

SOCIETY OF HELPERS

VOICES of Hope



Compassion

BRINGING HOPE TO THE HUMAN JOURNEY

Vol X Issue I

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Letter from the Editorial Team



Life has a way of confronting each of us with a variety of concerns, challenges and day-to-day issues that range in intensity from mild irritation to bitter suffering. At times we find ourselves alone and needing to reach out to others for help, whether it be spiritual guidance, medical consultation, or mental health support. We need a listening ear, a word of encouragement, or a quiet presence. We need someone else who somehow knows what we are feeling or experiencing, and who can let us know they understand and want to hold our pain with us, even if they can't take it away. Their presence with us changes what is happening within us. Compassionate people do not judge us. They do not blame us for bringing on ourselves our share of pain. They do not offer a recipe or a quick solution on how to live our lives better. While they are willing to help in whatever way they can, they do so without leaving us feeling inferior, or shamed. Compassionate people restore our human dignity often when we think we may have lost it, at least in our own opinion. They are truly "Voices of Hope."

This issue of "Voices" opens a window into the compassionate persons in our midst. It speaks of the people and situations that touch our hearts and inform our compassion. Our contributors discuss learning and growing into compassionate people through experiences of compassion in their everyday lives. Each writer looks at compassion through a slightly different lens. For example, Sr. Laetitia shares her experience of living out compassion through action during her trip to El Paso, Texas where she volunteered for eight days at Annunciation House, welcoming immigrants crossing the border. Sr. Mary Ellen invites us to reflect on how we sometimes limit ourselves in responding compassionately to various people or situations. And our other contributors show us how prayer intertwines with compassion, and how deeply compassion manifests itself in the grit of large cities and in the midst of desperate circumstances.

Hopefully, as you read through the issue you too will be moved to consider how and when you respond with compassion as well as when you do not allow yourself to respond compassionately for various reasons.

Sr. Jean Kielty, SH

Compassion is Alive And Well | By Kate Mulvaney



We have all witnessed a baby attempting to soothe someone who is suffering by patting and stroking that person, a toddler cuddling and caring for a sick teddy bear, or a preschooler putting an arm around a classmate when that friend feels left out. Compassion is thriving in children. Our observations show us that babies are born with an innate sense of empathy and compassion.

If God's gift of compassion that we recognize in children is to flourish, children need to witness caring, empathy, and compassion in their daily lives—seeing someone holding the door for another person, hearing their parents thanking the clerk at the store, speaking a kind word to someone who is sad, giving a smile to a stranger, letting a person who is in a hurry get in line in front of them, talking to others in a respectful way, volunteering their time to help at local organizations, and hundreds of other ways their role models show respect, caring, and support to others. Each of these daily kindnesses are examples for children on how to be an empa-



thetic and compassionate person. I am fortunate in my work for social justice with Catholic Charities to witness the now grown children who clearly had compassionate role models in their lives.

Catholic Charities Evening Supper Program provides hot meals and supportive services to the hungry and homeless. This is almost an entirely volunteer-driven effort and many are needed to cook, serve and clean up. In addition, we try to have a volunteer doctor regularly come to the suppers because many of our supper guests do not get regular healthcare. On one of the nights, I stand off to the side, deeply moved as I watch Dr. Greg move in and out with every guest who wants to talk with him and update him on the condition of their health. I am filled with awe, feeling as though I am watching Jesus as Dr. Greg kneels at the feet of the hungry and homeless, gently holding the leg or foot that is bothering them, listening intently to their concerns while examining their sores and aches. Love and compassion permeate the room. The guests radiate warmth and gratitude for the respect and dignity being given them. I stand observing as tears trickle down many checks.

On another day, I am at one of Catholic Charities' health fairs, which we host at several parishes in low-income neighborhoods. Medical personnel from local hospitals generously volunteer their time to



provide medical care for those who are uninsured or underinsured. Often the individuals who come for medical care are immigrants, fearful of seeking healthcare elsewhere, but who trust the Church deeply. I watch as women from the parish come one at a time, each clutching a melon, a bunch of bananas, homemade tamales, or a basket of baked goods to feed and honor those volunteers who are coming to bring healthcare to their community. Even though they have barely enough to feed their families, they still contribute what they are able, and soon it is like the loaves and fishes with plenty of food for everyone.

