

imagine **ONE**

CONGREGATION OF THE
SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

FALL/WINTER 2014
VOL. 6 ■ NO. 2

The *future*
really *is*
up to *us*



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 Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ



On the cover:

Yes, yes. We all know the old bromide that the future is up to us. Well, Pope Francis has declared 2015 as the year of religious life, calling for religious sisters, brothers and priests to "Wake up the world!" with their testimony of faith, holiness and hope.

The future **really** is up to **us** – **us** and **you**, because we know we are responsible for the quality of life we bequeath to the next and future generations. We also know that creating a viable future is a formidable job given the problems of today, so we need everyone to pitch in and live with intentionality and focus on what we can accomplish.

imagine ONE



The Well spirituality center in LaGrange Park, Ill., has been hosting 4th and 5th graders for retreats so the students can discover how all people and creation are interconnected. They come from different communities, different cultures and varying economic circumstances, but the consistent result is that they always end up bonding. This year, The Well reached halfway around the world to schools in Nigeria thanks to a connection Sister Bee Jay Ciszek, CSJ, has there through an Archdiocese of Chicago program. In both groups, the theme of the three retreat days is, "Walk with Me." The students above and students in Nigeria participated in the retreat at roughly the same time. When told that the hands of the Nigerian students who had made this poster for them had actually touched it, the students just started walking up to it and stayed there touching it in reverent silence for several minutes.

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Reflects on . . . the future

It isn't unusual for some of us to wish we had asked our now deceased parents or another family elder a question like, "Why couldn't Aunt Lucy go to college like her brothers did?" Or, "What did you think when the U.S. entered WWII?"

Imagine 75 years from now, if you can, what future generations would like to ask us about decisions we've made in today's world. Internationally known speaker, poet, writer and teacher of ecology Drew Dellinger, Ph.D., did just that in his iconic poem "Hieroglyphic Stairway." He writes that in his dreams his great, great grandchildren are asking what he did when he first knew that "the planet was being plundered ... that the earth was unraveling ... when the seasons started failing ... when democracy was being stolen?" You can read Drew's poem in its entirety on page 15.

Surely we did something, didn't we? Not just about ecology. What about gun laws? What about the racism we still don't know how to deal with? What is any of us doing about the entrenched causes of poor education systems and our younger generations' outrageous debts for higher education?

It's easy to feel powerless and overwhelmed, but that's no excuse not to do something. At our U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph event in 2000, this is how we described our direction going forward:

We remember that it only took six young uneducated women to form community in LePuy en Valey, France, in 1650 — the beginnings of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. So too, in our day, "a seemingly insignificant group of women hold fiercely to the belief that the grace of active inclusive love has the power to illuminate our broken, fragile, mysterious world. Relying on the strength of God, we dare to witness hope in the midst of diminishment; inclusion in a time of alienation; communion in an era of individualism; healing in the face of racism."

Whatever each of us is able to do about the issues that concern us, when combined with the actions of scores of thousands of our fellow citizens of the world, has an impact. It takes personal steps. Write letters to your local paper's editor, to your congressional and state representatives. Even a postcard note will do. Sign petitions, join prayer vigils. Do your own creative thing, whatever God inspires in you.

Irish political philosopher Edmund Burke summed it up well: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil, is that good men [people] do nothing."

We act through the power and grace of God. Or as my mother would say: *For God's sake, do something!*

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Joan Kreyenbuhl CSJ". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "CSJ" part being more distinct.

Joan Kreyenbuhl, CSJ



Photo by Sister Julie Cannon, CSJ.

After a hard journey on foot for some 20+ days, being questioned by the border patrol and processed by immigration, this mother and her two children came to the Sacred Heart Parish welcoming center in McAllen, Texas, where they finally had a meal, showers, received clean clothing and had a chance to rest on cots. Some of the migrants who came to the welcome center described it as "heaven."

It's amazing **Where Love leads us**

All women religious had to hear this past summer was that there were young children in trouble at the U.S.-Mexico border and they immediately swept into action. Sister Dorothy LeBlanc, CSJ, from our Wichita Center was one of the first to respond by volunteering at St. Pius X Parish in El Paso, Texas, one of the busiest border crossings.

Our congregation immediately made a contribution to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Migration Committee who, along with Catholic Charities, USA, was coordinating legal and resettlement services for families and children who arrived alone. They were fleeing the horrific, continuous violence of gangs, drug cartels and human traffickers in their home countries of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Our leadership team invited sisters, associates and

employees to respond as best each could by going to the border to volunteer, by making financial contributions, by contacting senators and representatives to approve more funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, etc. Then, in August, CSJ Sisters Julie Cannon, Paula Terese Pilon and Karen Kirby went to work at the welcoming center set up at Sacred Heart Parish in McAllen, Texas. Their stories are heart-rending.



Sister Dorothy's experience was that the parish, the diocese, local volunteer agencies and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) had processes down pat and everything well organized from years of experience helping migrants. "Yet, I saw so many children in need and I feel privileged to have been there with them." She visited with children at a detention center and later assisted a Spanish language teacher from the parish who explained to the children what solidarity and love of neighbor are all about.

Back in Wichita, Sister Dorothy joined a group from Sunflower Community Action (SCA) to visit the Fort Sill, Oklahoma, detention center. SCA exists to counter public misinformation about immigrants and received one of our congregation's Generous Promises grants last year. According to Sister Dorothy, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) — not

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) — manages the detention centers. "There was a lawyer from Catholic Charities whose firm provided four Hispanic lawyers each week to help the migrants," she explained. "He said he had no doubt that these children should officially have refugee status."

In McAllen, Texas, Sisters Julie, Karen and Paula Terese worked at the parish with people from Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army, various religious orders and denominations, the county, the city, and agencies such as Save the Children. And all those hands were busy about 12 hours per day:

- Helping at the registration desk explaining and checking documents
- Making sandwiches and preparing snack bags
- Feeding families
- Carrying in and sorting donations
- Helping select clean clothing for new arrivals
- Sorting and folding clothes (a never-ending job)
- Cleaning and sanitizing bathrooms, showers and resting tents
- Playing with the children
- Taking care of families' medical needs (including trips to pharmacies)
- Driving families to the bus station
- Running to pick up supplies
- Assisting families with phone calls home
- Replenishing registration packets, snack bags, toiletries bags, etc.
- Restocking supplies, e.g., towels, pillows, blankets

But it's an obstacle path for the families to get from the border to the parish. In a letter to the congregation, our sisters explained that when the migrants meet the border patrol they are taken to detention where they receive immunizations, have a court date, are charged as "illegals," apply for citizenship and are released on their own recognizance.



Photo by Sister Paula Terese Pilon, CSJ

Migrants who make the difficult journey walking from Central America through Mexico to Texas often need medical attention from volunteer medical professionals like Dr. Joel (l) and Sister Julie Cannon, CSJ, (r), pictured here with Sister Karen Kirby, CSJ. The parish Welcoming Center was equipped with a medical van with exam rooms and this medication area.

