



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

DECEMBER 2020

VOLUME 11 ISSUE 1

Crisis and Promise

by Venus Wozniak

It is early November. My daughter and I were driving through the neighborhood and more houses than not had their Christmas decorations out. I commented, “Wow. People are really decorating for Christmas early this year!” My daughter’s response: “We just really need the joy that Christmas brings. 2020 has been hard.”

Yes. 2020 has been hard. Very hard. In my 42 years, I have not experienced such world-wide struggle. It is easy to forget that 2020 has been a massive blow to every single person in the whole wide world when the struggle is so strongly personal.

Before the coronavirus took over the world, our nation was grappling with historical divisions. When the lockdowns and mask mandates of the Pandemic were added mistrust, violence, and infighting ravaged our nation even more fiercely.

In the early days of this crisis Pope Francis weighed in during his historic *Urbi et Orbi* where he addressed the entire world:

The storm [of the pandemic] exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows us how we have allowed to become dull and feeble the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities. The tempest lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people’s souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking

and acting that supposedly “save” us, but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity. (Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi*, March 27, 2020)

Our vulnerabilities have been exposed and we have become dangerous as a wounded mother bear. We are living in a time of forgetfulness coupled with ferocity. Pope Francis is challenging us: what actually holds meaning? We have truly forgotten who we are. Every single one of us, regardless of political leaning, race, sex, or nationality, are children of God. We are created in God’s image and therefore we are considered priceless before His eyes. We are called to fall in line with His loving gaze. We have truly forgotten that the state of this world, the brokenness that abounds, is, in fact, our responsibility. We have forgotten that the answers to these riddles lie in the nourishment of the mystical body of Christ.

I am reminded in rereading Pope Francis’ reflection that in the early days of the Pandemic we were in the penitential season of Lent. As in every Lent, we were being called outside of ourselves while deep inside of a new struggle. All of our woe and need for repentance was magnified by the world wide struggle.

Here we are again, in the penitential season of Advent. I am always simultaneously comforted and admonished by Dorothy Day’s



Human Dignity

by Brian Hickey

Why does the Catholic Church’s teaching on the dignity of the human person matter? Such teaching has profound implications for how we must treat each other. Social institutions should exist solely to uphold the dignity of human beings and create conditions for their flourishing. Practically, this means first protecting humans from all threats to life itself. Here, we know the Church’s opposition to abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty. It also means working for justice and peace, especially for those on the margins of society.

Pope Francis’ latest and brand new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, is the latest explication of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a term that describes a Christian stance in light of social problems in the industrial age. *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical

released in 1891, marks a new modern path via the principles of CST found in scripture and tradition; its ongoing understanding is supported in other conciliar, episcopal, and papal documents. These documents were written in response to the cultural and social events of their times, including a declaration on religious freedom in 1965, St. John Paul II’s *Evangelium Vitae* on abortion and other threats to human life in 1995, and Pope Benedict’s encyclicals on charity and social justice in the 2000’s. Each of the CST principles centers on the dignity of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God.

CST on human dignity carries significant weight for how the Church operates in society. The Catholic Church seeks to uphold human dignity worldwide. For instance, I lived next

continued on page 3

continued on page 7

Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends of Nativity House,

Advent tidings of peace and joy! Our prayer this Advent is that during this season of preparation our hearts are drawn closer to the mystery of Jesus' incarnation.

While we prepare our hearts for the birth of Jesus, this Fall we have been preparing the farm for winter. During our November Fall Work Day all of the garden beds were covered in straw, garlic was planted, many new tulip and daffodil bulbs were planted. Each year I take comfort in this countercultural exercise in hope.

Our goat bucks have gotten an upgrade on their barn. Since Kirk and 2K (our bucks) will be wintering apart from the does this year, we installed a stylish barn door on their mini barn to keep out the winter winds. Our doelings, Reims and Scip, have moved out of the chicken yard to the main goat barn since milking season is over.

