



# THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE PROJECT

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## Thoughts on the Holy Family

by Julie Carrick

As I think of the Holy Family, and then I consider my family, I could pale at the thought. Their holiness, compared to the brokenness in mine, makes me wonder *is there hope?*

Then the reality of this blessed trio begins to sink in and I feel the most life giving feeling in the world, hope. Mother Mary in her famous fiat, said 'yes' to the call on her life. I feel strengthened to daily say 'yes' even in the uncertainty of this life of mine. As a wife I have experienced major joy compared to serious sorrows. I learned to appreciate this all the more because of the example of Mama Mary. Her joy as she was chosen by God to be the mother of the Christ was certainly tempered as she was looked down upon, single, pregnant, even saintly Joseph questioning what to do with this woman. Then God intervened just in the perfect moment as he spoke to Joseph and calmed his questioning mind and allowed the acceptance of the shared life of raising the Christ-child.

When my own daughter was attacked and became pregnant from that attack, I asked God, *what are we to do? How do we journey with her? What do you wish for this child? Is he ours, or is he meant for another family to raise?* Thank you God, that he is ours. Eight years later, we are more in love with this child every day. Easy? Yes. Worth every moment of life and love? Absolutely! Is this a holy family? Most definitely.

When I consider the fact that my marriage was under attack at one point. The pain that was experienced

again made me ask, *Is this a holy family?* The answer: yes this is a holy family. Coming out the other side of pain and loss filled with grace by many prayers answered proves again that it is only by the presence of holiness that we are a family at all.

So as we look to the family of our Lord and Savior, especially at this time of year, and then, we look into our families, don't allow the world to make you feel a lack of holiness. We must of course acknowledge our faults and failings, but don't remain in the darkness of sin. Instead look to the power of the grace that surrounds you. In Romans chapter five verse twenty we read, "Where sin is found, there grace abounds all the more." We can rejoice as we cast off the darkness of the sin of our life and bring our family, in it's entirety, to the grace of Jesus' mercy and forgiveness.

Mother Mary did not shrink from the pain that she was called to go through. Most assuredly she recalled the words of Simeon, "a sword of sorrow shall pierce your heart". She, filled with grace, gave us the perfect example to embrace our crosses and the full life we are each called to live out. We have never been promised an easy road, in fact as we look to the life of our Savior, why should we think it would be easy at all? But is it worth it in the end? Most certainly. Mama Mary is the best example again of embracing all we are called to live on our way to our eternal life.

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## Advocates for Change

by Stephanie Daley, Theresa Marten, and Adam Smetana

As the United States continues to stimulate the economy and begin to chip away at the unfathomable debt, workers' rights are increasingly important. Jobs essential for the economy to grow, but equally essential is having work environments that are fair in all aspects. Notoriously, Wal-Mart one of the biggest corporations worldwide, has been known to be guilty of wage theft. A third party company, who is then hired by Wal-Mart, hires warehouse workers. Workers have complained that the companies hired by Wal-Mart are not paying minimum wage or overtime. In some accounts, including carts used to move goods is not repaired

when broken, sometimes access to cold water is not provided, and workers are forced to lift heavy items onto their heads because the boxes are packed too tightly in cargo containers. According to [warehouseworkersunited.org](http://warehouseworkersunited.org), if workers asked for a day off, "they would be punished with a week off of work" or if workers spoke up about missing hours, "they would be fired."

Wal-Mart's example of how they treat their workers in and outside the store reflects their mentality of workers' rights and responsibilities. One aspect of Catholic Social

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**Family**

Watching her precious son walk the road of Calvary was a massive sorrow, but the final outcome, the Resurrection, was pure gift to her and us. She did not lose hope or holiness. She, filled with grace, continued to live in holiness. We can bring all of our sorrows, our brokenness, our difficult journeys to the grace of her intercession.

I pray that this Advent season will be a time to remind us all that as our

families may not be perfect, and so many times the Holidays bring this point out in some negative ways, we can look to the hope of the season as we ask the grace of prayer to transform us into a Holy Family. 

*Julie is a prolific, award-winning recording artist, performer, and speaker. She may be found at <http://www.carrickministries.com>*

**Change**

Teaching calls our attention to the correct treatment of workers. Each worker should be working in a safe environment and under correct conditions. Work environments should not be dangerous. The workers should also have the right to speak up if they do not agree with things happening at work. The correct amount of pay should be given to the workers as well. It is not fair that the workers are working for less than minimum wage; and on top of that, the warehouse did not have record of the workers being employed. It is the responsibility of management and administration to keep the conditions just.

