



# THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE PROJECT

DECEMBER 2011

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1


## Mary, Mother of God: Lives Impregnated with God

Silvia Dall'olio

*And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* (Luke 1:43), says Elizabeth, pregnant with John, to Mary, pregnant as well, and come to stay with her cousin for help in the last months of pregnancy. In Elizabeth's words Mary is greeted as the mother of God for the first time. The Church will declare it a dogma at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431, bringing the Nestorian heresy to an end and affirming that divine and human nature coexist in Jesus. Christians, however, had already recognized in Mary the mother of their Lord for centuries, joining Elizabeth on the scene of the Visitation.

In this encounter of two pregnant women, the sterile and the virgin, God shows his over-abundant love and the great things a *yes* said to him can do. He has chosen a mother for his son, through whom he comes on earth and experiences human love in the maternal form. When Jesus will speak of God's love, he will speak of something that he knows, because of the communion, that *being one thing*, with his Father. But thanks to Mary,

the love of God that Jesus announces to the world also has a maternal side, because he has experienced his mother's embrace as well.

The maternal love of Mary is presence, meditative silence, service. It's an extra-ordinary way of living one of the most ordinary events on earth: having a baby. Taking care of a child, as caregiver, foster, natural, adoptive parent, imposes us to forget about ourselves, to bend over someone else's needs and desires, even when our minds and strengths are unwilling to do so. And we still do it, out of love. When we manage to do this in a way that changes us and teaches us to be persons of service in our own homes, then, maybe, we are getting closer to Mary and to living an ordinary life in an extra-ordinary way. Then, maybe, we too are generating God in our hearts and on this earth. 

*Silvia is an editor for an Italian publishing company. She also teaches Italian. She is raising Giacomo and Viola with her husband Michael.*

## The Call to Holiness Advent: To Decipher the Whisper

Venus Wozniak

*So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and*

*said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"* (1 Kings 19:11-13)

And there was the Lord - speaking in a gentle breeze. Not thunder and lightening. Not an earthquake. Not a wind storm. Not fire. The whisper of a gentle breeze.

A few weeks ago, a few days before Halloween, I was accosted by Christmas music in the consumer arena of life. I was adamant to the cashier that it was unnecessarily early for Christmas music. My complaints were met with a smirk as she said, "It's all about marketing." The thing that I found so offensive was that upon hearing Christmas music, my being



entered into the panic mode of *gotta be ready for Christmas*. These few short moments in our consumer world abruptly woke me (not the peacefulness of a gentle breeze) to the reality of what we (society - all of us) have done to one of the most glorious mysteries of our faith - The Incarnation of the Christ.

Around the same time, I was at a visit with my spiritual director. I confessed that in the chaos of life, I was finding it difficult to pray. There was just no time. Unless I was at adoration, sitting in stillness in front of the Eucharist (which was not happening as frequently as I liked,) I did not feel that I could really settle into a prayerful mindset. He was quick with his response, "That's easy. Use your daily work - teaching, serving dinner, helping Gracie get ready for school - as your prayer. Your way to be before

Christ. Serving your family." Right. *Ora et Labora. Prayer and Work*. Work becomes the prayer. And recognizing Christ in those closest to you through service to them. I have heard all that before. He called my bluff.

Now, as the days darken earlier and earlier, my heart and mind turn to Advent - the time when we hold the mysteries of our faith particularly close that we may catch glimpses of the Eternal Light and then bear it to others. Not only do we prepare for the birth of the infant Jesus, but we look forward to the second coming of Christ.

*Continued on Page 2*

## Organizing Hospitality

Andrea Setmeyer

In thinking through some of the practicalities of opening a house of hospitality, we have begun to think about what daily life might look like in the Nativity House. Will there be house rules? Guidelines for sharing bathroom, kitchen, and living spaces? What responsibilities will we expect our guests to have? What will we do if (when) a guest breaks one of the rules? And how on earth do we balance an open spirit of hospitality with the reality of bringing strangers together and asking them to live as a community under the same roof?

Certainly Dorothy Day believed hospitality could cover a multitude of sins: *Cruelty and ugliness, sadness and want, all can be changed by warmth and light and food prepared and eaten in brotherly love* (Day, *The Catholic Worker*, Jan. 1952). But can a community truly exist peacefully without any rules at all?

I e-mailed some existing Catholic Worker Houses across the country and asked if they would be willing to share their guidelines for guests with me and any lessons they have learned along the way. Of the 14 responses I received, only one had attached any type of document that clearly listed the philosophy of the house and guidelines for their guests. Each house seemed to approach the issue a bit differently.

The responses ranged from quite simple:

*To be honest the only rules we've ever had are that our guests cannot drink/drug in the house, come back drunk/high, possess a weapon or use violence. We've had people stay as short as a night and as long as 5 years. It all*

*depends on their situation and ours.*

*In our experience this works better if it isn't imposed -- for example, parents often enjoy cooking their own family dinner favorites for the entire house, and if we keep meal sharing more spontaneous and less of a scheduled chore, everyone is in a better mood.*

To theoretical:


*The first question I'd offer to assist you is, what is the vision of the CW (Catholic Worker) community you hope to create? And what is the focus of the work of the community? I believe your answers to those questions will largely determine then what you want community life to look like.*

To humorously honest:

*We have a small place here and there are few set rules—there are rules, but they do not stay set. Someone named X comes and does something outrageous and stays six months. So after that person goes, we may have a rule that a person can only stay 30 days and can't do such and such; then someone Y comes and does not do such and such, but manages to do something else outrageous. And then when Z comes, we have forgotten X and are thinking only of avoiding Y and make some rule about it, which in time is forgotten.*

Some expressed rules made over health and safety concerns:

Any "full-time" community

table, - or creating a still space within while in service to your loved ones -will open your heart to the gifts only Jesus brings. 

