



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

MARCH 2017

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 2

Women of the Way

By Sarah Reznicek

The house was abuzz with the happy laughter and conversation of over 20 women on Sunday, February 5th, as Nativity House hosted a luncheon to launch a new women's ministry in the Diocese of Joliet called WOW: Women of the Way. Women leaders from all around the diocese gathered to share a delicious meal and be nourished in the company of other women of faith. A delightful exuberance filled the air that day while women shared in the vision for WOW which is to connect, form, and empower women in faith and affirm them in their beauty and dignity or what St. John Paul II called the "feminine genius".

Following the meal, the women convened in the living room for an afternoon discussion led by Kelly



Wahlquist, national Catholic speaker and founder of WINE: Women in the New Evangelization. With a gift for weaving together her own personal stories and knowledge of Sacred Scripture, Kelly shared her wisdom and insight on women's special role in the New Evangelization.

On the topic of evangelization, Kelly highlighted how there is great need within the Church, not for more "programs," but for a "movement" to take root and grow. It is no coincidence that the same pope, St. John Paul II, who called for the New Evangelization, also spoke extensively on the unique gifts and role of women in the Church: women have a

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The Kingdom of God is at Hand

By Venus Wozniak

The Kingdom of God is at hand.

~ Jesus

The Kingdom of God is right now. This is something that I ponder frequently. At the start of this new year, I was on a 30 hour journey to the Philippines with the Diocese of Joliet on a Young Adult Mission trip. Our first full day on the ground we were welcomed to the village of Manapla. Upon arriving we got out of the jeeps and were showered with flowers and hugs. Most of us had never met any of these villagers but they knew we

were coming and they eagerly awaited our arrival. They whisked us away for Sunday Mass.

Mass was celebrated in the village's common space - a humble school house. We were packed in, over a hundred of us. Villagers spilled out of doors on all sides, gathered at the open air windows, to catch what they could of the Mass. The children had been practicing for our arrival. They sang the Mass parts with joy and spirit like I have never witnessed.

All I could think during that Mass,

with tears of thanksgiving in my eyes, "This is Eucharist."

The moments of that Mass were a profound realization of Heaven on Earth. We celebrated, strangers though we were, as family. Christ's presence was palpable not only in the Eucharist but in the presence of each person present and in the spirited music.

We spent the next ten days working alongside the villagers of Bago building two houses. We were in the countryside of Negros Occidental, surrounded by rice fields on all sides, volcanic mountains rising in the distance. We became the friends of those we worked with.

There is something very powerful about working alongside and befriending the poor. It is a profound realization of Heaven on Earth.

The thing is, there is no need to travel all the way to the Philippines to experience the Kingdom of God that is now. The Kingdom of God is at hand, right now - right where we are, right now. The challenge is seeing with the eyes of God so that we can recognize it.

It is so easy to get bogged down in the day to day rigamarole. We are very good at creating our own little empires, kingdoms, if

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From "Aims and Purposes of the Catholic Worker"

By Dorothy Day (1897-1980)

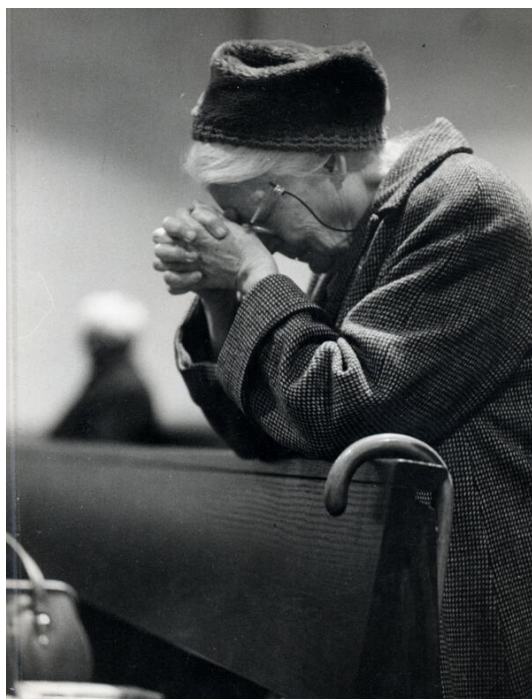
The vision is this. We are working for "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein justice dwelleth." We are trying to say with action, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are working for a Christian social order. This work of ours toward a new heaven and a new earth shows a correlation between the material and the spiritual, and, of course, recognizes the primacy of the spiritual. Food for the body is not enough. There must be food for the soul.

