



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

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VOLUME 12 ISSUE 2

Environmental Justice

by Kayla S. Jacobs

“Enlighten those who possess power and money...the poor and the Earth are crying out” - A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation, Pope Francis, Laudato Si’

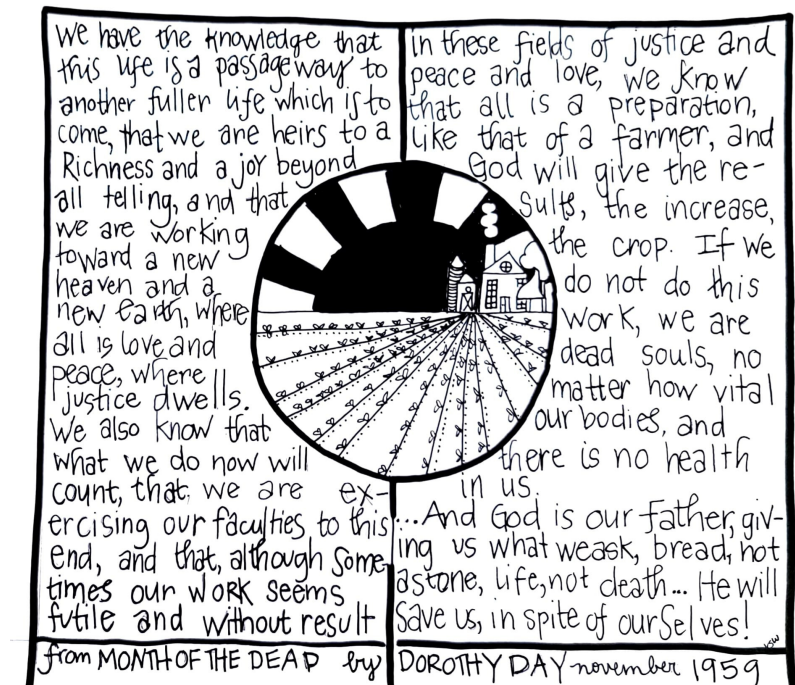
In summer 2016 I found myself on the Isle de Jean Charles, home of the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw people, and considered “ground zero” of climate change in the U.S. The Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw people are some of the first climate refugees in the United States. I was there with a delegation of young interfaith leaders for the GreenFaith convergence. As we were driving in I had a sinking feeling. The long road leading to the community was narrow and had water on all sides. Try to picture that. It is uncomfortable. Their land has disappeared by 98% over the past 70 years, that is within many people’s lifetimes.

While we were there we visited with members of that community. They shared stories about when they were younger and how a place that they used to be able to ride a horse to is now an hour boat ride away. While many of them were grateful that the federal government had granted their community \$48 million to relocate due to rising sea levels, many of them were also conflicted because Isle de Jean Charles had been their home for generations. Their ancestors took refuge there as white colonizers invaded their region.

A sign in someone’s front yard read: “We are not moving off this island” but a couple lines later it said: “the island is fading away.” Just behind the sign was a large floatable survival capsule, just in case a large storm came. The juxtaposition showed us how difficult of a decision it was for them to leave the land that they’ve always known while also acknowledging the serious dangers of staying.

Why do I share this story? My time on the Isle de Jean Charles, along with other experiences on that same trip, including meeting Hurricane Katrina survivors, has been one of the most impactful experiences of my life. While I had always cared about environmental issues (my mom works for a conservation organization and I grew up volunteering on their green team, my sister and I used to perform a song for our family called “The Recycle Rap,” and 90% of our family vacations took place camping in nature) I was never fully conscious of the reality that the ecological crisis means a human crisis. In other words, when the earth is degraded so are we, especially the most poor and vulnerable

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Identity & Justice

by Venus Wozniak

In 2016, I was privileged to lead a group of youth and young adults on a pilgrimage to Krakow, Poland for World Youth Day. We stayed in the town Nowa Huta (which means new steel mill). This town was built by the communist regime during the 1950s. It was to be the socialist ideal inhabited by industrial workers of the new steel mill. The apartment buildings were built such that you had your own private entrance to your home. A worker would never have the opportunity to pass someone in the hall as there were no hallways. Isolation was the ideal. Work was life. There was to be no time for relationship. Within socialist communism there is also no room for God; atheism ruled supreme. Churches were prohibited in Nowa Huta. But this would not stand for the workers that lived in Nowa Huta.

