



pursuing justice, we
seek god's gift of peace.

spring/summer 2014

Living peace

congregation of the sisters of st. joseph of peace

contemplative stance

in this issue



**Living
peace**
spring/summer 2014

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Cover Art

Artist and writer Jan Richardson painted the cover art, "Rise Up, Lazarus (Death Has No Power Here)," which she used in *Beloved: An Online Journey into Lent and Easter*. The colors and the expression of stillness and depth, motion and energy made this piece a perfect fit for our contemplative stance issue. Jan is an artist, author, United Methodist minister, and director of The Wellspring Studio, LLC. To experience more of Jan's work, please visit her website, at janrichardson.com where you are sure to be moved and inspired.

Back Cover

Mahina Pennisula, Tahiti by Fiona J Mackintosh

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Leadership Team Message: Deeply Connected, We Are Called to Respond

by Kristin Funari, CSJP

Any thoughts I share on contemplation come from a space within my spirit that is unfinished, hesitant and filled with a silent, stirring activity. God as the breath of life, life as the breath of God call me into moments of stillness, emptiness, longing and expectancy which both root and unleash a deep desire for union and surrender into the mystery of God; union where words are unnecessary, thoughts a distraction and all boundaries false.

I don't believe that we contemplate but rather that we practice various pathways into the heart of God. Contemplative moments are surprise visits from our very gracious and loving Creator; stunning moments into the mysteries of God that surround and enfold us. These visits come as gift, freely given and unearned. They are always a breath away. As I gaze outward it is the God within who allows me to truly see.

Contemplative practice is active not in the sense of busyness but rather in the form of entering into a level of being that connects us to all of creation and our

participation in it; we enter into the respiration of earth and the expansion of the cosmos. We enter into the lives of others and the affairs of the world from a new perspective, not separate from but deeply connected to; we are called to respond.

In thinking about contemplation in the sense of union with God and the flow of loving action that follows, a memory of Juana Aponte bubbled up from my heart. I was serving in St. Boniface Parish in downtown Jersey City. The parish was poor; the Puerto Rican and Dominican parishioners were put upon from every front; dreadful housing, high unemployment, food insecurity, poor healthcare, premature deaths and aggressive displacement. Juanita worked in a sewing factory after she arrived in this country in the 1950's; she had little formal education but was one of the finest educators I ever experienced in my life. There were priests, deacons and sisters in the parish but Juanita led the community. She fed the hungry, visited the sick, led

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CONTEMPLATIVE STANCE: A contradiction in terms? Not really.

by Jan Linley

At first glance the phrase contemplative stance seems like a contradiction in terms. The word contemplative is soft and deep. It brings to mind thoughts of quieting the mind and means of doing so—a smooth stone held in hand and rubbed with a thumb, watching a lazy flowing river or big fluffy clouds drifting overhead. We contemplate works of art and beauty in nature. As an adjective contemplative is often synonymous with meditative. As a noun it describes a person devoted to prayer or contemplation.

And then there is “stance” all bold and solid standing there with a mission and an opinion, not feeling very quiet or reflective at all. Certainly nothing like the word it has been married to here. So what's up with this unlikely coupling?

A contemplative stance is one that is firm but also just and peaceful. It is action born of a heart made wise through a contemplative practice such as meditation. A contemplative stance is a lifestyle; it inspires, influences and affects all of life as demonstrated by the breadth and variety of articles in this issue.

In perhaps the boldest example of what a contemplative life can foster, Sr. Simone Campbell, who has been meditating for over 30 years, generously gave us her time and talked with us about how Nuns on the Bus “would never have happened” without a contemplative practice. Of her practice she says, “It's the heart of who I am.”

We were fortunate to have three CSJP Associates write for this issue. Roshi Ann Wagner shares honestly and poignantly about the death of her eldest son and how a contemplative practice helped her through and has changed her life. Mike DeVito writes about how the charisma and contemplative stance of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace has influenced his relationships and day-to-day life, especially in the workplace. Terry Moran writes of contemplation that “it is the wellspring that nourishes all our other activities. It is a choice we make to look at our life and our world in a particular way.” He provides several examples for how to begin living a contemplative life.

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Contemplative Stance, Contemplative Crawl

by Terrence J. Moran, CSJP-A



Mt Desert Island, Maine by Alan Hoshor

Everyone's life is a mixed bag. We may not have our dream job, but if anyone asked us to point to significant accomplishments in our professional lives, we probably could come up with more than a few that give us a sense of achievement. Relationships too have their strains. As Pope Francis observed, "Even in the best of marriages, sometimes plates fly." Nevertheless, most of us can recall with gratitude and satisfaction our positive, life-enhancing relationships. But if we were asked, "Do you consider yourself an expert in prayer? A mystic? A contemplative?" we would probably laugh. People of faith would name their relationship with God as central to their lives but paradoxically it's the aspect of our lives about which we have the most frustration and the least sense of accomplishment. Contemplation seems like an unattainable luxury in our hyper-charged lives – something we will attend to someday – in the Never Never Land when the emails stop coming, the iPhone stops pinging, the kids stop needing rides, and the deadlines disappear.