We must practice the presence of God. He said that when two or three are gathered together, there He is in the midst of them. He is with us in our kitchens, at our tables, on our breadlines, with our visitors, on our farms. When we pray for our material needs, it brings us close to His humanity. He, too, needed food and shelter. He, too, warmed His hands at a fire and lay down in a boat to sleep.

When we have spiritual readings at meals, when we have the rosary at night, when we have study groups, forums, when we go out to distribute literature at meetings, or sell it on street corners, Christ is there with us. What we do is very little. But it is like the little boy with a few loaves and fishes. Christ took that little and increased it. He will do the rest. What we do is so little we may seem to be constantly failing. But so did He fail. He met with apparent failure on the Cross. But unless the seed fall into the earth and die, there is no harvest.

And why must we see results? Our work is to sow. Another generation will be reaping the harvest.

The Catholic Worker, February 1940



About The Visitation

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

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Past issues are online at:

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

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House 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.

Nativity House 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 are 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, please email Venus Wozniak at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

A Friendship Grown Through Serving the Poor

By Myela Varela and Rachel Majerczyk

“A love tank that is full is one that can change the world.”

These words have been carried with us throughout both of our trips to the Philippines together. Our first time taking the trip together, we had not met each other yet. However, during meetings leading up to the trip, it was clear that we were both passionate about serving the poor. While on the trip and living next to one another, we became incredibly close and were able to share our feeling about the trip. We were welcomed by loving spirits and felt constant joy while helping to build a house in a small community. Since then, our friendship has grown through service and we had the opportunity to go to the Philippines again for a second time together. Our love tanks have been filled by the memories we made, inspiring us to continue our friendship with the poor in our own communities. Participating in a service trip can open many doors to new friendships and open your mind to new opportunities.

Mayela’s Story

On every service trip I have been on, I have been blown away by the amount of love I have received from people I have just met. The villagers in the Philippines were always smiling, full of love, and incredibly caring. The best part of any experience is learning the unheard stories of the poor. While building houses, I was also creating friendships that have impacted me daily. I have learned from the poor, and I am inspired by their hope and strive to achieve their dreams. The poor has taught me how to love and welcome the stranger. This past summer, I went to Bolivia to serve in very low-income areas. Here I learned the stories of many inspiring women who give so much of their lives for others. The women who walk two hours daily in the cold dark to take care of children in the community and do it with a smile everyday. There is so much we can learn from the poor and children. In every encounter with the poor I have seen so much gratitude. I see it in their actions. They share the



little that they have, whether it is half of their only slice of watermelon, a seashell they picked off the shore, or a simple hug, they give what they can and they do it with a smile and love. It’s the simplicity, the smiles, the laughter, and the love that make the poor rich.

Rachel’s Story

This past winter break was my second time to the Philippines for a mission trip, going to the past village I visited two years ago. I was immediately greeted with warmth and kindness, and was able to reconnect with those that I had previously made connections with. One of the women in the village had remembered my birthday was coming up and all of the children were calling my name. Every volunteer opportunity

reminds me about why I serve. Initially, I plan on helping someone less fortunate. However, the richness of the hearts of the poor fills me with love and I am able to learn so much from them. By serving the poor, you not only get to assist with a project or help to build a community, but they touch your lives in so many ways, and I would recommend it to anyone.



Rachel is a graduating senior majoring in Biology. She has a great passion for social justice and volunteer work.

Myela is a senior social work major at Benedictine University. She is looking forward to a year of volunteer service following graduation.