At the time, Bishop Karol Józef Wojtyła (later Pope John Paul II), supported the people and they painstakingly, stone by stone built the Arka Pana Church. The communal building of the church was the exact opposite of what Nowa Huta stood for and many went to prison for gathering to build this amazing church.

Upon hearing the story of the hold of communism and the people’s deep faith rising above the regime, I was truly moved as I entered this Church. I had heard about how horrible communism was through my history classes but I was experiencing it first hand. The reality of being under communist rule is not just in history books but is in all adults in Poland a not too distant memory. They lived and fought against a system that sought to

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Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends of Nativity House,

He is risen! These last months at Nativity House have been times of newness and growth. On December 10, at 12:31pm Alianna Irena entered the world at 7 lbs 12 oz. It is always a special gift to give witness to new life and to see a new young mother blossom. Alianna and Diana are doing quite well. Diana's year at Nativity House is coming to an end. She will be moving on June 1, continuing schooling at Joliet Junior College in the Culinary Program. Send lots of prayers as Diana balances the life of work and school and being a single mom. It has been a gift to be part of Diana and Alianna's journey. Also in December, Karen who had served Nativity House as a full-time intern for one and a half years moved on to work with her new husband in his marketing business. While we miss Karen greatly, we are still neighbors! Jenny who has been with us since November will be moving back to Nashville at the end of April. Even though her stint with us has been short, it has been blessed.

The Nativity House CSA has been abustle with the new growing season. We have a great mix of old and new gardening friends. Asparagus spears are peeking up out of the earth and will be ready for munching in early May. Potatoes have been appropriately planted by tax day, to be consumed by mid-July. We have added a new buckling, The Mighty Quinn, to our flock. Here's hoping for an abundant kidding season in Spring of 2023.

In the Fall of 2021, it became clear the granting agency that has supported Nativity House for the last five years was struggling due to COVID. We have not received any funds from them for over a year. Foreseeing this we began letting many of you know of our financial struggles. In December, thanks to you, we raised over \$17,000. We were confident that we would be able to maintain a safe place for our current guest moms and their babies. It was truly a miracle of community. Thank you, Jesus!

This Easter Season we are greatly aware of new beginnings. With Jenny, Diana, and Alianna moving on, Nativity House will be looking forward. The funds raised covered their stay with us. We are eager to welcome another two guest moms and 2 part-time staff as soon as possible. In order to do this, Nativity House must be prepared with a full year of funding. We continue to seek out new grants and fundraising opportunities. Please pray that this important work can continue. As always, we are grateful to you for the prayers and support over these years. You have empowered us on this journey of serving expectant mothers. It is all a gift. He is risen indeed!

Venus & Justin Wozniak

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 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 house of hospitality for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. 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.

Wish List

Foaming Hand Soap Refills
New/Gently Used Queen Sheets
Organic Soil
8-10 Hand Trowels
1-2 garden hoes
1-2 garden spades
1-2 garden rakes



My Heart Cries Out for Change

by Lydia Finney

We talk about systemic inequity, systemic injustice. We mean the injustice, the inequity built into our systems. It's how the way that we operate perpetuates inequitable distribution of goods, services, and opportunities. It's how our systems continue to create a lack of justice for marginalized people in our society. It's about the processes, the paperwork, the way decisions are made, that are all built by people.

Systems built by people like the rich man who ignored Lazarus. The man who left him on the street, with dogs licking his wounds.

And these systems are as unjust as that man, as all of us sinful

people. And just like that rich man, who burned in Hell, and wished he could go back and warn his brothers, my heart cries out for change. For us to change before it is too late. For change now.

For the Lord, your God, is the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the resident alien, giving them food and clothing. So you too should love the resident alien, for that is what you were in the land of Egypt. - Deuteronomy 10:17-19

Where do I meet the marginalized, the "widow, the orphan, the alien

in our midst?" Everywhere. I wake up every day, and I encounter them. I encounter women. I encounter single mothers. I encounter people who are African-American, people who are Hispanic, people who are Native American. I encounter people with disabilities. I encounter people who have fled their homes. I encounter people. People whom I am called to love. You do too.

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. 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 15:12-19

We have one job. To love. I wake up every day and pray for the grace to love. Because I cannot do it by myself. I don't think that any

of us can. I try, and I fail - I come up short every time, a sinner. And at the end of the day, I sit in the silence and reflect on all that has happened, and where I could have loved better.