The Nativity House cupboards are particularly full this Fall. We had a late honey harvest that stocked our pots for winter tea. Upon closing up the garden we literally stumbled upon a large late and hidden harvest of pumpkins and butternuts. Our freezer is now brimming with delectable squash, thanks to the hard work of our interns Becca and Karen. Kayla has been very prolific with dehydrating herbs and stocking our spice cabinet. Venus has stocked the freezer with goat cheeses - chevre and ricotta. We are overflowing with abundance. What a blessing!

We are excited to announce that the Nativity House Christmas Coffeehouse is back this year after a few years hiatus. We will be selling party baskets stuffed with party treats, games, and party hats that will accompany a virtual concert. Watch your emails and our Facebook Events page to sign up!

We are currently accepting applications for guest moms. Please pray for Nativity House through this discernment process.

As always, we hold each of you in deep gratitude. You are our extended Nativity House community! Your prayers and support are invaluable. Take comfort that you are always in our prayers.

Peace of Christ,

Venus & Justin Wozniak

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 Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Past issues are online at:

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

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a house of hospitality for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House 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.

Nativity House 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 are 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, please email Venus Wozniak at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

Crisis and Promise

continued from page 1

examination of conscience at the start of Advent:

Here is my examination at the beginning of Advent, at the beginning of a new year. Lack of charity, criticism of superiors, of neighbors, of friends and enemies. Idle talk, impatience, lack of self-control and mortification towards self, and of love towards others. Pride and presumption. (It is good to have visitors – one’s faults stand out in the company of others.) Self-will, desire not to be corrected, to have one’s own way. The desire in turn to correct others, impatience in thought and speech. Meanness about giving time to others and wasting it myself. Constant desire for comfort. (D. Day, *On Pilgrimage*, Dec. 1948)

We recognize ourselves in these confessions. There is comfort in this. I am not alone in my transgressions. Here is the irony. Our sins are always obstacles to relationship with others and with our Creator. Sin is about breaking relationships. Sin draws us inward in a negative sense, causing isolation and division. Breaking free of sin causes discomfort. Our world and our God challenge us to enter the discomfort so that true transformation of heart can happen. We can all agree that our world and Earth are in need of transformation.

Advent is a time of waiting. We are waiting for the birth of Jesus. We find ourselves in the similar quandary of a new mother awaiting birth, new life. And isn’t a new mother also a bit anxious and apprehensive? Do we believe that there is indeed new life swirling in each of us? What meaning is held in this time of waiting? The promise of this Advent is perhaps magnified for each of us. We are being called to something larger than our hearts and minds can imagine:

If only this immense sorrow [world

woes accentuated by the Pandemic] may not prove useless, but enable us to take a step forward toward a new style of life. If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands and all its voices, beyond the walls that we have erected. (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 34.)

During these last nine months, I have been mulling over and over, what is the new style of life that we are being called to? How do I toss out everything and head in a new direction? I do long for a better life and a better world. I don’t want to be stuck in my comfort zone. I want to learn how to see other people’s point of view, understand without judgement, and love the person despite a different world view. The reality is that we cannot do this on our own. We need help.

Mother Mary is where I frequently turn when I am needing a guide. Especially during this accentuated time of waiting, I am convinced that she will be our comfort. Each Advent we revisit her part of the story. She was visited by an angel who gave her news. She was to become pregnant in this most mysterious way: through union with the Holy Spirit. (1. She was a partner of the Holy Spirit) The child is to be the Savior of the world. She accepted this. The Gospel of Luke tells us over and over again that Mary pondered in her heart the mysteries surrounding the birth, life, death and resurrection of her Son. (2. She always had a posture of pondering: reflecting, praying)

I hold close to her Canticle. Mary journeyed a two day walk to be with her cousin Elizabeth. I am sure that during this solo journey Mary had much time to ponder. Upon the miraculous greeting of her cousin,

continued on page 4

Rights and Responsibilities

by Stephen Storey

“The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities--to one another, to our families, and to the larger society” (USCCB).

