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Life Behind the Scenes as a Single Mother

Heidi Geiger

Becoming a mother has been one of the highlights of my life...probably the biggest and the best. Although I wasn't one of those mothers who enjoyed pregnancy due to extended illness, I LOVED birthing my babies into this world. Loved it! There is nothing on the face of this Earth like it. It's the most spiritual, powerful, sacred moment in a woman's life, if she so chooses, and one that makes you feel like you can do ANYTHING! I have gone through three pregnancies and three births. My first-born died in my arms at 23 weeks gestation. It was traumatic, but I was at peace letting my little Diego go and knowing that he would always be with me in my heart. After Diego died, I had two normal, natural, at-home births – a girl and a boy – my little blessings.

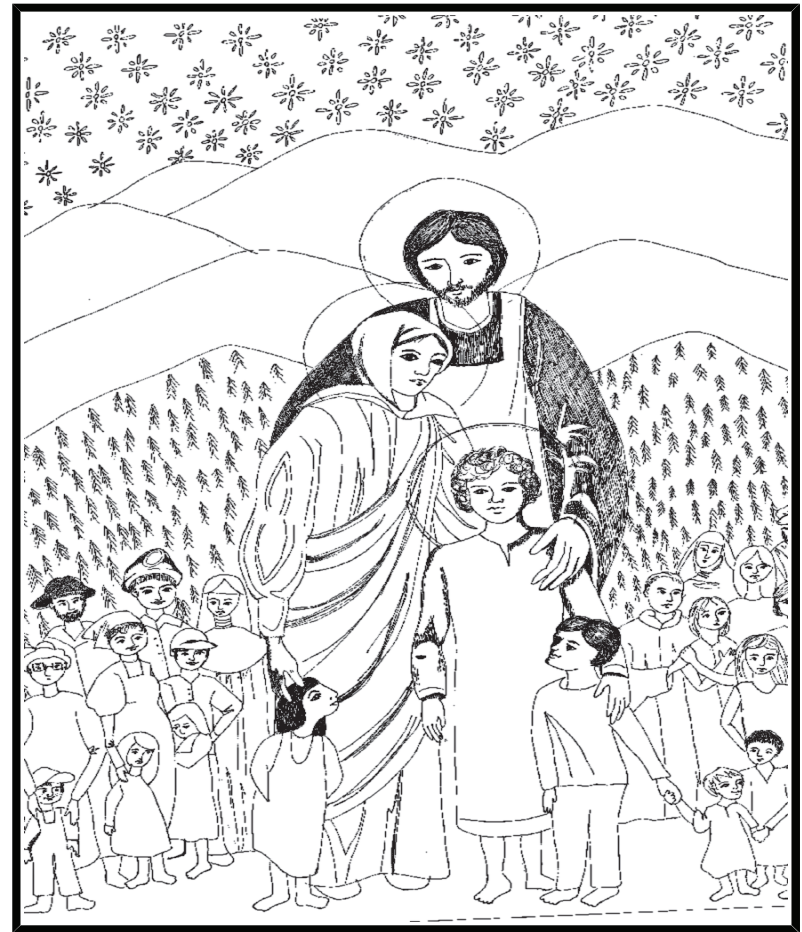
Two weeks before my daughter was born, I remember bursting into tears thinking about all the responsibility that lie before me as a parent. It took over my entire being. Many doubts surged my mind, but the one I remember most was, *Would I be a good mother?* Two things were blocking me from believing in this. The first was the lack of support from my parents and the second was the uncertainty of my relationship with my child's father. I felt everything was on my shoulders and for the most part it was and still is. Today, however, I believe I am a great mom and those two blocking issues have changed... my parents now support me and love my children and I am no longer in a toxic relationship with the father of my children. I AM A SINGLE MOTHER.

Being a single mother is something I feel I have always been even though I was in a relationship the first 3 years of having my children. I get two sides of the coin with friends and acquaintances, anywhere from, *I don't know how you do it to I totally understand.* First of all, I don't know how I do it either and second of all, no one can truly understand unless they live it. When looking at my life and all its glories, I appreciate the fact that I

only need to take care of my children and myself and whatever decision I make for the day is the decision that will be. We never need to wait for someone to get home to have dinner. We just eat when we are hungry. We are a co-sleeping family and have been since my babies were born. It has brought us together in more ways than one and has fostered a sense of security through tough times for my children. We all love waking up to each other in the morning as if we were one unit...because essentially that is what we are – a family unit. I love watching my children grow, teaching them new things, discovering the world with them one family field trip at a time, hearing things like, *Mommy, if 'beautiful' had a picture, it would be you* or just simply, *Mommy, I love you*, receiving hugs and kisses, hearing their belly-gut giggles over and over again, watching a big sister feed her little brother or wipe his nose with a tissue, hearing yourself through your child's mouth, watching them succeed, being there for them when they don't and encouraging them when they feel they can't.

On the other side of the spectrum, being a single parent poses its challenges. I am not only partially financially responsible for my children, but I launder their clothes, feed them, bathe them, nurse them back to health when they are sick, play with them, plan outings, put them to bed, guide them and love them (with many hugs and kisses and reassurance along the way)...all while trying to get dishes done, scrub the floor, clean the bathroom, make personal time for myself, massage my foot after stepping on a Lego, hold down one job and market myself as an entrepreneur for another, find a babysitter, being patient through a tantrum, study, exercise, pay bills, worry about money, grocery shop, console a teething baby and sacrificing sleep, research, doctor visits, etc.

