

SOCIETY OF HELPERS

# VOICES of Hope



Together in One World

BRINGING HOPE TO THE HUMAN JOURNEY

Vol VI Issue II

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We are continually looking to improve our publication as well as for topics/themes suggestions for future issues. We encourage you to forward any questions/comments or suggestions.  
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## Letter from the Editor



The topic of tolerance and acceptance has special importance to the Society of Helpers. From the time that our foundress Mary of Providence identified the need to serve the most marginalized in 19th Century France until the present day, it has long since been our mission to serve those most in need in whichever manner possible. Despite having more in terms of resources and capacity to connect, the world cries out with the pain of isolation and the violence attributed to intolerance.

As our world becomes ever smaller through technology and the ability to travel vast distances in record speed, it seems to require more effort to transcend geographical, social and religious differences. From the microcosm of a neighborhood to the macrocosm of neighboring nations, when people hold different religious or political beliefs, there are choices: either build up walls and disqualify the other's point of view or reach out and build a bridge of understanding.

The Society of Helpers believe that we all have our own missions in relieving the suffering of our fellow brothers and sisters, and that as we respond to a common call, we are required to use our individual gifts and talents to bring God's love to all who need it. We believe that it is in every single one of us to similarly respond to our brothers and sisters, no matter how different we may be. There is no better time than now to connect with one another, for beyond a multitude of differences between us lie the commonalities that make up the human family. Ultimately, both our differences and similarities should be celebrated and honored.



## Letter from the Publication Committee



Greetings and welcome to the Fall 2014 of Voices of Hope. Let's think about our theme, Together in One World: we are all in this together, aren't we? We all have our own spaces that we call home, but ultimately we share the same home on earth. The challenge, as ever, has been how to co-exist peacefully and lovingly, Together in One World. I, myself, have moved around quite a lot trying to find out where I fit in this world and what my purpose is, doing my best to provide help to those around me and facing whatever new situation arises. My path in life has been treacherous at times, with a lot of dead ends and stop overs, re-routes and U-turns. Throughout my journeys, however, I have always been able to help out or be helped in ways I never thought possible.

We do not know the good we put in motion by the simplest acts of kindness - saying hi to a passerby, holding open a door. Recently, while at work I overheard someone talking about how they were at an ice cream parlor and the person in front of them said, "And whatever they are having." That person had bought ice-cream for him and his two kids! The do-gooder turned around and said, "It's no problem. Pay it forward." Cool, huh? I never thought that actually happened but then I thought, "I should do that someday." The other day I got my chance while in line at a sandwich shop. I told the cashier that I'd pay for whatever the person behind me was getting. After the patron behind me figured out that I had paid the tab for both of our meals, she was so confused that it was almost funny, and I said the same thing my friend's benefactor had said to him: "I got it. Pay it forward, you know?" It was a nice thing to do and I recommend doing it if you are ever in the position to do so. It is things like that that help us co-exist. We are all Together in One World.

This issue explores the idea of how we interpret and experience each other's differences, from Elizabeth Wangen's experiences as a high-school student who has witnessed the most tragic results of bullying to Tesfamariam Kefle, who shares his thoughts as an academic who moved from Africa to make his home in Chicago. Candy Lo reminisces about being a young immigrant from Hong Kong and Rachel Arfa writes a letter to her thirteen-year-old self while Bridgette Purdome's poem highlights and celebrate how necessary it is to love and accept one another. I hope you enjoy this issue and are moved into new acts of kindness, whether it is a wave of a hand or the lifting of a mountain - where our kindness goes we may never know. What I do know is that, through the kindness of the Society of Helpers and my fellow editors, I am able to write for you now! I hope to provide some more stories and insight into my life journeys as well as hear from all of you. Be well and enjoy this issue of Voices of Hope!

James Jacobsen, Editor

## Helper Ministry | SPRED – Friends to Special Needs Parishioners Since 1966

The award-winning Special Religious Development (SPRED) agency began in response to parents who lamented the lack of religious development opportunities for children with special needs. In 1960, founder Fr. James McCarthy was the associate director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in the Archdiocese of Chicago. He recognized parents wanted their children with developmental disabilities to prepare to receive the sacraments, too, and set about to establish a program to help these children engage in the liturgical life of their parish.

Fr. McCarthy began to meet with parents, special educators and volunteers and reached out to the faith community to find someone who could help him actualize his vision to offer religious education to parishioners with special needs. His inquiries yielded Sr. Mary Therese Harrington SH, a young Helper living in New York.

"Parents were up in arms," said Sr. Mary Therese Harrington SH, one of SPRED's principals. "They didn't think that those with developmental disabilities were educable in faith," she said. "When my Provincial said that Fr. McCarthy needed a Helper to assist with this program, I told her that I had no experience. She said, 'You have the summer to figure it out,'" Sr. Mary Therese said with a laugh.

The team was connected to the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB) based in Geneva, Switzerland and formed the Medical Educational Psycho-social Commission of the ICCB. While researching the catechesis and theology,

Sr. Mary Therese encountered the symbolic method of Fr. Jean Mesny, a priest from the Diocese of Lyon in France who collaborated with Fr. Eucharist Paulhus from Quebec. They arrived in Chicago to develop the model and Sr. Mary Therese translated their work into English. The SPRED team was soon asked by the ICCB to handle the English speakers

interested in participating in the program from Chicago.

