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Care for the Sick: Reflections on the Good Samaritan

Br. John Luth

Over the last few days I have been listening to the elderly, or their caregiving adult children, talk about their health care expenses. One former patient must pay a multi-thousand dollar bill owed to her doctor at \$25 a month. While this is absolutely necessary, it is a humiliation to a member of a generation that prided itself on frugality and financial responsibility. Another told of a bill for over a thousand dollars for the ambulance which responded to the patient's door after a call put out to 911. It crippled the family budget for more than the next month, as the family had difficulty making mortgage and property tax payments.

I stood flabbergasted at such news, and incredulous, especially at the ambulance bill for a 911 emergency response. Departing after the story was finished, I saw in my mind's eye a patient of similar age and illness in even greater financial straits thinking twice the next time such a crisis might develop and rather than incur any additional crippling charges, choose to do nothing, let nature take its course. Or even asking someone to drive them to the hospital, denying themselves

access to the emergency equipment, not just the speed and siren of the ambulance. These choices might make the difference between life and death for that person - and woefully impact that person's family.

With a growing sense of concern, I read articles that discuss the cost of illnesses and health care to the GNP and national economy. These seem intended to focus the national attention on the money needed to keep someone's grandmother alive, thus changing the debate on the *humanity* of health-care for those who must suffer with illness, injury, or long-term health-concerns to the *financial cost* to the quality of life of those who pay the bill.

Health insurance companies, aided by the newspapers, accuse doctors and hospitals of lying, cheating, and exploiting loop-holes in the law in order to widen profit margins for themselves...

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Gathering to Christ - Encounters of Heaven

Venus Wozniak

Have you ever had one of those experiences where you are most definitely in the presence of Christ? Where the very air that you breathe seems to be saturated with Holiness? When I have these experiences I frequently think of the sacramental incense that is used for special feast days in the Church. We see the smoke rise to heaven giving us a tangible experience of our prayers rising to God. The fragrance permeates the air giving us a tangible experience of how the presence of God fills in around us, protecting and guiding us.

In his book *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, John Kavanaugh talks about these experiences:

matters of experience... peak experiences of transcendence, harmony, self realization, and ecstatic love. Human possibility is momentarily revealed within the experiences of cognitive unfolding, when we find ourselves defenseless open before the mystery of the "other" At times not subject to our control or strategy, we discover ourselves integrated and realized, in loving self-acceptance and self-donation, and in self-possessed

commitment. This is the emergence of our true destiny as loved and loving creatures. (Kavanaugh 79)

These *peak experiences* are moments that turn our being to the timelessness of our true destiny: eternal life with the Ultimate Love-Giver. For the split second that we are aware of our deep connection with the eternal, we have glimpses of perfection - they are moments of heaven on earth that leave us wanting more. Kavanaugh also speaks about how these moments turn us to the *mystery of the "other."* Each *peak experience* is a happening within relationship.

A few weeks ago I had one of these *peak experiences*. Justin, Gracie and I were gathered with some friends. The few days that we were together we said morning prayer. As we sang *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* to open our prayer, I felt the immense presence of the Holy Spirit descend on us like a thick blanket of morning dew. It was overwhelming. I was reminded *where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst* (Matthew 18:20.)

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Round Table Review

Visions for Approaches to Poverty in the Southwest Suburbs

Justin Wozniak

Audio from this round table is available at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

Nativity House hosted its first round table on January 21, 2012. Coincidentally, that morning saw the first Chicago Tribune report regarding the closing of Hull House, a significant, 122-year-old institution in Chicago. In light of recent events like this, the panelists convened to discuss modern, novel approaches to economic challenges and the new face of poverty in suburban Illinois.

The panelists were: Tom Garlitz, director of the Peace and Social Justice Ministry, Diocese of Joliet; Sister Lisa Polega, Ministry Associate, Diocese of Joliet; Pam Terrell, Program Director of Catholic Charities, and Deacon Paul Brachle of the Our Lady of Peace Food Bank.

Considering Faith Perspectives on Poverty through Scripture

Mr. Garlitz opened the discussion with a quotation from 1 Corinthians 11, a reflection on the Eucharist. He noted that words from this chapter are heard weekly at Mass.

*...When you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper; for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What!
(vv. 17-22)*

Mr. Garlitz noted that the ancient liturgy started with an *agape meal*: an actual meal that was connected to the Eucharistic feast. He interpreted this passage as a condemnation of a practice into which the worshipers fell, wherein the community was divided among those who started the meal with a sumptuous, early feast. Others arrived late, after work, with little to eat. These "divisions" are thus condemned by Paul, who accuses them of not understanding the social dimension of Eucharist: that some have more than they need, becoming drunk, while others have not enough. The resulting denial of social justice separates the community from the body of Christ.

Mr. Garlitz then turned to the take-home message of this passage. At a minimum, he said, we must be mindful of the poor, particularly when participating in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is an image of a reconciled, egalitarian society. "We are called to gather at table as equals," he said.

He closed with a quote from Pope Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)* (2006): "A Eucharist that does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."

How Does Catholic Social Teaching Relate to Poverty?

Sr. Polega started with Pope Leo XIII's identification of poverty as the key moral issue of his time, during the industrial revolution. His response was presented in *Rerum Novarum (Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor)* (1891), a foundational work in modern Catholic social teaching. Sr. Polega stressed that she intended to focus on issues in the modern era. She turned to

statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2009, the poverty rate was 14.3%, up from 13.2% the previous year, representing about 3 million additional persons in poverty. From 2000-2008, 9 million additional persons fell into poverty.