Later, I observe the volunteers at the health fair registration table offer a genuinely warm welcome to each of the patients as they arrive, speaking to them in their native language. I see high school students assist people with respect and dignity as they help them read or fill out their forms. I watch as nurses stay after the event has ended to ensure that the family who walked in at closing time feels

welcomed and cared for. I witness the dentists put their arms around fearful patients' shoulders and walk with them to the dental chair. I hear Dr. Eric tell a thin spritely man who has lost all of his teeth to come to his office next Wednesday on his off afternoon so he can give him a free set of new teeth. I watch as our volunteers hold the arms of the elderly and walk with them through the medical stations. The compassion fills the patients with joy. That joy is apparent in their posture and in their eyes, and contagiously spreads to others through their smiles.

I cannot contain my joy when I witness compassion being shown to others, and when I am the recipient of compassion from others. It is the foundation of peace.

It is clear to me. Compassion is a brush with God.

Kate Mulvaney has spent ten years working for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago as a Regional Director and Director of Health Initiatives. A former Montessori certified early childhood educator for 35 years, she is the mother of one adult son who is a high school math teacher, student mentor, and soccer coach; and grandmother of two boys who attend a Catholic Montessori School. Kate is also a Certified Naturalist in both Land Management and Interpretive Skills and is passionate about spending time out in nature.

Compassion in The Heart of The City | By Michael Gug



If you are like me, maybe you find it easy to look the other way when confronted with poverty, grief and our

inhumanity to each other. Confronting poverty, in any form, is difficult. Don't get involved, it's not your problem, someone else will help. How often have I said those things to myself? Instead of thinking that God is giving me a chance to act on his love by serving someone else, I cop out. As you can guess, I don't find compassion, sympathy molded by kindness, to be easy or even natural. Of course Lent with its emphasis on prayer, fasting and almsgiving --the blueprint for a Christian life-- really brings this out. I need to do even more, yet I can't master the basics of a Christian life.

This is not self-pity but rather a realization that living a compassionate and Christ like life requires work, prayer and most especially for me, a community of believers. Not just any believers but true friends in Christ, warts and all. I have been blessed to have found this compassionate crew in the form of the Community of Saint Egidio, a Catholic lay ecclesial community founded in Rome in 1968. Toward the end of the Second Vatican Council, Roman high school students took the call of the Gospel seriously and formed a community

that reached out to the Roman people, especially children and older isolated elderly. From the beginning, the community brought a compassionate presence to the margins. There is a lot more to say about the international presence of the 60,000 strong Community, but we can save that for another time.

God, however, works in mysterious ways. I knew I wanted to learn more about God's love and I had a desire to practice Gospel values like how, where and with whom? I took a chance and went to the website of the Archdiocese of New York looking for opportunities for prayer combined with charity. It was a roll of the dice but through the internet I found my way to Sant Egidio which has a small but dynamic presence in New York. It's been nine years since I met with Paola and Andre, the husband and wife team from Rome who provide guidance for the New York "branch." Since then, you might say I have been enrolled in a school of compassion.

Our ministry beautifully combines prayer with active ministry. Closest to my heart is our ministry to persons who may be homeless or who are otherwise on the economic fringe. I continue to learn that love is patient, love is kind, but love is not always easy. In our way, compassion means absorbing the woundedness

of those we serve. Sometimes this is manifested in addiction, violence, or mental health concerns, especially depression along with a host of more practical needs. Acting alone, it would be a great challenge to be present to these needs. Together in prayer and communion with the community, it becomes more of a way of life. This does not mean we can "fix" any problem, let alone a person. But it does mean that through friendships and deepening relationships, we can sometimes have an impact through the grace of God.

These small graces become apparent when we speak with friends who many people may not even look at, when we can share a hot cup of coffee on a cold winter's night, or when someone finally asks for help in getting off the street. It's not the coffee but the listening ear that makes a difference. Giving back a little dignity, sharing Jesus with others through relationship creates a bond of trust. Within all this we have made and continue to make mistakes. Compassion can be misguided and even misunderstood. One of the areas we needed to grow in was recognizing that true compassion meant caring for the spirit as well as body.

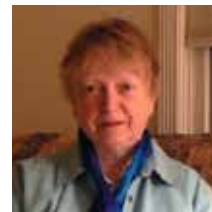
For several years we were very busy trying to help people with material needs we often forgot about our friends' spiritual lives. Looking back, this seems obvious but we wanted to feed the body and hoped the soul

would follow. I am happy to say that over the past few years we have incorporated regular prayer into our ministry. This includes a somewhat formal group prayer and spontaneous individual prayer "in the moment." One of the most amazing things we have seen is responding to grief. Led by Paola and Andrea, we opened up prayer to memorialize friends on the street whose survivors often do not have an outlet for bereavement. Being in a public space, praying for the repose of the souls of people who have died and are remembered by their friends is one of the most moving experiences I have been blessed to encounter. I know that so many of you have had similar experiences. I ask that we pray for each other that we may grow in compassion for all of God's children, becoming emissaries of understanding and mercy.