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Drawing by Lisa Boyer. Adapted from artwork by Sisters of St. Joseph, Wheeling, WV

Fatherhood From a Priest's Perspective

Fr. Walter Dziordz, MIC

Just recently I read an article in the Chicago Tribune about Fatherhood as seen from different perspectives, and I found it amazing, simultaneously realizing its accuracy, to see how much connection the concept of Fatherhood had with the ordained clergy. The author of the article went strikingly to the origin of the word, *Pope*, by showing a picture of Pope Benedict next to the title, *The granddaddies of all daddies*, (The article was published on June 15, Friday of this year.) The article quotes another work (Kory Stamper, assistant editor at Merriam-Webster) in stating, *The title for the head of the Roman Catholic Church comes ultimately from the Greek word 'pappas,' which was a title given to bishops, and is also baby talk for father.*

And the article goes even further. Even the word *Abbot* is relevant. *Abbot*, an English word that means 'the superior

of a monastery for men, 'also comes from a word for father, but not the Greek or the Latin roots. Abbot comes ultimately from abba, the Aramaic word for father.

So, no matter which way one looks, one cannot help but notice a strong emphasis on the fatherhood role of a priest, a ministry which quite directly takes the title, *Father*, unlike the two words above, in which *Father* in insinuated in the root meaning of the titles. This fact alone is significant. It is an expectation among many that the priest be a father to his congregation, as opposed to an unreasonable, perhaps even exaggerated, understanding coming from the priest himself concerning his role in society, in the very Church in which he is ordained.

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Reflections

The Spiritual Life of Grandparents

Dave and Leslie Bertram

Our middle son and his wife recently blessed us with our second, beautiful granddaughter. Although born prematurely, she is now doing quite well, and we thank God for that blessing. After her early but joyous arrival, we had to patiently wait for her to gain weight and eventually be released from the hospital so that we could spend some quality time with her. During that time, we often found ourselves reflecting upon our role as grandparents.


We regard *Grandparenthood* as a special reward from our offspring and God for our years of sacrifice as parents. And over those years, we have fully come to realize that religion is one of the key factors that hold families together. We have gained intimate knowledge that time with our

loved ones is both very precious and very fleeting; children grow more quickly than we could ever have anticipated, and we need to impart that knowledge upon our son and daughter-in-law. We have intimate knowledge that the days may be long but the years are short.

We have a view of life that contains a far broader perspective that comes only with a passage of time. Our collective years offer what youth cannot—wisdom gained by living; loving gained through our losses. Our faith has given us resiliency and the ability to cope with adversity. For that reason, we believe that a spiritual life will help not only our grandchildren but also their parents triumph over difficult times and offer stability to their family.

Yet how do we impart that spirituality upon our grandchildren? Religion is often more easily passed from a grandparent to a grandchild than from a parent to a child. Because of our role, we can afford to be more unhurried and relaxed than their parents. We can certainly teach by example and help them build self-esteem and courage. We can focus on their interests, their creativity, and their unique personalities and leverage those aspects to help build the loving foundation of a family with God's helping hands. And, of course, we can supply all of our grandchildren with unconditional love.

Our lives as grandparents and grandchildren, therefore, can be linked in a number of ways: through roles, through interactions, through sentiments, through exchanges of support, and through transmitting family values. Although we will not be the ones choosing between private and public schooling or taking them to Mass each week to keep them

connected to their faith, we still hope and pray that we will remain active in our grandchildren's education and in protecting their well-being, both physically and spiritually. Studies have shown that religious grandparents are more involved grandparents, and this involvement is explained, in part, by their generally greater involvement in all types of family and social ties—religious grandparents are more likely to be enmeshed in social ties to others. We fully intend to draw upon our religious background to enable us to impart spiritual guidance and wisdom to our grandchildren to the best of our God-given ability. 

Dave and Leslie are parishioners at Our Lady of Peace in Darien, where they serve on Finance and Parish Council.

Family Life in an Intentional Community

Matt and Jess Ochalek

Matt and Jess visited the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington D.C. in 2004. From that time on the seed of starting a life together and Catholic Worker grew. Along with Sr. Anne McCarthy, OSB, Matt and Jess founded Mary the Apostle Catholic Worker in 2006 in Erie, Pennsylvania. Mary the Apostle Catholic Worker blends the philosophies of Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, Jean Vanier and Monasticism.

This article is just about a month overdue. Our one consolation is to say, "That's nothing. Our own newsletter hasn't been sent out in two years." That, perhaps, is raising family in community in a nutshell. There is little


time for anything that can be classified as nonessential. Even now, as one types the other is tending noisy, tired children.

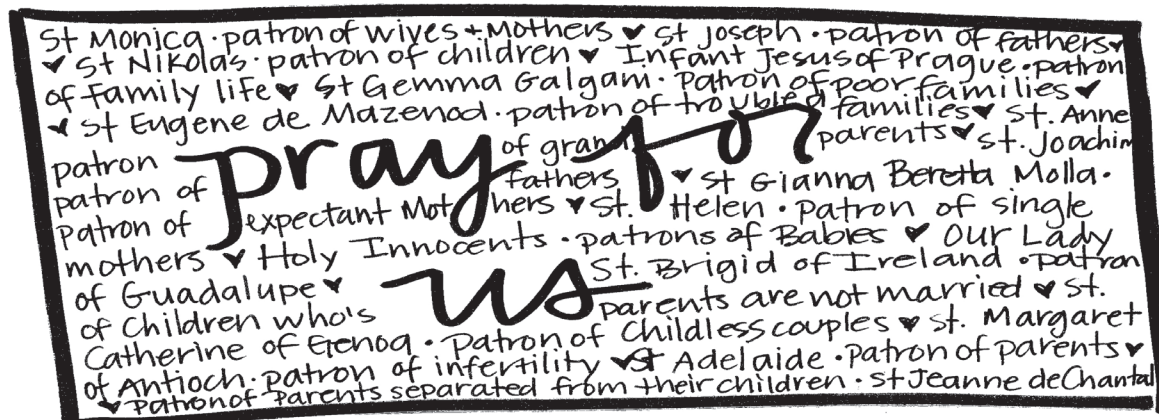
Nevertheless, we both know that, on some level, we would not have made it this far if we did not live in community. Though there is little time, as mentioned above, the only reason we are able to have time to be together as a couple is that there are beautiful people living with us offering to hang out with the kids while we enjoy the occasional cup of coffee or draught of beer. This is a key benefit of raising a family in community instead of on our own. The questions we hear most often when others discover that our nuclear family is not independent but part of a whole are about how we can live with