Sr. Polega stated that Catholic social teaching is rooted in Scripture. Citing Genesis 1:27, she noted that every person has the right to be free from poverty. Jesus' mission, defined in Luke 4, was to bring good news to the poor, a mission that is still alive today in the Church. Catholic social teaching, thus, is the body of social wisdom informing our heads and hearts, to understand and respond to societal problems such as poverty. She then quoted from *Rerum Novarum*: "[The Church's] desire is that the poor, for example, should rise above poverty and wretchedness, and better their condition in life; and for this she makes a strong endeavor... When there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration. The richer class have many ways of shielding themselves, and stand less in need of help..."

Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World) (1965) "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

Economic Justice For All (1986) "As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental 'option for the poor'—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless... As Christians,

we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response."

Deus Caritas Est "Love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to [the Church] as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel."

She summarized these quotes, saying Catholic social teaching helps us to focus and ask relevant questions about what is happening around us.

She discussed many ministries that local parishes are carrying out in the diocese, including the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the Hispanic Ministry for low-income Hispanic individuals at St. Patrick in Momence, Warehouse Workers for Justice in Will County, and One Stitch at a Time, a community-building group in Glen Ellyn.

In conclusion, she described Catholic social teaching as a shining light that helps us address difficult situations as individuals, communities, and parishes.

Being Positive in Light of the New Reality

Ms. Terrell started by stressing that poverty and related issues look very different today, a situation she described as a "new reality," created by economic changes. New faces are seen seeking help, people who never thought they would see themselves in financial difficulty, now unable to put food on the table.

She described the surprise that people express when she talks about poverty in Dupage County. She noted that the Dupage Illinois Dept. of Human Services office is the busiest in the state, even though Dupage County is marketed for its affluence.

She noted the fact that the state has been late on delivering benefits, and is moving to a reimbursement model for child care, forcing qualifying mothers to pay up front. Shrinking resources have caused a decrease in provided services, particularly in rent assistance. About 9,000 households were turned away.

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Roundtable Panelists - Deacon Paul Brachle, Pam Terrell, Sr. Lisa Polega, Tom Garlitz

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Good Samaritan

At the same time, however, health insurance companies make skyscraper profits, among the highest in the nation. They rank with oil companies, pharmaceuticals and other huge profit-makers by cutting benefits, hiding costs, denying treatments, and engaging in a host of clearly questionable, if not outright unethical, actions themselves.

Many people in this country are disturbed when medical costs cramp their life-style. They are reluctant, however, to rein in the health insurance companies because of a faith in the value of free enterprise. The Chicago Tribune reported some weeks ago that capitalism is in the business of making profits, not in making - or securing - jobs; if it came to either securing jobs or making profits, capitalism would leave jobs in the dust. So it can come to no one as a surprise that insurance companies - profit-makers par excellence - would just as soon bury someone (if not literally, then under a pile of bills - even one of their own stockholders) if it would safeguard their own profit margins. It is frightening to note that hospitals - part of a health-care "industry" - and individual doctors join their considerable voices, talents, and resources to protect their interest and piece of the pie in this profiteering process. And thus, the value of a person has become inextricably tied in its relationship to the unspoken, yet supremely more valuable, object of financial gain.

Then, I turn to any hospital with a Christian name, such as Bon Secours, Bethesda, Holy Angels, or, notably, *Good Samaritan*. The very name of the last secures the confidence of everyone who speaks or hears of its name because of its association with the wonderfully merciful parable of Jesus in the Gospel. Such a name engenders

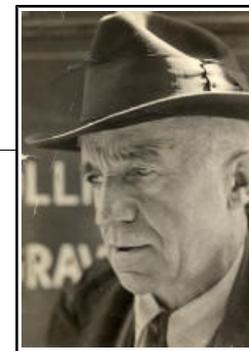
a sort of soul-searching, and moral compassing when it comes to providing health-care. In all events, the very association with the gentleness of, say, that Samaritan of long ago along the road to Jericho, instills not merely the hope, but the promise of care based solely upon the absolute and irrevocable value of the person in the bed and the person at his bed-side.

And I fall to thinking: what is so valuable about this extraordinary story of the Good Samaritan from the Bible, what is so extraordinary about *this* particular Samaritan? And I conclude his value is *not* in his courage in stopping to aid the injured wayfarer *or* that he cared enough to bind up his wounds *or* carried him to an inn. No, this Samaritan's most extraordinary kindness, that which marks him as an "Everybrother", lies chiefly in the remarkable gesture of handing over a purse of coins which came attached to a promise to cover whatever other costs might be incurred. In other words, this Everybrother for all seasons - or for all ages - infused not just this inn, but the whole world, with a renewed sense of GOD's idea of man in his making. In caring for this less than ordinary, bone-weary foot-soldier in the army of mankind, as if he were the soul GOD made him to be, this Samaritan gave all men a bird's-eye view of each their own value. In other words, the restoration of a man's life, the renewal of human breath, for this Samaritan gave the only worthy use of monetary resources, and what a beautiful, breath-making use that was.

