

imagine
ONE

FALL / WINTER 2010 | VOL. 2 | NO. 2

THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

Creating a culture of
Compassion
in a complex
world



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 through 2013.

- ⊕ 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.

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FALL/WINTER 2010 | VOL. 2 | NO. 2

imagineONE is published twice yearly,
in Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter,
by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

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Where is this?

This image comes from the grounds of one of our founding congregational centers. Do you know which one? See below for answer.

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If you guessed St. Joseph Center in Cleveland, Ohio, you are right! This beautiful fountain sits in the grounds behind the former motherhouse and serves as a place of tranquility for all who visit.

Sister Kathleen Durkin, CSJ

Reflects on...

Creating a culture of compassion



As you read this new issue of *imagineONE*, pause and ask yourself what you thought when you saw the theme: "Creating a culture of compassion in a complex world." Was it, "Are you kidding!" or "Well, this sounds hopeful!" Given the state of our world and church, a mix of skepticism and hope is understandable.

The culture of any group demonstrates its ways of relating and doing things. Insiders understand the appropriate behaviors without benefit of words. The old saying, "We've always done it this way," is a way of describing the culture.

A culture of compassion is evident as friends lend support to one whose job disappears; and when family and friends gather at the death of a loved one. These impulses draw us together and we know the responses by heart. Moreover, we see a culture of compassion when famous persons use their influence to urge action on behalf of those suffering from natural disasters or when people place memorials at the site of a tragedy. Our practices reflect our desires to relieve the burden of others in some way.

A broader view suggests that compassion takes us beyond feeling others' pain to being present to all the emotions of others in their joys and successes, their anxieties and dreams. This view stirs up a memory of when I was teaching high school religion in the early 1980s.

A teacher never knows what the mix of students in a classroom is likely to bring. The class I had was very diverse. Surprisingly, the atmosphere emanated a spirit of mutual support, listening, laughter and cheering one another on. I watched the shy grow in confidence, the awkward feel a sense of acceptance, the popular develop understanding for others. How did this happen? The source was an upbeat, mischievous 16-year-old, whose words and actions spread compassion and helped to release it in others. Would he have recognized that he was creating a culture of compassion? I doubt it. He simply seemed to live out his gift to feel with others and to ignite that same response in his peers.

Imagine a culture marked by compassion in the ordinary circumstances of life. What might family, business, church and community interactions look like even when things are difficult? What might change in public discourse, our relationship with the planet and with those who are "strangers"?

Truly, life is complex. The way of compassion does not ignore life's complexities, but elicits our deeper capacities. This issue of *imagineONE* invites us to be the face of God's compassion as, together, we "move always toward profound love of God and neighbor without distinction."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sr. Kathleen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Sr. Kathleen Durkin, CSJ
Congregation of St. Joseph Leadership Team

upfront



Women on a Journey

From different parts of the country and bringing their diverse life experiences, these six women are in various stages of discerning whether God is calling them to vowed religious life with our congregation to serve the *dear neighbor*.

Seated from left: **Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ**, who teaches theology at Nazareth Academy in LaGrange Park, Ill., is initially professed. **Allison McCrary**, a new graduate of Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans and a Soros Justice Advocate Fellow working in New Orleans, is a new candidate. **Paula Terese Pilon, CSJ**, working as chaplain at Borgess Medical Center and Borgess Garden's Senior Living in Kalamazoo, Mich., is also initially professed.

Standing from left: **Jenn Graus**, a novice, is volunteering at St. Joseph Press and has recently participated in a study of the vows. **Barbara McCartney, CSJ**, is initially professed and studies social work at Bethany College in Wheeling, W.Va. **Mary Kay Ruvolo**, a new candidate who was a physical education teacher in the Strongsville City Schools in Ohio, is pursuing a new job in the Cleveland area. ●



Sister Frances Duos, CSJ, takes a break from the heat and hard work.

Devastation: Homes and families torn apart.

KATRINA WORK CONTINUES

Nuns help rebuild New Orleans

by Bridget Brewster, CSJ Associate

Ask, and they will come – always – with enthusiasm and energy. It's a fact.



Sister Jackie Schmitz, CSJ, learns the art of 'mudding.'

It seems no matter what the need or how difficult the challenge, people will be there to help. **St. Bernard Project Rebuild** in Chalmette, La., initiated a fundraiser to raise dollars and help after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The question circulated, "Wouldn't it be great to invite sisters from around the country to spend a week rebuilding homes?"

According to Sister Frances Duos, CSJ, "The response was overwhelming. Eighty sisters signed up in 2009, and what a week it was! They worked from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. every day. "But the most amazing thing of the week," she said, "was to see all these wonderful women mudding walls, hammering, painting, sanding, sawing – and laughing through the humidity."

Sister Frances began as a volunteer for the St. Bernard Project and then accepted an invitation to serve on the staff as a case manager. Now, she helps organize volunteers throughout the year and maintains

relationships with the homeowners as well as the volunteers. Sister Frances learned quickly. "I realized that with contractor fraud and stolen materials, credibility and trust were issues. Being a sister in a Catholic neighborhood has helped me immensely to bridge some pretty big gaps."

Following a stroke at the age of 45, one man came to Sister Frances asking for help with his home. He is a father of three girls, one of whom is handicapped, and they are currently living with various relatives and away from each other. He brings his girls almost every day to see the progress on his house. Soon, they will have a home and be reunited.

This year in May, almost 100 associates, priests, men and women in formation and co-workers joined the sisters. One volunteer commented, "Working together, meeting the neighbors and sometimes working along with the homeowners is such a rewarding experience. I know we are directly making a difference in peoples' lives." Often these volunteers return home and organize a fundraiser to help finance a home. Many families fall through the cracks and are unable to qualify for grants. Private funding is vital to meet the needs of these families.

If you're wishing you had been a part of this effort this past spring, don't despair! There is another **NunsBuild** opportunity this November, 15-20 that is open to sisters and anyone interested. To learn more and volunteer, you can visit www.stbernardproject.org. Sister Frances is pretty sure, "The weather will be cooler." And just to make it even easier for you, "We will provide housing, local transportation and airport pick up for you. I promise it will be an experience to remember!" ●

Sisters came from many orders and lay volunteers pitched in.