so many and maintain our relationship. We simply respond by asking how anyone does it without living in community. (Perhaps isolation of the family is a contributing factor to our culture's unfortunate divorce rate?)

Challenges arise from having a family in the community as well. First, the attention due to our marriage and children does distract from the works taken on by our community. For example, operation of our neighborhood garden has fallen on just one member of our community - taking up a great deal of her time to make it happen. Second, many couples struggle to have the same response to behavior of children. That issue is multiplied by five other adults in our house - making family issues into community issues from time to time. Finally, for the sake of this short list, our community's membership hovers around 3-4 people making decisions. Two of that small group are married. This is a difficult community dynamic

to negotiate when discerning big questions.

Despite these challenges, we choose community daily. We believe this is the only option for an authentic expression of our faith and spirituality. Embracing vulnerability and weakness by living in the inner city and casting our lot with the poor is our attempt to follow Jesus in the here and now. We read in the Acts of the Apostles that the first Christians sold their possessions, gave the money to the poor, and lived in community with one another. They prayed together, broke bread together, sang together, and they probably shed a few tears together (though the Scripture does not include this detail). We fall short of that archetype for Christian community, but we give it our best shot. We couldn't come any closer by living alone. Nor would we want to try. 



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Life Behinds the Scenes as a Single Mother

Yes, every little detail falls on my shoulders. There is no Grandma and Grandpa right around the corner, there is no nanny or housekeeper, there are occasional friends and babysitters that help me out when I'm in a pinch and of course, their dad sees them six hours a week.

Currently, I am studying to become a health coach and part of my homework is to practice health histories with other classmates. One of the questions asked to me was, *At what point in your life did you feel your best?* Without any hesitation and a chuckle, I answered, *Before kids.* Life without children was more carefree and relaxed. I could come and go when I pleased. When I was single I took professional ballroom dance lessons and played volleyball twice a week on a couple of leagues. My career moved to the south side of Chicago where I was making decent money as a Montessori teacher and could live comfortably. I even had dreams of moving downtown. On the weekends I could stay out as late as I wanted to and sleep in until mid-morning. I was only responsible for myself.

But then, one after another, these little beings entered my life and I could only think about them...these precious little gifts. Life as I knew it shifted, but it shifted in the right direction. God had a plan.

Before I had children and before I met their father, I moved to Chicago from Michigan to take a Montessori job. I left my family, my friends and everything familiar. I also left behind a group of people I had been involved with for four years as part of my spiritual journey. I became one of their victims of emotional and psychological abuse which put me into a deep depression that nearly took my life. I say I left them behind, when really, I was trying to get as far away from them as I possibly could. Needless to say, my emotional levels weren't stable when I moved, but I knew it was a new beginning for me and focused all of my energy in that. I tried very hard to continue in my Catholic journey by attending Mass regularly, going to adoration, attending prayer groups, and meeting other Catholics in social circles. Unfortunately, I was floundering. My heart was conflicted. I didn't know what to believe anymore. And it seemed like everyone I was meeting in the Catholic circles were like the very people I was trying to escape from...rigid, pious, and

judgmental and so caught up in the "rules", they were forgetting the spirit. So, slowly, one skipped Mass at a time, I was making the choice to divorce my Catholic faith. Then I met the father of my children.

Of course I can say, *If I regret meeting him, then I regret having three beautiful children.* I've always felt funny about this statement because it makes me feel like I have to accept something that I wish never happened in the first place. While I love my three children and am thankful for them and cannot imagine my life without them, I know their father and I were never meant to be together and part of me does wish I never got involved with him in the first place. I met him during a very confusing time in my life. I loved him, but I failed to pay attention to all the red flags. On a relationship level, aside from children, he was toxic to my life and wasted my time. Eventually I was holding on to him and losing myself when he could care less about losing me. I think many people stay in unhappy, toxic relationships out of fear...fear of being alone, fear of losing dependency, fear of breaking up a family when kids are involved and sometimes fear for their life. It was not easy to break free from the dependency I had on the father of my children, but I armed myself with lots of support, made the choice and kept on moving.

When my daughter was born, I didn't have her baptized. I never wanted her baptized because I wanted it to be her choice, not mine. Her father insisted, but merely on a cultural level. He doesn't practice his Catholic faith at all. So, she was baptized. I didn't know how to feel about this, but this was the beginning of my journey back to God. I knew her father wasn't going to take her to church and I made a promise that I would raise her Catholic when I answered *yes* to the priest's questions on the altar. I knew I had to do it. So, off to church I went...and not happy about it. In fact, my skin crawled every single time I stepped foot inside of one.