I have a theory, that if something that is valued is coveted or must be held guarded, hidden from general view, secured from others, it cannot be of any honestly genuine merit. If it is something of value, it cannot ever be exclusive, denied, or kept from others. And the sheer joy of having it, would prevent the thought of hiding it. The Good Samaritan knew that. That is what made him "good." He knew the life-breath in himself - in mankind - was GOD's breath, and that it was

Easy Essay Voluntary Poverty

Peter Maurin (1877 – 1949)



**Christianity has nothing to do
with either modern Capitalism
or modern Communism,
for Christianity
has a Capitalism of its own,
and a Communism of its own.**

**Modern Capitalism
is based on property
without responsibility,
while Christian Capitalism
is based on property
with responsibility.**

**Modern Communism
is based on poverty through force,
while Christian Communism
is based on poverty through choice.**

**For a Christian,
voluntary poverty is the ideal
as exemplified by Saint Francis of Assisi,
while private property
is not an absolute right,
but a trust,
which must be administered
for the benefit of God's children.**

GOD's breath which actually gave each man that most authentic value of his personhood. In turning the eye of his heart to this one central facet of one man's life, he identified the richness in the whole gem of mankind. That is the soul of this story: The profit of a man's soul: that is the only profit.



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Conception. He is doing an apostolic
year at Our Lady of Peace Parish in
Darien, IL.*

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Poverty Round Table

Ms. Terrell turned to positive things that Catholic Charities is doing regarding these changes, including advocacy, social media for information sharing, pursuing non-traditional funding sources, expanding the volunteer labor force, and collaborative funding arrangements with partner agencies. However, many difficult choices are being made regarding funding cuts.

Ms. Terrell then discussed the need to break the cycle of poverty, including back-to-school fairs, adult classes on budgeting, financial literacy, nutrition, etc. She described various housing programs in place.

She told the group that the Community Connection meeting is a good way to find out about related issues in Dupage.

<http://www.cc-doj.org/advocacy.htm>

Personal Response to Poverty in the Parish

Deacon Paul Brachle started by stating that the Our Lady of Peace Food Bank, operating for 28 years, intends to help make people more self-sufficient, and is based on Christian, individual charitable actions. He described the failure of the Hull House as a consequence of following the "siren song of government funding," that dried up. He said the motivation of government action is fundamentally different from that of individuals.

He noted that the typical number of families served on a given day has risen from 30 families to 70 families over the last two years. He noted that parishioners are very supportive of the food pantry, and that they have been able to respond to the increased need. Many of the new needy families are very embarrassed about their situation, and offer to help the pantry in some way or offer to volunteer in bagging the groceries. He identified this as a "need to give" present in all.

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Who's Calling, Please? Embracing All the Church's Vocations

Allison Covey

"Is that it?," one of the candidates asked, looking disappointed. Our pastor had just finished sharing the story of his priestly call and ordination with the RCIA as part of his talk on vocations. "I thought it would be more dramatic," the candidate explained. "After all, it isn't everyone who is called by God!" Isn't it, though? Aren't we all called, through our baptism, to be priest, prophet and king? Is God not calling or are we not listening?

Unfortunately, the candidate's confusion is not unique to someone new to our faith. Similar beliefs are often echoed by Catholic speakers and bloggers as well--Marriage is the default vocation for all and calls to other vocations are rare and dramatic. This position is problematic on so many levels. It not only denies the need for prayerful discernment but it also implies that God is simply choosing to call fewer and fewer priests and religious even as the

Church grows. It diminishes marriage as a true vocational call and brands those who have not married--by choice, lack of opportunity or canonical restriction--as disobedient to God's will in their lives. What a mess!

Lent, as a time of renewal and refocusing, is a great time to carefully consider whether we are encouraging young people to reflect on a variety of vocations or pushing them toward an assumed default. Do we teach our youth how to discern and follow God's call or to simply follow the crowd?

In my pastoral work, I've noticed an interesting inconsistency. We speak often of the need for more vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In our parishes, we set aside whole days and weeks of prayer for this intention. Back at home, however, many of us are singing a different tune. We speak to our children of becoming a doctor, or a firefighter, or a school teacher.

We tell them that, one day, they will get married, have children of their own, buy a nice house. How many of us assume our children are called to married life without even thinking about it? How many of us truly recognize married life as a vocational call, worthy of the same careful discernment a seminarian gives his priestly vocation?

In order to encourage religious vocations, we need to first learn about them ourselves, to get familiar with the options out there and to share this knowledge, unbiasedly, with the young people in our lives. This is especially true for parents, catechists and Catholic schoolteachers. It's difficult to help someone discern a call to a vocation neither of you knows much about! Most practicing Catholics have at least a basic understanding of what their parish priest does but what about a missionary priest? How about a cloistered nun? A consecrated virgin? A religious brother? As vocations to the religious life decline, so does our meaningful exposure to persons living out these vocations. We need to seek out and create interaction between our young people and the religious orders

in our community. Invite a sister or a brother to come speak with the youth about life in their order. Ask your parish priest to share how he discerned his call. Explore a variety of vocations in the classroom, examining the mission and day to day responsibilities of each. Be sure that young people realize that choosing a vocation other than marriage does not mean giving up one's career aspirations. There are sisters who are lawyers, brothers who are schoolteachers, priests who are airplane pilots! God does call, let's be sure they're listening and we're supportive! 

Allison is a PhD candidate in the field of Systematic Theology. She works as a Pastoral Associate and holds a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies (Religious Education) and a Master of Arts in Theological Studies (Sacred Scripture) from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas.

Walk with me, good and loving God, as I journey through life.
May I take your hand and be led by the Holy Spirit.
Fill me, inspire me, free me to respond generously to your call.
For I believe you desire my deepest joy, and it is only in your company that my soul will be satisfied and my life will find its meaning.
Amen

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Poverty Round Table

He said that currently, families come to the food bank for help from Burr Ridge and Hinsdale, some of the wealthier towns anywhere in the U.S.