Michael has worked in the New York City area for the 25 years, mainly in various ministries or church related roles. This includes eight years directing outreach and mission for the Armenian Diocese of America, eleven years managing pastoral outreach for the Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn and, most recently, several years in healthcare ministry, with ArchCare, the healthcare ministry for the Archdiocese of New York. A native of Buffalo, NY, and a graduate of the University of Minnesota with seven years in Wisconsin, he gives new meaning to the phrase cold hands, warm heart!

The Limits of Compassion

By Sr. Mary Ellen Moore



March 1, 2019
Argosy University closed its doors without warning in the middle of a semester. It was

reported that some 22,000 thousand undergraduate and graduate students were affected across 11 states. The newspapers carried reports of the devastation experienced by many, especially graduate students who were caught in the middle of Masters and Doctoral programs without any immediately obvious way of completing their studies. There was great uncertainty whether they would get reimbursed for the money they had paid for the classes in which they were enrolled but had not completed, and would not receive credit. One reporter described how an Education Student learned of the closure in the middle of her orals on her dissertation for her doctorate. She passed the orals, but there was no university to graduate from, no institution to confer her Ph.D. degree after all that work, and all that money, and all those student loans! She cried all night. It was close to unbelievable that something like this could happen.

In the chaos that followed in the students' lives, there were many expressions of compassion. People reached out to the students with empathic support. Some professional organizations swung into action to protect work that had been done by many of these students. By May, many of the students had been registered in universities, but it is still unclear how many students are still left hanging. Compassion for the students was immediate, and freely expressed. They were judged to be victims of an incredible injustice.

However, as the days passed, there was little expression of empathy, concern or concern for faculty and students at the various Argosy universities. One person asked, one individual commented, "well, they are professionals, they have savings and something to fall back on. Most of the students have nothing but loans."

The faculty and staff who had lost income, health insurance, and retirement benefits were not seen as victims of compassion by many people, at least not thought about as often



students. Why is it so very hard for us to be compassionate toward those we judge more fortunate than ourselves, more powerful than we experience ourselves to be, more respected, loved, admired or more privileged than we are? In fact, the faculty and staff were also left scrambling to find jobs at new institutions that would cover their health insurance and pick up retirement benefits, as well as pay bills. One professor was heard to say, "I have been teaching at the University for 25 years and now I have 24 hours to clean out my office and be gone."

Our ability to be compassionate has limits and perhaps as we develop our humanness and our desire to be the presence of Jesus Christ in our world today, it is good for us to know those limits; why we keep them as well as how we can enlarge and expand them. We find it a stretch to think about being compassionate to those we deem to have committed serious offenses, such as violent crime, or domestic abuse. Years ago, there was an expression that was often taught in schools: "Hate the sin, but love the sinner." Somehow in our enlightened awareness, loving the sinner has fallen out of vogue, especially when the sin involves an abuse of power in situations of domestic violence and sexual transgressions.

Certainly those who are more fortunate than ourselves, or who have received greater privilege, are not spared the "slings and arrows" of human suffer-



ing. Pain finds its way into the crevices of human life, no matter the degree of privilege. Likewise violent crime and abuse probably enclose the perpetrator in some degree of shame (though admittedly, not all may feel shame). In most cases, if we dig deep enough into the hidden stories of our criminals we discover their crimes cover depths of loneliness and insecurity that are not readily accessible to the eye of victims and/or observers.

The journey to become more fully human, a closer follower of Jesus in the way of compassion, asks us to confront our limits, to acknowledge them, and work with them in order to look at the world the way God looks at the world. We are invited to embrace the whole world—victim and perpetrator, privileged and powerless, with love and compassion.

Originally from New York City, Mary Ellen Moore is a member of the US Helper province and works in clinical practice as a psychologist and as training director at "The Circle," a Helper ministry in Chicago which offers services to underserved women and trains bilingual (English-Spanish) student therapists.

It was with the help of an Easter bunny that I learned a lesson about compassion.