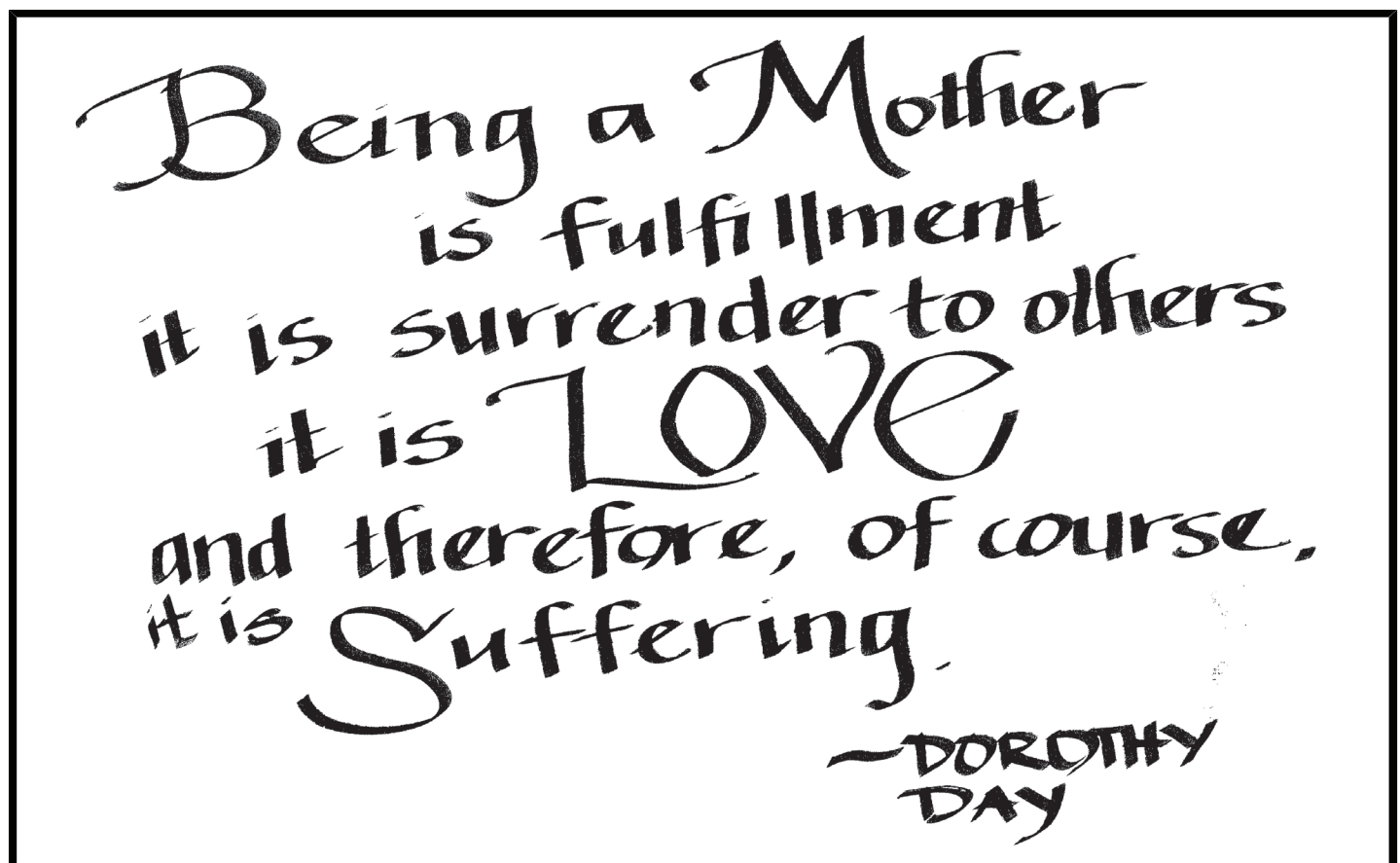
Until one evening, a new friend of mine, who is very in touch with her spiritual side, came over to my home for a chat. After we talked for a while she looked at me and said, *Heidi, God wants you back!* The surge of tears flooded my entire face and my response was, *Don't you SAY that!* She looked at me again with convicted, loving eyes as if God was talking through her and said, *He does. And he loves you so much. You've been gone for a while and he wants you back.* Then, I surrendered as I was crying uncontrollably and muttered, *I know.* From that moment on, one Mass at a time, I crawled my way back to the love God had for me. For weeks, I would attend a service at her church and just weep. Time and time again, I'd go up for prayer and continue to cry.

God wanted to heal me and I was open to His healing hand. I started changing

again. I wanted my old self back. After trying and not succeeding, I realized I would NEVER have my old self back. This was who I was today and my faith and life had taken a different shape. It would never be the same, but it would be mine and it would be true to me and where I was at. My life had evolved and I had grown into a different woman.

Since then, it has been a journey. It has ebbed and flowed and definitely still a process. I do enjoy talking to my daughter about God since I enrolled her in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program through our parish. From time to time, I go through confusion, but I know that no matter what – God loves me. I am grateful to God for so many things. I am not rich, but my life is rich with my children, amazing friends, a great job, a supportive family and plenty of opportunity to grow. 🏠

Heidi is a Montessori teacher, entrepreneur, and mother of 3. She is also a Personalized Health Coach at Heidi's Health Hub (www.heidishealthhub.com).