Deacon Brachle then discussed his efforts to ensure that pantry resources are distributed properly, including investigating need vs. greed issues, and deception in those that apply for help. He noted that this has challenged his spiritual growth, causing him to feel judgmental, but is a necessary aspect of stewardship of the pantry resources.

He then described the practicals of food bank operations, which includes distributing food in a typical supplemental grocery bag worth about \$30. The food bank is run by a "happy crew" of 14-20 people, and is self-sufficient, which he termed a "genuinely Christian community."

Questions from the Tables

Questions from the group included requests to repeat quotes, practical questions about the food pantry and charity information, and novel income generation for agencies. Ms. Terrell discussed the presence a large group of newly underemployed, the fight against complacency, and the high success rate of individuals passing through transitional housing

programs. The group discussed the root causes of poverty, including drug abuse, mental illness, and temporary economic causes, and the relative proportions of those categories in the homeless population. Ms. Terrell stated that current funding rates are primarily geared toward the chronically homeless, and that she wished that corporations would do more to address poverty in light of large profits. The group discussed the motivations of corporate giving. Ms. Terrell said that corporations lay off workers and instruct them to call Catholic Charities for assistance. Deacon Brachle pointed out the difference between individual, Christian, charitable intentions and fundamental corporate motivations. 

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Round Table Review

The Domestic Church: Parents as the First Catechists

Adam Setmeyer

There does not exist a Bible that we read and the Liturgy that we live; there is the Bible we live with the whole of our life and especially so in the Liturgy. The former, the bible, without the latter the liturgy is deprived of its most intense moment of life. The latter without the bible would be based on a void. The bible finds its fullness in the listening of the community that lives in justice and builds itself in the Eucharistic celebration. – Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential in the Child*

On February 11, during the second Nativity House Round Table this quote was shared by Jackie Bedore, and, in many ways, it could be seen as center point of the evening. The evening, titled *The Domestic Church: Family as the First Catechist*, was graced with presentations by Susan Tracy, a veteran Montessori educator, the aforementioned Jackie Bedore, who is the Coordinator of Faith Formation at St. Dennis Parish (Lockport, IL) which includes the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* program, and Felicia Leon-Driscoll, who co-founded the Good Shepherd Montessori School (South Bend, IN). The evening's presentations by the panelists danced in and out of a formal presentation of Montessori's theory of education, the personal experiences of the presenters, and, often, profound insights from the likes of Sofia Cavalletti and Pope John Paul II. Though, it could be said, that "presentation" is too formal a word, because Tracy, Bedore and Driscoll were far too personal and engaging to give it such a dry definition. Likewise, their subject and content were approached not in an abstract academic manner, but conversationally, something Maria Montessori would be proud of given her drive to view all people as learners despite their role in the school.

As someone who is knowledgeable of the Catholic faith tradition, currently raising a two year old son, but entirely uneducated in Montessori theory, I found the evening completely engaging. What follows is a more thorough summary of the evening's events.

Susan Tracy provided a basic overview of Maria Montessori's theory of child development, and offered a few of her own reflections on each stage. Montessori divided child development into 4 stages, each lasting six years. Ms. Tracy was careful to

note that the first stage begins not at birth but conception and lasts until the child is six years old, and stated that more learning takes place in this stage than the remainder of one's life. Accordingly, this stage is identified by the child's "absorbent mind," a phrase which is meant to explain how a child is taking in their entire environment, and, most importantly, the people in their lives. In doing so the young boy or girl is discovering that they are a person separate, though connected, to all other people, and, likewise, that there is a God – seen most clearly in his or her parents. Through this process the child is "normalized" – a healthy and essential process – and begins to move from purely self-interest to developing a concern for others.

From here, Ms. Tracy explained, children move into the second stage (6-12 yrs.) and discover morality. Questions such as, "This/That is wrong, right?" become commonplace during this stage. As the child matures and becomes morally minded, they then move into the third stage and are, so-called, born-again. Montessori called the stage between 12-18 years old the time of being "newborn into society." And, according to Susan, it is during this time they undergo a spiritual awakening. Finally, after this awakening, children move into early adulthood and become "contributors to society." Rapt with idealism, those between 18-24 years old, if they have matured through the previous stages healthily will express themselves through compassion for others. When hearing this the image of college graduates joining the Jesuit Volunteer Corp or Lasallian Volunteers traveling around the country just to serve those in need may come to mind, but, before finishing, Ms. Tracy raised a poignant question, what if the first three stages of a child's life were not addressed properly? Can we expect that person to be a compassionate adult? Therein lays the importance of the home as the center for spiritual formation.

Jackie Bedore next explained how a movement started by Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi known as the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* (CGS) continues to promote Montessori's theory of education. Sofia Cavalletti, who was a scripture scholar, was asked by her friends in Rome to give their children catechetical instruction. While initially she refused because she felt she had no



Round Table Panelists: Felicia Leon-Driscoll, Jackie Bedore, Susan Tracy

expertise in what we might commonly call elementary education, she eventually consented. Ms. Bedore went on to tell how at the very first catechetical session Sofia met a young boy named Paulo, and as she broke open the stories of Genesis he was enraptured and asked question after question. Two hours later Sofia, herself, was completely taken in and thus the genesis of CGS. Over time Sofia partnered with Gianna who was personally educated by Maria Montessori's method, and they developed what is now known as Catechesis of the Good Shepherd – an international association found in thirty-seven countries.

