

SOCIETY OF HELPERS

VOICES of Hope



BEAUTY

BRINGING HOPE TO A BROKEN WORLD

Vol XI Issue I

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,



In early February when the editorial team met to choose our theme for this issue, we were aware of the state of the world and our own nation. Thinking about the different options for our theme, we decided that we needed one that would lift our spirits and help us focus on something other than the news. This was even before the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) a pandemic, and our world situation became even more dire with sickness and death ravaging countries, cities, and families. Unfortunately, there is no certainty as to when we will return to our “normal” way of going about our daily lives.

With this as the backdrop, we invite you to set aside some of the challenges of the “stay at home and social distancing” orders and immerse yourself in these nine articles in which the authors share how beauty through music, theater, poetry, Holy Yoga, painting, nature and other forms of art bring peace and hope into their lives. Clarence Heller reminds us: “If your soul is hungry, feed it beauty” while expressing how he engages in beauty through art, poetry and attentiveness to nature. Michelle Cutinelli demonstrates her love of art and nature in “A Wet and Colorful Prayer.” Patricia Rogucki recounts how she engages young Salvadoran children in bringing color and beauty to the areas devastated by war and poverty through drawing brightly colored chalk clowns. These are just a few of the articles that focus on art; each delightfully different and inspiring. Additionally, we hear from authors who find beauty and hope through music, theater, yoga, and the artistry of make-up.

As you read these articles may your spirit be lifted and inspired to pray with us for the end of the coronavirus in our midst and around the world.

Sr. Jean Kielty, SH



Food for the Soul | By Clarence J. Heller



If your soul is hungry, feed it beauty. Pause a moment to recall a specific place and time when beauty fed you.

Savor that moment again now.

For most of us, the moment that comes to mind occurred while engaging with nature, such as witnessing a sunset, sitting on the beach or walking in the woods. Notice that these are sensory rich experiences that often touch not only all of our five senses, but even deeper, they touch our psyche, a place of resonance with God.

Attempting to describe beauty is like trying to describe God. Defining beauty is elusive, always incomplete and wrapped in awe, wonder and mystery. Beauty draws us in and fills us precisely through its mystery. Yet, like God, beauty offers itself to be experienced freely and frequently, if we but open ourselves.

Engaging in beauty can be both a spiritual practice and an orientation that flows through our daily lives. A friend of mine watches the sunrise each morning and another friend lies on the ground each evening soaking in the night sky. These practices need not be complicated in order to be fruitful; more than a few

people enjoy greeting the day admiring the birds at the feeder with a cup of coffee in their hand and God by their side. The following poem came to me during one such moment.

Aster Hope

*On an overcast silent winter morning
aster seeds remain in place
dry and fluffy sparks of hope
ready and patiently waiting for
the best moment to fly free
to be taken by a force beyond their
control
graced with the opportunity to bring
new life in new places
to spread goodness and beauty
take me with you please*

Throughout the day there are countless invitations to stop, notice and soak in the beauty surrounding us. For example: when walking to the car from the grocery store, pause for fifteen seconds to take in the sky as deeply as you can. How the sky is that moment will never be repeated.



As a spiritual director, there is another favorite way that I know beauty, namely the beauty of the human spirit. I approach a directee as I approach spending time with the sky or walking in the prairie, with deep openness, acceptance, freedom and love. There is no thought of how the circumstances could or should be different, but rather only appreciation for what is. As I listen to what on the surface are often discussions about the daily challenges and joys of life, what I experience is the beauty of their soul. Certainly I respond with empathy for the specifics shared, but as when engaging with nature, there is a resonance that arises in me stimulated by the directee's deep yearning to know and be known by God, by their essential goodness, by how completely loved they are, and yes, by their inherent beauty. What a joy it is to help someone discover, over time, what God is revealing; what a delight to help them claim their own beauty.

These sacred conversations are not limited to spiritual direction sessions, but I believe happen to many of us, often by surprise: times when there is a profound sense of connection with another person, communion in fact, by virtue of both persons being open, vulnerable and authentic. These moments of connection can occur with strangers or the people we know best. They can

be a few minutes long or extend a lifetime. Again, I invite you to stop to recall and savor such an experience you may have had. If this is not beautiful, what is?