Journey Into Motherhood: In Community and on the Land

Mary Kay McDermott

*There was a child went forth everyday,
And the first object he look'd upon,
that object he became,
And that object became part of him for
the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles
of years.
The early lilacs became part of this
child,
And grass and white and red morning
glories, and white and red clover,
and the song of the phoebe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs and the
sow's pink-faint litter,
And the mare's foal and the cow's
calf...*

- Walt Whitman

I was never sure if one of my life's callings was to be a mom. Through the years I watched as my girlfriends and family members entered motherhood, and the seeming isolation – both from nature and humans – and stress that came with that role. Living in the U.S., a culture that treasures individualism and single-family houses, I found lacking the extended support group


surrounding parents that I had witnessed while living in East Africa and Haiti. Being an extrovert I could not envision how spending my days mostly in the presence of my children would feed my spirit and my strong need for community, support, and adult engagement. A life of freedom, adventure, and justice seeking enticed me in a way that motherhood did not.

In 2009, my husband Peter and I returned from our international travels to join the community at New Hope Catholic Worker Farm. We had discerned that this was the place where we could best live out our vision of Christian radical simplicity, solidarity with the poor, and community living while being in the close vicinity of both our extended families.

What we had not expected to find at New Hope was a strong desire to become parents. In our first two years on the land we watched as the four children being raised here interacted with nature and people in a way that was healthy and awe-inspiring. And the parents of those children being supported and nurtured by community and spouses who were working on the

farm more and in paying jobs off the farm less. I imagine the more wedding anniversaries my husband and I celebrated the more our families gave up the hope of our marriage producing offspring. However, after five years of married life we came to the conclusion that the world needed more children raised in this nurturing way and that in this environment we could become the healthy parents we so desired to be.

Micah Joseph was born on June 12, 2011. Every day we grow more in wonder and awe of him and the life that he lives at New Hope Farm. From observing him interact with the animals and plants, to seeing him play

with and be cared for by the farm children of all ages, and witnessing other community members become like parents to him – all inform his being and overwhelm me with a gratitude that 'overfills my cup' and make me glad to be a mom. 

Mary Kay resides at New Hope Catholic Worker Farm in LaMotte, Iowa. Mary Kay is making a concerted effort to sing and dance more and is excited about their community hosting the National Catholic Worker Farmer Gathering this coming President's Day weekend.



Round Table Review Eco-Justice: Exploring Church Teachings on Stewardship of Creation

Justin Wozniak

On March 3, 2012, Nativity House held a roundtable discussion at Our Lady of Peace Parish in Darien, IL, on *eco-justice*: the concept of *justice* as applied to *nature* and *ecology*. Venus Wozniak introduced the discussion with the following quote:

The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood. The deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: when "human ecology" is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.

- Benedict XVI
Caritas in Veritate

She then introduced the panelists: Dr. Thomas Roose, Associate Professor of Physics and Science Education, Trinity Christian College; Sister Janet Weyker of the Eco-Justice Center in Racine, WI; and Leslie Bertram, naturalist at the Fullersburg Woods Nature Center, IL.

Science and Faith for Earth-Keeping

Dr. Roose began by stating his two reasons for concern about eco-justice from a faith standpoint: 1) to be a good steward of the earth and 2) plundering the earth it adversely affects the poor.

He offered an illustration of the intersection of science and faith by telling the story of a young scholar who struggled with these issues in his early life- St. Augustine, who was able

to reconcile what he knew about scientific matters and faith. He quoted BOOK ~9:45 saying that a both Christian faith that denies scientific explanations *and* a scientific atheism that denies a creator are flawed positions- to the contrary, the biblical vision calls us to be earth-keepers, using scientific observation to be good stewards of the earth. Thus, earth-keeping offers an opportunity for science and faith to mutually benefit each other and the environment.

He then went on to cite multiple scriptural passages and commented on their relevance for eco-justice: In Genesis 1:20-21, God creates "all creatures, great and small" and declares them all good - not just the humans. This indicates an inherent worth in all life. In Genesis 9:13, after the flood, God says the rainbow is "a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth", indicating the whole earth has moral value. In Deuteronomy 22:6-7, he extracted a somewhat obscure prohibition against hunting and taking a brooding bird on the nest, though the eggs may be taken: in the context of eco-justice, this may be taken as an image of sustainable wildlife

management. Our lifestyle in North America, he said, is like taking the mother along with the eggs. He continued to cite relevant passages from the Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, the letter to the Colossians, the Apostles' Creed, the Doxology, and Revelations.

Dr. Roose then related several communications from his colleagues in areas such as HIV/AIDS treatment, botany, and water remediation regarding how their scientific work supports and strengthens their Christian life. Thus, faith motivates scientific work, allowing us to glorify God and serve humanity. Similarly, science educates the Christian, allowing their service to be more effective.

As a final note, Dr. Roose has been to Costa Rica five times on ecological trips and stressed that climate change is having a real effect on species there. In response to a question regarding how to interact with those that disregard climate change, Dr. Roose said that simply collecting more data may not be persuasive: people may have to see the effects for themselves.

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Fatherhood From a Priest's Perspective

Consider: In another article in the Chicago Tribune, a writer noted that Cardinal George submitted his resignation as Archbishop of Chicago, a submission that is actually routine with a carried sense that the Holy See will not accept it. Nonetheless, the writer continues to write as if it could be accepted, and shares his own desire as to how the next Archbishop ought to be. The bottom line is that it ought to be far more natural to call the Archbishop, *Father* than Cardinal or Archbishop. This is precisely what this writer wants Cardinal George's successor to be like!

Years ago I had a private Mass with Pope John Paul II (me and thirty other people), and I was invited to offer him the sign of Peace. I went up to him, gave him a fraternal embrace, and said, *Peace of Christ be with you, Father*. Really! It was so natural for me to call him that title as that was, in fact, how he lived out his own role as priest and Pontiff, or better yet, Holy Father. That's how I saw him and how I related to him.

