

imagine
ONE

CONGREGATION OF THE
SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

SPRING/SUMMER 2017
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SOIL AND **SOUL**
CULTIVATING
LIFE AND LOVE

imagine ONE

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VOL. 9 | NO. 1

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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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ON THE COVER

Watering My Garden
Acrylic on Canvas Painting
by Este MacLeod

Este MacLeod is a professional artist, designer and educator based in the UK. Through her work, Este reflects on the sentiments, joy and nostalgia surrounding the ongoing process of life. She can be reached at www.estemacleod.com.



If you are reading this issue during the Lenten season, you might agree that *Soil and Soul* is a great title for it. The very word “lent” is an ancient Anglo Saxon term meaning “spring” and refers to the springing forth of life from within the soil. Originally the entire season of the year was called “lent.” It wasn’t until the 16th century that the season’s name was changed to “spring.” By every definition, Lent calls us to touch the divine energy of the soil, to cultivate it and taste what happens in our soul!

Until recently, there was a greater respect for the sacredness of the soil. People knew that the inherent power within soil, sun and water brought forth food and gave itself to become one with body and soul. From the beginning of time, people recognized – even if they could not name it – the paschal dynamic happening in all creation and which is incarnated in the life, death and resurrection of Christ!

Christian rituals bring to light the holiness of creation. People are blessed with sacred dust from the palms burnt on Palm Sunday. “Remember, you are dust.” Worshippers are reminded: You are one with the holy soil of your birth. Remember who you are. You too are pulsing with divine life longing to spring forth. The use of darkness, fire and water in the liturgy on Holy Saturday reveal the transforming power of the Spirit through the darkness and into the dawn. This amazing power is great enough to roll away stones, awaken new life and send humanity racing into life with a mission. And what a mission it is: to foster forgiveness and community so we know that we are one with God, one with each other and one with all creation, and above all, that we are called to set the world afire with love!

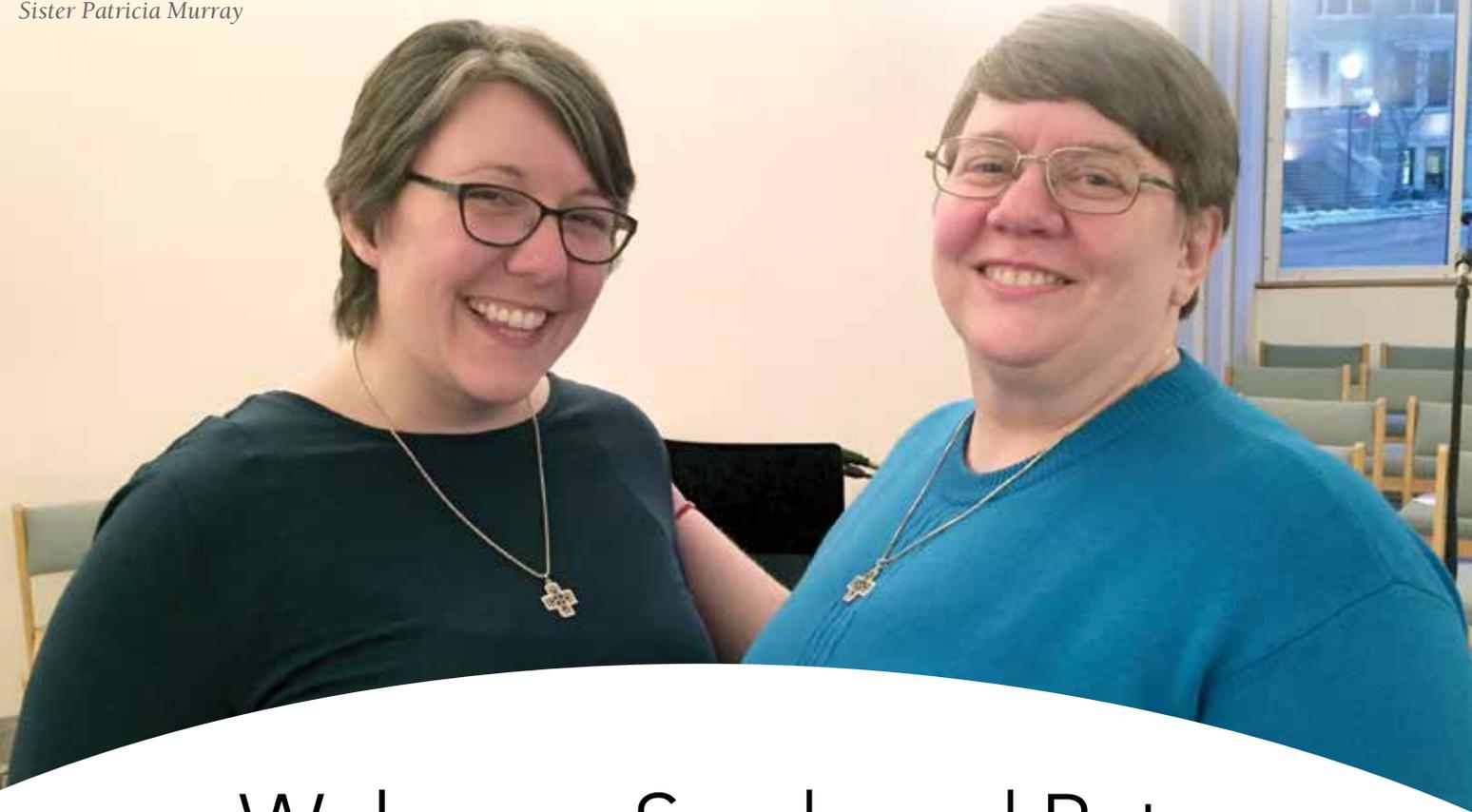
Soil and soul bring us in touch with the consecrated energy pulsing in all that is. Souls come alive and begin to give birth to dreams, images, ideas, songs, and works of art. You will sense this energy as you read the feature article “Soil and Soul.” And you will see why it makes sense to bless our meals. To bless the meal is to acknowledge the spirit of the living God inherent in the soil, the water, the sun, the food, the farmer, the trucker and shop keeper each of whom has a part in bringing this gift of Earth and work of human hand to become the bread of our body and soul. To bless the meal is to pray that this food will nurture works of love and justice in us to bring forth a lasting peace.