As the director of The Healing WELL, a wellness center for homeless and marginally housed people in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, I am regularly inspired and blessed by this community. Whether overhearing a kind word exchanged between participants on yoga mats, or witnessing a "high-five" after an awesome sharing in a poetry group, or listening to the gentle offering of wisdom in a support group, I know the power of care and compassion. While our participants draw upon tremendous resiliency and strength in facing the trauma and stress in their lives, they also give greatly to one another. With that compassion and connection to one another, healing occurs.

Sometimes that generosity isn't easy to give. Some of our neighbors are plagued by profound mental illness or deep substance abuse addiction.

A couple of weeks ago, "Diane" came through the door. I see Diane a lot. She's the woman on the sidewalk who screams and spits at people. She leaves messes wherever she goes. When I see her coming toward me, I cross the street to avoid her. So when she burst

through the door of The Healing WELL last week, I was challenged

She immediately ran into the bathroom and locked the door. With 20 people gathered in the adjoining room for the final 30 minutes of the 12-Steps for Healing group, I weighed my potential response: 1) Give her a few minutes, and then knock on the door and ask her to come out, which would likely result in a very loud and toxic altercation; or 2) Allow her to remain in the bathroom until the group ended, during which time Diane was likely to "trash" the bathroom. I opted for the probable need to snake the toilet and scrub the floor upon her voluntary departure from a lengthy stay in the bathroom.

Waiting in the lobby for her, my thought was, "How do I get Diane out of here?" I had no conscious thought of what Diane might need nor how I could best honor and support this struggling woman. On the off chance of ignoring my personal values, I



failing in the test of applying a principal lesson of de-escalation trainings: "Identify with the full humanity of the person."

Diane came out and, yes, the bathroom was as bad as I had thought it would be. She entered the lobby and greeted me with "you wretched woman!" For a few seconds I watched her anxiously as she eyed some of the displayed clay figures our participants had created in an Art class. The two long ears on a bunny captivated her. As she began to finger them, I ventured a conversation starter: "This morning I saw a poster inviting kids to go to a shopping center to be photographed with the Easter bunny. Do you think it's possible that a rabbit would allow dozens of strange children to hold it?"

Diane put down the figure and stopped in her tracks. "Do you like rabbits?" The conversation began, and the barrier between us started to come down. We exchanged words about fur and pink noses and springtime. She calmed, and took a chair beside me. Miraculously, my mindset slowly shifted from, "at what point can I coax her out of our doors?" to "she wants human connection, and she is fine right here." After several minutes of talking, Diane stood and said, "I'm leaving now. When I come back, I'm going to bring you tulips."

I am not only inspired and challenged by my community here; I must add that I am humbled. Warm and genuine hospitality is a cornerstone of The Healing WELL. So, too, is connecting with the "whole person," especially through their strengths and interests, rather than considering others as the manifestations of their problems which need to be fixed. When Diane crossed our threshold, I thought only about how to "get rid of this problem." How contrary to who and what I am called to be as an individual, as well as what our mission in this neighborhood is.

Even in the most difficult packaging, every person is a divine creation who wants, needs and deserves to be honored. Diane reminded me to pause and acknowledge the whole person before me, regardless of the situation. Truth is, it was Diane who offered me compassion that day. She opened herself up to me by inviting me to connect with the beauty inside her. Thank you, Diane.

Kathy has been involved in social justice and community ministry all of her adult life, especially around the issues of Central America, immigrant rights, criminal justice reform and affordable housing development. She and her husband Jim have 6 adult children. If you would like to learn more about her ministry with the Healing Well, please contact her at kcurran@healingwellsf.org

Compassionate Presence

By Mary Ann Wachtel, SFC



Very early in life I was drawn to reflect on the passage from Mt 5:48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." I pondered

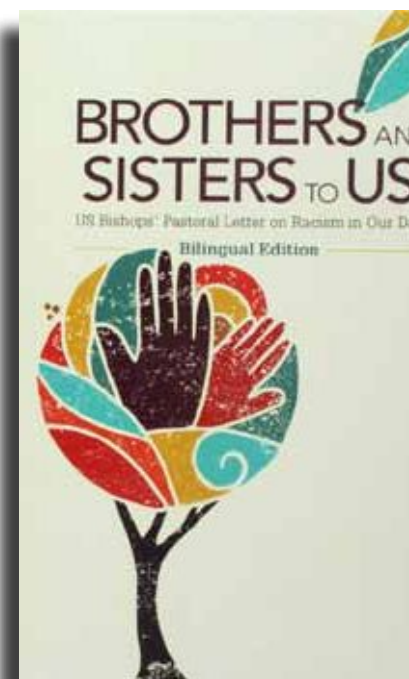
and puzzled over the text. At some point, I realized for me to be perfect was an impossibility, so I changed the word 'perfect' to 'compassionate'; it took on a life of its own and the passage made a lot more sense to: "Be compassionate, therefore, as your heavenly Father is compassionate."