This is how priests are encouraged to be when they are ordained. They are encouraged to be fatherly. In seminary I was taught by a Canon Lawyer Professor that the Church stands on two pillars, Prophetic and Pastoral. The Church has clear teachings embedded in proclamations, doctrines and dogmas. This is its prophetic side. But it must present these teachings to the faithful in a most loving way, and in so doing, it reveals its' pastoral side. The priest must be prophetic in, for example, stating from the pulpit that abortion is wrong. And if a woman has had an abortion and comes to him for

counseling, he must thereupon be the healer, and work with her in a loving, patient, and understanding manner, thereby exhibiting his pastoral side.

Like any father, what it means or can mean to be a father, must be learned, and that implies being loving toward oneself. After all, Scriptures tells us what must be integrated to be a true father to others, and that implies first and foremost, loving God and loving one's neighbor as oneself. I can be a father for others successfully to the extent that I see and recognize that God is Father for me. Isn't there an old saying that *hurt people hurt people*? Sure there is! Well, if I am to learn to be father for others, I have to find a way to heal my own hurts. If I cannot do that, then I will relate to people as someone hurt, and the likelihood is there that I will inflict hurts on others.

There are deeper layers to fatherhood that I move in and out of. I can act as father by simply offering absolution to people in confession. But I can move deeper into fatherhood with that person who comes to the confessional in tears; with questions built up perhaps from not having been to confession in years, in opposition to the person who comes in routinely each week. The person in pain immediately focuses me, as the need for healing is so evident. Then, having been so focused, I reach out to heal, and learn what fatherhood means on a more profound level.

In a similar way, I can be a Father to people when I offer a homily. But even here I must not lose sight of my attitude toward the Congregation. Am I in genuine dialogue with this Congregation,

insuring that I am addressing the needs that can nurture this Congregation here and now? Or have I simply adopted a dominating stance, playing the part of telling people how to live, forgetting in this act that I am continuing to learn myself. After all, are we not all students?

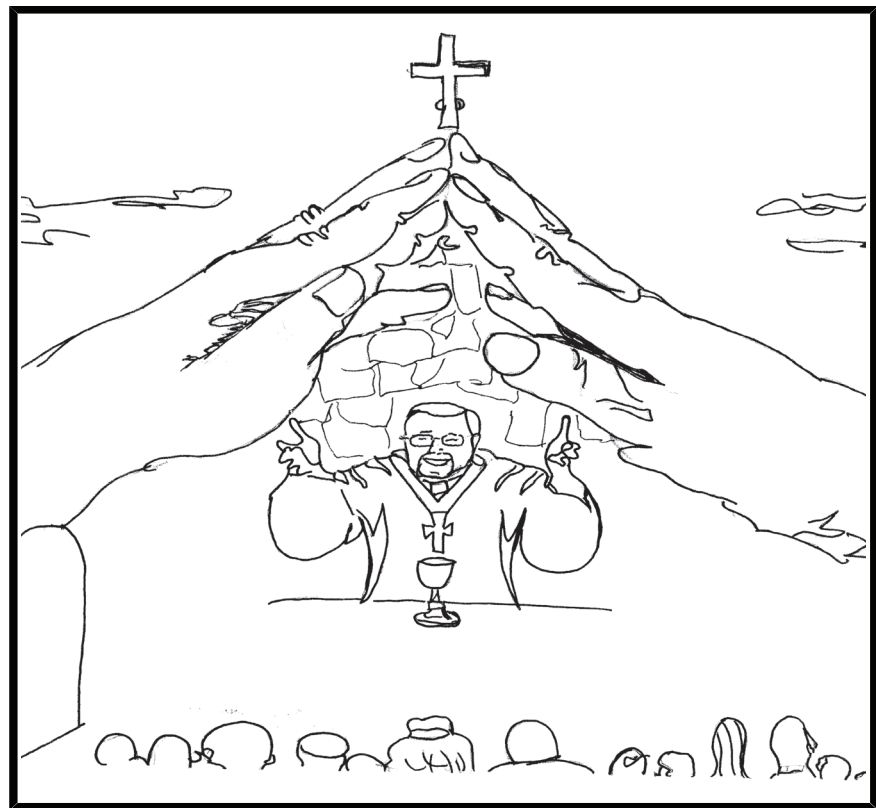
Perhaps my most fond way of being a Father for others, realizing that such an understanding will vary from priest to priest, is when someone comes up to me after Mass, and instead of simply rushing past me with a quick handshake and the mumbled *Goodbye and have a nice day*, comes up to me and asks me to pray with them. I typically ask what their need is, and after learning of this person's unique problems and pains, pray with them. Here, my role is multiple. I am Father precisely in being their Brother and Friend in this precise moment, praying that the Lord would heal these particular hurts and pains. The most wonderful

complement that I have ever heard is when someone says that their earthly father was also their friend. When I can be that for other people, acting out of these various layers, all personal and caring, then I am also Father for them.

In ancient times, priests would offer the Eucharist to people, not by saying *The Body of Christ*, as we do now, but by saying *Receive what you are, be what you see*. Such is true for how a priest is Father. This is his title and he accepts it by his willingness to be ordained. After that moment, the moment of ordination, he spends the rest of his time learning what that means, perfecting it – becoming it. Such is my own hope and prayer.



Fr. Walter is Pastor at Our Lady of Peace Parish in Darien, IL.



Round Table Review: Eco-Justice

Answering the Call for Education and Justice

Sr. Janet shared her early history as a teacher, joining the Dominican community as teacher and principal. After Vatican II, the call for service to those in greatest need led Dominicans to social justice.

