



imagine
ONE

CONGREGATION OF THE
SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

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**If light is in
your heart,**
you will find your way home.

– Rumi

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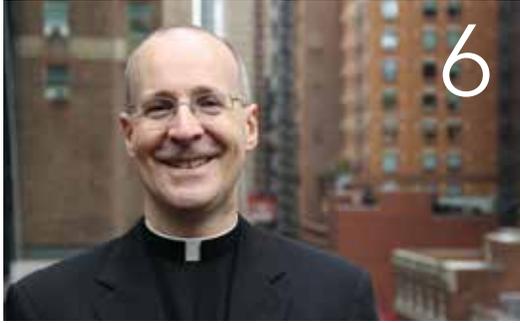
Our mission as Sisters of St. Joseph flows from the purpose for which the congregation exists: We live and work that all people may be united with God, with one another, and with all creation.

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

Rumi was a 13th century poet, scholar, and Sufi mystic whose work is hugely popular around the world. His poems transcend race, gender and creed; ideas explored in this issue.

"Our Lady of the Broken Heart."
Acrylic by Sophia Rosenberg. Prints available at www.etsy.com.



▲ Sister Nancy Conway, CSJ

When I read the articles in this issue of *ImagineONE*, I think about the challenges of Lent and the great joy of Easter. I think about how these articles on civil discourse, racism, Catholic Social Teaching and prayer can be tools for me to approach Easter with a thoughtful and open heart, ready for the joy of conversion that Easter brings.

I'm grateful to have the insights and example of Fr. James Martin offered to you in this issue. He has long been an advocate for religious women – among many groups that he advocates for, and we were thrilled that he took time to speak with our editors. Sister Pat Bergen offers her personal history relative to racism and Sister Jeannie Masterson explains some of the efforts that we as a congregation – sisters, associates and employees – are doing to address the challenges of racism around us and in us. We have two really excellent articles on prayer in this issue. One is a reflection on prayer as a relationship with a loving God which Sister Christine Schenk wrote for us. It reminded me of some of my own spiritual mentors and the great grace of prayer. Sister Pat Kozak and Cathy Lanning Knittel continue to pull us all deeper into the challenges of honoring Catholic Social Teaching and integrating those challenges into our lives with prayer and action. I also appreciate the fact that I can tear out the 7-week prayer and study guide and carry it with me through Lent and Easter, into the summer, and maybe even beyond!

...these articles on civil discourse, Catholic Social Teaching and prayer can be tools for me to approach Easter with a thoughtful and open heart, ready for the joy of conversion that Easter brings.

Finally, this issue is about positive conversation with God and with each other. We hope *ImagineONE* is a conversation starter for you. One of the goals of the magazine is to encourage creative thinking on important issues and offer them to you with the lens of our charism of unifying love. The best way to get to know someone is to both talk and listen and we try to offer articles and insights that will do both. We encourage you to join us as we seek to talk to each other with dignity and respect, work to heal the broken hearted, take action for those who cannot act and always treat everyone with great love.

Sr. Nancy
Sister Nancy Conway, CSJ
Congregational Leadership Team

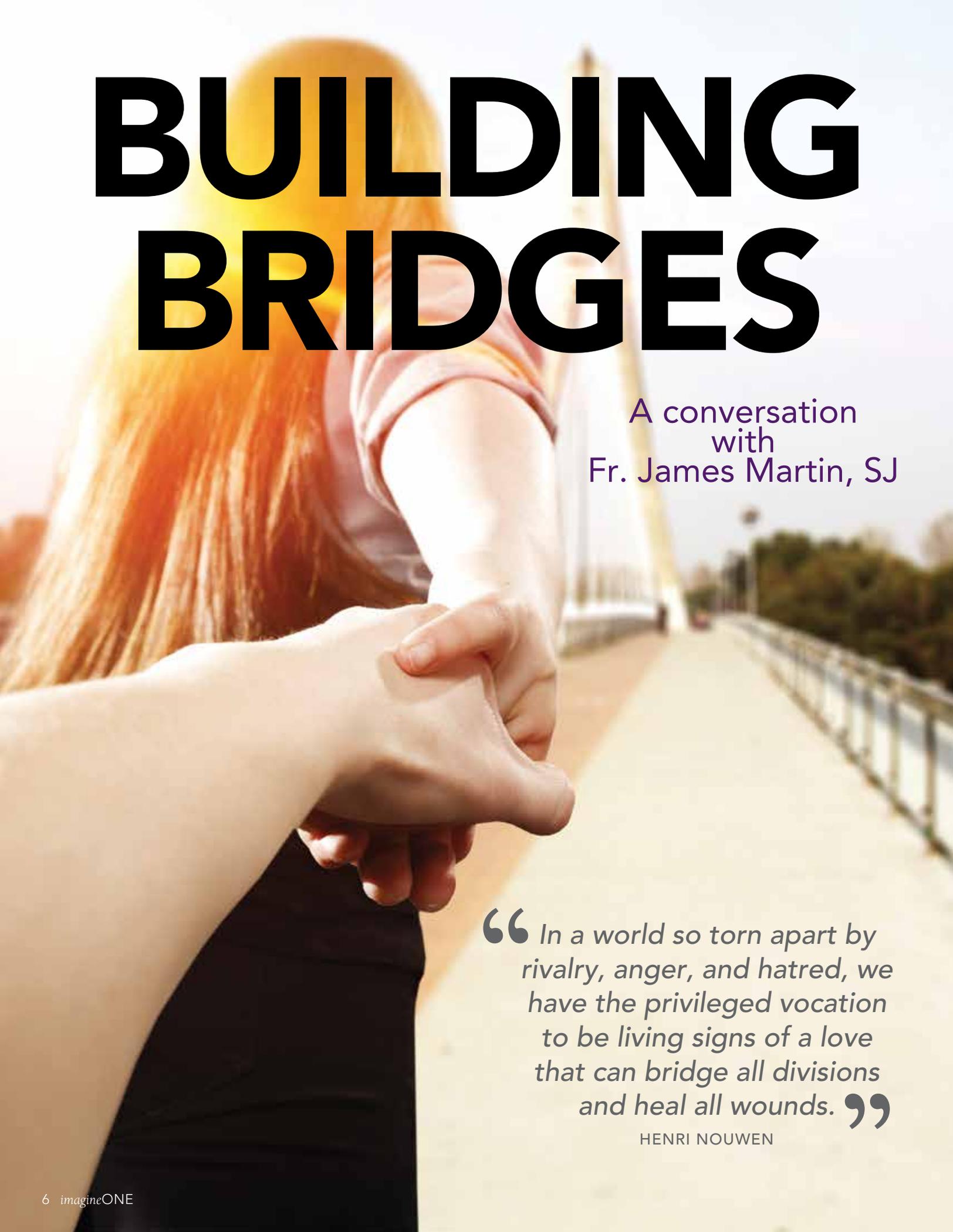


Sister Juanita Meets Cleveland's New Bishop

Recently, Sister Juanita Shealey, CSJ, attended the First Friday Club of Cleveland, a forum for Catholic thought leaders. While at the event she was seated next to Bishop Nelson Perez, the new Bishop for the Diocese of Cleveland. Sister Juanita was thrilled and honored to meet Bishop Perez who was the guest speaker, and to hear his inspiring and thought provoking words. "I was thrilled to be invited and have the opportunity to welcome Bishop Perez to Cleveland," said Sister Juanita. "As Sisters of St. Joseph, we believe in inclusive love, and therefore celebrate diversity as a gift from God. As St. Paul reminds us in Corinthians, 'Christ is like a single body made up of many parts; it is still one body...baptized in one body by the same spirit.'" Bishop Perez summarized his pastoral vision as, "Church on Mission: Proactive, Involved, Supportive, Fruitful, and Joyful." Welcome, Bishop Perez! ■

As Sisters of St. Joseph, we believe in inclusive love, and therefore celebrate diversity as a gift from God. As St. Paul reminds us in Corinthians, "Christ is like a single body made up of many parts; it is still one body...baptized in one body by the same spirit."

BUILDING BRIDGES

A woman with long blonde hair is seen from behind, holding hands with another person on a bridge. The bridge has a metal railing and a paved walkway. The background is bright and slightly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees and a clear sky.

