

imagine
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CONGREGATION OF THE
SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

**LIVING
BOLDLY**

...as if love mattered

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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, with one another, and with all creation.

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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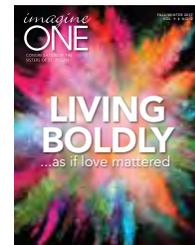
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We challenge each other to boldly answer the call of the Gospels and address the needs of the *dear neighbor* in our world.



▲ Seated from left, Sisters Rita Ann Teichman, Nancy Conway, and Pat Bergen. Standing from left, Sisters Joan Kreyenbuhl, Marguerite O'Brien, Christine Parks, and Jeannie Masterson

In this issue, we explore attempts at self-emptying love, of helping one another carry the cross, of loving boldly, of standing in solidarity with the total human experience.

beliefs of others – not to be converted, but to simply understand? How might we be called to speak truth with courage and conviction, but always with love?

In this issue, we explore attempts at self-emptying love, of helping one another carry the cross, of loving boldly, of standing in solidarity with the total human experience. We highlight a few ways some people we know have attempted this spiritual journey to “live as though love mattered.” We hope that you will be inspired, and discover ways that you can expand your own efforts to express unifying love in the world.

The Congregation of St. Joseph Leadership Team

No doubt about it, love is hard work. Whether we're referencing an individual relationship, interreligious dialogue, or international summits, the Gospel challenge to “love your neighbor as yourself” is challenging. It requires constant awareness of the impact of one's decisions on others, letting go of preferences to consider the whole, openness to changing one's mind, philosophy or long standing assumptions. Yet followers of Jesus are compelled by Baptism to believe that love is the energy by which all of creation will eventually realize union with God, so we keep searching for common ground on which to base conversations of substance that explore our differences while respecting the other.

Our world is certainly in a complex, tumultuous time. Division, disrespect, unethical behavior, critical negativity, distrust, fear, and hate are what make headlines. Clearly we are more aware of the wide range of diverse beliefs in our world than ever before. People are suffering in ways we will never have to suffer, simply for being who they are. We yearn to leave the world a better place for future generations, to leave our legacy of love and hope. But how? How do we take leadership in a search for deeper truth, for connection with those who differ from us, without denying life's tribulations, and with authentic integrity? How can we learn to listen with empathy to the

PEACEMAKING THROUGH ACTIVISM

You can take action, change policy and make your voice heard.

Activism in the Wake of Recent Events

On social media, Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, posted her thoughts on what to do after recent events exposed racism and bigotry in our country. In her tweets, she wrote of her life experiences and how her African American neighbors became her teachers about the 'other America' that they are subjected to. "Thank God they were so patient with me!" she said. With over 30 years of work trying to end the death penalty, Sister Helen offers her insights in hopes that it might illuminate your path as we press onward together in this struggle for justice. "We all need to get involved in our communities and act for justice," she said. Here are some of Sister Helen's tweets on getting started with activism:

- Activism is like riding a wave in a tiny boat. You can feel this immense power under you. You know you've connected to something powerful.
- Be ready. Be poised. You've got to have depth and you've got to be spiritually grounded or you won't last long in this endeavor.
- You're going to be engaged with people who are suffering terribly, and the forces arrayed against them will feel unassailable.
- Often enough, the outcome is going to break your heart. The suffering and defeat gets inside you and gnaws at you as if it were your own.
- It is this experience of compassion in you that will jolt you out of your small ego-absorbed self and stir your heart to try and try again.
- What's important is that when we wake up to an injustice, we must immediately act. Take a concrete step right away, no matter how small.



▲ Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ.

- Not to respond to injustice immediately is to risk paralyzing ourselves. Action is a freeing thing.
- Find your passion, find the injustice that offends your moral sensibilities to the core, and then take action right away.
- Write a letter. Join a protest. Contact your elected officials. Most importantly, make a personal connection with people who are suffering.
- Martin Luther King said it best: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

For more on Sister Helen, please see page 9. >

A Manifesto for Surviving Dark Times

BY SISTER CHRIS SCHENK, CSJ

The following is an excerpt from an article written for the National Catholic Reporter online.

I haven't been in the best personal space lately. Internally, I feel 'flat' and I miss the quiet sense of God within me. These times of emptiness trigger me to focus on what is wrong with me, the country, and the world. In this particular period of hollowness, I took some time to reflect and to face the hard question: "Just where is God, anyhow?" Where is God in the current state of politics that affects the poor and those fighting for the common good? Where is God with immigrants, refugees, and those needing health care? Where is God in the environment, in people who are under attack by virtue of race, religion, and sexual orientation? Where is God in all people under attack?

I know I am not alone in my questions. I see similar wonderings on Facebook. Watching the news doesn't help. It leads me down a rabbit hole of alienation away from the Divine Energy that my faith experience tells me is always at work – even in the midst of abandonment, be it personal or political. Although the news provides needed information and analysis, it feeds the complacency that knowledge alone is enough to meet the current crisis.

So, what to do? For me, only a renewed conviction that I belong to God, and a cessation of internal naysaying, brings me any peace. That and actively praying. I pray my 'vulnerable' prayer, which helps me remember that I, along with the poor, are helpless in the face of evil and oppression by the powerful. By accepting this, I cast myself into the infinite mercy of God. I am powerless to overcome the evil and oppression; that is God's job. This relieves me of responsibility or believing that I should have the power over every evil. I believe that God is on the side of the impoverished – materially or spiritually. If I didn't I would remain in a state of cynicism and despair.