The word compassionate comes from the Latin root *pati-*, meaning suffering. Thus compassion means "to suffer with". Because of the situations I was encountering, this perception of compassion helped me to remove myself from the temptation to "fix" or "remedy" the state of affairs; I learned to suffer with the other. The healing actions of Jesus, the parable of the Prodigal son, the raising of Lazarus all took on a new meaning.

Compassion has to be learned and practiced. When my mother died of ovarian cancer at the age of fifty-four, we as a family were doing "hospice-like" things before hospice existed in the United States. She was at home where my dad cared for her. A nurse friend went with me every

week to bathe her and give her the nursing care she needed. I invited a Maryknoll priest to bring her the Eucharist and administer the Sacrament of the Sick because my father had asked the parish priest to visit her and he replied "Oh, she can't take that sick!" and never showed.

Then I encountered the US Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism entitled



"Brothers and Sisters to Us" (1979). I prayed and mulled over the document until I understood that the core focus for me was to comprehend and practice the truth of the dignity of each human being. I also realized that all forms of discrimination against individuals and groups

whether because of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, economic status, cultural or national origin were there because this human dignity was unacknowledged. All the “isms”: sexism, ageism, militarism, racism, play and interact on the same playground. I had to acknowledge the oneness of the human family—that all persons are created in God’s image and all bear the imprint of the Creator and are enlivened by the breath of the Spirit. This new awareness helped me to understand compassion at a deeper level. I had to let go of my biases and sometimes imagine the person I was dealing with encased in some kind of costume, while at the core was a child loved by God, a person with dignity. And so the call to me is, how can I make life for the oppressed, the neglected, the outcasts of our society more human? I realize that my own heart has to be transformed.

Much of my sideline work has been training men and women in the Ministry of Consolation and facilitating bereavement groups. My work as a hospice chaplain has taught me more than I realize. One day I walked into a patient’s room at a nursing home and noticed that the patient was actively dying; no one was there with him. I decided not to call the nurse but softly sang “Amazing Grace how sweet the sound...” I proceeded to the second verse, “When we

have been there ten thousand years...”; the patient breathed his last. I wept. I realized I had just midwived a person from here to there, whatever that meant for him. I remained there for some time in compassionate presence. Then I went to get a nurse to check the patient in his room; she verified the person had died.

It is not easy to be compassionate. We are so focused on ourselves. I know I have had to work on this throughout my life by learning to be aware; to learn how to ask open-ended questions; to be non-judgmental; to zip my mouth when I want to say something of my own story while the person is sharing his/her story; to be reflective and prayerful. I have just received a copy of “Boundless Compassion: Creating a Way of Life” by Joyce Rupp (2019). This is a six week “retreat” on compassion. I am going to use this for myself since I have a lot more to learn about compassion, especially how the Christ in me meets the Christ in the other. I pray that this grace be yours as you encounter the Christ in you meeting the Christ in another.

Mary Ann Wachtel, PhD, is a member of the Sisters For Christian Community (SFCC). Currently she is on the Pastoral Care and Circle of Creation Committees at St. Francis Xavier parish (college church), St. Louis, Missouri.

The Gospel tells us that when people came to Jesus with an open heart, He treated them with compassion. Based on His commandment to love, He set the standard for how to treat others.

I have worked with street gangs and the poor for over thirty years. I live by a spirituality of love, trusting in God, forgiving everyone everything, and not being afraid. When I face fear, I try to respond with love because God is love and love casts out fear.

Compassion is an emotion that I experience daily. Sometimes in dealing with those trying to hustle me, I feel my heart harden. Noticing this, I get in touch with compassion and try to treat them as human beings.

Hardness of heart is the great sin of the Bible. It comes not from our own sin, but focusing on the sins of others. As Jesus said, “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?” (Mt. 7:3).

It is often hard for us to generate compassion for some people—gang members, those on welfare, or even some immigrants. It is easy to see their sins while overlooking our hardening hearts. It is important to try to understand how different their lives are from our own and what challenges they face.