"It took off," said Sister Mary Therese. "We began in 2 mobile units in the Garden. Then it grew to 14 groups, where it stayed for a long time. Then Fr. McCarthy found this site in 1973. After two or three years it really took off. Now we have more than 1,000 volunteers."



In 1966, SPRED was formally recognized as an agency of the Archdiocese of Chicago, helping to establish the SPRED model in other parishes. In 1973 the SPRED Agency moved to St. John Nepomucene parish in Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood. Fr. McCarthy became pastor of the parish while remaining the SPRED's director. When the Archdiocese closed several area parishes in 1990, including St. John Nepomucene, the SPRED Chapel and Resource Center remained on-site, continuing to serve the area and while training volunteers.

What began as an experimental program to serve parishioners with special needs has become a thriving agency represented in 7 countries. With 156 SPRED centers in Chicago alone, it is clear that Fr. McCarthy's vision to bring religious development to an underserved population has come to fruit.

### Model, Method and Training Opportunities

Once the model was established, the team developed the SPRED model center to train volunteer catechists in their methods. Now serving 156 affiliate centers in Chicago, the SPRED model training continues to grow, with SPRED centers in 9 Diocese across the nation.

SPRED groups are base communities whose goal is integration into the larger community of worship and the SPRED team develops training methods in view of the needs of parishes in the Archdiocese.







As the number of centers grew and the need arose for persons in one age group to move to the next age group, it became important to secure the same structure and use of materials for each center, resulting in standards that were created to support the development of a common mentality and spirit among centers.

### Core Leadership Teams

The SPRED team's core leadership training develops teams who share responsibility for the group. Appointed by a pastor, the chairperson is responsible for securing a location for the SPRED program and for handling logistics and administrative work. Leaders and activity catechists oversee the group, handling the catechesis and the celebration room, with one activity catechist assigned to each participant or "friend", a very hands-on role essential to the effectiveness of the program.

Shared responsibility is very important in a SPRED community, ensuring cooperation within a core team. The chairperson is appointed by the parish's pastor, serving as the link from the pastor to the families, caregivers and SPRED agency and also acts as a helper catechist within the group. The leader catechist leads catechist preparation sessions and the catechesis with the total community, while the activity catechist helps the community prepare for catechesis by engaging in concentrated activities. Finally, each member of the SPRED community has a godparent figure, or a helper catechist for each person with special needs, serving as a faith friend, a witness and a guide.

Core teams are trained together and broken into their role groups, learning every facet of the SPRED method to bring back to their communities, including the mandatory observation of two catechesis sessions. Qualifications for core team members, according to Sr. Mary Therese, require that volunteers "show proficiency, reliability and leadership."

While 1,000 trained team-members in the U.S. may seem like a large number, the SPRED team stresses the importance of the volunteers who make up the core leadership teams. Although the entire core team is responsible for the group, the activity catechists spend the most one-on-one time with the program's participants.

"Our activity catechists work one-on-one with our friends and we currently have approximately 100 children on our waiting list," says Sr. Mary Therese. SPRED serves an ever-growing number of people in need with their unique method of religious education. With growing numbers of people in need of such services, engaging increasing numbers of volunteers is essential to the program's continuing success. SPRED training also addresses several levels of competency, offering opportunities to students to gain credit in their college courses.

### The SPRED Method

Originally designed by Fr. Mesny, the curriculum creates a dynamic process of transplanting a life situation into a catechetical climate, the SPRED team writes their own curriculum, using the Five Biblical Axes developed by French bishops to address socioeconomic, geographical and age differences within the curriculum. "We address developmental realities through theological framework to help them develop spiritually and socially," said Sr. Mary Therese. "Catechesis has a therapeutic byproduct. We address their lived experience in the light of scripture and liturgy, how God is working in their lives."

The method was developed to enable catechists to share their faith while leading the community to live in Christ together. Furthermore, Sr. Mary Therese's research during the development of the SPRED method influenced pastoral guidelines developed in 1985 by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin that modified the criteria required for parishioners with special needs to make



the sacraments. The objective of the method is to encourage communion with Jesus Christ within the Christian community of faith with sacramental initiation taking place according to each friend's personal development.

Core teams are trained over a period of five days to work with each of the four age groups, 6 - 10, 11 - 16, 17 - 21 and 22 and older. Training also includes mandatory observation of catechesis. The rooms are set up in the Montessori style. Sr. Suzanne Gallagher SP, one of the SPRED agency's principals, has a background in both special education and the Montessori method, resulting in activity rooms that address a variety of social, developmental and life skills through art, everyday life and sensory motor activities that provide experiences specific to each age group. After 40 minutes in the Montessori room, the groups move to their respective Celebration rooms for Catechesis preparation.

SPRED has been part of various departments in the Archdiocesan structure. Communication within the Department alerts other agency directors to the importance of parish involvement in SPRED ministry. The SPRED agency belongs to the Department of Parish Life and Formation with several other agencies. Coordination of Parish Centers within each area is important.