To engage with beauty is to engage with the Divine. Beauty is one of our God's favorite channels of connecting with us. I close with sharing a poem about babysitting my grandson.

May Have

Today may have held the most beautiful moment of my life...past or future. Cradling my sleeping grandson and gazing, glowing like a halo in a warm Rembrandt painting. Love radiating, breathing together, being together pure goodness.

*Clarence J. Heller is a spiritual director, poet, artist and dreamer. For the past fifteen years he has served as the coordinator for an ecumenical retreat in everyday life ministry that was started in St. Louis, MO by Sr. Mary Funge, SH in 1995. Author of *Everyday Sacred: Meditations and Paintings to Inspire Reflection and Prayer*, Clarence also publishes a monthly email called *Connecting New* and a daily email/post entitled *A Piece of Goodness*, all accessible through his website www.clarenceheller.com. When he is not with his grandsons, you will find him hiking in the woods, working in the prairie or sharing his love of life with others.*



When given the theme of this issue, *Beauty: Bringing Hope to a Broken World*, what first came to mind was the sense of beauty

I still carry from reading *An Interrupted Life* by Etty Hillesum years ago. This is the diary of a young woman beginning to attend to her inner life about the time that the Nazis invaded Belgium. Sent to a concentration camp, she reflects on her dark circumstances and also recounts the enduring beauty of life in this world. From Westerborg, she wrote: "The sky is full of birds, the purple lupins stand up so regally and peacefully, two little old women have sat down for a chat, the sun is shining on my face – and right before our eyes, mass murder... The whole thing is simply beyond comprehension." She also sees the beauty deep within her terrorized fellow prisoners and is able to show them the way into their own interior beauty. She was the presence of hope in their troubled world.



Today, you and I find ourselves facing a serious new invisible virus we've no experience in dealing with. It is new to science, very contagious, without cures, and in the U.S., without adequate testing. We are paralyzed by fear, by our need to stay isolated, and tune into each other while keeping our physical distance. How might deeper listening within ourselves and to one another help us discover and grow in beauty and turn this strange new world into a place of hope?

I am allured by beauty, no doubt about it. We're all made for beauty and need beauty. "We were designed for beauty, just as we were designed for air, sleep, food, friendship" writes John O'Donohue. Our eyes are designed to see beauty, the divine beauty made manifest everywhere in Creation. But it is our heart that perceives beauty and thus it pulsates in every cell of our being. It is beauty which enflames our passions, our feelings. How can we quicken our perception of beauty, explore it, and act out of it with one another during this health crisis?

Beauty is a matter of the heart. Our hearts reach for beauty, and when we reach for beauty we are reaching for God, for God is Beauty. *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*, is a book by Charles Eisenstein. I love the title of this book. What if we spent this "slow," thoughtful time we're having togeth-



street corner, Thomas Merton wrote: “There is no way to tell people that they are all walking around shining like the sun!” What beauty might we see in another person? Would we try to tell them? The beauty of God is alive in people, in trees with their sap rising, in shoots pushing up from the winter soil, in the cardinal’s spring song, in the twitters of chickadees...

er in re-imagining our world? The author shows how we have created a culture of separation from one another and from our Earth. What we’re made for actually, is Oneness, communion, interbeing. The coronavirus is now demonstrating to us that truth: we ARE indeed, totally, locally and globally interconnected!

God first reveals God’s self to us as Beauty! The Natural World with its myriad forms and shapes and colors, is first and most basically a manifestation of the divine as beauty and oneness. The Natural World is God’s love letter to humanity! Let those of us who are able during these weeks spend more time out in our beautiful Earth. Let us ask the trees, the soil, the atmosphere, the water, and let them teach us—what is important, what is loving and essential and beautiful...?

Our hearts perceive beauty, but so much beauty is not immediately apparent. Once, after seeing “the secret beauty” of people on a busy

Our hearts are revitalized with hope and our greatest hope is described as beauty in scripture: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2,9). What great hope do we secretly carry for this unprecedented period of time in which we find ourselves today?