Each of us is part of the 'God-energy' at work in the world, although we might call it by another name. Activism, getting informed, and working for justice and peace 'on earth as it is in heaven,' is an indispensable part of the equation. But it is not the only part. The other part is the recognition that we are often powerless over the forces of evil, whether in ourselves or in our country, but God is not. So we must rest and wait for the Spirit to help us see what



▲ Sister Christine Schenk, CSJ.

is ours to do – and what is not. Then we must carry it out. For me, my overachieving Messiah complex sometimes guilt me into thinking that it is my responsibility to save the world. It is not. That belongs to God who is infinite and incomprehensible love.

When despair happens, and it will, it is good to remember that our responsibility is to shelter within us the God-love until we are shown the part that is ours to play in building the reign of God. Sometimes, our part to play means speaking truth to power and risking our lives, as so many did courageously and recently in Charlottesville. Maybe, as more of us step up to play our part, God's new reign of justice and peace will dawn at last. ■

Artwork by Marcy Hall. Commissioned by FutureChurch as part of the Women Witnesses of Mercy series.

You **CAN** change policy. You **CAN** take action **TODAY!**

It is not just politicians and the media who have all the power to create policies that govern our lives. You have more of a voice than you think. These tips will make sure that those in charge hear you loud and clear.

- **Google Alerts:** Sign up to receive news and articles about policy issues that are relevant to your interests.
- **Statehouse News:** Sign up for alerts and newsletters to stay up-to-date on policy.
- **Research programs in your community related to policy issues of your interest.** Learn about the organizations that run them and who the leadership is.
- **Educate yourself on the policy making process, timeline and budget.** Each election also has important dates and processes related to voter registration and voting.

Stay informed about issues, policies, and community conversations in your state.

- **Attend conferences, state capitol days, events,** and meetings around your state and meet others who work in the field.
- **Network, ask questions and research organizations** to learn about their policy agendas and priorities.

Build relationships with key leaders and decision makers in the field.

- **Introduce yourself, and keep in contact with leaders.** Share articles or reports, ask to meet and talk about their role, volunteer for their organization, attend events hosted by their organization.

- **Learn which philanthropic, nonprofit, and businesses** in your community support your areas of interest.

- **Follow elected officials and organizations** related to your issue area — participate, comment, like, share, and retweet information.
- **Join a coalition, or volunteer** for a local or statewide advocacy organization.

Join the conversation by becoming a champion of your policy interest.

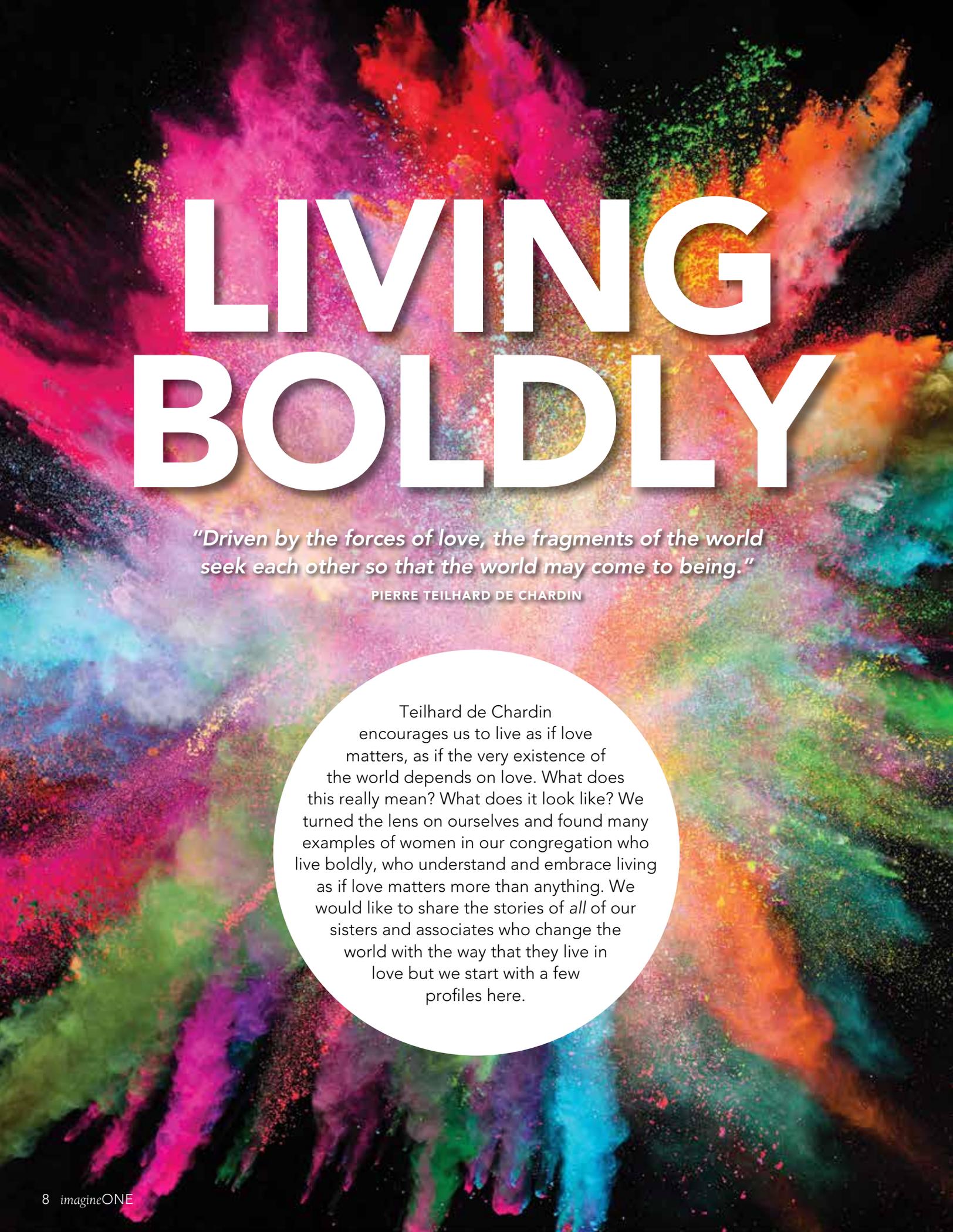
- **Attend candidate forums & VOTE:** Ask questions about which platforms your candidates support, volunteer for phone banks or GOTV drives, and VOTE. Talk to your friends, family, and colleagues about important issues and encourage them to register to vote.
- **Write a Letter to the Editor** for your local paper.
- **Write a letter to your local elected officials** urging them to support a specific policy related to your issue area.
- **Meet with your local elected officials,** talk to them about current policies and issues of interest in your community.

