome hate. Can I work toward bonding in solidarity with those who resettle in the U.S.?)

Where there is doubt, faith; (Can I test my faith enough to research and learn that Islam is a religion of profound peace and enlighten others with what I learn? Can I make time to actually read the Quran and find out what it really teaches?)

Where there is despair, hope; (Can I imagine the deep despair each individual stranded refugee feels as



countries close and tighten their borders and immigration laws? How can I support those who are working to welcome them?)

Where there is darkness, light; (Can I reject the idea that the problems are so huge I can't do much, that it's all too depressing to think about, anyway? How can I add to the light so many others are focusing on welcoming the refugees?)

And where there is sadness, joy. (Can my response to this crisis be driven by imagining the joy of even one refugee who, finally, is welcomed by compassionate people?)

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; (Is this what God asks of me, now in the tensions of our time?)

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. (And isn't this what our faith teaches are the tests of our life on Earth?)

Journey to America:

How a Muslim woman found a home, job and (finally) peace with a Catholic organization.

Insaf, a housekeeper at one of our centers, is a tall, striking woman whose ebony complexion is complemented by her colorful head scarves (hijabs). She is known to instantly break into wide, sparkling smiles that are infectious.

Sisters and coworkers at the center know that Insaf is a deeply spiritual Muslim who does not hesitate to talk about her deep faith in God's love. She is perfectly comfortable joining the center community in the chapel at prayer gatherings for peace, the environment, an end to human trafficking and other global concerns. At one gathering, she read aloud a prayer from her own faith tradition of Islam.

Insaf wishes people here knew more about Muslims and Islam. "Islam never teaches us to kill innocent people. Islam teaches us to be kind, to be peaceful, to be loving," she says. "I don't believe terrorists can be good Muslims."

Insaf and her husband, Morghani's journey to America from war-torn Sudan was anything but quick or easy.



Insaf (right) speaks English with a heavy Arabic accent and her coworker, Julia, with a heavy Mexican accent. Most people who overhear them can't recognize that they're speaking English, but they understand each other. (Photo by Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ)

Their marriage had been arranged when she was just 16. While waiting for two years in Egypt to be accepted for asylum, they had a baby girl. "When we went to add her name to our U.N. registration they told us we would soon be going to live in the U.S. I just kept thinking 'How? How will this happen?'"

People at our center first encountered a wary and protective mother carrying her three-month old daughter, as she and her husband entered the center's dining room for a meal. Neither could speak any English. They were U.N.-sanctioned refugees from war-plagued Sudan, Africa, who were to stay with the sisters for a few nights.

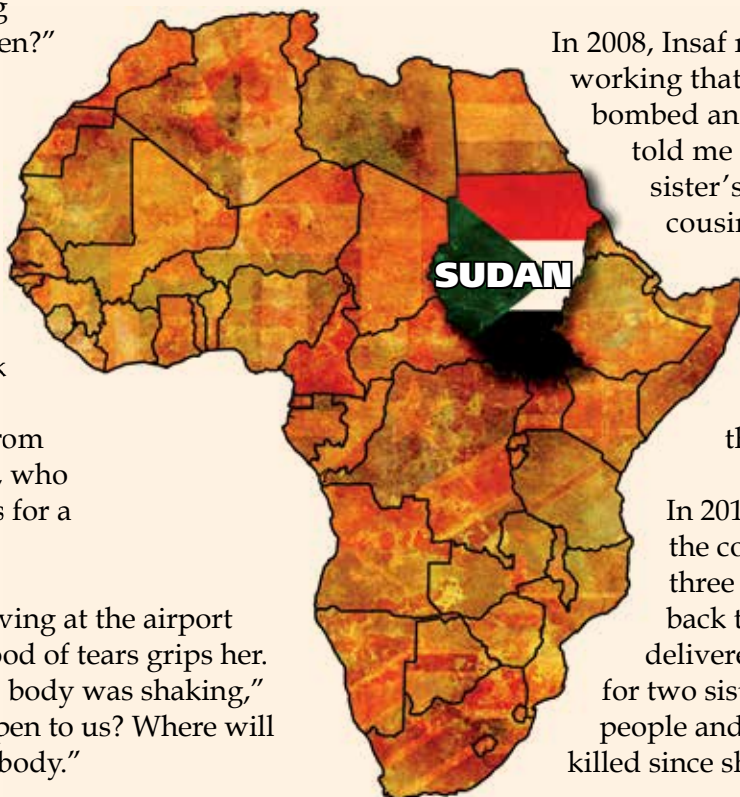
When Insaf talks about arriving at the airport the previous day, a swift flood of tears grips her. "I was so scared. My whole body was shaking," she recalls. "What will happen to us? Where will we go? We don't know anybody."