And I wonder. What if we all took care of our own insides? What would it look like, if we all woke up, and followed that one commandment? What if we all woke up one day, and prayed for the grace to love, and it was granted? And in each encounter with the marginalized, we actually loved them. And in each line of every policy that was written that day, we loved them. And in each piece of paperwork, in each decision, in each act of the execution of power, we loved them.

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Identity & Justice

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deny their true identity and squash their faith. The aftertaste was palpable.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

I never tire of this passage. It is truly remarkable and we must remember who we are. When this God speaks humanity into being, God speaks of himself as "us" and "our." This is not a typo. This is a clue to who God is. God is more than one but also one: Trinity. God's very nature is relationship, community - Father, Son, Holy Spirit. If the story of Creation was all we had to get to know God and ourselves, we would also come to understand that this Triune God creates freely. God does what God does and he does it freely: free will.

Being made in God's image carries many implications for humanity. We have been created in God's image, male and female. Since we are made in the image of God we too must be made for relationship and community. We are creators, too. Our inheritance invites us to free will. Anything that violates any of these characteristics of who we are is the root of injustice. Any. Single. Thing.

We live in a world where systemic injustice is rampant. These systems have helped us to forget who we really are. Because of the

big unjust systems it is easier to swallow the smaller injustices. We have made it very easy for life to be aborted. Yet barren women cry out. Somehow abortion is more heroic than placing your child up for adoption. Women will continually be fighting for their voices to be heard, for workplace equality, for motherhood to be honored rather than punished. The family structure has been beaten down over the years by consumerism and the fight for rugged individualism to reign supreme. Power and prestige still tromp on the lives of the innocent through a world on the brink of world war. But really, as Pope Francis frequently asserts, we have been fighting a piecemeal world war for decades now. The elderly are isolated and forgotten; have they really lost their usefulness? We have allowed generations of men to be locked up, demoralized, and dehumanized. The rich have kept the poor poor for thousands of years; stealing their resources, pushing them to the margins, using them as mere cogs in their profit systems. We continue to stand by with our heads turned. What is all of this for? To show us the path of death.

Don't worry. There is hope. When I get overwhelmed by the world's injustice I find myself pondering Jesus. And yes, there are times I think of Jesus with fists raised to heaven. But then I take a few breaths and think about how he lived. He lived in community with a vagabond troupe of disciples. History and tradition tells us that there were women and men in his inner circle. His inner circle was composed of aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, tax collectors, fishermen (remember the fisherman, Peter, had a mother-in-

law) and a whole host of characters. I think about how the miracle of the resurrection was first made known to women. We don't hear stories in the Gospels of rivalry between women and men. We see a man who honors motherhood through unwavering devotion to his mother. We see a man standing up for the marginalized and the outcast. He is the embodiment of our God who created male and female in his image. He lives a beautiful communal life with them. He asserts, "the kingdom of God is at hand!" Perhaps this is a vision of heaven to show us the path to eternal life.

Jesus was also adamant that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 3:2). At the first part of this exclamation is a command: Repent! Systemic injustices were prevalent during Jesus day. They were occupied by the Romans and within the Jewish culture there were definite class divisions. People complacently participated in these systems; just as we do now. The vagabond community

lifestyle, men and women equally valued in community, befriending the marginalized and unclean definitely turned heads and challenged the status quo. It's remarkable and inspiring.

Repent. Turn away from these systems rooted in injustice. They only lead to death. Let us live firmly in the now - the kingdom of heaven is at hand! Let us abandon these systems that leave us barren and bereft. Let us take heart in previous generations - the identity claimers, the system challengers, the faith seekers. Let us seek justice. Let us remember who we are.

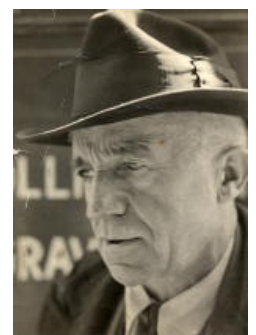


Venus Wozniak is the cofounder of Nativity House and Director of Faith Formation at St Dennis in Lockport, IL.

Easy Essays:

Honest to God

by Peter Maurin
(1877-1949)



One of the slogans
of the Middle Ages
was "Honest to God."
We have ceased to be
"Honest to God."