Articles in this issue will encourage you to discover how to build a loving community through social media and suggest cultivating kindness in a variety of ways. Another article addresses reverencing the soil beyond farming to socially responsible investing. Notice what stirs and moves in your soul as you read these articles. The seeds of new life are nurtured in the darkness of the soil. Perhaps in reading “Getting Through Darkness” you will begin to uncover and appreciate the value of difficult times in our lives.

Our hope is that this edition of *imagineONE* will lead you to a better appreciation of the sacredness of the soil and its life-giving connection to your soul and the soul of the world. Certainly the world is ready to be alive with the Spirit of Christ waiting to rise anew in our culture!

Sr. Pat

Sister Pat Bergen, CSJ
Congregational Leadership Team



Welcome Sarah and Pat

The Congregation of Saint Joseph recently celebrated the entrance of **Sarah Simmons** as a new candidate for vowed membership, and the transfer of **Sister Patricia Murray** to the Congregation of St. Joseph.

Sarah began her journey with the congregation four years ago, which included her becoming an associate and developing and deepening many relationships with sisters and other associates. She is currently a professor of chemistry at Glen Oaks Community College near Kalamazoo, Mich. She was officially welcomed with a mass and ceremony on September 3, 2016, at our Nazareth center. “The CSJ charism, ‘That all may be one,’ is very powerful because it puts words to what has always been in my heart,” she said. “I’ve realized that the charism is not just in my ministry or prayer, but permeates into every part of my life. It is a continual invitation to choose words and actions that bring about greater love and unity in the world.”

Sister Pat celebrated her transfer of vows to the congregation on October 29, 2016, during a mass and ceremony at our Wheeling, W.Va. center. A sister since 2000, Pat is currently working as a consultant for the West Virginia Home Visitation program. She was previously the Executive Director of ABLE Families in Kermit, W.Va., one

I’ve realized that the charism is not just in my ministry or prayer, but permeates into every part of my life. It is a continual invitation to choose words and actions that bring about greater love and unity in the world.

SARAH SIMMONS

of the congregation’s sponsored ministries. It was this role she credits as bringing her to the Congregation of St. Joseph. “My time at ABLE Families, in one of the most poverty stricken areas of the country, moved me to a deeper understanding of the *dear neighbor*,” she said. “Living and working in a place that was so foreign to my suburban Chicago upbringing ironically brought me back to my CSJ roots.”

Congratulations, Sarah and Pat! ■

What Better Time Than Now?

Circle the Cities With Love Goes International

There are moments in all of our lives when we know that something real and different is happening; When we feel in our souls that we have tapped into something larger than ourselves. The love and fellowship that brought thousands together for the first Circle the City With Love last July on the eve of the RNC was felt not just by those who participated, but by all. Such was the power of loving and peaceful intentions put forth that blistering hot day in Cleveland and in other places as strangers stood, hand in hand, silently for 30 minutes.

Almost immediately after that day, people started asking when the next event would be. So, on January 15, 2017, the Sunday before the presidential inauguration, the second Circle the Cities With Love took place. Over 5,000 people participated, this time in over 120 different locations around the world. Groups formed at our center locations, but also in cities from all corners of the United States including Los Angeles, Key West, Florida, and Marlborough, Maine, and internationally from as far away as Australia and Guam.

We thank everyone who joined us in circling our cities, and the world, with love. ■







SOIL AND

BY FATHER MICHAEL WOODS, SISTER KATHLEEN DURKIN, CSJ, AND EILEEN BIEHL

Over 80 years ago, there was a movement in rural America, supported and enhanced by the Church and many Catholic bishops, to sustain and integrate the life of the Church with the needs and lives of American farmers. Bishops, priests, and farmers and their families came together to form the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) which offered liturgies, rituals, religious education programs, and groups of action and solidarity that raised up the importance of agriculture and the agrarian lifestyle in the United States.

The NCRLC recognized, long before the organic food movement or awareness of genetically modified products, that God's gift of the soil and the stewardship of the soil was critically important. In fact, in the mid-20th century, some of the strongest leaders of Catholic agrarian efforts asserted that stewardship of the soil should be the 11th commandment. The complete reliance of all humanity on the soil for sustenance and survival placed farmers and the agriculture industry in the position of caretaker and cultivator. Seeing the importance of this relationship, leaders in the American Church and society worked to support farmers and farming and to sustain them with liturgies and rituals, as well as education and community.

Unlike the current movements to support organic and non-GMO farming and food which are driven by health and environmental concerns, NCRLC was grounded in the sanctity of God's relationship with humanity through the ability of humankind to sustain itself by cultivating the soil. It is this relationship between God, the soil, and our souls that **Sister Kathleen Durkin, CSJ** and *imagineONE* Editor **Eileen Biehl** discussed with **Father Michael Woods, SJ**, author of *Cultivating Soil and Soul – Twentieth Century Catholic Agrarians Embrace the Liturgical Movement*.



SOUL

EB: Father Michael, I'm going to dive right in; your book really made me wonder if we have lost something since Vatican II, in terms of liturgy, sacrament and ritual, with the Church and the soil and the farmers. There seemed to be such respect and synergy between farmers and the church and the priests. Do you agree?