Connect community engagement to policy change and action!

- **Develop initiatives** to gain school credit for building, shaping, advocating and learning more about policy and advancing policy priorities.
- **Seek or establish internship programs** that allow young people to engage and support organizations, efforts, and/or related issues or campaigns.
- **Encourage organizations** and government agencies to establish committees or subcommittees led by young people to help shape that organization's policy priorities.
- **Support policies** that encourage school districts and/or higher education to support careers in your interest area.
- **Support and/or educate political candidates** about your policy priorities to reinforce that youth have a vested interest in policy, too.
- **Lead by example.** If you want a role at the table ask for one by taking your own action steps!

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LIVING BOLDLY

"Driven by the forces of love, the fragments of the world seek each other so that the world may come to being."

PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

Teilhard de Chardin encourages us to live as if love matters, as if the very existence of the world depends on love. What does this really mean? What does it look like? We turned the lens on ourselves and found many examples of women in our congregation who live boldly, who understand and embrace living as if love matters more than anything. We would like to share the stories of *all* of our sisters and associates who change the world with the way that they live in love but we start with a few profiles here.

SISTER HELEN PREJEAN, CSJ



It's impossible to talk about sisters who are bold without mentioning Sister Helen Prejean. With over 30 years in prison ministry, Sister Helen has become one of the strongest voices against the death penalty in the United States and the world. She not only ministers to death row inmates, but has also worked with victims' families and has made it her mission to educate the public about the problems inherent in the justice system and the death penalty. Her first book, *Dead Man Walking*, was made into an award winning film by the same name, and opened up the conversation about the death penalty to a wider audience.

Sister Helen continues to be relevant today, in part, because of her willingness to embrace new forms of communication and to stay on the front lines of the fight against the death penalty. She is a prolific presence on social media, never afraid to speak her own truth about the evils of the death penalty.

With over 68,000 followers on Facebook and 42,000 followers on Twitter, Sister Helen shares the most up-to-date information about potential executions, changes to policy, and calls to action in an instant with the tens of thousands of people who now follow and support her cause. She also uses

these sources as a way to engage with others around her beliefs, calling out politicians in states that utilize the death penalty and helping to organize online campaigns to encourage those in power to end the practice of government sanctioned death.



Sister Helen's courage, and her willingness to embrace men and women who have committed terrible crimes, comes from her belief in God's infinite mercy and compassion. She is able to see the humanity and worth of all people, often when few others can. A recognized and respected leader of the anti-death penalty movement, Sister Helen does not shy away from debate. Her willingness to talk about the racism and classism that exists in our criminal justice system helps open the eyes of people who are unwilling or unable to examine the issue. Sister Helen's perspective on these issues and systems are central to Christianity and the belief that only God has the power to end a life.

Currently, Sister Helen is working on her third book. She shares on Facebook that this newest book,



▲ Sister Helen listens intently to the Dalai Lama. The two participated on a panel on peace and non-violence at the University of Arkansas in 2011.

River on Fire, is “like a prequel to *Dead Man Walking*, about how this nice, polite nun came to a new understanding of Christianity and the need to fight for social justice.” The new book, expected to be out in 2018, will offer an even deeper understanding of her life and

ministry, and will shine a light on how this bold sister came to live her life through love of all.

To learn more about Sister Helen and her ministry against the death penalty, visit her website at www.sisterhelen.org.



◀ Sister Helen greets a participant of the *Voices of Hope* conference in Galway, Ireland in 2013. Photo by Dermont Roantree.



◀ Sister Helen with Bernie Sanders and actor/activist Tim Robbins in May 2017, at the Death Penalty Focus Awards Dinner in California.

DIANNE HANLEY

As Executive Director of the St. Joseph Spirituality Center in Baton Rouge, Congregation of St. Joseph Associate Dianne Hanley is especially attuned to the spiritual needs of the Greater Baton Rouge Community. She has initiated multiple opportunities for unique interactions and growth, often under challenging circumstances.

In the spring of 2016, Dianne introduced “Word and Deed,” a project designed to awaken and deepen the spirituality of church congregations in the hope of allowing them to more effectively work to change unjust societal systems. While the groundwork for the project was being laid, the city was rocked by two catastrophes that proved the importance of this work: the police shooting of Alton Sterling and the life-changing flood of August 2016.

By grace, the first church group had met the day of the shooting, and in response had planned a rare gathering for the South: equal numbers of people from different races would gather for spiritually deep and honest conversations about their relationships. The gathering was postponed by the rains that deluged the city, but seeing how race caused a great disparity in the community’s ability to rebuild, the group was more determined than ever to continue with their plans. They came together that September in a predominately African American Catholic church where 80% of the membership had been affected by the flood.