We are called as a community to ensure that each person has the right to work and are being treated fairly. It is also the responsibility of each person to speak up and be advocates for change if unjust situations are present. With the improvements of rights and responsibility of works, the overall sense of human dignity and community would also be raised. There are many things that can be done to prevent the further corruption

of wage from hard working employees, specifically in the Walmart sector. For example, while many have tried striking and voicing their opinion, it hasn't always worked. Videos like the one created by the Walmart warehouse workers helps to bring awareness to the issue. When posted on YouTube and sent to various new agencies, news papers, and TV stations, it can gain further exposure and shed light on the issue to many. The goal would be to reach to outside help to reevaluate the wages and overall safe working conditions of the company. It is extremely difficult for those who work at an establishment where people aren't treated fairly and have no way to fight back or be heard. There is any clear solution; but, other people may be going through the same thing. And so, we must band together and work as a collaborative unit; change can be gained and argued for. 

*Stephanie, Theresa, and Adam are students at Lewis University.*

**Solidarity at the Shelter**

by Ryan Wynn

Catalyst is a Social Justice Retreat that takes 30 Lewis University students to downtown Chicago in January to experience and become more aware of social justice in our community. The retreat uses Catholic Social Teaching and a "Mission of Presence" approach to expose retreatants to the ministry side of service. During the retreat, we offer reflections, social justice themed activities, and a site experience at a shelter or food bank. Catalyst itself is an attempt to get a younger crowd more involved with service and social justice.

The Catalyst retreats were my first time visiting a homeless shelter. We were going "just to talk" to the men. I wished we were serving dinner so that I would have something in between me and the men. I needed a task to do so that I wouldn't say something awkward. Once we were there I looked at the men and tried to decide who was "normal" enough for me to approach. I ended up talking with a middle-aged man. He told me about how he had lost thousands of dollars in the stock market. He talked

about the cars he used to own, and how his friends stopped contacting him after he lost the money. After listening to this man's story, I realized that everyone has the potential to become homeless. The men at the shelter were human beings, just like the rest of us. We are all made in the image of God.

The shelter experience was a ministry of presence. We simply listened to the men tell their stories. At first I felt like it was a waste of time since we weren't going to be performing any service. By the end of that night, I realized that the men at the shelter, and many people who are homeless, do not have a person to listen to them. They do not have anyone who affirms their self-worth. Catalyst was an opportunity for us to be in solidarity with the men.

Catalyst opened my eyes to issues in Chicago that I would have otherwise had no idea were going on. Before Catalyst, I would walk past the homeless people on the streets of

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**What the Catholic Worker Believes**

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)

The Catholic Worker believes in the gentle personalism of traditional Catholicism. The Catholic Worker believes in the personal obligation of looking after the needs of our brother. The Catholic Worker believes in the daily practice of the Works of Mercy. The Catholic Worker believes in Houses of Hospitality for the immediate relief of those who are in need.

The Catholic Worker believes in the establishment of Farming Communes where each one works according to his ability and gets according to his need. The Catholic Worker believes in creating a new society within the shell of the old with the philosophy of the new, which is not a new philosophy but a very old philosophy, a philosophy so old that it looks like new. 

## About The Visitation

This newspaper, The Visitation, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House Project. Submissions 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.

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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 on-site with community supported farm (CSA) that will provide nourishment for the mothering community and the greater community. 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:

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We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

## Transitions and Journeys

by Justin Wozniak

We moved! Nativity House is set to begin hospitality this fall and we are getting the final, physical aspects of this project together.

Life is truly a journey and series of transitions. In retrospect, our life is a chain of memories connected by many changes- for worse or for better. Each comes with its pros, cons, and difficult, weighty decisions. But from a deeper perspective, we can see the overall path of our lives as an evolving spiritual quest with its ups and downs, quirks, and humorous pitfalls.

While packing, I thought lightly of the process as an expression of the death/resurrection cycle- I bury my belongings, then, on the third day, open them again to their new reality!

Now located in Lockport, IL, we are in position to carry out the work of Nativity House. We will have space for up to two guest mothers, sleeping space for temporary volunteers, garden space for community-supported agriculture (CSA), etc.

The house itself was abandoned for at least two years, then flooded in the April storms. Quite a bit of work has been necessary. A whole bunch of people have already helped out and

supported us in many ways!

Our overall plan is to start small with the CSA and open house in the spring to allow people to become acquainted with the project. Then, in the fall, we will be able to bring in our first guest mother for up to a year, along with scheduling short term overnight volunteers as available.

The fact that the project is at this point is another example of the death/resurrection cycle as we have seen so many other potential plans “die” off to make room for this one. We have seen God's grace in many ways over the last months and years as this project has come close to fruition, in His time.

Speaking of time, here is our schedule for the coming year:

**March 2014:** Community garden (CSA) sign-up and kickoff event.

**May 2014:** House dedication to the Mother of God.

**September 2014:** Welcoming of our first guest.

Please check our web site or contact us to join a mailing list!



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### Solidarity

downtown without even thinking. I now realize that these people are human beings just like us and deserve the dignity and respect that the rest of us receive.