MW: There was, that's true. But it was a combination of the reforms of Vatican II, the Green Revolution (which introduced nitrogen into fertilizers), policy makers such as Earl Butz who supported large commercial farming and major agribusiness corporations, as well as trade agreements like NAFTA, which crushed small farmers, that really led to a disconnect between farmers and rituals and liturgies. Large-scale conventional farming eventually forced out the smaller farms or

pressed them to consolidate. The NCRLC did in fact embrace some of this change and still tried to adapt liturgical celebrations appropriately. The farmers still needed such rituals, perhaps even more so as they shifted to larger acreage and new technology. But the NCRLC still advocated on behalf of small family farms, and continues to do so to this day.

Beginning in the 1940s, new technology was one factor among many that drove people from the countryside into cities. With such large, powerful, and efficient machinery, farming simply requires fewer people. Thus, there began to be a greater disconnect between the people and the land upon which we all depended. In some respects, this impoverished the countryside. The liturgy-life connection sought to hold together that which was being torn

asunder by all kinds of 20th century socio-economic forces. However, there are still movements afoot to reclaim it.

EB: What does that look like?

MW: Have you watched 'Symphony of the Soil' (www.symphonyofthesoil.com)? Please do! It's a wonderful documentary of the marvels of soil and the damage that we have done to it and it's an indication that everyone, not just Christians, are realizing that the soil deserves to be revered. The main effort that I am part of now, Grow Ohio Valley, is not a religious organization, but it is what I would call a sacramental one. It's no exaggeration to say that soil is life and that soil is part of what traditional Catholic theology calls the Sacramental Principle—that is, all creation has the potential to mediate God's saving presence and activity in the world.





▲ Father Michael Woods and Sister Kathleen Durkin enjoying time at our center in Wheeling.



▲ Father Michael Woods checking on Grow Ohio Valley Farm 18 which is located under the freeways that bisect Wheeling.

KD: These disconnects between the soil and the soul are a reflection of how dualistically we live. We need to foster the connections that support the reality that all of life is one. The awareness that we are all one is the foundation of our Sisters of St. Joseph mission and charisma.

MW: We need a “worldly” spirituality. We need to invite people to see the value of liturgy and rituals that have structures and meanings that free us to enter into real substantive attentiveness. As an example, while teaching at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, I ministered to four rural churches in farming communities. In the spring I blessed the soil and seed from their farms and gardens. Then, I used this blessed soil to grow a patch of raspberries...and they were wonderful raspberries! They really were! And

The most exemplary nature is that of the topsoil. It is very Christ-like in its passivity and beneficence, and in the penetrating energy that issues out of its peaceableness. It increases by experience, by the passage of seasons over it, growth rising out of it and returning to it, not by ambition or aggressiveness. It is enriched by all things that die and enter into it. It keeps the past, not as history or as memory, but as richness, new possibility. Its fertility is always building up out of death into promise. Death is the bridge or the tunnel by which its past enters its future.

WENDELL BERRY

later in time, I made raspberry tarts and shared them at another blessing to celebrate the harvest. These are a kind of ritual that brings each of us to a greater awareness and appreciation of the ways that God is present and active in the very sustenance of our

lives. We need to appreciate that the SOIL grows the food, NOT the farmer. The farmer’s job is to work thoughtfully, with grace and humility to realize God’s great gift to us in the soil. Some have called this “farming in nature’s image,” that is, working cooperatively

with the forces of nature that God places before us, rather than forcing nature into our image. This is what basically guides organic farming.

KD: We are the soil; cultivating that is so important. We need a deeper integration of that. We need to realize how intimately our own health is tied to the soil...and the same thing is true of the spiritual life.

MW: Kathleen is right, and it goes back to Adam and Eve. Adam comes from *adamah*, the soil. The name Eve means *life*! Our beginning is soil and life; our vocation is soil and life.

MW: You know Wendell Berry writes about the absolute connection between how we treat the earth and how we treat each other. He and Pope Francis are two great voices that are making statements about the need for all of us to check our lifestyles and to look at how we have lost our connections to the soil, to the food, to the kitchen, to the community, to the family.

EB: So, what makes you hopeful about the situation? Where are the opportunities?

MW: Grow Ohio Valley is a small but impactful organization. In essence we reclaim abandoned urban parcels, brown lots where homes once existed, and we begin building up soil again – *life* – so as to grow food there. These spaces, once home to people and community, quite simply, have died, save for an abundance of weeds! We resurrect them and make them life producing. This makes the farming we do redemptive, a *paschal practice*,

Eucharistic, even if the organization is not explicitly religious.

Grow Ohio Valley's Farm 18 in Wheeling is a great example. Families lived on this block for almost two centuries. They lived, worked, played, celebrated, grew gardens, grieved, grew old and died there – *life* flourished. In 1970 eminent domain was invoked and families were moved out, relocated, and their homes demolished, making way for a new highway overpass. The area under the highway overpass became a place for all kinds of activity that does not help a community flourish. About six years ago, Grow Ohio Valley began to reclaim it for gardens. You should see this parcel of land now! In its own way, it is an urban Eden. Eden, of course, means *delight*! Why a delight? Because it has once again become a place of the spirit where life-giving soil has been created anew and bodies are nourished with good healthy vegetables that come from it. It is a place of community and beauty in a tough degraded neighborhood. We educate people about food and farming but also health and wellness. "Health" is a word related to salvation. It speaks to "making whole," and is related to heal, hallow, holy, and holistic. It is indeed "holy" work.