Next, they meet with immigration agents who contact a family member already in the U.S. or a sponsor who purchases a bus ticket which is waiting for the migrant at the bus station. Immigration then takes the families by van loads to the bus station and drops them off. Catholic Charities has volunteer “spotters” at the bus station watching for the immigration vans. When the families arrive, the spotters ask them if they would like to come to Sacred Heart church (a few blocks away) to get freshened up, eat, rest, see a doctor and get new clothes and travel packs with snacks. They almost always accept.

Sister Karen, from Parma Heights, Ohio, related that “The organizers are just fabulous. Even when you think you are not being of much help due to the language barrier, they tell us to just walk the families through the center for a meal, which has to be small because they have had an average of 22 days without proper food and their bodies cannot handle it ... then to a shower, clothing, shoes, toiletries and a place to rest before their bus trip. What a transformation from a beaten down appearance to smiles and hugs when they leave.

“Yesterday,” she added, “as I was registering, I asked a woman how she was and she said ‘Feliz!’ The next woman could not stop from crying from her distress. The lesson is ... you cannot cry with them or show sympathy. It would not help them. So, you try to look into their eyes with joyful eyes and just keep saying ‘Bienvenidos!’ (Welcome!)”

Sister Julie, an R.N. from the LaGrange Park Center who recently retired from teaching nursing told us, “I am filled with awe at what these women and children endure to get here on their 15-22-30-day journeys. It is not unusual to see children as young as three months who have made this journey. We have seen everything from headaches, stomach aches, and earaches to young children with seizure disorders, heart conditions, asthma and mothers eight months pregnant who are concerned about their babies. This is the stuff of memories that will remain forever. This effort is totally volunteer ... from the doctors, nurses, lawyers, church and school groups, locals from McAllen, and places all over the United States. One six-year-old from Houston told his family that he wanted to do something for the migrants. The whole family arrived with a van packed



Finally a safe place: Sister Paula Terese Pilon, CSJ, seems to be a protective spirit guarding this baby from all hardship.

with toys, candy, clothing, blankets, bags, etc., ... all due to the work of this young child.”

Paula Terese added in the letter that “It’s unbelievable how downtrodden these folks are when they get to us and how transformed they are with a little food, a shower, change of clothes and a whole lot of TLC. When the families get here we clap for them when they first come in the doors. It is all I can do not to cry sometimes. It is a very emotional moment for them and us.”

She further explained that “One of the other volunteers told me that when they call home, they tell their families they are being treated like royalty — most are moms with kids — and that they are in heaven. We are in a parish hall with mobile showers and tents with cots for resting. And, of course, we are people who welcome and love them. This is what they call heaven.” ●

Six ministries celebrate a combined 150 years serving our dear neighbors

It is a great pleasure to highlight these six of our congregation's ministries that are observing milestone anniversaries this year, because they reflect the wide variety and important ways we serve our *dear neighbors* in various parts of the country. In fact, two of the ministries reach *dear neighbors* around the world.

Ministry of the Arts (MOTA), celebrating its 20th anniversary, and **St. Joseph Press**, celebrating 10 years, are the ministries that reach around the world. Both are located at our LaGrange Park Center in Illinois. MOTA just mailed its Fall/Winter catalog to 145,000 people in August and that will keep St. Joseph Press busy printing literally thousands of cards, especially those for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Many of the cards and

products feature the works of CSJ artists, photographers and musicians. Since 1995, CSJ Associate Flo Christiano has been director of MOTA, whose mission embodies using the arts to bring hope and healing to the world. Congregation employees and sisters work in its Call Center, Fulfillment Center, Gift Shop and, of course, St. Joseph Press. Within the last two years, MOTA expanded its ministry to include serving prison

inmates — sending more than 6,000 copies of its inspiring 2014 Calendar to prisons. This outreach was made possible in part by donations from compassionate customers. MOTA has a wonderful collection of notes of gratitude from many of these inmates.

In Wheeling, West Virginia, **Holy Family Child Care and Development Center** is celebrating its 30th year, having grown from just seven enrolled children in 1984, to today's 75 enrolled children, ages six weeks through the beginning of kindergarten. According to Executive Director Michele Forsythe the center boasts of a totally new commercial-grade kitchen, a beautiful outdoor classroom/playground and expanded classrooms. Its

staff of 20 provides high-quality, developmentally appropriate early care and education Monday-Friday, 6:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., 52 weeks per year. In collaboration with the Ohio County Public Schools, the center offers a Universal Pre-K program for 4 year-olds, as well, and can provide occupational, speech and physical therapy for those children who need it.



Holy Family Child Care and Development Center today has 75 children enrolled.

In New Orleans, the congregation's **People Program** has been a hot spot for 40 years for people ages 50 and over to come for classes, recreation and the arts. According to People Program Executive Director Lynn Crean, the breadth of offerings span courses in art, crafts, needlework, dance, fitness,

languages, music, computer skills, financial fitness, writing, scripture and much, much more. While its first year, 1974, started with just five instructors and 30 members, the membership grew to 100

people by the second session and, within three years, there were more than 500 members in 100 classes, all with volunteer teachers. Today, People Program offers classes at its Westbank and Lakeshore campuses two semesters each year, plus a summer session at Lakeshore. Altogether they serve 1,000 *dear neighbors* annually. The latest exciting news: Ph.D.s from Tulane University's School of Aging Studies have been partnering with the program teaching, conducting tests and presenting programs on topics of great importance to the aging journey.

Rounding out this year's ministry milestone anniversaries are **St. Joseph Spirituality Center** in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, at 30 years and **Transformations Spirituality Center** in Kalamazoo, Michigan, 20 years.

Both spirituality centers offer retreats, spiritual direction, and spirituality and self-improvement classes and programs. The center's programs in Baton Rouge draw about 800 women and men each year and the Transformations Spirituality Center, more than 1,600 people annually.

St. Joseph Spirituality Center Executive Director Dianne Hanley highlights its "True Fasting: Contemplatives in Action" program that helps participants integrate



These program participants at St. Joseph Spirituality Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, were interested in integrating spirituality with social justice work.

spirituality with justice work. One participant evaluation explained that "praying, reflecting on Scripture ... and sharing our personal stories ... provided both challenges and affirmation

to answer the call of putting my faith in action and practicing the Catholic Church's teachings on social justice." According to Dianne, this woman became involved in working on policy regarding "food deserts," or areas where grocery stores won't locate due to crime. Through the center and its work, a leader has been cultivated to create real change in our community."

Transformations Executive Director Michele Gossman reports that more than 98 percent of attendees who write evaluations report that their participation has enriched or increased their sense of:

- connections with self, others, the Divine and/or nature;
- spirituality, faith, and/or spiritual journey;
- meaning and purpose in life;
- confidence in expressing beliefs, opinions and expectations;
- acceptance of differences; and
- gratitude and sense of peace.