"Our parishes cluster and work cooperatively," said Sr. Mary Therese, describing how groups divide resources to address the various age groups effectively. In the spring of each year, Parish Chairpersons gather with SPRED Community Religious Workers to plan for growth and to share stories of the year so that all can sense the needs and the development that is occurring within their Deanery and Vicariate.

Every three years, the directors gather to share their experiences and to develop solutions through the Project Peer Support meetings. The cooperative nature of the organization has been a cornerstone in its success and the collaboration of all core teams brings the volunteers and trainers together, despite geographical distance.



## Serving an International Population

As SPRED has made tremendous strides in meeting the needs of special needs parishioners since 1966, the program has been addressing the needs of the Spanish-speaking community, as well. Ramiro and Eva Hernandez first became aware of SPRED in the early 1990s. Now in their 20th year, the Hernandez family has worked tirelessly to serve Spanish-speaking parishioners and has been instrumental in establishing the Spanish training program.

"My wife invited me to come observe. I liked it and I stayed for twenty years. First, I became a leader and then a trainer," Mr. Hernandez said. "I have trained approximately 200 [catechists] since the Spanish training started." With 15 Spanish-speaking parishes throughout Chicago and record-breaking numbers of all Spanish-speaking training groups, Mr. Hernandez also led in the development and training of core teams in Mexico City. "We need more people to



## ACCOLADES AND AWARDS

May 19, 2013 - Fr. Jenkins CSC, President of the University of Notre Dame conferred on Fr. James McCarthy, Sr. Mary Therese Harrington SH and Sr. Susanne Gallagher SP Notre Dames highest honor, the Laetare Medal.

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June 19, 2013, through Commissioner John Daley, the Illinois Cook County Board of Commissioners offered its highest tribute and message of congratulations on receiving the Laetare Medal, to Fr. McCarthy, Sr. Harrington and Sr. Gallagher "as a symbol of gratitude on behalf of the many lives that have been touched by the wonderful ministry of SPRED."

\*\*\*

Sr. Mary Therese Harrington S.H. has been honored by the Archdiocese of Chicago for 50 years of dedicated service as staff member of the Special Religious Development Agency, SPRED-Chicago. On this special occasion Cardinal George remarked to Fr. Jim McCarthy, SPRED Director, "You have created a model for the world."



train teams who only speak Spanish,” he said. With the help of Armando Cuaya, who translates all materials into Spanish, and the thriving local and international Spanish-speaking SPRED community continually growing, the Hernandez family has helped bring the SPRED method to a growing population of faithful.

“We call each other friends here,” Mr. Hernandez said.

“These children, they have a hard time in school. They say, ‘I don’t have friends,’ but we tell them, ‘Yes, you do. We are your friends.’ We are here for them.”

#### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

**VOLUNTEER** – The organization depends on the time and energy of dedicated volunteers. Contact Sr. Mary Therese to find out how to engage in SPRED training or other ways to volunteer your time.

**DONATE** – SPRED depends on the generosity of supporters and friends through direct donations or engaging in various fundraising efforts. Find out how you can support the SPRED mission.

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## The Consequences of Bullying

by Elizabeth Wangen



The teenage world seems to be mystifying in many ways, from the blatant disregard of others’ feelings to the self-centered ways of the average teenager. It seems to be most confusing to the adults who have to deal with troublesome teenagers, never seeing the kindness, humor and friendliness of the majority of quieter students.

What is most confusing is the ways in which bullying and intolerance happen. From cyber bullying to actual fights, bullying comes in many different forms. But, what happens when the bullies take a step too far? It can result in something as drastic as suicide, and in a junior high in Maple Grove, Minnesota, year after year, it seems to happen to every class in ninth grade. Why in ninth grade? Even I can’t answer that and I was there - in that school.

One such victim was my friend Alex, a boy that could have grown up to be who knows what, with an amazing singing voice, a passion for skiing, active in his church and an Eagle Scout. Alex’s bullying was not in public. It was behind the scenes - places and experiences that Alex hid from everyone. Alex seemed to be a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, and because I was in eighth grade, I never saw the bullying that went on in Alex’s classes and he never talked about it.

The call came right before my choir concert, where he was supposed to sing with the show choir - Alex had ended his life, brutally alone.

I worried for a long time about whether I could have done something, but since Alex was so private in his pain, I know there was nothing I could have done differently. Something that came as a surprise was how much Alex’s actions hurt the bully himself. Alex’s bully intended to be funny by his actions. It was the bully’s way of making himself popular and superior to Alex. But as soon as word got out about who had bullied Alex the most, the bully was forced, almost overnight, to switch schools, for the general ninth grade population had





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and it then  
becomes more  
acceptable to  
either speak up  
or report it.*

found out and had socially isolated him. Almost reverse bullying! I don't know whatever happened to him.

Everyone was saying "something has to be done" - but what? Alex's parents met with the school to see what changes could be made to make things better. Right away, the school helped by providing counselors for the grieving students to talk to, even pulling the counselors out of the surrounding schools to come and help the students. It's safe to say that the school is now taking actions to help the students out more, by having a "Foundations" class where twice a week you can hang out with your friends and do activities that are supposed to help build the foundation of our character.