It's a little like David and Goliath. For example, Grow Ohio Valley works with hundreds of young people on their farms to shake them up and out of their ways of thinking. We get people thinking about who is making choices for us. What drives us? Beauty? Tragedy? What centers us? Are we driven by convenience? With Grow Ohio Valley and other urban farm efforts, we are trying to get >



Grow Ohio Valley is an urban farm project run by Danny Swan and Ken Perolta situated in Wheeling, W.Va. In three short years, this non-profit organization has changed the local food landscape by turning vacant lots into thriving urban gardens, educating school children to grow and eat healthy food, and running mobile markets that carry locally-produced foods to the senior high rises and low-income neighborhoods. With support from the Congregation of St. Joseph, two large greenhouses like the one above have been installed on an area known as Wheeling Hill overlooking the Ohio River Valley. These greenhouses enable fresh food to be available in areas that are now known as food deserts, predominately low-income areas with no easy access to grocery stores.

To learn more, visit www.growov.org.



▲ Sister Kathleen helps in the chicken coop. These chickens provide necessary fresh eggs to people in the neighborhood.

into people's hearts via food and create a sense of community. We are trying to foster the relationship between soil/health/sacrament and salvation.

KD: With Easter approaching, it seems appropriate to think about the connection of the Triduum and soil and soul. I am asking myself

how I bring the experiences of my life into the liturgies of this season.

MW: As I mentioned above, caring for the soil is a paschal practice. The Triduum is *the* celebration par excellence of the paschal mystery. These rich, powerful liturgies call the Christian community to renew their commitment to God, all of humanity, and all of creation. The Triduum, and the Easter Vigil in particular, allows us ritually to pass through the whole sweep of cosmic history! We are immersed into this saving history. The whole of creation is being renewed. This is not some intellectual notion or mere ritual formalism but a call to action on the part of Christians. Pope Francis has made caring for creation integral to being a Christian. Ritual, and especially the Easter liturgies, can help us make this connection. Even though the Triduum liturgies basically remain the same each year, we come to them differently, changed by events of the past year and being changed in these liturgies. The ritual remains constant but the life we are living changes. Ritual has the purpose of reminding us where we stand with God, all humanity, and all creation. The Easter Vigil ends with Eucharist. "Blessed are you Lord God of creation, for through your goodness we have this bread and wine to offer. They are fruits of the earth and vine, the work of human hands. May they become for us our spiritual food and drink." Right there, at every Eucharist, we find or renew our vocation to till and tend the soil, to serve and preserve it!

Farming is a form of liturgy. There are set rhythms to the seasons and how nature moves and there is a constant

[It] is not to suggest that we can live harmlessly or strictly at our own expense; we depend upon other creatures and survive by their deaths. To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation. The point is, when we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament; when we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.

WENDELL BERRY

set of things required for farming: water, weeding, pruning. But, each growing season is never the same. The rituals and community of worshippers hold us and sustain us and our life just as the day in and day out faithful work of sowing and harvesting sustain us with food. The soil and its magnificence and passivity are a metaphor for the Paschal Mystery. The passion of Christ, passively taking on the pain and suffering of a sinful world and transforming it to new life is reflected in the soil and God's giving us life through it.

So, to get to your question, Kathleen, I would assert that this Easter, we all need to make a sacramental connection between our souls and the soil. Until we make this connection, efforts to cultivate our souls and the soil, movements like Grow Ohio Valley will be piecemeal at best. I feel that we need to help each other and the Catholic faithful see this connection... much as we did 80 years ago, with liturgies and blessings that celebrate the preparation of the soil, the growing seasons, and the harvest with gratitude and respect.

What makes food meaningful is knowing its source just as what makes Eucharist meaningful is knowing its source as the celebration of Christ in us. If I know the story behind how my food comes to me...the soil, the rain, the bees that pollinate...everything, then I can celebrate the sacramental nature of it as another way of God being present to me. ■



Father Michael Woods is a professor at Wheeling Jesuit University, an urban farmer and an organic farming advocate. Although he is a theology professor, he prefers being outside in a farm or garden to the classroom. He is passionate about eliminating food deserts and bringing affordable and fresh food to neighborhoods that lack easy access with his efforts in urban farming. Sister Kathleen Durkin, CSJ, is an Associate Staff Member for St. Joseph Retreat Center in Wheeling. She offers retreats, spiritual direction and facilitation of groups. Her interests include supporting efforts to expand locally grown food and healthy food access, gardening, walking, reading and dream work. Eileen Biehl is the editor of imagineONE and has worked for the congregation for three years. She holds an MA in Ministry. Among many interests, Eileen enjoys cooking for her large family and is passionate about sourcing food that is local and organic.

Greater Cleveland Food Bank





Who Better Than Me?

Hundreds of Volunteers Participate in First Service Day Event

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

The awareness of our many blessings prompted us to plan special service days as one way we hope to share and celebrate this 10th Anniversary year with you. On October 15, 2016, our Founder's Day, we served alongside you – our friends, neighbors, employees, families and supporters, in ministries and other organizations all over the country. Just as our first sisters did in 1650 France, we went wherever the needs were. Our hope is that these events might serve as a public witness and symbol of our love of neighbor and our communities. ■

For more information on how to join us at our next service event on April 29, 2017, see back cover.

GETTING THROUGH THE DARKNESS

A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

BY SISTER PAT HERGENROETHER, CSJ

"I've fallen and I can't get up!"

"I'm in the darkness and I can't get out!"

Our novice director told us about the "Dark Night of the Soul." She said that we could experience this darkness in our ministries, our local communities and in our personal lives. She encouraged us to pray that it would not happen in all three areas at the same time. As a young sister, I was naive enough to think that this darkness would envelop me only once. I would say: "Why me? Why now? Why this?" Now in my wiser years, I know this cycle happens many times; and I believe and trust that I will survive and thrive. Just as daylight emerges from night; a child bursts forth from the darkness of the womb; a caterpillar evolves from the cocoon into a butterfly; a precious seed, nurtured in the darkness of the soil, becomes fruit in the light; and spring follows winter; I can move through the darkness into the light.