Her experience directing the Center leads Michele to conclude that, "There are practices deeply rooted in Christian tradition that can help open us to a life that is deeper and richer than we can imagine — to a life lived from trust, love and abundance rather than one of fear, jealousy and scarcity." ●

SISTERS IN 20th YEAR OF MEDICAL CENTER ALZHEIMER'S STUDY

Twenty years ago, our sisters in LaGrange Park, Illinois, were the first to participate in Chicago's Rush University Medical Center's Religious Orders Study of Alzheimer's disease that grew to include about 1,200 nuns, priests and brothers of religious orders at 46 locations around the country. To mark the two decade milestone, David A. Bennett, MD, who is the principal investigator of the Religious Orders Study, hosted a luncheon for the sisters still participating in the study, thanked them for their considerable commitment to the research and reported key findings they helped make possible.

Of the 35 sisters who have participated, 23 are still alive and active in the study. To be included each sister had to be 65 years of age or older, have no obvious signs of dementia, and agree to donate her brain for further research at the time of death. Participants undergo an annual medical history, neurologic examination and neuropsychologic performance testing.



Dr. David Bennett, M.D., principal architect of the study, hosted a luncheon for the sisters who are still participating. Sister Adrienne Schmidt, shown here, was in the very first group in the study.

Here are some of the key findings Dr. Bennett reported at the luncheon:

- **Lifestyle choices we make are important.** Staying cognitively active (by playing games, reading books or newspapers, taking a class or trying a new activity) and physically active (adding steps to your daily activities, exercising daily for 30 minutes, etc.) benefits your brain health.
Other lifestyle choices that help our brains include maintaining friendships, volunteering, being active socially (not isolating ourselves) and eating more fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Alzheimer's disease leaves evidence on the brain post mortem.** The evidence can be there in spite of the fact that the person did not exhibit any signs of memory loss while alive. About one-third of deceased participants were in this category. The human brain has a protective "reserve" that keeps our memories intact, even when signs of Alzheimer's are present in the brain.
- **Alzheimer's can be related to strokes:** Persons who develop Alzheimer's disease are likely to have mixed pathology — the presence of both Alzheimer's disease and infarcts (strokes).
- **Blood samples collected from participants helped create a large database used to observe cognitive decline and to conduct analyses of changes in DNA cells.**
- **The study has generated more than 100 scientific publications.** Many of these are considered to be seminal works prompting news releases from such institutions as the National Institutes of Health and the American Medical Association. Many also were the subject of editorials in leading medical journals.

The Religious Orders Study, a collaborative effort with Rush and a number of other medical centers across the country, is seeking to identify a new generation of Alzheimer disease targets. Rush was recently awarded one of three grants to integrate epidemiology, systems biology and technology to discover and validate new therapeutic methods for treating and preventing Alzheimer's disease. ●

Serving the Dear Neighbor

St. Joseph Workers, Jenny and Lauren



Jenny Ploussard



Lauren Schmitt

Our sisters in Wichita have welcomed Jenny Ploussard and Lauren Schmitt, who are participating in the yearlong St. Joseph Worker program. Grounded in the values of justice, leadership, spirituality and community living, the St. Joseph Worker program trains, supports and mentors single women between the ages of 21-30 to be agents of change as they provide direct services in local communities.

Jenny, a 2014 art therapy graduate from Washburn University, is from Oberlin, Kansas. She is serving at the congregation-sponsored Dear Neighbor Ministries (DNM) and StepStone as a resource outreach assistant and using her art therapy education working with children there. Dear Neighbor Ministries (DNM) helps our neighbors through direct assistance and through collaborative efforts with other service providers. One of the most recent examples of partnering with other providers came in June when DNM began collaborating with the Lord's Diner, a Diocese of Wichita ministry, to start delivering daily evening meals to residents in the Hilltop area of town.

Lauren is a 2014 graduate of the University of Northern Iowa having majored in leisure, youth and human services, with a minor in gerontology. She is ministering at Episcopal Social Services in the Breakthrough Club, a ministry that supports mentally and emotionally challenged adults in setting goals. Many people with mental illness do not live as long as the average woman or man in the United States because they lack the personal and financial resources to engage in healthy behaviors, such as exercising and eating nutritious food. Lauren's ministry work at the Breakthrough Club involves helping with health and wellness education, a key component to their goal-setting agenda.

Other member congregations of the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph who have welcomed St. Joseph Workers this year are: Albany, NY; Carondelet - St. Paul, MN; and Carondelet - Los Angeles, CA. ●

At the request of Dear Neighbor Ministries, the Diocese of Wichita sends a mobile unit of the Lord's Diner to provide one meal a day for our dear neighbors in the Hilltop area. The diocese began the Lord's Diner in 2002 in downtown Wichita and has since expanded to another fixed site and another mobile unit. Today it serves 1,000-1,200 meals seven days a week, 365 days a year, including holidays.



Investments can influence better corporate behavior

Just like ordinary people and businesses, our congregation works at managing its finances and invests some savings in order to be able to meet future needs. While we use professional investment managers, two of our Peace and Justice team members, Sisters Mary Ellen Gondeck, CSJ, and Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ, work to ensure that we invest responsibly, in ways that influence companies to change policies or practices that are unjust or oppressive to people or to the environment.



Mary Ellen
Gondeck, CSJ



Joellen Sbrissa, CSJ

It's called Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) and Sisters Mary Ellen and Joellen are members of the nationwide Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) where they partner and network with other faith-based group members to influence responsible corporate practices, both nationally and internationally.

"The first thing we do is ask our money managers to select investments that fit with our investment policies and values," Mary Ellen explains. "For example we will not invest in companies that manufacture weapons."

ICCR members work together having frequent conference calls on what issues are most in need of shareholder pressure for change and how they can best strategize about effecting that change. In addition, those who are highly interested in a specific issue – such as hydraulic fracturing or human rights or human trafficking – meet in issue-specific groups when necessary.

"We sometimes take action as shareholders," Joellen adds. "We may dialogue with a corporation or speak out at its annual shareholders meeting. Because ICCR members have cultivated relationships with corporate managers who view us as serious long-term investors, they agree to formal conversations with specific agendas. Dialogues are our primary tool to raise awareness with corporate management."

If dialogues and other communications with a company do not produce results, then our congregation and other ICCR members may file a resolution that would appear in the company's annual shareholder meeting proxy book to be brought up for a vote. ICCR members also vote their proxies on other resolutions presented, according to their values.

One of the most effective cases of using investment strategies to achieve justice contributed to ending apartheid government in South Africa in the 1970s. One strategy was for investors to divest of their holdings in South Africa because the apartheid government benefited from those investments. Another strategy was dialogue with banks that sold the country's gold Krugerrand, returning profit to the apartheid government. And faith-based investors brought the issue up at shareholder meetings. Because of pressure from justice organizations, the business world and faith-based investors, the South African government collapsed, Nelson Mandela was released from 27 years in prison, and he became President of South Africa.

Two current examples of cases Mary Ellen, Joellen and ICCR are working on involve an oil company and a coal mining company. Significant issues with the oil company focus on reducing and eliminating methane emissions in both its use of hydraulic fracturing and in its oil and gas development. Other significant issues involve contamination of the local water where fracking operations continue and the company's implementation of its policies on drilling on Native American land.

The issue with the energy company is that coal mining consumes billions of gallons of fresh water per day. Through dialogue, this company has promised to report progress on its three-year goal to increase water recycling by 80 percent.