Contemplation is not another agenda item we add to an already overfull day. Rather it is the wellspring that nourishes all our other activities. It is a choice we make to look at our life and our world in a particular way. It is a lens not a chore. Franciscan writer Richard Rohr speaks about contemplation becoming a way of life, a way of sight:

I don't like to think of it so much as something I do, but something I am; so I often use the phrase "the contemplative stance." It's a way of living, moving, and being in this world. The very word means "to see." I fully admit that we don't live all of our twenty-four hours there. The world keeps pulling us back into our false and small self. "Put on this hat. Attach to this identity. Take on this hurt. Put on this self-importance," we say to ourselves. It's all right as long as we know how to take it back off again, and rather quickly, if possible. "Who was I before I was hurt?" is your original face, your true identity in God, your own "immaculate conception." We must all crawl our way back to such innocence and such freedom.

The Congregation of Saint Joseph of Peace (CSJP) has recently focused its attention on developing a contemplative stance – or perhaps Rohr's contemplative crawl, baby steps to greater freedom. In 2013, the CSJP sponsored a contemplative congregation retreat for Sisters and Associates held in three locations; East Coast, West Coast, USA and the United Kingdom. Guided by Sister Nancy Sylvester, IHM, the participants spent a week in contemplative sitting in silence and in deep listening to one another. In doing so, they were drawing on the contemplative wellsprings that are an important inheritance from their founder, Mother Francis Clare Cusack. She herself spent the early years of her religious life in the monastic setting of a Poor Clare Convent. She dedicated much of her early writing to making the richness of the Celtic spiritual tradition available again to the beleaguered people of Ireland. She knew that the best way to empower people to resist oppression was to teach them to look at their reality from the contemplative stance and to see how far from

God's dream were their present circumstances of oppression and want.

What can we do in our own circumstances to develop the contemplative stance?

Practice

Work. Keep digging your well.
Don't think about getting off from work.
Water is there somewhere.

Submit to a daily practice.
Your loyalty to that
is a ring on the door.

Keep knocking, and the joy inside
will eventually open a window
and look out to see who's there.
(Excerpt from *The Sunrise Ruby* by Rumi)

The contemplative stance is not a matter of reading, workshops, ideas. It is a practice – daily, diligent, persevering even when results seem scanty. Sit in silence for five minutes a day, follow the movement of your breath, go to the place deeper than word and thought, keep digging the well.

Sabbath

Probably the commandment most violated is the one that tells us to keep the Sabbath day holy. All of us need one day in the week when we receive life as a gift rather than attack it as a chore. If you can't do a whole day, choose a Sabbath hour, a Sabbath minute in each hour – when you lay down the iPhone, look out the window and watch the clouds journey across the sky.

Choose Joy

Willa Cather chose this line from her novel *My Antonia* for her epitaph: "That is happiness: to be dissolved into something complete and great." Think of your happiest moments. They were probably times when you were so captivated by something complete and great that you were utterly swept up in the present moment: gazing into the eyes of a newborn child; standing slack jawed at the edge of the Grand Canyon; stammering to respond in words to a forgiveness so complete and total. Do you make time in your life for the complete and great, or is your life wrapped up in the partial and the urgent? Dig out of the cellar the musical instrument you once loved to play; the watercolors that taught you how art comes from losing control; call the old friend, cook the favorite dish, grow some of your own food, explore the park you drive by wistfully every day. All these things teach us more about our God than grim "spiritual" practices.

Make the connection between inner and outer

There is no flourishing of the spirit in a world that is violent, polluted and unjust. The contemplative eye is focused not only inward but outward and sees and works for the New Jerusalem in city streets, board rooms and voting booths. Here again, Mother Francis Clare Cusack is a model and a resource for us. She writes:

Consider how you may console the Heart of Jesus... Let it be by the tenderest charity towards all who are in any affliction, from the poor half starved wailing infant to the much tried parent who must have so many and such anxious cares.

O, let us beware, especially if we are religious, how we despise the carpenter's Son! Many of those whom God has raised to eminent sanctity have been born in what are called the lower ranks of life. The canonized kings and nobles are few, but how many were once poor boys begging their bread or daughters of poor parents employed in trade or husbandry.

For someone who always had a tendentious relationship with churchmen, Mother Clare's words resonate well with those of Pope Francis, "True love is always contemplative, and permits us to serve the other not out of necessity or vanity, but rather because he or she is beautiful above and beyond mere appearances." (The Joy of the Gospel, #199).

The contemplative stance enables us to see the glory of God resplendent in the most unlikely of places. What can you do today to take a "contemplative crawl" closer to that place of innocence and freedom?



Steps, Thuya Gardens, Northeast Harbor, Maine by Alan Hoshor

COMMUNAL CONTEMPLATION: Collectively Creating a Future

by Coralie Muzzy, CSJP

It is no secret that Catholic religious orders in America are undergoing a tremendous demographic shift. Even though young men and women continue to join religious congregations every year, a graph depicting the age distribution in most congregations today reflects a handful of members under 50 years old and the vast majority 70 and above. Gradually, the wide disparity will even out over the next 10-20 years but in the meantime, how are long-established religious orders preparing for a future of greatly reduced numbers?