I love that these tenets of Catholic Social Teaching, rights and responsibilities, are addressed together. The Church is calling us to hold a difficult tension between preserving our own rights (and the rights of those closest to us) without neglecting the responsibility to protect the same rights for those outside of our immediate circles. Several months ago I witnessed a family striking this balance to what I would consider a heroic degree and today I am experiencing the fruits of their efforts.

I became acquainted with the situation as I was driving to the farmer’s market with a truck full of veggies in the Spring. Along the route from the farm

to the market, there was a gas station with a vacant lot behind it. As I was driving, I noticed a collection of tents on the lot and a congregation of men and women around the tents. A “tent city” had sprung up, largely as a result of homeless shelters limiting their occupancy in response to the pandemic.

By the time I drove to the market the following week, the tent city had moved across the street into a large field. The week after that it was gone, having moved this time to the grounds of a church a few blocks away. It was at this point that I became slightly more familiar with the story. The tent city was now in a residential area, surrounded by homes. The home directly across the street happened to belong to two of my friends, and their five small children. It didn’t take long to recognize the negative impact that the tent city was having on the neighborhood. There was near-constant yelling and cursing, violence and public intoxication were not infrequent, and the squeals of skidding tires could be heard once or twice an

continued on page 5

Poor and Vulnerable

by Karen Rojas

What do you normally think about when you hear the word poverty? As Catholics, we are taught and encouraged to follow Catholic Social Teachings. One of the seven teachings is option for the poor and vulnerable, which consist of respecting human dignity, loving and placing those in need first. Questioning the system to help bring justice and improve the lives of those in need is also part of the teaching.

God chose a poor family to be born into. He preached to the marginalized, the poor and the vulnerable. Why? Because God came for those in need, which indicates as Catholics we must follow His footsteps, not see the poor with our eyes instead with our hearts. 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Mark 12:31). No one is superior and we are all here on this earth to learn from each other.

How do I serve the poor? Do I have to leave Illinois to serve? These are questions I kept asking myself, which slowly started to fade away in the beginning of my early 20's. In an unique way, God always finds a way to remind us what is important which he did by touching my heart on a girls trip to New Orleans. At first, I was enjoying the Jazz bands playing on every street corner, the smell of beignets, and photographing the city. Then on day three of the New Orleans' trip, we were walking towards our next site when a family passed us in a rush. Each family member pulled their own suitcase, even the child who looked about 10 years old. The appearance of the family led me to conclude they were homeless. The family seemed to be walking across the city carrying all their belongings in search of shelter or their next meal. "No human being should live like that, especially a child," I kept repeating in my head. Reminding me that the marginalized and vulnerable need to be placed first. In a matter of seconds, adrenaline

filled my body and I felt ready to save the world. Then Saint Teresa of Calcutta came to mind, "If you want to change the world, go home and love your family." After the trip, I went home and started serving my family in any way possible.

Another form of being poor is lacking love. Loneliness could threaten the emotional stability of human beings because we are social mammals. Untreated mental health issues have moved people to the margins. For a person to feel vulnerable and isolated is a terrible combination. Spiritual accompaniment, lending an ear and an open heart to could be everything a person needs to feel Christ's love. Love and acceptance helps people to persevere and chase their goals. Sometimes a person needs an ounce of faith. May our actions and loving words be the form in which people receive the love of God. Hopefully we continue to remind ourselves and the people around us that God is with us every step of the way. Through Christ everything is possible, and together we could bring justice, love, and acceptance.



Karen Rojas is a Nativity House intern.

Crisis and Promise

continued from page 3

Mary bursts forth in song. No doubt, she had been pondering these words on her long journey. She sings of great wonder and blessings that the Lord is bestowing on her and her people and the whole world. She recalls God's promises to her people: God has promised salvation and that all of creation will be in its rightful place:

[God's] mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him. He bared his arm and showed

Easy Essays:

Politics is Politics

by Peter Maurin
(1877-1949)



A politician is an artist
in the art of following the wind
of public opinion.