"Socially responsible investing provides some of the best opportunities for us to network with others to influence corporate decision making on environmental and social issues affecting our dear neighbors," Joellen concluded. ●

500 Garden project unites neighbors and beautifies the area

From vacant unkempt areas to eye-popping, fresh smelling, food-producing gardens, the Sisters of St. Joseph living in Madisonville, Ohio, have joined the local citizens in improving their community, one garden at a time. New signs advertising “**500 Gardens Madisonville**” sprang up along our streets. Neighbors have joined the effort to teach and mentor new gardeners growing food. Their hope was to have 500 gardens help change the face of Madisonville in Cincinnati.

A few years ago Sister Caroline Benken, CSJ, covered over a broken sidewalk area in her yard and used some stacked up bricks from behind the garage to build a wall around the area. She filled it in with the dirt from compost. Alleluia! A garden came into being with lettuce, tomatoes and bell peppers right outside the kitchen door.

The Director of the Lighthouse Community School changed the troubled students who hung out in the parking lot trying to sneak a smoke into a cohesive team with a growing interest in raised beds for gardening. Their fresh food helped feed their neighbors. The task even became a job opportunity for some of the students. The school has expanded to an



The 500 Gardens project brought neighbors together like never before for common purposes: beautifying the neighborhood, enjoying home-grown vegetables and sharing with people in need in the area.



Sister Caroline Benken, CSJ, starts up this year's garden explaining the process to an interested young neighbor, Addison.

overrun vacant lot and is now one of the sponsors of this project. Some of the goals of this effort are to provide better food, some exercise, help build community and help the economic possibilities of a once thriving neighborhood that has fallen into so much disrepair.

Joining this effort is one more way to network with others and renew the face of earth and to make a shift in our culture toward inclusivity and mutuality. Everyone involved in the gardening has enjoyed the blessings of neighbors, homegrown vegetables and rebuilding their neighborhood and the earth it occupies. ●

SPIRIT OF GIVING

Helping Others Has No Boundaries

In 2011, Diane Palmer went on a one-woman mission trip to Africa where she climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro to raise funds for five missions in Africa — including St. Joseph Hostel in Songea, Tanzania. When asked why she made this effort, she said the answer was simple, "... because of the wonderful influence of my parents, St. Joseph sisters I had as teachers and my dear aunts, St. Joseph sisters, Lillian and Emma Molitor, who were wonderful role models." Sister Lillian was an educator and Sister Emma was in health care and one of the first two missionary sisters sent to Japan. "They served the poorest of the poor with dignity and made you strive to be better than you thought you could be. And, the people they served felt they were their friends, and they were," said Diane, adding, "The *dear neighbor* concept to me is anyone we come in contact with no matter where we are — home or in a foreign country miles away. My aunts were two of the first to model this for me."

After the climb, Diane spent three months visiting the charities in Africa. While she traveled alone she says she never felt alone because of the generous and kind people she met on her journey noting that they

embodied the concept of ONE. Diane recalls one example from her fourteen-hour bus ride to reach St. Joseph Hostel. "My seat partner was a Muslim lady. I had never had a one-to-one conversation with a Muslim and I found out she had some of the same concerns I had about the world and what we could do to help each other. She was diagnosed with breast cancer and was going to Songea for a second opinion. When we said our good-byes I was so grateful that she and I spent the day together on that bumpy, dusty hot bus ride. I tried to be a good listener and give her some comfort. I hope I did."

While helping, others might be part of Diane's DNA, she says she believes that the spirit of giving is more of a learned attribute, growing in the day-to-day act of giving, whether it is making a meal for a neighbor who is ill, tutoring a child having difficulty reading or volunteering on a church committee. She added, "Once you volunteer and know the feeling of helping others for the sheer reward of helping, you don't even think about receiving any other reward than the satisfaction of helping another person in need." ●



Diane enjoyed visiting with the students at St. Joseph Hostel in Tanzania.



Diane remembers her aunts, Sisters Lillian and Emma, serving the "poorest of the poor" with dignity.

To learn about more ways to support the congregation's mission and ministries, visit our website at www.csjoseph.org.

hieroglyphic stairway

BY DREW DELLINGER

*It's 3:23 in the morning
and I'm awake
because my great great grandchildren
won't let me sleep
my great great grandchildren
ask me in dreams
what did you do while the planet was plundered?
what did you do when the earth was unraveling?*

*surely you did something
when the seasons started failing?

as the mammals, reptiles, birds were all dying?*

*did you fill the streets with protest
when democracy was stolen?*

*what did you do
once
you
knew?*

*I'm riding home on the Colma train
I've got the voice of the milky way in my dreams*

*I have teams of scientists
feeding me data daily
and pleading I immediately
turn it into poetry*

*I want just this consciousness reached
by people in range of secret frequencies
contained in my speech*

*I am the desirous earth
equidistant to the underworld
and the flesh of the stars*

I am everything already lost

*the moment the universe turns transparent
and all the light shoots through the cosmos*

I use words to instigate silence

*I'm a hieroglyphic stairway
in a buried Mayan city
suddenly exposed by a hurricane*

*a satellite circling earth
finding dinosaur bones
in the Gobi desert
I am telescopes that see back in time*

*I am the precession of the equinoxes,
the magnetism of the spiraling sea*

*I'm riding home on the Colma train
with the voice of the milky way in my dreams*

*I am myths where violets blossom from blood
like dying and rising gods*

*I'm the boundary of time
soul encountering soul
and tongues of fire*

*it's 3:23 in the morning
and I can't sleep
because my great great grandchildren
ask me in dreams
what did you do while the earth was unraveling?*

*I want just this consciousness reached
by people in range of secret frequencies
contained in my speech*

DREW DELLINGER — ©2003

Editor's note: When our Editorial Ideas Team met to plan this issue, the gist of the poem above led us to the theme: "What did you do once you knew (that something was wrong)?" Internationally known speaker, poet, writer and teacher of ecology Drew Dellinger challenges us with his iconic poem "hieroglyphic stairway." Visit Drew's website at www.drewdellinger.org.



Photo by Elena Chermak.

"Sister Principal" Jean McGrath, CSJ, (lower right) hams it up with her youngsters imagining their hands full of gooey peanut butter and jelly. Read her story to find out why.

We can all do something *to influence a better future*

By Jean McGrath, CSJ

I confess. I was a reluctant recycler.

As a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph, for whom reverencing earth and all of creation is a core value, it is tough to acknowledge this shortcoming. I work in a school with seven hundred children and even though I am the queen of paper conservation, the idea of no water bottles, no paper plates, no paper napkins was a very practical hurdle that seemed far removed from a core value. (Imagine the sticky hands and tables after fourteen hundred peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch!)

But change is possible and can happen in very small, yet sacred ways.

Drew Dellinger's thought-provoking and perhaps guilt-inducing poem on page 15 of this issue is a wakeup call for major conversion. However, I am not one who has had 3 a.m. dreams featuring questions from future generations about planet plundering or earth unraveling. I do not identify as one "equidistant to the underworld and the flesh of the stars." I am like most busy people worried about paying bills, cholesterol numbers and my car making it through another Chicago winter.