Then she saw about 100 people from a group of local churches who had formed a ministry called New Hope Connection to welcome refugees to their new country. "I could see they were smiling," Insaf remembers, tears still streaming down her cheeks. "They wanted to hold our baby. I didn't know what anyone was saying, but I thought they must be good people." Among the greeters were Sisters of St. Joseph and associates.

The New Hope Connection provided the couple with an apartment filled with donated furniture, brought in a tutor to teach them English, showed them how to use their land-line phone for emergencies and how to shop for groceries, arranged for and accompanied them for medical treatment, among a host of other kinds of assistance.

Once settled, Insaf relates that she had no way to reach her family. "For more than two years I had no contact with them," Insaf explains. But one day, she met a man

attending Islam prayer at a local church that provided space for their faith community. "He was going back to Sudan, so I bought a cell phone and paid him to take it to my father and teach him how to use it. It was for emergencies."



In 2008, Insaf received a call while she was working that her village was being bombed and strafed with gunfire. "They told me my younger brother, my sister's husband, an uncle and a cousin were all killed." Just last year, she took another call at work. It was a cousin saying they couldn't find her family and she could hear bombs exploding in the background.

In 2013, with attacks continuing, the couple and their family (now three children), managed to go back to Sudan. She bought and delivered more cell phones, one each for two sisters and a brother. Countless people and whole families had been killed since she had left her home.

In the ten years they have been in the U.S. they've both learned English quite well. They've both become American citizens, and after eight years in an apartment they've achieved the "American dream." They now own a small three-bedroom home.

But they're not living on "Easy Street." Mirghani works two jobs and Insaf thinks she may have to get a second job in order to continue helping her family in Sudan. Whenever the shooting and bombing get intense there, she pays rent for her family to stay in a distant safe place – about three-to-four times a year.

Despite all she has been through, Insaf remains positive. She says she wants to tell the American people that she is sorry for any attacks that happen here. "We feel the pain, too, because we all are a family and we are one nation here. If a terrorist strikes and we are in the crowd, they won't pull us out before shooting. It can happen to us, too." ●

How *mercy* tempers *justice* for juvenile ‘criminals’

By Cami Taylor, Attorney and CSJ candidate

Disclaimer: to protect confidentiality, details of client stories have been modified or aggregated. Client names and specific offenses are not revealed, and gender may have been changed as well.

*L*ighting off fireworks to celebrate the 4th of July. Playing with water guns on a hot summer day. Fighting with a classmate in school.

These are some examples of the types of crimes for which my clients have been arrested. I am an attorney working with LAF (a legal aid nonprofit in Chicago – formerly known as the Legal Assistance Foundation) and it is my job to help people erase their juvenile criminal records at the Juvenile Expungement Help Desk. I never regret asking to hear their stories.

Once, a client who had been arrested for a minor and expungable offense broke down crying in my office when I asked to hear his story. He was a young black man from the south side of Chicago. The conduct that led to his arrest was nothing more than harmless teenage shenanigans; and yet he felt despondent about his future. “I’m so afraid I’m not going to make it,” he confided tearfully. “I always like coming downtown – everyone’s



Cami Taylor

wearing suits and going places. It's not like that in my neighborhood." He went on to share that there were no caring adults in his life – yes, his dad was in the picture but he wasn't a good role model. "The only person who ever looked after me was my grandfather. I know he really loved me. But he's gone now."

Another client visited with her mother, who was positively gushing with gratitude. "I spoke to an attorney on the phone who was going to charge me \$2,500 to expunge this arrest. It's so great that you're willing to do this for free," she said. Almost every client who visits my help desk lives at or below 125% of the poverty guidelines - which, for a family size of 1, means that the person's annual income is \$14,588 or less. Almost none of my clients owns a car, real estate, or any other items of value; their bank accounts, if they have one, usually contain between \$3 and \$150 dollars.