Journeying with others has allowed me the privilege of holding in my heart and prayers those who are walking in darkness precipitated by various events and experiences, such as the loss of a loved one, job, or home; stress caused by financial pressures, political outcomes, or natural or human disasters; life changes like retirement and the diminishment of physical and mental health; and the sadness that comes with alienation and lost dreams.

These experiences can leave in their wake physical, emotional, spiritual suffering and darkness. One might feel unsafe, unloved, anxious, depressed, angry, lonely, uncreative, having no passion for life, unable to pray, unable to see colors and beauty, unable to hear the joyous sounds of creation, not tasting scrumptious foods, being numb to life.

When I have been in the darkness well meaning people have said: "I know how you feel. I have experienced that.

You will get through this. You are being tested. God must love you very much for this to happen. It will get better. Do such and such and you will feel better. Just take one day at a time." As a spiritual director, I do not use those statements. Rather I say to people: "I see you. I hear you. I am with you. I love you." Silently in my heart I pray that someday I will be able to say "Wohooooo." I believe that every person has to find his or her own way through to the light. When I am in the dark I wrap myself in the belief and words of the Prayer of Protection by James Freeman (paraphrased): Your light surrounds me; Your love enfolds me; Your power protects me; Your presence watches over me; Wherever I am, You are!

Joseph Campbell said: "The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light." Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars."

What can we do? We can share our stories; enter into rituals and rites of darkness and light; and walk together until we come to the light. In walking together we will find God in our midst. Let's try, as Ellen DeGeneres says at the end of every program, to "Be kind to one another," and as Jesus told us, "Love one another."

I will leave you with one of my favorite stories below about a Cherokee Indian youth's rite of passage. ■

Sister Pat Hergenroether, CSJ, holds a BS degree in Biology and an MA degree in Christian Spirituality with a Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction and Directed Retreats. Although Pat is retired, she continues to volunteer at Angela Hospice in Michigan.



CHEROKEE LEGEND

His father takes him into the forest, blindfolds him and leaves him alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not remove the blindfold until the rays of the morning sun shine through it. He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he is a man. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience, because each lad must come into manhood on his own. The boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kinds of noises. Wild beasts must surely be all around him. Maybe even some human might do him harm. The wind blew the grass and earth, and shook his stump, but he sat stoically, never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could become a man! Finally, after a horrific night the sun appeared and he removed his blindfold. It was then that he discovered his father sitting on the stump next to him. He had been at watch the entire night, protecting his son from harm.

CARRYING FORWARD THE TORCH OF CHRIST'S LIGHT

BY SISTER ERIN MCDONALD, CSJ

Few of us will ever know the horror and heart break of fleeing for our lives; of leaving all that is familiar and all we know as "home"; of rushed and uncertain good-byes to family and friends not knowing if and when there will ever be another "hello"; of literally running away with what we can carry on our back, often a precious child, and heading with desperate hope into an unknown future where we can find shelter and safety and someone who will offer us welcome.

An estimated 51 million people in our world do know what this experience is like and about 80 percent of those people are women and children. We call them refugees, individuals and families forced to leave their home to escape the ravages of war, terror or persecution, or devastation of natural disasters. We call them asylum seekers, individuals and families who have endured unspeakable

torture and live in constant fear of a cruel and unimaginable death. In all of them, we are called to see Christ. "I am Jesus, who you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). All of them carry the image of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, looking for somewhere safe to rest their weary heads, displaced and wandering, seeking shelter, and experiencing rejection and refusal because they are aliens, foreigners, and unknown and thus feared. Never before has our world experienced the migration of so many millions of desperate families on the move. In the face of such human tragedy we hear the challenge of the Word of God:

"You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you, too, were once aliens" (Leviticus 19:34). Pope Francis reminds us of our obligations in this crisis: "Jesus Christ is always waiting to be recognized in migrants and refugees; in displaced persons and in exiles."



In 2010, I began working as a humanitarian aid worker in the refugee camps of Rwanda accompanying Congolese refugees through their experiences of being violently displaced and then forced into camps. My time there was a hugely transformative experience. In the lush and broken heart of Africa, I found both great consolation and great desolation. In my work, I ran my fingers through some of the most horrific wounds of humanity and in the darkness of it all, I found God. It was here, in the midst of profound suffering, where paradoxically, I had a personal and mystical experience of God. I found the courage to move beyond my personal fears and apprehensions to truly open my heart to loving God and neighbor without distinction.

Pope Francis calls us to be light for the world and to be like a lamp guiding the persecuted and displaced. He says, “Remember that authentic hospitality is a profound gospel value that nurtures love and is our greatest security against hateful acts of terrorism.” Despite my personal urge to walk away from the suffering and brokenness of the masses who lived in central African refugee camps, I leaned into the hands of God’s great love and stood in solidarity with my brothers and sisters. It was then that I profoundly understood that as a follower of Christ, I am called to radical love and inclusivity of all, especially the most vulnerable among us.

From Rwanda, I began working with refugees who had been resettled in Cleveland, Oh. It was a powerful experience to have been in Africa and then to be receiving newly resettled refugees as they arrived in Cleveland. What I discovered was that the trauma



▲ Sister Erin McDonald, CSJ, with refugee children in Rwanda in 2010.

the refugees experienced was not easily shed. The violence of war and persecution is not only a physical experience but enters deeply into one’s mental and psychological being as well. Removal of fear and terror from the psyche is a long, slow process. Finding one’s way in an unfamiliar culture, with an unknown language and seemingly strange customs, is a daunting task. Depending on others for assistance both personally and for your children at almost every level of daily existence can be humbling, humiliating, and often very painful. For example, our Motherhouse in Cleveland was able to offer short-term shelter to one Iraqi family. The father, speaking a little English, had worked with our military stationed in Iraq and had deep facial scars from an IED that exploded while he was on duty. At first, the family was placed in a very old

home where their smallest daughter developed lead poisoning and had to be hospitalized. Catholic Charities had no alternative housing for them; they called us. Fear on the father’s face was palpable when they came to us. How would Catholic women welcome a Muslim family? How safe were they among us? Witnessing this confirmed for me that when refugees and asylum seekers reach our shores, their journey is not over but only just begun.

