

SOCIETY OF HELPERS

VOICES of Hope



God of Playfulness

BRINGING HOPE TO THE HUMAN JOURNEY

Vol VIII Issue I

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Letter from the Editor

There is a time for everything, and Spring is the time of new beginnings, of life, of color, of fun and play, of growth and change. So what better time than now to make our *Voices* team grow? We are excited to be joined by our newest member of the *Voices of Hope* publication team, Sydney O'Hearn. Sydney brings us her communications background and joins the team as an intern looking to gain some publications experience. As a contributor this issue, her simple message to us is that "God doesn't have to be serious, He just has to be there -- He always is."

For this issue, God of Playfulness, we asked our contributors to share with us how "play fosters a relationship with God." We were interested in knowing what play means to them and what religious or spiritual rituals have a component of fun or play that draws them closer to the divine. Not surprisingly, everyone experiences fun and play in a spiritual context in different ways.

Ally Spiroff talks about her passion for running and how her moments pounding the pavement elevate her to a state in which she finds clarity and peace. Ann Smith opens up to us about how she and her husband consciously created moments of play to rediscover themselves in their relationship to bring them closer to God. Cecile Eder finds joy and life in acting. Jessica Palys reminds us that God is all around us in nature and Earth is not to be taken for granted. Kay Caraher teaches us that play re-energizes, allowing us to recreate and grow. Marianne Tan points out that play has different functions in different facets of life, all of which are an opportunity to getting to know God more. And Tami Galbreath experiences the divine through her Yoga practice.

As I drove to work one morning I ran into more than the usual traffic on the freeway, which made me late. My first reaction was annoyance. But as I continued to roll through traffic, I remember a sensation of peace and calmness coming over me, and I smiled. Then I laughed, and then laughed a little louder. Those driving next to me may have wondered what a woman alone in her car could possibly be laughing at. And, as I continued to revel in my joy, God came into my mind, and I felt blessed. I felt alive, and most importantly, I felt happy. You see, it was in that moment, that I realized God IS always there, all around us -- waiting to grant us His grace. And it is in those moments of joy, of peace, and of clarity, that we may indeed, be closer to Him.

God Bless,
Theresa Casillas & the Voices Team

Play: An Essential Component to a Healthy Life

by Kay Caraher



Play is usually thought of as pertaining only to children. In fact, play is a necessary part of a healthy life for each one of us throughout all our lives. For children, play often reflects what has occurred around them. Activities such as "playing house," where one child takes the role of the father, another that of the mother, and another as that of a baby are ways children incorporate into their lives what they have observed.

As adults, when we relax and recreate, we too incorporate into our wisdom lessons we have learned. Sometimes those lessons are difficult for us, but every experience is a learning experience. And, I believe, all experiences (especially the difficult ones) are God's way of giving us the opportunity to grow into His likeness.

We, as adults, and indeed children, as they mature into adulthood, still need play to pause and reflect on what has occurred in our daily lives, to make sense as it were, of our experiences. This process usually is not a conscious decision, but nonetheless occurs. Play takes many forms. Sometimes it is just relaxing, clearing our minds of the busy-ness around us. Other times, it is interacting with another and just plain having fun.

There are references to play in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. Often, the familiar words sound hollow with repetition, but the wisdom contained therein applies as much to our modern age as they did when they were conceived thousands of years ago. However we play, it is good to remember Ecclesiastes about there being a time for everything, "a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, a time to dance."

In Genesis, Scripture reminds us that God rested on the seventh day after creating the world. When the Israelites were fleeing Egypt and the Egyptian army and horses drowned as the Red Sea filled, Exodus tells us that the Israelites celebrated with song and dance. There is reference to David dancing and leaping with joy before the Ark of the Covenant in Second Kings. Psalms 149 and 150 tell of glorifying the Lord with song. Those Psalms inspired Dan Schutte to write the beautiful hymn "Sing a New Song Unto the Lord."

Play is one of God's blessings, although as we grow and mature, we usually call it re-creation. Indeed, it is re-creation. Through play, we have the opportunity to set aside our burdens (sometimes only for a little while) and play, to re-create, to grow through the experiences that test us and to experience joy and

give our thanks go God, our Creator, for the many blessings He has granted us in our life.

Kay Caraher, a retired legal secretary, is a resident in an active retirement community. She was married to her recently deceased husband for 63 years with whom she had five wonderful children.

Ramblings of a Girl Who Doesn't Want to Talk About God | by Sydney O'Hearn



I can't say that I'm religious. Don't get me wrong — I believe in God, I pray, I've seen miracles happen. But that doesn't mean that I'm religious, at least I don't think it does.

My mother's side of the family is Catholic, while my dad's side... Baptist? I'd like to say I know that for certain, but I've only been to church with my dad about five times in my life and most of those times were before I turned 10 years old. As a teenager (and sometimes even now), I referred to my family as "church CEOs"; we attend mass on Christmas and Easter Only. But it wasn't always that way.

I went to Bible school every summer as a kid. The week that I spent learning, singing and playing was the only time that I thought God, and religion, could be fun. I remember talking in big groups about the Ten Commandments and what they

meant, and having in-depth conversations (as in-depth as a seven-year-old can get) about how I could be close to God. All of that seriousness was interspersed with games, crafts and sing-alongs.

I suppose that with a big group of kids, you'd have to have play when you talk about God. It must have been hard to get us all to focus if there wasn't a game involved. So, they gathered us seven-, eight- and nine- year olds up to play, learn, sing, pray and keep going along those lines until...when? At what point do they stop letting us play?



I'm no authority on the matter, of course. For all I know, there are games being played at every mass that I don't attend (which, according to my CEO status, is all but two a year).

As a budding adult, I can't help but think it may be even harder to get grown-ups to focus than it is for kids. We're too caught up in our own heads now. Bills to pay, mile-long to-do lists, that guy you thought was waving at you but really he was waving to the girl to your left...there's too much to think about. So when we go to church, we're listening but we're not, we're there but we're at home reorganizing the closet, we're praying but we're often praying for ourselves. We want a promotion, we want a relationship, we want our mothers to stop saying "God knows you did that" every time we slip up.

We need to play. We need to relax. At the risk of letting my millennial personality shine too brightly: We need to chill.