*Venus is a Montessori teacher. She is member of Our Lady of Peace Parish where she serves on the Parish Council.*

*She may be contacted at venusad@nativity-house.org.*

*member can "veto" someone staying at the house because of safety issues. For both these folks and for folks who we don't really know, we'll offer yard-space for the short-term (a night, maybe 2-3 nights) if they don't want to stay at one of our local homeless shelters as well as invite them in for meals during daylight hours, etc.*

*We invest a lot of time in bed-bug prevention which is endemic in the shelters here; nothing can be brought into the house without being washed in hot water & machine dried. We limit personal possessions to 2 bags each.*

Others had implemented some intentional ways to create a community:


*Our focus is on creating a warm, homelike environment which supports them in doing these things. We give a lot of personal attention; there's a birthday party tonight. We all eat dinner together each evening. We encourage women to be supportive of each other without losing their focus on their own needs.*

And several of them also seemed to be working to balance hospitality with rules for living together:

*I have found that the fewer rules the better. Length of stay? We detail it to each individual. We currently have two guests who are long-term guests and a few who are more transitional. For our community it is more about "What are you doing to get your life where you want to be"(education, medical, work) and not so much about "How long can you stay?" I would say the average stay for our guests is 3-6 months. We do expect our guests to be present at dinner, served at 6pm all are welcome. We also expect our guests to do daily chores and to be good community.*

*Guests are welcome to attend Mass, prayers, and events but none are required. My best advice is to keep it small. Dorothy and Peter both felt very strongly about personalism, in fact it is central to the CW (Catholic Worker) movement. Personalism done well can only be done in a small community.*

*A lot of it is to live truly in the spirit and see where the greatest need is and meet who comes along – if someone comes along I think there is of course the Christian hospitality – but in my humble opinion, it is a place for people to get shelter/support as they try and move forward and get out of their situation, not simply use the house as a long term option. With mothers and children, I know that has been a problem in the past – but clear instructions at the beginning that it is not a long term option should be the way to go. Zero tolerance on drugs, alcohol is good to start out. It is a place for those struggling to get a new perspective, restore dignity and pride in themselves, embrace community, and to be inspired to share the love and support for others.*

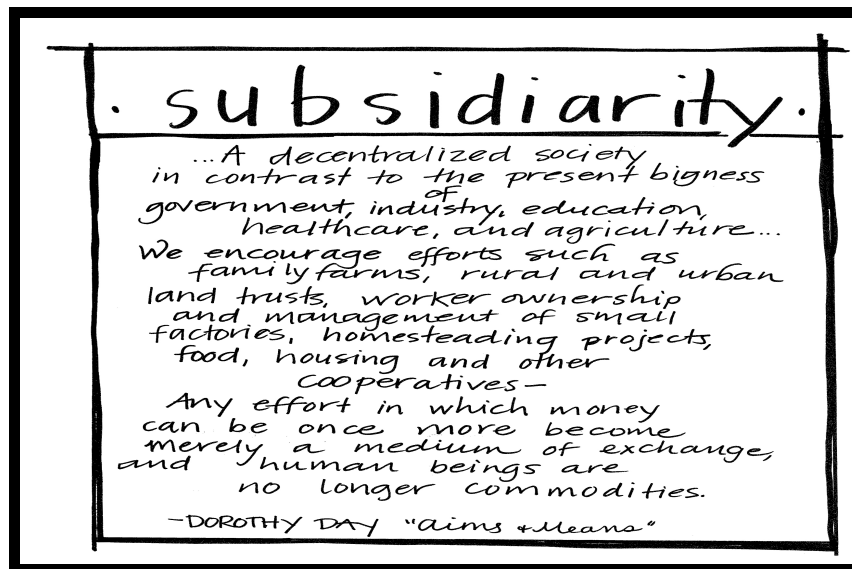
What about you? What rules do you have for your home? How do you create an atmosphere of hospitality? What does your vision for the guests at the Nativity House look like? We'd love to hear your thoughts as we partner together on this journey. 

*Andrea is a school psychology intern in the Laraway School District, a former family support worker with Healthy Families. She is a member of Sacred Heart Parish in Joliet. She can be reached at andreasetyer@yahoo.com*

Continued from Page 1

## Advent

My challenge to you this Advent is to decipher the whisper of the gentle breeze. We can embrace the moments of stillness in our everyday life and set them aside for Christ. We can take time to focus on particular events in Mary and Jesus' lives. The Joyful Mysteries are a great place to start, especially in Advent: The Annunciation, The Visitation, The Nativity, The Presentation of the Lord, The Finding of the Child Jesus. Sitting in silence, whether in front of the Eucharist or a lit candle at the dinner



## Lewis University Students Write for *The Visitation*

Adam Setmeyer

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus asks, *What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.*

Again he asked, *What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked*

*all through the dough.*

The **Catalyst Social Justice Team** at **Lewis University** (Romeoville, IL) is answering the call of this passage by bearing witness to the Kingdom of God, particularly by promoting social justice. The way the program works, roughly, is as follows: The team, comprised of six undergraduate students and two University Ministers, spends the fall semester growing in

their understanding of social justice by participating in service projects, prayerfully reflecting weekly on topics related social justice topics, hosting a Fair Trade Fair, and writing for this newspaper. All the while they are preparing to pass on what they have learned to thirty other students during the **Catalyst Retreat** in January – out of which next year’s Catalyst leaders will be chosen – by reflecting on how their eyes and ears have been opened to the need for justice in our world; their call by Jesus to become people of justice; how they have been transformed and hope to become agents of transformation in the world.

For this issue of *The Visitation* the Catalyst Team has been blessed with the opportunity to tell you, the reader, a piece of what they have learned – if only a small piece. Using the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, as found in the U.S. Bishop’s document *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, as a lens, the team is reflecting on how their personal experiences relate to what they have learned. We hope you enjoy. 🏠

*Adam is a University Minister at Lewis University and Co-Coordinator of the Catalyst Social Justice Team.*

## Two Friends and a Plan to Change the World

Ron Pollak

Most people think of the rights of the unborn and the elderly when they hear the Catholic social justice issue of *Life and Dignity of Every Human Person*. However, if we focus on the *dignity* part of this phrase we can come to the realization that we need to give every human person the respect they deserve. One group that addresses this issue at its core is Best Buddies.

The mission of Best Buddies is to establish a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Their vision is to put Best Buddies out of business. This makes sense if you think about it. If they accomplish their goal and create a society that is completely accepting of one another, Best Buddies will not be needed. Society will naturally perform all the services Best Buddies offers. I have personally seen the mission lived out through my friendship with my buddy and involvement in the organization.