A conversation
with
Fr. James Martin, SJ

“*In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred, we have the privileged vocation to be living signs of a love that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.*”

HENRI NOUWEN

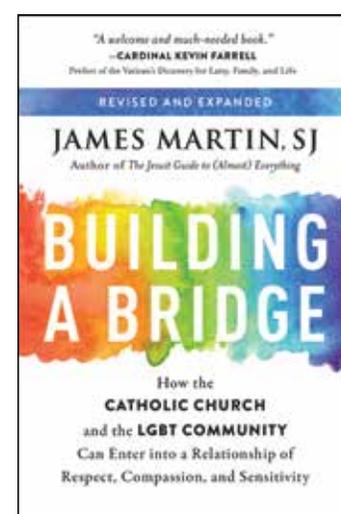
Some of us might remember the Coca Cola commercial from the 1970s that featured people of various shapes, sizes, ages and races singing about teaching the world to sing in 'perfect harmony'. It was incredibly popular and the actual song hit the top of the charts. That desire for unity and harmony seems especially acute today. Yet we see so much obvious divisiveness in the world today. Perhaps we contribute to this disharmony when we stand up for or defend something that is important to us. It is easy in today's rapid response society, where the digital culture dominates, to respond without listening, often without really thinking deeply about what we say or how we react.

As humans, we like to compartmentalize things. It helps us organize our lives and confine things that challenge what we believe. We may even separate our religious values from our day-to-day life – to proclaim one thing on Sunday in church, but then live and act differently in the workplace or on social media the rest of the week. It's natural to think about ourselves and those we care about, but not so easy to consider decisions that affect a broader group of people. How often do we think about those who are strangers or different from us – those in this country who are living in fear of being deported, the thousands of migrants and refugees in the world who are seeking a better life, or those of both genders who are excluded from the church for their sexual identity?

Issues of importance often raise significant debate. It's good that people care so deeply. But we need to challenge ourselves to debate not for the sake of winning an argument, but in order to discern the best course of action for the common good. Perhaps a worthy place for all debate to start is with our core belief in the Gospel message that all people are created in the image of God. We all share

the same human nature and we are all called to values and practices that honor the dignity and rights of all people, especially those who are often the least able to honor themselves. Jesus went as far as challenging us to "love our enemies". Admittedly this is easier said than done, especially on social media where comments have little consequence and attacks on the person, not the opinion, is the norm. But there are people who are doing it right.

One such person is **Father James Martin, SJ**, who routinely demonstrates how to have civil discourse and positive communication on social media. We interviewed him to get his take on the polarization that is so rampant in our country today, and get his tips for engaging in more civil dialogue. Fr. Martin is committed to sharing and communicating Jesus' message of inclusivity and love; to speaking the truth, confronting social injustice, and initiating conversations in the church and public arena via his writing and posts on social media. He invites readers and followers to engage in civil discourse. These conversations are not always easy, but neither are the issues of our times. When asked



his mission, Fr. Martin answered with one word: "Jesus". What, in these times, would Jesus stand for? "If his life is any indication it would be the poor and the marginalized," Fr. Martin said. "More importantly, how would Jesus engage with others? Perhaps by listening, responding with compassion and strength, and speaking the truth." As a follower of Jesus and a modern day prophet, Fr. Martin tries to do both. And, like Jesus, he faces criticism, doubt, and challenges for speaking up and inviting conversation on difficult issues of our day. After his recent book, *Building a Bridge*, was published, he was uninvited





▲ Fr. Martin with the LGBT group at the University of Scranton.

from a speaking engagement at a prominent Catholic university. Throughout the Gospels we can find many instances where Jesus' prophetic words were not welcomed because they threatened the status quo.

Listening, asking people their desires, and responding without judgment are core to Fr. Martin's ministry success. Recognizing we live in a world that is very polarized, we asked how he sees his ministry of communications in helping to bring people together. "The more you listen and learn, the more you come to understand the spiritual lives of people that you might have thought of as 'other,'" he said. Listening with an open mind and heart is an idea reinforced by Pope Francis in his 2014 World Communications Day message: "To dialogue means to believe the 'other' has something worthwhile to say, and to entertain his or her point of view and perspective."

Because we often see vicious attacks on people and their views on social

media, Fr. Martin says he works to create an environment on Facebook and Twitter where people feel comfortable engaging and are not defensive. While some allow any comment to be posted, Fr. Martin says he limits people's ability to ruin it for others and tries to create a space for civil discourse. "I recognize not everyone is going to like me, love me, agree with me," he said, "but I try to treat everybody who has a thoughtful critique or question with respect, never engage in vilification, ignore trolls, and ban or delete the haters."

Fr. Martin recognizes social media contributes to both division and unity in the world today. "Just like social media brings us together, it can divide us," he said. "We only look at the things we are most comfortable looking at. In the past, with three news channels and one newspaper (in most towns), people saw or read the same things, were more informed in a general way and had the same basic knowledge. Now, we can decide what we want to see or not see, and go to

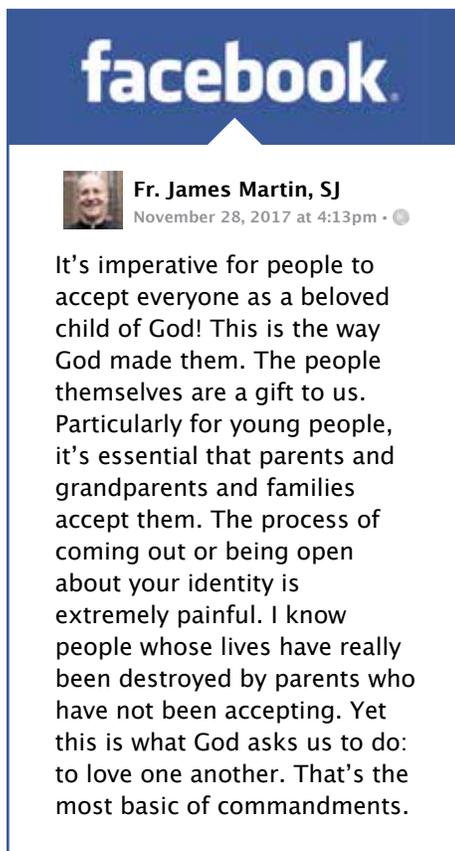
websites that only reinforce what we already believe. This can divide us rather than unite us. Also, with so much anonymity, people can feel free to attack people, and this pushes us back into our corners."

At the same time, Fr. Martin shows us that digital media can help spread messages of love and hold up authentic conversations. The more opportunities we have to initiate relationships around shared ideas and beliefs and invite people to deeper conversation and relationship, the better chance we might have of deepening communion everywhere. Fr. Martin notes that it is important to not be partisan, which can be highly polarizing, and that his primary goal is putting the Gospel out there. Like Jesus, he says he tries not to preach about politics itself, but he recognizes that social justice concerns are often intertwined and related to policies. "It's the intersection of religion and politics that really seems to draw engagement," he said. Of course, his posts draw attention and comments that he sometimes responds to in order to deepen the conversation and hopefully to broaden understanding and compassion. The point isn't to avoid discourse but to find ways to speak the truth and invite dialogue without bitterness, hatred and vilification of individuals.

Fr. Martin's posts, speeches and writing also frequently address issues the Church, or people in the Church, have found to be difficult, have ignored, or have been challenged by, but are affecting marginalized people. One current example is the status of LGBTQ people in the Church.

Fr. Martin's book, *Building a Bridge*, and subsequent social media posts address the Church's attitude and treatment of LGBTQ people. When asked why he thinks this issue is an important one in today's church and why he is addressing it knowing he won't be popular with some people, he simply replied, "They are the most marginalized people in our church – ignored, excluded and in many cases, mistreated."

"Jesus asks us to go out to people on the margins and Pope Francis has asked the Jesuits to go out to people on the margins and peripheries," he continued. "There is an urgent need for us to reach out to these people who are excluded from their own church." In a Facebook post related to the topic of his newest book, Fr. Martin responded:



facebook

Fr. James Martin, SJ
November 28, 2017 at 4:13pm • ●

It's imperative for people to accept everyone as a beloved child of God! This is the way God made them. The people themselves are a gift to us. Particularly for young people, it's essential that parents and grandparents and families accept them. The process of coming out or being open about your identity is extremely painful. I know people whose lives have really been destroyed by parents who have not been accepting. Yet this is what God asks us to do: to love one another. That's the most basic of commandments.

Just like social media brings us together, it can divide us. We only look at the things we are most comfortable looking at.

FR. JAMES MARTIN, SJ

Although the book has generated controversy, support for Fr. Martin has come from inside and outside the Church, with many priests and bishops publicly offering statements that indicate their own openness to discourse and action on the matter.