The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace are engaging members in a Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP) initiative as one of the means of planning for our future. The need for such a plan is essential in light of our changing demographics. The regional campuses (formerly called Mother Houses and Provincialates) and other Congregation-owned houses already have an abundance of capacity no longer needed. From both a practical and fiduciary point of view, it would be irresponsible not to downsize as well as not in keeping with our values.

The challenges are formidable. How can we do this in a way that honors our charism of peace through justice and our values such as care of creation? How do we manage this congregation-wide across three different cultures (East Coast, West Coast, USA and United Kingdom) knowing it implies changes in living spaces for Sisters of all ages; knowing the emotional attachment members have to buildings, communities and properties that hold long and cherished histories; knowing the choices will be difficult, require energy, willingness and adaptability in regard to where and with whom we will live? How, you might ask, can we even begin to make such monumental decisions?

One light hearted answer: "Well, for starters we sit a lot—all of us—together at once and try not to think at all!" In other words, we practice communal contemplation, sitting together silently, collectively attempting to clear our thoughts and calm our hearts as a way to ready ourselves to listen to the divine and



Top: Sisters in Rearsby, England plan for the future.

Bottom: CCP Steering Committee (standing) Norah Clarke, Kathy Swingle, Susan Schorsten, Skip Hedger, Louise DuMont, Corky Muzzy; (seated)-Hilda Baxter, Susan Whitsell, Rosemary Reilly, Kristin Funari

one another and to speak deeply and thoughtfully as we work toward important decisions.

Contemplation is not a new practice within our Congregation. Practicing *together* is what's new. That practice began in earnest for us last year after many Sisters and Associates participated in Congregation-wide retreats facilitated by Sr. Nancy Sylvester, IHM. Offered in all three regions, the theme of the retreat was "In the Wellspring of Experience Our Future Evolves." With an emphasis on communal

contemplation, the retreats were designed to help us begin to consciously evolve into a preferred future together.

Each day began with 20 minutes of communal contemplation with shorter sessions built in throughout the day. Well aware that the decisions ahead of us will require deep listening and sharing with one another, Sr. Nancy impressed on us how important it is to listen and speak to one another from contemplative hearts. We practiced this in small groups during the week.

In those six days we were communal in other ways as well. We ate together, danced, played and prayed together. We laughed; we cried. We shared deeply and honestly with each other and had experiences that helped us see one another anew in ways many said they had never done before. Nearly a year later a phrase still being voiced by many who experienced the retreat is, "It changed us." We came away with a clear sense that communal contemplation is a practice we want to continue, one that will help us meet the

"We came away with a clear sense that communal contemplation is a practice we want to continue, one that will help us meet the challenges ahead."

challenges ahead.

Soon after the retreats we engaged in communal contemplation again as we began gatherings for development of a comprehensive community plan. A total of five day-long meetings was planned for each of the three regions. Each meeting began with prayer followed by a period of communal contemplation. Sisters grouped at tables for conversation were reminded to listen and speak to one another with contemplative hearts. Before seeking consensus on any part of the plan, a period of contemplation takes place.

At this point we are beyond midway into the process. The hoped-for outcome is to reach consensus that would lead to a final proposed plan that will be presented to the entire Congregation membership in September of this year.

To date the CCP process is going well. Even though the meeting days are long and intense, members are energetically engaged and appreciative of the way communal contemplation helps to bring calm and clarity to the choices being made. The CCP process is only one of many initiatives in the works as we evolve into the future. We don't know yet how our future will unfold, but one thing we do know is the practice of communal contemplation is going to help us create the future we want.

Leadership Team Message, continued from page 3

both young and old through the process of dying and was never afraid to speak truth to power. One evening a group of women were going to clean the church in preparation for Holy Week. I went to the church earlier than their scheduled time of arrival to get buckets, cloths and cleaning products organized. Upon entering I saw Juanita already up in the front of the church dusting the altar of the Blessed Mother. I stood still and silent because it appeared as though she was in conversation with the image of Mary, and I didn't want to frighten her. As I stood in the darkness of the entrance Juanita's words ceased and she was transfixed in a very long, loving gaze, I could almost hear heart talking to heart.

Juanita never read Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart or Thomas Merton, but her life reflected the breathing in and out of God's life in that struggling but vibrant community. Perhaps the call to a Contemplative Stance is as simple as the manner in which Juanita lived her life.

Contemplative Stance, continued from page 3

Sr. Eileen Byrne reflects on how her prayer life has grown from memorized prayers and rituals at the family table to include a deeper, more personal and contemplative relationship with God. Sr. Coralie Muzzy opens a window into how the members of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace have been using communal contemplation in making significant decisions about the future direction of their lives and ministries.

Because contemplation requires a certain amount of breathing space within our spirit, we've tried to put more poetry and beautiful imagery in this issue. We are pleased to be publishing original poems and photographs from a number of contributors.