Global warming? Fracking? Carbon footprints? I read the articles, watch the news, shake my head and think of my dear mother, who, though she never heard of theologian Teilhard de Chardin, would say, "God must be trying to tell us something," after a major weather event in any part of the world. Then she would offer her daily rosary for the victims of these tragedies, confident that her prayer would make a difference in an unsteady world.

Who can doubt a mother's wisdom?

Every day we are challenged to strike a balance between awareness that our time to save the planet is finite and the invitation to make small changes to our lifestyles. Will bringing a canvas bag to the grocery store really make a difference in "the grand scheme of things"?

What will be the source of optimism and hope for our children and grandchildren when bad news is so abundant ... and the time, energy and passion to make a difference is too often buried in our busy calendars ... and innumerable tasks demand our attention?

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Those encouraging words from anthropologist Margaret Meade remind us that optimism flourishes and change occurs when even a few dedicated individuals demonstrate their desire to challenge systems that hamper human development. The enthusiasm and dedication of these creative few is contagious. Small changes often result in big differences.

Often great ideas that result in significant change happen in response to an immediate need. Many of the vital ministries of the Sisters of St. Joseph began when a small group of sisters responded to a local need in their area. Our history and heritage hold inspiring stories of women and men who, in living their gospel values, effected major change. Their vision and fierce determination resulted in establishing schools, hospitals and spirituality centers to address the physical, intellectual, and spiritual hungers of the soul. Today, sisters and associates continue to be passionate about immigration reform, the indignity of human trafficking, care for Earth and other issues that diminish hope for future generations.

When I taught Confirmation preparation classes, I tried to inspire my students with the story of the prophet Jeremiah. Loosely translated Jeremiah is challenged by God not to let his youth, his perceived weaknesses, or his inability to be more articulate be an excuse for complacency.

If we had the same conversation with God, our response might be; I am too busy, I am too tired, I cannot change the system. But we can do something... we can make small changes.

Instead of complaining endlessly about an ineffective congress, what if we wrote letters to our senators on critical issues or called their offices to express a view? What if we did not eat meat one day each week because it takes an a lot of precious water of precious water to raise livestock? What if we shopped only where we knew fair labor practices were the norm? What if we believed more strongly in the call to holiness and the power of love to transform lives?

I am happy to report that every classroom in the school where I work now recycles with great fervor. I am trying to conserve gasoline by consolidating my trips. I have replaced the case of water in the kitchen with some lovely water bottles (that really do keep the water much colder!) and I am more mindful of conserving energy at home and school.

None of these changes will allow me to meet or match poet Dellinger's lofty goals. But inspired and encouraged by the words of Mother Teresa, I continue to believe we are called to "do small things with great love."

The paper napkins in the school cafeteria remain the next challenge. ●

Sister Jean Anne McGrath, CSJ, is an educator who serves as principal at St. John Fisher School in Chicago.



For the children in the occupied territory, the power of art and color expresses hope. Imagine the same scene without art anywhere.



"And I hope that the children will remember that someone came and painted with them," says Kate (background wearing hat) of her experience in nurturing reconciliation in the occupied West Bank, Israel.

See what a *faith-filled art teacher* has accomplished

Art teacher Kate Marshall makes a difference in the world in truly unconventional ways. She lives intentionally in community at the House of Hagar Catholic Worker in Wheeling, West Virginia, is a member of a Faith Sharing group at our Wheeling Center and offers art retreats at St. Joseph Retreat Center.

In early 2012, Kate learned of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a unique outreach created before WWI, to encourage reconciliation in places where animosity rages. She responded to the Fellowship's invitation to submit artwork in competition to join a team going to the Palestinian West Bank territory occupied by the Israeli. The purpose was to use art to inspire reconciliation among the people there. Kate made the cut to be on the team of six, who worked in the West Bank from September through October 2012.

"We arrived in Hebron, only two weeks after Sister Anne Montgomery died," Kate recalled. "Sister Anne, who was in her eighties, regularly broke curfew to bring bread to hungry, home-bound Muslims and Christians. The people there asked us to paint her figure on an outdoor wall for all to see, along with another figure, Rachael Corrie. Rachael, a 23-year-old Pennsylvanian, was killed by a bulldozer as she tried to protect Muslim and Christian homes from being destroyed.

How does art help? Kate tells of visiting a community where she saw some art done by a previous team. "One of the Muslim women there introduced us to her baby girl, Dara, whom she named after a Jewish artist on that earlier team.

"The people told us that they felt like forgotten people, that it was meaningful that we came from outside to be in solidarity with them," Kate explained. "We established relationships and I keep in touch with people I met there — I hope for the rest of our lives. And I hope that the children will remember that someone came and painted with them and had tea with them."

Back stateside, Kate has made it a goal in her contacts to humanize the story of what has been dehumanized in the West Bank and to raise awareness by showing pictures of her friends there.

At Catholic Worker House, Kate met a fellow resident who was involved in organic farming. Their discussion led to her becoming the Art and Agriculture instructor for Grow Ohio Valley, the nonprofit sponsor of an urban inner-city farm where she teaches area youth agriculture concepts through art in her "classroom" below in an abandoned highway underpass. Recently they concentrated on pollination.

The farm consists of two greenhouses and crops and chickens on formerly abandoned lots. Grow Ohio Valley's first grant, which came from our congregation, has helped the community set up a farm stand and teach the area youth agriculture and gardening skills and marketing and pricing concepts for selling in "food desert" communities that have no grocery stores. They already have arranged to take senior vouchers and food stamps. Grow Ohio Valley also works with Wheeling Jesuit Appalachian Institute immersion programs for children and adults.

"The people in West Virginia have some issues in common with farmers in the West Bank," Kate observed. "In the occupied West Bank the occupiers ration clean water to the Palestinians and don't allow them to have running water. Also, the settlers poison their crops. Here, in West Virginia, coal production and fracking are poisoning the water supply and that kills our crops."

"We really are connected with our brothers and sisters all over the world," Kate concluded. ●



This Grow Ohio Valley farm produced 10,000 lbs. of organic produce last year. A grant from our congregation helped the students and farm workers set up a clean, attractive market where area people otherwise had no local access to such bounty. At right, Kate's "classroom" is nothing more than a corner of an old highway underpass.



Neighboring a New – Creating a Future that is Active and Vibrant

By Jeannie Masterson, CSJ

When our seven founding communities of St. Joseph came together as one congregation in 2007, we were clear that it was all about the mission – not about finances or someone to care for us in our old age – but about what we can be and do together more effectively than any one group of us could be and do separately. From every perspective, we see confirmation that our decision to come together as one community was the right one. Here is why I say this.