At a retreat celebrating the millenium in the year 2000, the community asked

itself where the community is and is not in ministry. Through prayer, the community determined that it needed to work for education and justice in environmental context. The initial concepts to be pursued were *community, contemplation, creativity, and cultivation*.

The Eco-Justice Center site was selected because it had everything it

needed to support the goals of the project- land, a barn, etc., but insufficient living space for the community. The need building addition turned into a great opportunity to bring in volunteers and pursue green construction, while maintaining the original character of the house- the ownership can be traced back to 1847. Solar electricity, solar hot water, and a geothermal heating and cooling system, a foundation on duracell building blocks, ecoshape shingles. A new education building,

also a green building, was built on the foundation of an original farm cottage. The site is also supported by a wind turbine and a sizeable solar array. A great deal of money was saved through the use of these technologies.

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Fatherhood and the Domestic Church

Anthony Boyer

Fatherhood has changed my spirituality in profound ways. Spirituality begins, I am convinced, with deep and abiding love. And, my spirituality has changed as my understanding of love has changed.

When my son was first born and I was taken into a small room with him lying in a heated incubator, my first (irrational) thought was, “Oh Wow, this is just like getting a new puppy only better! Can I really keep him?!”

I was experiencing the first impact of a love that was so deep and so consuming that I couldn’t see but the tip of it. It felt as if I was receiving it from somewhere outside. One minute I was sitting by my wife, holding her hand as she was delivering our baby, the next I was taken completely by surprise by the enormity of the emotion I felt when I first saw my new son. As my spirituality grew, I began to see this love as a gift, just as Faith and Hope are gifts from God. It was also an incredible insight into God’s love for me. As I was able to experience a love that would never withhold forgiveness and demand nothing in return, I began to understand how God can forgive me no matter what, delight in my joys and comfort me in my sorrows.

Without really thinking about it, I came to understand that love is sacrificial. Picking up more of the cooking and housekeeping chores while my wife fed and cared for the baby, getting up for late night feedings and changings, all were fueled by that abiding love. Instead of looking at

these tasks as infringements or impositions, I began to view them (not consciously) as opportunities to help out, or to participate in the new life in our family.

Two years after my son was born, we were blessed with my daughter. When she was born, I discovered that love is not a zero-sum equation. So many things we have are limited: we have only so much money, energy, attention... And, when we spend any of these resources on one object, there is that much less to give to another. Amazingly, however, I found that I felt that I had more love to give with my second child. I didn’t have less affection for my son or my wife when my daughter came along, instead my capacity for love expanded.

In the years between our wedding and the birth of our children, I was not spiritually active. My wife taught in the Catholic schools and kept in touch with the faith. I, however, moved from one job in corporate America to another and was focused on providing materially. However, after our son was born, my wife gently began guiding us back to weekly Mass attendance (always a harrowing experience with an infant). She also became involved with the Catechism of the Good Shepherd, a catechetical program for young children (beginning with age 3) centered (especially early on) on the parables of Jesus. As she became more involved with the Scriptures, I did also.


I began to understand that faith, like love, is a gift. And that as my understanding of the faith grew, so my

own faith grew. And as my faith grew, the gifts of the Holy Spirit grew within me, fueling my desire to study the Scriptures, pray and participate in the life of our parish. I began working with the marriage ministry, administering the FOCUS test and counseling engaged couples on the Catholic understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage. I began studying the writings of John Paul II, especially the Theology of the Body.

It amazed me at the time (and still does) how John Paul II developed a system of morality from essentially a handful of the most ancient and foundational Scripture verses. As my wife worked more and more with the Good Shepherd program, she was spending more time reading Gospel commentaries and theological resources to understand more fully the Scriptures she was taking with the children at school. So we were moving in parallel paths, reading Scriptures, commentaries and theologies centered on marriage and family. As we read more, we discussed our learnings, questions and experiences. Slowly, our home became a place where the Word of God was an ever-present companion; at the dinner table, in the evenings, even in the car as we ran errands.

As the children grew older, I started becoming more involved in the teachings of contemporary Catholic preachers and theologians. I tried to catch the teachings of Fr. John Corapi, Fr. Robert Barron and Cardinal Ratzinger whenever possible. One of the common threads through all these post-Vatican II thinkers is that the deposit of the Faith is still as relevant today as it has been throughout the ages. My children today face unique

challenges, but the precepts of the Church are as true and relevant today as they ever were. But to make them relevant, they need to become part of the daily conversation, lived out in front of and with the kids, discussed after homework and at the basketball games.

This, I’ve come to realize, is the importance of the domestic Church. Just as the Body of Christ is made up of many members (all of us), our domestic Churches play a critical role in the continuance of the universal Church. When my wife and I took our marriage vows, we did it in a church, in front of witnesses. I’ve come to see that as a religious vow. Different, perhaps, from the vows that priests, deacons and the religious orders take, but similar, too, in many ways. Just as the religious are responsible to minister to the flocks in their trust, so are we responsible for the souls in our household. Religious formation, teaching by example and catechism are all my responsibility. In sum, I’m responsible to do whatever I can to help get my wife and children to Heaven. To that end, studying, participating in the sacraments, working within my local parish and participating in my children’s catechetical formation are all part of my role as a leader of my domestic church. 

Anthony is a parishioner at St. Dennis in Lockport, IL

Round Table Review: Eco-Justice

Four sisters live on site. The site has a large organic garden, alpacas, goats, geese, guinea pigs, chickens, rabbits, turkeys, bees, cats, dogs, and a significant amount of forest wildlife.

The site has a wide range of educational programs, from summer camps for children to visits by colleges, as well as events open to the general public.