It turns out the unlikely marriage of "contemplative" and "stance" is a solid one, an enviable one, the one we all hope to have. The good news is this is a union we all *can* have. Like all good relationships, it just takes love, patience, listening and practice.

Sr. Simone Campbell:

Deep Listening and Walking Willing

Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS is the Executive Director of NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby (www.networklobby.org). She is a religious leader, attorney and poet. In 2012, she was instrumental in organizing the Nuns on the Bus tour of nine states to oppose the “Ryan Budget” approved by the House of Representatives. In 2013 she led another cross-country Nuns on the Bus, focused on comprehensive immigration reform. Her book, *A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change and Community* was published in April. She has been practicing Zen meditation since 1983. Sr. Simone recently took time out of her very busy schedule to talk with us.

LP: How long have you been practicing contemplative prayer and what is your daily routine like?

Simone: Most mornings the alarm goes off at 5:00, I listen to the news and get up about 10 after, and then go and do about 45 minutes of meditation to an hour; it depends. And I do it out of Zen tradition meaning that it’s about a posture, being still and just trying to let go of all of my myriad of thoughts, conversations, organizing, all of that stuff. It’s always a challenge. I’m sort of laughing at myself this morning on that very score.

I’ve done Zen since 1983 and for me my experience of it was like diving in the deep end of a swimming pool. My community was hosting Willigis Jäger who’s a Zen Roshi and a Benedictine Monk, and he came to our retreat center in Encino, and my heart just leapt at the idea of doing it. So I went on the five day sitting retreat that he offered, and it was the biggest joy of my life. It was like... wow!

LP: Why do you think your heart leapt at that?

Simone: I had been trying centering prayer. I’d been kind of dabbling around the edges of it, but this was a whole context in which to do it, and to do it as a group was so enriching, and to do it with my community was a delight, and it just touched my heart deeply. I’ve always been drawn to more silence in prayer than words.

LP: You have a daily practice. Do you notice ways in which it has changed or affected your personal life and your work life?

Simone: Oh my gosh, yes. It’s the heart of who I am. Nuns on the Bus would have never happened without it, quite frankly. I describe my contemplative life as deep listening and walking willing. Gerald May in the book *Will and Spirit*, says the only thing we bring to the contemplative life is a willing heart. So for me that gets translated into being willing to listen. It’s all about



Sr. Simone at Representative King’s Office, Ames, Iowa

listening, listening to the nudges of the Spirit, being willing to risk, following that nudge even if it doesn’t make a lot of sense. And the Nuns on the Bus, my prayer was at the time, how do we use this moment for mission? And what came to me was to ask for help, and that’s what we did.

LP: You mean ask for help from the public?

Simone: From others, yes, for help figuring out what to do because what came to me was that we had too small of an imagination. Left to us, you know how Catholic sisters do things. We would have cut out felt letters and glued them on cardboard and tied it to a Prius and driven around the country. We would have never had a bus.

We had a meeting here at our office on May 14th, and the sign of the Holy Spirit for me is that nobody remembers who first said “road trip,” but it was clear by the end of this hour and a half meeting we were going on the road. We were going in a wrapped bus. I had no idea what a wrapped bus was. And we were going to lift up the works of Catholic sisters

and push back against the Ryan budget, which we'd been doing for a couple years. It was totally out of the contemplative stance.

LP: A lot of different things are putting Catholic sisters in the public eye right now, and the Nuns on the Bus was certainly one of them.

Simone: Well, and it's all thanks to the Vatican. That's the other piece that the contemplative stance does is give perspective. So then nothing ever goes wrong. There's no such thing as a failure. It's all just a matter of how do we see the deeper truth of the whole thing? The Holy Spirit is so alive and well, and making mischief as they say. It's fabulous. But if there had never been the Vatican censure, there never would have been Nuns on the Bus.

LP: How do you mean that?

Simone: Well, I mean our effort was to use the moment of notoriety that we had because of the censure, because NETWORK was named in the censure, which was pretty amusing. Nine fulltime staff and we were making the Vatican nervous. I mean it just made me laugh. I can say it made me laugh, but it was hurtful.

LP: Yes, it was. I remember when it happened. It was shocking, but then you made a positive out of it, if that's possible.

Simone: Oh yes, I mean it's totally possible because the Spirit uses all things to good. Sometimes I wonder in what timeframe. Geologic time? Just how long is this going to take? But it's true.

LP: You had a second tour of Nuns on the Bus. Will there be others?

Simone: Yes, we went out on immigration reform. Now here's the challenge of the contemplative life, the two things that shut down a contemplative life are fear or holding on. I used to think that holding on, or grasping, was the result of fear, but what I've discovered is it's also a temptation for good stuff. It's very tempting just to hold on to good stuff because it's nice. But if we're holding on to good stuff, then we don't have our hands open to receive the new. With the Nuns on the Bus I say, "It's like Robin Hood, it'll show up when you need it." But I'm really clear that we can't just keep repeating it; that it's a gift for a time and to be sensitive to that gift is really important when it's appropriate and not to just hold on because we like it, and it was really fun, and we had a great time.

LP: It looked like a lot of fun.