St. Bernard Project

Rebuilding
in Partnership

with
NUNS
build
CATHOLIC HEALTH
INITIATIVES
Enterprise
TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH
NEW ORLEANS
LOAVES & FISHES
CAFÉ RECONCILE
ST BERNARD
PROJECT

www.stbernardproject.org

ABOUT ST. BERNARD PROJECT

The St. Bernard Project (SBP) is a nonprofit disaster rebuilding organization in New Orleans, La., dedicated to rebuilding the homes and lives of Hurricane Katrina survivors. Its programs are designed to address the physical, emotional, and psychological devastation caused by the storms. Using volunteer labor, SBP takes gutted houses and makes them livable again in approximately 12 weeks with \$20,000 worth of building materials. Since its inception in July 2006, SBP has rebuilt nearly 280 homes with the assistance of more than 22,000 volunteers. SBP has expanded its rebuilding program with the joint goals of assisting more families and developing a replicable model for postdisaster rebuilding. ●

Students experience *hungers of the world* by Ann Hultgren



St. Joseph's Academy students (l. to r.) Adele Wiggins, Kendra Hinnenkamp, Angela LeBlanc and Mary Kathryn Romero built friendships with Cantera participants.

By immersing themselves in service, connecting with people in other parts of the world and exercising the spirit of unity that the sisters practice, 56 of our high school students had life-changing experiences this past summer. Students from St. Joseph's Academy in Baton Rouge, La., Nazareth Academy in LaGrange Park, Ill., and Saint Joseph Academy in Cleveland, Ohio, embarked on separate group trips that helped them discover possibilities for a purpose-filled life.

Three groups comprising 28 students and seven adult chaperones from St. Joseph's Academy in Baton Rouge, La., traveled to Managua and Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, where they met Sister Dianne Fanguy, CSJ, who lives and works at Cantera, a center for popular education that contributes to building a more just and fair society. They learned about the culture, played games with preschoolers, planted trees, saw native Nicaraguan dances, visited cathedrals and *La Chureca* — the Managua city trash dump — where people live and scavenge in order to survive. Their schedule also included a visit to a natural medicine clinic, an experimental farm facility for sustainable and organic farming, karate classes, an ecological mountain hike, playing soccer and attending Mass.

This year, one of the groups' focuses was on technology, where they spent time helping with the center's communications system, wiring and computer set-up.

Tori McRoberts, campus minister at St. Joseph's Academy, says that the purpose of these trips "is for our students to simply share a bit of themselves with their peers in Nicaragua — much like sharing the state-of-the-heart, a tradition of the Sisters of St. Joseph."

Student reactions to the trip:

"I truly lived. Each day I had a purpose: I loved and received love."

—Alaina Leggette

"It was inspiring to watch people facing seemingly hopeless challenges with such compassion. I learned that even though we are worlds apart physically, our hearts are so similar."

—Claire Karam

"After spending 11 days without a computer, cell phone or any other distractions, I realized how these material things can complicate our lives."

—Mary-Katherine Montes de Oca

"It was a great way to end our junior theology course, because we talked about corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Seeing these works personally gave me a better understanding. I learned about love, acceptance and hope."

—Nathalie Roeling

Another group from the school immersed themselves in the unique culture of a Native American Indian reservation in Klagetoh, Az. The six students and an adult chaperone taught vacation bible school to children during their one-week stay.

In Wichita, Kansas, a group of 12 students and two adult chaperones from St. Joseph's Academy learned more about the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph and their love of the *dear neighbor* when they helped renovate a house for the StepStone Transitional Housing Program. This program provides housing to women and children who are escaping a violent situation. The students painted, cleaned up



These two little Nicaraguan girls light up the world with their smiles.

the yard and stripped away old carpet inside to provide a new look for a house that would be home to a mom and her children the following week.

Another ten students and two adult chaperones joined Contemplatives in Action, an urban ministry and retreat experience in New Orleans, where they helped with the Hurricane Katrina rebuilding efforts.

From Nazareth Academy in LaGrange Park, Ill., a 13-member delegation of "Just Us," a peace and justice group, and two chaperones attended the "Love of God and Neighbor Without Distinction," CSSJ High School Conference at St. Joseph's College Brooklyn campus in New York, N.Y. A total of 38 students from Sisters of St. Joseph-sponsored schools from six states attended the conference, themed, "The Millennium Development Goals: Only 5 Years to Go," where they were able to broaden their awareness of the global nature of the mission and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Nine girls and two adult chaperones from Saint Joseph Academy in Cleveland, Ohio, spent some time this summer with "A Reading and Feeding" program in the Appalachia area of Wheeling, W.Va. The students worked with school-aged children at a summer camp in the mornings and then had lunch with them. Visits to area residents and working in a soup kitchen rounded out their week of service.

Experiencing the reality of life's complexities and recognizing commonalities helped the young people to listen, understand and share the spirit of the sisters while serving the *dear neighbor*. The mission lives on! ●



Six CSJ ministries celebrate 200+ years of *compassionate service*

Our sponsored ministries have been creating a culture of compassion in meeting the needs of the *dear neighbor* for many years. Just six of those, which are celebrating milestone anniversaries this year, give us a glimpse of the *variety, diversity and magnitude* of our CSJ-sponsored works:



Holy Family Child Care and Development Center observed its 25th anniversary of providing high quality, developmentally-appropriate day care and education for local children in Wheeling, W. Va.

Top photo: The center celebrated "Week of the Young Child" earlier this year with a mini-concert. Regional music artist B.E. Taylor (right) and Rick Witkowski played for this pint-sized audience.



Christ in the Wilderness Hermitage Retreat Center marked its 30th year of being a getaway for silence, solitude and prayer in rural northwestern Illinois.

Second photo from top: Sister Lorraine Mark, CSJ, built the center 30 years ago, which has since welcomed 1,600 people to its individual cabins, wooded trails, and abundance of nature.



Azaka Catholic Center for the Elderly, which is celebrating its 50th year in Matsusaka City, Japan, includes a nursing home, an assisted living facility and day care services.

Third photo from top: Sister Catherine Takahashi (right) ministers to the elderly.



The Well spirituality center in LaGrange Park, Ill., is celebrating its 10th year of programs, retreats and classes promoting awareness of our sacred unity with God, Earth and one another.