Mary is a Sister of St. Joseph and artist whose fascination is the elegance and creativity of the Universe, most especially of our beautiful home, planet Earth. Her paintings and sculptures explore and give expression to our soul journey within this intimate, interconnected evolutionary community of life, with all its beauty and pain, its passion and mystery. An experienced educator, retreat director, and group facilitator, her delight is to be with others as they awaken to their creativity and to that of the Universe. She lives and has her studio in La Grange Park, Illinois. Visit her website at www.marysouthardart.org



The first day is always the same. An exchanging of names, a series of tentative hugs and handshakes, a few attempts at humor followed by polite laughter, and an awkward silence as the rehearsal begins. A group of strangers, pulled together by a common passion, adopting facades of confidence to hide the jitters that come with entering a group that knows nothing about one another. A group that, in only a matter of weeks, will learn to shed these facades and put their vulnerabilities on display not only with one another, but also for an audience of hundreds of new faces.

The theatre bug first bit me when I was a student at Sacred Heart Schools in Chicago. By fifth grade, the social structure of my class was set in stone. We had discovered what our favorite recess activities were, which lunch table we wanted to sit at, and who we felt most comfortable spending time with. The quirks I was only beginning to

discover within myself— an appreciation for bad puns, a love for the discography of Britney Spears — were shared only with the few friends closest to me. Like most middle schoolers, we all played the roles we felt society expected of us. The good student. The class clown. The soccer star. When a teacher took notice of my flair for the dramatic and encouraged me to try out for the school play, I discovered an art form that would give me permission to break out of this mold, and to throw away the preconceived notions I’d had about my fellow students.

Everybody knows what it feels like to “let down one’s guard.” It happens usually without conscious effort, but immediately changes a person’s entire demeanor. Whether it be when returning home to a loved one after a long day at work, or diving into a much-needed vent session with close friends, there’s no better feeling than that of shedding the armor that the outside world often requires we put on. Among the most trusted people in our lives, it’s effortless

and natural to let the light of our unique, unimpeded personalities shine. Letting one’s guard down in front of strangers, however, becomes one of the most intimidating, effortful, and fulfilling tasks we face. It requires coming to terms with parts of us



References of Interest:
Eisenstein, Charles. *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*; North Atlantic Books
Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures of a Gullible Bystander*; Doubleday
O’Donohue, John. *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*; Harper Collins.

that scare us, the ones that we wish we could change, and sharing them with a person who has the power to confirm our fears. I am different. I am unworthy of acceptance. I am not allowed to be *me*. Throughout the past decade and a half, my foray into the world of theatre has taught me to approach these insecurities in a new way to create something incredibly beautiful – a space where all people are granted permission to let down their guards without any fear.

Each time I make my first entrance on opening night of a new show, I do so with an incredible appreciation for the transformation that has occurred within me since the first day of rehearsal. The process of putting on a new show is about much more than memorizing lines or learning my blocking. The real work does not begin until the actors allow themselves to be ugly with one another. To scream and cry, shedding society's notion of weakness. To open their hearts up and share in unbridled love, without the threat of rejection.



There's a unique power in sharing myself completely with another human, inviting them to explore with me the traits and habits that are most protected from the world outside the rehearsal room. This power grows tenfold a few weeks later, when I have at last practiced enough vulnerability to learn to put my imperfect self on display in front of an audience of complete strangers.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes *empathy* as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to...the experience of another." What the dictionary doesn't quite capture is the beauty that is tied to this action. To be able to appreciate and feel love for somebody else, in spite of the things that make us different, is a gift that we don't allow ourselves to indulge in often enough. Theater is an exercise in feeling empathy – both between actors and between the observers. For me as an actor, the most beautiful moments are the ones I witness in the audience. The moments when

I see tears shed, hands being held, and laughter unleashed as a group of strangers allow themselves to share in a few hours of vulnerability, compassion, and appreciation for the imperfect beauty that is within each of us.