Simone: Oh, it was amazing. The bus for us is magic. That's the seduction of it. Because we're with all these people, but then one of the things that I realized is that I think because we prayed together every morning when we were on the bus, and that at the core of what it was about was faith, that it had a whole different resonance than other just functional bus trips might.

LP: How many people were on the bus?

Simone: The first time we only had six seats for people on the bus. So we had a smaller crowd rotating and I think we had a total of 13 rotate through. The last year we had different configurations so we could get more people on. We had over 40 sisters rotate through, but then at all of our stops there'd be sisters and all kinds of folks.

LP: To shift gears just a little, when you spoke at the National Communicators Network for Women Religious conference you said something about practicing nice thoughts towards even those you aren't too fond of.

Simone: It's more than just nice thoughts; it's radical acceptance. It's accepting folks—everyone—in love, even if I think they're out to lunch. It's a huge challenge, but that's the thing about the contemplative life; no one is a mistake, and having the perspective to see that we are one body, that God hums them as much as God hums me. That's how I think of it. Radical acceptance is all about letting them into my life, not shutting them out.

LP: Do you intentionally go into contemplation working on that, or is it something that grows out of a contemplative practice?

Simone: I think it grows out of a contemplative practice, but it was also on a contemplative retreat where I got pushed into it. It wasn't willingly. Pat Hawk who was a Redemptorist Priest and a Zen Rishi pushed me to radically accept and fight. And the combination of radical acceptance and fighting, for me, the image is fire, and then it becomes about Pentecost, being Pentecost. The burning bush first and then Pentecost is the new burning bush where we all get called to let God flame-up in our lives.

LP: How do you think anyone can incorporate and benefit from that kind of practice?

Simone: I think it is what we're all called to. I don't think anybody's left out of this, but we all have our different paths, and some of what I've learned is you have to trust your path. God is in the midst of us. My image of

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Coffee House Contemplation

by Simone Campbell, SSS

Marvel at this convivial cup that quenches a dual life—a jolt of froth and flavor, foam and fragrance. Ah! Cappuccino!

Poised, waiting to be drunk, we see the brown, the white, the blurring line of demarcation.

But in the sacramental moment of sipping—two are scorching one then gone! Mmmm! Cappuccino!



Evidence for Evolution

by Simone Campbell, SSS

We, as children, learned with rote certainty: We are created in the image and likeness of God! We live rather disbelieving, unable to comprehend our noble mirror status. But accept, for now, this premise. Engage the hidden corollary: If we reflect God, then, God, like us, must be an avoider of the daunting challenge of creation.

In our bones we know that, if like us, God would not, could not, do all of creation in six compact days.

We breathe the certainty that, if we're like God, then God ponders, dawdles, plays solitaire, turns an idle thought into a reflective moment, yields to the unknown, unguessed glimmer, the seed of opportunity—an acorn that does root down in earth and soul—the clay of our sinewed selves resulting in the Creator's gasp, then chuckle at this emerging surprise.

It's Nothing Personal...or Is It?

by Mike DeVito, CSJP-A

"It's nothing personal – it's just business." It's a common expression often used in business, politics and other aspects of life – we've all heard it and maybe used it. It's an expression sometimes used as a free pass to possibly mistreat others under the guise of doing business or as a waiver from the usual respect or dignity one may typically afford another. It's a phrase that stings me deeper each time I hear it, and it affects me in a new light as an Associate with the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace (CSJP).

I initially heard about the Congregation through friends in my town who I deeply admire, and my interest was piqued. Later, when my wife Gail became an associate, I learned more about the Congregation and knew this was something I wanted to be a part of but wasn't quite sure how I could fit in. The answer came to me while I was going through the covenanting process. In speaking with associate Bob Chambers and wondering how I could possibly contribute to the Congregation and be worthy of membership in such a group, Bob told me, "We get to take the charism to places that the Sisters typically don't go." Such as the companies we work for and those we conduct business with. Those words and that challenge have always resonated within me and have certainly made all aspects of my life richer – especially work.

In learning more about the sisters' ministries and what I consider the miraculous work they have done throughout the years pursuing justice in the trenches of humanity through their efforts in education, healthcare, human rights, protecting the environment and other missions, I was inspired to apply the charism to all aspects of my life, especially in my management position in the corporate world where I spend most of my time. In addition, the charism of the sisters reflects a contemplative stance that raises my consciousness and deepens my awareness on an ongoing basis to ask myself the question, "Why am I here and is this the best I can do?"

CSJP Constitution 15 states: *"Our call to peacemaking permeates all aspects of our lives together. It seeks expression in mutual love and concern. It challenges us to accept and share our gifts and empower others to do likewise."* While I think my work pales in comparison to that of the sisters, I draw strength and wisdom from their triumphs and struggles. I have always believed that when you surround yourself with good people, you can't help but to become a better person, and I believe I continue to



Sister Associate Retreat Day, L to R: Mike DeVito, Sr. Eithne Brady, Ann Wagner, Sr. Antoinette Moore, Frank McCann

constructively grow through my connection with the sisters.