Fourth photo from top: Sister Paula Gonzalez, SC, (in green), was presented the 2010 Sacred Universe Award by Well staffers Sister Mary Southard, CSJ, Executive Director Sister Marlene Schemmel, CSJ, Sister Paula, Father John Surette, SJ, and Bridget Spurduto (from left to right).

Saint Joseph Academy in Cleveland, Ohio, is marking its 120th year of excellence educating young women.

Fifth photo from top: Saint Joseph Academy students.



River's Edge in Cleveland, Ohio, is celebrating completion of its first five years fostering the integration of personal wellness, spirituality, and global and ecological responsibility.

Bottom photo: River's Edge Executive Director Sister Rita Petruziello, CSJ, chooses a raffle winner at its recent 5th year anniversary celebration.

Altogether, these six of our 31-sponsored ministries have provided a total 235 years of compassion! ●

One couple's commitment to serve the 'dear neighbor'

by Gina Sullivan



Bob and Marlene Rink

Bob and Marlene Rink call themselves ordinary people living ordinary lives. However, it's what they've chosen to do with those lives that is extraordinary. They met in Cleveland doing volunteer work, which as Marlene explains has been a thread throughout their lives. "We were both raised to care about poor and marginalized people," she said. "Somewhere around 1977, we were invited by a friend to get involved with a peace and justice group in Cleveland, and that is how we first got to know the Sisters of St. Joseph. We developed relationships with many of the sisters, I became an associate, and it has gone from there."

Since then, the Rinks have been involved with the Congregation and its ministries, both individually and as a couple in numerous ways. Marlene worked with Sister Kathleen Kilbane, CSJ, at West Side Catholic Center in Cleveland in the early 1980s ministering to the city's poor. She was also on the Board of Saint Joseph Academy for six years, and is a current member of its Mission Effectiveness committee.

Bob, an attorney, serves on the board of River's Edge, one of the Congregation's spirituality, wellness, and conference centers located at St. Joseph Center in Cleveland.

When asked what it is about the CSJ mission that most attracts them, both Marlene and Bob are quick to answer.

"It is that direct connection and commitment to serving the *dear neighbor* and the legacy of going out to serve wherever it is most needed," Marlene said. Bob added, "These women listen for the call of the *dear neighbor*, and then respond so that today's hungers of the world might be fed."

The Rinks recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. They chose to mark the occasion by traveling to New Orleans to help rebuild homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina. "We felt so blessed to be part of the St. Bernard Project*," said Marlene. "It was such a gift to work with the young volunteers and with the homeowner on this renovation."

In addition to giving their gifts of time and talent, the Congregation, Saint Joseph Academy and River's Edge have also been blessed by the Rinks' generosity over the years.

"At first blush, serving the *dear neighbor* seems ordinary and unremarkable," she said. "But we have found that connecting with the *dear neighbor* in everyday life is the place where we have extraordinary encounters with the divine." ●

*See sidebar article on page 7 for more information on the St. Bernard Project.

To learn about ways you can support the Sisters of St. Joseph, visit us online at csjoseph.org and click on Make A Gift.



When this iconic photograph of “Earth Rising” across the lunar landscape first appeared in 1969, it was startling how beautiful and self-contained Earth appeared. Did we even get an inkling when we saw this then that all of us on earth are one?

Compassion in the World and for the World

by Judy Cannato, CSJ Associate

At the congregation’s first Chapter meeting in April 2007, members identified what they were “hearing” the Holy Spirit calling the congregation to do to respond to the needs of our times. Just as the first Sisters of St. Joseph — established in LePuy, France, in the year 1650 — discerned the Holy Spirit’s call in their day and named their responses “generous promises,” our congregation identified the urgent promises we would focus on for at least the next six

years. One of those promises calls us to compassion for our planet and all of creation:

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.

The emergence of this particular Generous Promise at this time in our history is evidence of a convergence of two streams that have met on our watch: our connectedness to the gospel and the current environmental crisis.

For the Congregation of St. Joseph, it is the gospel that grounds our charism of unity and defines our generous spirit, and we have always been open to allowing its message to evolve as we grow in our understanding of who we are as human beings.

The environmental crisis is expressed in myriad ways. Our rivers and rain are polluted, our soil is depleted and filled with deadly chemicals, our oceans have become inhospitable for sea life, our rain forests are disappearing at breathtaking speed. Add to that the threat of nuclear holocaust and other deadly kinds of warfare and the scenario is ominous.

Past eras on Earth have experienced the impact of asteroids, the coming and going of ice ages, the shifting of tectonic plates and other geological forces that impact life on Earth. But what has occurred in our lifetime is that humankind itself has become a physical force capable of destruction as deadly as any cosmic calamity.

The question for us now becomes: How do we respond to the environmental crisis in a way that is consistent with the gospel?

A New Story

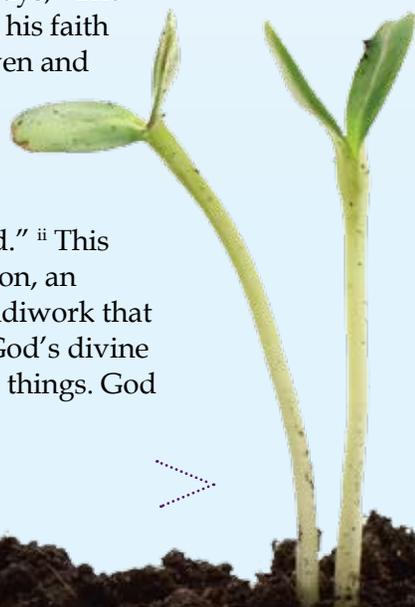
A third factor that has entered into the dialogue between Earth's crisis and gospel living is an emerging view fashioned by modern scientific discoveries. These tell us that we live not in a static universe, but in

the midst of ongoing creation — in a cosmos that is continually expanding and expressing itself in ever-more complex, conscious, and creative ways. Theologian Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, tells us that the Nicene Creed identifies the Spirit as the "Vivifier." "The Creator Spirit ... is the one God who exists as incomprehensible mystery beyond the world, and ... pervades the material world with graceful vigor." ⁱ The universe is not an assembly of disparate pieces and parts, but an interconnected expression of ongoing creation. Connectedness is our fundamental, underpinning reality.