We think more
about ourselves
than we do
about God.

We have ceased to be
God-centered
and have become
self-centered.

NATIVITY HOUSE SEEKS STAFF



- Are you passionately pro-life?
- Are you eco-justice minded?
- Seeking community life?

We are seeking part-time residential staff. This position includes living at Nativity House, participating in community life with our guest moms and farming community.

Our goal is to live out Catholic Social Teaching in action. We are seeking creative, nurturing, dependable, faith filled staff. There is much opportunity for farming, publishing, grant writing, community organizing, event planning.

Tasks Include

- Hospitality (caring for our guest moms)
- Community Farming
- Share in daily living tasks
- Newspaper publication
- Community Events & Education
- Fundraising
- Spirituality (evening prayer each night)

For more information or to apply please email
venus@nativity-house.org



Nativity House is an intentional Catholic community offering hospitality for expectant moms rooted in Catholic Social Teaching and the Catholic Worker Farm.





A Good Place to Be

by Stacy DeMarais

Last season our family joined Nativity House's CSA. It was our first time doing any sort of actual gardening, so we went in with the expectation of being shown a lot of what to do. A few weeks into the season, definitely not experts, we found ourselves responsible for the ENTIRE tomato crop! My husband Jake and I spent that work day planting tomatoes and making sure everyone knew we had no idea what we were doing. Forty tomato plants later, we left thinking there was a good chance the CSA would be without tomatoes this year.

As the weeks passed our Saturday mornings were well spent in the garden. Between spreading mulch, harvesting asparagus and bringing home bags of lettuce, we kept a watchful yet hopeful eye on the tomato patch. Along with the basics of weeding and sowing soy beans we learned for the most part, vegetables are forgiving, goats will eat anything and with some water and sunshine tomato plants will grow.

Eventually, we realized hauling potatoes and carrots home is just a bonus to the actual good we experienced. Like meeting a new friend who is a doula and you're pregnant with baby number five; smiling because you spotted an oriole and you're an amateur birder; or enjoying your kid dig up his hundredth worm. As our memories multiplied, so did the tomatoes. We brought home so many tomatoes. We didn't need to worry about the spacing or depth or state of the seedling. We needed to recognize the good we were encountering by being present to those around us, and what a joy it was to find that at Nativity House. Turns out you don't need to be an expert to plant tomatoes; you just need a good place to do it!



Stacy is a busy stay at home mom who enjoys reading, coffee and any moment of silence. She lives in Lockport with her husband Jake and 4 kiddos.

The Medieval Girl on Fire

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...you will set the world on fire."

Why would the patron of fire prevention want to set the world on fire? Catherine noticed how the element of fire not only illumines, warms, and purifies the Earth, but also ignites feelings of passion and peace within human souls. Biblical references to fire are plentiful, such as when the Holy Spirit embodied tongues of flame at Pentecost. If we live with openness and receptivity, Catherine predicts, the fire of passionate and pure faith in Jesus Christ will cover the Earth and transform it into His Kingdom. God's spirit is the spark, His word

is the tinder, human discipleship is the wooden logs, and the fire is faith.

So be like that one birthday cake candle that refuses to go out. Be the light of the world that sets fire to any bushel that tries to cover it. Keep on feeding the flames of faith with scripture, communion with God, and humble service of others, and you will finally be who you were meant to be.



Jenny Coman has recently completed her role as Nativity House Intern and now resides in Nashville, TN.



Environmental Justice

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by Kayla S. Jacobs

among us.

After that trip I had the desire to focus all of my energy to try to address the ecological crisis that we find ourselves in. That same year Pope Francis had released an encyclical addressing the climate crisis called *Laudato Si'*. In *Laudato Si'* the Pope wrote that while addressing the climate and environmental crisis we must take the approach of integral ecology, which is an integrated approach of politics, economics, social, and environmental issues. After reading *Laudato Si'* everything clicked for me and paired with my experience in New Orleans it eventually led to the founding of *Laudato Si'* Ministries in the Diocese of Joliet.

On the feast of St. Francis of Assisi (October 4), the patron Saint of ecology and animals, in 2019 the Diocese of Joliet started *Laudato Si'* Ministries, in which I am the Director of Programs. Our ministry uses the lens of Catholic Social Teaching to approach agriculture, environmental, food sustainability, climate, and rural life issues. The objective of this ministry is to develop a comprehensive implementation of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* in our diocese, parishes, schools, and local communities. We do this through educational and pastoral support, policy and legislation, creating community, and sustainable food sources for the poor and vulnerable.