Injustices exist in all aspects of life. Through living the CSJP charism of peace through justice, I have become more aware and perceptive of those injustices that affect humanity, nature and the environment. I have personal experience with circumstances that are not always fair and just in the corporate world. But one of the greatest gifts in experiencing an injustice is that it helps build a sensitivity and awareness to the necessity to be peacemakers in the world today. Awareness is the first step in facing injustices and eventually taking action to work toward more productive and peaceful relationships. In the end, whether at work or outside of work, most people want the same basic things in life: stable employment, to take care of their families, sufficient food and shelter and a healthy environment to pass on to future generations. Why not help everyone achieve these needs regardless of who or where they are? In a book I am currently reading, *Pope Francis, Why He Leads the Way He Leads* by Chris Lowney, there is a simple quote by Pope Francis that I think sums this up: "Don't just look; do something. Once you walk among us and know our reality, you will never be content to witness suffering passively."

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The Supreme Contemplation

by Rev. Ann Wagner, Roshi, CSJP-A

My first knowledge of death came from my Catholic roots. If I led a good life of justice and compassion, Jesus would usher me into heaven where I would rest in the presence of God. This God was the sky God that I spoke to and tried to please all my life.

I held onto this concept until I was in my early 50s. I raised our four children with this belief.

My concept of God and Jesus slowly changed through my practice of contemplative prayer with Fr. Thomas Keating and my Zen teacher Genki Kahn along with my 14 years of working with the homeless in the city of Paterson, New Jersey. In the 1980s I held the hands of many who died from AIDS. I was amazed at their strength and steadfastness during this time of letting go.

Michael our firstborn was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2002; he was married to Maria, a beautiful woman from Columbia whom he loved dearly. They had two sons who were five and three. When his first son was delivered he reunited with his Catholic faith. All that his father and I taught him as a child he taught his children and embraced himself in his faith.

When Michael was diagnosed his cancer was already at stage four. He had a doctor's appointment after work and received the news on Good Friday. Maria and the boys were driving later in the afternoon to our home so that we could all be together for Easter. We were sitting on the couch and Mike laid his head on my lap and said, "Mom what is going to happen to me?" He lasted ten months. I was with him when he came into the world and helped birth him into the next.

There was one problem for me during this time. I no longer believed what we taught him as he grew to be a man. But I was able to put everything aside and be totally present to him, and his suffering, and where he was during the end of his life.

Zen teaches to be totally present to life, but that life is impermanence. We are all going to die, and it could be today. My life has been completely



Roshi Ankai (Ann Wagner) with Roshi Genki.

restructured because I now believe it. The rugged truth of impermanence has simplified my life, shown me what is important, inspired me to continue my contemplative spirituality.

The Buddhists have reminders, or thoughts that turn the mind and are an important preparation for death.

First: Contemplate the preciousness of being free. Now I must do something meaningful.

Second: The whole world and its inhabitants are impermanent.

Third: When death comes I will be helpless. I must always devote myself to virtuous actions. Thinking this, every day I will examine myself.

Andrew Holecek, in his book *Preparing to Die*, says the following.

Ask yourself these two questions: Do I remember at every moment that I am dying, and that

“The rugged truth of impermanence has simplified my life, shown me what is important, inspired me to continue my contemplative spirituality.”

everyone and everything else is, and so treat all beings at all times with compassion? Has my understanding of death and impermanence become so keen and so urgent that I am devoting every second to the pursuit of enlightenment? If you can answer, “yes” to both of these, then you really understand impermanence.

One of my Zen teachers, Anthony DeMello, SJ, said he pictures himself every morning laying in a coffin with his left ankle over his right for this is how you are laid out in India.

Dying people sometimes ask, “Why do I have to die when everyone else keeps on living? It is so unfair. Why me?” At that point, it can be helpful for them to remember that those left behind are not returning to a party that lasts until infinity. Those left behind are returning to a challenging life that is filled with joy as well as dissatisfaction and suffering. It is a matter of time before everyone dies.

I was able to walk with our son through the dying process and as best as I could through my total presence with him answer his question, “Mom what is going to happen to me?”

I said, “Michael follow Jesus; through his life he showed you not only how to live, but also most importantly how to die.”

Michael was only in the hospital bed for one night, and when it was delivered, he walked to it with the assistance of his wife, his father and me. I was with him the night before he died, and he asked me to help him with a phone call to order pink roses for Maria for Valentine’s Day. He died Feb. 11th, and he was buried Feb 14th. Maria still has the roses with the card she received the day he was buried. It said, “I will love you always.” Our whole family was blessed by this one presence of the divine Presence that encompasses all life. I was blessed by being his mother.



River rocks, Hunter’s Creek, Aspen, Colorado by Alan Hoshor

Rev. Ann Ankai Wagner, Roshi, Christian Zen, Living Presence Community of Zen Garland Airmont, NY
Roshi Ankai has been a CSJP Associate for 31 years. She is Co-Founder of Oasis A Haven for Women and Children in Paterson NJ.



First Session

by Susan Dewitt, CSJP

How can I find hope?

Take off your coat and sit down. Sit down. Not on the couch. There's a straight-backed wooden chair. Sit there. Wait until you can breathe more easily. Let your heart calm down a little. Now. What do you seek?