The Theological Basis

As we seek to clarify our second Generous Promise, I would like to suggest three theological elements from Christian tradition that give a solid theological foothold to this promise and our response to it.

The first element is our conviction that there is a single Creator — one God of incomprehensible holy mystery who creates and maintains all that is. This principle is fundamental to Christian belief, spanning theological reflection from St. Thomas Aquinas to the twentieth century theologian Karl Rahner. Rahner says, "The Christian professes in his faith that all things — heaven and earth, the realm of the material and of the spiritual — are the creation of the one and the same God." ⁱⁱ This implies a single creation, an intricately woven handiwork that continues to evolve. God's divine presence embraces all things. God dwells in all things.



"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scattered seed on the ground. Night and day, the seed sprouts and grows." (Mk 4: 26-27)

A second theological element that is significant is the Incarnation. We make the distinction that Jesus Christ is the Incarnation, God enfleshed. The Creator desires to dwell and be recognized among us creatures of earth. Jesus suggested to his disciples that they would do what he does – and more (Jn 14:12). He quite intentionally taught his disciples to become the compassion that was the hallmark of his own character and actions. To live with the same awareness that Jesus manifested is an invitation to experience a unity of the human and divine, enfleshing compassion in a way that is liberating for all who belong to Earth and Earth itself.

A third element of Christian theology that relates to our Generous Promise is salvation. Rahner says in Christian terminology, when we speak of salvation, we have to recognize that "... [we] are describing a final and definitive state of fulfillment of the cosmos."ⁱⁱⁱ Because all life is intricately connected, salvation is collective and communal relating to all creation. We all are engaged in the process of salvation together.

These three elements, then – a single Creator, Christ's embodiment of humankind and all creation in the Incarnation, and salvation that includes the whole of creation – provide a theological foundation for us to take steps now to strengthen, heal and renew the face of Earth.

Preaching the Gospel

In the Gospel of Mark we are bid to preach the good news to "all creation." St. Francis is reported to have said, "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words," implying that it is not the words we speak but the compassion with which we live that most clearly defines us.

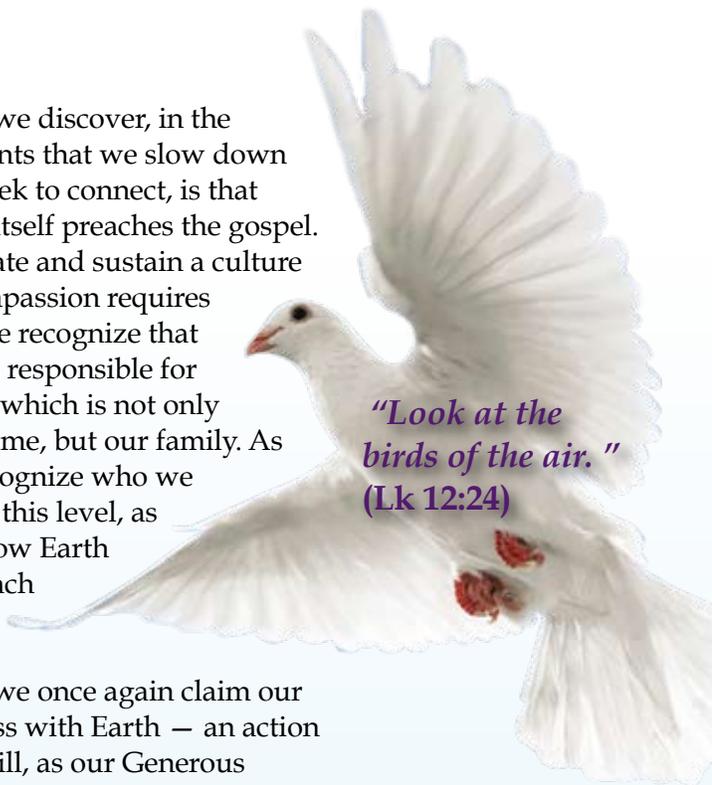
Recent scientific discoveries emphasize that "we are all one," not only with God and with one another, but with nature. We are related to all that is in the

universe. Johnson explains that we are "distinctive but not separate, a unique strand in the cosmos, yet still a strand of the cosmos."^{iv}

"Consider the lilies of the field."
(Lk 12:27)

What we discover, in the moments that we slow down and seek to connect, is that Earth itself preaches the gospel. To create and sustain a culture of compassion requires that we recognize that we are responsible for Earth, which is not only our home, but our family. As we recognize who we are on this level, as we allow Earth to preach the gospel to us, we once again claim our oneness with Earth – an action that will, as our Generous Promise suggests, "strengthen, heal, and renew all creation." ●

"Look at the birds of the air."
(Lk 12:24)



- i Elizabeth Johnson, "Quest for the Living God," 183.
- ii Karl Rahner, "Foundations of Christian Faith: An introduction to the Idea of Christianity," William V. Dych, Trans. (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 181.
- iii Ibid., 190.
- iv Elizabeth Johnson, "Quest for the Living God," 185.

Judy Cannato has been an associate from the founding CSJ community of Cleveland for 15 years. She is the author of "Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life" and "Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and Other Wonders of the Universe." (Sorin Books)



We, the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph* Leadership Council and the Congregation of St. Joseph, compelled by the Gospel and by our heritage to be responsive to the *dear neighbor* without distinction, are concerned for all of God's creation and our sisters and brothers everywhere. Earth, which reflects God's glory, is in great peril.

We accept scientific evidence that climate change is happening and is caused by human activity. "There is now widespread acknowledgement that the countries least responsible for global climate change will be the ones most severely threatened by it." (UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report) Climate change is a global issue which affects all creation. The United States alone adds almost six billion tons of carbon dioxide every year to the atmosphere. This seriously contributes to climate change. All creation suffers the consequences.

"Climate change is expected to have a net negative impact on water scarcity globally this century. By the 2050s, the area subject to greater water stress due to climate change will be twice as large as the area experiencing decreased water stress." (UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report)

In the encyclical "Caritas in Veritate" Pope Benedict XVI writes, "The environment is God's gift to everyone and, in our use of it, we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole." (No. 48)

"Responses to global climate change should reflect our interdependence and common responsibility for the future of our planet. Individual nations must measure their own self-interest against the greater common good and contribute equitably to global solutions." (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) ●

* The U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph is a dynamic union of all the Sisters of Saint Joseph in the United States who share a common heritage as descendents from communities founded in LePuy, France in 1650. As we move toward our goal of "being and acting more as one," we become a sign of our mission of unity and expand our ability to witness to God's active, inclusive love.