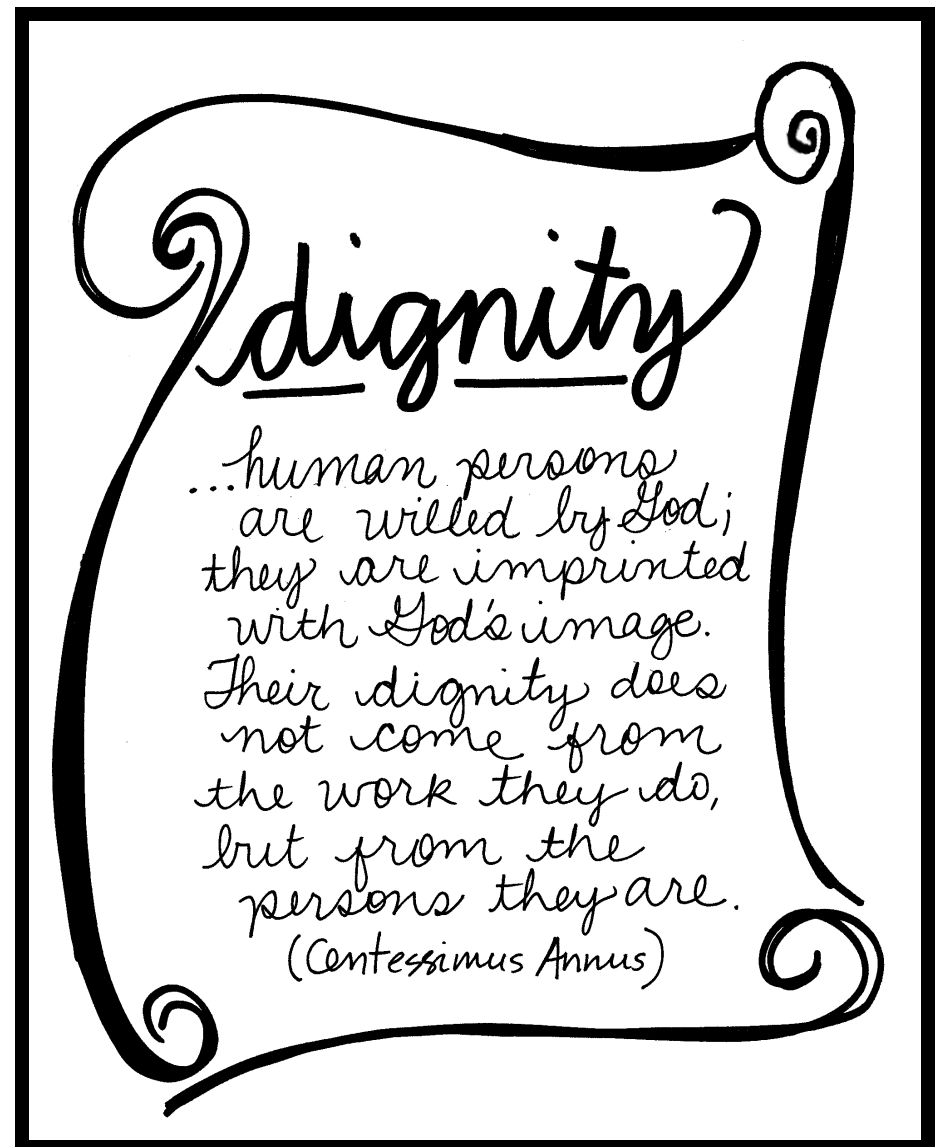
Best Buddies provides one-to-one friendships between college students and people with IDD’s. I was matched with my buddy my freshman year of college, and we are now entering our third year of friendship. What do we do? We love to do anything two normal friends would: we go out to eat, watch movies, listen to music, and dance like fools. The only thing that makes our friendship unique is how it started. Without Best Buddies, I would never have had the chance to meet my buddy.

Best Buddies does not directly offer integrated employment, but, by carrying out their vision, they create a society that does. For instance, this year, the Senate Committee on *Health, Education, Labor and Pensions* was trying to pass a bill that would make it legal to pay people with disabilities lower than the minimum wage. Their theory was that employers could give a disabled person a *chance* to work for below the minimum wage, to assess if they were worth the risk. However, this is a denial of the life and dignity of the human person. Best Buddies works everyday to educate people and create a world that pays everyone a fair wage.

Best Buddies educates and empowers people with IDD’s to become leaders in their schools, community and workplace through the Buddy Ambassador program. This program gives buddies the opportunity to use their public speaking skills to self advocate. They become active agents of change. They share their story with others when they speak at corporate events. I can honestly say they are better public speakers than me, and it motivated me to help live out their mission.

If you would like to get involved and help them achieve this goal, visit their website at [bestbuddies.org](http://bestbuddies.org) 🏠

*Ron Pollak is a junior at Lewis University majoring in Accountancy and Finance, and minoring in Economics.*



## Port Ministries: A Place for Families

Carissa Johnson


Upon arriving at the Port Ministries, I had no idea what we were about to experience. I was with the Catalyst team and this was our first service project of the semester. Excitement quickly took over because I knew we were going to be helping the poor in some shape or form.

When we got to the door, we were warmly greeted by Miss Kris, Miss Pat and Sr. Sarah. We were brought in to what they call the Mantle. This is the Family and Children center where they teach English to adults and provide child care and after school tutoring, all free of charge. As the families started to arrive, we were all gathered around in a circle and were invited to sing and dance along to a variety of songs. The children really enjoyed getting to dance and sing with their mothers and their smiles lit up the room. This seemed to be a great bonding time for the families.