Being outside is, in my opinion, the best way to play. I remember playing kickball in the backyard with my brother, jumping on trampolines and running through sprinklers. There was a huge patch of dirt near our fence that turned into a mud pit when it rained, and of course we had to dive into it. I took all of that for granted, as a kid, but grew up to appreciate my childhood. It wasn't



without flaw, but I was loved and blessed more than I could ever hope to be.

It took me a long time to learn to appreciate that. By the time I had my first car, I would continually drive to places that I could think. Riverside, in the woods or on a lake — this is where I would go to think, to revel in the good things that I was blessed with. I felt closer to God when I was able to appreciate the people around me and the life I lead. No one knows that I would do that. I didn't tell people about it — and I'm sure that if my family or friends (who have heard me refuse to get up early for Sunday mass a hundred times) read this, they'll be a little surprised.

For me, being close to God is a very personal thing. It's a feeling I get when I'm surrounded by people I love, when I'm sitting by a fire with hot chocolate and book, when I'm on a hike with a friend and when I'm doing all the things that I enjoy. It's



not something that I want to discuss, or to analyze. In fact, it's the one thing in my life that I don't analyze. For me, God doesn't have to be serious, He just has to be there — and He always is.

Sydney, 23, has an undergraduate degree in communications from Kentucky Wesleyan College and is currently a graduate student in Loyola University Chicago's

School of Communication. She aspires to become a managing editor for a women's magazine in order to influence women's rights, confidence and ambition around the world. In addition to working with the Society of Helpers as a Communications Intern, she holds a research assistantship with LUC's Social and Interactive Media Lab and a public relations internship with the School of Communication.

Performing with God – Our Double Act! | by Sr. Cecile Eder, SH



I had a dream: I was standing backstage during a theater production knowing I would soon have to make my entrance. I had no idea WHAT I had to perform, but I wasn't nervous, only bewildered. The person on the otherwise empty stage gave me my cue and made their exit. I walked on to the stage, stood there and heard a voice inside me saying, "You just have to be yourself."

When I retired in 2004, I wanted to act. I took some courses, and since then, I have performed in a senior theater group. Both by myself and in a team, I have written and performed in two staged plays and am waiting until I have enough time to write another. Alongside this, I have made smaller theatrical appearances and worked as a director.

What does my acting have to do with God?

My God is a God of play, to-ing and fro-ing with the ball of life and its events.

My God is a God of music, as in the refrain of a German hymn: "I believe in a God who sings, from whom all of life vibrates." I believe in a God who dances - Jesus, who danced at the marriage at Cana, who joined in with Aramaic singing and dancing circle.

In Tai Chi, an internal martial art, Chinese meditation and health practice, I learned and practiced how to understand and be aware of my movements, how to make them "mine" and how to let myself be moved by them. I was then able to entrust myself entirely to my body; "it" moved me. It is the same with my acting - "It," the primal force deep inside me.

A multicolored bouquet of theatrical worlds – Cuba, in a caravan moving from village to village – St Petersburg, with its children's theater academy dating from 1917 – the USA, with so many volunteers – Hungary, with its minimal budget, a woman from Brecht's troupe... More than 200 men and women, of all different ages, who dedicated their time to theater projects with children and young people. It all came together in a ball of tremendous passion for peaceful, creative collaboration. It was springtime, Easter... PEACE, NEW LIFE.

Where does God come into my acting? His spirit? His work?

First and foremost, in my GRATITUDE.

Gratitude for my talent, the seeds of which were sown by my mother's family, which I used as a sideline all my life and which has now blossomed.

Gratitude towards a Helper, who was aware of my desire and drew my attention to the perfect form of training: "That's what you're looking for!"

Gratitude towards my teachers for encouraging me, especially Christel, who didn't let up until I had premiered my first self-penned play at an international festival – and it was very successful!

Gratitude towards the experienced director who spent hours fine-tuning a short scene and helped me to experience what it really means to be an actor, who, with a cheerful smile, saw all of life as play, even through his tears and when suffering from cancer.

Gratitude towards so many exciting festivals, with their freedom from the pressure of competition, passion for acting, and the vibrant spectacle of theater groups from many different countries. These events demonstrate to me time and again that “another world is possible.” Out of all of these events, I would like to highlight the World Festival for Youth Theater in Burgenland, Austria during Easter 2010:

Group work as an experience of the Spirit of God, who “calls us to freedom”

At the World Festival for Youth Theater in Burgenland, Austria during Easter 2010, most of the people taking part in the courses and trainings with me imagined life in a religious order to be quite different from the person they saw before them. The greater their curiosity, the longer our late-night discussions, the more inquisitive their questions became: What attracts you to the order? What is your life like? You really can't have a lover?

Then came some confessions: “I left the Church years ago”, “I'm divorced”, “I don't believe anymore”.

A theater group is a mixed gathering of several people – “being” part of that as someone with my attitude to faith and system of values has an impact. Mindfulness for each other also helps us all to learn more about each other's lives:

- Some sixty-year-old women talk about their fruitless efforts to find a partner online – and I can sense their frustration, their feelings of inferiority.



- Roland cannot perform anymore because his mother-in-law, who lives in the same house, now needs 24-hour care; and, due to a technical error in his permit, he has to demolish his beloved little garden shed, which he built himself. He is really sad.
- Through acting and sharing with others, Rosemarie found a way of freeing herself from her husband's demands.
- By inviting a friend's husband to a performance, I managed to arouse his enthusiasm to come and perform with us.
- My mindfulness and response to one or two situations has helped to resolve both imaginary and real problems when acting. I am not the only one who does this; we all feel together.
- And it also meant standing by and watching while Margaritha, desperately searching for affection, found a partner who now controls her.

For me, there are also subtle “ANALOGIES with GOD”

- Playing a clown – God makes the fool for us
- Improvising – God often has to do it when dealing with me
- Take into my heart the world, the myriad of ways of being a human while acting
- Mindfulness for each other, discreetly covering our failures during performances, coordinating the unfolding of the play
- “Memorializing” several women in my own plays because they conveyed to me something of God's work
- The dawning and development of a friendship with one of the cast which continues beyond the theatre.
- “Representing” something with body and spirit, “appearing” as I am, with everything that is inside me, opening myself up to others; even if I am playing a role, it can only be authentic if I give it my all
- Experiencing the uniqueness of every single performance – for better or worse – and living in the moment
- Not giving in to stage fright – doing everything I possibly can and trusting in the art, in the intuition in the moment

During the open-door day in the Lucerne Theater, I stood alone on the large stage – the empty auditorium lay before me. Then the stage filled up and I perceived with all my senses - all the roles that had been played here, all the feelings, failures and challenges, love and hate, grief and happiness, joy and intrigues, the mourning, all the reconciliations, the countless plays through all the centuries since people began acting. This is a universe of BEING HUMAN, the universe and all humanity are here. What else besides INCARNATION?