Since that difficult beginning, Dianne has convened the group monthly, bringing together more than 150 people from a variety of diverse parishes. The main focus of these meetings has been to speak openly and honestly about race relations in the community and to bring spirituality to bear on that dialogue. Such conversations are the rich soil in which racist attitudes and actions are recognized and overcome. By building



▲ Dianne Hanley



◀ *Together Baton Rouge is a volunteer organization whose goal is to help close the grocery gap for people living in low-income neighborhoods with unacceptably low access to grocery stores and other quality food options.*

relationships and recognizing shared vision, the group works to effectively change deeply rooted systems that have divided people for over a century, shifting the power base to one of inclusion and mutuality.

In addition to Word and Deed, Dianne is also a founding member of Together Baton Rouge, a broad-based coalition of congregations and community-based organizations that come together to address community problems large and small. The coalition has been deliberate about crossing the lines of race, religion, neighborhood and political affiliation as they work on issues affecting families and communities in a strictly non-partisan way. Clearly, Dianne is committed to recognizing the needs of her community, and exercising leadership to collaborate for the unity that is ours by our oneness under God.



CONGREGATION OF ST. JOSEPH LEADERSHIP TEAM

Living boldly is a way of life for our sisters. And the way that they manage leadership and decision making continues to put them at the forefront of innovative and collaborative processes.



*Sister
Joan
Kreyenbuhl*



*Sister
Nancy
Conway*



*Sister
Jeannie
Masterson*

There are many groups of Sisters of St. Joseph around the world. Usually, they are identified by the place where they were located after being part of a founding congregation that can be traced back to France. Ten years ago, seven of these Sisters of St. Joseph communities came together and reconfigured into the single group that is now the Congregation of St. Joseph. Reconfiguration is a way of coming together that other groups of religious sisters have done or have considered doing. Many religious communities are looking to the congregation to see what reconfiguration can look like. One of the most unique ways that the congregation managed reconfiguration was by implementing a circular or shared style of leadership. One of the first

promises that the members made to one another was that they would share leadership for the sake of the mission.

Canonically (and civilly), every congregation must have a president. Sometimes in religious organizations, this sister is called the Superior General or Mother Superior. The Congregation of St. Joseph does have a president and in certain canonical or rare civil circumstances she does need to assume that role. However the congregation's president doesn't function in the traditional way that the role has often been experienced because there are six other elected

sisters to the Leadership Team and all members function as equals. Decisions on every level are made by consensus and in collaboration. The team meets monthly to be informed, to discuss, to pray and reflect, and to work together on all matters of the congregation. The Leadership Team functions as an open system which distributes control across the congregation and there is not one decision maker; decisions are made at every level by persons to whom the Leadership Team has delegated its authority to perform certain responsibilities. Leadership of this kind demands a different type of steadfastness and determination and a lack of ego. Circular Leadership requires more time and more vulnerability as there is a risk in letting control be collective and communal.

Sister
Rita Ann
Teichman



Sister
Pat
Bergen



Sister
Marguerite
O'Brien



Sister
Christine
Parks



The Leadership Team functions as an open system which distributes control across the congregation and there is not one decision maker; decisions are made at every level by persons to whom the Leadership Team has delegated its authority to perform certain responsibilities.

There are many approaches to leadership; however, members of the congregation have promised each other to support this shared leadership approach. As a result, decisions tend to emerge over time after broad consultation rather than be decided quickly and singly by the Leadership Team. The voices of many are considered even if the process takes more time and energy than anticipated. Recently, the sisters collectively decided to address the needs of aging sisters, shrinking demographics, large and underutilized motherhouses and buildings, and the need to move forward with collaborations that expanded the mission. The entire

congregation was invited to express its willingness to move this project forward in a statement of direction. Over 90% of the sisters actively supported initiatives to address the future.

So, shared leadership has acquired a new dimension as the congregation manages construction projects at four locations along with possible partnerships. Vendors and organizations in relationship with the projects are often surprised at how the sisters 'do' business; yet the feedback is overwhelmingly positive about the results. Relationships thrive as everyone feels their voice can

be heard. Being an example of shared leadership requires boldness and patience and is always risky. Sometimes the sisters on the Leadership Team admit that they are figuring it out as they go. Yet, the Leadership Team and the congregation remain committed to it, to being stewards of the 'whole' in the face of companies and business groups in the world that thrive on competition, profit, and the bottom line at the expense of people and their lives. Jesus was countercultural and his life and the Gospels support the congregation sisters in this approach. ■

What we stand for...

We believe that we can bring positive change to the world. We believe that by living out our mission and charism, we can be a part of the effort to unify the world with God and the earth. The Congregation of St. Joseph holds itself accountable to one another and the world with promises to risk our lives and resources to work for systemic change that will answer the hungers and needs of the world. We promise to take steps to strengthen, heal, and renew the Earth. We promise to work with others to create a culture of inclusivity and mutuality. These are powerful words which we strive to support with equally powerful results.

We concentrate our energy and resources around four priorities:



Spirituality



Education



Care of vulnerable populations



Care of the Earth

Our sisters, associates, and employees work and minister in over 20 locations in the United States and around the world, with concentrations in Baton Rouge, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Crookston, Detroit, Chicago, Wheeling, Kalamazoo, Wichita, New Orleans, Tipton, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Kyoto.

With your help, we provide over \$2 million in support to projects that are transforming the world. Won't you help make a difference? Together we can change lives, heal wounds, and keep hope alive for so many.



CONGREGATION OF ST. JOSEPH

Who we stand with...



Our five spirituality centers offer resources that foster practices and experiences in support with our mission and charism. Places of quiet and reflection, each center offers spiritual mentors and programming that encourage growth and peacefulness in individuals and groups. Almost 30,000 people visit one of our spirituality centers every year.