In February, I ran into my friend of years, known simply as T. T had po but his life began falling apart the sister was murdered. T developed problem, and eventually became hless. T would always try to get mor me. I would usually buy him a sanc give him a ride, but on this Februar I gave him a hooded sweatshirt. He overjoyed to receive it. In that mor felt loved. He died a day or two lat unknown causes. I feel fortunate t reconnected with him, and been a share this small bit of joy with him my friend and I loved him.

My recent encounter with T remind of my days working in Cabrini Gree large public housing complex on C near north side. When I started wo ing with residents in 1984, I notice our poorest families had a roof ove heads, heat, plumbing, and electri things were really bad, they could a church or a pantry for food and ing. Back then, they had “the basi but the underground economy lef





community's legal economic structure almost non-existent. Gangs ruled the buildings and thousands of young men died violently. During certain periods of violence, it was dangerous for kids to attend school. Violence was prevalent inside the home as well. Parental relationships did not last. Fathers went to prison. Mothers had health problems related to stress and substance abuse. Grandmothers fought to keep families together.

One of the families from Cabrini that I came to know well had a father who was in and out of prison. The mother and father had several children before the relationship ended. As gentrification began on the near north side and Cabrini Green was to be torn down, P, the mother, was offered a housing voucher to move into private housing, with the right to return to the neighborhood when new mixed income housing was built. She found a six-bedroom apartment for her large family on the

west side of Chicago. Although she was leaving the violence in Cabrini, the west side was also rife with gang violence and poverty.

Ten years later, her son was shot while returning home from work. He was hospitalized, lost his job, and suffered from PTSD. The family feared the shooters would return

for him. Consequently, P applied for her right of return so they could leave the west side. She was accepted, but only for a two-bedroom apartment. Two of her daughters had "aged out" of the right of return agreement, but still lived with her because they now had small children of their own and could not afford their own apartments. Although the daughters worked, they only had low-paying jobs. P knew her family could not fit into a two-bedroom apartment, so without other options, they stayed put.

Several years after the shooting, the family still has not moved. The economic, social, and physical stresses remain. In a city like Chicago where there are over 500 murders a year and thousands of shootings, families, like P's, are common. They value and fight for their independence, but the poverty and violence tend to keep people in the same place and trapped in the same circumstances.

I feel fortunate to call T and P my friends. We became part of a community from Cabrini that shares the bonds of love, even in the midst of violence, and even as folks moved away. They look to me for friendship and to help with, but not solve, their problems. I look at them as friends who enrich my life. I have learned a lot from them, and I am particularly grateful for what they have taught me about compassion. In the midst of all the suffering, God breaks through. This is the blessing of love and compassion on the hard Chicago streets.

Jim Fogarty is a Catholic Layman who is known as Br. Jim on the streets of Chicago. Br. Jim holds a Masters of Divinity from Catholic Theological Union (1995). He is Executive Director of Brothers and Sisters of Love (BS/L). He has worked with street gangs and the poor in some of Chicago's most violent neighborhoods since 1987. His approach is to Love, Trust in God, Forgive Everyone Everything, and Not Be Afraid. When he is in dangerous situations he loves because "Love casts out Fear" (1John 4:18) and grace happens.



Compassion is Not Enough

By Sr. Laetitia Bordes, SH



"Like sheep being led to the slaughter...." This is the image engraved in my heart of the immigrants getting off the Border Patrol bus and filing

silently into one of the shelters of Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas. I spent 8 days during Lent volunteering at a shelter where between 80 and 90 immigrants seeking asylum were dropped off by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), or the Border Patrol on a daily basis. They were tired, hungry, sick and afraid. The volunteers at the shelter greeted them with warm smiles as they called out, "Bienvenidos." When was the last time they had heard the word "Welcome"? They had trudged for weeks through hills, highways, deserts, and even rivers to reach their border destination, without a definite place to eat or bathe or sleep. Once at the border, they were placed in detention centers awaiting the paperwork that would allow them to cross. There they often slept on cold floors and shivered through the long nights,

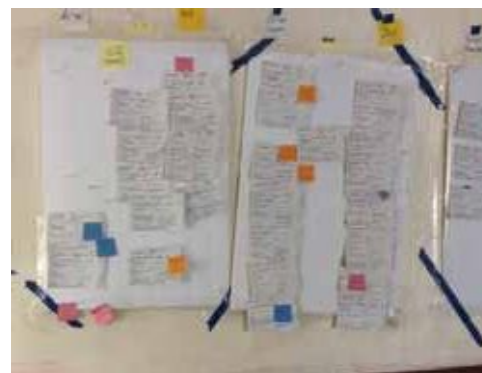


deprived of sleep and medical attention for themselves and their children.