He who follows the wind
of public opinion
does not follow
his own judgement.

And he who does not follow
his own judgement
cannot lead people
out of the beaten path.

He is like the tail of a dog
that tries to lead the head.

When people stand behind their
president
and their president
stands behind them
they and their president
go around in a circle
getting nowhere.



his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts. He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud. The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold. He embraced his chosen child, Israel; he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high. (Luke 1: 46-55)

This is a song of power, salvation, and justice. This is a song of promises kept. (3. She stood firm on God's promise of Salvation)

During these earth shattering months of 2020 I have felt righteous anger and deep sorrow. Our world is a cacophony: injustice for the poor, for people of color, for immigrants and refugees; and the conductors of oppression and exploitation are the tyrants and braggarts. The world is crying out. Mercy! We need Mercy! Many of us have sound proofed our comfort zones to block out the loud clanging bells. We need a turning to a new style of life. Maybe this new style isn't all that new. Maybe it's taking the

posture of Mary: partnering with the Holy Spirit, always pondering, standing firm in God's promises of Salvation. If we take in this true nourishment we will be given courage and strength of heart. The natural consequence of this is being knitted more closely into the Mystical Body of Christ. We are not alone. We work at all of this struggle and woe together.

Perhaps the reason for scrambling for our Christmas decorations early this year is a need to hold tight to the promises of Christmas - God's promise of salvation, God's promise of nourishment, God's promise that we are never alone. Taking comfort in these promises bring the Joy for which we all yearn.

Mary, Mother of Justice; Mary, Mother of Salvation - Pray for us



Venus Wozniak is the Director of Faith Formation at St Dennis in Lockport. She is also the co-director of Nativity House.

Solidarity

by Sarahi Perez

During this difficult time of so much division and isolation in our country Jesus' words to the scribes in the gospel of Mark very close, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." How can such a simple commandment feel so tough to accomplish? How can we truly be in solidarity with those around us? With these questions in mind, I want to share my experiences with solidarity and how we can be inspired to grow in this virtue in our homes, our jobs, and everyday interactions.

At the core of solidarity is commitment to the common good. Beyond feeling sad or frustrated with injustices, being in solidarity with those most in need means firmly committing to doing something about it, a call to action. Now, this call to action might look a little different for each person depending on where they are in life. We each have unique talents, skills, interests, and experiences that guide us to find where we are needed most.

At different moments in my life I have been called to be in solidarity with different marginalized groups. In high

school, I volunteered with an organization that focused its efforts in providing resources for children with autism. Later on as an undergraduate student, I spent my free time serving at a hospice home near my junior college. After I finished my time at the hospice home, I went on to become a tutor to youth in Chicago. Every experience brought with it a deep awareness of suffering, disparities, and inequalities that exist in our world, and I knew I had to do more.

"The principle of solidarity requires that men and women of our day cultivate a greater awareness that they are debtors of the society of which they have become part" (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004). As I grew in this awareness, my life decisions changed drastically. I began to see Jesus more clearly in those I served, in the classmates sitting right next to me, and in my friends and family. After college, I joined the Salesian sisters to do service as a lay missionary in Guatemala. There I witnessed even deeper educational injustices, schools with no electricity, working bathrooms, or proper transportation. This was a very tough time for me. I knew that in that short mission trip I could only do so much,

and this really troubled me for sometime. Mother Teresa of Calcutta really inspired me to stay focused, and do "small things, with great love."

Today, I continue this work as a program coordinator of an organization that provides mentorship and tutoring for low income students in Chicago. I have seen the need, I have felt the suffering, and I have made it my mission to do something about it. I hope that as I share my experiences with you, you too are moved to do something for someone you know that is in need. There is a deep connection between solidarity, justice, and peace. When we go out of our way to express solidarity, we acknowledge the suffering of that person or people, recognize there is injustice to heal, and peace to be made.