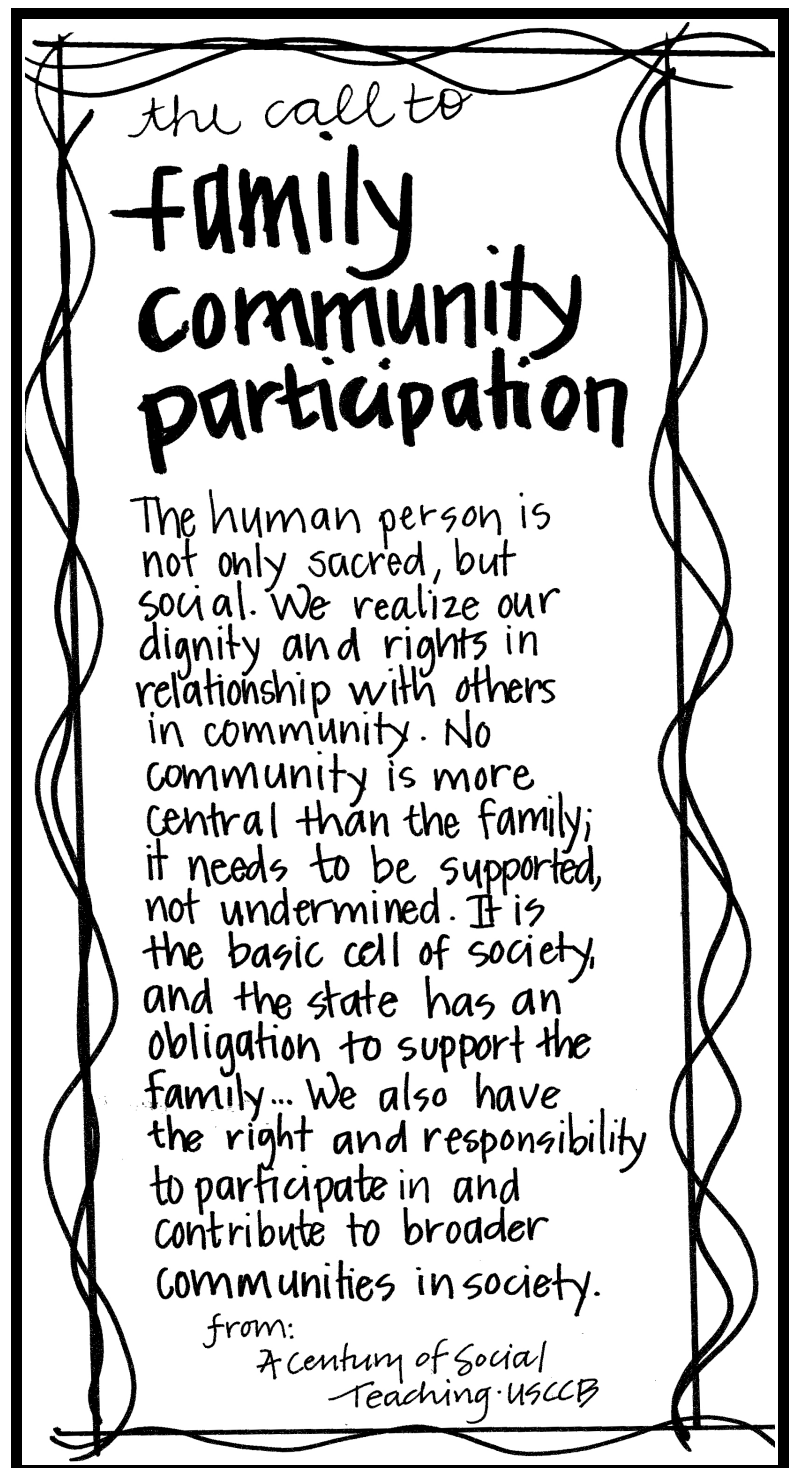
After singing and dancing, the mothers went to their English class and the children went into their classrooms. In the preschool room, the children were able to play during free time. One-by-one, students were called to work with some of us, the volunteers, to practice their English. We used flashcards to help the children practice their alphabet. This was a great activity for the preschool children who would be soon heading off to Kindergarten. Then, one of the coordinators sat down with the students and went over the calendar with them. Before going to snack time, she asked each of the students a different math question. It was amazing to see that most of them could do the math without any help. After snack time, the children were allowed to play some more before their mothers came to get them.

Finally, while some of us were volunteering at The Mantle, others went and helped out on the bread truck. The bread truck serves about 1350 meals a week to the poor. Volunteers come together to create and package all of the meals, so that Port Ministries can deliver food every day. Many people rely on them and it is great that they are able to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves.

Port Ministries strictly rely on volunteers and donations. Without them, the Port would not be able to help serve the poor the way that they do. They help provide for families and act as they are their own.

I see the Port Ministries as just doing their part to promote and embody Catholic Social Teaching. They bring a light to the *call to family, community, and participation*. Port Ministries treat the homeless and the poor as their own brothers and sisters, and the impact is noticeable. This is greatly needed and admired in our society today. I am so thankful that I was able to be a part of the Port Ministries for a day, it was an amazing and inspiring experience, and I cannot wait to give my time in service again. 

*Carissa Johnson is a senior at Lewis University majoring in Special Education-Elementary Education.*



## Finding Faith in the Law

Angela Cotta

As a college student who is a practicing Catholic and has a career goal of becoming a lawyer, it is important to me to maintain a connection between the law and my faith. The component of Catholicism known as Catholic Social Teaching allows me to do this. The principles of Catholic Social Teaching significantly connect both the areas of faith and law. Catholic Social Teaching provides a solid foundation for morals and ethics. The principle of *Rights and Responsibilities* is the most relevant to the field of law, because it describes the obligations that lawyers should attempt to fulfill.

This principle can be described as *the Catholic tradition teaches that human*

*dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.* The ultimate goal of a lawyer is to protect the dignity of his or her clients. The law serves a purpose of protecting everyone's rights and ensuring that everyone meets their responsibilities. Rules are made to be a source of protection, not oppression. Laws should always result in justice, but because of greedy and power-hungry lawyers, justice is often lost, especially in the courtroom. When the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, especially *Rights and Responsibilities*, are emphasized the goal of justice becomes a reality again.

One area, *public-interest law*, focuses specifically on reaching out to the less fortunate members of society. Public interest law has the strongest connection to our faith. Public-interest lawyers enter this field because they want to serve their communities and *fight the good fight*. They are not interested in practicing law for the paycheck. Public interest lawyers exemplify the principle of *Rights and Responsibilities*, because they willingly choose to accept the overall responsibility of defending the rights of the poor. This area of law also has a strong connection to social justice. There are so many opportunities that people living in poor communities could never dream of without the work of public interest lawyers. These attorneys are also advocates for the needs of poverty-stricken individuals.

My hope is to become one of the lawyers who can make the future

brighter for the less fortunate individuals around me. My *right* to take my life in the direction I choose is protected fairly well, so I see it is as my *responsibility* to protect and defend the rights of individuals less fortunate than myself. I also desire to live out the Catholic Social Teaching principle of *Rights and Responsibilities* by working for equal opportunities for all people regardless of wealth and advocating for the needs of the poor.

*Angela Cotta is junior at Lewis University majoring in History and Theology.*

## One Body

Ryan Snow


Recently, I traveled on the Lewis University Ministry Trip to Tennessee to help work on houses that would be sold to families in need at an affordable cost without burdening them with high interest rates. While we were down there, we went to one man's house to help him clean up his property from tornado damage. This man lost everything he had; his entire house lay in pieces everywhere, his wife was killed in the tornado, and his property was covered in debris and damaged trees. It reminded me of the story of Job where Job lost everything in his

life. *This man* was at *that point*. He lost his wife, so I'm sure he felt like he lost his family.