Our three high schools educate over 2,500 students each year and offer instruction in and integration of the mission and charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Bolstered by high academic standards, students and alumni of our schools continue to move our mission forward in the world with efforts and actions of dynamism and compassion.



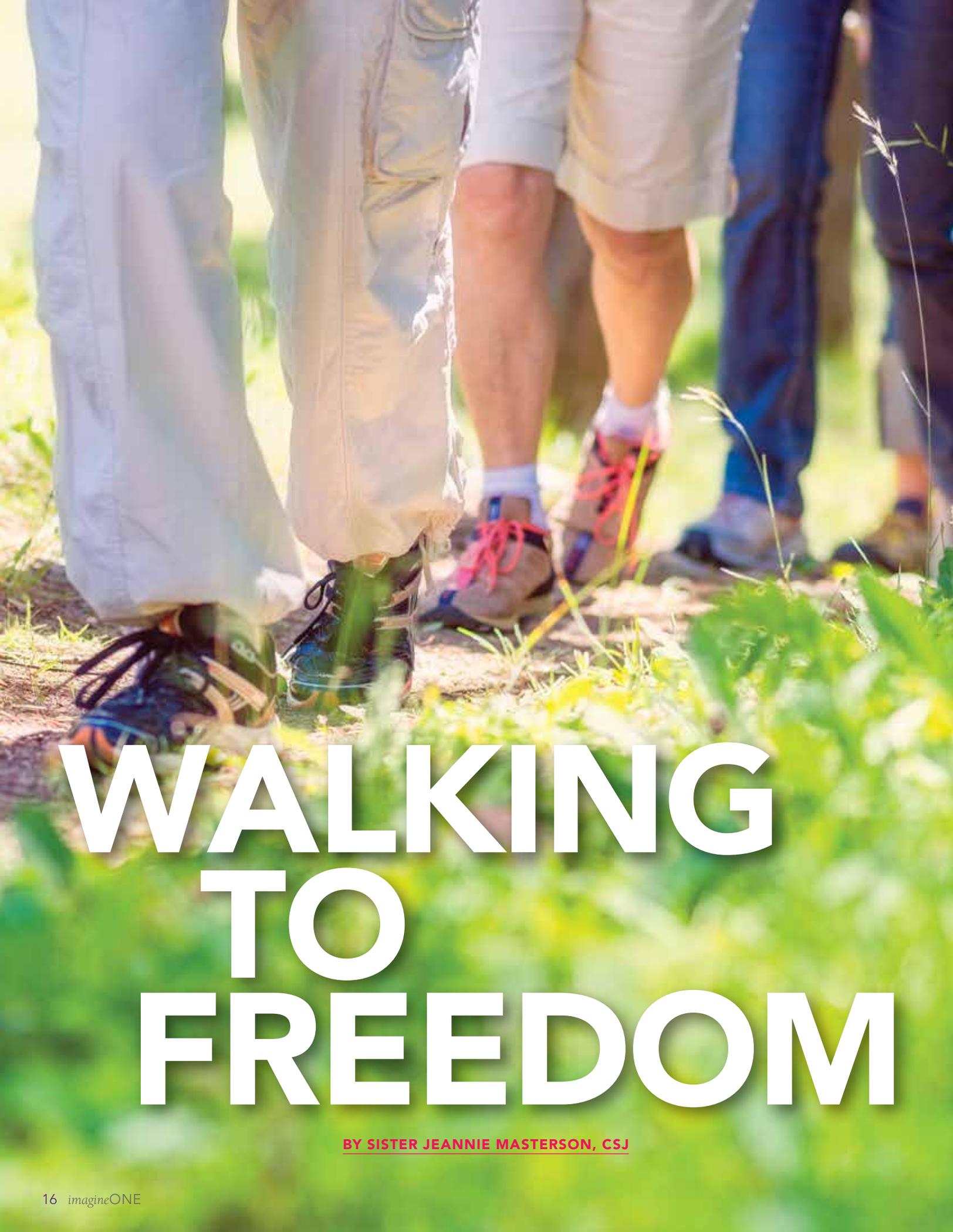
The needs and hungers of the world are of great concern to the congregation. With our founding desire to take care of the *dear neighbor*, we claim unity with all. Currently, we are focusing efforts on the critical areas of ending human trafficking, abolishing the death penalty, and supporting immigration reform and the needs of refugees. We work alone and with others to take care of our own sisters as well as those on the margins of society. Always seeking ways to change systems that break the cycles of poverty and violence, we risk our lives and resources to support projects that others might reject.



Part of honoring our connectedness to each other and the world requires accepting responsibility for and working to restore the needs of the earth. Our efforts to uphold the dignity of the environment include educating ourselves and others on issues such as safe water and water resources, adding solar panels to power some of our centers, supporting organic agriculture, and being part of urban farming to eliminate food deserts.

We are witnesses daily to transformation and joy in a complex world. But there is so much more to do! ■

To make a gift, please use the enclosed envelope or visit us online at csjoseph.org and click on "Make a Gift."



WALKING TO FREEDOM

BY SISTER JEANNIE MASTERSON, CSJ

Sister Jeannie Masterson, who lives in Cincinnati, recently wrote the following post for *Beyond the Habit*, our congregational blog. The post reflects the commitment of a community of like-minded individuals to act in solidarity around an issue.

This past summer, in a burst of creative genius, three groups from my parish; the Health Ministry, Network of Care, and Peace and Justice Committee, collaborated to motivate a group of us to exercise from July through September. Whether walking, swimming, bicycling, gardening, or even chair exercises, we're encouraged to keep a tally of our miles (if you don't have a Fitbit or its cousin, on average 20 minutes of any exercise is considered a mile). But in a unique twist, as we exercise, we're invited to consider the millions of refugees and immigrants whose only choice for life is to walk: away from everything they've ever known, with no clarity about where they might be welcomed to begin anew. Thus the exercise program is known as "Walk to Freedom."