"The message of the Church's social doctrine regarding solidarity clearly shows that there exists an intimate bond between solidarity and the common good, between solidarity and the universal destination of goods, between solidarity and equality among men and peoples, between solidarity and peace in the world" (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004). Each and every one of us has a

commitment to the welfare of our neighbors, near and far. We are one human family, one body in Christ, and like St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it". As we continue to strive for unity and peace in our world let us not forget the beautiful words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, that if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.



Sarahi Perez is a current U.S. Army reservist and also works for Midtown Educational Foundation, a non-profit that serves low income youth in Chicago.

Rights and Responsibilities *continued from page 3*

hour as cars peeled in and out of the neighborhood. My friends, and several of their neighbors, were reluctant to let their children play outside and their indoor routines, especially in the evening and at night, were often disrupted by the noise.

The situation was clearly bad for everyone. The homeless weren't in a situation to flourish and the difficulties of their situation were spilling over into the lives of everyone in the neighborhood. It would have been very reasonable for my friends to protect their right for a safe environment for themselves and for their children and to have the tent city moved. That "not

in my backyard" mentality is precisely what had resulted in the tent city moving twice already (as businesses around their first two encampments had them escorted away).

Remarkably, my friends and their neighbors were able to see the homeless as more than an obstacle to their own rights. They recognized that these were also individuals with a right to those things required for human decency. They got connected with local politicians, homelessness consultants, and private donors to imagine scenarios in which the residents of the tent city might be better housed before winter. This course of action didn't

remove the homeless from their neighborhood as quickly as simply kicking them out would have. They remained for weeks as action plans were created. Fast forward several months and the county has provided funds for over 100 homeless individuals (including all of the residents of that tent city) to be housed for at least the next six months in motels, with recovery coaches, case managers, and two meals per day. I have had the gift of working with this program and seeing the abundance of support being provided for these individuals, the business being provided to the motels housing them, and the number of homeless on the

streets decrease (even while COVID continues to limit the occupancy of homeless shelters). These developments are, in large part, the result of a few families viewing their right to a decent living situation as going hand-in-hand with a responsibility to ensure that same right for others.



Stephen Storey is a sustainable farmer in South Bend, Indiana and a lover of the Catholic Worker Movement.

Dignity of Work

by Joshua Solarz

Do you ever wonder what it was like for Jesus to work? It's easy to forget that Jesus spent the majority of his time on Earth completing ordinary work, just like you and I, as a carpenter. If the Creator of Heaven & Earth chose to spend so much time working, the ordinary work we partake in must mean something extraordinary, right? Let's explore this.

Immediately before his Passion, Jesus intimately prays to the Father, "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). What was the work the Father gave Jesus? The Gospel of John makes it clear that Jesus' mission was and still is to reveal the Father to the world; Jesus says, "Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God..." (John 17:3). What does Jesus desire to reveal about the Father? That our Father is a good, good Father.

If everything Jesus did was to reveal the goodness of the Father, I think we can imagine what his carpentry days looked like: walking into his workshop early in the morning, praying to the Father before beginning, "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wood we offer you, fruit of the trees and work of human hands, it will become for us (insert today's project here)." Isn't this incredible to imagine? Every new day, every piece of wood, every mistake, and every moment would be offered to the Father, completing every project as if it were for the Father himself.

Again, why would Jesus do this? Because he wants us, as his disciples, to reveal the goodness of the Father to the whole world. Listen to Jesus as he says, "As the Father has sent me [to reveal His name to the world], so I send you" (John 20: 21). We have inherited Jesus' mission to do as he did through our own work.

Ask yourself: have you ever considered that the work you complete day after day could reveal the Father to the world? Do you take your ordinary work and make it into something extraordinary? As we know, something like this occurs everyday around the world with ordinary bread and wine.

How do we reveal the Father to the world through our work and transform it into something extraordinary? Jesus shows us it is by doing everything, down to the most menial of tasks, with extraordinary love and offering it to the Father. Our work should be an unending offering to the Father in thanksgiving for our very lives, our families who we provide for, and the opportunity to partake in God's creation.