Michael Waller is a New York based actor and singer. Michael grew up in Chicago, attending Saint Ignatius College Prep and later New York University. When not performing, Michael spends his time helping high school students prepare to take ACT and SAT tests.



A Wet and Colorful Prayer | By Michelle Cutinelli



Wednesday mornings have become a part of my "experiential prayer life" in a powerful and precious way. Each week I meet with my watercolor "sisters in Christ" led by watercolorist friend, Norine Guy. We are a small group of moms from different church backgrounds and stages of life who share the desire to tap into our creativity with Jesus front and center. So, we bundle up, grab our painting gear and gather together in Fullersburg Woods, a local nature preserve.

Norine starts each session by reading aloud a morning devotion.

With scripture lingering in our minds and fresh eyes, we crack open our watercolors and turn blank paper into a wet and colorful prayer. It's as though the forms in our hearts spill onto the blank page. Our conversations weave in and out as we contemplate and meditate, water and color mixing. We are encouraged



and inspired by painting arm-in-arm, sharing in trials and joys—whether in painting or life.

The painting below on a grey but bright, misty day. The perfect mist in the air reminded me that HE is in our midst! As I worked in wet paint/paper from the outside edges inward, it became clear that the bridge was what mattered the most. Clarity and direction came from the trinity of mixed colors. John 5:24 says that "...whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." The bridge that came into clear view reminds me to tune out the outside noise and focus on Jesus, "the perfect bridge" that leads to our eternal life.

My paintings are works in progress. Brushes are always on standby. They beckon me to meditate over scripture with Him whether in my "Happy

Place" in the forest or sitting at my kitchen table. My paintings remind me - "lift your eyes, draw near to God and he will draw near to you." He is with us! The paintings that each of us makes are the glow of our time spent in reflection with God in nature and community. A few of my paintings have made it out of my bag to be framed or given as gifts. Each watercolor painting is a journey of ups and downs, starts and stops. Just like life. What shall we paint today?!

Michelle Cutinelli is a wife, mother of three teens, and follower of Christ. She lives in suburban Chicago where she is a small group leader of a non-denominational bible study for women, teacher of Holy Yoga (more experiential worship), owner of a local embroidery business (modstitchembroidery.com), watercolor painter for fun, and former kindergarten teacher. She is ever a work in progress and enjoys the journey of life with her family and friends.



Our world can be a difficult place to make sense of, especially in recent weeks. I often feel overwhelmed by the chaos and uncertainty of our current reality, and I am reminded of the Nietzsche quote I read many years ago in Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*: "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering." I take a deep breath and recall the importance of actively seeking beauty in my surroundings. Art is my favorite item in my toolbox when I need a reminder of the beauty, and goodness, and solidarity in this human experience. Art not only pushes me to expand my own ability to process, but lets me plug into other perspectives.



When I lived in Saint Louis, I spent a little over a year working as an early childhood educator. A strong portion of the curriculum encouraged children to express and explore new concepts through art. I think about how many art projects my mom has saved from my wee years, and how those projects gradually diminished in number as I advanced in age. Unfortunately, our society often seems to minimize the importance of art in adult life. Sure, if you really love art, you can become a career artist. But it should not end there. Art is an essential component to human development in all stages of life.

There are many adults who shy away from expressing themselves artistically. They "can't draw," or "are not creative." I think there is so much more to learn about art than creating an aesthetically pleasing piece. One of the things I find most beautiful about the art-making process is learning from my internal dialogue. For instance, during social distancing I have been challenging myself to create new makeup looks, broadening my color palette and my idea of what colors and makeup items are "allowed" to go where. I look in the mirror. *I have no idea what I'm doing.* That's a great place to start - the possibilities are endless! *I guess I'll start with blue. I can't wait for those gorgeous blue skies of spring. Oh no, I don't like the way that looks.* Excellent, a challenge. What shapes

or colors would complement it? *Let's try to extend the line... maybe blend it into a lighter shade. Oh dear - that's even worse. Worse? It is just different than what I am used to! Maybe I could paint some flowers here. Wow, that is really sweet. My face looks like a spring day even though it's cloudy and snowing outside!*

Art has the power to transport us to different emotions and times and places. Art has the power to validate our deepest thoughts. Art helps us learn how to recognize the power within us, the beauty and divinity of our souls that connect us to each and every human. I have learned so much about my own self-talk through trial and error, whether feeling inexperienced and self-conscious trying out watercolors, getting nervous about trying a new drawing style, or brainstorming for makeup inspiration. I strive to seek the beauty in mistakes and flaws. I learn how to approach not liking the final product. I spend time hearing my inner dialogue, and seek to be more patient and kind with myself.