Shortly after starting the ministry we realized that a crucial element of the work that we did would have to be focused on environmental justice. Environmental justice is: "the fair treatment and meaningful

involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income in the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" as defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We came to that realization because as we were trying to address clean air, water, and soil issues we were meeting people from the communities most affected by various types of pollution.

Unsurprisingly, and unacceptably, the people most affected by the effects of environmental degradation are more often than not people who live in low-income areas, people of color, and young people. That is not a coincidence. It is common practice for highly polluting industries to be disproportionately located in low-income communities. Environmental assaults are inherently classist, racist, ageist, sexist, and ableist leading to terrible physical and mental health issues, including birth defects, heart conditions, asthma, thyroid disease, and cancer.

A couple weeks ago I was on a rock climbing trip in southern California. We ended every day of the trip by going to the beach and watching the sunset. During one of the sunsets I was really struck by peace and was in awe of God's creation. I felt overwhelmed by God's mercy. A mercy that I so deeply need when I think about my own shortcomings in my relationship with the Trinity, my fellow humans, and creation. We are now in the Lenten season, the season of mercy.

On Ash Wednesday we heard a reading from the book of Joel that says:

"The Lord was stirred to concern for his land and took pity on his people."

Joel 2:18

We need to do the same.



Kayla S. Jacobs is the Director of Programs of Laudato Si' Ministries for the Diocese of Joliet

My Heart Cries Out for Change

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"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Would it look like the kingdom of God? Would we not see systemic equity, systemic justice, begin to be sown?

Christ died on the Cross for our sins. He gave us the choice to repent, to accept his grace, fix our insides, and be freed from the sin of these systems. He commanded us to love. Will we? My heart

longs for that day to come, for us all to be free.



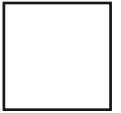
Lydia Finney is a diversity, equity, and inclusion professional and mother of two boys. She is a board member of Nativity House, and a member of St. Dennis parish in Lockport.



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Nativity House
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The Medieval Girl on Fire

Feast Day: April 29th

by Jenny Coman

Patron of fire prevention, illness, miscarriages, people ridiculed for their faith, sexual temptation, and nurses

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), a mystic and doctor of the church, used the imagery of fire 94 times in her Dialogues, the collection of her dictated theological teachings. Most famously, she is credited with the quote "Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."

This celebrated quote, when read in the context of modern American culture that is obsessed with self-discovery and popularity, can easily be misinterpreted.

"Be who God meant you to be..."

Figuring out who God made you to be does not require you to look in a mirror, but rather to BE one. God designed each of us to receive and reflect his light and warmth. Like a mirror, crystal, or magnifying glass at a perfect angle, together with God, we can start a fire. At the Easter vigil service this year, I learned that there is an old Catholic tradition

of lighting the Paschal candle using a crystal and the sun's beams, which represent Jesus's light of truth and warmth of mercy peircing through the darkness of sin. St. Catherine is an excellent example of someone who mirrored Jesus by her life, and she indeed set the world aflame.

As a child, Catherine practiced a disciplined prayer life, which attuned her to God's presence and voice. She reported many supernatural visions; at only seven years old, she first saw Jesus, sitting on His heavenly throne. Amidst these miracles, Catherine spent the beginning of her life in humble service of her parents and siblings (she was one of 25!). She said she considered her mother like Mary, her father, Jesus, and her siblings, the apostles. Catherine experienced a miracle of being unburnt while engulfed in flames at the kitchen stove.

At 13, Catherine took a vow of perpetual virginity. She became a

lay member of the Dominicans of Siena, Italy. She planned to remain in her home the rest of her days, until she received a vision from Jesus that she writes was both a "Mystical Marriage" and a call to go out and serve the poor. This was just six years before 1374, when the Bubonic plague struck her hometown of Siena. Always from a posture of receptivity to God's will, Catherine responded to the many

needs of her community, such as caring for the sick and burying the dead. She also lived during the Great Scism, which began in 1378. She never tired of speaking publicly, proclaiming the Gospel, and dictating influential letters. Most notable was her exhortation to the pope to return to Rome.



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