My heart swelled with joy and gratitude. Go! Go! With a big hug, I spit over the left shoulder of my acting companion for luck! Raise the curtain!

Born in 1940 near Lucerne to a family with six children, Cecile has lived in France, Austria, and Switzerland, working as a primary school teacher, an adult facilitator, and as a theology student. From 1977 until 2004, she worked in parishes as a lay leader. Now retired, Cecile loves reading, writing, acting, laughing, and singing. She lives with four sisters in a house that represents six nationalities.

Work is Hard; Play is Harder | by Ann Smith



My husband, Michael, and I were both teachers at the same school. A year after the birth of our first child, Mike left our school for a new position, and that's when the trouble began. Because we both had high-stress careers that demanded loads of paperwork after school for me and meetings and various after school functions for Mike to supervise, we were the two passing ships that spouses so frequently and tragically become.

We moved to accommodate Mike's new location and didn't meet our neighbors for an embarrassing length of time. There was no landscaping to our new yard, which stuck out among the neatly manicured and interesting gardens of the neighborhood. Our son, who was on the cusp of turning three, was all too familiar with after-school care at his preschool. When I picked him up from school, I was beyond tired. I was exhausted to an overwhelming degree. Yet, I rolled up my sleeves for night duty as mom, dad, and playmate to my sweet little boy.

I took him to his favorite places such as the pet store and the bookstore. Many times, we went straight home and played a thousand games outside and inside, and made our own games in addition to playing the standard board games. We laughed, ran and cuddled. We argued about who may or may not have moved out of turn. We cleaned up messes together and made odd snack concoctions in the kitchen.

Though we played and laughed, in the back of my exhausted mind was the endless list of household tasks that demanded my attention — the pile of dishes and the overstuffed laundry hamper, the clutter and mess, and the egg that was cemented to the stove from last week's omelets. Last week! Ugh! But, on we played — we made Play-doh animals and fought pretend dragons with empty paper towel rolls. I wondered if my son knew that my mind wasn't completely absorbed with his world of play, if he knew that I was so tired and just wanted to feed him and get him to bed so I could tackle some chores before falling asleep at the table with a grading pen in my hand.

I was in a quagmire of an endless to-do list and wasn't allowing myself to be in the moment, and my situation was

likely not different from most other working parents. It was a tough balancing act. There were evenings that I cleaned more than I engaged in "quality time" with my little boy. There were also the times that the house was left in its state of chaos while the two of us ate microwaved chicken nuggets under a homemade fort. Then there were other times I was able to manage both tasks at the same time and never relished it. I planned for it. I organized it. I worked hard at it.

After my almost-three-year-old went to bed, there was absolutely nothing left for my husband when he came home from a late night, except a growing resentment, due to, "I ran into (whomever) and just lost track of time." Though we didn't see much of one another, Mike worked hard to make sure he spent time with our son, oftentimes taking him out for breakfast in the early morning, going fishing or just hanging out at home and playing.





He was a great dad, and I was a great mom, and we were both great at our jobs. But, we were blind to the sinking ship that was our marriage. Then came the moment that Mike told me he was no longer in love with me, that I had lost my spark and my youthful nature. You can imagine my response to that, and I was neither shy nor quiet in sharing it. I thought he wanted to end our anemic relationship. Surprisingly, he meant just the opposite. He wanted to save our marriage, and we worked hard to do that by scheduling fun.

Mike made a commitment to come home as soon as he was able. I made arrangements to get a sitter (grandma to the rescue!) one night per week so Mike and I could spend time becoming reacquainted with one another. Then we did something we hadn't done since having children: *we let go*. We went on nighttime hikes, took dance lessons, and spent time at the local coffee shop. We were still tired and stressed, and

we still had our own to-do lists on our minds, but we worked hard to push that from our minds one night per week.

At some point, we realized that, though we were having fun and getting the spark back to our marriage, we had to work

really hard to have fun. We didn't feel quite complete. It turned out, we were missing God. We both felt the emptiness but couldn't quite place it. After all, why would we be missing God? We went to church. We said our prayers. We were reverent. We felt that God wouldn't care whether or not He was on our minds while we were walking in the woods or having a cup of coffee. As that emptiness widened in our lives, our one night a week date night (Mike loathes that term), was soon replaced by the omnipresent grind of meetings and grading. This time, however, among the stress and exhaustion from work and raising a child, we struck a balance that worked for us.

Instead of going out, we stayed in and played Christian songs at home and danced around the house with our son, being silly and laughing until our cheeks ached. We rapped our son's memory work to him to help him learn it. We created silly stories and ate dinner together under a

homemade fort. We imagined the laundry was a monster that each of us had to defeat. We played dusting and vacuuming games. We created obstacle courses inside and out. In short, we had fun together, and we invited the Lord into every minute of it.

You see, God does want to be with us on a walk in His woods, and our Lord does want to be glorified

while singing songs dedicated to His mercy and love. And He does want us to acknowledge Him while doing homework with our son. Once we incorporated God into our play time, remarkably, playing was no longer such hard work.

Ann Smith is an English instructor at Olivet Nazarene University who lives with her husband and two boys in downstate Illinois.

The Sole of My Soul | By Ally Spiroff



"Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life." I have heard this career advice a lot in my life. More than one time

upon hearing this phrase, I would roll my eyes. But something changed as I approached sophomore year of college. I was no longer a freshman. I was a year older, a year wiser, a year out from moving out of my house, into a new state, surrounded by new people, living on my own.

I am a Division I collegiate runner on the track and cross-country teams at Loyola University Chicago. When I tell people I run, I get a lot of comments along the lines of: "Wow, you are crazy!"

To tell you the truth, they are right. I am kind of crazy. It comes with the title. I think to do what I do - to be a distance runner - you have to be a little crazy, a little different.