More students are getting help, and after three straight years of suicides, the school and the students have finally realized that they have to be nicer to each other and the intolerance has seemed to stop as people become more accepting. The schools are working on the problem for now, but what will happen in the future, when the kids who have lost someone have grown up and moved on, the teachers involved with Alex and the others who have resorted to drastic measures retire, and complacency settles in again?

One of the best ways to end bullying is to talk about it - talk about it everywhere because the more we talk, the more aware everyone becomes of the problem, and it then becomes more acceptable to either speak up or report it. Another solution is quick and easy, although it is heartbreaking to watch. There are videos online that demonstrate the personal impacts that bullying has on its victims. The Amanda Todd video, for example, can be found on YouTube. It's entitled My Story: Struggling, Bullying, Suicide and Self-harm, which showed her using a series of flashcards to tell of her experiences being bullied just before she ended her life. Seeing the results of bullying could make even the worst bullies realize how terribly their actions impact the victims. Hopefully, they would see

that bullying is bad and give up. There are other ways to make changes that are more personal, too, like speaking up for myself, if I'm being bullied, or talking to my friends or parents which always seems to help.

You may be wondering about the senior high... The students there DO NOT accept blatant bullying as they have all lost a friend to the atrocious ways of teenagers. But even at the senior high, there is an undercurrent of bullying - a little different because it's with the cliques, where they only accept people from a certain sports team, dance group, or music club, or those went to the same school. As I get older, it's easier to ignore and not let the groups make me feel excluded.

Now you have seen behind the "iron curtain" of junior high and high school drama, what actions would you take against the bullies? The same as mine, or something more extreme? The intolerance in my little world seems to slowing down and getting better. Now, as these same people take more time to look around and maybe notice the problems in the world and apply these same lessons about bullying to try to fix the intolerance worldwide. It would be a great world!

*Elizabeth Wangen is a junior at Maple Grove Senior High School. She was asked to write for Voices of Hope by her Aunt Jean. She loves to write and volunteer. She and her sister found a new passion with We Can Ride - therapeutic horseback riding. Elizabeth is active on the Northwest Alpine Ski team and the OMG Mountain Bike Team. She has a twin sister, Emma and an older brother, Jared. She lives with her parents in Maple Grove, MN. \*\*\*Bio Photo By splitpixeldesign\*\*\**







Hey, girl,

It's me, well, you, from the future. I'm your 36 year old self, and I have so much dish to fill you in on. First, let me give you a big hug and some words of support: hang in there. Your mom, dad and your brother are amazing sources of love and support. No doubt, you are going to do great things. (More on the cool things!)

But first, I have to break some tough news to you. This year is going to be one of the most difficult years of your life, and it is also going to be a time that shapes you. It's seventh grade, and you have a group of friends that you spend your time with. You go to the movies, and hang out at each other's houses. But, all of this is going to change in literally an instant. While you're on your class trip, the queen bee of your group does the cruelest thing possible: she instantly stops talking to you, and tells all the girls in your group to exclude you. She punishes anyone who tries to be your friend. It is going to be a pretty lonely rest of the year, and you're going to wonder what exactly you did wrong.

You suspect that it is because you're deaf. I'm here to tell you that you're right. You wear hearing aids, and sometimes they whistle and go off, and you can't hear it, but everyone else can. You're a killer lipreader, so you get by trying to lipread. The

queen bee knows this, and she taunts you by trying to get your attention by waving, and then when you look in her direction, she covers her mouth and talks. Honey, anyone who talks like that and treats people so poorly doesn't have anything important to say. Another girl's mother tells your mother, "Oh, Rachel is so hard to understand anyway - why should we make the effort to communicate with her?"

I know that was hard to hear, especially since you've been going to speech therapy since you were 18 months old, and you'll continue going until you're 19 years old. When your parents found out you had a hearing loss at 18 months of age, they had to make the difficult decision on whether to teach you to speak and listen, or to use sign language. Your parents chose listening and spoken

language. They wanted to be able to communicate with you, and for you to be a part of their world. You were first fitted with a body hearing aid, and when strangers gawked at you, mom would tell them it was your life support system. While Mom was joking, your hearing aids gave you access to the world of sound. When you were five years old, you upgraded to behind the ear hearing aids, which gave you even more freedom.

You wore those hearing aids until around 8<sup>th</sup> grade when you realized they didn't quite work for you anymore because you lost all your hearing. Not to worry, a fantastic technology has been improving, called the cochlear implant. Electrodes are surgically implanted to stimulate your hair cells and teach you what it is like to hear all over again. (Yes, you have to get over your fear of hospitals and surgery -

but you do it!). The cochlear implant is incredible, I tell you, and when you are 15, you get one. You continue going to speech therapy and it'll be fun again (you won't have to pretend you heard the therapist anymore - you'll actually be able to hear her). At first, you'll worry about how it looks since it looks uncannily like the body aid you had as a kid, but the company promises you that they will make a behind the ear version. (They do!). Spoiler alert here: fifteen years after the first one, you get a second cochlear implant! The technology has improved even more, resulting in you being able to hear more as an adult than when you were a kid. A cool effect is that because you can hear more, your speech improves. People don't ask you to repeat your name anymore because you pronounce the "r" in your name more strongly and you can also hear the hard to hear sounds like "s" and "z."