Catalyst taught me the difference between service and justice. Service is like putting a Band-Aid on the situation. By doing service, we temporally help those in need like giving them a meal or a place to stay

for the night. Justice is like putting stitches on the situation. Justice is changing the system and helping people get to a better situation. This can be accomplished by encouraging elected officials to change the laws to help those in need. This can also be accomplished by helping people find jobs, education and solidarity.



Ryan is a student at Lewis University.

## St. Nikolas

by Venus Wozniak

*Patron of Children and the Poor  
Feast: December 6*

The day we found out that we were pregnant was December 6, 2006. It was after more than a year of hoping for an addition to our family. I was convinced that the date of this discovery being the feast of St. Nikolas was not a coincidence. He is after all the patron of children. Why wouldn't he bring the good news of pregnancy to a hopeful couple?

I was familiar with the tradition of leaving shoes out to be filled with goodies of St. Nicholas. I had been doing it for years as a teacher. Oddly enough, it was a tradition that was welcomed in Catholic and Secular schools alike. He is indeed a saint that defies the boundaries set up by our secular society - much like St. Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa.

Really, what a funny tradition, to leave our shoes out so that they may be filled with chocolate coins, oranges and candy canes. Being a teacher, it became very important to teach the meaning behind the symbols. Coins and oranges remind of us the work that Nikolas did as a young Bishop. Three young girls, hoped for marriage but their single father had no means to provide dowry. It was likely that these girls

would be sold into slavery. Nikolas, late in the night, threw a bag of gold coins into the window of their home, hence providing a dowry. This was an act of protecting the dignity of young girls.

The candy cane is reminiscent of the bishops crozier because he was the Bishop of Myra (which is in present-day Turkey.) I always stopped there. But if we look a little further into his life as a Bishop we discover a man that was deeply rooted to Jesus as the model of a shepherd of his people.

On more than one occasion, it is documented that Nikolas, upon learning that prisoners had been wrongly accused he would plead their case and get them freed. On one occasion he rushed to the sight of the execution of three innocent men. He boldly grabbed the executioner's sword and threw it down.

During a famine, he learned of large grain ships sailing for Alexandria. Nikolas persuaded the sailors of the grain ships to give a measure from each ship, promising that upon arrival in Alexandria that the measure would be replenished. Not only were the citizens of Myra fed by Nikolas' imploring but the grain ships upon delivery to Alexandria all grain was found to be intact.

Nikolas, Bishop of Myra, was a man of the people. In order to care for his people in these ways - protecting the dignity of young women, vying for the innocent, feeding the hungry - he had to know them well enough to know their needs. He lived with his flock, as the Good Shepherd does. He knew them by name, he knew their cares and worries. Nikolas relied on the Holy Spirit to work in him so as to be the person he was meant to be.

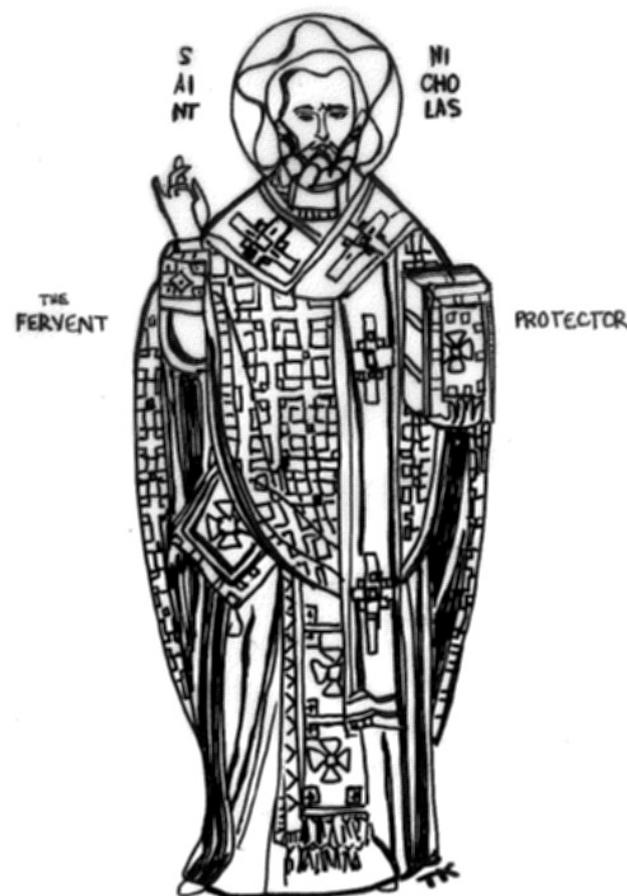
For more information on St. Nikolas, folklore, and traditions visit <http://www.stnicholascenter.org>

*O God, help us follow the example of Nikolas, who loved the poor, weak, and the young, giving what he had to those who had little.*

*May we too walk in the way that leads to life: loving you with all our heart, and our neighbors as ourselves, through Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
Amen.*



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