For now, at the shelter, they were safe: offered soap and toothpaste, a hot shower and a meal and, when available, a change of clothes. They carried nothing with them except the clothes on their backs and the paperwork prepared by ICE that they would need to travel to their destination and present at their court date where the process for asylum would begin and probably last for years to come. They stayed at the shelter for two or three days at most, while their sponsor purchased the ticket for their flight or bus ride to a place totally foreign to them. Every day the ritual repeated itself. No sooner had some of our guests departed than the Border Patrol would arrive with another group.

The volunteers who came from throughout the country – many of them retired religious – were extremely dedicated serving meals, making 150 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches a day to put into lunch packs for the long bus trips; gently combing out the knots in the hair of the children, communicating a language of love. They helped those who anxiously awaited their departure date to check the board to find their names and the time indicated for their ride to the airport or bus station for the long journey ahead. The effect of this

"Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves." (Ps. 126)



loving attention on the guests was tangible as the fear in their eyes was transformed into wonderful expectancy.

As one group after another left each day, it was evident that contentment had replaced their terror, with warm hugs accompanying their "Gracias" and "Dios te bendiga" as they walked out the door.

So what does one do with this experience?

My heart is filled with compassion, yes, but compassion is not enough. My heart also carries a lot of anger. The experience of spending a week with immigrants who are scarred with such deep wounds cannot be left in the past because I am responsible for what I have

heard and seen. So often we dwell on Jesus, the image of a compassionate God. How often do we meditate on Jesus who reveals an angry God who demands justice? Rereading Matthew 23 reassures me that God is very angry with those who oppress the poor and afflicted. Six times Jesus launches out at the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites. He goes even further. *"You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?"* (Matt. 23:33). My anger urges me to act to resist the temptation to remain silent when I have the opportunity to speak up; to denounce the "Pharisees" of our day who vaunt their righteousness by imposing sanctions and unjust treatment on those who knock on our door asking for refuge.

There is something very simple that I do. For almost a year now, ever



since the children were separated from their parents at the border, I have been wearing a pin that reads: "I stand with immigrants and refugees." I have worn it proudly, whether walking along the beach on Cape Cod, standing in front of my students in the classroom, sitting in a doctor's office. I have received far more positive comments than negative ones. Not too long ago, I was shopping at Trader Joe's. I heard a woman say, "Thank you." I looked at her, a bit confused. "Thank you," she said, "for wearing that pin."

The image of the immigrants in El Paso engraved in my heart, I now also carry on my bosom as a reminder to others that we can choose sides in these turbulent times.

Sr. Laetitia Bordes lives in San Bruno, CA. She has been involved with immigrant ministry for the last 35 years. Her favorite pastime is walking along the beach and reading good books, especially novels.



Living Without Expectations | By Sr. Luisa Kujur, SH



Have you ever lived a day without any expectation? Neither had I before I reached the USA. The only things I packed

were my clothes. That was my preparation for a one year stay in Chicago. I had no lists of things to get or to receive. It had not occurred to me to expect something special

by being here. One thing I knew for sure was that I wanted to come with "an open heart."

Now, as I prepare to return to India, my hands are full and my heart overflows with gratitude and thankfulness. God has blessed me with an abundance of graces that have come to me through different people and a variety of places: in Helper communities, on the street, in hospitals,

in churches, and in shelters. If I count the blessings that I have received while being in the United States, they are like the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea. It might sound weird, but it is true for me.

Just two days after my arrival in Chicago I went to CTU (Catholic Theological Union), to see what courses I might take. All this was new to me. Luckily, I met Patrick, the assistant director, who took care of me like a mother hen takes chicks under her wings. He made me feel warmly welcomed, and helped me adjust to the academic environment. Slowly I encountered the different professors and students who welcomed me and helped me find what I needed. I remain so grateful for all the support they gave me. Sr. Mary Ellen, who accompanied me during this year of renewal, encouraged me to choose the courses that interested me. I felt I was trusted in my choices. I have had very few places where I could choose what I wanted to study. This experience gave me joy and greater freedom in my life. A chain had been released from me. I had the opportunity to take many courses throughout the year. Those I took fulfilled my desires. I received new insights into the Scriptures, how to read and interpret them in daily life in a particular culture and context, and how to apply them

for a meaningful mission in the future. I discovered what it meant to study in freedom and joy. This experience will help me to encourage my sisters in India to study in the same way.