Guess what? The technology improves everywhere. Right now, when you go to the movies, you try to read as much about the movie before you go and only go to action movies because there is no captioning in the movie theaters. Afterwards, you nod politely with your friends because you have no idea what they said in the movie. Now, there is captioning at the movie theaters. You can go to almost any movie! There is even captioning available at live theatres so you can laugh at the jokes like other audience members, instead of



being left out and sitting there with a fake smile on your face so no one knows.

New technology called the Internet is invented. Using the internet, you can contact your friends immediately - no more asking Mom or your brother to make phone calls for you. The internet proves to be a level playing field for you and other people with hearing loss. Things are looking up already!

Even more good news! You go to college at University of Michigan, where you meet an amazing group of friends. You all still keep in touch and go to each other's weddings and baby showers - these are the friends that make you feel loved and support you through life. You become a lawyer (making your parents so proud!) and go to work at a public interest law firm called Equip for Equality in Chicago, where you represent people with disabilities in employment discrimination and in civil rights violations.

So, some things to review:

1. Because of your experience, you learn to filter your friendships through your hearing loss. The people who take the extra time to talk to you are the ones who want to be your friend. You'll spot your true friends.
2. Those mean girls from this year? While your feelings and trust in people will be hurt for several years, you'll persevere and thrive.
3. You will use your experiences

to identify with your clients and be a strong advocate for them, because you know what it is like to face adversity and to get through it.

4. Use your strengths. You'll be in lots of different situations in the future. For example, after college, you'll go to work on Capitol Hill (forgot that spoiler alert!) and work hard on causes that you care about.

Now get out there, and be your fantastic self.

XOXO,

Rachel Arfa

*Rachel Arfa is a Staff Attorney and PABSS Project Manager at Equip for Equality, Illinois' designated protection and advocacy organization to protect the human and civil rights of people with disabilities. She serves as the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Midwest Center on Law and the Deaf (MCLD), as Alumni Co-Chair on the Board of the New Leaders Council and is a member of the Steering Committee of the Chicago Cultural Accessibility Consortium. Ms. Arfa is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin School of Law and the University of Michigan.*



As a suburban wife and mother of 2 beautiful girls, my days are filled with chores, taking care of my family and hanging out with my girlfriends who are also moms. Sounds pretty normal right? Well...for me, that was not always the case. My family moved here from Hong Kong in 1990 when I was in fifth grade. In Hong Kong, I was athletic and popular. I was the fastest girl in gym class even though I was just an average size compared to the other kids. My dad had a bookstore and I would share my comic books with friends during recess. I had a great time. Then the big "move" happened and bam! My life was turned upside down.

When I moved to Chicago from Hong Kong, I was labeled the sore thumb of the year at school. I went from being the cool girl to being the only Asian in my entire grade. I barely spoke or understood English and I had no idea what was going on for the whole first semester at school in the States. My biggest nightmare was dodge ball. Picture me lining up with the rest of the class, not knowing what would happen next - it was not pretty, I can tell you that.

Besides being clueless in school, I was often confused by American holidays. I couldn't understand why I was supposed to dress up for Halloween or why a rabbit would bring treats on the day of Jesus' resurrection. I didn't know any of the words to the songs at the Christmas pageant. My elementary school years were very hard for me, so when it was time for me to choose a high school, I knew I had to go somewhere with more diverse ethnicity, so I picked Maria High School in Chicago.

Every morning I took 3 CTA buses to commute and it was worth it. I was no longer the odd girl who didn't speak fluent English. I started as a freshman, I wore the same uniform as everyone else and I was no longer the only minority. My communication skills improved greatly and everyone treated me like a normal student. The best part was that dodge ball was banned there - that was a great relief. After 4 years at Maria, I was more confident. I had made friends, and, more importantly, I learned about different cultures and history. I learned to embrace my differences, and be proud of being a sore thumb. I will teach my girls the same lessons I learned the hard way and pray that they will help sore thumbs like me feel accepted in school or where ever their lives take them.

*Candy Schlee was born in Hong Kong and moved to Chicago at age ten. She is a wife and the mother of two beautiful girls. Candy enjoyed writing her second essay for Voices of Hope.*



## A Diverse Spiritual Group | by Bridget Purdome

They're male, female, transgender;  
African American, Caucasian, Latino;  
Gay, straight, bisexual  
Millennials, Gen Xer's, Baby Boomers.

They're Pentecostal, Baptist, Catholic;  
Jewish, Muslim, Hindu;  
"Spiritual but not religious."  
And even, "I don't believe in that God stuff."

Many grew up in poverty.  
A few fell from professional positions.  
Most are in recovery from addictions.  
Several struggle with mental illness.

They're all HIV positive.  
They've all been stigmatized.  
They've all repeatedly heard,  
"You're not okay."

"You're not okay if you have the virus."  
"You're not okay if you're homosexual."  
"You're not okay if you're an addict."  
"You're not okay if you dress in drag."