CGS divides the child's education into three stages which relate to Montessori's stages, they are 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12 years of age. As Ms. Bedore explained, through observation Sofia and Gianna found that children ages 3-6 primarily need to receive a love that is equal or greater to the love they are able to give. However, the only one capable of returning more love than a child is able to give is the Eternal One, our triune God. They found the example for this in the parable of the Good Shepherd found in John 10. In the second stage, ages 6-9, children are developing morally, and within a Catholic setting this means they are beginning to understand God's justice. The conclusions to which children might come can be either wonderful or terrifying depending on their environment, according to CGS. On the one hand they might see God as that great love, searching for us as we have gone astray, in which we have come to believe. However, they might also see God primarily as a judge, and an angry judge at that. This greatly shapes the third stage, ages 9-12, during which the child is able to understand their life as a part of God's plan. The danger then is, as Ms. Bedore reminded us, that we are only one generation away from losing our faith. The hope is that movements like *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* are equipping parishes and parents to cultivate a love for Christ in our children daily.

Finally, **Felicia Leon-Driscoll**, provided an account of her experience

of starting a Montessori school with her husband Dan Driscoll. Their school, Good Shepherd Montessori, located in South Bend, Indiana is unique in its emphases which are the traditional Montessori methods, using CSG to provide time and space for spiritual encounters, developing a Farm School so that children can intimately encounter creation, and requiring socio-economic diversity (specifically 1/3 enrolled children come from poverty). Though Felicia and Dan Driscoll never intended to start a school and make it their life's work, they intended to become Maryknoll Lay Missioners; she credits the Holy Spirit for directing them to this work. After having children they were looking for a Montessori school in which to enroll their elementary age children, and when they could not find one they decided to create one. At the time their school only educated sixteen elementary age children, but today the school ranges from Pre-K to Eighth Grade and enrolls over 100 children.

Today, Ms. Driscoll credits the example of the Early Church in the Acts of the Apostles as their ongoing example as they strive to be "servants-in-relationship" through their school to the community in which they live. Ultimately, she stated emphatically, this is what the work of the school is all about: changing their town and community through education.

After Ms. Driscoll's presentation the evening concluded with a few questions for the presenters from those gathered. In light of the goals of the Nativity House Project this Round Table was particularly engaging. Using the methods developed by Maria Montessori and contextualized by Sofia Cavalletti the Nativity House has a profound opportunity to be a transformative element of its community through the young mothers and their children who reside in its hospitable and healing environment.



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Encounters of Heaven

There are many times that we as Christians gather in His name. The moments of transcendence are there for the taking if we wish to participate in the Presence of Grace.

Justin and I, due to our vows, are *always* gathered in the name of Christ. When we are having fun playing with Gracie, when we are driving to our cousin's birthday celebration, when we are in a heated discussion, when we are working together on Nativity House Project..... there Christ is! I can tell you that I am not always in tune with the Presence, but undoubtedly Christ is there.

Every family is gathered in His Name just by the very nature of *family*. A man and a woman join together through the sacrament of marriage. Then, if it be the God's will, the sacramental, unitive act brings about new life in children. Pope John Paul II expounds on this notion further in *Familiaris Consortio*:

...the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love, in an effort that will find fulfillment, as will everything created and redeemed, in the Kingdom of God. Looking at it in such a way as to reach its very roots, we must say that the essence and role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. Hence the

family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride.

How much did Christ love his bride? Enough to die for her – the Church. Husband and wife declare their vows – giving of themselves freely to the other in front of their family communities, the Church, and the Communion of Saints. Their mutual love is the first example of Christ's love for the Church. This example is furthered by parental love for their children. These examples strengthen the Church. In the family (a community) - there Christ is. Think back to those moments when you were entrenched in the realization that your parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, dearest family friends loved you regardless. Those moments are some of our *peak experiences*.

The family is the microcosm of the Church: our parish family, our diocesan family, the entire global Catholic Church. We are each privy to a *peak experience* of the sacrificial love of the Divine Liturgy each week. There is an amazing reality in the feast that we share every week. This same reality is the love that marriage and family are founded on. Through the Love Feast of the Eucharist we are fed with the strength to give the same sacrificial love Christ gave.

Each prayer, song, and action within the Liturgy is of profound importance

and relevance to our life but there is one aspect that I find of particular interest. For example, a parish has four Sunday Liturgies a weekend; each one is full – we will say with 1,500 people attending each Liturgy; that is 6,000 people! That is many, many people gathered in the name of Jesus. What an amazing Presence that must be. Let's take this one step further. Let's say that half of those (3,000) receive the Real Presence of Christ into their being through the Eucharist. Those people then leave the Liturgy with the tangible Presence of Christ now an integral part of their being.