In the last 7 years, we have fostered collaboration among sponsored ministries across our geography, strengthening their network of support. We have initiated new ministries and infused existing ones with new energy. We have worked with others, such as Crossroads anti-racism training, joined in anti-

trafficking efforts with other religious congregations, and been part of multiple groups working to end capital punishment. Young people welcome us, and we welcome them, in our efforts for justice. Our circles of connection continue to expand as we work with local communities and state and federal legislators for immigration reform. The ripple effect of our energy, direction, and pursuit of dreams continue to surprise those who want to think of us as old and tired. As noted theologian Ilia Delio says, “We are dying - and that’s OK.” We are committed to embracing the newness that is emerging from our openness to reorganizing.

At the same time, while we believe that age is “just a number,” we are consistently realistic about our demographics: the number of sisters in our congregation is dropping quickly. Our group began with approximately 800 members, but we look toward

being less than a third of that number in 2027. Despite our declining numbers, we have not one, but six former motherhouses (now called centers), each with significant acreage. It is a test of our creativity to make decisions that will preserve our heritage and leave a legacy of mission well beyond the physical presence of our members and our current buildings. We have lots left to do! This awareness has only strengthened our resolve to make courageous, intelligent, thoughtful decisions about our lives, our land, our legacy and our future. As an old poster proclaimed, "God ain't done with us yet!"

Obviously, we want to provide for our sisters in settings that are safe, age-appropriate, adaptable for eventual use by others, and reflective of our openness to the Spirit's constant coaxing to new life. At the same time, we are unwilling to make senior care our primary focus. We have responded to God's call to be of service to others, so our care for ourselves must be balanced with care for others. We want and need to collaborate with others in new initiatives. We want and need our lives to be mingled with others in mission; contemplative isolation is not our calling.

Through our congregation-wide planning and strategic development process called Neighboring aNew, we have engaged all of our sisters in choosing four areas of focus that have potential for future outreach in our center buildings and properties. These focus areas are: spirituality that reverences all of life, housing for vulnerable populations, multigenerational education, and ecology. We have no expectation that every center will host all four values, but that each value will be represented somewhere around the congregation. We invited experts in all four fields to talk with us about the needs in our areas. We find ourselves, as we have at other times in our history, determined to act as we have always been called to "see what needs of our *dear neighbor* are not being met, and meet them," and to do this in relationship with others.

We are now in a period of research and conversation with multiple nonprofit groups, considering special needs populations, sustainable farming, renewable energy, and expanded ways to share spiritual nourishment with our *dear neighbors*. We are working with the consulting firm of Hofmann, from Appleton, Wisconsin, to creatively design living spaces for ourselves and future generations, based on their



Part of our congregation's efforts to build relationships and support our dear neighbors involve collaborative meetings that bring together our ministry leaders, sisters, ministry board members and staff. This picture was taken at a recent CSJ Ministries convocation.

experience and success doing this for other congregations of women religious. You will see either renovation or new building at some of our centers to make spaces that are more appropriate for aging bodies and that allow for both community and ministry connections. We are looking at ways to reorganize responsibilities so that our sisters no longer will have to manage buildings, properties, and health care. We are looking for ways to create new patterns of life that will support the needs of our *dear neighbors*, including you, the earth, and ourselves.

As a congregation, we anticipate offering rich benefits for the world through the choices we are in the process of making. Our younger members, and those who will join us as partners in the coming years, will have the freedom to respond to ministry needs without the encumbrance of managing large properties. The future will certainly look different from the past, as we continue to find our way into new efforts that express our love for, and commitment to, our global *dear neighbor*.



Jeannie Masterson, CSJ, is serving a second term on the Congregation Leadership Team. Earlier she served in provincial leadership, teaching, high school administration, and as a pastoral associate for adult formation. Sister Jeannie was the founding and active director for eight years of Cincinnati's Jordan Center, which brought health attention to uninsured working people and their families.



A new generation explores the morality *of the death penalty*

By Rachael Hudak, National Coordinator of the
Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project
Photos by Brian Cobas

Hector Montoto didn't have an opinion about the death penalty when he took the lead role in Miami Dade College's (MDC's) production of "Dead Man Walking." "I never thought about it," he explained. "I never had a personal experience with crime or knew anyone who had been murdered. But after playing a man sentenced to die, it's a different story."



Sister Helen talks with members of the play's cast.



Hector Montoto plays the role of the condemned Matthew Poncellet

Based on the bestselling book “Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States,” the play centers on Sister Helen Prejean’s experience as a spiritual advisor to a prisoner on death row. Twenty years after the book’s first publication, many young people recognize the phrase “dead man walking,” but most have neither seen the film nor read the book. And yet, with 32 states still in support of the death penalty and more than 3,000 people on death row, the issue of capital punishment is just as relevant today as it was when the book was first published.

Since the launch of the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project in the fall of 2004, more than 240 high schools and colleges across the country have produced the play, bringing the issue of capital punishment to life for this new generation. The play provides an opportunity for students to explore the death penalty from multiple perspectives. As students research their roles, which include the grief-stricken parents of two murdered teenagers, a Louisiana prosecutor and a guilty man on death row, they’re also confronted by the facts.

Students often develop their own opinions about the death penalty while participating in the production, but the project also supports those students who are undecided or struggling with the facts. Valerie Holliday, MDC’s chairperson of Arts & Philosophy, shared, “Ultimately, I think Sr. Helen wants us to genuinely and

authentically think the issue of the death penalty through for ourselves and not because it’s being propagated by some agenda.” And that’s precisely what Tim Robbins, who wrote both the screenplay and the stage play, was trying to do when he made the play available to young people around the country. “I don’t think anyone would argue that we should kill innocent people,” Robbins wrote. “I want the argument to be more complex than that: should we kill even the most despicable human beings?”

Mariandrea Garcia, who played the grief-stricken mother of one of the victims in MDC’s production, answered, “Dead Man Walking reminded me that we’re all imperfect but we all deserve understanding and forgiveness. We’re all human and we should not have an inhumane practice of killing people.” But while she has developed her own opinions, Mariandrea understands the importance of not pushing other people. “I spoke to a lot of people after our performance who told me they’re so confused about the death penalty, and are not sure how to feel. I think that confusion is the best thing — it asks them to process what it is they stand up for.”

For Adib Sharief, who played the chaplain at Louisiana State Penitentiary, Robbins’ question is more complex. “My father was gunned down when I was 12. I do think we should have the death penalty as an option. But the people who usually get the death penalty are people who are not so economically well-off and there are a lot



of gray areas. I had no idea that it costs more to execute a prisoner than to put him behind bars for life. I'm still grappling with that information."

"This is so much more than a play," said Jaime Anzalotta, MDC's Professor of Social Work and Student Life Skills who helped over 40 classes participate in MDC's campus initiative by reading the book and participating in the production of the play. "This was a life-changing experience. Not only were teachers teaching students, but students were teaching other students and teaching teachers. The play is a real world project that truly teaches empathy."

When Hector Montoto's friends and family ask him about his experience, he tells them that playing a death row inmate led him to oppose the death penalty. And it changed his life. Today he works at a trauma center at Jackson Memorial Hospital, where sometimes prisoners in chains are brought in for care. "I think about how I walked up and down that stage in leg shackles for two

months and I connect with the prisoners. In a way, I lived their experience. And that's the beauty of acting."