Just how crazy is crazy? The answer is much more than you know. I have practice for at least three hours every day, sometimes more. Okay, almost always more. I run 70 miles per week. A run or a running workout may take up to two hours alone, not counting all the warm-up drills, recovery drills, core, hurdles, weights, medicine balls and the time spent in the training room. I find that I spend around four hours, at least, in the collegiate athletic center at Loyola each time.

We practice every day. We travel to meets almost every weekend, all over the country. We mostly take buses, and some of our bus rides can be up to eight hours long, one way. We fly sometimes, but even those flights are long, including airport travel time. Then factor in the time you spend psychologically preparing for those big, important races. It takes a great mental and physical effort.

So what does my collegiate running have to do with work? Well, besides going to school, running is technically my job. It funded four years of undergraduate schooling, and it is funding my first year of graduate school this year (I redshirted one year of running due to an injury). It is my job to perform well, so that I can keep receiving money to go to school. Then, after school, I will start a career that I can be successful at for the rest of my life. Sure sounds like all business to me. At least it used to be all business - but not anymore.

Freshman year, I came in all worried about being on my own, coming in to a new team with new coaches, and adjusting to college life and collegiate running all at the same time. I started running my junior year of high school, so it was still pretty new to me when I started college. I had always loved running, but I had focused on other sports like soccer and basketball. When I hit junior

year, I decided to give cross-country and track a go. Once I started and realized I was pretty good at this "running thing," it has been a whirlwind ever since. I came to college still wrapped up in this cyclone, not being able to stop for a second and sort out what was going on.

By the time sophomore year rolled around, I had the time to adjust to being on my own, adjust to collegiate running, calm down and breathe for a minute. I came to some serious realizations about what I was doing all of this work for.

Throughout freshman year and the summer before sophomore year, I was able to return to the roots that got me into running in the first place: my passion for the sport. Running in college and then training on my own when I went home over the summer gave me a long time on runs just being able to think, and these moments are the ones that



led me to a new, more spiritual level of appreciation for running. Whatever happens in my day, whatever stress I have, I can release all my stress and tension on my run. I step out the door, run along the beautiful Chicago lakefront (or Milwaukee lakefront when I am at home) and I forget all of my problems for that day. I can just be.

If I am with my teammates, we have fun talking and laughing on our easy runs. Even on our hard workout days, we still have fun while working together and pushing our physical limits, making each other better runners. The bond with a teammate is one that only another teammate will know because they have gone through Hell and back with them.

If I am alone, training over the summer or just running on my own, I have time with myself to reflect and think about my day, week, year, past, present and future. Some of my greatest ideas in writing and projects, for school and otherwise, come to me while I am on a solo run. My head is the clearest when I am outside, when I am moving, when my feet are repeatedly hitting the pavement, trails or track. I can talk to God when I run. I can pray. Outside, in nature, I feel closest to Him. I can ask Him what he needs me to do at this moment in my life. I can thank Him for all the



blessings He has given me. I can ask Him for help. Running has made my connection to God stronger than ever before in my life. Together, God and running, and God through running, have helped me get through my toughest times in recent years.

For me, running is not work at all anymore. It is play. Every day I am blessed that I get to wake up and do what I do, and I never take it for granted. I thank God every day when I am running for my health, the ability to do what I love, and for all of the amazing people in my life that have helped me along the way.

As cliché as it once was, I will never roll my eyes anymore when someone tells me to do what I love and I will never work a day in my life. It's actually true. I have lived it out and I am still living it. When work is not

work anymore, it becomes play. And if you play every day, it's really ok. In fact, it's the way it should be.

Ally Spiroff is a graduate student in the Digital Media & Storytelling program at Loyola University Chicago. She also attended school at Loyola during her undergraduate years, receiving a Bachelor's degree in English. A Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, Ally is an English nerd,

a writer, a hippie, a music fanatic, a foodie, a concertgoer, a traveler, a huge sports fan, a fashionista, an art lover, and an urban explorer who likes natural adventures as well. She also is a social media queen, especially in the running world. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram: @runningforlife2. Check out all of her latest endeavors on her website runningforlife2.wordpress.com as well as on her blog, a—star.tumblr.com.

How Play in Nature Feeds our Spirits and Improves Health

By Jessica Palys



"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness..." Galatians 5:22

French Jesuit and scientist Pierre Tielhard de Chardin once said, "Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God." But busy lives and faithful devotion tend towards seriousness and stress rather than the playfulness that opens us up to easy laughter and gratitude. Recent science suggests there is a simple remedy to the impact of chronic stress on our bodies: to go outdoors. Time spent in nature shows

positive physical changes that, collectively, make it easier for us to experience joy.

Stress is the body's response to threat. It triggers responses in the nervous system, the endocrine (hormonal) system, and the immune system. Biologically, these responses allow us to survive a threatening situation with surprising strength, mental acuity, and physical endurance through pain. But chronic stress causes excess wear and tear and even permanent change to our bodies.¹ Chronic stress occurs when we are enmeshed in chal-

lenging, stagnant situations, such as struggling through poverty, illness, feeling unsafe, racial oppression, or processing trauma. While our long-term goal must address the social systems that contribute to these stresses, we are learning that spending time in nature causes a drastic reduction in all three of the systems in our bodies that are affected by stress—the nervous, endocrine and immune systems. But how?

"We are restored because nature is so awe-inspiring"

"We have known for a while that nature has psychological and physical benefits," said Dr. Theresa Horton at The Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation's workshop, *Connecting Nature, Faith and Health*, held at the Forest Preserves of Cook County's Thatcher Woods in January. "Other researchers have documented the benefits of nature. What I wanted to learn was how it works."

Dr. Horton, an ecological physiologist and endocrinologist with the Laboratory for Human Biology Research at Northwestern University, recently began investigating the mechanisms by which exposure to nature and green space enhance human health and wellbeing. She shared her insights and the Forest

Preserve highlighted their programs with faith leaders from many traditions and areas in Chicagoland.

After spending time in nature, researchers have measured positive improvements in anger, confusion, depression, fatigue, tension and vigor in participants. A field trip or hike in a nearby forest is not only good for body and soul, it also results in increased social interaction and a reduction in incivilities. Scientists are now striving to find the underlying mechanism for these changes, some of which can be described as *truly religious in nature*.

"We are restored because nature is so awe-inspiring," says Horton. There are few places in our everyday life that can remind us of the awe-inspiring power of God. Spirituality and science intermingle in wonder at the impact nature has on our senses and psyches. But it comes down to the same thing: opening our vision to wider horizons in a single moment.