Let's Walk Together

By Kevin O'Donnell

"Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you do criticize them, you're a mile away, and you have their shoes."

- Jack Handey

The actual Native American proverb of walking a mile in another man's moccasins is powerful.

To understand someone, try to experience what they experience.

Try to see things through their eyes.

In doing so, we can be surprised by what we learn, what we come to understand. Suddenly, we know something we did not know before.

I usually understand me really well. It is you who confounds me. It is you of whom I am somewhat, or mostly, or completely ignorant.

Valuable as it is to walk in someone else's shoes, what about walking with someone else?

You wear your shoes. I wear mine.

We can trade footwear if you want, but let's walk together.

We can talk, or not, and if we get comfortable enough with one another, or are willing to risk enough, we should ask questions with a disposition of seeking to understand, not just to be heard.

I manage a mentor program for high school kids. 15 year-old boys tend to, more often than not be absolute turds when it comes to conversation.

Most don't need, value, or want it. They avoid it.

Rare is the willing 15-year-old-male participant. They tend to give one-word answers and can sit in uncomfortable silence for minute, after minute, after ice age.

However, when a mentor learns to be comfortable with silence and maybe finds a thing to do together- like hiking a trail, or playing a round of miniature golf, or sorting supplies at a pantry, that's often when things turn the corner. Almost never is it the content of the conversation, but the fact of being together that holds the value.

Patience. Investment. Relationship.

In the last few months since DT was voted in at 1600 Pennsylvania, I've been thinking so much about all the opining about what troubled times we are in.

Maybe we are. But I think we are here, wherever here is, because of the fact that so few of us are seeking relationship. We are seeking ourselves.

We are yelling, protesting, wanting to be heard.

We are not seeking to hear the other.

Rare is the listen. Frequent is the talk, the tell.

Maybe not a new trend in humanity. Probably another old-as-humanity-mistake which we've foolishly repeated.



Kevin is a husband and father who lives in Lockport. He has worked as a campus minister at Lewis Univesrity.

Women of the Way

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particularly important part to play in the New Evangelization.

The aim of the New Evangelization is the transformation of hearts to Christ. It is not enough to inform people with mere head knowledge of their faith through "programs"; conversion must begin in the heart, and occurs when a person encounters Jesus and comes to know him through having a real relationship with him. Women, Kelly explained, are created "radically relational" and with the natural gift of receptivity. This gives women a special "intuition" to the things of God (thus, the universal phenomenon of the "church lady" and why our religious congregations are composed of a majority of women).

Kelly drew our attention to the women of the Scripture who are the first to proclaim the Gospel. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, recognized the presence of God and was the first to publicly proclaim the mystery of the Incarnation: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, and how is it that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" Mary Magdalene and the women present at the crucifixion were the first to receive the good

news of Jesus' Resurrection and were given the mission of bearing this news to his Apostles. Mary, the Woman "blessed among women" who holds the most privileged place in the history of our salvation, is the first and most perfect disciple of Jesus and never ceases to draw others into intimate relationship with him.

Mary changed the world by her fiat, her yes to God, and she was just a young girl at the time. By her example, Kelly encouraged all the women present not to be afraid to say yes to God. Our world is starved for the tender and merciful love of God. Each woman by her own fiat can transform hearts, change the world, and bring about a revolution of love.

To learn more about the women's ministry of the Diocese of Joliet you can find us on Facebook under WoW- Women of the Way. The first WOW Catholic Women's Night will be held Sunday, April 2nd from 4:00-6:30pm at the Cathedral of St. Raymond in Joliet.



Sarah is an intern at Nativity House and a Director of Religious Education for Saint Jude Parish in Joliet, IL.

Upcoming Events at Nativity House

Next Roundtable Discussion: EcoJustice

May 5. 6:30 pm potluck, 7:00 pm discussion

Calling all gardeners and lovers of organic produce!