If you can sew a straight seam, you can make

a world of difference

by Grace Skalski

There's not much difference between a grown woman and a little girl when it comes to having a brand new dress. It lifts the spirit, helps build confidence, and it feels good all over. Just look at these little ones striking a pose at Grace House of Hope Orphanage in Haiti.

*E*ver since Therese Xandrew read about CSJs in Detroit who were sewing dresses for orphans in Africa, she's been doing the same. Therese is a shipping clerk for Ministry of the Arts at the congregations's LaGrange Park Center. In just nine months, she and some sisters and coworkers she trained on her pattern have made and sent 250 dresses to orphanages in Sierra Leone and Uganda, Africa; and to Haiti.

"Today, millions of girls in Africa are orphaned due to HIV/AIDS and, in Haiti, many were orphaned by the quake," Therese explained. "It is our goal to inspire hope and confidence in these girls by providing them with special dresses that are easy-to-make, yet beautiful to wear."

This year, Therese will personally deliver more than 100 dresses to orphans in Haiti. But that's not all. She's also taking six new sewing machines and five used machines that she obtained as donations. She will use them to teach the girls basic sewing skills so they can learn to make their own living, and she will leave the sewing machines behind.





In addition, Therese has turned her work into a nonprofit organization, and it's growing. Her daughter created a website, www.onlylovedresses.org, that invites volunteers to join the effort. It even provides the dress pattern.

Therese also likes to point out a thread of coincidences that seem to be blessing the group's efforts. "Our last shipment went to Grace House of Hope Orphanage in a suburb of Port-au-Prince, Haiti,"

Therese said. When she went to buy sewing machines to take to Haiti, the name of the machine model turned out to be *Grace*. "Several days later," she added, "a fabric store employee who was impressed with what we are doing

"Today, millions of girls in Africa are orphaned due to HIV/AIDS and, in Haiti, many were orphaned by the quake," Therese explained.

"It is our goal to inspire hope and confidence in these girls by providing them with dresses that are easy-to-make, yet beautiful to wear."



called and offered to buy another machine. She added that her church would donate the material, notions,

scissors, etc. The name of her church," Therese giggled, "is *Grace Lutheran Church*."

"Living in countries where girls and women are often devalued and abused, orphan girls are likely to face a very difficult future," Therese concluded. "If one pretty dress helps them feel they have some personal human worth, it will help them learn to present themselves confidently."

"If they learn a skill by which they can support themselves, they'll become contributing members of society with a better future." ●



Therese Xandrew



IMMIGRATION CHAOS:

Compassion is key to an honorable solution

by Kathleen (Kit) Kaiser, CSJ

"The young man asked Jesus what he must do to be eternally happy. Jesus responded: "Keep the commandments." The man said to him, "I have kept the law my whole life." Jesus looked at him and said, "Because I love you, from you I ask much more. Let go of what you think is yours, what you think you have earned. All that you have, I have given you as gift. Be my manager and distribute the gifts of the earth in such a way that no one is without what they need to live and be happy."

(Mt 19:16-22 paraphrased)

How many of us go through life believing that keeping the law is enough? We don't speed; don't steal; don't kill. At the lowest level of human existence, this may be enough. But God, the Giver of everything, asks us to live on another level: the level of compassion. Compassion, the ability to feel with another,

implies turning my attention on the other and realizing that his need might far outweigh what the law says is my right to own.

The following are stories of people I have met who have "broken the law" because their circumstances and their human dignity drove them to actions that are illegal. What response would you give them? Does the deed merit punishment or compassion?

Jose's Story

For three generations, Jose's family owned and worked a 20-acre coffee farm in Oaxaca, Mexico. When a U.S. company moved in, the family could not compete with its lower prices and the free trade market, and soon they were forced to sell their farm. Jose went to work with other locals as virtual serfs in the coffee fields of the U.S. company. They earned barely enough to put food on the table. If they protested for higher wages, the company would easily replace them with other workers waiting in line for jobs. At the age of 16, Jose left his family, crossed illegally into the U.S. to find work, and sent much-needed money back to his home in Oaxaca. Who is responsible for Jose "breaking the law"? Who should be punished?



In 2007, Sister Kit Kaiser (left) had an immersion experience that included working at Annunciation House refuge in El Paso, Texas. The house offers sanctuary and, Sister Kit said, "we had an amiable relationship with the authorities who, at times, brought undocumented people for shelter."



This mural in the older part of El Paso, Texas, depicts persons, events, history and scenes from the poor area around Sacred Heart Parish. The figures of the crucified Christ and Our Lady of Guadalupe are strong symbols of faith and hope for the suffering immigrant community.

Lupita's Story

Lupita came to the U.S. illegally about 15 years ago in desperate need of work. She met her husband, Juan, while working in a factory in Mexico that was owned by a U.S. company. When the factory closed, there were no jobs and no benefits for the hundreds who had been employed. The couple decided to pay a "coyote" to illegally lead them across the border with their six-month-old child – leaving the home they had known and the love of parents and siblings. Every week they call home and each month they send money back to Mexico to help put a younger brother and sister through school. Lupita works in a local packing company while Juan picks cucumbers in the fields.

Last year, Lupita got word that her dear mother had fallen seriously ill. Her siblings dropped out of school telling Lupita that, now, they needed the money she sent for their mother's medicine. In March, Lupita's mother died. With a broken heart, she sent money for the funeral as the only way she could be

present to her family. She had not seen them for 15 years, but Lupita knew that she could not return to Mexico or, because of stricter border security, she would never again be able to come home to her family here in the U.S. How does one choose between family members?

Victor's Story

Victor has crossed the U.S.-Mexican border several times. His dad, a mason, earned so little that the family of eight often went without food or electricity. One morning in 1991, instead of going to school, the 17-year-old packed a few belongings and made arrangements with a "coyote" and five others to cross the border. After a three-day trip by bus to Mexico City and then to Tijuana, they walked the eight hours by night into Texas. From there, the group flew to New York, where Victor washed dishes for two years to pay the \$2800 he owed the coyote. He left New York and for the next twelve years worked as a migrant, picking oranges in Florida, tending golf courses in Arizona, and harvesting apples in Michigan. Any

extra money he earned went back to his family in Mexico.