In the past year, I have been seriously considering the career path of art therapy. I was lucky to receive art therapy in the treatment of my own depression, and I would be honored to share that with others. Art assumes a very crucial role in



an environment where people are profoundly hurting and seeking healing. Art does not necessarily require a specific aesthetic outcome or end goal. It is a path to vulnerability and empathy, to finding meaning in suffering, and beauty in the complex tapestry of human emotion.

Katherine studied Psychology and Spanish at St. Louis University. She currently lives in Chicago, and is looking forward to pursuing a career in psychology and art therapy. Some of her favorite activities include taking long walks, cooking, scouring Zillow for old Victorian mansions, yoga, and creating art.



In March, 1989, a U.S.-funded war was raging in El Salvador. Churches of various denominations were sending delegations for accompaniment and solidarity. Since I am of Polish descent and the Solidarity Union originated in Poland, joining the delegation from the Archdiocese of Baltimore seemed a perfect fit for me.

Our group of women and men stayed in the Parish of "Madre de los Pobres"—Mary Mother of the Poor—in southeast San Salvador, the capital. The parish was comprised mostly of the war's displaced victims. Many of them lived in makeshift houses of black plastic, cardboard, mud, bamboo, and corrugated metallic that lined both sides of a railroad track that ran through the area. Although a smelly and ramshackle place, I fell in love with the beautiful people of Madre de los Pobres and their tenacity to cultivate beauty in their lives.

As we walked along the railroad tracks, children clean and well combed, dressed in neatly pressed clothes, emerged from their dwellings. (We found out that mothers heated the pressing irons on hot coals.) Small plants grew in metal and plastic containers next to the homes.

During our visits to the railroad tracks, our delegation listened to many stories of these survivors, young and old. Witnessing the destructive use of my tax dollars made me feel guilty. My heart told me that this would not be my only visit to El Salvador or to the people of "Madre." In May of the same year, I eagerly returned, this time armed with large computer paper and colorful pastel chalks. Tapping on my experience as an art teacher in elementary school, I invited the children along the railroad track to a simple art lesson. Using basic human face measurements to draw a clown, the art class was a lesson in equality, as well as math. Unknown to me at the time was how much clowns and circuses are part of Salvadoran culture! Perhaps that is why I was never wanting for eager students in the parish community to draw a col-





orful clown. The proud artists signed their work and had their photos taken with their clowns. These art lessons have become a thirty-year labor of love for me. To this day, when I return to visit Madre, I still discover some clown photos hanging on the walls of the houses along the railroad track. Aspiring artists still wait in line for me, reluctantly accepting “the law” – one child, one clown.

The dignity and the lives of my artist friends have been threatened by the violent gang culture existing in El Salvador today due, in large part, to the large number of gang members deported by U.S. Immigration Officials in the late 90’s. Some have been killed; others have fled north. The Salvadorans who remain in places like Madre de los Pobres face extortion, pressure to join a gang,

and even death if they cross into another gang’s territory.