We asked Fr. Martin if he considers himself a prophet, especially about building bridges of compassion, sensitivity and respect among diverse and divisive groups. "Well, we're all prophets, right? We're all baptized 'priest, prophet and ruler.' So, yes, I hope I'm a prophet, as I hope every Christian is a prophet," he said. Being prophetic in today's world seems to call for loving people who feel like your enemies and praying for people who feel like your persecutors. In Fr. Martin's case, it's not about picking sides. It's about listening and trying to help people find where Jesus and the Holy Spirit are present and leading us. It encourages us to practice treating each other with respect that allows for dialogue that leads to somewhere productive. Fitting of the title of his book, communication as ministry calls us to be bridge builders, to engage in meaningful discussion and discourse, and to encourage dialogue that might strengthen our faith and awaken us to new or renewed ways of acting on behalf of people in need.

So how do we help to support those on the margins, ensure

Fr. Martin offers these key elements for civil discourse:

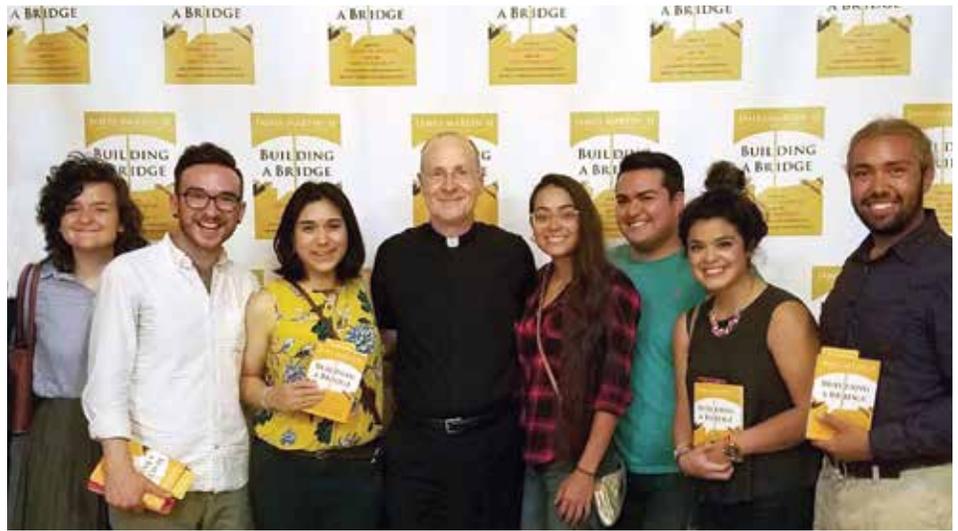
- 1 Be willing to give people the benefit of the doubt, from the beginning
- 2 Be willing to listen, to learn, and be open to finding out something different
- 3 Be willing to be charitable
- 4 Be willing to be corrected
- 5 Be willing to be surprised or confused (Often our first reaction is to attack it or say it can't be true)



their voices are heard and engage in civil discourse? Fr. Martin says the most important things are to listen to them, befriend them, allow them to tell us what they need, advocate for them and be willing to suffer for them. Specifically related to the LGBTQ community, he offers the examples of Cardinal Joseph Tobin who sponsored a welcoming Mass for LGBTQ people in the Archdiocese of Newark, and Cardinal Blasé Cupich who has planned listening sessions in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

“It starts with listening to the people on the margins,” he said. “Just like in the Gospels when Jesus meets Bartimaeus, the blind beggar of Jericho and says, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus didn’t just heal him. He listened to him and asked about his desires.”

Fr. Martin says he’s learned a lot from just listening. He encourages us to see people as individuals with different hopes and struggles, and not clump people into groups with attached stereotypes. Perhaps this is one of our challenges – to risk asking someone what they need and



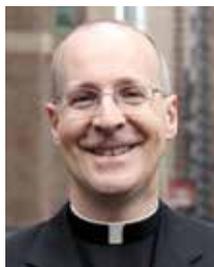
▲ Fr. Martin at the “Building A Bridge” book launch in Hoboken, NJ.

Jesus asks us to go out to people on the margins and Pope Francis has asked the Jesuits to go out to people on the margins and peripheries. There is an urgent need for us to reach out to these people who are excluded from their own church.

FR. JAMES MARTIN, SJ

responding without judgment. What if we start by listening to and coming in contact with someone different than us? What if we search together for truth and insights from different vantage points? What might we gain in greater understanding by engaging with people who are not like us or who think differently than us?

We might ask ourselves the following: In my conversations and interactions with others, have I listened without pre-judging? Have I responded with truth in a compassionate way? Have I found a way to build a bridge for someone on the margins? ■



Fr. James Martin, SJ, is a Jesuit priest, editor at large of America Magazine, author of several books and consultor to the Vatican’s Secretariat of Communications. He has written for many publications and is a regular guest speaker and commentator in the media on Twitter and Facebook. Before entering the Jesuits in 1988, he graduated from Wharton School of Business and worked for General Electric. After publishing his book, My Life with the Saints, in 2006, Martin was encouraged by his publisher at Loyola Press to begin a public Facebook page. While Martin sees Facebook as a natural outgrowth of his ministry, in a recent interview, he said he resisted it at first, afraid that it would take up too much of his time. He soon learned that was not the case. It became an outlet for him to share information and to engage with people. For some, Facebook is a hobby, for Martin it is a tool and one of the main media of his ministry today. He also continues to write books, and use Twitter and Instagram to share information and engage with people.

Neighboring a New

HONORING THE SACRED LEGACY OF OUR LAND

Honoring Earth and taking care of creation are vitally important priorities for our congregation. We know that all are connected and that God is present in everyone and everything. As stewards of God's creation, we accept responsibility for repairing damage done to our Earth and honoring all the resources we have been given now and for future generations. Recent disturbing actions by the federal government regarding limits on preserving and maintaining access to our national parks and protection of national resources bring to mind our commitment as a congregation to the sacredness of our land. Specifically, we reflect on recent decisions we have made about our motherhouses and the land we own. >



▲ This piece of concrete bearing the St. Joseph crest is all that remains of our original motherhouse on Mirabeau Avenue in New Orleans, which was destroyed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Today, plans are underway to convert this vacant 25-acre property into the Mirabeau Water Garden, a water management system that will allow this sacred land to help hold flooding naturally, while also providing green space to residents.



As Sisters of St. Joseph, we are always seeking the best ways to answer the hungers of the world with our resources and efforts. As part of this constant reconsideration and discernment, we look especially at a few things: reducing our carbon footprint and honoring Earth, taking care of our aging sisters, and continuing the work of our ministries. Some of these efforts, particularly those related to care of our sisters and managing our properties and land, were organized into a plan of action that we named Neighboring aNew. One of the challenges faced by Neighboring aNew was how to manage our seven motherhouses and the land they sit on. After careful discernment, prayer, and consideration by the sisters, it was decided that, at four locations, we would build new, right-sized centers for our sisters and others to live. These will be smaller and energy-efficient buildings, some with solar power capabilities.

But, building new places meant that we would have four existing motherhouses that were empty – four aging

▲ Although we let go of our property in Tipton, In., in 2016, we continue to honor our long legacy of service and our deceased sisters who are buried there. This marker was installed last year to pay tribute to all the sisters who first came to the area in 1888 led by their foundress, Mother Gertrude Moffitt, and names the land sacred.

and large motherhouses that needed to be repurposed or, possibly, deconstructed. We also had acres of land in New Orleans where one of our motherhouses had been destroyed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Not wanting quick or inappropriate solutions, the sisters used Neighboring aNew to give themselves guidelines, priorities and a way to be accountable to each other and potential partners. Neighboring aNew gives a framework of how to assess moving forward with sensitivity, and attention to decisions we make that impact Earth and

reflect our mission, and how we can share that mission with the world.

We find ourselves as part of a bigger movement with others who are concerned with the sacredness of Earth and all the resources of God's creation. In a recent article by the Global Sisters Report, a group of sisters visited Bears Ear National Park to highlight actions by the federal government that threatens this park, as well as Grand Stairs - Escalante. The article referred to these sites as 'holy' which brings forth strong affirmation from us. Like these national monuments, we respect our land as sacred, full of history and meaning that commercial activity or gain could never replace.