For the group of actors at Miami Dade College, the play is so much more than a story. It's a call to action. "We are participating in the creation of reality," says Adib Sharief, "and if we sit back and let someone else hold the paintbrush, I don't think we should complain about the picture. If we want change, we're gonna have to jump in." ●



Rachael Hudak is a project manager for Sister Helen Prejean and she is the Director of the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project, based at DePaul University in Chicago. Rachael has worked for a number of organizations that address issues of incarceration and poverty. She's also a poet, storyteller, and yoga teacher.

Bring the program that participants have called "life changing," "staggering," and "so much more than a play" to your community. For a reading copy of the play and an information packet to share with schools in your area, contact Rachael at 312-362-5573 and playcoordinator@dmwplay.org or visit www.dmwplay.org to learn more about this powerful interdisciplinary program.

Catholic Mobilizing Network now officially a sponsored CSJ Ministry

Late last spring the congregation's leadership team approved Catholic Mobilizing Network as a separate sponsored ministry. Initiated by Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, in 2009, Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN) had been operating as a component of our Ministry Against the Death Penalty (MADP).

Catholic Mobilizing Network supports Catholic institutions and organizations in their efforts to end the use of the death penalty in the United States and in initiatives promoting restorative justice. CMN works in close collaboration with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to prepare Catholics for informed involvement in state campaigns to repeal death penalty laws, reduce death sentences and executions, and expand or inaugurate restorative justice programs. CMN's home office is in Washington, D.C.

For more information about CMN visit its website at www.catholicmobilizing.org.



Catholic Mobilizing Network Executive Director Karen Clifton often addresses important groups, such as these people participating in the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress.

Take a look... *the earth is full of sacred places*

By Marie Schwan, CSJ

Photos by Sister Mary Anne Hebert, CSJ



Come with me as I drive across the plains of South Dakota following Interstate 90 that runs like a ribbon from Sioux Falls to Wyoming. Lakes sparkle in the sun; the fields are green with crops; then we roll through towns that connect the people of area. As we cross the mighty Missouri that cuts diagonally through the state, the farmlands turn to grasslands that by mid-June have already turned brown, burned by the droughts that too often mark the summers.

Imagine the settlers who once lived in this abandoned house on the road to Sioux Center, a Jesuit retreat center.

As I travel I am always struck by the undulating rhythm—almost like music—of the landscape, broken occasionally by a tree or two standing deformed and naked against the sky, or a distant fringe of trees that indicates a wandering stream. Here or there is a herd of cattle, black against the golden earth—or even a scattering of elk.

Is that a shadow of Native American warriors riding across the distant hills? Here and there is what remains of a homestead, a reminder, perhaps, of old dreams. Against the background of blue/gray sky and rolling clouds, the scene is a panorama of beauty, and my heart cries out with the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins in “The Golden Echo”:

*“Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty
back to God, beauty’s self and beauty’s giver.”*

The hills sing to me. Perhaps it is God Him/Herself who is singing to my heart. And I am a part of all that is.

Near a town called Wall, named for the jutting up of limestone that has emerged from prehistoric times, I turn south and drive to the rim of what is known as the Badlands. I am intrigued by a sod farm settlement that is still intact. I want to speak with and listen to those first settlers. What kept them there during the threat of summer tornadoes and three-day winter blizzards? Was it the magnificence of the sunrises or the sunsets, or was it simply the pioneer tenaciousness that forms the heart





The barrenness of the Badlands presents no mystery about how these rock formations came to be named.

of the people of this state? I can only imagine what it was for the first settlers to have painfully made the trip across the plains and to arrive at the edge of what is in many ways a wasteland. And wasteland that it appears to be, it has its own incredible majesty and beauty — layer upon layer of limestone, golden, rose, blue and every hue between that shifts in the changing day as the clouds roll across the sky. I have stopped in wonder on an evening, when the sky was mauve, and a silver disk of moon rose over the rock formations. God spoke; God called; God smiled in the mystical moment.

Eventually I come upon the foothills of the Black Hills. In the distance there are the blue and deeper blue, almost black mountain formations that predate the Rocky Mountains. The hills are covered with pine trees; the rock formations stretch into majestic peaks. Something of the mystique of these hills, held sacred by centuries of Native Americans, envelops me. It is to these heights that young warriors wound their way to spend days and nights in fasting and silent prayer, awaiting a vision that gave shape to their lives. So

sacred are the land and the trees and the animals that provide sustenance to the people that the Native Americans see in creation, “all my relatives.” When they chopped a tree down for firewood, or killed a deer or buffalo, the first moment was to offer thanks to the tree or the slain animal.

In all these moments I am aware that the Great Spirit reaches out to smile on me, to comfort me, to embrace me in the Presence that can only be known in the incredible beauty of creation.

My profession is to always be on the alert to find God in nature, to know his lurking places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas, in nature.

– Henry David Thoreau

I think that St. Ignatius of Loyola would have cherished an experience of South Dakota – and perhaps he does so through his Jesuit companions who, for close to 150 years, have entered into the lives of the Native Americans who populate the reservations. Ignatius closes his “Spiritual Exercises” with an invitation to live one’s life with an ever-deepening awareness of the gift of creation. Every tree, every mountain, every animal is a gift. But as we ponder the beauty of the flower, the majesty of the mountain, the cunning of the wild beast, we can come to realize that we are experiencing the beauty of God, the majesty – and even, yes, the cunning of our Creator.

With Black Elk, I pray, “Great Spirit, to the center of the world you have taken me and showed me the goodness and the beauty and the strangeness of the greening earth. ... You have shown me and I have seen.” And I

know again, as for the first time that “All things are connected like blood which connects one family. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth.” (Chief Seattle) ●



Sister Marie Schwan (Jerome Marie), CSJ, ministered with the Jesuits in the Diocese of Rapid City, SD for eight years, helping with the lay and diaconate formation programs, spiritual direction and retreats.




Sunset on the way from the Badlands to Rapid City, South Dakota



Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: **Our Responsibility**

By Pam Young, CSJ

My introduction to care of the earth/sustainability/ climate change began in the early 1970s when a local newspaper printed a series of articles and interviews about the possible depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer that is tapped by farmers and ranchers in eight states in the Great Plains.

n western Kansas, much of the water is used to irrigate corn which, when harvested, is used to feed cattle in order to satisfy our taste for beef. The comments of some farmers and ranchers who indicated that they would continue drawing from the aquifer at the rate to which they had become accustomed shocked me. Even though the water I used for my small garden originated from a nearby river rather than the aquifer, I began learning how to conserve water while maintaining a productive vegetable patch. In subsequent years my concern widened to include our dependence on fossil fuels and the damage this ultimately causes to the ozone layer, and the negative effects of deforestation to the climate and to persons living in the affected area. Once some of the ways in which human behavior negatively influences the climate became clear, I had to look more closely at my own actions and their consequences. As my environmental awareness has increased, I hope that my carbon footprint has decreased.