Because I happened to be born in a country that has not fought wars on its own soil in my lifetime, I can only imagine what it's like to be so terrorized as to leave everything behind. Circumstances would have to be very challenging for me to make the decision that it's safer and more hopeful to take whatever possessions I can carry than to stay where all my roots are. Things I take for granted, like having available bathrooms, a place to brush my teeth, three meals a day (and usually ample snacks in between), a safe and warm/cool place to sleep, accessible health care, the knowledge that my family and friends are safe, even wi-fi access on demand – all vanish when one hits the road as a displaced person.

Throughout these months of mindful walking, the parish will offer insights about refugees through speakers, movies, articles,

and discussions, leading to some action in solidarity with our brothers and sisters; for example, volunteering or offering sanctuary or providing meals. We will map the total miles the parish walks in comparison with the most traveled routes of modern day refugees. With all our supports, will we collectively walk as far as one person from Syria walks to find safety? We have no children to carry, nor sick parents to assist, nor family members from whom we have been separated in the



With all our supports, will we collectively walk as far as one person from Syria walks to find safety?

migration. Our walk is totally voluntary, and at our discretion. What a difference from the forced marches of children, often as young as six, who are kidnapped into various armies in our world!



A further offering of our parish “Walk to Freedom” is weekly devotions: scriptures, quotes, poetry, and music to keep us connected with both our spiritual forbearers who journeyed, from Abraham to Mary and Joseph to St. Paul, and these modern journeyers. Our journey is to be spiritual as well as physical, to walk in others’ shoes to get a glimpse into their lives: their fears, their struggles, their challenges, and most of all, their hope. What a gift to be offered more than the thirty-second news feeds, to connect my life with those of my brothers and sisters, to become all the more alert to my multitude of blessings and comforts!

I hope that, by the end of our three months, I have become more sensitive to a wide variety of ways I can become connected rather than distanced, to live with hope rather than fear, to offer generosity of heart rather than greedily clutching the benefits with which I have been blessed. If I’ve moved even inches in these hopes, I will have indeed walked to deeper freedom in the strongest sense of the word. ■



Sister 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 director of Cincinnati’s Jordan Center, which brought health attention to uninsured working people and their families.

SANCTUARY

Sanctuary, one of the most ancient traditions that we have as a people of faith, is documented as far back as the early Hebrews. They allowed temples and even entire cities to declare themselves places of refuge for persons accused of a crime they may not have committed, allowing time for the matter to be resolved before the accused were unjustly punished. In the U.S., the Underground Railroad came into being to help slaves find safety, mostly in religious settings. In the 1980s, over 500 church congregations established themselves as sanctuaries for Central American refugees fleeing civil war in their countries, where they were threatened by death squads.



Today the practice is being revived as the status of immigrants and refugees fluctuates, and hate crimes increase. The eleven sisters of the congregation living in Cincinnati, having been actively engaged with the local sanctuary coalition in the 1980s, have unanimously agreed to sign on to the Cincinnati Sanctuary Congregation Coalition as a “solidarity congregation,” adding our name to the public list of supporters and pledging prayer and various simple modes of support (letters to legislators, presence at public events, education of selves and others about the plight of immigrants and refugees). Although age limits our physical capacity, our love is great and we are eager to be part of a coalition network that witnesses publicly our belief in the oneness of all creation, and the subsequent right of all to safety.



CARING FOR CREATION

in Our Own Backyards

“What did you do, once you knew?” This question, posed in the poem “Hieroglyphic Stairway” by Drew Dellinger, is a question that weighs heavily on the minds of many of us as we think about our dedication to the care of the Earth. We believe that we are called to be protectors of creation, and we work to make choices that will lead to a sustainable future. However, in a world where we are surrounded by information, sometimes it can be difficult to figure out where to start. What environmental need is most important, when it seems there are so many areas in crisis?

In order to help us think about our responsibility to care for our environment, we’ve decided to start in a place that makes the most sense to us: in our own backyards. On the following pages you will see a map that draws attention to some of the most pressing environmental issues in the locations where our sisters reside. By starting with some of our own states, we are hoping to make these problems personal. We want to give each of us a real place to start from, with concerns that are immediate not only to our earth, but to the well-being of our own neighborhoods, families, and futures.

Once we name these issues, we ask “what will you do?” What can each of us do to help take responsibility for our environment, teach others about the crisis facing our earth, and find innovative ways to protect our natural resources for generations to come?

► Scan the QR code
with your smartphone
to watch a video.



ILLINOIS: Invasive species, which are plant or animal that are not naturally occurring in an area, cause destruction when they are introduced to a new environment. These invasive species have had a severe impact on the ecosystems in the Great Lakes, including Lake Michigan. These species can also cause additional problems, including negative effects on health as well as damage to the economy by hurting water based industries, such as fishing. Due to proposed cuts to the EPA, the funding provided to address the issue of invasive species in the Great Lakes is in jeopardy of being rolled back.