I will end with this, hoping to convince you that your work can mean something extraordinary, just as God became flesh in Jesus to reveal his love for his children, God continues to "become flesh" through the work of our hands to reveal that same love. Whether we are doctors, teachers, youth ministers, stay-at-home parents, priests, etc., we are all God's hands and feet with the same mission: to reveal the Father to the world through the work of our hands. Our co-workers, our families, and the world desperately needs the Father. What are you waiting for?



Joshua Solarz is a recent graduate of the University of Notre Dame and aspiring physician.

Care for Creation

by Kayla Jacobs

Shortly after I graduated college I moved to the great state of West Virginia to live in a Catholic intentional community farm and service retreat center. As a community we led home repair service projects for the poor and vulnerable of the area. One of the first projects I worked on was a roof over a trailer home. The home was on top of a hill and working on the roof gave an extended view of the beautiful rolling Appalachian mountains. One day, while working on the roof, I paused to take in the view. My heart was moved with joy at the sight. The deep beauty of nature was a clear sign of the Creator's deep love for us. In the next moment my heart was moved again as my gaze shifted from the trees and sky to the little homes I saw below. In those homes, I knew, were people and families loved so deeply by the Creator. Of the many experiences and memories I made in my two years in Appalachia those few moments of being still and attentive to God's creation stuck with me.

For people of faith the idea of caring for creation should be one of the most fundamental beliefs we hold. For Christians our scripture starts with the story of Creation, the most consistent word used in that story is "good." God created <fill in the blank> and it was good! For Catholics we proclaim, in our Creed, that we believe in the Maker of Heaven and Earth, of all things visible and invisible. In Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, he wrote: "*Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.*" (L.S. 84) A line in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* sums up how I feel when I'm in nature: "*He did not study God, he was dazzled by Him.*" Nature is, unequivocally, a sign of God's love.

Unfortunately, the powers and principalities of the world have turned caring for creation into a political view.

This is odious for many reasons. It not only convinces people, including people of faith, that caring for creation isn't important, even worse, it convinces some people that caring for creation is bad. It lends to the exploitation of nature, which always results in the exploitation of people. It accepts unfettered consumption as a norm, which is the base of the throw-away culture. And ultimately it leads to the death of many species, ecosystems, and people.

The political fight of climate change (a.k.a the political fight of caring for creation) is a dark one. As people of faith we are called to bring light to darkness. We are also called to have hope. Sometimes hope is difficult to maintain when we see an increase in intensity of climate related disasters, ecosystems being destroyed, the hard plight of climate refugees, high birth defect rates among women in heavily air polluted areas, and an absurd amount of plastic in our oceans. Let us pray through the Holy Spirit to grow in the virtue of hope, an active hope, that will guide our work to care for our common home.



Kayla Sue Jacobs is a Nativity House Community Member

Family & Participation

by Jake Teitgen

For the past ten years, one of my family's Thanksgiving traditions is to participate in the local Turkey Trot 5K in the historic downtown of our suburban city. We bundle up in hats, gloves, and sneakers to take a lap through town (and then use it to justify an extra helping of mashed potatoes later in the day). We used to have an unspoken rivalry with a couple who showed up in their Detroit Lions jerseys and seemed to be at a similar pace to us each year; nowadays, our three children have slowed us down a bit and we're content to walk/run with a stroller or two.

We see a ton of people we know at the Turkey Trot, including many who have become friends because their kids went through the youth ministry program that I organize at our church. It's a joyful morning in which there are many greetings of old friends, catching up with former youth ministry students who are now in the working world, and a lot of talk about how slow we're going to be this year. There are a few stud runners in the group who know that a top finish means they'll be taking home a medal and a coveted pumpkin pie.

The event itself is sponsored by the Michael Treinen Foundation, a local organization that was named after a young man who died in 2008 from leukemia. His family developed the foundation to help the community and improve the lives of other families affected by cancer. The Treinen family introduces the race each year with some words about Mike, enthusiastic gratefulness for the crowd, and a prayer.