How can I find hope?

Remember the way you came here, driving or driven, all the lights on in the winter dark: did you see anything unexpected? A blue roof? A snowy owl? A ragged man with a backpack? Did a red hound chase the car? Were primroses blooming early in a yard you passed? Have you seen nothing?

Nothing. But what can I do? How can I find hope?

Where were you when you were seeing nothing along the way?

I was still at work, I was chewing over my day's cud – people, confusion, bad news, a headache, worry – I was watching the traffic, listening to the news. What are you getting at? What can I do? How can I find hope?

Stay seated, please. Don't be alarmed.

Breathe slowly and again. Notice this moment full of silences. Notice your breath and those thoughts chasing each other around – notice them too, as you might notice a red hound, a snowy owl, a ragged man. Notice the color of your shoes, the feel of the chair on your backside, rumbles of digestion.

All very fine, all calming, but irrelevant. In the face of war, earthquakes, poverty, outrages, stupidity, the rape of earth, the loss of human kindness, how can I find hope?

Try speaking softly. Hope is a story you tell yourself as despair is also a story you tell yourself. Try living for a minute without stories. Breathe and let go of them all. You will find you hardly recognize yourself. You will find *yourself* shifting, dispersing. You will breathe unimagined air. You will find

Hope?

Perhaps. Or perhaps the next breath or a snowy owl. Pay attention.

Prayer Progression

by Eileen Byrne, CSJP

First prayers remain with us—this is certainly true for me. They got added to during different stages of my life, but never taken away from or substituted. They are always a constant when I need to pray but cannot rouse my mind and heart to concentrate deeply.

My memories range over the “God bless...” prayers at bedtime, which were usually family connected but could, on occasion, stretch to friends and even pets. Then, there was the family Rosary every evening after tea when we would kneel down, lean on the chair we had been sitting on at the table, and pray together; in later years, as we grew up and, I suspect, as our parents got older, we said the Rosary as we sat at the table. During the day the church bell rang at three different times, eight o’clock, noon and six in the evening and we said the Angelus as we listened to the bell. Even in this modern time, the State TV evening news starts with the sound of a church bell ringing out the Angelus. I don’t remember learning the Our Father or Hail Mary—I just absorbed them and perfected them with repetition, so they were embedded in my soul and remain so.

Early school led to an increase in specific prayers to prepare for First Sacraments—Acts of Contrition and Faith, Hope and Love and as we approached Confirmation we learned the Memorare, the Hail Holy Queen, the Litany of Our Lady etc. All these prayers could be found in any Daily Prayer Book.

It was only when I entered Religious life that I moved on to a different prayer style—meditation and praying with the Gospels, the Psalms and other books of the Old Testament, but always there was the printed word before me, perhaps a short passage or just a phrase or a single word which would occupy my mind and lead me into closer connection with God. Quiet times in Chapel in the early morning were conducive to prayerfulness (and sometimes sleep!). Communal prayer was not confined to Chapel as we used our house-chore time to string prayers for the Holy Souls and to say Rosaries for special intentions.

Later, when Novitiate days were long past, I experienced the joy of folding nature, all of Creation into my prayer—I realised that to contemplate Creation was a blessed way to reach God, and I was surrounded by God in all areas of my life. And, as I was drawn to be more aware of the fragility of Earth, I accepted that there was a place for “heart prayer” in response to the



Stained glass from Chapel, St.-Mary-on-the-Lake, Bellevue, WA

concerns I had for Peace, for Reconciliation, for the needy in society, for the injustices I saw around me. These were and still are the times I use the words in my heart, or most often, just open my heart, sit without words and put everything in God’s hands.

I know there has been a progression in my prayer, and while I savor the rich cadences of Psalms and prayers at Office, I also delight in the simplicity of personal conversation with God, the quiet pauses that add so much to my listening capacity, to the quality and depth of my contemplation. Many times in these special pauses I can only pray in thanksgiving that I grew into the freedom of a kind of familiarity with God which doesn’t restrict but encourages, which opens up new ways to meditate.

The best prayers are those which come from the heart; this can be hard work sometimes, when I cannot focus or draw anything from my heart because of my weakness. But I must always be aware that my prayer has a positive influence on how I live. God speaks to all of us—he never shouts so we need to listen for His voice in what we see and hear around us.

God is that God hums us all the time. God is the hum of the universe, the hum that holds us together. God creates us at every moment. So we're never orphaned. We're never left. How are we called to turn our attention to that? Everybody's path is different, but it's all sacred.

LP: When you say God hums us, do you have a visual image of God or do you think of God as everywhere and everything and within and without?

Simone: That's how I got into this thing. I was going to be leaving retreat in Tucson. After I was in leadership in the community, I went on seven weeks of Zen; it was fabulous, a little space-making. It was one of the last days, and I was out walking in Tucson. I don't know if you know Tucson; it's exquisitely beautiful and ringed in these mountains, and so I said, "Oh God, I'm going to miss you in these mountains, but then you're everywhere." And what echoed back to me was, "No, Simone, I *am* everywhere." It's existence not location, and in that I realized that God is all of us. God holds us together in every moment. And we can't be separated from God. Even though I feel at times distance, that's my problem; that's not God's problem.