"You're not okay if you've sold your body."  
"You're not okay if you've served jail time."  
"You're not okay if you don't have a degree."  
"You're not okay if you've lived on the streets."

She wants to shout,  
"You are okay!"  
"You are okay!"

But she knows that they'll never believe her.

All she can do is create safe space  
For them to share their stories  
Then listen attentively

And watch the Spirit work.  
Each group begins with words of gratitude.  
"I'm thankful for being alive."  
"I'm grateful to be sober another day."  
"I finally found a place to stay."

They share their struggles.  
"My family isn't talking to me."  
"I've had to let some friends go."  
"It's hard to stay focused on my recovery."

Then, one man speaks of "God's plan for my life."  
Another proclaims, "Jesus Christ is my Savior."  
A woman says, "I experience my Higher Power as energy."  
An older gentleman talks about his Jewish faith.

She briefly wonders if all hell will break loose  
With so many diverse views in the circle  
But nobody seems to feel the need  
To convince the others of one right way.

They listen to each other  
And they each listen to themselves  
And as the weeks go by  
Something begins to happen.

"I'm working on my GED."  
"I'm volunteering at a soup kitchen."  
"I've been asked to lead AA meetings."  
"I've found permanent housing."

And underneath each milestone  
She hears the faintest voice,  
"I am okay."  
"I am okay."

*Bridget Purdome is the spiritual care coordinator for a ministry that serves those with HIV/AIDS, a spiritual director, and a retreat leader. She can be reached at [Bridget@theSpiritToday.com](mailto:Bridget@theSpiritToday.com).*





Diversity and multiculturalism describe well the society we live in. These terms imply richness in the sense of variety but can also be problematic due to the confusion that can accompany them. The first thought that comes to mind when I hear these words is that there are numerous differences among us concerning culture, customs, food, religious practices and political systems. In spite of having diverse or multicultural experiences that sometimes evoke tension among us, we also are well aware that we have one planet to share. This very fact of having one world to live in does not give us choice but to adopt some form of tolerance to co-exist.

Globally, as we advance in technology, our world is becoming smaller and smaller and we find ourselves more connected than ever before. The internet and social media make it possible for the news of events to spread much faster. As we continue to be more connected, we also influence each other in more ways than ever. This sounds wonderful and exciting until we realize the effect of this is not always good and can also be negative. It is a privilege to have access to what is going on in our world, but this privilege carries a heavy burden and responsibility. We are part of the world and have a role to play in its betterment.

We do not have to travel much to realize how multicultural most neighborhoods are here in our city. Chicago possesses a rich blend of cultural traditions from all over the world. This diversity, I believe, enriches our own culture by bringing new ideas. So the richness that comes with diverse and multicultural sources, and the challenges that this richness carries, invites us to promote tolerance. We easily come to realize that some sort of tolerance is needed to manage diversity. Tolerance helps us to coexist peacefully with people from different cultures, races and religions.

Generally, the daily messages regarding respect and acceptance are positive and encouraging. For the most part,



common values are stressed and promoted. I think there is a sincere attempt to accept differences among various ethnic groups. And even though the source of the acceptance sometimes seems to operate from a disposition of giving permission from the majority to allow minority cultures to maintain their own cultural heritage, the minority cultures can do so as long as they don't challenge the established majority culture.

United States is a melting pot. At one time, I read that people from about 150 countries are represented in the USA. Unlike the place I came from, which is predominantly one culture, I find Chicago very diverse. It became clear to me, perhaps beyond my imagination, how complex a multicultural society is. Generally, my experience is that the predominant culture in Chicago tends to be open and accepting. This is especially noticeable in the summer when people of various ethnic groups can be seen coming together in summertime events such as neighborhood block parties, the Taste of Chicago and other city and neighborhood festivals -- evidence of an easy-going and accepting American culture. This is a country of immigrants - people from different parts of the world who came and settled in this new world. And it is a good example, especially to third world countries, of how people can survive and get along with other cultures. This does not mean all is heavenly and we are an ideal society that lives in harmony. To the contrary, our daily news is full of violence and innocent victims of crimes that often have cultural or racial overtones. As a matter of fact, when a crime is committed, people tend to jump into categorizing the nature of the crime as racially motivated or not.

In our effort to practice tolerance and harmony among different cultures, our faith plays a major role. Many people struggle in defining what faith is. Many times we tend to confuse it with organized religion. The purpose of religion is to help us grow in our spiritual life. As far as I am concerned, it is a means to an end with the end meaning 'faith and relationship with God.' I am aware of the Church teachings and efforts to promote human dignity.



As a child of a very dedicated religious family, I studied in my catechism which holds the basic and fundamental teaching of the Catholic Faith. Namely--Who created us? Why did He create us and what is our destiny? So, from a religious point of view, I believe that all humans were created in the image of God, and our dignity is based on this. So if as human beings we are dignified by being created in



the image of God, it follows that each human family deserves the right to be and to express itself in a unique way. That is where I believe the multiculturalism comes in. It comes with richness as well as with a huge responsibility.