Do you love organic produce, but hate the cost? Do you wish you had the time it takes for a vegetable garden? Are you looking for new recipies and new veggies to change things up? Always wanted to learn how to preserve food? Make jams, jellies, salsa and tomato sauce? **Then join us for the 2017 CSA** (community supported agriculture). Nativity House has a working CSA. That means you work for 2 hours a week and then take home your share of the organic produce. Cost for a share this year is \$300. You can't beat that price for organic produce from May to October. For more information, contact Venus at venusad@nativity-house.org

Roundtable Review: Racism in Our Communities

By Justin Wozniak

How does racism affect us? Our neighbor? What are ways that we unknowingly participate? These were some of the questions carefully considered by two local experts in a roundtable discussion at Nativity House on Feb. 17, after a community stew dinner.

Racism has resurfaced in the popular consciousness as a significant issue over the last year or so. Smartphone videos began to emerge showing police violence against African-American men. Donald Trump won the US presidency, despite a history of legal penalties for discriminatory housing practices and even a racist comment about a federal judge. Issues tangential to racism have also

arisen. Immigration reform has been a hotly discussed topic throughout the presidential campaign. Proposed changes to US immigration policy based on religion have been promoted from the president. And an apparent spike in anti-semitic attacks may indicate a resurgence in racist, xenophobic activity.

The mission of Nativity House, however, is to start with small things. We wanted to begin a discussion that would last beyond the roundtable about what the local and personal causes and effects of racism are, and how they can be addressed by individuals or small groups. Our panelists each presented some thoughts about these

aspects, and then the whole group discussed some key thoughts.

The panelist presenting first was Tom Cordaro, a parish staff member from Naperville. He presented the structure of US racism and its levels of impact. In his analysis, the effects of racism take on multiple forms, from the individual to social structures to the community as a whole. Thus, side effects of racism benefit whites in ways that are not always apparent to them- they don't have to think about it. Thus, it is not always explicitly malicious, but it still has strongly negative impacts.

Cordaro then turned to approaches to reduce racism in US society. However, he cautioned against simply addressing the individual interactions, as these can be distorted. Fixing these cases can

turn into the precarious case of "help the victim," which can so easily become "blame the victim."

To support this, he referred to the well-known formulaic definition that racism equals prejudice plus power.

His suggested approach is thus to follow the structures of power that impact people and recognize the benefits of power. Sometimes, people may be confused by assertions that they hold an unfair advantage, leading to confusion. Thus, his approach is to listen to the stories of people of color to engage in an unraveling of the power structures that bind society in a state of indifferent chaos. All people need to be liberated from this system, he said, a point that can lead to a desire for greater

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Easy Essays: Tradition or Catholic Action

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



The central act of devotional life in the Catholic Church is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The Sacrifice of the Mass is the unbloody repetition of the Sacrifice of the Cross.

On the Cross of Calvary Christ gave His life to redeem the world.

The life of Christ was a life of sacrifice.