"We are constantly bombarded with messages and the need to filter, to focus, to concentrate, to shut out noise. Our neural pathways become exhausted. But nature is so big, so complex, so attention-grabbing that we become immersed in it! Then we can truly relax. That break allows our neural pathways to reset – and we are restored."

¹ New research suggests that these factors may cause an epigenetic predisposition to low birth weight, obesity and even diabetes. The changes occur to the proteins that regulate the expression of DNA.

This is similar to how spiritual practice functions for our bodies. When we contemplate scripture, or when we pray and sing, or when we gather in community with other people, we are disrupting the stress pathways and allowing our bodies, minds, and spirits to reset. Often nature and spirit combine. Many of the images and symbols in our sacred scriptures and traditions are from nature.

We are fortunate in the metropolitan Chicago area to have abundant resources for exploring nature. The Forest Preserves of Cook County protects over 69,000 acres of green space in 22 dedicated nature preserves scattered throughout Chicagoland. These include woodlands, tallgrass prairies and wetlands; waterways available for canoeing, kayaking and bird watching; 300 miles of trails and, for the first time ever,



Nature restores our attention level, and also helps us feel safe. Horton says, "Having familiarity with a landscape can provide a sense of security, and our natural attachment and comfort level with trees and bushes helps to reduce stress." Somehow nature helps us to experience a spiritual connection that is deep and refreshing. Once we feel refreshed and safe, joyfulness and playfulness follow.

camping facilities and gear available to the public at very affordable rates. There are also 6 nature centers and tons of environmental education programming available. The Forest Preserves are incredible, yet underutilized, assets in our community – and both science and faith show us we need more of it!

The opportunity for faith leaders to minister to their congregation through play in nature is at your

fingertips in the Chicago area. Elder trips featuring devotionals and meditations can help process the seasons of life. A day retreat could reinvigorate a staff strategy meeting. Youth may find enjoyment in nature for their first time ever during a youth camp overnight outing. The potential is endless and the destination is convenient.

The Center has created an interfaith guide called *Connecting Nature, Faith and Health: A Spiritual Guide for Encountering Nature* for inspiration and activity ideas. Spending time in nature is an ideal way to contemplate the *Source of life, our Interconnectedness, our Migration through the Seasons of our lives, and the Vastness of the Universe.*

Download to find stories, reflection questions, activities, and sacred texts pulled from multiple traditions. It can be found at the Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation's website, www.faithhealthtransformation.org.

Jessica Palys is an experienced community organizer, graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary (M.Div '14), and Member In Discernment for ordination with the Fox Valley Association of the United Church of Christ. believes that faith communities are an integral part of living whole and healthy lives. She has worked extensively with faith communities in the Chicago area on issues of health, health equity, racial and economic justice, and is grateful that the Center for Faith and Community Health Transformation has helped shaped her faith journey.





Play. Children running around on a playground, playing with toys, playing sports. What does play have to do with God?

Well, whether you think so or not, play can actually have a lot to do with God.

Play is a natural inclination for children. It helps them to explore the unknown in the big, wide world around them. It is this very wonder and awe at the little things of life that we lose sight of in God's role in our lives as we grow older. Play helps us to explore, enjoy, and wonder in awe at the very pleasure we receive from living and the One we owe it all to. This demonstrates one way that play is important in our lives.

In our fast-paced, hectic, and busy lives, the only way we come back



to the leisure that reminds us of God is innocent play. This is one reason why Christ tells us that the kingdom of God belongs to such as the children, that unless we become like children, we cannot enter the kingdom of God. That is to say, we need to become childlike in taking joy and pleasure and wondering in awe at the goodness of our God. We should become childlike, not childish.

As I said, play is exploration. That is what we need to do. Christ is calling us deeper and deeper into a relationship with Him. This is impossible if we do not explore and try to get to know Him more. In order for any true relationship with anyone to form, we must first know the other in some way or another. This cannot be done with Christ if we do not explore the recesses of His attributes. An appropriate place to start exploring, especially during this most opportune time in the Lenten season of an Extraordinary Jubilee Year, is Our Lord's Mercy.

Christ Himself will not leave us alone on this playing field of life. He is the "Hound of Heaven" as Francis Thompson says in one of his poems, playing a game of chase with us, persistent and unrelenting. As someone I know said, God is our coach, cheering us on just like in playing sports. We also have teammates to depend on and work together with.

The harder the goal, the more we try. Just so it is in the playing field of life. We are not the only ones on this journey. Perseverance and encouragement are all learned in the game. So it is in life.

It is as St. Paul says, "Run so as to win," and nearing his death, he speaks of himself in life as having finished the race. Just like St. Paul, we can offer up our joys and thanks during play. I learned this myself in college. Ultimate Frisbee was a huge thing in college. Our peers who led the game would always begin and end with a prayer. This helps us to build deep and lasting friendships because they are founded on Christ. These friendships help to challenge us, keep us accountable, and grow ever deeper and stronger in our personal relationships with Christ. We were not meant to be on the playing field of life alone. As humans, we were made to be social beings, we were made to be in community.

Play also shapes character in team-building and taking initiative or leadership. What we enjoy we want to share. We get more pleasure from sharing what we enjoy. This drives evangelization, the zeal of the saints. St. Francis Xavier, a star athlete and of the Spanish nobility, left everything to go and set all afire as his friend, St. Ignatius of Loyola told him to. So, St. Francis Xavier set off on the greatest adventure of

his life. This does not only happen in the past. It happens today. The same college students I played Ultimate Frisbee with have also chosen to follow through with the lessons they have learned in leisure. They have also chosen to follow the adventure of life they are called to. Quite a few of them have followed in St. Francis Xavier's footsteps and are pursuing the path of the priesthood. Others have answered the call to serve as college missionaries through the Fellowship of Catholic University Students. Still others continue to serve in their careers in the world.