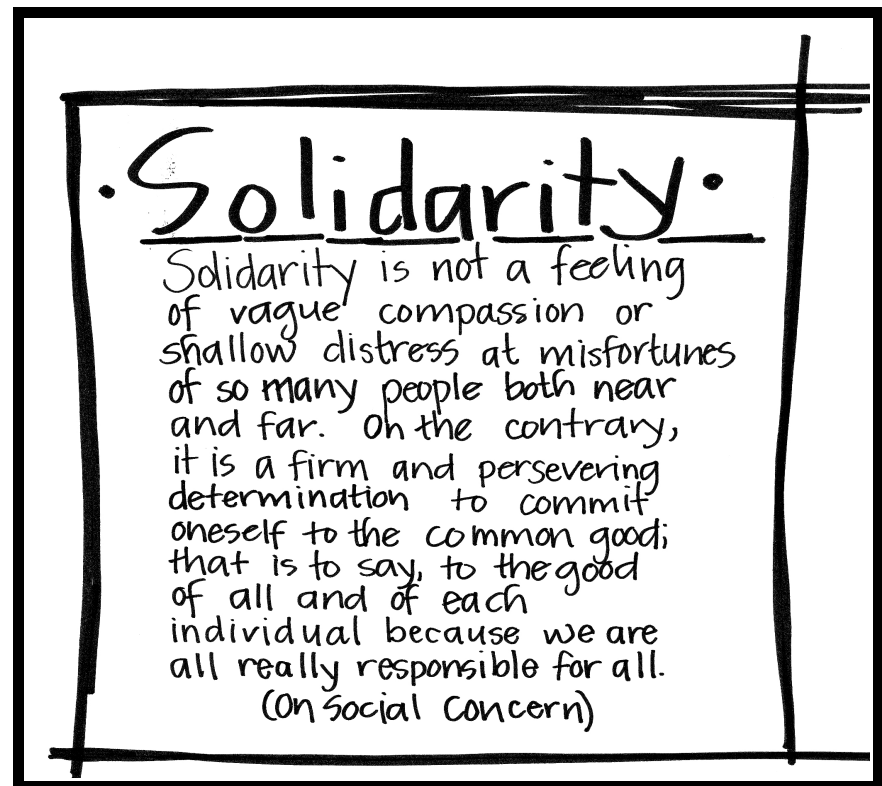
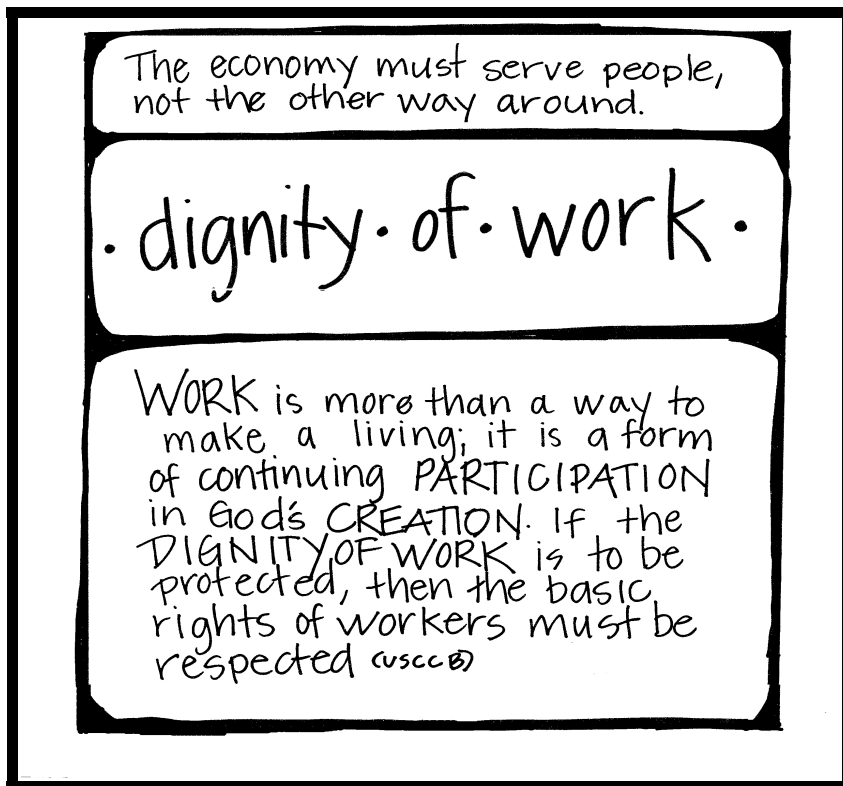
This encounter and this trip reminded me of the Catholic Social Teaching principle of *Solidarity*. Solidarity means learning that *loving our neighbor* has global dimensions in an interdependent world. I hope our habitat group helped in a way to show this man that we are one human family and that even though he lost his wife, there is a huge Christian family out there that will help him out. I know we

could not fix the damage the tornado caused in his life, but my wish is that we at least brought some hope back into his life, and that there is good out there despite the bad things that were thrown into his life. I hope that he felt the love for our neighbor we offered and tried to bring through our service. I believe that is what the teaching of Solidarity is all about: show love towards our neighbor.

I had never met or even heard of this man until we went to Tennessee; however I still cared for him and wanted to help him because we are all part of one human family. Christ speaks of the Church as one body. He says that one part of the body cannot function properly without the other.

That is how our world should be: one body. As one body we should all work together to keep all parts functioning. There should not be people that are living on the streets hungry, while others are trying to decide which sports car they will take to work that day. It should be everyone's concern to look out for another to make sure that these types of things do not go on because we are all one human family. 

*Ryan Snow is a senior at Lewis University majoring in Aviation Security while minoring in Aviation Flight Management and Business Administration.*



## Fair Trade What?

Liana Vantrease

Students at Lewis are constantly complaining about the food and beverage selection that our school has to offer, but they are doing it for the wrong reasons. Regardless of the fact that we have four places to eat on campus, it is rare to find someone who is satisfied with the options. The food is too bland or seasoned, cold or hot, undercooked or overcooked, and the coffee is too strong or weak, bold or mild, or too cold. These miniscule concerns are nothing compared to the complaints that our brothers and sisters from overseas have about the choices we make as consumers.

Last year, the Catalyst team hosted our first ever *Fair Trade Fair*, and one of our goals was to ensure that the students would stop caring so much about how bad the food or drinks

tasted on campus. Instead, we wanted them to focus on all of the laborers overseas who are being paid a very unfair wage, while those of us in the free-market system are drastically profiting. According to an article written by the Catholic Relief Services, it is our moral responsibility to advocate for fair wages, safe working conditions, cooperative workplaces, credit and technical assistance, environmental stewardship, and long-term trading relationships.