My clients are not bad people; they are, quite often, simply lost and lacking constructive outlets for their youthful energy. Like the young man from the south side, they lack positive adult role models. Their parents are overburdened and lack the financial resources to enroll their children in costly extracurricular programs like sports and cheerleading, so after school and on weekends they find themselves running the streets instead.

My clients are also people who are deliberately targeted by the criminal justice system. Because they often have black or brown skin, they experience a well-documented phenomenon known as "disproportionate minority contact" with police, judges, and probation officers. Youth of color come into contact with all points of the criminal justice system at rates disproportionately higher than their white counterparts, and are more likely to be incarcerated - even when charged with the same category of offense. Retired Baltimore police sergeant Michael A. Wood Jr., in the documentary "Fixing the System," explains the phenomenon with startling honesty: "When I was a sergeant, we were routinely one of the

best squads in the city." Why? "Because we had the most arrests, and I [fed] those stats with nothing more than, almost exclusively, those black males in the 16-24 year old range," he confessed. "And it's not necessarily because they're the [only] ones committing the crimes. Whites and blacks have been known to carry narcotics at the exact same rate, so if we went around rifling through pockets whenever we wanted in a white neighborhood, I'm sure we'd find a lot of [narcotics]. But we don't do that. We only do that in these neighborhoods."

A criminal record, while easy to obtain, can be difficult to overcome. A client who had been arrested for roughhousing with a classmate in grade school many years ago visited me at the Juvenile Expungement Help Desk one blustery day. Expunging her criminal record became an immediate priority for her when she applied for subsidized housing and was denied subsequent to a criminal background check. She was disconsolate when she found out that the expungement process takes more than 3 months. She had no place to live, her housing application had been denied, and winter was fast approaching.

Any criminal record can become a barrier to housing, education, and employment.

Many people believe that a juvenile record disappears once the alleged offender turns 18, but that is incorrect. A juvenile record is permanent in the sense that it exists forever, unless it is expunged – and can usually be found by people who look for it. Any criminal record can become a barrier to housing, education, and employment. Typically hiring personnel do not explain why a job applicant has been rejected, but the criminal background check is a factor. For those who have brushed up against the criminal justice system, punishment continues well beyond their official sentence as they face a lifetime of discrimination, judgment, and negative labels like "convicted felon."



One Federal District Court judge, John Gleeson, recently chose to expunge the record of a nonviolent offender he had sentenced more than a decade earlier, saying, “I sentenced her to five years of probation supervision, not to a lifetime of unemployment.” Judge Gleeson further noted that the collateral consequences of a criminal record are often “random and senseless,” and that an “ancient and minor offense” should not prevent someone from finding employment.

My work with juvenile expungement is driven by my understanding that we are to “act justly and to love mercy.” I am a lawyer, but the law without mercy doesn’t do justice to the life, death, and message of Jesus Christ. In the context of my Catholic faith, expunging criminal records is a just act of redemption. It is a second chance for people who were never given a first chance, who were presumed guilty even as children and teenagers.



Blind Justice? The image of the Goddess of Justice balancing the scales and blindfolded goes back to ancient Rome.

It is also an ongoing chance for me to meditate and act upon Jesus’s directive that we are to give one another the benefit of the doubt and forgive our brothers and sisters “not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Doing this work has opened my eyes. It a heavy burden for many growing up on the south or west side of Chicago. One client revealed to me that, from the earliest age he could remember, he dreamed only of joining his neighborhood’s fiercest gang. The gang members were his role models; being in a gang was his version of success. In his world, gang members had the most power, status, and money. He truly felt that the gangs were his path to glory and a brighter future. Now he knows better.

My work with juvenile expungement is driven by my understanding that we are to “act justly and to love mercy.”

Doing this work has challenged me. At first, it seemed like a stretch to feel compassion for people who had allegedly committed criminal acts. But then I took a look back at my life – all the loving people who had mentored me, guided me, cared about my wellbeing, and helped me to make good choices. I realized how my parents have modeled success for me, and how they paid for me to take dance lessons, participate in sports teams and drama clubs and choirs. When I was growing up, it was automatically assumed that I would attend college, and of course my parents paid for my education. Without all those blessings, where would I be today? Had my circumstances been different, would I have a criminal record too?