A recent editorial in the *New York Times* points out that 200 million acres of federally protected land will be sacrificed to commercial development and, in particular, energy mining for oil and minerals. Oil and gas companies will profit at the expense of clean air, clean water, wildlife preservation and the sacred land of Native Americans. Claims of federal overreach are being volleyed on both sides, yet, the reality is that the loss of important and bountiful open spaces is at stake. In the debates about the future of these lands, and in our own conversations about our land and resources, we need to work carefully. We encourage a consciousness in which all land and resources be considered as holy and sacred, and not parcels of space to be used for the immediate profit of corporate needs. Preservation and restoration of natural resources require a commitment to stewardship that might sacrifice income and revenue, but can insure a future for creation that is immeasurable.

It is our goal, in all of our partnerships and relationships, to carry forth the part of our mission that calls us to honor the sacredness of Earth, including land that we own. We support all who are making choices for Earth and working towards the protection and preservation of 'holy' land. ■

The following song is sung by sisters, associates, employees, and all in attendance at congregational groundbreakings:

This is Holy Ground

adapted from Christopher Beatty

This is holy ground

We're standing on holy ground

For the Lord is present

And where God is, is holy

This is holy ground

We're standing on holy ground

For the Lord is present

And where God is, is holy

This is holy ground

We're standing on holy ground

For the Lord is present

And where we are is holy

This is holy ground

We're standing on holy ground

For we are present

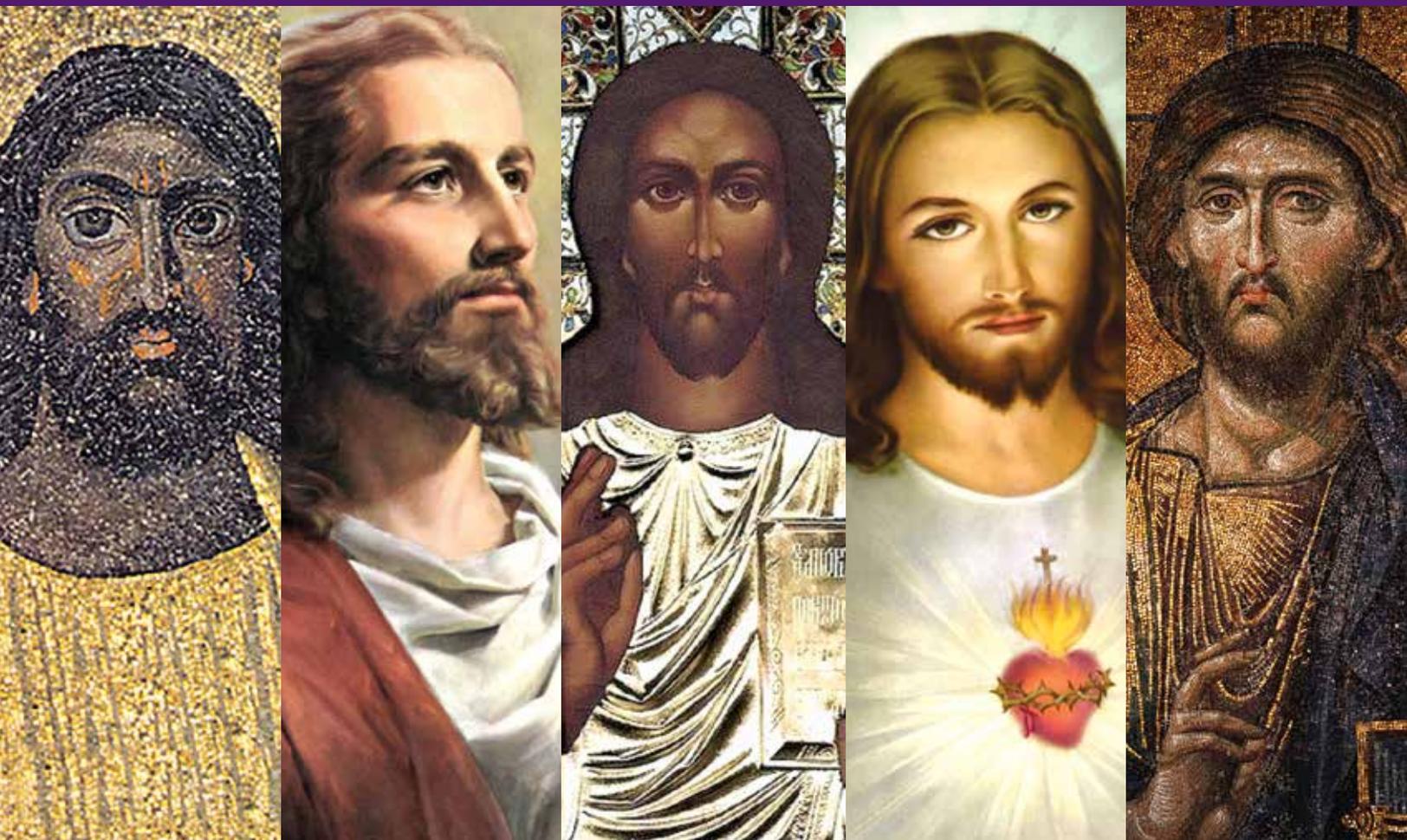
And where we are is holy



Becoming **WOKE**

Facing Systemic Racism in Our Own Congregation

BY SISTER JEANNIE MASTERSON, CSJ



“Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on Jesus.” These are the opening words of a spiritual sung occasionally in my parish. When my mind stays on the historical person of Jesus, I recognize that given where he was born and lived, and despite the religious images with which I have lived all my life, he was probably dark skinned. And yet, somehow, throughout history, I am part of a culture in which we often refuse to acknowledge that the image of God is ingrained in all of creation, including – perhaps especially – in our brothers and sisters of color.

As Sister Pat Bergen, CSJ, reflects in the sidebar at right, some of us within the Congregation of St. Joseph came to this realization years ago, and began educating ourselves and making changes in our lives and practices. After we became one Congregation in 2007, the effort continued on a wider scale. We have come to realize that racism is much larger and deeper than personal prejudice, and that it pervades the very fabric of our societies in ways white-skinned people are never called upon to question.

White people are often socialized to believe that we are better than people of color, without ever having those words spoken to us. We assume that the privileges afforded to us are “just,” and we accept them as the norm. Because whites have been the dominant group, we have assumed the power to make the “rules” that govern our society, and have, over time, built racist practices into the institutions and systems of our country that offer us privilege, while habitually ignoring the contributions of other peoples and cultures. There are reasons why white people can more easily purchase houses, get an education, find meaningful employment, and avoid legal sentencing. This is a direct result of the belief system upon which our society has been built, which is totally unconscious for most of us.

We Sisters of St. Joseph have enlisted the assistance of two organizations to awaken us to these deep-seated realities: Crossroads and ERRACE (Eliminating Racism & Creating/Celebrating Equity). Both organizations offer training workshops to develop our awareness, both by education and by bringing us together to talk honestly and seriously about our life experiences. It's hard >

Sister Pat Bergen shares her memories and efforts to uncover and address racism

I heard Martin Luther King speak in the 1960s. His words set me on fire. When he died, and so many cities erupted in looting and flames, I had to be there. In the midst of the chaos and tears after the tragedy of King's death, I passed out food and clothes. I thought I was making a difference – I wanted so badly to help. White privilege was not even a concept I knew about, much less addressed. Living and working only with people who were similar to me had a way of making me blind. My religious community made efforts to learn black history, heard stories of the injustices of the past, but in our minds that was the past history. I naively thought we had arrived at a new moment, and yet in truth, we couldn't even see what was right before our eyes.

And yet we tried. Answering the call of the moment, our community started with workshops for our sisters, associates and employees. Following the workshops we formed Anti-Racism Committees to organize our sisters to address racism in our congregation. As part of this training, I will never forget being asked to help create a wall of the History of Racism and Opposition to Racism. As we got to 1966, Martin Luther King's March in Chicago was listed. One of the black participants standing near me began to recall her memory of being hit in the head by a rock thrown in anger. She told of running up the steps of a Catholic church to get out of the line of fire. She remembered seeing

people on the other side of the glass door as they turned the lock at her approach. They stood on the other side of the door glaring at her as she bled. As I listened to this memory, I began to cry and everything in me begged her forgiveness as a Catholic sister and human being. I knew at that moment that I had to do all in my power to prevent this from happening again. But, how?

I started at home. I am participating with others within our congregation in ongoing conversations, offering education to others in our community on equality and diversity, and providing and participating in opportunities to engage with people of different races in events and ministry opportunities. We know that even with this work, to this day, we have much more to learn and to do about personal and systemic racism.