Before 2006, Victor crossed the border four times; sometimes to visit his seriously ill mother, other times out of depressing homesickness. Crossing back to the U.S. each time became much more difficult and dangerous. The Texas border was tightly secured, so coyotes took their groups through the deserts of Arizona. This route required three days of constant walking day and night, with 20-minute breaks every couple of hours. The heat was unbearable. There were snakes everywhere. The groups drank water from cattle troughs.

On Victor's first such trip, five of the original group of 15 reached Yuma, Ariz. The others, including a six-month pregnant woman, turned back due to sickness, dehydration and exhaustion. Succeeding trips proved to be repeats of the others: heat, snakes, dehydration. The third time, Victor and the group were shocked into silence upon finding the body of a young man apparently dead from thirst or sickness or an attack by animals. "When we saw that dead man, we all thought only about ourselves and how we could each survive," he recounted. "I prayed constantly that God would protect me and that Our Lady of Guadalupe would talk to her Son for me and take care of all of us."

Victor misses his parents and Mexico, but now he speaks English, has a job at a lumber mill and is accustomed to the U.S. He has a 2-year-old son whom he adores and would like to present to his family in Mexico. This will never happen under present immigration laws.



Sister Kit found this shoe at the border fence that separates El Paso, Texas; New Mexico; and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico where people meet to pray and commemorate the thousands who have died over the years crossing the Mexican-U.S. border.

For decades, a broken U.S. immigration system and the economics of some unscrupulous international business practices have taken the livelihoods and personal dignity from thousands of people like Jose, Lupita and Victor. It's impossible to count the numbers of people whose spirits have been crushed by laws that separate families and loved ones. Along with a just, comprehensive immigration system, the U.S. needs to promote economic development in poorer countries so that people migrate here by personal choice and not out of desperate necessity.

Compassion calls us to see and feel with the person before us. Our response must be in the moment, as well as for the long term. Our congregation addresses this mandate of compassion this way:

"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."

In a recent interview, Bishop John C. Wester, chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Migration, addressed present U.S. immigration laws that violate basic human dignity and call us to compassion.

"... (T)he broken U.S. immigration system contributes to the exploitation of migrant workers in the workplace; (to) their abuse by ruthless smugglers; and (to) their deaths in the desert as they seek to find work to support their families. ...

*Comprehensive immigration reform ... would replace illegality with a system based on legal presence and legal entry, thus restoring the rule of law to a chaotic system while also protecting the basic dignity and lives of our fellow brother and sisters."**

The U.S. Bishops' Conference suggests the following as necessary components of compassionate immigration reform:

- An "earned" legalization for undocumented persons in the United States, regardless of country of origin;
- A worker program that allows foreign-born workers to enter and work in the United States safely and legally to earn a living wage in jobs that have adequate workplace protections;
- Reform of the immigration system to permit families to reunite in a timely and dignified manner; and
- Restoration of due process protections lost in the 1996 immigration legislation.

And Jesus said: "Be my manager and distribute the gifts of the earth with compassion." – (Mt 19: 22 paraphrased) ●

**"Answering tough questions about immigration," Bishop John C. Wester, "Our Sunday Visitor," May 16, 2010.*

*As one of four coordinators of Hispanic Ministry for the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Mich., **Sister Kathleen Kaiser, CSJ**, ministers to both migrant and resident Hispanics. She is also part of the congregation's subcommittee for immigration.*

A tale of two students



Emily Frost



Lucie Calderon



At the beginning of their senior year, Emily heard “Three Cups of Tea” author and humanitarian Greg Mortenson’s presentation at her school; and Lucie was there virtually, through a live video stream to her school in Baton Rouge. Mortenson, who has built schools in Afghan and Pakistan villages, talked about his belief that when you educate a girl, you educate a whole village and transform the society. His book, “Three Cups of Tea,” has been a runaway best seller.

Shortly afterwards, Lucie and Emily met when the two schools arranged for a Skype session between their student council officers — talking to and seeing each other over their computers.

But the clincher is either coincidence or God’s plan. Both women, it turns out, are now freshmen at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. Emily is studying communications and cognitive science; Lucie, premed.

Emily Frost and Lucie Calderon, recent graduates of our schools — Saint Joseph Academy in Cleveland and St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge — are sharing their “third cup of tea.”

“I was just going to take ‘pot luck’ on whom I’d get for a roommate,” Lucie said, “but I decided to do a quick check on Facebook (five hours!) for a roommate. I saw the name ‘Emily Frost’ and thought I might know her. So I ‘friended’ her. We wound up focusing on ‘Three Cups of Tea,’ and decided then to be roommates.”

Emily provided the punch line: “You won’t believe it, but ‘Three Cups of Tea’ is the book Vanderbilt assigned to our incoming class to read prior to orientation.”

As part of its “Commons Experience,” Vanderbilt asks the students to do a creative project on the book — writing, music, art, etc. The winner(s) will be awarded with dinner with Greg Mortenson. Might there be another coincidence/heavenly plan for Lucie and/or Emily to win? Another cup of tea? ●



Another songwriter, who was killed by gunfire, once imagined a world without violence.

Compassion: A Songwriter Responds to Violence

by Kathy Sherman, CSJ

It was Mother's Day 2009. There was going to be a press conference in one of Chicago's troubled neighborhoods to interview mothers who had lost children through gun violence.

I wanted to go. I had to go and stand in solidarity. Thirty-five women gathered at the church — all in pain and eager to share their stories, hoping to end the violence. Plenty of media people were there, plus a few others like myself. I introduced myself to one of the women whose name was Gloria and told her why I had come. She broke down sobbing in my arms. I cried too. We held onto each other for several minutes. Gloria lost her 14-year-old son to street violence in 2005.