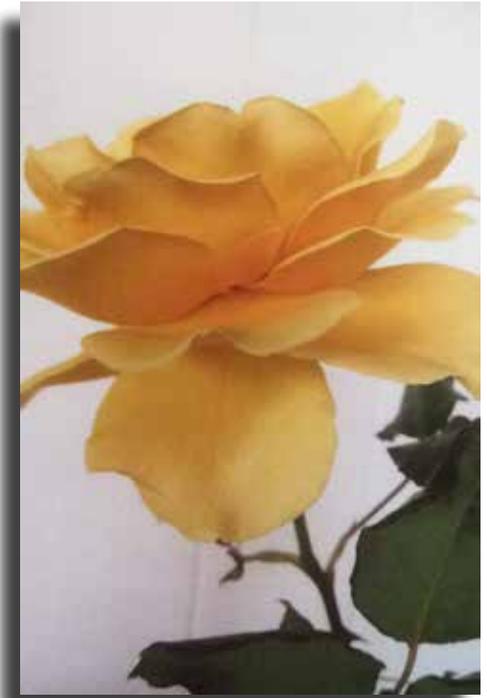
I continue to walk with the Salvadorans who arrive in the Baltimore area by accompanying them to appointments with lawyers, to court hearings, and ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) officials, as well as write affidavits for their cases.

Despite this new form of gang violence that surrounds them, I am struck when I return to El Salvador year after year to notice the improvements residents have made to their shacks and how they have enhanced their gardens. Mesmerized by the variety of vibrant blooms, I captured their beauty on my camera and made cards with the logo, “A Patti Print.” A Sister of Mercy who works on the border recently remarked on a photo of brilliant red Salvadoran roses. “It is a testimony to the faith and resiliency of the people that keep faith and beauty alive.” This gave me the impetus to change the logo to “Beautiful Blooms,” referring to our immigrant sisters and brothers who arrive here daily to raise their families, work hard, contribute to our culture, practice their faith and enrich our own.

A theologian once commented that three things were left from Eden after the fall: the twinkle of stars and

the fragrance of flowers. I have long ago forgotten the third, but for me, the smiles and the light in the eyes of the children are a vestige of Paradise.

Patti was born in New Jersey and has lived in Baltimore, Maryland for the last 30 years, dividing time between Baltimore and San Salvador. She is a member of the Sisters for Christian Community and has been a religious for over 50 years. Her ministries have included teaching, work with the homeless and those who suffer mental illness at the Baltimore Catholic Worker, retreat work on the Passionist Retreat Team, and advocacy with immigrants in the U.S.



Christian Yoga... A Dance for the Soul and a Healthy Life

By Kimberly Leigh



In 2003, as a young mother of an active toddler, one of my soon-to-be “best friends” discovered that I had never done yoga. Knowing how passionate I was for health and fitness, she was aghast and exclaimed, “You’re coming with me! EVERYONE needs yoga in their life!” Suffice it to say, I was hooked after my first “down dog”! I instantly took to yoga as a “dance for my soul” and a physical expression of inner beauty and gratitude for my God-given

health; and a discipline that was calming, centering, engaging and strengthening.

After 16 years of that first down dog, and a consistent, personal, yoga practice, I became a certified instructor in 2019 through HOLY YOGA®, and have been blessed to be leading others in yoga as an *experiential worship* practice ever since. I’ve literally been “on my knees” in “table top” with a heart full of gratitude and grace giving back the gift of Christian yoga to friends, family



and my community. My goal is now to share the transformative power of yoga so others can tap into their own God-given beauty - heart, soul, mind and body - and not only practice for health, but also grow in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ along the way. I strongly feel that there are yogis out there who need God, and that there are Christians out there who need yoga!

Yoga is a long-standing practice of connecting the breath, mind, body and soul. Placing Christ at the center of my heart's and mind's intention, tuning into some Christian music as I move through postures, and focusing on a simple "breath prayer" help to transform my yoga practice. A breath prayer can become "*Inhaling 'FAITH in Christ' and Exhaling 'FEAR' or 'Letting go.'*" My "intention" or mindful focus (which is nurtured as one flows through breath, postures, and

meditative reflection) points me to our Heavenly Father and Christ. Instead of a generic intention such as, "Remember you're beautiful," my Christian intention can become a Bible verse which claims my beauty as a God-given gift and truth. For example, the meditative intention would become Psalm 139:14, "*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*"

Or Ephesians 2:10, "*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*"

Being a kinesthetic learner, my journey has taught me that beauty and a deeper sense of "knowing" reach me most profoundly when they can be *experienced* by worshipping as a whole person. (Mark 12:30, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*") Christian yoga allows me to grow personally and lead students by slowing down our breath and mind to steady our hearts and hear God's voice in the stillness. *Moving* to a set of postures awakens us to embrace the richness of a beautiful, active life that God intended for us. At the end of each class, it is my prayer that we can all

step off our 6-foot by 2-foot rubber yoga mat with a renewed, steadfast spirit, transformed to be "Jesus' hands and feet" with a calmer mind and healthier "vessel."