My desire to live out our charism continues with my current work at Freedom House, located in Detroit, which is a shelter for survivors of torture and persecution who are seeking asylum. Asylum seekers can come from any country in the world. Many of the people who come to us at Freedom House are educated professionals who were working



▲ *Sister Erin is currently a case manager at Freedom House in Detroit. She works with asylum seekers from all over the world, helping them to settle and assimilate in the U.S.*

with integrity and were faced with the certainty that remaining in their homeland would mean unjust imprisonment, torture, and quite possibly, death. Freedom House is a place where all are welcome and where our CSJ charism for unifying love and reconciliation flourishes. As a social worker on staff, I help residents navigate the process of becoming self-sufficient to start new lives in the United States. There are enormous challenges politically and financially in assisting asylum seekers with the legal process and the process of healing and recovery. Also, there is about a three-year waiting period for a petition for asylum to be processed. Those seeking asylum live in the uncertainty of not

knowing the outcome. The psychological wounds they carry are profound. Many suffer survivor's guilt, knowing because they have escaped, other family members suffer persecution and torture. Some left behind family members because they had insufficient funds and now have no idea if these family members are alive. Children draw pictures of ghastly sights they have witnessed. Mothers arriving at the door of Freedom House burst forth with tears, begging social workers for help while their children shiver nearby. Freedom House is that Light of Christ, the lamp at the golden door for all those who have, like our Holy Family, been persecuted in their home country. Freedom House is full. There is no other shelter that has room or adequate resources to assist. Yet, despite its challenges, Freedom House continues to carry the torch of hope for exiles in search of shelter.

We are all made in the image and likeness of God and as such, we are called to unifying and inclusive love for all. As Christians we are commanded to be the light of Christ and the face of God's Love. As Americans, our liberty is intertwined and embedded with providing care for those who are exiled and persecuted. As a sister of St. Joseph, I am called to be a catalyst for reconciliation and unity and to continue to accompany the refugees as they create new lives for themselves. Our response as human beings, as Christians, as Americans... my response as a sister of St. Joseph... is not comfortable or easy. But, my experience has led me to believe this work is truly life-giving and is a way to deeply encounter God who abides in each person seeking refuge. "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me" (Matthew 25:40).

We are called to be light for refugees, but we are also called to receive the light with which they bless us. In my ministry, I have been blessed in ways too numerous to count. The many gifts and talents of those I touch, their undaunted courage, inextinguishable hope, and the gentle graciousness have lit up my heart many days. We need their light as much as they need ours. ■



Freedom House Detroit is a transitional home for indigent survivors of torture and persecution from around the world who are seeking asylum in the United States or Canada. The mission of Freedom House is to uphold a fundamental American principle, one inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty, providing safety for those "yearning to breathe free." Guided by the belief that all persons deserve to live free from oppression and to be treated with justice, compassion, and dignity, Freedom House offers a continuum of care and services to their residents as well as to other refugees in need. They also advocate for systemic change that more fully recognizes the rights of asylum seekers.

To learn more about Freedom House Detroit or to donate, please visit freedomhousedetroit.org

Socially Responsible INVESTING

BY SISTER MARY ELLEN GONDECK, CSJ

It may seem strange to couple investing with this issue’s theme of soil and soul. Yet, corporations are often more involved with the soil and our souls than we would imagine. As stewards of the soil, our souls, and other resources, as a congregation, we need to look at how we participate in the way business is conducted in today’s world.

Socially responsible investing (SRI), or Social Investment, also known as sustainable, socially conscious, “green” or ethical investing, is any investment strategy which seeks to consider both financial return and social good to bring about a social change.

THE CONGREGATION CARRIES OUT THIS RESPONSIBILITY BY:



Putting screens in place that tell our investment managers to avoid or to be more aware of certain categories of stock. These screens include: the product itself and/or policies of the company. For us some of these filters include: weapons companies, companies dealing in pornography, gambling, and companies whose practices are detrimental to the environment or human rights.



Engaging in shareholder activity in collaboration with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR).



Investing in community development to meet human needs such as Mercy Housing, the Opportunity Resource Fund.



Investing in start-up companies who share our values.



Our shareholder activity provides us with a way to make our voices heard in corporate America. As shareholders we are part owner in many corporations. We are very small owners. We work with other small owners to advocate for changes in policies or advocate for new evolving policies that make these values part of the company culture and operation.

In this role, we write letters to management, file shareholder resolutions, dialogue with company management, and attend shareholder meetings. This is our way of dealing directly with companies and their decision makers. We do this jointly with other shareholders in order to make our companies more attentive to their impact on people – and all of creation – and to hold them to fulfilling the responsibilities of their corporate or business charter.

The charter details core values, goals and specifics about the company's operations. It often serves as a guide or mission statement for company executives to conduct strategic planning and assessments. For example, if the company's goals surround putting health and safety first by committing to being environmentally responsible, executives typically refer to this goal when detailing safety policies within the workplace and mandatory recycling and water preservation strategies.

An example is the mission statement of Starbucks which is literally "to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time." The company hinges its mission on a number of principles,



▲ *The Fair Food Act, initiated by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, advocates for just wages and the fair treatment of all farm workers.*

Despite admirable mission statements, there are times when economic pressures and circumstances direct management more to the bottom line than to the values stated in the business charter.

including offering high-quality, ethically produced coffee, treating employees and customers with respect, offering stores that foster human connection and becoming part of each community in which it is present. But despite admirable mission statements, there are times when a lot of pressures and circumstances direct management more to the bottom line than to the values stated in the business charter.