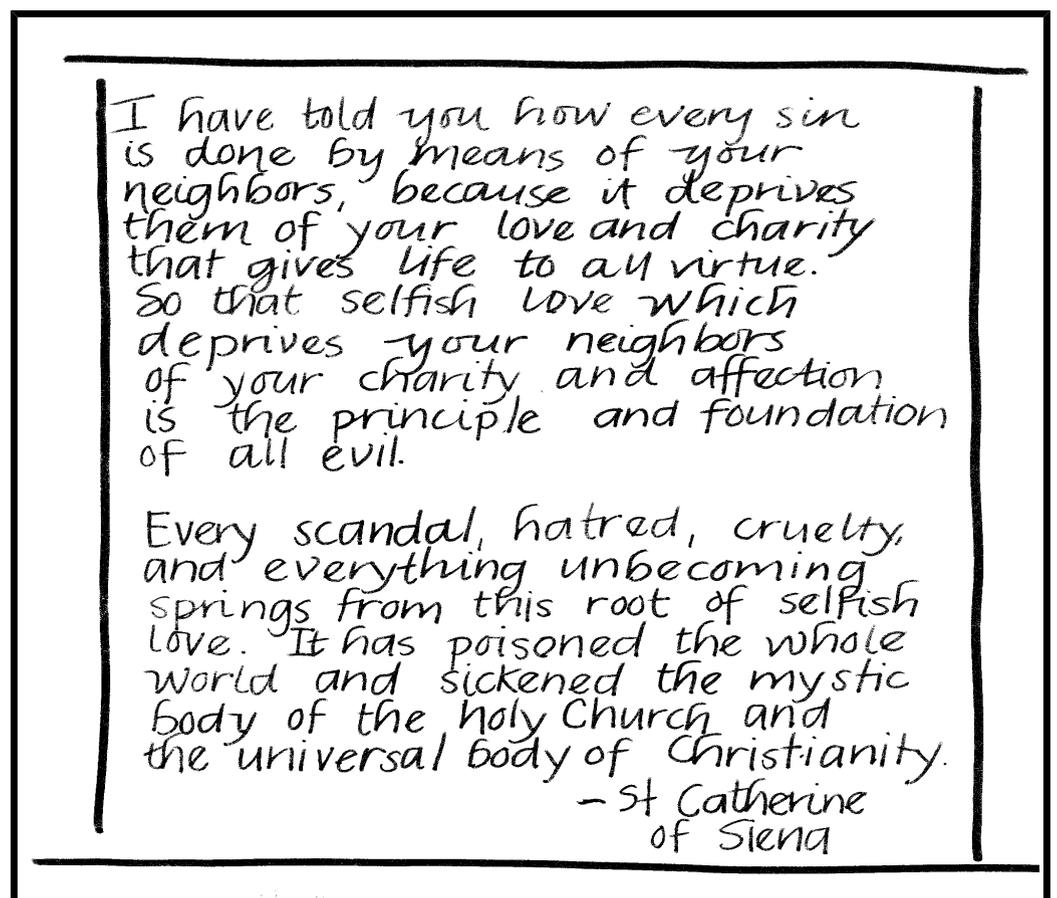
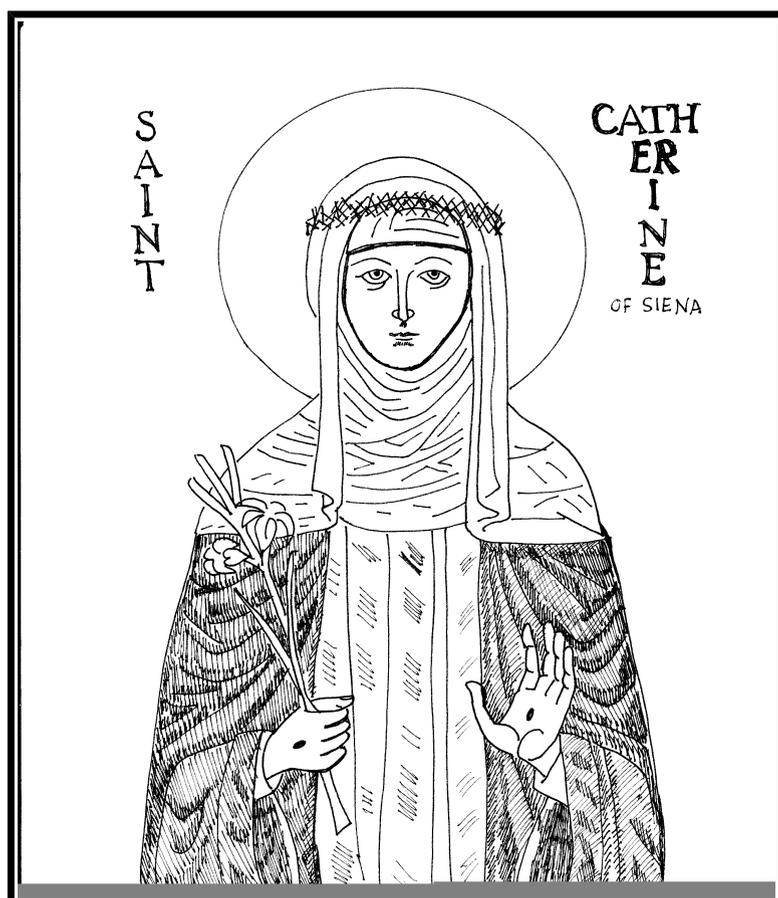
Imagine if each person who partakes in the immense Presence during Sunday Liturgy went out and showed Christ to others – you know through acts of love. Some people have taken to the notion of random acts of kindness. They should not be random acts but calculating acts of love. In the above scenario I am speaking of only one parish. There are thousands of parishes all over the country. In the perfect world where every person that attended Liturgy was awake to the Presence in the Liturgy and the Presence that then becomes an integral part of their being through the Eucharist - us Catholics would be a *presence* to be reckoned with – in the most positive way possible.