The life of a Christian must be

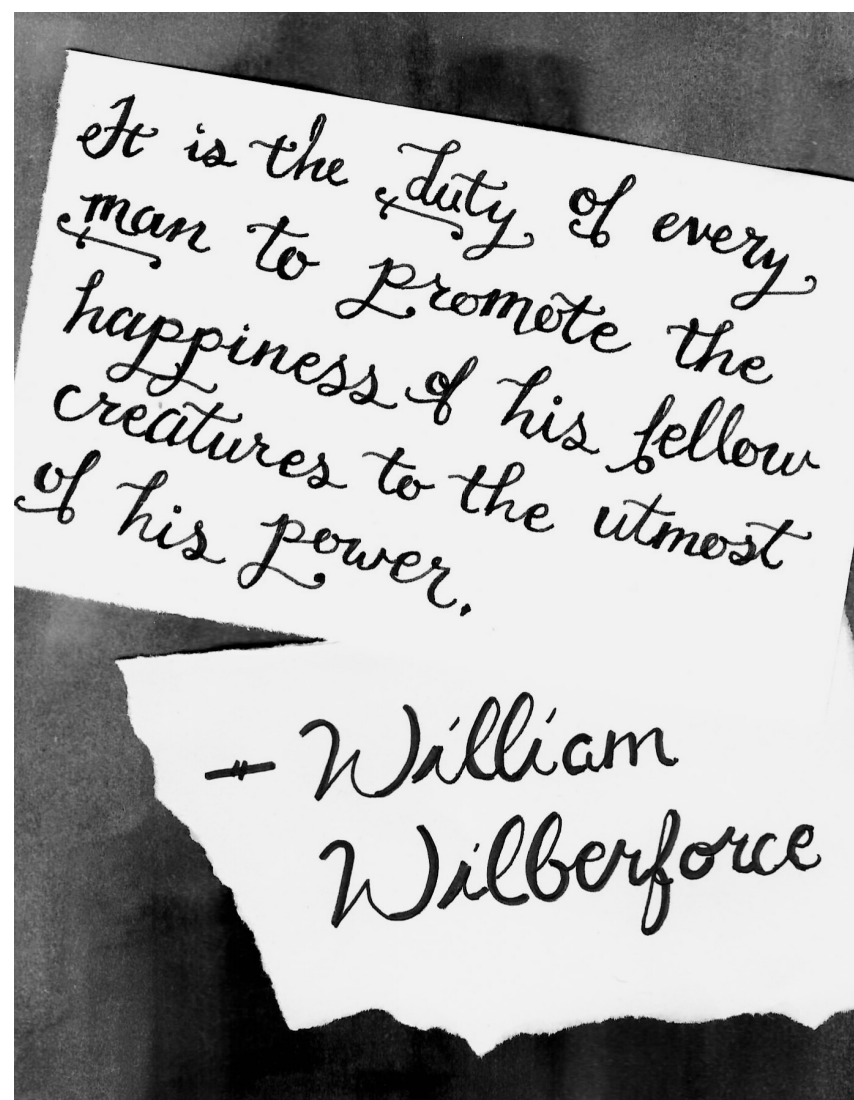
a life of sacrifice.

We cannot imitate the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary

by trying to get all we can.

We can only imitate the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary

by trying to give all we can.



The Kingdom of God

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you will, where we are at the center. We call the shots, we run the show, and we are very important. We get stuff done. We make people happy. We live comfortably. But we are exhausted, irritable, and emotionally empty.

People say that our cultural landscape is changing. Fear and hate are taking hold. People are leaving the faith. People are clinging to fear. These are some of the worst times in history.

False kingdoms. And what is the opposite of false? True.

There is good news. Cling to what is true. That is what matters. The truth matters most, above all else, the truth of Jesus and his

Kingdom that is right now.

One of my favorite stories in scripture is the Ascension/Pentecost sequence (Acts 1). Jesus has risen from the dead and has been with his apostles for the last forty days preparing and strengthening them for what is coming next. They are back up at the Mount of Olives. Jesus gives the apostles strict instructions to stay in Jerusalem to wait. They start to get excited. If he is leaving he must be going to get his troops, "Jesus is this time? Are you gonna restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus responds with a bit of short temper, he had already conquered death but they still didn't get it, "That is not for you to know! I am going to send you my Holy Spirit and you are going to take my message to the ends of the earth." I am sure that there were quizzical looks and slouched shoulders from the apostles. They just didn't get it.

Ten days later, back in the upper room, huddling together with the windows and doors barred shut, a burst of wind sweeps through the room and flames rest over each of their heads. From that moment on, they were given Holy Confidence to go out and get the Good News delivered.

They proclaimed the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth. Without their witness there would be no church today. They were empowered to live in a way that was witness to the kingdom that is now - sharing all that they had in common so that none of the followers of Christ ever went without. They lived in a way that turned heads and inspired others to live "in a manner worthy of the Gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

Our inheritance is that same Holy Confidence. It has been gifted to us at our Baptism and reinforced one-hundred-fold at our Confirmation. Our very inheritance is the Holy Confidence of that Holy Fire that is the Holy Spirit. It is through the graces of our inheritance that we are called to give witness to the Kingdom of God that is now!