It is here that shareholder activity becomes important. As a congregation we depend on dividends from our limited investments for our ministries and our retirement needs. Yet we know that we have a responsibility to see that our values are represented in

the policies and the actions of those companies.

A company with whom we are currently engaged is Wendy's. On the website, the company says: "Wendy's is a leader in the development and execution of quality processes and initiatives that are focused intensely on a safe and wholesome food supply – from our suppliers' farms to the customer's table. Since we opened the first Wendy's in 1969, we have been proud to source most of our food from American farmers and ranchers. It's a partnership built on mutual respect with an unwavering commitment to quality." Yet, we believe the reality of how Wendy's does business today does not reflect its

stated mission. Wendy's workers in Immokalee, Florida, who had harvested tomatoes and other produce for the company, were not earning a just wage and were not working in safe conditions. When the workers asked for better conditions, the company switched its source of produce to growers in Mexico with a reputation for "slave labor." As shareholders we are asking the company to adopt the Fair Food Program initiated by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and to again source their produce from them. The company certainly lives up to much of its vision, but it seems it is not treating these workers fairly.

This is one example of how we are bringing our investments to the soil of our earth and to our responsibility as owners in the company to treat the workers in the supply chain with respect and dignity.

Some of the companies we own shares in directly impact the soil. Mining companies are one example. Mountain top removal to mine coal not only destroys part of the landscape (the mountain), but the process puts a lot of coal particles, chemicals, and waste into bodies of water sharing the same landscape. The end result impacts plant, animal, and human life both near and far depending on where the waterways lead. Our response as owners has been to engage in dialogue with these companies. Some of these companies are located in West Virginia. The dilemma is that if the companies do not change their policies and practices and are forced into bankruptcy and closure, it has a direct impact on the workers and their families in the area. How do we

protect both the soil and the livelihoods of families as well as challenge the integrity of the company?

The extractive industry focusing on oil and gas also produces some of the same results. The process of fracking makes an impact in people's homes. Water contaminated with chemicals and gas is the same water being used for cooking, cleaning and bathing. Again, our response as owners has been to file shareholder resolutions, dialogue, and advocate for laws to enforce compliance with regulations designed for the safety of the water and the people.

The dilemmas continue. Some of the seed and chemical industry directly impacts the soil with herbicides and pesticides that are harmful both to the soil and humans. Soil is organic, living. Its life is severely damaged, just as human life is severely damaged, when foreign substances are introduced into its life cycle. When organisms in the soil that support the growth of food are contaminated with poisonous substances, they transmit those substances to those who eat the food. The weapons industry makes and sells products that destroy and contaminate soil making it unusable, either because of contamination or by leaving

unexploded ordnance on land where farmers can no longer grow food for fear of detonating the shells. Many companies overuse and contaminate water. Some are removing water from our Great Lakes and aquifers and selling it as bottled water. These bodies of water are being consumed in greater and greater amounts. To these and other issues that arise, our response as owners will continue to be to file shareholder resolutions, to remain in conversation and to advocate for regulations that uphold what is safe for our Earth.

Most of the people with whom we engage as socially responsible investors profess the same values that we support. They love their families; want to be good citizens, work to support their neighbors, their schools, their religious families. And for the most part they struggle with the larger picture of "the system" just as we do.

Much of what we have reflected on here deals with the soil on which we walk and in which our food is grown, the air we breathe and the water we drink. But we are also called by God and the gospels to act as responsible and thoughtful investors and work to be part of unifying the world to be and act as one. ■



Sister Mary Ellen Gondeck, CSJ, is a member of the Peace and Justice Team of the Congregation of St. Joseph and has served as a representative of the congregation at the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility and the Conference for Social Responsibility Indiana Michigan doing shareholder ministry.



Putting the “SOCIAL” back in Social Media

Social media offers wonderful opportunities for individuals to connect with and learn from one another. As a congregation, it presents a unique forum for us to extend our mission of unity to people far and wide. The global scope of social media platforms swells our capacity to reach the *dear neighbor* all over the world! Our Facebook page includes followers from 45 countries, and allows long-term relationships to stretch and grow. Used well, social media can be a meaningful way to connect with others who share our commitment to social justice and who want to join us in bringing God’s inclusive love to all corners of the planet.

However, social media is not without its shortfalls. When used haphazardly, thoughtless, rash, or impulsive comments or posts can have serious negative consequences. They can create anger, insult, tension, and disharmony in those who read them and can recklessly undermine our desire to create unity. This election season, it was difficult to avoid being exposed to bitter and resentful conflict that was sometimes frightening to encounter. The anonymity that the internet provides and the sometimes inflammatory

nature of social media posts can create a slippery slope for each of us and put our individual integrity in danger. In these situations, it can be easy to let emotions win out over thoughtful, civil discourse grounded in values.

So, how can we each do our part to encourage civil discourse and help put the “social” back in social media? We’ve created a thoughtful guide of things to consider as you navigate your own social world.



BE DILIGENT

Did you know that according to Pew Research, 62% of U.S. adults say they get their news from social media? While the internet is a great way to stay informed, we also must be diligent and aware of the sources that we are trusting with our information.

WATCH OUT FOR FAKE NEWS

A lot of “news” being put out on the internet does not come from a reliable source. In fact, it’s sometimes completely made up! Investigate news stories before you share them or take them as fact. Sights like Snopes, PolitiFact.com, and HoaxSlayer.com can all help you figure out if the news you’re reading is real.

REPORT FAKE STORIES

Facebook and other social networks are stepping up to help stop the spread of fake news, but they need your help! Facebook now lets you report news stories that are fake so they can best determine how content should be distributed.