More than anything, doing this work has given me hope. Each of my clients has a story – a fascinating, true story of resilience, resourcefulness, and courage. Sometimes they got arrested for acting like silly children or restless teenagers. Sometimes they got arrested for behaving imperfectly while having black or brown skin. Sometimes they got arrested for seeking attention in school. Sometimes they got arrested because the inevitability of their arrest was assumed, just as it was assumed that I would go to college. But no matter who they are or what neighborhood they come from, an arrest, a mistake, is not the end. They have more to say, if we are willing to ask. I never regret asking.

I believe justice should be tempered by mercy, because I have never met a client for whom redemption seemed impossible or even improbable. I believe in the young man who broke down crying in my office. He will “make it.” So will all the others. We just have to give them a chance to tell us their stories. ●

Reflection

‘The quality of mercy is not strained ...

... It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath ...
It is an attribute of God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s
When mercy seasons justice.’

– William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene I

By Sallie Latkovich, CSJ

I suspect that the most well-known commentary on mercy comes from William Shakespeare as quoted here. The quality of mercy is not strained, forced, nor demanded, but is freely given; indeed, a gift to the one who receives mercy. Thus, mercy is best understood by one who has received another’s mercy in some way.

According to the Bible, the people of ancient Israel experienced the mercy of God time and again. The Hebrew word, *hesed*, is often translated as mercy, but that is too general a definition. *Hesed* is rooted in relationship, and refers to God’s faithfulness, God’s commitment to keep the covenant. When Israel sins and breaks the covenant, God is released from the obligation of covenant; but it is **mercy** by which God remains faithful.

We might conclude then that mercy is the source of care, of loving kindness, of forgiveness, of compassion when it is unearned or undeserved. Mercy is a quality of humanity at its best.

The Scriptures often reflect on God’s mercy, as in Psalm 145:8: The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The book of Hosea is an allegory in which Hosea remains faithful – and thus merciful to his unfaithful wife, Gomer. In Matthew’s Gospel, 9:13, God says: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” Acts of mercy seem more pleasing to God than ritual acts of sacrifice. In Chapter 6 of Luke’s

Gospel, Jesus teaches that those who act with mercy are indeed children of God, who “is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful as your God is merciful.” A little later in Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 15, we hear the story of the merciful father, who welcomes home his prodigal son as a touching example of great and unexpected mercy.

And so we reflect on a time or times when we have observed mercy, been treated with mercy, or been conscious of choosing to be merciful rather than judgemental. Some stories of mercy are quite simple, but leave lasting impact: like the girls’ championship softball game where a batter hit a home run to win the game. But, she tore a knee ligament at first base and could not move. The umpires warned her team that if she were touched, the home run would be null and void; or if there were a pinch runner, the home run would become a single. The opposing team’s pitcher and catcher went to their opponent on first base and carried her around the bases to complete the run that won the game!

In common use, mercy may be seen as the opposite of “an eye for an eye” but in reality it is much, much more. The merciful person is an image of God, recognizes the relationship with all as brother or sister or the *dear neighbor*, and is ever called upon to show mercy. To be merciful is indeed to be “stimulated by the Holy Spirit of love and attentive to the Spirit’s inspirations.” ●



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LOOKING AHEAD – CONGREGATION OF ST. JOSEPH TURNS 10.

August 2016 marks the beginning of our 10th Anniversary Year.

Since August 2007, when our seven founding communities of St. Joseph came together to be one as the Congregation of St. Joseph, we have experienced the abundance of God's great love through our relationships with each other and with you .

The awareness of our many blessings has prompted us to plan special "service days" as one way we hope to share from our abundance and celebrate with you. On October 15, 2016, Founder's Day and on April 29, 2017 (close to St. Joseph the Worker Day) we are inviting you to participate in service with us in one of the areas of our country where a Center exists or a group of our sisters lives and ministers. We hope that this might serve as a public witness and symbol of our love of neighbor and love for our communities.

In the summer of 2016 we will begin posting service day information on our website. If you are interested in joining with us or want to receive more information when it is available, please drop us a quick note indicating your interest and where you live at celebrating10@csjoseph.org.