As communication systems and means of travel have given us means of meeting one another, we have begun to understand that environmental issues and events may occur locally but their effect is global. Often what becomes an issue in one part of the world, carbon emissions, for example, is an issue in another part of the world as well. Cities in China and Europe as well as the U.S. suffer the ill effects of air pollution. We are also beginning to realize that the economically disadvantaged and physically frail people among us are likely to suffer the most from the negative effects of environmental issues and events because these people have the least ability to change their situation.

This spring two reports were issued that highlight the global dimensions of climate change and call us to take seriously our responsibility to care for all of creation, human and non-human. The first was another in a series of reports on climate change issued by the United Nations' intergovernmental panel on climate

change; the second followed a workshop on sustainability held at the Vatican.

On March 31, 2014 the United Nations released a report on climate change containing three assertions that can have serious implications for all life on our planet:

- climate change not only exists but currently is impacting natural and human life forms on every continent;
- some negative effects of climate change occur because of human behavior;
- people living in poverty are the most likely to suffer the ill effects of climate change.

More important than the data, however, is the document's emphasis on managing the risks of climate change. The 300 experts who produced the report were forthright in stating that, on one hand, the timing and severity of climate change are difficult to predict; and on the other hand, humans must learn to mitigate the risks if we wish to survive. The report's authors did not engage in finger-pointing. Rather, these experts highlight governments' responsibilities to provide the means for people, especially those living in poverty, to adapt to and survive the effects of climate change. They also highlighted government's responsibility for supporting sustainable development. (The summary report is available at www.un.org/climatechange/summit/2014/03.)

Six weeks after the release of the U.N. report, natural and social scientists gathered in Rome for a joint workshop at the Vatican. "Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility" focused on three interrelated basic human needs: food, health and energy. In their summary report, this group of experts acknowledged the reality of human behavior as a cause of some climate change that produces negative effects. "Humanity's relationship with nature is riddled with unaccounted for consequences of the actions each of us takes for both present and future generations." The report clearly highlights the chasm between persons who develop and use technology with both

positive and unintended negative consequences — such as global warming and ocean water acidification — and those who have almost nothing with which to survive. They are further hurt by the unintended negative consequences of minority living in the “developed” countries. Like the U.N. report, this summary also advised that the poor are most likely to be harmed by the negative impacts of climate change. The moral stance of the summary is unmistakable: “Today we need a relationship of mutual benefit: True values should permeate the economy and respect for creation should promote human dignity and wellbeing.” (See www.casinapioiv.va/content/accademia/en/events/2014/sustainable/statement.html.)

Climate change exists whether humans inhabit the planet or not. How we humans live our lives can help the planet or be a detriment to the lives of all creatures. Small, positive, preventive actions of many persons combined can make a difference because they signal a change of heart and a change of behavior. For example, Sue Torgersen, CSJ, Director of Faith Formation and Peace and Justice in Annunciation parish in Minneapolis, Minnesota, reports that parishioners have committed to make the parish a no-waste community. With grant money from the city of Minneapolis, the parish has the means throughout its premises for composting as well as recycling. Parishioners and staff place food scraps and paper products associated with food into compostable plastic

bags, and then place the bags into composting containers. The parish pays a commercial composter to haul the material to a composting site. The resulting fertile compost is sold to landscapers. Through their commitment to become a no-waste community these parishioners take seriously their responsibility to care for one another and for the planet.

Years ago someone planted two crepe myrtle bushes on the west side of our house. Today the branches of one bush extend outward far enough to span the width of my double bedroom window. Looking though the leafy branches in warm seasons or through barren branches in winter, it is very hard for me to imagine life on earth being much different from what I experience today. Yet I know that if we humans do not reconsider some of our choices and preferences, life in the not-so-distant future may be significantly different — or even ended — for increasingly endangered species. ●



Sister Pam Young, CSJ, attributes her love of nature to her parents, each of whom appreciated nature in different ways, and to a next-door neighbor who, when she was age five, let her become his “helper” in the garden.

...example from Sister Sue's parish bulletin

Each week, Sister Sue Torgersen's parish Peace and Justice Committee publishes “zero waste tips” in the parish bulletin. They usually consist of a quote by a pope or the USCCB, followed by a practical application. Here is one abbreviated example anticipating the parish's recent annual festival.

“Creation is not some possession that we can lord over for our own pleasure; nor, even less, is it the property of only some people, the few: creation is a gift, it is a marvelous gift that God has given to us, so that we will take care of it and harness it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.”
— Pope Francis

Stewardship Tip: SeptemberFest

Next weekend is our annual church festival and ZERO WASTE EVENT, or “Zee Wee.” Our goal is either to compost or recycle everything possible, leaving less than 5% going to our city's incinerator.

When you walk up to the waste containers, please sort your items into compostable, recyclable and trash. (The message goes on to explain which of the items supplied by the parish for the meal are compostable, which recyclable and which are trash.)

Enjoy SeptemberFest, but please be thoughtful at the waste containers!



Sneaky Jesus!

By Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ

We Sisters of St. Joseph have this maxim: Never leap ahead of grace. But when grace comes, follow it generously and faithfully. It's like riding a wave, and I'm trying to stay poised on the tiny surfboard of my life, give or take a few wipe-outs, trying to listen to grace and be true to its call.



I slept through my baptism. But here was the first gift of grace: a loving Catholic Mama and Daddy, who brought me to St. Agnes Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and taught me to pray and to be quiet to listen to the nudges and stirrings of God's Spirit. The spiritual life is a continual waking up to God, with the question: "What? What? What do you want me to do?"

That's risky to ask of God. It brought me to death row, to stand up for some of the poorest, most despised people on earth.

When I joined the convent at 18, I didn't know what lay in store. That's how grace works — slowly, imperceptibly, building, steadily rising. When asked to be a pen pal to a death row inmate, I thought all I'd do was write letters. I never dreamed Louisiana was going to electrocute this man — much less that I would be with him in the killing chamber and watch him die. When I wrote the letters we hadn't had an execution in Louisiana in 20 years. I hadn't even noticed that the Supreme Court had put the death penalty back. See what I mean? Sneaky Jesus. Of course, grace unfurls inside us as we need it. Not ahead of time. The truth is I didn't have the grace then to shoulder it all.

Which brings me to my community. The great gift of sisterhood is our prayer together, searching out our Gospel mission together, supporting each other and challenging each other to be generous in service to the poor ones, the despised ones, the elderly castaways, our besieged planet, abused children, battered women, immigrants, trafficked young men and women, and criminals and their

traumatized victims.

If I didn't belong to my congregation, I might have lived my entire life as a nice person, but never one who tackled huge issues of injustice. Without community I wouldn't have the courage, or even the insight, in the first place.

With death row prisoners and murder victims' families, I've met the cross. Mary gives me strength. After 25 years in this ministry I wonder how I made it through six executions and gatherings of victims' families in a room so thick with pain that I could scarcely breathe. At every step, my Sisters have been at my side.


I look back and see God's good grace that awakened me and carried me — all within my religious community, which may be in my life the greatest grace of all. ●

Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, and the ministry she began to end the death penalty became widely known in the U.S. through the Academy Award Winning movie "Dead Man Walking," based on her book. She currently is writing a memoir, "River of Fire," about the spiritual journey that led her to death row.



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