As St. John Paul II says, life with Christ is an adventure. In my own life, I have experienced just the beginning of the truth of that statement. When I was getting ready to transfer from my local community college to a university, I had no idea where I would actually end up. One day, on my way into adoration, I was in the vestibule of my parish perusing the various brochures and materials laid out. I noticed an Our Sunday Visitor magazine and decided to take it into adoration

Laugh and GROW
STRONG
Ignatius of Loyola

with me. While browsing through the magazine, my eyes landed on a small ad to the University of Mary with a beautiful and attractive background. I decided to check it out on a whim, which I later realized was a prompting of the Holy Spirit. I never dreamed that I would actually follow through with this and end up spending the next two years of my life and the last years of my college career there. I mean, when I looked it up, I found out it was in North Dakota. Who would ever want to go to North Dakota for college unless you were from there or even if you were from there? It seemed bizarre for me, a suburban girl, to go to a little unknown college in the middle of nowhere or so it seemed. When I actually decided to go there, everyone I knew couldn't believe I planned to go there and asked what was in North Dakota.

This is just the beginning of where I felt God was playing hide-and-seek with me in my life. He was slowly little-by-little revealing the direction He wanted me to go, because if I had known far enough ahead of time where He was leading me, I would have run hard and fast in the opposite direction. After all, I was pretty timid and simple in what I wanted in life. I knew I wanted no adventures and certainly nothing that took me out of my comfort zone, but thank God, He's in control



of our lives. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI says, "We were not made for comfort, we were made for greatness." If I had not gone there, I never would have ended up where I am in my spiritual life now.

Innocent play reminds us that living Christ's life for us is full of joy. Christ said at the Last Supper, "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you" (John 16:22). One easy way we become aware of this joy is through innocent play. Every time we engage in this kind of play, we answer the call to come in touch with Christ again, who is our Joy.

Marianne is a high school graduate of Mother of Divine Grace and a proud graduate of University of Mary, Bismarck, ND. She currently lives in Illinois and enjoys playing the piano and spending time with her family.



As I sit in sukhasana, the Sanskrit name for easy seated position with my eyes closed breathing in and out of my nose and

slowly quieting my mind for meditation a sense of spirit surrounds my entire body. Meditation comes in many forms as I have learned over the years. In my twenties, it was kneeling at the altar praying before the statue of Mary or saying Hail Mary with my rosary. As I progressed into my thirties, I found that I spoke to God when I was driving. Those long commutes to work meant I had "time" to talk to God about my life. I prayed for myself, always being specific of my needs. I prayed for others and thanked God for my blessings and forming my own mediation with the Divine. Moving into my forties, I found yoga. Or, it might be that yoga found me.

It all started with a yoga class at a park district where I convinced a friend and my teenage daughter to attend with me. From that first class in a gym I knew this thing called "yoga" was more than just a form of exercise. Oh sure there were the usual downward facing dog, warrior II, and tree poses building strength in my body. But, there was something more. At the end of each class we laid down on our mats in savasana. Our bodies are in neutral position, arms are at our sides with palms facing up, and our eyes are

closed. We may have an eye pillow or a blanket for comfort. As we sink our weight into the earth the brain becomes calm and the body relaxes. With each class I took I wanted to learn more about this thing called "yoga."

I began taking classes at my teacher's home, the same one who taught at the park district. I tried different yoga studios in the area. There are so many different studios and fabulous teachers. They each have a different style but all come from a place of love. What can possibly be better than that? I began to feel like a little kid again as if my Mom was singing "Jesus Loves Me This I Know for the Bible tells me so." I started to realize that becoming close to the Divine can be fun. It was as a child so why shouldn't it be now?

As I flow through my Vinyasa style classes or try some crazy pose that I fall out of, I laugh. I am having fun with each class and each pose. I love to travel and one of my favorite things to do now when I travel is to try a yoga class in a new city or country. I meet interesting people and learn new and different styles of yoga. I have fun while I am doing this. The classes I really find fun are the ones that incorporate meditation and focus on pranayama (control of breath). It is in these moments that I become still, and I hear

the Divine speaking to me. When I first began taking yoga classes this was hard for me. I didn't like to sit still and meditate. After all, who has time for this? I have things to do. As my practice has grown, it is my favorite part of class. It's the time I now dedicate to myself and that I really listen.

In August 2015, I decided to enroll in a Yoga Teacher Training program at Align Yoga Studio in Kankakee, Illinois. I continue to learn the history of yoga, its philosophies, its poses and correct alignment, and more. I was not planning to ever teach. I wanted to learn. My teacher pushed me from day one to try teaching, so it began in my yoga room at home with few brave friends. I am now teaching at the studio and special events for friends. I am a meditation and breathing coach who guides stu-



dents through yoga poses, pranayama, and various forms of meditation. My goal is that my students are have fun, feel confident, relaxed and overall better about themselves. It is my hope that through their individual practice they come closer to the Divine.

I still attend church regularly; however, there is nothing that has brought me closer to God than yoga. It's through this asana, or breathwork and meditation that I quiet my mind and listen. It is during these times that I feel His love deep in my heart. I continue to grow in meditation from walking meditation, to guided meditation, to Yoga Nidra (yogic sleep). I am having fun and feel spiritually stronger than I have every in my life. Trying something fun and playful can bring us closer to God.



Tami is a wife, mother, a yogi, and is owned by a Black Lab named Briscoe. When she is not in her Safety role at work or practicing yoga, she can be found cheering on Notre Dame or the Chicago Cubs or sipping a glass of wine with friends. She volunteers with many organizations, and one especially close to her heart is Teen Hope where she serves as a Financial Mentor to teen moms.



Reflections on my Journey to the Province of Central Europe | by Sr. Laetitia Bordes, SH



From December 14 to December 30, 2015, I traveled to the Province of Central Europe, visiting communities in Leipzig, Germany, Romania, and Hungary. I will not give you a detailed description of where I went and what I did, but rather share with you my reflections on spending this time with Helpers from another Province where I had not been previously.

First of all, I want to say that the journey was grace-filled, grace-filled in the sense of meeting Helpers on their own terrain and spending quality time with them, which provided the opportunity to share histories, stories, ideas, laughter, and new discoveries. The fact that I had no agenda contributed a great deal to what I received. I was not going to a meeting, had no

expectations, and was not looking for any answers. Therefore, I was open to receive what was there. I was there during the holiday season when everyone was super busy, yet there was always time "to be with."

The Helpers had made all the necessary travel arrangements for me and someone was always at the airports or at train stations to meet me on my arrival. This meant, for example, for Victoria in Csobanka to travel three hours on public transportation to meet me at the Budapest airport, and three hours for the two of us to travel back to the house on a bus, two subways, a train, and another bus. Also it meant Rita Kedves driving three hours on Sunday to take me to visit the two communities in the villages of Gheorgheni and Sandominic in Romania, and driving me back to



Tirgu Mures the following day...another three hours. But think of the amount of time we had to share!