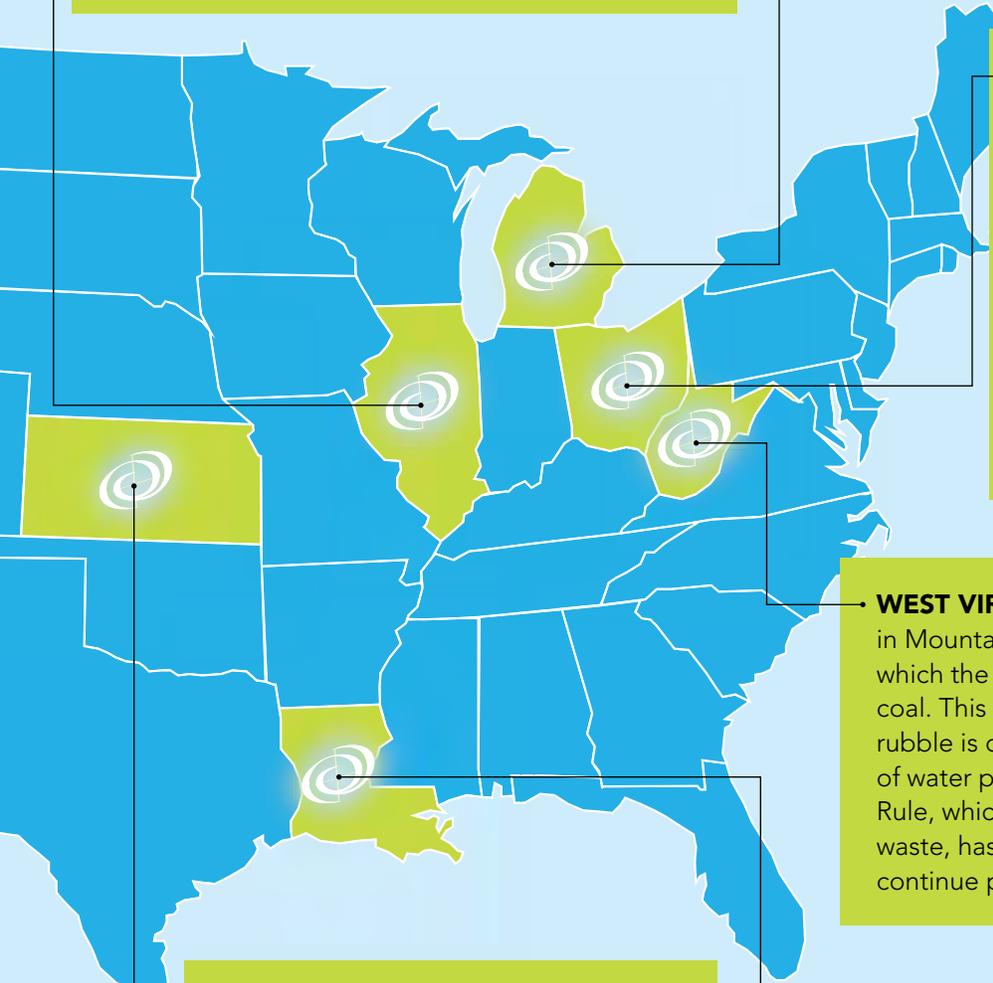
MICHIGAN: In 2014, the city of Flint, Michigan, changed their water source in the hopes of cutting costs. But things soon turned disastrous, as high levels of lead were found in the population's drinking water. Today, the people of Flint still do not have drinkable water. Despite federal funding, enough money has not been allocated to complete the project. If the city is able to come up with the needed funding, it is still estimated that it will take at least another two years for the citizens of Flint to have safe water available to them.

OHIO: The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which was started in 2010, is an effort to restore and protect the Great Lakes, which is the biggest freshwater system in the world. The initiative aims to clean up decades of industrial pollution. However, because of rollbacks to the EPA, this initiative is in danger of being eliminated and leaving our water at risk, not only in Ohio, but throughout North America.

WEST VIRGINIA: Many mining companies take part in Mountaintop Removal Mining, a form of mining in which the top of the mountain is removed to reach the coal. This type of mining is controversial because the rubble is dumped in valleys, resulting in high levels of water pollution. This year, the Stream Protection Rule, which was written to stop the dumping of mining waste, has been repealed, leaving companies open to continue polluting the environment.

KANSAS: The building of new oil pipelines across the country is endangering the water of many states. The Ogallala Aquifer, which provides fresh water to eight states, including Kansas, and helps with the irrigation of crops, is in jeopardy from oil spills should the Keystone XL Pipeline get built. Once rejected on the grounds that it would contribute to global warming, the president has recently approved the building of the pipeline.

LOUISIANA: Global Warming is causing rising sea levels, more intense storms, and sinking wetlands in Louisiana. This year, the United States pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, a global effort to combat climate change and to help countries to deal with its impacts. Leaving the agreement, along with rollbacks that are being made to the EPA, means that these problems will continue unchecked as sea levels continue to rise and weather patterns become more unstable.



WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Now that we know about just a few of the problems facing the environment in some areas, what can we each do to make a difference?

- Contact your representative, go to **house.gov** and click on the "Representatives" button.
- Contact your senator, go to **senate.gov** and click on the "Senators" button.
- Join an organization in your area to make your voice heard locally and nationally. Some groups to learn more about include:
 - Alliance for the Great Lakes: **greatlakes.org**
 - Peoples Climate Movement: **peoplesclimate.org**
 - Catholic Climate Covenant: **catholicclimatecovenant.org**
 - The Nature Conservancy: **nature.org/?intc=nature.tnav.logo**
 - The Global Catholic Climate Movement: **catholicclimatemovement.global**
 - Catholic Health Association: Focus on Environment: **chausa.org/environment/overview**
 - The Sierra Club: **sierraclub.org**
- Take part in marches and demonstrations to insist upon action.
- Support groups that are doing good work in your area. Through volunteering, attending events, and offering support, you can make a difference in your own backyard.
- Make changes to your own lifestyle:
 - Pay attention to how you use water. Turn off the faucet when it's not in use, fix running toilets and leaky faucets, and take shorter showers.
 - Drive less! By walking, biking, or even carpooling to work, school, and to run errands, you're helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
 - Recycle!
 - Conserve energy – by turning off lights when you leave the room, unplugging electronic devices, and changing your light bulbs to energy efficient options.
- Follow the Congregation of St. Joseph Social Justice Ministry Facebook page to learn more @CongregationofStJosephSocialJustice

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The congregation is committed to care for all creation, and it is our goal to live this to the fullest. As such, we have taken on several projects and causes to help restore our earth.