It is 17 years since we started actively acknowledging and working on dismantling racism as a congregation of religious sisters and associates. Truly we have only just begun, and we cannot let feelings of inadequacy stop us from trying to rectify wrongs. We ask your forgiveness if you have been among the many we have ignorantly hurt. We ask you for prayer and support as we seek the wisdom to work together for that day when all sisters and brothers of all races can realize full freedom from oppression and experience the dignity that is truly theirs.

work, it takes relentless commitment and deep honesty with ourselves to confront our own complicity.

We ask ourselves why we have so few people of color as members of our congregation, when we have ministered among people of color for decades. We question why nearly all of our employees of color are in dietary or housekeeping roles, rarely in management positions. We query one another on when we have ever had a significant conversation with someone of another race, culture, or creed – let alone developed a friendship, or even had them over for dinner.

We wonder aloud why we are uncomfortable when we are in a gathering where we are the minority. We challenge one another's comments when we appear to make quick judgments as we watch the news or discuss world events, making assumptions about guilt or blame without basis. None of these are easy conversations, either to initiate or to respond. And yet, putting on the mind of Jesus compels us to WAKE UP!

Recent best selling novels and first run movies have helped call attention to the issue, as well as educate the general populace, including our sisters and associates. *The Help*, *Ten Years a Slave*, *Hidden Figures*, *Loving*, *Small Great Things* are a few examples. Hollywood is awakening to the discrimination of its primary choice of white men in its award choices. The dinosaur is dying, but not without serious whacks of its flailing tail in protest. Our complicity within our own congregation cries out for our attention, even as world events call us to a broader scope. Ours isn't an either/or dichotomy, but a both/and: the more we learn and understand, the greater our responsibility to address the evil of racism.

In the past year alone, our country has witnessed an alarming resurgence of overt racism—the attack in Charlottesville, the ongoing effort of Richard Spencer to spread hate on college campuses, the proliferation of white supremacist groups, to name just a few. The alarm raised in many of us sometimes goes no further than prayer, concerned discussions, and hand wringing. What action beyond our internal efforts is called for? How do we use our moral integrity to change the atmosphere which allows such bigotry to be expressed with such impunity?

Systemic racism has been described as race prejudice plus the misuse of power by systems and institutions. As those who claim the majority of power in our country – actually, throughout our globe – we whites are the ones who must change the system. Those of us who are not actively engaged in hate cannot stand idly on the sidelines, but have a responsibility to delve deeply into our faith belief that all are created in God's image, all have dignity, all have equal claim to basic human rights, and work relentlessly to change systems that deny these rights to anyone.

In our training, we learned that the names given to groups of people and how we refer to them is vitally important in how we see each other and in leveling the playing field.

During the training, and in this article, we sometimes refer to whites as “People of White” and African Americans as “People of Color”, not only because the terms are conceptually the same, but because they are more accurate and less divisive.

I'm proud that our sisters in West Virginia nursed soldiers from the Union and Confederate armies without distinction, and that our hospital there was the first in the state to hire an African-American nurse – and keep her, even when the white nurses went on strike in protest. I'm proud that our Academy in New Orleans was the first to integrate, even though white flight eventually caused the closure of the school. Yet what have we done recently with equal boldness and foresight? How do we move from lukewarm acceptance to passionate advocacy for equality as sons and daughters of God?

At one of our Spring Assemblies for sisters and associates several years ago, we opened a session with all the slurs we could think of, bombarding our ears and hearts with the hurtful words used against those considered “other.” It was hard to hear, and harder yet to make our lips form the words so often used. It woke us to the bruising that is so constant in some lives, and led us into a reflection on our earliest awareness of “difference.”

Where did it originate? How was it handled? What did we learn? What recollections did we have of early participation

in, or resistance against, the personal prejudice that underlies systemic racism? After private reflection and table sharing, we spoke together of the learnings of the morning, wrote a brief note of apology for something specific in our past, and wrote a commitment for our future work. Some of our learnings illustrate these pages. And still, we have only just begun to awaken.

This work calls for a complete transformation of our consciousness, as individuals and as a group. As with any organization, we have been formed in many different settings, from the deep South to the mid-west prairies to the mountains to the rural farmlands. Each of us has family history, as well as local cultural history, which have influenced our ways of thinking, to say nothing of the variety of ministries in which each of us has engaged.

In a way, our ministries have put us in the role of “fixers,” or healers, or educators, in which we expect ourselves to “have the answers” to offer to others. We’re accustomed to being in charge, and many of us take charge instinctively. We have challenged ourselves through our Generous Promises to become more collaborative, more inclusive in all of our dealings, both within and outside the congregation. Anti-racism work is but one aspect of the overall challenge we’ve set for ourselves and our future.

What are some of the practical steps individuals or groups of sisters and associates are undertaking? Many are quite simple: committing to frequent conversations of significance with someone whose experience has been different from ours. Listening deeply to another, without judgment, seeking to hear beneath the words. Joining a group, be it a justice-oriented group or a book study group, where the majority of members don’t look like us. Being a participant rather than a leader. Calling forth and

affirming the leadership qualities in others. Sharing articles and books for our continuing education. Talking with other congregational members about what we’re learning. Participating in events sponsored by local libraries that put us in touch with others in our neighborhoods who are also in the struggle. Reading African-American authors. Writing letters to the editor, to our lawmakers about disparities in laws and/or their application. Advocating for changes in unjust laws. Being willing to be seen in public with someone obviously different from ourselves, having earnest

conversations and enjoying each other’s company. The opportunities are myriad!

In a more structured effort, a group of us is learning a process called “caucusing,” in which willing people of both white and color come together on a regular basis to look deeply into our own hearts at our unconscious assumptions as they get expressed in our daily actions. The group begins with a specific question, such as “How does my internalized racial superiority/oppression get in the way of supportive and accountable relationships in anti-racism work?”

After an initial prayer and reminder of instructions, we separate so that People of White can reflect together on the question from their superiority perspective, and People of Color reflect together from their internalized oppression perspective. After a specified amount of time, the groups come back together and report on their group learnings. These caucusing dialogues open us to awareness of how collaboratively (or not) we tend to make decisions, set directions, live our lives with/without awareness of the implications of our actions on others. Did those affected by our decisions have a say in the decision? Might our decisions have been different should others have been included? There is minimal dialogue, only listening to both perspectives.

In our training, we learn about Internalized Racial Superiority (IRS) and Internalized Racial Oppression (IRO). The definitions are eerily similar:

Internalized Racial Oppression

A complex multigenerational socialization process that teaches People of Color to believe, accept and live out negative, societal definitions of self and to fit into and live out inferior societal roles. These behaviors support and help maintain the race construct.

Internalized Racial Superiority

A complex multigenerational socialization process that teaches People of White to believe, accept and live out superior societal definitions of self and to fit into and live out superior societal roles. These behaviors define and normalize the race construct and its outcome – white supremacy.



Racism is built on unconscious assumptions we have taken as truth. Bringing those to consciousness and examining them for their truth is a big part of our work. Do we truly believe the stereotypes we've been fed? How do we confront them lovingly with one another, in order to live with greater clarity and truth? Again, it's hard work to be this honest, and sometimes quite emotional as we recognize a blindness of which we have been unaware. There is a ton of grace in such times! We need one another to stay awake to the process, and to hold on to our commitment to the vision. It can easily take 30-40 years for any organization to become totally non-racist, so in many senses, we've only just begun.

We are committed to continuing to "keep our minds stayed on Jesus" as our Redeemer is made visible through every aspect of creation, every person whose path crosses ours. We want to be able to claim that we "ARE WOKE" and more able to love every dear neighbor as ourselves. We invite you to pray with us for whatever it takes to become more deeply one in God, and we invite you to join your efforts with ours in whatever courageous steps you feel called to make. ■



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.