It was interesting for me to be in three different countries that had been under the communist regime from the end of World War II until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The cities, for the most part, have been restored to the way they were before communism, yet there are still poor areas that have not been restored. The Sisters would point these out to me. "See, this is from communist times." (Actually, the buildings looked just like our projects in big cities like Chicago and New York.) But the question that puzzled me, and continues to puzzle me, is this one: Where did all these young Helpers receive their inspiration for religious life? They are all in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s...young, I would say, and they were raised under the communist regime.

There were no Catholic schools; no

religious communities of women or men; priests were underground, for the most part. These women had the faith handed down to them by their parents.

Still, today, the Helpers are the only religious community of women in the city of Tirgu Mures and there are only a couple of Catholic schools - Catholics are the minority. The majority of Christians are Orthodox and the universities are all state run. Helpers were invited to come to Hungary and Romania after the end of the Communist regime by Jesuits who had returned. They engaged in much needed pastoral work which included retreat centers. Young women who felt a call to dedicate themselves to God met Helpers, and I assume that was it.

I was impressed by our Sisters and their ministries. Three of them are medical doctors and one candidate is finishing medical school. Intrigued by this, I asked Magdolna,

26 years old, a Junior Professed who is an internist, "What attracted you to the Helpers?" Her answer was quite simple. She looked at me and said, "God." The Helpers have a great deal of contact with young and professional university students. They accompany them on their life's journey (they do not use the term "spiritual direction"), and I think that is where several vocations to the Helpers come from. They have several Junior Professed sisters and, right now, I think they have five candidates. While their schedules are really full, they do structure time to be together. Community prayer and meals together are important to them, and whether or not everyone can be there, they do have these at scheduled times. In Tirgu Mores, there were 15 minutes of silent prayer together every night at 9:15 pm for whoever was at home.

The Sisters were very much interested in our Province and asked me different questions. When I spent one afternoon in the village of Gheorgheni in Romania, they did not waste any time. "Tell us about your life. How did you become a Helper?" Of course, they were all intrigued about my stories of El Salvador. Several of the Helpers of that Province have spent time in India and I found them very open to different cultures. They all speak at least four languages, and some of them speak five.

I did love Romania, a country with people in villages still riding on a cart driven by a horse. Many of our Romanian vocations come from the two villages I visited that weekend. These are farming villages with a considerable Gypsy population. I was intrigued by Gypsies, both in the countryside and in the cities. In Hungary, I accompanied Agnes in delivering bread on a Monday morning to very poor Gypsy families.

I will just say a few words about Christmas. In Romania, they do not celebrate Christmas until Christmas Eve. They celebrate Advent to the very end. Everything is very simple. Christmas celebration revolves around baking. I have never been surrounded by such a variety of breads and rich desserts. Everybody bakescream puffs, chocolate cakes, etc., and that is what they offer as gifts to neighbors and friends.

We went to the 8 p.m. Mass in a poor parish where Csilla, a Helper, does pastoral work. It was a very small church and she had prepared the children to put on the Christmas play. It was lovely. She had told her pastor that I would be there and lo and behold, at the time of his homily, in perfect English, he welcomes me to the community and proceeds to read to me his homily which he had translated in English for me!

On Christmas day, we went to the 5 p.m. Mass in another parish where the brother of Iren Bara, another Helper, is pastor. He had prepared the small group of children who attend religious instruction to put on a play. They had memorized all their lines. They were as proud as could be.

There is so much more I could write about, but I hope I have given you a "taste" of my journey. I am very grateful to the Leadership

Team for coming up with this idea and making it possible for both me and the Sisters of the Province of Central Europe to have such a privileged interchange.

Laetitia lives in San Bruno California where she enjoys watching the planes land and take off from San Francisco International Airport as she sips a cup of coffee in her living room. For the last fifteen years, she has been teaching ESL to immigrants who continue to educate and challenge her. Her favorite pastime is walking along the beach.

Sister Dolores Blahaus - Helper History in the Making



Born in 1930 in Jersey City, New Jersey, Dolores Blahaus was part of a "steady, orderly, peaceful and progressive family existence" led by her stay-at-home mother and her hard working father. Active in CYO

and Sodality through her local parish, she and her sister "were public school girls all the way." Dolores recognized early on that she had a calling to religious life, but her route was not direct. The Tides of Vocation

"Back in 1947, before we graduated, the boys were being drafted for WWII. Father Callaghan, the associate pastor at St Paul's parish, said, 'What am I going to do with all these girls on my hands?' So he got in touch with Father Drolet, a Jesuit from St Peter's." Father Drolet gathered the girls for lectures and activities, and sent them out into the neighborhood wherever they were

needed to begin to discern their inclinations to religious vocation. "Father Drolet liked what the Helpers did," Dolores said. "We were out with the poor. He had connections with other religious communities, but he recruited many Helpers in his years."

As the soldiers began to return home from war, Dolores and her friends attended proms and graduated high school and she soon began working as a secretary in an accounting department. "I was a good worker," she said. "We got that from my mom and dad." She and her friends frequented Point Pleasant, a beach on the Jersey Shore. "One day we were playing ball in the ocean and I didn't realize that a wave was coming. It thrust me down on the surf and when I got up, I saw spots. Those spots didn't go away and on Sunday, I said to mom and dad: Something is wrong, these spots are still here."

A specialist in New York diagnosed Dolores with a detached retina, a condition that, at that time, had no cure. She then had the realization that the typical future of marriage and children was not for her and the lingering desire to "always be actively engaged in life" led her to determine that she had been called to religious life.

"I was drawn to the Helpers. I did go to the Dominicans and I went to the Sisters of Charity, too. They were too fancy. The Helpers were not put on, they realized their own humanness," she said. "We're not a community who broadcasts ourselves. And the Helpers must have seen something in me. We Helpers, we are always moving. We have grit."

Finding Her Calling

Dolores became a postulant in 1954 and, six months later, became a novice in Chappaqua, New York. She made her first vows in 1957 at the Helpers house on 83rd Street in New York and soon after joined other Helpers in St. Louis. "Apparently I showed some skill in the kitchen and they needed a cook, so I became a cook," she said. "In 1959, I moved to the house on Barry in Chicago. I ordered the food, I was the chief cook and bottle washer for a house of about 50. I served three meals a day and I loved it."