It's not always easy when we are at the center of kingdoms that we have built. Jesus knew that it would be a challenge. That's why he left us help along the way: Reconciliation and Eucharist - healing and nourishment. Through Reconciliation relationships are being continually healed: our relationships with loved ones, with our enemies, with those who are indifferent. And when we are continually seeking this reconciliation with others by the very nature of reconciliation and God's Kingdom, we are seeking reconciliation with Him.

The Eucharist is the food for the journey. It roots us more deeply to the Mystical Body of Christ. The Eucharist has the power to transform our lives, helping us to see the world the way that God sees it. Then we are able to see the false kingdoms for what they truly are. We are able to spend our efforts in the Kingdom of God that is now. And that work does not leave us exhausted, irritable, emotionally empty. We become energized vessels of joy.

Maybe your Lenten action is to pray and work to be free of the false kingdoms that we participate in: indifference to the poor in our communities, apathy at the plight of those of another color, refusal to the call of care for our common home, judgmental attitudes of those with differing opinions, backbiting remarks and petty arguments, practices of immediate self-gratification.

Maybe your Lenten action is to change the prayer upon daily or weekly receiving of the Eucharist, "Transform my eyes, that I may see they way that you see, Jesus."

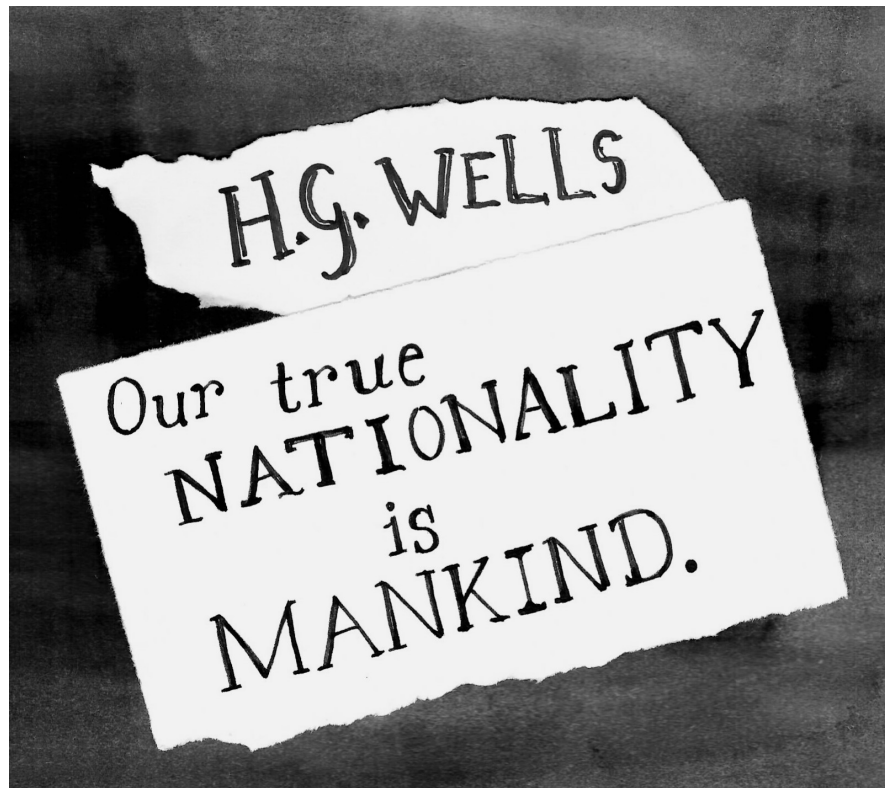
Maybe your Lenten action is to grasp the Holy Confidence of your inheritance and help to create a society where it is easier for humanity to be good by feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick, befriending the imprisoned, clothing the naked.

The Kingdom of God is now. Not tomorrow. Not yesterday. Right now, right where you are.