Rapids, Petrohué, Chile by Alan Hoshor

LP: In some ways it feels privileged for us to be able to talk about and pursue a contemplative life when there are people in poverty in the world who have to think about survival—finding work or getting heat or keeping food on the table.

Simone: But do you know what? I've met a lot of low income folks that struggle every day for survival, but they have a much greater sense of the nearness of God.

LP: Do you think they have a stronger faith?

Simone: They certainly have a stronger daily experience, because they know how hard it is. They don't even pretend they can manage it, that they're in charge.

LP: I believe your book came out in April?

Simone: April 15th it went on sale.

LP: What is it called?

Simone: *A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change and Community*. It's sort of a memoir. What I care about is the intersection of faith and politics. It's trying to encourage creating community going forward. But it's also going to have some of my poetry in it.

LP: Regarding the intersection of faith and politics, it seems like now everything is intersecting more and that everything is becoming less separate from faith. Do you feel that way?

Simone: Well, I've never really seen them as separate. I mean for me the Gospels have always been about justice so they've always been connected. But it does seem like other people are catching on which is nice. The Pope's Exhortation from November is "The Joy of the Gospel." That's totally about the intersection of faith and politics, it's fabulous, and peace-building and the economy and science. He's got it all in there.

We are one. We're one body, so it's all united. God's at the heart of it all. All creation groans in travail, one great act of giving birth, so we just keep at it.

TREE

by Nancy Barrett-Dennehy, CSJP-A

Fir, Cedar, Birch, Willow

Waiting, silent, rooted, ready, receptive.

The breeze stirs each limb

And the tree dances in response.

The branches wave, dip, swing,

Each to its own rhythm, flexible and free.

Sighing, rustling, each singing its particular song.

Or when the east winds sweep down the mountain,

The branches whip and tear and lash,

They moan and creak,

Their song now full of fury and passion.

This is the integrity I seek to live out.

Not frantically or fretfully,

But with the sure anticipation it will unfold

As I welcome the breath of the Spirit,

Waiting, silent, rooted, ready, receptive.



Pondering Presence

by Margaret Redmond, CSJP

My sunhouse is safe
 Several elevations above sea level
 in St. Beunos Spirituality Centre.
 Below the distant fields are awash
 from December's incessant rains
 Few animals to be seen - the land is bogland.
 Contrast the fields above me -
 Cattle and sheep grazing in lush pasture as if mid May

Incredible sun ablaze, with warmth too
 Most trees bare except for verdant evergreens
 Some like Christmas trees shining, twinkling
 tall and straight
 Others bent and twisted and ageing
 Lawns with pleasant smell of dewy grass.
 Have to keep reminding myself it is mid January!
 Could Spring be mistaken in its leap forward
 even if not total in its tumultuous spring-ness?
 Daffodils, primroses, daisies, bluebells, buttercups
 all adorned in their beauty
 While I patiently wait for sleepy snowdrop to appear.

Here in my sunhouse
 Peace, Serenity, Stillness, Freedom abound.
 Thrush, blackbird, seagull announce their presence
 peeping through my windows
 Squirrels pose for my attention and food

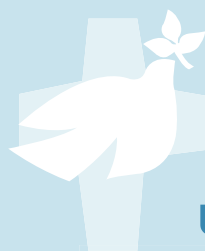
Even a wasp and butterfly pay a visit to my still centre
 Busy A55 Road less than a mile away, yet all is calm.
 To my left the Rock Chapel
 now with its beautiful stain-glass windows
 A gem, saturated in prayer by pilgrims in their
 thousands.

In the distance my eyes
 soak in the exquisite grandeur of snow capped -
 Snowdon
 Together with Llandudno Pier
 Reflecting the glory of creation and their Creator
 The sea water smooth as polished glass
 completes the breath-taking panoramic view
 Reminding me of John Masefield's "Seafever"

How can anyone be so blessed
 Seeing from here the grandeur of God's Creation
 No wonder the Jesuit Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins
 could not put down his quill
 As I walk my daily path and ponder, leaning on my
 stick
 Walking the labyrinth, carrying you in my heart
 I relish the sacredness of this blessed place
 The many footsteps of people who have walked this
 ground
 before time began - a history only God knows.

It's Nothing Personal, continued from page 11

A simple reminder for me is that God is in all of us—always—not just in times of prayer or solitude—regardless of the situation. Even at work no matter who I am dealing with, whether I like the person or not, whether I know that individual is trying to take advantage of a situation or maybe not acting justly, isn't God still in that person despite the circumstances? Whether in church or at work, the Godliness within that person is no different. The mystery we name "God" is present in that person as much as this Presence resides in me. Of course, it's not always easy to see everyone in this light in every situation, but it certainly makes things more interesting and challenging and has the potential to lead to a more just interaction and relationship. In the end, all human interaction is personal and should be dignified, respectful and peaceful, even if it is just business.



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*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,
by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let
your requests be made known to God.*

—Philippians 4:6

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