The impact and the challenge of diversity and multicultural experience were felt by the early Christian communities as well. We know the early church was confronted with a similar problem, which was partly addressed in the council of Jerusalem (Act:15:1-35) in which the disciples were trying to sort out what a Christian should be and how to accommodate the new non-Jewish culture into the early Christian community. This council attempted to address their different understandings of what it meant to be a follower of Christ. At the end, there was compromise, a way for the Jews and the non-Jews to embrace Christianity. As Church continues to spread in the world and interact with various cultures, it will continue to face challenges on how to take into consideration the values and customs of people without undermining the Christian teaching.

I came to the US from Eritrea, a small country located in the horn of Africa. Unlike a multicultural society in which we come across different languages, different foods and diverse cultures, it was predominantly one culture. As a newcomer to the States, it was very intimidating, although it was not as traumatic because I'd been exposed to the Comboni Missionaries at a very young age. I attended a local seminary then later in Chicago joined students from seven countries, which was my first experience with culture shock. My initial reaction was a sort of mistrust that came from not knowing someone, let

alone the culture they came from. At the same time, I was curious and wanted to find out more about them. As I came to know my classmates and began to appreciate the richness of their diversity, it became less threatening for me. Today, I feel blessed and enriched by these tremendous exposures into so many interesting cultures. Although that feeling of being a minority will always be with me, I am more comfortable and accepting of people of different cultures.

I attended theological school where there were cluster schools made up of different denominations. We were allowed to register for our biblical courses outside of our denomination, which was another shock for me. At home there was a very strict and rigid boundary which discourages interaction within the different denominations. So being allowed to take a biblical course in another denomination was an eye-opener that showed me that the Christian family is in dialogue and there is a relatively comfortable co-existence.

Churches, in general, seem to be accepting and less rigid. The churches were at the forefront in creating an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance of other cultures and made efforts to accommodate the newly arrived immigrants i.e. many Catholic Parishes have liturgical celebration in various cultures.

I remember at my Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), a class made up of various religious groups, we often engaged in heated religious debates on theological controversies. But when it came to the biblical context, we found a common denominator that is Jesus and His ministry. This had the magic to overrule the religious practices and their deficiencies, emphasizing the mission that Jesus entrusted to His disciples.

Another positive element in this society is the agreement between the civic and religious regarding human dignity and individuality. I believe this is a strength that has been helpful in facilitating and defusing ten-

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sion among the different cultures here in the United States. There is an interest and open-mindedness, a curiosity regarding why people do what they do, which is fascinating. The more we understand a culture, the more we become open to accept, admire or even imitate certain values of different cultures. There are many examples of how intolerance causes tension in many parts of the world. We hear countless stories of innocent people losing their lives on a daily basis. The world has witnessed ethnic cleansing based on cultural, racial, political as well as religious beliefs. The trouble spots of the world, those that get media attention and those that remain obscure to the American media, are many and widely spread.

If we look at the Middle East, so many innocent children, women and families are losing their lives. The mere religion or political organizations that are established to protect people become the main obstacle and the cause of much suffering and death. In the midst of all this tension, it might seem a little simplistic to say that the cause of the conflict is intolerance, but it more than likely is. According to UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, among other things, tolerance is considered respect and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, culture being our forms of expression and ways of being human.

In conclusion, as we become more and more connected, tolerance, inter-cultural dialogue and respect for diversity are more essential than ever for our world.



Hence people in authority, whether political or religious, need to emphasize peaceful co-existence in which all peoples' cultures are respected and recognized and in which diversity is embraced. The meaningless wars on all corners of our planet are most of the time exacerbated by erroneous beliefs and oppressive political systems which lack inclusiveness and active participation of their citizens.

*Tesfamariam was born in Eritrea, a small country in East Africa. He came to the U.S. to continue his studies. He has M.Div in theology from theological Union and MSW from University of Illinois Chicago. He has been a licensed social worker with Catholic Charities for 20 years and is currently working on the housing service division. He lives in Chicago with his wife and four children.*

## A Brush with Evil

by Roy F. Baumeister

There wasn't much time. She was hungry, but her flight would be boarding soon. Sometimes flights just worked out so that you got nothing to eat all day, and she really wanted something. As luck would have it, there was a small place open near her gate. She stood in line and bought a bag of chips and a diet soda.

But all the tables in the small airport cafeteria were full. There was not a single free table. She'd have to share with somebody who already had one.

She spotted a likely prospect: a reasonably well dressed man sitting by himself at a small table, reading a paper. Certainly he would not mind if she sat at one of the empty seats at his table and quietly ate her snack.

She sat down. They briefly made eye contact; he seemed to nod slightly and then went back to his paper. She was nervous for no apparent reason. She busied herself with her snack. She set down her diet cola, unwrapped the straw, inserted it in the slot, and had her first sip. Then another. Then she had a chip.

When her mouth crunched on the first chip, the man suddenly looked up from his newspaper. He looked angry, intent, alert, vaguely dangerous. He fixed his eyes on hers, violent, like a predator seeing prey. And then, amazingly, he slowly reached out his hand into her bag of chips, extracted one, brought it to his mouth, and ate it!