This is where Jesus' message - *the kingdom of God is at hand* (Matthew 3:2) – becomes pertinent. Being aware of these moments of transcendence and in tune with His Presence is the first way that we partake in the immediacy of the Kingdom. There are two

concrete ways in which we are offered experiences of Christ: through family life and through Eucharistic Liturgy – there Christ is. Here are two realities that keep us connected to the Kingdom – here and now. The more that we become aware His presence in these gatherings the easier it is to be the selfless lover we are called to be. Each time we have these real encounters we are transformed. When we are awake to His Presence we are led further down the road to *self-acceptance* and *self-donation*. In self-acceptance we become more comfortable with our timeless nature. This timelessness allows us to shift focus from the material to the spiritual – a shift that brings us closer to *the other* and *self-donation*. Through self-donation we give of ourselves, practicing the calculated acts of Christ's perfect love.

St. Catherine of Siena said *all the way to heaven is heaven because he said I am the way*. Christ's example – perfect sacrificial love – is one of both joys and struggles. We are called to love until it hurts. And joy is the direct result of loving until it hurts – joy as a result of being closer to the perfection of Christ. The Kingdom is here among us in our gatherings where Christ is found. Along the way we are met with encounters of heaven. 

Venus is a Montessori teacher. She is member of Our Lady of Peace Parish where she serves on the Parish Council. She may be contacted at venusad@nativity-house.org.



About *The Visitation*

This newspaper, *The Visitation*, is a publication on topics of spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House Project. Contributions are accepted from readers everywhere.

We need help with:

- Articles and topics: news, views, reviews, letters, event listings, etc.;
- Art: hand-drawn or graphic design; or
- Web and outreach volunteers.

To contact us, email us at

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

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About *Nativity House*

Nativity House will serve as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The project will also foster a mothering community offering education and support for all mothers. The program will operate in partnership with appropriate local agencies, volunteers, and parishes. Overall we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

The project is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that will be extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house.

Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us regarding this project, please email Venus at:

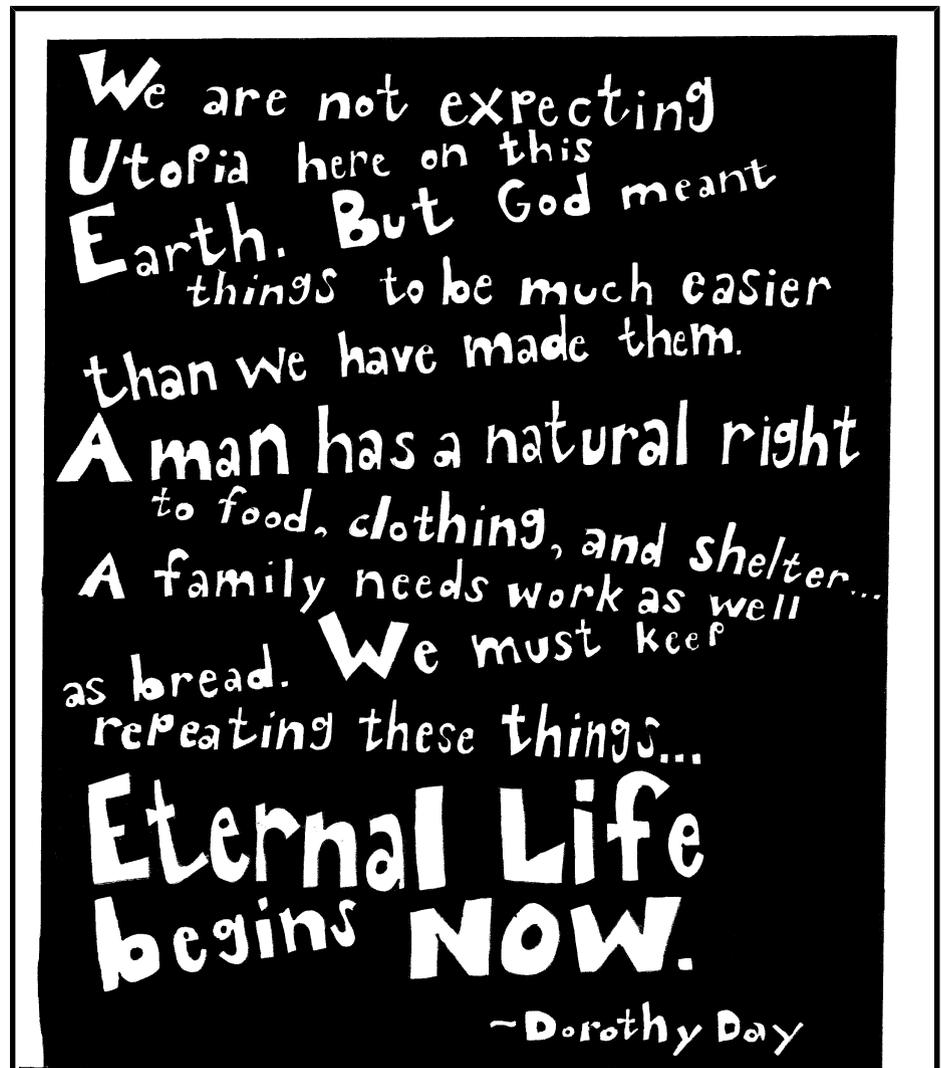
venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

**Nativity House
5621 Plymouth St.
Downers Grove, IL
60516**

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

<http://www.nativity-house.org>



Nativity House Needs Your Help!