*God of love and justice,
We are grateful for the legacy left by your prophet,
Martin Luther King, Jr.,
but we know that the hard work is not done
and that our nation has not become the Promised Land
that we aspire to be.*

*Crack open the hearts encased in the hard shell of privilege,
those who must relinquish their stranglehold on power.*

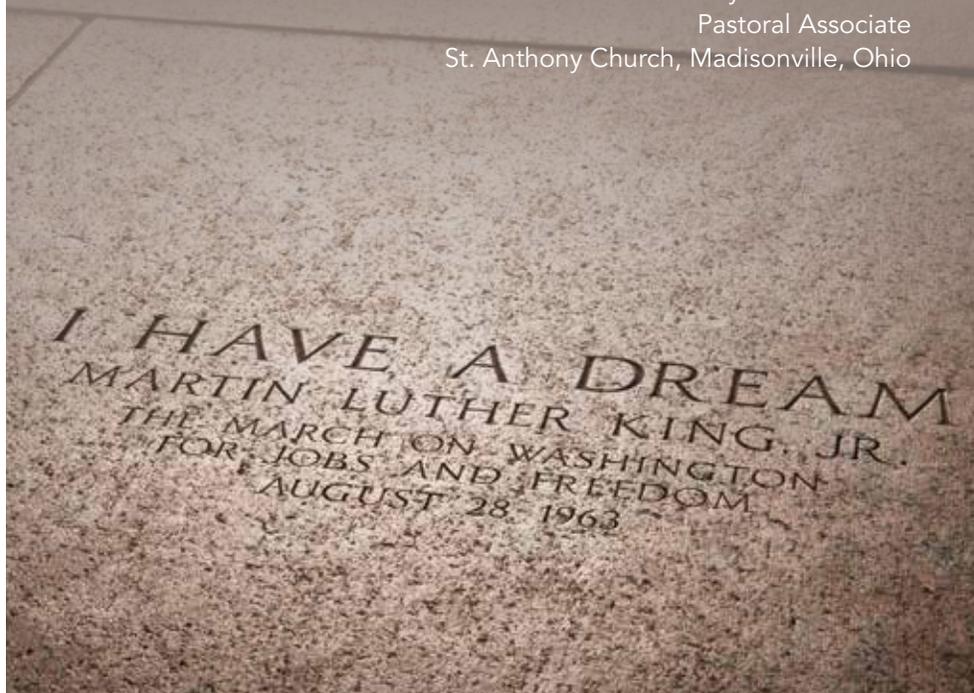
*Send us prophets of our day who will challenge the powers,
who will lay bare the corruption
that imprisons people in jails, poverty, addiction,
lack of opportunity, violence,...in despair.*

*Open the hearts and minds of those praying these words,
that we may hear your call,
that we may be agents of change in our cities and beyond.*

*Steel us for the work of dismantling structures of oppression.
Gentle us to speak your word of love and mercy.
Unite us as one human family, created in glorious diversity.
We lift this prayer as brothers and sisters,
dedicated to bringing about justice and peace
in your holy name.*

Amen.

– Mary Anne Bressler
Pastoral Associate
St. Anthony Church, Madisonville, Ohio



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

– PART II –

The Catholic Church remains committed to the changes set forth by the Second Vatican Council over 50 years ago. Pope Francis often calls the faithful to the founding goals of Vatican II and remains committed to the vibrancy and vision of the Council. To support the goals of the Council, principles of teaching and actions, referred to as Catholic Social Teaching (CST) were written. Given the challenges of today's world, CST demands our attention. Even though they are not new, many Catholics remain unaware of the scope and support of CST. We continue to offer our readers information and reflection on CST and the necessity of it in our spirituality and in our actions. Cathy Lanning Knittel, a teacher in the Theology Department at Saint Joseph Academy, Cleveland, and Sister Pat Kozak, CSJ, offer insights on their personal integration of CST and ways for us to embrace CST, including an 7-week spiritual exercise with scripture reading supporting CST and ways to apply CST to our daily actions. We seek to make CST real and present in our lives as we make decisions and choices.

Ite Missa Est As Church, we are Called and Sent Forth

BY CATHY LANNING KNITTEL,
CSJ ASSOCIATE

Like many of you I grew up in the pre-Vatican II era, and literally came of age during the Council. I'm still living in the post age of that amazing moment in time. It has been and continues to be, on many levels and in many contexts, a wonderfully wild ride. In addition to trying to make sense of it all for my own life, I am now in my 31st year of teaching high school at my alma mater. I very often reference the Council because it changed my life personally, and also changed what it meant to be a Catholic (both in the institutional and individual realm) in ways that are still being discovered over 50 years since the Council's closing sessions.

Whoever said that when one becomes a teacher, by their students they are taught, was spot on! Walking with my



▲ Cathy Lanning Knittel

students through these post conciliar times and trying to discern what our faith response can and should be has been a pilgrimage of sorts. Being asked to respond to issues that had not previously been thought of as matters of our religious practice as well as trying to respond to God's Revelation, particularly the message of the Gospel, was a challenging journey that has yet to end. Who would have considered prior to 1960 that being a good steward of the created cosmos, for

example, was part of what it meant to be a Catholic? Considering this post-conciliar pilgrimage recently caused me to look back on life before the Council – or better put, what life *seemed* to be like in those years. Life was much simpler; answers seemed obvious, everyone went along with the program, and “Father” really did know best; at least that is how it appeared.

When I investigate and discuss the Council with my students I mention to them that, in my opinion and experience, the major shift pre- and post-Vatican II was that for the first time we began to understand the *connection* between our faith and the “real” world; what we now refer to as Catholic Social Teaching. That connection had always been present in the Sacred Scriptures, in the history and Tradition of the Catholic Church, and in the example of great men and women from every time period who set a high bar as exemplars of what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. But we lost track of that connection and as a Church

...the major shift pre- and post-Vatican II was that for the first time we began to understand the *connection* between our faith and the “real” world; what we now refer to as Catholic Social Teaching.

seemed to concentrate more on tasks and goals involving organization, structure, and rubrics. As necessary as an operative framework is for any organization, perhaps our reasons for being Church were overshadowed by the structural aspects of the process of faith in action.

Learning new ways of being can be difficult. The last 50 years have shown us this. We are still working through how to understand the essential nature of not just praying for justice and peace, but for actually DOING justice which will lead to that peace that all people desire. It can be scary and certainly unfamiliar to understand that in so many areas of my life including the work I do and how I do that work that I also have my responsibilities regarding the environment. I need to wade through the systems and structures of our society and learn (and re-learn) the moral imperatives that everyone has a right to not merely exist but to thrive and flourish. I cannot opt out of the pursuit and protection of everyone's rights. It can be hard to look at issues involving respect for life and the inherent dignity of ALL, the scourge of poverty, the scandal of hunger, capital punishment, nuclear arms proliferation, race relations to name a few, and realize

that I must address these issues through the lens of my Catholic faith. My faith and the life I live in the world are not separate – they exist in consort one with the other.

I suppose for most of us, it is easier to segment our existence into smaller pieces. We seem to find it less foreboding if we can reduce the multiple parts of our lives into piles. Maybe that is why I see so many stories about avoiding clutter, getting organized (finally) and how getting organized will make your life worth living and make you more loveable and everyone will want to be you, – and on and on. Although organization is basically a good practice, life isn't always manageable – life, in all of its wonder and majesty, gets complicated, even messy sometimes.

Might this desire to be organized be part of the reason that some wonderful and good people just can't wrap their heads around why the Church or some members of the Church are so concerned about issues that seem to them to be none of our business as Catholics? Rather than “us versus them” or “I'm right and you're wrong,” can we accept that we are new to this approach of connecting life lived in the secular realm, with God's invitation

to, “love one another as I have loved you.” My life in the world and my faith are inextricably linked.

Perhaps each of us taking some time for reflection and introspection regarding the application of what has become known as the Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching is a good place to start. This “list” was formulated by the American Catholic Bishops in 1998 in a pastoral letter entitled, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching; Challenges and Directions*. You can readily see by the title of the document that the bishops knew we were going in a different direction and there would be challenges; indeed there have been and are.

One final thought; I am surrounded by a family of legitimate Classics scholars – truly. I asked my son, Peter, who holds a master's degree in Classics, what the literal translation was of the phrase, “Ite missa est.” You might notice this as the title of this piece but not referenced yet in the body of the article. This Latin phrase from the old rite of the Roman Mass has been in my mind as I wrote. I remember hearing that it really meant not “Go, the Mass is ended” but rather something on the order of “You are sent,” in other words, now the real work begins. I always thought that was so apropos; we have reflected on God's Word, we have nourishment for the work to be done (Eucharist), now let's get to that work, together, for all of us.

Peter actually said that the phrase, “ite missa est” literally means “something *feminine* has been sent.” He went on to say that perhaps it referenced us – all of us – as Church, and that the word “church” is often referred to using the feminine gender as the descriptor. God blessed men and women and sent us forth to be persons of Christ to one another. Are we not incredibly blessed to be so?