- Solar power: In an attempt to reduce our carbon footprint, the Congregation of St. Joseph is replacing some of our traditional power sources with solar power. Not only are we hoping to limit our carbon dioxide emissions through the use of solar power, but also to shrink our use of power provided by coal, which can impact the earth through acid drainage, acid rain, ozone pollution, and mercury deposits in our lakes.
- Mirabeau Water Garden: Water is a life-giving gift, but it can also cause destruction, especially in Louisiana. For this reason, the Congregation of St. Joseph has been working with many in the city of New Orleans on the Mirabeau Water Garden, a project that will allow for water management in the case of major storms in the city. Using land belonging to the sisters, the water garden will not only allow for the earth to help manage water in the city during a major flood event, but when not in use the garden will provide space for environmental education.
- Peoples Climate March: In April of 2017, sisters from across the Congregation of St. Joseph joined other individuals, students, faith communities, and environmentalist groups at Peoples Climate Marches across the country. The goal? To make our voices heard in our hopes to work towards a clean energy economy that works for everyone. Climate change affects us all, and we are committed to continuing to stand together to help our environment. ■

Carrying the Cross

BY SISTER JUDY SCHROEDER, CSJ

You might be familiar with the quote by Allen Saunders and popularized by John Lennon in one of his songs, "Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans." In April 2013, this saying took on deepened meaning for me when I was diagnosed with advanced, stage III breast cancer.

It had begun several weeks earlier with a routine mammogram. No lumps or bumps or other symptoms, just another appointment that was crowded into a busy day full of plans and responsibilities. Breast cancer was not foreign to my family, so the diagnosis was not a shocking surprise but rather a startling awakening to a journey I was being asked to take. I knew that although I did not have a choice as to whether to enter into this

challenging time, I did have a choice of either giving in to despair or of searching for the meaning of what it meant to carry this cross.

So began the months of chemo, surgery, additional chemo, treatment decisions, and struggling with the discomfort – both physical and psychological. Family, friends, community, and prayer were a great support



as I passed through each day and sought to find the purpose and learning that was being revealed to me. I had on occasion, for a number of years, entered into the practice of the Tibetan Buddhist meditation known as Tonglen. In this practice, one visualizes taking in the suffering of oneself and that of others on the in-breath, and giving respect, compassion, peace and comfort to all beings on the out-breath. This seemed to me to be a relevant path in my journey.

Thus I began to fervently engage in this practice multiple times on a daily basis. Each day breathing in, not only my suffering and fear but the suffering and fears of others. Each day breathing out, loving kindness and peace. Gradually the meditation took on new dimensions: breathing-in the suffering of the world and universe, breathing-out loving compassion, comfort and peace – all the while experiencing God in all and all in God.

Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans.

In this daily meditation, I met the meaning of why I was asked to carry this challenge...to carry this cross. In the depths of these meditations, I found myself embracing all and being embraced by all. I experienced that suffering is not a singular, isolated act but it is a communal encounter that leads to a deepened knowing of oneness with all of creation; or as Pema Chondron, a Buddhist nun states, being awakened to “unlimited spaciousness.” It may sound strange, but I was enveloped by a profound sense of peace and at times even joy that transformed my sense of isolation, suffering and fear. In relating this experience I have found words to be so imperfect in giving expression to the mystical for they are unable to encompass the profundity of God’s love.

I do have to confess that had I in the beginning been given a choice as to whether I would enter the journey of cancer, I would have definitively said no. However, through my experience of coming to know this passage as an immeasurable gift, I am filled with gratitude and peace and would not wish anything different.

So, the journey continues. The lingering side effects of treatment, choices for additional treatment, and doctor appointments can be a weekly if not a daily routine. However that routine is immersed in a deepened knowing of the preciousness of life and the oneness of all. A learning to vigorously embrace the gift of each moment; as Teilhard de Chardin would say “to rest into the future.” My wish for all is that whatever your journey might be, whatever crosses you might bear, you will come to know the transforming peace of God’s unlimited spaciousness. ■



Sister Judy Schroeder, CSJ, has ministered as a clinical social worker for more than 40 years. She holds Master Degrees in Social Work, Management and Culture and Spirituality.

She helped co-found Transformations Spirituality Center located at our Nazareth center in Kalamazoo, Mich. She retired from the VA Medical Center in Battle Creek, Mich. in 2014. Currently, she is working at the Parchment Community Library.



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Sisterhood Film Now Available

The Congregation of St. Joseph is honored to be the first of seven congregations of women religious featured in a film which aired this past June on Salt + Light, a Canadian Catholic TV network. The film, entitled "Sisterhood," was created by Salt + Light filmmakers through a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to Loyola Institute of Ministry.

The 30-minute video represents the culmination of two years of study and collaboration with our sisters, and communicates beautifully the transformative work of Catholic sisters in the world today. Our history, sisters, ministries, and justice work are all featured. "It was fascinating, thrilling, and humbling to be portrayed through the eyes of a film team who had not known us prior to the start of filming," said Sister Jeannie Masterson, CSJ, a member of the Congregation's Leadership Team. "They followed us around, observed us in ministry, talked with us, read our documents, and caught our charism!"

To watch the film, go to www.saltandlighttv.org/sisterhood/. Scroll down and click on "Part 1: Congregation of St. Joseph." This video, along with the entire 7 part series, will be available for purchase through the Salt + Light website.