During the Fair itself, the Catalyst Team helped raise awareness about the injustice that the students on campus were unknowingly a part of. Most of the students that we would approach about Fair Trade responded by saying something along the lines of *Fair Trade what?* While many of our peers

did not purchase anything from the Fair, it felt good to at least spread the word to others by advocating for those who are poverty-stricken, underprivileged, and treated unfairly.

This year, the team is attempting to do the same thing with the Fair Trade Fair, but we want to take it to the next level. To do so we are going to host an event in which we watch the movie *Black Gold*, and we are hoping that the students on campus will learn that their complaints about the food and drinks offered at school and in the world are insignificant compared to the complaints of laborers who are unfairly paid to produce said products.

Throughout the planning of the retreat, we have focused on the Catholic Social Teaching principles, and I cannot help but think of our responsibility pertaining to the *Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers*. A

worksheet that we constantly reference during our meetings emphasizes, *The economy must serve people, not the other way around*. This is something that all of the Catalyst leaders are trying to live by while we promote our Fair Trade Fair because the workers deserve fair wages, and more people need to be aware of this injustice that we actively participate in on a daily basis.

Therefore, we are hoping to change the attitudes of our student body at Lewis, one meal, cup of coffee, or person at a time. 

*Liana Vantrease is a senior at Lewis University majoring in English and Secondary Education. She is a student Co-Director of the Catalyst Team.*

## Want, Need, and the Preferential Commitment to the Poor

Kristen Calvert

As a child, I never realized all the privileges that I had growing up. Both my parents had well-paying jobs, we vacationed annually, and always had food on the table. We were not rich, relatively speaking, but looking back, I realize that I never—not once—worried about the financial stability of my parents.

Naturally, I assumed that everyone lived as I did. It was not until I was in third grade that I saw poverty in the world around me. I was on a school bus, returning home from a field trip to downtown Chicago, when we traveled down Lower Wacker Drive; there were mattresses and people laying down there. I understood immediately, but it was a strange reality for me as I started to compare—I sleep in a warm bed where my mother tucks me in at night and these people sleep out here in the cold. I was so upset. Devastated. I ended up writing a paper about it, about how I wanted to make a difference.

From a child's dream to an adult's reality, I still want to make a difference especially in the lives of those I deem less fortunate than myself. Simply by chance, I was dealt a good deck of cards at birth, and I have been blessed with many opportunities throughout my almost twenty-two years of life, but what about those who have not been so lucky? What about homeless children or people born in a cycle of poverty without the resources to ever get out for a chance at a better life? There are so many people in this world living in extreme poverty and I cannot simply sit by idly as if nothing were wrong. It feels morally *wrong* doing nothing, so therefore I serve.

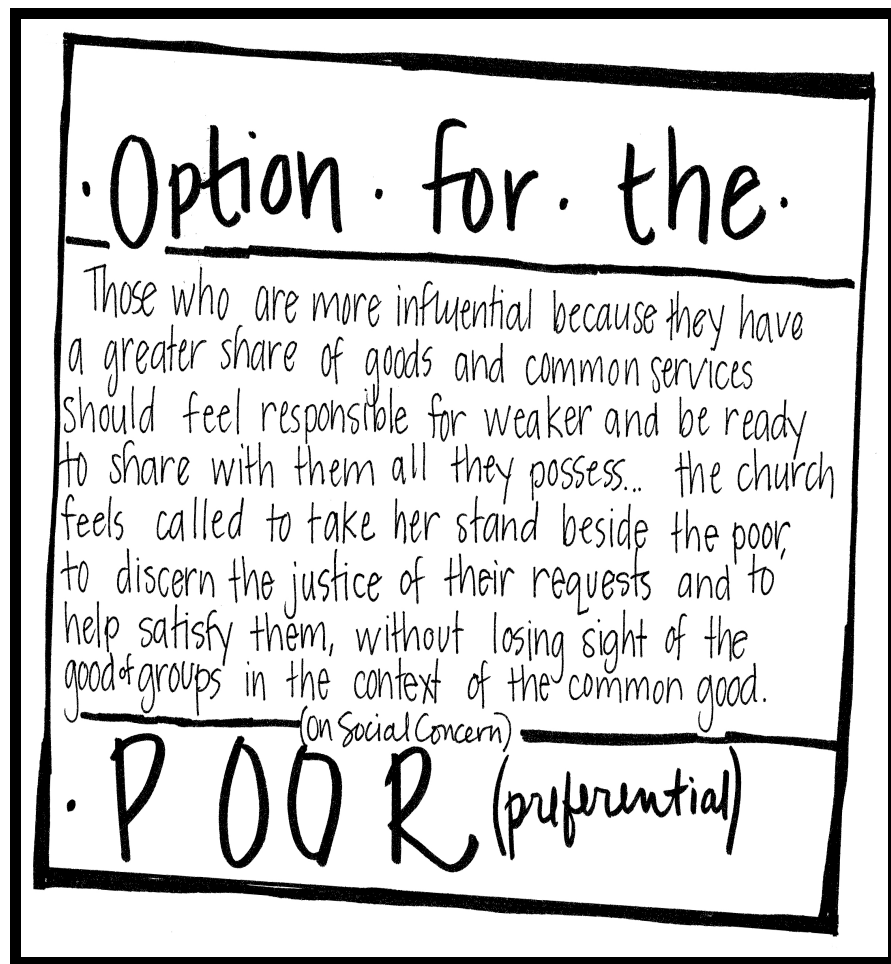
I have had many different volunteer opportunities but my most powerful

experience took place this summer while I was on a mission trip to Sucre, Bolivia, through Lewis University with the Diocese of Joliet during which we served children living in extreme poverty. One of my favorite sites to work at was a soup kitchen for the street children and the elderly. I enjoyed this experience greatly because it showed me the difference between WANT and NEED. Many of these children were malnourished and probably starving, but they never took more than they needed. Based on age and size, the children would ask for *grande* or *poquito* (large or small) for servings; on multiple occasions I accidentally gave a child a *grande* when he deserved a *poquito* and he told me; he wanted to make sure there was enough for everyone, for his friends, for his brothers. Seeing these children being selfless for the benefit of those around them inspired me to do as much as I can to serve the poor.

In my daily life, when an opportunity presents itself to lend a hand to those in need, I am always more than willing because I view it as, *I am only doing what I would hope that they would do for me if I were in their shoes*. I know that the world cannot get perfect in a day but I realize that if I want things to get better I must do something. So, I try to emulate one of my favorite quotes, by Mahatma Gandhi: *Be the change you wish to see in the world*. I am committing myself to the poor.



Kristen Calvert is a senior at Lewis University majoring in Special Education-Elementary Education and Psychology. She is a student Co-Director of the Catalyst Team.