Living the Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

BY SISTER PAT KOZAK, CSJ

Faith has never been simply a matter of *what* I believe; rather it offers a challenge for the *way I live* my life. Perhaps that’s why we talk about the *practice* of our faith. Hopefully, we’re always trying to deepen our faith, make it fuller, more loving and encompassing. So we keep practicing; we keep working at it and growing.

To get real about this practice of faith, we need to get underneath the words of the Gospel and of any church teaching, down to the practice of love that is at the heart of the teaching. This is often a messy task; it needs to be governed by a wisdom, by respect, and most essentially, by the primacy of love.

Whether you are actively praying this Lent or not, why not consider committing to 7 weeks of *practice* of Catholic Social Teaching? Think

about it. Musicians practice daily to be better at their craft; athletes embrace rigorous daily training to improve; scientists undertake disciplined, daily research to uncover a new discovery. Doesn’t it make sense that prayer, one of the most important of all projects, should have a daily practice?

We invite you to tear-off the prayer and study guide on the right, and put it somewhere that you will see it daily during Lent, or any 7 weeks of your life.

However; this invitation comes with a warning. This prayer practice is likely to change you. Your life will get messier. While your faith may become stronger, even simpler, your sense of participating in a sacred mystery may deepen. You may have fewer easy answers as you actually think about, *what does love require?* You are likely to find yourself being invited to actions with the example of the mystifying compassion of Jesus: “forgiving 70 times 7” or “walking the extra mile” or “welcoming the stranger.” Praying with the Gospel or with Catholic Social Teaching is



▲ Sister Pat Kozak

not for sissies. It is intended for those with the largest of hearts, for those who want to hold out hope for the future, for those who believe.

It is our hope that with these reflections, we might build a community of readers who commit to the Catholic Social Teaching. In the process, as a company of believers, we will allow ourselves to be changed and transformed, and in the process change our world. ■

Perhaps that’s why we talk about the *practice* of our faith. We never quite finish; we’re always trying to get it a little fuller and deeper, more loving and encompassing. So we keep practicing; we keep working at it and growing.

WEEK FOUR: Care for God's Creation

4

The commitment to care for creation is more than a social movement; it is a requirement of our faith. In Genesis, God gave a command to Adam and Eve to care for the diverse and beautiful creation in which they lived.

Humans possess this responsibility not because we are more important than other creatures; rather it is because we have the unique capacity to reason and choose, to safeguard the harmony naturally occurring in creation. Because our choices impact generations coming after us, our decisions must be made not only for the sake of convenience and comfort, but for the future we hold in our hands. Such moral and ethical dimensions call for a consciousness of the whole that underlies Catholic Social Teaching.

How can I become more aware of the impact of my decisions regarding the food I eat, the clothes I buy, the energy I use? What can I

do to nurture my appreciation of the beauty around me and deepen a commitment to protect and preserve it for my children and grandchildren?

What is one practice I can adopt that will nurture my sense of wonder?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Genesis 1:1-31; Leviticus 25:1-7; Daniel 3:56-82; Matt 6:25-34; Matt 6: 25-34*
The countercultural choice to care for an unseen future – and unknown peoples elsewhere on the planet – is not easy. How can we bring real faces and needs into our decision-making about the use of resources? What is one step can I take to learn more about the impact of first world life-styles on the sustainability of Earth's resources?

WEEK FIVE: Rights and Responsibilities

5

A healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.

Every person has a fundamental right to life. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. In the encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis reminds us that society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good. As members of society, we too are called to attend, not only to the immediate issues of family and neighborhood, but to the larger issues of society, like climate change, poverty, unemployment and racism. Change begins with individuals taking their responsibility as citizens seriously.

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Leviticus 25:35; Tobit 4:5-11; Jeremiah 29:4-7; Luke 16:19-3; James 2:14-18*

Our faith assumes that we want to be adult believers, willing and able to take responsibility for what we see, for the multiple systemic causes that contribute to local and global tragedies. When do I abdicate responsibility, complaining the situation is too big to address or simply “not my fault”? What is one thing I can do to invest myself in these situations?

WEEK SIX: Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

6

In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, the needs of and the participation with people who are poor must be our first consideration.

The preferential option for the poor does not position one group or class against another. Rather it embraces the belief that the deprivation and powerlessness of any one person or group wounds the whole community. The gap between the rich and poor in society is a measure of how far we are from being a true community. The restoration of the dignity and rights of those made poor is an act of justice. What specific contribution can I make to this need?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Ex 22:20-26; Leviticus 19:9-10; Is 58:5-7; Matt 25:34-40; Luke 4:16-21*

One of the challenges of this and the following theme on solidarity is that often we are caught in a feeling of “unfairness” – we believe we have worked hard, we have accomplished something through commitment and education and perseverance – only to hear that we are somehow “to blame” for the poverty of others, people we do not even know and have never met. And yet our faith tells us that we ARE responsible. We are called not only to “do no evil” but to seek out those in need and do good. It is the command to “walk the extra mile,” to lift up the fallen, to share not only our surplus, but our daily bread with the hungry. What concrete step can I take to “bridge the gap”?

WEEK SEVEN: Solidarity

7

We are one human family, with all our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are interdependent; our actions and decisions influence every other strand of the web of life in ways that are sacred and powerful.

Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. The vast circle of life depends on each of us being responsible for the other's well-being, keeping one another safe, providing an environment in which Earth – and all her peoples and creatures thrive in sustainable and just ways. How might we enlarge our hearts and our understanding? How might we attend to the anxiety that sometimes arises that we may not have “enough”? What is one step I might take to enlarge my circle of care and ease the anxiety that arises in me?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: *Zechariah 8:16; Matt 5:21-24; Acts 4:32-35; 1Cor 12:12-26; 1John 3:16-18*

We have often allowed our world to be too small; our family restricted to those close at hand, our community of welcome limited to those who look and think as we do. What challenge do these passages offer me? What one commitment can I make to recognize the abundance that is present rather than any fear of scarcity? What new expressions of generosity can I discover at home, in my family, my communities, and extending this in larger and ever broader circles?

7 WEEKS, 7 PRINCIPLES

Getting started - Determine a regular time of day when you can claim 20 minutes for yourself. Put away your cell phone. Settle in your chair. Close your eyes. Breathe easily until you feel yourself slow down. Read the teaching for the week and sit with the questions for reflection. Stay with a reading longer if you find it particularly challenging or nourishing. Be open to the Spirit of Love moving in your heart and head. On the last day of each week, reread the Theme of the week. How has your understanding of this changed or deepened? Take time to express gratitude to God and to others who have been part of your awakening this week.

WEEK ONE: All Life is Sacred



All life is sacred and the dignity of the person is central to a moral vision for society. Each person possesses dignity because he or she is created in God's image. Such dignity and the rights that flow from this are inherent, inviolable, and inalienable.

In the creation stories in Genesis, we read that God created sun and moon, animals, plants of all kinds – and humans, male and female. *It is good*, God said, over and again. God's statement was not selective. One plant was not better than another, one animal more important, one star brighter, or one gender preferred. Rather, *God saw that it was good*; everything, everyone.

If I apply this generosity of judgment and love found in Genesis to the first theme, how might the Spirit of God be inviting me to grow in love? As I consider my own experience of the diversity of people, culture, age and gender, where am I most apt to judge or

notice bias? What personal experience or hurt contributes to the bias I hold? For what healing can I pray?

What is one small practice I can put into place today to move in the direction of greater and more inclusive love?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: Genesis 1; 1Cor 3:16-23; Deut 10:17-19; Luke 10:25-37; John 4:1-42

How do these readings invite me to become more appreciative of the dignity of each person? Who among my circle of friends and colleagues exemplifies this for me? What is one step I will take to deepen this quality in myself today?

WEEK TWO: The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers



Both the worker and the work itself possess dignity that is unrelated to the perceived status of the job. Workers have both the right and duty to bring claims to their employer or governmental agency when they experience unfair or unjust situations.

Our work is a continuing participation in God's creation, not simply a way of making a living. The economy is intended to serve people, not the other way around. This should be demonstrated in the value given to human labor as well as in the right to leisure and Sabbath.

In the gospel of Matthew (Mt 10:1-14) Jesus speaks of the laborer's right to be paid for his or her work. The assumption is that wages will be fair; paid without bias or prejudice, and yet discrimination in wages, sweat shops, and abuse and harassment of employees are all well documented today. Such injustice is often met with silence, and a quiet, even if unintentional complicity. When I am honest with myself, what do I gain by my own silence? What prevents me from seeing this injustice more clearly – or speaking out? What is one practice I can begin today to express this commitment?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: Deut 5:12-15; James 5:1-6; Genesis 2:1-3; Matt 20:1-16; Luke 12:13-21

What do these readings suggest about the interdependence of meaningful work, Sabbath time, the rights of workers and the social fabric? What do I find most challenging? What is one step I will take to deepen this theme in myself?