We have just come across an affordable rental property in Downers Grove that will accommodate three guest mothers. Nativity House is now collecting pledges for the monthly expenses that this will incur. Our estimates put this at \$350 per mother, including housing and food. Please consider “adopting” a guest mother or splitting one with your friends. Contact us to participate in the beginning of the work of Nativity House!

Wish List

- A4 Invitation Envelopes
- Vegetable Shortening (for soap making)
- Essential Oils (for soap making)
- Printer Cartridges (for a Canon MP470)
- Stamps for our mailings
- Furniture (sometime after May)

To relay information concerning properties or to donate please contact Venus at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

or

773.331.1789

Profile of a Saint

St. André of Montreal

Richard Klee

January 6
Miracle Man of Montreal
(1845 - 1937)

During Lent, it is natural to look for companions in faith, especially from among the saints, our friends who have gone out into the desert before us. The desert is a place that we must go, as Jesus did, even though it is not easy to go there. To go into the wasteland is to go through a doorway, to a God who sustains us anywhere and everywhere, but not in ways that we necessarily know.

Although Montreal is not a desert place, one recent saint found his own way to the Lord there, reliant upon God by those exercises of the heart that can make even the desert bloom: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. St. André of Montreal was a slight and timid-looking man who spent decades serving as the doorman at various schools and churches. Considered stupid and insignificant by others, even his own religious community, he was given the least important job; St. André joked that *my superiors showed me the door, and I stayed for forty years!* He soon became known by two titles, and Brother André is the first of these. It is telling that despite his lofty status today as saint, the millions who come to the Oratory of St. Joseph, that St. André inspired, still refer to him by his humble title of brother.

Brother André shared his life as a true

brother to all who came to his door: cracking jokes, listening compassionately, and above all praying for another as if he himself were that person. He tried to live as St. Paul taught: to *bear one another's burdens*. (Galatians 6:2) His perspective was shaped by a profound sense that he was a part of the Holy Family because he was a member of the Church. As such he called upon God with the confidence of one who had Joseph as father and Mary as mother and Jesus as Lord and also as brother.

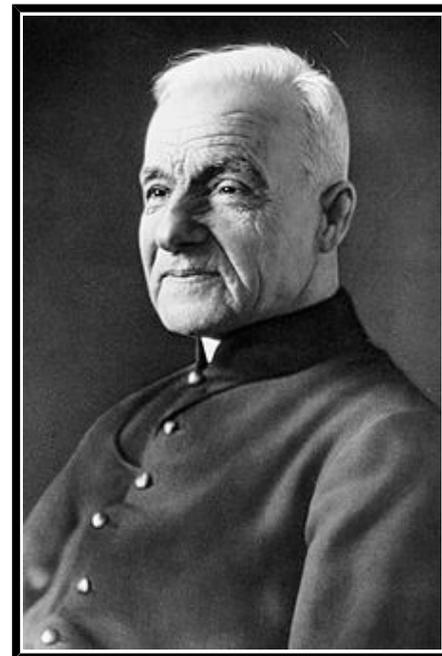
In particular, Joseph the just, the protector, the worker, the man of faith, taught André how to relate to those at his door who suffered injustice, who were burdened by illness, who were worn down with work, and who needed help to find God in their lives. André told his visitors of Joseph the man, who experienced the whip of gossip, the tyranny of a dictator, the despair of a door closed to his family in dire need. André shared stories of Joseph who trusted in God in all things, who listened to God's word, and who followed God down a path that he did not know. At his doorway André shared his sense of being a member of a divine family in Christ, a family that is human, a family that we too can call upon confidently in our need.

St. André's second title was famous in his time: the Miracle Man of Montreal. Hundreds of infirm and sick each month made their way directly to his

door, stumbling on crutches, being rolled on wheelchairs, or even carried by friends. After days of receiving them, Brother André spent his nights visiting the sick who could not come to him, praying with them like a family member, confident that God would address their physical and spiritual needs in surprising ways. The surprises were almost beyond belief, and today the presence at the Oratory of St. Joseph of hundreds of differently sized pairs of wooden crutches, left by the healed at Brother André's door, testify to the miraculous healing power that God worked through this humble servant.

Lent is a time to go out into the desert. We do this remembering that what Christ did in his death and resurrection, he did once and for all. The triumph over death is true and real, and we can see this most clearly in the desert, a place with little life. The desert's *desertedness* - the distance of my friends, the greatness of my sins, the suffering of my life - can become with a little trust a doorway to new life with God, with greater compassion, a sense of God's immediate mercy, and strength to share new life with others. What Christ accomplished on the cross is done, and what Christ will accomplish with us is yet to be discovered!

Brother André would often counsel his visitors about ways to pray. Again and again he told them of the Holy Family, who themselves crossed the desert into Egypt, and looked for a door to open to them at the time of the Savior's birth. Brother André at times told visitors to approach St. Joseph and say *Please help me, as you would have liked others to help you, if you had been in the same situation on earth*. This prayer sets us at the doorway between



isolation and a home where all are beloved of God.

As we turn to God anew in Lent, we too can pray and make our way inside with our saintly sisters and brothers, who pray better than we for what we need. And we may find with this familial love the courage to love those who now need family too. St. André of Montreal, our miraculous brother, pray for us. 🏠

Richard is a Ph. D. student in Theology at the University of Notre Dame. He lives in South Bend, IN, with his wife, Kelly, and two children.



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THE VISITATION

Issue: *Things Made New*

- *Reflections*
- *Roundtable coverage*
- *Thoughts on vocation and St. André*