## Meeting God Every Day


Sabrina Poulin

*I thought carrots come from a factory off a conveyor belt.* I was a senior in college, sitting in my Theological Ethics course, and we were discussing the care for God's creation, specifically modern farming practices and where our food comes from, when a girl in my class uttered this phrase aloud. I was flabbergasted. How could she think carrots come from a factory? Everyone knows that carrots are grown in the ground. Or at least I thought everyone knew that. But then I started thinking, *If you had never grown a carrot in a garden, how would you know where carrots come from? If you had never seen a cow being milked, you probably would not stop to think about where milk comes from past the dairy aisle.*

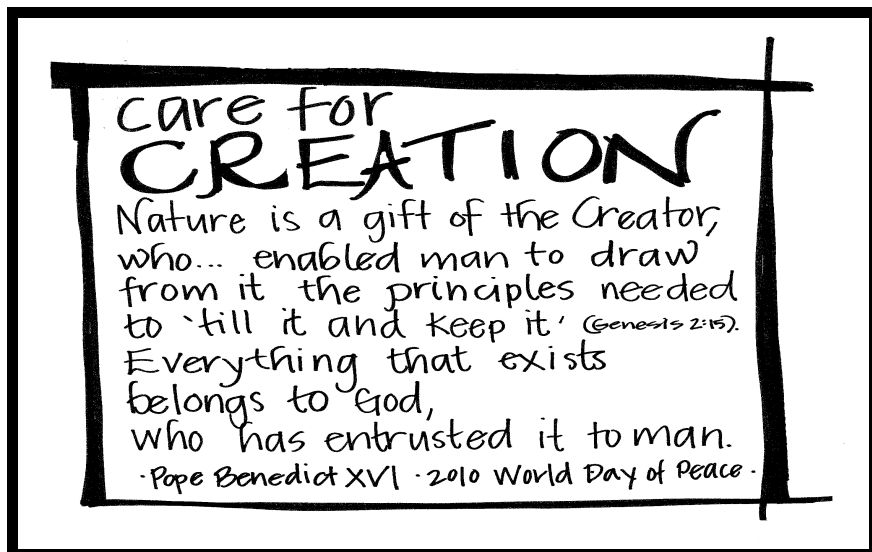
This was my first realization that we, as consumers, are completely removed from the source of our daily food. When Abraham Lincoln was president, 90% of Americans were farmers. Today, only 2% of Americans work as farmers. How can we care about how our food is raised or farmed, and subsequently, how Earth is being cared for, if we never come in direct contact with it?

*Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity – however invisible – has been there for the mind to see in things he has made. (Romans 1:20). Luckily, we come in contact with*

Earth every day; we just have to be more observant of the sacredness of Earth. Albert Fritsch, SJ writes, *The earth is not insensitive or devoid of communication; rather, the Earth is precious, for it is the meeting place of God and people....By sensing the earth we start to communicate [with it.] We receive an elemental word spoken here before us. We can start caring for God's creation by first opening our ears to hear what Earth is telling us. How she is no longer being held sacred by us, how she is deeply wounded by our misuse of her, and how the tie between she and us has been severed due to our busy lives demanding convenience.*

As a Christian, I am called to care for Earth, not just by recycling my plastics or using reusable grocery bags, but by holding Earth sacred and holy. I must see her as *the meeting place* between God and me. I need to know and feel the connection of her to me as a sacred bond. When I begin to do that, then I will truly care for her in a much deeper and more Christian way. 

Sabrina Poulin is a University Minister at Lewis University, and is Co-Coordinator of the Catalyst Social Justice Team.



### About *The Visitation*

This newspaper, *The Visitation*, is a publication on topics of spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House Project. Contributions are accepted from readers everywhere.

We need help with:

- Articles and topics: news, views, reviews, letters, event listings, etc.;
- Art: hand-drawn or graphic design; or
- Web and outreach volunteers.

To contact us, email us at

[newspaper@nativity-house.org](mailto:newspaper@nativity-house.org)

Issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

To ensure you continue to receive *The Visitation*, please subscribe by emailing the address above.

### About *Nativity House*

Nativity House will serve as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The project will also foster a mothering community offering education and support for all mothers. The program will operate on-site with community supported farm (CSA) that will provide nourishment for the mothering community and the greater community. Overall we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

The project is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that will be extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house.

Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us regarding this project, please email Venus at:

[venusad@nativity-house.org](mailto:venusad@nativity-house.org)

Postal mail should be addressed to:

**Nativity House**  
**5621 Plymouth St.**  
**Downers Grove, IL**  
**60516**

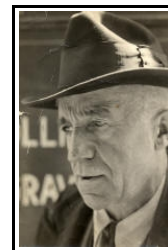
We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

### *Easy Essay:*

## The Irish Monks and the Reconstruction of the Social Order

### Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



The Holy Father and the Bishops ask us to reconstruct the social order.

they brought thought to the people.

The social order was once constructed through dynamic Catholic Action.

Through free guest houses that is to say, Houses of Hospitality, they popularized the divine virtue of charity.

When the barbarians invaded the decaying Roman Empire Irish missionaries went all over Europe and laid the foundations of medieval Europe.

Through farming communes that is to say, Agronomic Universities, they emphasized voluntary poverty.

Through the establishment of cultural centers, that is to say, Round-Table Discussions,

It was on the basis of personal charity and voluntary poverty that Irish missionaries laid the foundations of the social order.

### The Nativity House Round-Table Discussion Series

Nativity House is pleased to announce the inauguration of our Round-Table Discussion Series. Each discussion will occur after 6:30pm liturgy in the Church Hall of Our Lady of Peace Parish in Darien, Illinois. There will be a 30-40 minute panel presentation followed by a question and answer period of 30 minutes. Soup, salad and bread will be served.

- Saturday, January 21  
**Visions for Approaches to Poverty in the Southwest Suburbs**
- Saturday, February 11  
**The Domestic Church: Family as the First Catechist**
- Saturday, March 3  
**Eco-Justice: Exploring Church Teachings on Stewardship of Creation**

For questions, comments or RSVPs contact Venus at:

[venusad@nativity-house.org](mailto:venusad@nativity-house.org)

### Catholic Calendars

Nativity House is printing our first annual Catholic Calendar featuring Catholic Feast Days and artwork from the year's Visitation. Email Venus if you are interested:

[venusad@nativity-house.org](mailto:venusad@nativity-house.org)

## Profile of a Saint

### St. Anthony of Egypt

Matthew Ochalek

January 17  
Father of Monasticism

*Give us a word that we may hear and have life thereby.* St. Anthony (251-356 A.D.) no doubt heard these words frequently from seekers coming his way through the Egyptian desert. Anthony was one of the first Christian monks who, like so many others after him, fled the cities in search of God and the life of the Gospel.