Venus is a wife, mother, and Director of Nativity House. She can be contacted at: venusad@nativity-house.org





Pope Francis on Encounter

"An encounter is something different. It is what today's Gospel proclaims to us: an encounter; an encounter between a man and a woman, between an only living son and an only son who had died; among a joyful crowd because they had encountered Jesus and were following him and a group of people, weeping, accompanying that woman, who had come out from the gate of the city; an encounter between the exit gate and the entry gate. [The sheepfold]. An encounter that makes us reflect on our way of interacting with each other.

We are accustomed to a culture of indifference and we must strive and ask for the grace to create a culture of encounter, of a fruitful encounter, of an encounter that restores to each person his or her own dignity as a child of God, the dignity of a living person.

We are accustomed to this indifference when we see the

disasters of this world or small things: 'What a shame, poor people, look how they are suffering,' and then we carry on. An encounter. And if I don't look, it's not enough to see, no, (we must) look – if I don't stop, if I don't look, if I don't touch, if I don't speak, I cannot have an encounter and I cannot help to build a culture of encounter.

In our families, at the dinner table, how many times while eating, do people watch the TV or write messages on their cell phones. Each one is indifferent to that encounter. Even within the heart of society, which is the family, there is no encounter. May this help us to strive for this culture of encounter, just as simply as Jesus did so.

Don't just say 'what a shame, poor people,' but allow ourselves to be moved by pity," Pope

Francis concluded, stressing, "Draw near, touch and say in the language that comes to each one of us in that moment, the language of the heart: 'Do not weep,' and donate at the very least a drop of life."

From the Morning Meditation
September 13, 2016

Racism in our Community

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solidarity.

Our second panelist, Abraham Mwara, a community organizer from New Wineskins Catholic Worker, presented the group with three exercises and led interactive discussions that followed. In the first, the participants were asked to each draw a spectrum (on hidden pieces of paper) from "color blind" to "racial justice." This led to a discussion about what a transition for society from indifference to the effects of racism to a genuinely just society would look like. For example, I had considered what the concept of a "truth commission" (like the one in South Africa) would look like if

one were to be held in the US, to investigate the history of slavery. How would such a commission gain credibility in the current situation, where government bodies and the press alike have such low levels of approval?

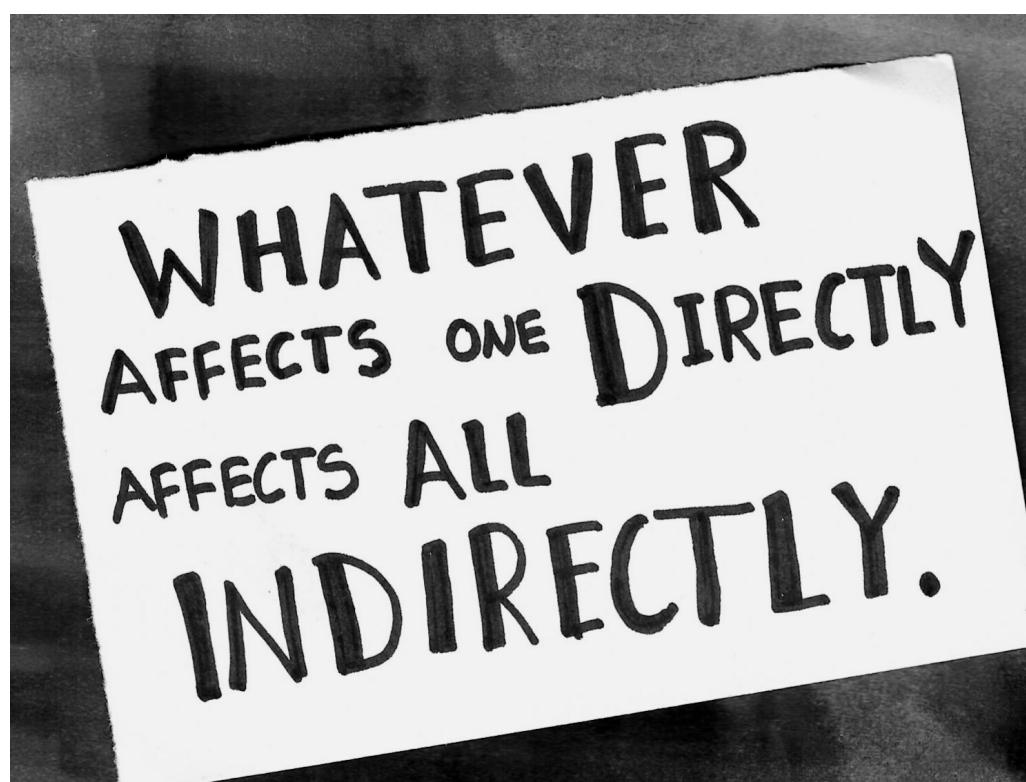
The next exercises involved drafting private narrations of your life lived in successive moves from the current, broken society, to a just one. This involved recounting interactions that one had in the past, as well as extrapolated encounters in the future. The presentation ended with a discussion of contrasting models for community.