She speaks fondly of Sister Agnes Fitzgibbons, the Provincial of the Helpers at the time. "She gave me carte blanche in the kitchen. She was a marvelous woman, a missionary to China," she said, smiling with her recollection. But her time cooking for the Helpers in the

house on Barry would soon be supplanted by two years in San Francisco that would awaken her calling to religious education and introduce her to a mentor, Sister Maria De la Cruz, whose impact on Dolores went beyond their time together in South San Francisco.

Maria de la Cruz revolutionized the way religious education was taught, developing the well-known catechetical series *On Our Way*. As Dolores served as religious education coordinator for 1,100 primary students at Mater Dolorosa Parish, their shared love of religious education created the basis for a lifelong friendship. "She made her own way in life. We had a common spirit."

Dolores returned to Chicago prepared to engage in her vocation, enrolling in Mundelein College in 1972 to study theology, also serving as the Director of Religious Education at Chicago's Immaculate Conception Parish. "I was very much into teaching religious education and I used teaching preschool religion for my thesis," she said. "These mothers, they knew what their children would like, so we made up our own program for the preschool after I got my Bachelor's degree. And it was fun. I had seminarians, young women, mothers, and I would train them to teach catechism for preschoolers through 8th grade at Immaculate Conception."

A Developing Ministry

Dolores had earned her Master's in Religious Studies in 1976, continuing her ministry in Religious Education in three Chicago parishes. She also served as a Pastoral Associate at St. Benedict for three years. "I developed all sorts of programs and occasions for people to come together to share faith while experiencing life." As a pastoral care volunteer, however, she had found yet another avenue for her ministry.

After a period of international travel and intensive personal reflection, Dolores entered a program in 1990 to pursue credentials in a chaplaincy program. "I feel I have learned much while at Columbus Hospital and felt most comfortable listening to where people were at in their life journey," she wrote in application materials for a chaplaincy program. "In these instances I felt God's grace placing me there for them while I was as an apprentice looking at my own reactions. In listening to the stories of others' experiences, I discover the Providence of God present in them and myself."

Her reflections on pastoral ministry highlighted "the attentiveness to the needs, the cries, the joys, the hopes of others with an appropriate response in the particular circumstance - one of loving compassion. ... In a hospital setting, it is the

pastoral minister's mission to help those involved to realize a theology of humanness that is serious, practical, playful and full of God's loving compassion." She served as a chaplain at Norwegian American hospital from 1999 until 2005.

"It is a Helper charism to be at the service of the people."

In a life dedicated to living out the Helper charism, Sister Dolores has not let retirement slow her down. As a resident of the retirement community Marian Village in Homer Glen, Dolores began her search for a parish in need of volunteers.

"I started testing out local parishes and I recognized Father Ed. 'Where do I know you from?' he said. We had met on the north side doing religious education back in the late 70s, early 80s. I asked him, 'What do you need?' So I became the Eucharistic minister and minister of care, bring eucharist to the sick and homebound with the parish of St Francis of Assisi."

When asked about her reflection on this issue's theme, God of Playfulness, Dolores said, "I'm really not funny at all. I'm a doer. What has to get done, what is important to do, I do. I'm not a sit around person. I'm an extravert. I like talking to, meeting people. But my talk is not just surface stuff. I want to do real talk."

She still travels annually to see her family in New Jersey, visiting with her sister who lives in the same house that her husband had built, where they had raised their children. Dolores also keeps busy with the book club she began at Marian Village, hosting five members at any given time. She may not identify as a funny person who laughs a lot, but during our interview, Sister Dolores brought warmth, insight, a well-documented record of education and employment and, most certainly, laughter. Humility might be the strongest impression left by sitting with Sister Dolores for an afternoon. "I have been blessed," she said with a smile. "God makes my way."





Sister Veronica Donlon, SH

Born: March 6, 1926 in Glasgow, Scotland

Died: March 2, 2016 in Chicago, Illinois

If you look up into the heavens on a clear night, you might detect a particular sparkle in the stars. That's because Vera is now gracing heaven with her beautiful smile.

Vera was one of five girls born in Glasgow, Scotland to a Scottish father and an Irish mother. She always retained a deep love for her native land, its people and customs. Her father was the gardener at the convent and retreat center of the Helpers in Glasgow and, during her teenage years, Vera spent most of her time at the retreat center, volunteering to do whatever was needed. She loved the Helpers, yet never expressed openly her desire to join them. As a young adult, Vera decided to go to Los Angeles, California where her oldest sister had settled. Soon after her arrival, she made contact with the Helpers in Los Angeles, and not too long after decided to ask to enter the Helper novitiate in Chappaqua, New York.

Vera's preference and desire was to minister to the community and to the many groups who came to the Helper convent. She was a "home body" who loved to welcome people and make them feel at home. After spending several years in Chicago, Vera was sent to San Francisco, a city she loved dearly. There she was Superior of the community, treasurer, cook and "welcomer". Whoever came to the house was greeted with Vera's smile and made to feel at home. There was always time to stop whatever she was doing and sit down to have a cup of coffee or tea with a guest. She was a wonderful listener and people sought her out as an "arbitrator". She had the gift of bringing about peace in conflictive situations without ever siding with one or the other person.

In June, 2005, the Society of Helpers decided to close the house in San Francisco because of the advanced age of the sisters and a new option for a retirement community in the Chicago area. Closing the house was a very painful process for Vera. She and Maria de la Cruz were the last to leave. On the morning of their departure, they got into the car and were ready to go when the driver noticed that the door to the house had been left wide open! She had to jump out of the car and go lock the door. What a symbol that was of Vera's hospitable heart! The door was always open.

During the last years of her life, despite her Alzheimer's disease, she retained her beautiful smile and happy disposition. The staff and patients at Resurrection Center in Chicago loved her. She made friends there and greeted everyone, even though she could not remember who they were.

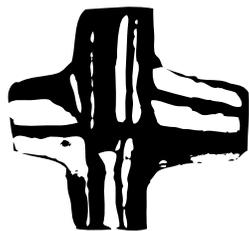
One can only picture Vera entering eternity, a big, beautiful smile on her face, as now she is the one being welcomed into her new home.

Reflections from Pope Francis



"And here the first word that I wish to say to you: joy! Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but of having encountered a Person: Jesus, in our midst."

— **Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy**



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