WEEK THREE: The Call to Family, Community and Participation



Human persons are social beings living within a variety of circles of association: family, civic community, church, employment, etc. Each of these associations carries with it both rights and duties to participate in mutually responsible ways.

How we organize our society directly impacts human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. People have a right and a duty to seek the common good, in all aspects of society.

Often we claim powerlessness or maintain a safe distance, to avoid coming to grips with what demands our time and attention. Do I avoid getting involved? What explains our unintentional blindness to situations in my family, society or place of work? What is one practice I can begin to change this avoidance?

One step beyond: Suggested readings: Genesis 4:8-15; Deut 5:12-15; John 15:12-17; Acts 2:43-47; Romans 12:4-8

How do these readings remind me I am not the most important person in my universe? That we have been created for one another to love, respect, and care for? Where do I see signs of a thriving community because people are willing to "let go" of a pre-occupation with themselves in favor of a concern for the whole? What is one step I can take to move in this direction?

Prayer is a Relationship

BY SISTER CHRISTINE SCHENK, CSJ

So much has been printed about the mysterious power and solace of prayer that is hard to know where to begin. Perhaps telling a few stories is a place to start.

When I was twelve, a rain storm threatened to cancel a girl scout camping trip that I had been anticipating for weeks. My pouting and complaining were wearing my mother down, so she finally told me to go in and pray to St. Jude. I went into my parents' bedroom, knelt before the St. Jude statue that always graced their bureau, and prayed for the rain to stop. And it did! My longed-for camping trip was back on. Early lesson here—prayer actually works!

Which is one reason why through college and as a

young adult I continued to experiment with many kinds of prayer—the Mass, the Rosary, the Psalms, reflections on scripture, centering prayer, journaling, frequent small prayers throughout the day, etc., etc.

They were all good, but eventually I found myself feeling confused and at a loss. I wasn't sure I was actually praying "right," and I needed some advice. So, I made an appointment to see our own Sister Hope Greener, CSJ, who had impressed me with a talk she gave at my local parish. Hope listened quietly as I outlined (in probably excruciating detail) my prayer routine—psalms, scripture, reflection, journal etc., etc. When I finally finished, Hope looked kindly at me and said simply, "Prayer, Chris, is a relationship."

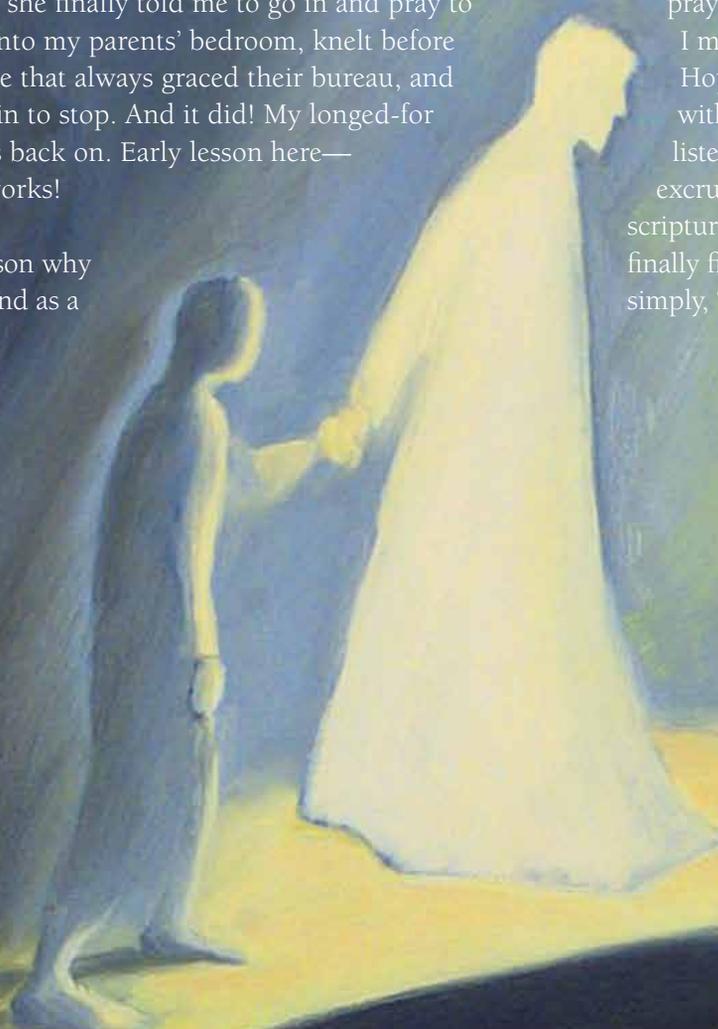


Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, T-01088-OL, 'Even in the darkness of our sufferings Jesus comforts and guides us, copyright © Radiant Light 2003-2017, www.radiantlight.org.uk

A relationship?

Not a ritual to please a somewhat strict Father-God (as I usually imaged God at the time)?

Hmm.

From then on, whenever I entered into my time of quiet, I first imagined God as someone very like a dear college friend who had loved me unconditionally through difficult times. A loving relationship. Yes, that's what had been missing. My heart began to open up in unexpected ways. And great stuff began to happen—healing stuff and love stuff and creativity-in-new-directions stuff. (Not to mention strength in times of trial, and determination to work on behalf of marginalized women and refugees.)

The God of Loving-Relationship changes things—me first of all. (Oh yes, and I was led into nundom, but that is another story.)

So, when I am in a purple funk over all the evil in the world (or in myself), I remember and rely on my relationship with the God who loves me unconditionally. And I recall Paul's letter to the Romans where he writes: "Where sin increased, there grace abounded all the more." (Romans: 20 NRSV).

Because you see, the Divine love-energy at work in the world is bigger than all the evil, all the sin, all the destruction. But this is also a great mystery. We cannot be naïve about the nature of evil that is far bigger than we can understand, but which we are nevertheless called to resist with all of our strength, no matter how hopeless things appear.

We are not alone in struggling to make our world a better place. There is One who went before us—the Jesus of history and of our faith—who also struggled mightily against worldly powers and principalities and died on behalf of the goodness of the God to whom he witnessed.

I was once asked by a dear nun-mentor what I thought of the Jesus we find in the gospels. I told her I knew of only one power on earth that would make Jesus do what he did, and that is the power of love. So, I reasoned, Jesus must have loved God an awful lot to do what he did.

Jesus' deep and loving relationship with God is what gave him strength to resist the injustices of his times. (Injustices, by the way, in which his own religious and political leaders were complicit much as today—indeed throughout history.) Jesus' resistance of evil led to his death. In our own times, resistance against racism and exploitation of the poor and of the environment led to the deaths of people of conscience such as: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Harvey Milk, Archbishop Oscar Romero, the four churchwomen of El Salvador, and Sr. Dorothy Stang, to name a few. And just like Jesus—their lives and their deaths energized thousands to work for a more just and loving society.

Evil powers and worldly principalities thought they had defeated Jesus but they were fooled. The God of Relationship raised him up as first witness, brother and healing friend to those like us who are also called to resist the evils of racism, sexism, homophobia, environmental exploitation, and human trafficking to our dying breath.

With the help of the God who loves-us-beyond-all-telling, we too will be given strength and courage to follow Jesus in whatever way the Spirit leads. ■



Sister Chris Schenk, CSJ, has worked as a nurse midwife to low-income families, a community organizer, a writer, and the founding director of an international church

reform organization, FutureChurch. Currently she writes an award-winning column, "Simply Spirit" for the National Catholic Reporter. Her book, Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity, details original research into iconic motifs of female authority found in early Christian art and archaeology. It was released in December 2017 by Fortress Press and is available on Amazon and Barnes & Noble.



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- to live the mission of unity and spirituality of the Congregation of St. Joseph.
- to partner with the congregation in serving the *dear neighbor*.
- to participate in faith sharing and community with sisters and other associates of the congregation.
- to offer your life experiences, hopes and gifts to enrich the community and world.

To learn more about associates and how to become one, contact Kate Theriot, Associate Director at ktheriot@csjoseph.org, or visit us online at www.csjoseph.org/as-an-associate.