As the interviewing began, I was keenly aware of the prayer going on in my heart: "These are not just one neighborhood's children or one race's children. These are my children. These are OUR children." As I stood with the women, an experience of profound solidarity filled my heart. That moment, and the encounter with Gloria, rekindled my passion and commitment to create music that fosters peace, unity and healing. The following day I wrote:

*Your skin is black, yellow, brown;
mine is clearly white as you can see.
You have children, some have died;
I've none,
Yet, yours belong to me.
The heart that beats inside us is one.
Believe it's true.
That's why, my sisters, I've come today,
to stand and weep with you.*

The media's focus on violence certainly isn't new. In 1992, a stray bullet killed 7-year-old Dantrell Davis while he was on his way to school. It shocked the city and the nation. It was unthinkable that a child, so full of promise, wasn't even safe going to school. Shortly after Dantrell's death, the "Chicago Tribune" ran a special series, "Killing Our Children," which focused attention on gun violence. Every time a child under the age of 15 was killed, the *Trib* placed the story on the front page. At year's end, 61 children had been killed.

I remember feeling sad and angry as I read one tragic story after another. What could I do? How could I make a difference in the lives of the children? I have composed many songs through the years that have been inspired by teenagers' lives cut short due to gang violence; or children shot and killed because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time; or because a stray bullet shattered the living room window during a surprise birthday party.

One of my songs, "Get Those Guns Out of the Hands of the Children," expresses the rage I feel over children being able to get their hands on assault weapons. It is dedicated to Starkesia and Siretha, two young girls who were murdered within 10 days of one another in 2007.

*Get those guns out of the hands of the children.
Take your feet.
Beat the streets
for peace in our neighborhoods.*

I remember feeling sad and angry as I read one tragic story after another. What could I do? How could I make a difference in the lives of the children?

More recently, someone shot 7-year-old Desaree Sanders in the head as she rode her scooter. I went to the hospital to offer her parents a peace lily from the congregation. I told her father that we shared their sadness and were praying for their daughter's healing and an end to violence. This small gesture will not likely stop the violence, but it does keep me from becoming numb to tragedies like this. I fear sometimes that we have come to expect and accept violence; that we have become

desensitized to what is happening to our children everywhere. Someone once asked peace activist Daniel Berrigan, S.J., why he got involved in government protests, since protesting would never change the government. Daniel's response: "I don't protest to change the government, I protest so that the government doesn't change me."

The crises of our time challenge us to do some soul searching, trusting that we will be graced with the courage and compassion to set things right. The Hopi Indian elders remind us that, "We are the ones we are waiting for." This wisdom will empower us and show us the way to restore healing and unity to the sacred communion of life. Though a daunting task, it is possible. Our time is now!

Catholics for Nonviolence

is a new initiative of the Chicago Archdiocese that seeks to address the violence by fostering peace and Gospel nonviolence. Francis Cardinal George of Chicago supported the initiative by writing a pastoral letter that went to all parishes in the archdiocese. The group created a pledge to accompany the letter, inviting people to feel the urgency and make the pledge to practice Gospel nonviolence. Perhaps you would also want to consider making this pledge.

Faithful to the transforming vision of Jesus Christ and no longer willing to accept violence in our homes, on our streets, or in our global community,

I pledge to practice Gospel nonviolence to heal the violence and conflict in our lives, our families, our parishes, our communities and throughout all of God's creation.

I pledge to cultivate peace by proclaiming the Christian message of healing and hope, of renewal and reconciliation, of life and love to all people.

I pledge to address the root causes of violence that continue to affect people throughout (name of your city or town) so that we can end the cycle of violence and create a more just and peaceful city and world.

Sister Kathy is a member of Catholics for Nonviolence in Chicago.

A bit of precious wisdom I learned from a small child gives me reason to hope. In Jack's kindergarten class there was a little guy who was constantly getting into mischief. Jack befriended him, took him under his wing and helped him get back on track. The teacher was so impressed with Jack's amazing sensitivity that she called to praise Jack's parents. When Jack's grandmother heard the story, she was curious about his motivation and asked Jack why he was so good to the other boy. Jack sat up straight and proudly proclaimed: "Because 'kind' is my superpower. Everyone has one; it's just that sometimes they're invisible."

Jack is indeed wise — and perhaps on to something we all need to learn and believe. Each of us has a superpower, and how we name it and claim it has the potential to help put the world back on track — back on the path to oneness, peace and harmony.

Walk with me, will you walk with me down the path, toward a place where violence is no more?

Walk with me, will you walk with me down the path, toward a place, where together and forever, we will live in peace! – ks ●

Sister Kathy Sherman, CSJ, is a composer, singer, poet and recording artist whose original music and song invite people to recognize the sacredness of their own life stories and our common hopes and dreams for one another and all of Earth. In addition, she directs retreats across the country and Canada and she coordinates the directors of the congregation's CSJ Associates Boards.



Reflection

On Compassion

by Gretchen Shaffer, CSJ

If we are fortunate, we learn compassion at the knees of our parents. Touch ... voice tones ... the gaze ... shape us and our view of the world. On June 4th, an eighteen-month-old child was not fortunate.

It happened right in my nearby community. A child was scalded to death by his mother, high on drugs. The ripples from this tragedy have touched everyone.



I thought of Ann Marcum, neighbor and friend, who was laid to rest May 30th. Ann personified compassion for every living being and would have led collective grieving for the baby and his family. She was once called on to nurture a motherless fawn until it could return to the wild on its own, and she routinely took in stray dogs, cats and even a horse. An entire wall in her house was dubbed her “critter wall” with pictures of animals in her life.

She demonstrated that same compassion for anyone who needed the heart, the shoulder or the hand up. When our organization, Big Laurel Learning Center, responded to the need for an emergency food pantry, Ann volunteered. She could never be restricted to emergencies only, such as a death in the family, a house fire or job loss. As far as she was concerned, not having enough

food at the end of the month – the mandatory fasting time for far too many poor people – was emergency enough. People also came to the pantry, not just for food, but to talk to Ann, knowing they were sharing in her large-heartedness.

On a recent evening, I visited Ann’s home-place on Earth. The ever-present dogs were on their own sojourn somewhere, so a family of rabbits was peacefully having a meal. I thought of the Bodhisatva of Compassion in the Buddhist tradition, who is often portrayed with rabbits at her feet. I pondered on how we are frequently halted by unnecessary death, be it a child’s, a soldier’s, a drug addict’s, a part of

Earth’s ocean. If you allow yourself, you could cry a river.