For a long time, I had dreamt of accompanying people on their spiritual journey. I expressed this desire to Sr. Mary Ellen, and she encouraged me to follow the course for Spiritual Direction at the Claret Center, a holistic support center for spiritual and personal growth. Only after I started the program did I find out that she was one of the co-founders! I learned a great deal in the spiritual direction internship course. It's not easy to accompany others, but it's a process one grows into every day.

Even the dogs in our community, Cappi and Mocha, helped in my formation. I tried to be gentle with them, kind in words and deeds, even with Cappi, the young one who shows aggression. I have learned to understand their non-verbal language and talk to them like a human person and they have reacted the way people often do. They proved to be great company and I loved living with them. They taught me how to be kind, merciful and loving.

Besides studies, I had the opportunity to visit some of our sisters' places of ministry. At Catholic



Charities, I visited homeless and domestic violence shelters. I was not sure what kind of work I was going to do, but just being there among the guests was more important. I joined them in knitting, sewing and making ornaments. I also spent time with the children talking and playing with them. Instead of teaching, I became the one who was taught by them.

At "the Circle," a resource center for Hispanic women which is a ministry of the Helpers, I was limited in words because I don't speak Spanish. However, I joined the women in the Zumba group, and I learned to crochet winter hats. We didn't speak one another's language but understood the knitting language. Wonderful! Sometimes they brought some food to eat and they showed interest in learning Indian cooking. It was wonderful to share an Indian meal with them.

I also had the opportunity to join in NET seminars (Narrative Exposure Therapy for traumatized people) at the Circle. I am happy to be able to practice some techniques I learned that will help me in my ministry in India.

While in Chicago, I lived with three other sisters, who shared their particular gifts with me. From Sr. Jean I learned how Helpers help the homeless, and I also learned gardening, how to shovel snow and use the snowblower. Learning how to cope with Chicago weather was a feat! Sr. Mary Ellen looked after my inner, physical and spiritual needs, as well as my family needs. Sr. Gerry shared many stories from the past. All three sisters gave me so much. Something totally unexpected was the opportunity to learn to drive and finding my way around the city. I did not drive in India so this newly acquired skill certainly increased my self-confidence.

Although I am a foreigner in the United States, I never felt a stranger. From the moment I arrived until this very day, I have felt "at home" among my American sisters. I have felt privileged in being here. My life has taken a new turn. All the goodness I have received will remain with me and enable me to act accordingly to those in need in my country. In the United States, I have become a "New Me," and that is how I return to my country, India.



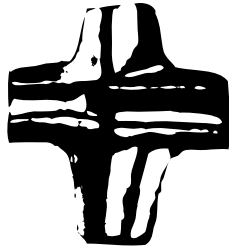
Sr. Teresa Sheehan, SH
Born: August 26, 1926 in New York
Died: July 7, 2018 in Chicago

Teresa came to the Helpers from a family of eight brothers, the only girl. She enjoyed telling stories of their evening meals together when they would debrief current events. Her parents, born in Ireland, cultivated many of her talents which would support her pastoral gifts. She learned the piano, was skilled in singing, writing songs, embroidery, painting, and creating plays to perform. Her brothers were lawyers, soldiers, real estate developers, and a Jesuit priest. They as well as she were very effective in interpersonal relations.

Completing her schooling in her local parish in Bronx, New York, she went on to College with the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Teaching became her profession until she was 30 years of age and became attracted to the vocation of a Helper. On August 15, 1958, she made her First Vows at the novitiate in Chappaqua, New York.

At Marquette University in Wisconsin, she finished her theology studies which gave the foundation for her very productive catechetical ministries. Wherever she was to serve, whether in St. Louis or New York, she was gifted with a facility for multicultural communities. At Incarnation Parish in New York, where she remained for 27 years, she created a program for more than 2,000 children released by the public-school system each week for religious instructions. She would meet them at school and lead them through the streets to the Church, often calling the priests in the rectory to assist as crossing guards for the safety of the children. One hundred four parishioners were her catechists whom she formed and assisted with lesson plans she wrote for each class. At Incarnation she also developed Crossroads, a multicultural meeting, whose goal was to share amongst persons a greater understanding of each other.

Then after 27 years at Incarnation she returned to the parish of her youth, St. Margaret's. Here, she taught Scripture classes for adults. What was most appreciated, and which endures after her death, is the group she formed for Contemplative Prayer. Clearly evidenced at Teresa's recent Memorial Mass is the deep gratitude of the persons who benefited from all her gifts and all she shared with them in the ways of the Lord.



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