Anthony was born in Egypt to Christian parents. His family was apparently economically comfortable, though his parents would die when he was 18 years old. Soon after Anthony heard the words of Jesus, *Go, sell what you have, give the money to the poor and follow me.* He was convinced these words were being spoken directly to him so he arranged for his sister to have shelter in a convent and headed out into the wilderness.

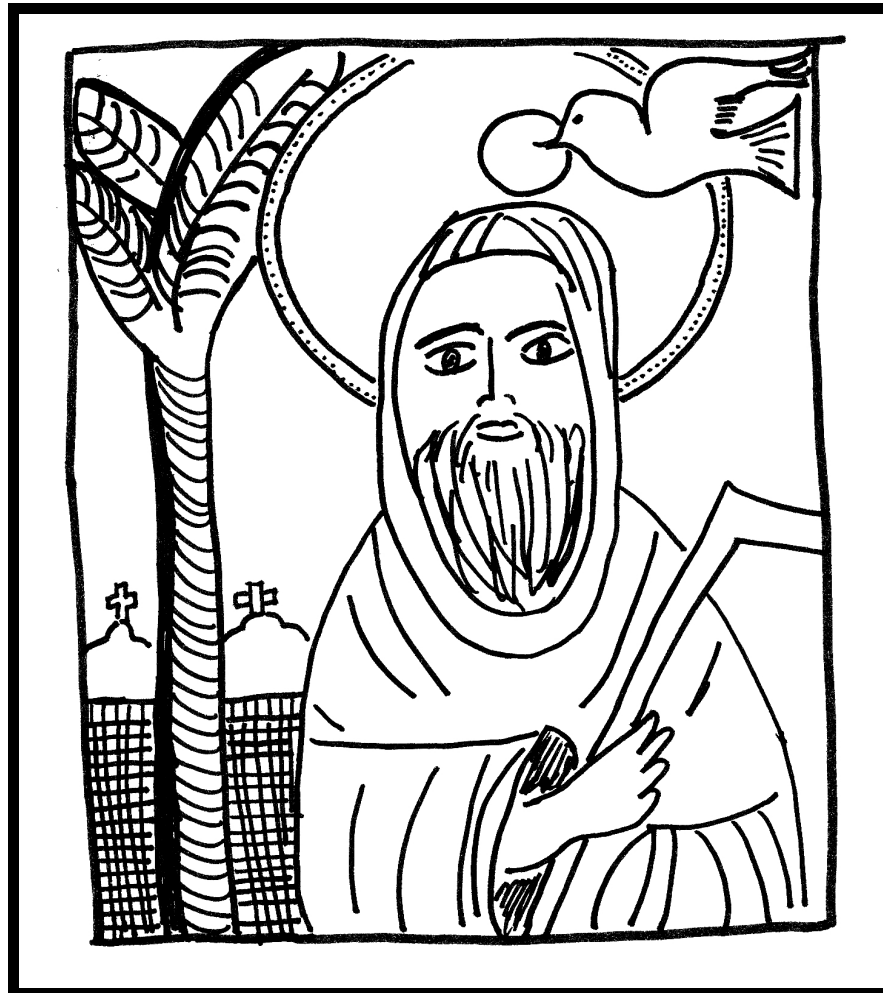
Anthony's life of prayer, study and work in solitude developed in him the discipline and wisdom that is well-known and rightly emphasized in hagiography. Yet, for Anthony, monasticism was not just about himself and God. Rather, after many years of solitude Anthony took to teaching young monks who came to him to learn the monastic way.

Though few Christians today, especially in the United States, are monks in the manner of St. Anthony there are many lessons in his life and words that are applicable to all. First, and perhaps most obvious, is Anthony's example and teaching on the need for solitary, contemplative

prayer. In *The Wisdom of the Desert*, Thomas Merton's translation of the sayings of the Desert Fathers, there is a teaching of Anthony in which he says, *Just as fish die if they remain on dry land so monks, remaining away from their cells, or dwelling with men of the world, lose their determination to persevere in solitary prayer.* Here Anthony admonishes monks to stay monks, to avoid the temptation to water down their vocation and return to the city. For 21<sup>st</sup> century lay folks, the lesson is similar: be in the world, but not of the world, cut out distractions, embrace silence and commune with God.

A second teaching of Anthony that is desperately needed today is another given to a fellow monk. He told his brother: *You must advance yet further in the fear of God... Go and insult that stone and beat it without ceasing.* When his brother had completed this task he asked if the stone had responded to the violence, which, of course, it had not. Then came Anthony's teaching: *You too must reach the point where you no longer take offense at anything.* It seems that many have lost the memory of Jesus' words *Whoever is angry is subject to judgment*, or Paul's *Be angry, but do not sin.* Anthony uses the natural world to demonstrate this teaching very concretely. Perhaps some would do well today to carry a small stone as a reminder of our calling to be free of anger and hatred and to assist us in responding lovingly to offenses great and small.

A final lesson, for the sake of this short profile anyway, to be drawn from St.



Anthony is one not of words but of action. It comes from *The Life of Anthony* by St. Athanasius. During a persecution, Anthony and the other monks went to Alexandria to care for the Christians headed to their martyrdom. When the judge saw how Anthony and the others were fearless in their encouragement of those about to die he ordered all monks out of the city or they would meet the same fate of death. All the monks fled except one. Anthony washed his garment and took the most visible position he could the next day to make sure the judge would see him. He stood his ground, *demonstrating the purposefulness that belongs to us Christians.* If only Christians today showed as much courage! Where is the purposefulness

of Christians today for works of mercy and acts for peace?

Anthony was spared death in spite of his blatant disregard for the judge's order. Commentators speculate that perhaps Anthony was seeking to die a martyr's death, yet that was not his vocation. Instead, he returned to the desert, his roots, and died in solitude at 105 years of age. 🏠

*Matthew teaches high school theology and is a founding member of Mary the Apostle House, a small community seeking to blend the Catholic Worker, L'Arche and monasticism. He lives in Erie, PA with his beautiful wife, daughter and son, and a few dear friends.*



NATIVITY HOUSE  
5621 PLYMOUTH  
DOWNERS GROVE, IL  
60516

## THE VISITATION

- *Mary & Advent*
- *Thoughts about Service*
- *Upcoming events*