And we sisters want to save everything, the golden thread of mercy that keeps compassion alive. The world, as has always been the case, needs compassion; we long for compassion. We strive to give and receive each day – and sometimes we can only cry.

*To weep
with those who suffer
does not mean
that we have a good cry
and get on with other things.
It is more that we have a good cry
and we are never the same.*

–Jan Johnson,
Christian author

Who is it today who waits at our knees? ●

Gretchen Shaffer, CSJ, lives on an ecological land trust in West Virginia and is director of Big Laurel Learning Center and the Web of Life Ecology Center.

I AM A *volunteer*

by Agnes DeVasure



I have been a volunteer for the Sisters of St. Joseph Dear Neighbor Ministries (DNM) in Wichita for approximately six years. We focus on our neighborhood clients who need help with food, shelter, utilities. We also give them gas cards or bus passes to get to work or to the doctor when needed. The need is so great, with the economy as it is, that we run short by the end of the month and have to turn people away.

We help people who are mentally and physically handicapped by being their representative payees. Our volunteers write the checks to pay their rent and other bills. What's left becomes their allowance to buy food, clothes or whatever they want to spend it on. Dear Neighbor Ministries started the representative payee program in 2005 with 17 clients. Today we have nine volunteers taking care of approximately 90 clients. I fill in when someone is gone, and I also reconcile all of the 90 checkbooks each week.

Earlier this year we offered free tax filing for anyone in Wichita who meets our criteria. They can't make more than \$ 50,000, or have rental, farm or business income. Last year, I think we did approximately 550 returns for free. We had 12 IRS-certified preparers volunteering this year to prepare taxes. Although I am certified to do taxes, I have been appointed the coordinator of the Dear Neighbor site. I filled in as a tax preparer when needed, but my job was to make sure everything ran smoothly and that all taxes were filed in a timely manner.

Dear Neighbor Ministries also handles the Prairieland Food Co-op every month. People can purchase a package of food, which includes meats, fresh vegetables

and fruits for \$22.50. A couple of years ago, our former Director of Dear Neighbor Ministries, Bill Gress (now assistant director of CSJ ministries), ran a test and purchased the same foods at the store for about \$45.00. Every month, I keep track of all the orders and make sure the money and orders come out even.

We also have a community garden. For a very small fee people can have a small garden spot to grow a few vegetables and plants. We furnish all the tools, mulch and water. Participants only need to add seeds and labor. In addition to the crops, the garden also produces visits with neighbors and new friendships.

Volunteering gives me a purpose in life. In May of 2009, changes in my life gave me even more free time, and I found myself spending those hours at DNM. There, I found caring people, friendship and the love of the sisters and staff that I needed at that time. During the tax season I work five days a week. This gives me the opportunity to return God's gifts that He has given to me.

I am a volunteer! And I plan on remaining a volunteer as long as the good Lord and the sisters allow. ●

Let Your Light...

Regardless of the negative news we hear, if we open ourselves to what often is right in front of us, sunshine blesses our lives. Whether it's a seemingly insignificant act such as an unexpected smile or an offer of help, when it is received (or observed), that simple act becomes a miracle.

Below are a few examples of blessings given and received with no expectations.

Sister Jeanne Gamache, CSJ, shares a touching moment from our neighbors in Nicaragua:

I was negotiating with a lovely young woman for avocados. The women here carry their produce in a large woven basket on their heads. Two young, very poor men busily cleaning up garbage from the street noticed that she had stopped and would be having to lift her heavy basket from her head and bring it to the ground. One literally leaped over to us and politely lifted the basket from her head and gently placed it on the ground. I had tears in my eyes as I witnessed one very poor person working hard to eke out a meager living, responding lovingly to a sister who was doing the same.

Employee, Christine Murphy, CSJ, makes this observation, which speaks of sisters in all our Centers:

No matter when we need assistance in our Retreat Center, even at night, we have a core of six sisters who are always happy to help out. When I meet them in the halls, they always ask if I have anything for them to help with. These women reach out in kindness to help, not for a paycheck, and we get very positive feedback from our guests.

Wichita Associate, Kathy Cowan witnessed a seemingly unseen act of kindness:

In a thrift store in Oregon, a woman and her son laid their items on the counter: two green striped towels, a set of flowered sheets, a beige light-weight blanket, a beat-up looking pillow and a raggedy blue quilt. The boy and the mother began whispering and fingering the things on the counter. "Maybe not the quilt?" mother said to son. A woman behind them reached into her wallet, pulled out a couple of bills, and said, "Oh, I couldn't help hearing you just now. I just got some extra money from a project, and I'd really enjoy sharing it. How about if I give you this for the quilt?" She reached out, handing

the bills to the young man. I saw that woman leave items she'd been waiting to purchase on the counter.

Donor, Cathy Valcke, is touched by observing the kindness of another:

While grocery shopping, I saw an elderly lady in one of those motorized carts trying desperately to reach something on the top shelf, but was unable to reach it. A mother, toting three children was near her. Despite having her hands full with her family, she stopped what she was doing, and helped the lady get what she needed. The look of gratitude and relief that was on the elder woman's face was truly touching. It really doesn't take a lot to make someone's day!

Sister Marlene Schemmel, CSJ, was thrilled to tell us about this act of giant generosity:

Jodi Tamen, a resident at LaGrange Park Center donated a kidney earlier this year to someone she didn't even know – all because she is so thankful for her life and things she can do that people who are sick cannot. This is a "Pay it Forward" contribution with the National Kidney Registry. The person receiving the kidney must arrange for someone else to donate a kidney, and the next recipient finds another donor to pay it forward. So far, five people have received kidneys as a result of Jodi's donation!

Employee, Kathy Gilmartin, is inspired by a volunteer:

Sandy Brewster is a volunteer with Dear Neighbor and goes beyond the expected to be of service to others. In one particular instance, Sandy's passion shone brightly. Sandy was relentless in her effort to help a client find suitable housing after hospitalization. She removed seemingly impassable roadblocks and now the client is doing well in an assisted living facility.

If you would like to share a brief account of witnessing someone letting Christ's light shine through a simple act of God's love in the world, please send your story to bbrewster@csjoseph.org.

Kindness is a soothing balm for the soul, giving an inner light to everyone who is touched.

It is up to each of us to allow that light to shine, shine, shine.



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