<http://www.racinedominicans.org/eco-j.cfm>

Dimensions of the Interconnected Cosmos


Mrs. Bertram introduced herself as a nature educator. Her goal is to appreciate and value the natural world. She said that upon being asked to join this panel, she did not know exactly where to begin, especially since the Forest Preserve is a government agency. After a period of prayer, she felt she could tell us about how her work influences her faith.

As a child, she would often visit an undeveloped property and look for wildlife, enjoying the outdoors, and was a girl scout. Mrs. Bertram was an at-home mom, and volunteered at the parish and school, was a cub scout

leader, but had difficulty passing the love for nature on to her children and husband. Thus, she started volunteering at Fullersburg Woods; while she has no formal education in environmental sciences, she was very good at her job and stayed on as a paid employee. Since then, she has pursued certification at Morton Arboretum.

Having time in the woods is very important to Mrs. Bertram. Like putting together a three-dimensional puzzle, she realized an otherworldly influence in the mysteries of the natural world. As she grew to deeply appreciate the balance of the diverse animals and plants in nature, she also realized the imbalances caused by negative human impacts, such as destroying populations of “pest” species, etc. She the listed multiple

reasons why the environment should be protected, including the natural right of creatures to exist, the need to pass on a healthy and joyful world to future generations, and out of respect for the unknown connections among species.

In summary, she noted that ultimately she is called to action and to be responsible for what she does in the world. She brings connection to the natural world in her third grade religious education classroom. She tries to pass on the message that all of the natural world is a gift from God. 

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>

To ensure you continue to receive *The Visitation*, please subscribe by emailing the address above.

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:

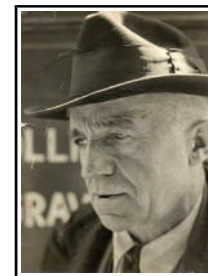
**Nativity House
5621 Plymouth St.
Downers Grove, IL
60516**

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

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

Easy Essay: Unity in God

Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



I. Unity in God

1. The church and the family are two fellowships in love and faith of the redeemed Christ.

2. In the sacramental communion of marriage the man and his wife bear to Christ a relation similar to the one existing between Christ and his Church.

3. Just as Christ and the Church constitute the Mystical Christ the married couple ought to constitute Christ in the perfection of their unity.

4. The unity in God of the man and wife of parents and children is the most profound meaning of marriage and the family.

-PETER MAURIN

Roundtables!

Last year, Nativity House held three roundtables with a total of ten panelists. This year, we hope to continue with new topics and panelists.

Roundtables are held at Our Lady of Peace parish in Darien, IL, in January, February, and March.

Please contact us with your ideas!

venusad@nativity-house.org

Round Table discussions go on everywhere, when two or three gather together...

- Dorothy Day

Profile of a Saint Mother Teresa

Liz Kurtz

September 5
Mother to the Poor
(1910-1997)

So, here's a scene:

My 2-month old son is screaming at the dentist's office. No, not because he has a cavity, but because he's tired and getting hungry, and the only remedy is just beginning to get her teeth cleaned. My hygienist assures me that she can work around his needs, handle the cries, but what about the others? The receptionist is

trying to make calls, there's the dentist, other techs, let alone the other patients waiting. Do they have kids? Are they cursing under their breath?

I feel ashamed, self-conscious, a never-before sense of helplessness. The last time I was in this office, I had been a working professional - graciously and easily following the codes of conduct typical of public places. But now my paradigm had vastly changed; I needed to ask for help, I was at the mercy of others.

Once I acknowledged and expressed my need, the rest of the office staff gladly swooped in to hold the baby, effectively distracting him with their affection. Next thing you know, I learned a lot more about their families.

But the moral of this story is not just to ask for help. Because motherhood continually asks more of me than I knew I had to give, puts me in unfamiliar and uncomfortable positions, and thus creates an ongoing identity crisis. It can be alienating or at least tiresome, that this new identity of "mother" is so persistent and yet ever-changing. That it constantly requires the mercy of others and the giving of oneself.

Luckily, this 'motherhood' thing isn't a lonely status. Like the women at my dentist's office sharing stories of their children, there is camaraderie between mothers. The moral of this story is to gain strength from those who have gone before us, and learn from them.

Blessed Mother Teresa's feast day is September 5, and though not a biological mother, she can relate. Motherhood means relying on others' mercy. Mother Teresa left the comforts of the Sisters of Loreto to walk the streets of Calcutta, begging for food and shelter as she followed the call to help the poor. Motherhood is about self-giving to unforeseeable levels. Mother Teresa continued to serve the poorest of the poor, trusting in its divine purpose, despite withstanding nearly 50 years of spiritual emptiness.

Motherhood brings with it a



closeness and camaraderie. The Missionaries of Charity order that Mother Teresa began now numbers around 5,000 sisters serving in 120 countries.

September 5 is Mother Teresa's feast day. Let us mothers aim our prayers at her, that we may draw from her example, relish in her successes, and gain endurance from her camaraderie. 🏠

Liz is a stay-at-home mom in her hometown of South Bend, Indiana. Before having her son, she worked in social services (at the Catholic Worker and The Salvation Army).

*That special power of loving
that belongs to a woman
is seen most clearly
when she becomes a mother.
Motherhood is the gift of
God to women.
How grateful we must be
to God for this wonderful
gift that brings such joy
to the whole world,
women and men alike!*
- MOTHER TERESA



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THE VISITATION

Issue: *Family and Community*

- *Fatherhood and Motherhood*
- *Roundtable Coverage*
- *Struggles and Sacrifice*