Committing to an experiential form of worship like a Christian yoga practice, whether in a group class as part of a church Women's Ministry, at a gym, or at home in the privacy of one's own space, is one way we can become more peaceful, intentional, "spiritual" beings. Prayerfully, it encourages me that this type of transformation could help to bring the light of Jesus' love, hope and beauty to our world.

I can think of no more perfect way to sign off than Paul's words in Romans 12:1-2, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's*

mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." May God bless us all as we continue to seek and discern our own soul's "dance."

Kimberly lives in a Chicago suburb with her husband, three teenage children, and their family dog, AJ. When she is not spending time with her family and friends, you will find her teaching Christian yoga, leading Bible study, or serving in her local church where she recently was appointed an Elder. She is a certified HOLY YOGA® instructor teaching at local churches and in one-on-one training. She is the owner of SoulFuLL Yoga, LLC.

Playing Life By Ear | By Ace Gangoso



As a professional musician in a bustling metropolis, I live in a world full of sound. Most weekends, I sit at a beautiful piano in

a church surrounded by the robust singing of choristers and parishioners. Several evenings a week, I rehearse or perform with music groups ranging in size from 4-200 members. To get to and from these engagements, I spend a decent amount

of time on loud, packed trains and weaving through the foot traffic on the busy streets of Chicago. Rarely in my life are there moments of true stillness and quiet.

The coronavirus pandemic hit Chicago in late February. Over the next several weeks, the city would limit gatherings to 50 people, then 10, and eventually order for all to stay home as much as possible to prevent mass infection. Schools, busi-

nesses, parks, and theaters closed. Everything came to a screeching halt, and an awkward, unusual calm remained. This sudden and stark change was like a silent alarm alerting me to the incredible busyness and noisiness of my life. It reminded me how important and profound silence can be, in music and in life. Now several days into the statewide standstill, I find myself reflecting and writing at my dining table in near-silence, noticing only the pleasant ringing of nearby wind chimes. Being an introvert, the quiet has been a welcome silver lining to this crisis. Admittedly, having the time and space to breathe, think, and simply be has been refreshing. I'm also enjoying being able to listen to more music since I'm not so busy making it. This came with the perplexing epiphany that I don't spend enough time listening to music, taking in and experiencing this art form that I profess to love so dearly. What else, then, have I neglected? What am I not hearing? To whom have I not been listening?



Interestingly, this crisis began to affect Chicagoans during the season of Lent, during which scripture calls us to turn inward, to hear, and to listen. For instance, on the last Sunday before public Masses were cancelled, we heard from Matthew's Gospel, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." The Psalm response that we would have sung together the following Sunday was "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts." In our age of information overload, holding fast to the Word is a daunting task. How do we sort through all of the noise in our lives (literally and figuratively) and listen for the voice of God, the cry of the poor, our own inner dialogue? If you are like me and have a smartphone, it likely buzzes several times an hour with a news story, calendar event, text message, email, or social media post. Our social and professional lives are nearly impossible to maintain without our devices, yet many of us have never been so out of

touch with ourselves and each other. While no one comes to the Father except through Christ, it seems no one comes to us except through our smartphones. I pray that on the other side of this crisis, we will have taken the time to stop,

embrace moments of silence, and remember what it means to be present and truly listen. Only then will we be able to provide adequate room for ourselves, our loved ones, and for God in our lives. Where do we begin?