Overall, the roundtable was a great opportunity to consider one's own experiences with racism, as well as hear from others on the topic.



Justin is a computer systems professional. He can be reached at:

justin@nativity-house.org





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Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441



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Valentine's Day and the Martyr from Rome

by Barbara Bass

As the excitement of the holiday season fades, it is time to exchange our decorations and carols for paper hearts and boxes of chocolate. The feast day of St. Valentine has widely exploded into a holiday of sweets, romance, and love. But just as many have commercialized the season in which we celebrate the birth of our Lord, we may also (and maybe even more so) have forgotten the “reason for the season” of Valentine’s Day. Who was this St. Valentine, anyway?

The Church acknowledges St. Valentine as a martyr, executed on February 14th, 269 A.D. Being Christian, at the time, was considered a serious crime under the rule of Roman Emperor Claudius II. Valentine was not only Christian but an ordained priest dedicated to marrying people into the Church. But St. Valentine believed in the sacredness of marriage between man and woman before God, and he lived and died for this belief.

Although the Church does not teach that Valentine’s Day should be celebrated in connection with romance, we can definitely learn a lot from the saint for whom this day was named. St. Valentine certainly

did not have a “crush”, nor was he pierced by cupid’s “arrow” of romance and love in contemporary culture’s understanding of these terms. But he was definitely pierced by true love. He was pierced by the love of God— a God who first loved us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8); a God who became man for our sake, being literally “pierced” for our transgressions, and crushed for our sins (Isaiah 53:5). It is this love — God’s love - that emboldened St. Valentine to make the strongest declaration of love that exists: to lay down our lives for the ones we love.

God and His people were the two loves of St. Valentine. It was this radical Love in his heart that led St. Valentine to put his own life on the line. Jesus Himself said when speaking to his disciples, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:3). And what were the two main commandments Jesus gave us? To love God and to love one another. St. Valentine fulfilled both of these up until his last breath.

In the Christian understanding of

romantic love between a man and a woman, we find the ultimate expression of this love in the marriage vows taken before God and the Church. It is consummated in the one-flesh union of husband and wife, and it takes on a life of it’s own in the daily interactions of marriage — much of which requires self-sacrifice and a “dying to self.”

If St. Valentine were with us today, what would his message be to young and old alike, both married and those looking forward toward marriage? In the words of Fr. Frank O’Gara of Whitefriars Street Church in Dublin, Ireland: “If Valentine were here today.... He would say to married couples that there comes a time where you’re going to have to suffer. It’s not going to be easy to maintain your commitment and your vows in marriage. Don’t be surprised if the ‘gushing love’ that you have for someone changes to something less ‘gushing’ but maybe much more mature.... Love — human love and sexuality is wonderful, and blessed by God — but also the shadow of the cross.”

As a very wise Jesuit priest once said: “Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in



Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.” St. Valentine of Rome, pray for us.



Barbara is a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin and a parishioner at Saint Bernard's in Homer Glen.