KEEP SCROLLING

See negative, fake, or explosive content being posted? Rather than engage in pointless and negative debate, keep scrolling! These stories gain traction when individuals engage with them. By scrolling past, you’re also helping end the cycle!

SHARE THE LOVE

Rather than engage in negative and fake spaces online, focus on the positive, informative things you care about. There are many great ways to use social media to get involved with causes that are important to you.



FOCUS ON WHAT YOU LOVE AND SUPPORT

Follow individuals and groups that offer diverse ways of sharing values that have meaning for you.

GET INVOLVED

Online communities are a great way to organize with others around issues you care about, from nationwide social justice initiatives to local neighborhood groups.

SPREAD POSITIVITY

Be conscious of the messages that you are putting out on social media. Are they positive? Are they civil? Change starts with each of us being aware of our own ability to bring positive energy into the world.

BE PRESENT

The web may be worldwide, but don’t forget to interact with people in person!



MAKE PLANS WITH FRIENDS

Be sure you’re checking in with friends off-line as well as on. Make time to have coffee or dinner, catch up, and talk one-on-one.

TAKE ACTION BY HELPING PEOPLE IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Find local ways that you can volunteer your time and spread positivity in person.

TAKE A BREAK

We all need the opportunity to recharge and reflect on what matters in our lives. Take mindful time away from social media and give yourself space with your own thoughts and feelings.

Looking for a positive space in your own social media world? Follow the Congregation of St. Joseph on Facebook and @congofstjoseph on Twitter for information on social justice initiatives, positive posts and pictures, and more tips on social media and civil discourse.

Special Angel Finds Unique Way to Support Vocations

Our sisters often hear from benefactors and friends who want to encourage vocations to religious life, especially to the Congregation of St. Joseph, but they are unsure of how to do so. One such friend, we'll call her Angel, decided to address the challenge in a special way.

Student loan debt is sometimes cited by women considering religious life as a road block. Most religious congregations are not financially able to absorb the staggering costs of student debt for an incoming sister. Women who are interested in joining a congregation have been forced to delay their plans until their student loans are paid. Angel recalls first thinking of assisting the congregation in this way a few years ago when she read about how the burden of financial debt from student loans was limiting women from vocations. "When I had the chance to share from the abundance I have received, I really wanted to help younger women who desire religious life but couldn't afford to because of their financial obligations," she said.

While Angel had already made a long-term commitment to the sisters by naming the congregation in her estate plans, she recognized that the sisters have more immediate needs.

Angel shared her feelings, "I felt the call that we as Catholics often hear – the call to share our time, talent and treasure and to be good stewards of our resources and gifts. For some of us, this resonates through acts of service and for others of us through financial contributions." As Angel looked at how she might use her financial resources to help others, she immediately thought of the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph – to love and serve the *dear neighbor*. "I know it sounds pretty basic but I knew theirs was a mission



I could get behind and believe in," she said. "It's a purpose that has withstood the test of time and been a part of their work as Sisters of St. Joseph for more than 360 years. More than that, it really resonated with me because I believe the *dear neighbor* is really all of us. My gift, combined with those of others, and the service and prayers of others – all the *dear neighbors* – allows us to do more than any of us could do alone."

Although there are many ways to give, including through direct donations and planned gifts, Angel chose to make her gift through appreciated securities.

"Somehow it seemed different to me than writing a check," she said. "Donating shares of stock enabled me to give more than I would have felt comfortable doing another way. It really is a win-win for me and the congregation because it is fully tax-deductible and helps me avoid capital gains taxes, while allowing the congregation to benefit from the full-market value of the gift."

Angel said making this kind of gift was so easy to do. "One call to the Development Director at the congregation to get the transfer information and a quick letter to my broker was all it took," she said. "The more time I spend with sisters and get to know them, the more respect I have for them," said Angel. "I find their value of inclusion, dedication and respect for others refreshing. It's easy to love them. I'm grateful to be a part of supporting them and future women religious." ■



Cultivating Kindness:

Ways to Bring Light into Your Everyday Life

We are all called to live our lives in kindness and to bring kindness to the *dear neighbor*. But how do we cultivate kindness in a world that can often seem dark? How can we bring light out of the hate and ugliness that threatens our world? In John 1:4-5, we are told: “What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The smallest action can create a space for light and hope to emerge. Now, more than ever, we are all called to let light shine. Here are some suggestions to create kindness in your everyday life!

- Give someone a compliment
- Check in with friends who have lost a loved one
- Each time you go to the store, buy one additional canned good to donate to a local food pantry
- Put a surprise note in with your child’s lunch
- Visit with an elderly neighbor
- Help others find the positive in themselves and their lives
- Listen to others without interrupting
- When you see something good happening, share it with others
- When you get great service, tell the manager
- Encourage someone to pursue their dream
- Give someone the benefit of the doubt
- Learn the names of the people you see every day
- Check in with a friend you haven’t spoken to for a while
- Buy a stranger’s coffee for them
- Call your parents or grandparents
- Make someone laugh
- Volunteer at a local nonprofit
- Share a great book you’ve read
- Let a car merge in front of you
- Leave a big tip
- Tell someone you love them
- Allow someone to help you
- Talk to a homeless person
- Let someone cut in front of you in line
- Make an effort to not complain for a day
- Surprise a friend with flowers
- Stand up for others in need
- Help a coworker when they are stressed
- Ask someone how their day is
- Post affirmations on your social media
- Share pictures to brighten someone’s day
- Take part in a service day!

Learn how you can join the Congregation of St. Joseph in service at www.csjoseph.org



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Join Us For Service Day

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

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

If you are interested in joining us in service or would like to learn more about service opportunities near you, email us at celebrating10@csjoseph.org