I suggest we face the music, naturally. Hearing and listening are at the center of musicians' work. We practice and rehearse for hours upon hours to ensure that we are balanced, in tune, and in sync. We contemplate, discuss and interpret the text, melody, rhythm, and harmony. We search for truth and find common ground in an effort to communicate clearly and thoughtfully through our singing and playing. We do all of this together to create a moment of beauty that carries with it the deepest, truest emotions that we encounter in our shared human experience. Through our music, we say to each other and our listeners: you are heard, you are loved, and you are not alone.

This reality can and should extend beyond the studio, the choir loft, and the concert hall. Imagine a world in which everyone listened and communicated with such care, not just in music making, but in everyday interactions. If we tune our hearts and minds, we can make it so.

"We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems."
-Ode, Arthur O'Shaughnessy

Whether or not we play an instrument or sing, we are all music makers. May we all carry a tune of peace and love through our lives, that we may be messengers of hope and bearers of light in our dark and broken world.

Ace Gangoso is a professional musician in the Chicago area. He is the Director of Music Ministry at St. Nicholas Church in Evanston. Ace is also a singer on the roster of several area ensembles, such as the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Grant Park Chorus, Chicago a cappella, and Fourth Coast Ensemble.

Bringing Hope to a Broken World Through Art



Using the word “beauty” in relation to my painting is actually not a preferred topic for me and seems

rather strange. I never want to paint “beautiful pictures.” For me beauty, if allowed, happens simply and spontaneously. It results from an inner recognition that intrinsically flows through the hand and the brush, spatula or roller full of color, onto the canvas. Such an experience is both delightful and encouraging. Time disappears and I experience astonishment, fulfillment, and gratitude.

The history of my painting

I have lived in the small, beautiful country of Switzerland for 80 years, many of those spent in Berne.



By Gabriela von Daeniken, SH

Already as a child and later as an adolescent, I was fascinated by the wonder and power of nature, animals, and every living thing. My sensitivity to beauty only grew more acutely by drawing and painting. Early on, I had a deep desire to seek the all-embracing, absolute presence of God/Jesus Christ in everything. This desire continued to deepen and led me in 1964, at the age of 25, to enter the novitiate of the Society of Helpers.

As a Helper, I have engaged in many ministries: nursing, adult education, facilitating meditation and painting groups, occupational therapy, and accompanying people with mental and physical disabilities and refugees on the fringe of society. In my middle years, I attended a School of Arts and learned the craft that encouraged me to become more deeply involved in painting. In 1986, I had my first exhibition followed by many others until the summer of 2018. For some time now, I have been experiencing “fallow time” in the studio. But this is also a part of the process.

I am amazed that people are deeply moved by the different styles and expressions of my painting. A transforming energy and harmony quietly impacts the viewers and gives them



the desire to hang the paintings in their homes. That inner attraction to a painting gives them the ability to sense and express the ONE and the inconceivable behind everything visible and tangible. Allowing this process to happen in silence is both a challenge and fulfillment which can radiate and unintentionally bring hope, beauty and a transforming power to our broken world.

I wish to add that playfulness is also integral to my work; a playfulness which can be characterized by a fundamental openness and orientation towards the Unity in Everything...the ONE. The interplay with colors and forms, with light and shadow gives me a sense of fulfillment and I feel the deepest gratitude for this and the other huge gifts in my life.

Although I am grateful to experience this fulfillment as a creator of art, I've also felt it as an observer of art. Not too long ago, I experienced the internalization of sublime art when I watched the violin perfor-

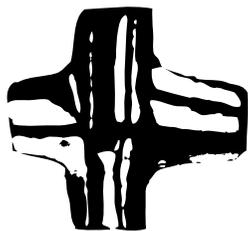
mance of Ludwig van Beethoven with Herbert von Karajan and Anne-Sophie Mutter on TV. Their performance made me happy, touched me deeply, and offered me the gift of extraordinary and purest beauty. What indescribably wonderful talents and

abilities distinguish people! All that remains is immense gratitude.

**“Beauty has a suitable relationship to the divine and provides joy and openness in human beings.”
(Plato)**

Gabrila von Daeniken is a Helper who lives in Berne, Switzerland. After many years in various ministries, she dedicated herself to art and had her first exhibition in 1986. She sees art as a transformative power that can bring hope into our broken world.





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