## Helper History: The St. Ann Community in St. Louis

by Geraldine Finan, SH

Her heart began to beat rapidly. A crazy impulse told her to flee, abandon her food to this man and save herself. She took another drink and then made herself take another chip from her bag and eat it. He glared at her, motionless. It was a hostile, evil glare. What had at first struck her as a calm, middle-aged gentleman now appeared as a dangerous individual, capable of unknown things. As she finished chewing her chip, he reached out and took another himself. Now she knew he was not just helping himself one time, as if to say she owed him a chip for sitting at his table. Now he was totally outside the bounds of normal etiquette between strangers. What sort of person was this?

They finished the bag, not speaking a single word but intently taking turns drawing chips. He looked at her the whole time; she didn't know whether to meet his gaze or to look away, so she alternated. She took big gulps of her drink. Soon it was nearly gone and the bag was nearly empty, too. She had had enough. She stood up, nodded, looked away from him, picked up her bags, and walked quickly out of the place. She got to her gate a few minutes early and sat in the waiting area, heart pounding, still unable to grasp what had just happened, what manner of creature she had just encountered. What sort of people help themselves to a stranger's food in a restaurant?

She learned the answer sooner than she expected. They called passengers to board the plane, and she got right in line. When she came to the front of the line, she reached into her bag for her ticket. It was there, and next to it was her bag of chips. Somehow, when she paid for the snack, she had put her chips into her flight bag, and at the table she and the mysterious stranger had shared chips, not hers. She herself was the sort of person who just helped herself to a stranger's food in a restaurant.

*This story is an excerpt in the book Evil - Inside Human Violence and Cruelty by Roy F. Baumeister. While this story is intended to illustrate perceptions of evil, it can also be used to describe how we understand people who appear to function outside our ideas of normal human behavior. Ultimately, the story effectively underscores how easy it is to believe that others are behaving outside the norm while overlooking our own behaviors, perceptions and proclivities. Our perceptions determine how we interact with the world around us and, while perceptions can be flawed, they can also be altered to fit new information and insights into the world we live in. It's our hope that people's perceptions can be altered by love and respect, resulting in a more just and tolerant world.*



Pope Francis' recipe for happiness was part of the ingredients of our life in North St. Louis in the 1970s. We were in union with fifteen parishes whose people believed in "moving forward, letting others do the same." Together we gave of ourselves for all of our youth, spending time together, listening to each other's needs, formulating programs and building lasting relationships.

Our community had a healthy sense of leisure. Ours was a house of hospitality. Innumerable friends shared our meals, prayer life, and ministries. The young people especially felt at home in our kitchen and living room. We grew together through our communications.

Though it was a time of social upheaval, none of the parishes nor our house suffered any loss of property. All along, we had been proactive for justice. There were many blessings given to us during that time, mostly those good people who invited us to be a part of their lives.



*\*\*\*We extend our most heartfelt apologies for neglecting to add Sister Laetitia Bordes' byline to the Spring 2014 issue's Helper History section covering the Society of Helpers' presence in California. We appreciate her thoughtful and comprehensive continuation on the subject and regret the omission of her byline on the piece.\*\*\**



**Sr. Mary Paul SH**

Born: February 16, 1917

1st vows: September 8, 1955

Final vows: August 19, 1961

Died: February 10, 2014

### She kept her eye on the prize

Being amongst the community of St. Peter's Church, Yonkers, evening Eucharist is a special homecoming for any Helper because of our Sr. Mary Paul Metivier. Men, women and children beam while reaching out and embracing us warmly in memory of her. Their vibrant community of all generations as of an extended family carries the legacy of her unfoiling confidence in her ability to be disciples of Jesus Christ. In their midst are advocates for the poor and the marginalized, pastoral ministers, catechists, dedicated married couples and deacons.

Mary Paul, baptized Gertrude, was born of a Quebequoise father and an American mother. As an only girl with two brothers, she grew into a talented young woman working as a reporter for a local newspaper in her home state of Rhode Island. During these years, she placed herself under the spiritual direction of an ascetical Jesuit priest who exacted from her a strict discipline to ascertain if she had a calling to religious life.

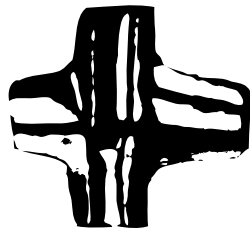
Then becoming a Helper, Mary Paul also fulfilled her deep desire to be a missionary. Volunteering to go to Columbia, South America, she ministered to youth and received experiences which prepared her to serve in the Hispanic community in New York.

Mary Paul had been single-minded in her service of the Kingdom of God. She labored incessantly in voice, writing and in retirement on the Internet to champion the cause of the alienated and disenfranchised. All of this was fueled by her relationship with Jesus. In these last years she would say, "I am ready to leave and be with the Lord". Well, now she has reached her destiny; and what a homecoming for her it is.

"The Lord created us in His image and likeness, and we are the image of the Lord, and He does good and all of us have this commandment at heart: do good and do not do evil. All of us. 'But, Father, this is not Catholic! He cannot do good.' Yes, he can..." "The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. Everyone!". We must meet one another doing good. 'But I don't believe, Father, I am an atheist!' But do good: we will meet one another there."

--Pope Francis, May 2013





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