In many ways, this event represents what a community is supposed to be. The Catholic Church would agree. One of the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching is the Call the Family Life, Community, and Participation.

Like our gaggle of children, strollers, and stray gloves on Thanksgiving morning, the Church teaches that family is its most intimate, foundational level of structure. The love that leads to the vows of matrimony causes a new little church to form. This domestic church is far from tame (you've never seen wild until you've seen the scramble to get three kids in winter gear and in the car on time), but it's where children are introduced to culture, faith, and hope. The family is where love begets love.

Just as we love the feeling we get when we see good friends in the crowd of other runners, we know that humans were not created to exist in isolation. In everything from our triune God to our anthropology, we are designed for community. A true Christian community embraces the idea that we are "our brother's keeper" (Gen. 4:9) and seeks communal salvation.

The community also rallies on this chilly morning for a worthy cause. When the Treinens experienced tragedy, their people showed up and continue to show up to bring light from darkness. The Church tells us that we are obligated to be active in the social and political elements of our communities, with a special focus on the local opportunities to effect change that supports dignity, mercy, and the common good. We are not merely called to avoid injustice and despair, but to transform it.

I've tried to connect the Turkey Trot to this theme of Catholic Social Teaching, but, actually, there's an even better place to draw a connection to this teaching: your local parish.

"The parish is where the Church lives." (Communities of Salt & Light, USCCB) Your local Catholic church is intended to be the hub of family, community, and participation. It's where you celebrate the ordinary and

extraordinary moments of family life. It's an eclectic group of people who can disagree on a hundred different things but can come together on core beliefs and supporting one another. It's a polling place, an arena for tackling moral issues of the day, and an active source of justice and charity in the wider community.

"Parishes serve as anchors of hope and communities of caring, help families meet their own needs and reach out to others, and serve as centers of community life and networks of assistance." (Salt & Light)

In fact, the only reason our family ever signed up for the Turkey Trot in the first place is because of our home parish.

The day I interviewed for my role in youth ministry at our church was the same day in 2008 as Michael Treinen's funeral. It was difficult to find a parking spot because hundreds were still gathering to mourn the loss of a son of the community. The same day he was buried was the day I decided to put down roots in the same faith family. We now go to the Turkey Trot in remembrance of Michael and because we have joined a tribe that loved him.

I thought that I could be a source for good change in this small area, but for years it has been reforging me, just as it is called to do. Are you willing to run towards the wild frontier that is your local Catholic parish in order to fulfill the call to Christ's social teachings? It will surely not be tame, but it will be good.



Jake Teitgen works as a Youth Minister in Noblesville, Indiana. He loves the Catholic Worker Movement.

Human Dignity

continued from page 1

door to Missionary of Charity sisters in an impoverished country in the Horn of Africa. Every day, these sisters not only brought relief to the suffering but also hope by recognizing an individual's need for love and being with them during times of pain. In the Diocese of Joliet, the Office for Human Dignity advocates protections for the unborn, disabled, immigrants, and all others enduring injustice.

Often, we hear the words "human dignity" in secular and religious discourse and documents referring to the rights human beings possess in society. We can become susceptible to merely acknowledging the phrase "human dignity" as a nice saying that expresses respect for individual humans. The term did not enter prominently into popular secular discourse until the United Nations (UN) ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It declared that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." While this declaration was a welcome step into why the rights of persons need recognition and application, it falls short of the CST meaning of human dignity.

Individually, one can fulfill Catholic teaching on human dignity by seeing each person with the eyes of Christ. By considering all humans sacred, as people for whom Christ suffered and died, society's moral foundation will change radically. CST on human dignity goes further than the UN teaching in proclaiming that the intrinsic value of humans can only be endowed by God, the creator of the universe.



Brian Hickey is an associate director in the Office for Human Dignity at the Diocese of Joliet. He recently received a graduate degree from the University of Notre Dame.



In this issue:

- Crisis and Promise
- Thoughts on Catholic Social Teaching
- Nativity House Christmas Coffee House
- Sts. Cyril and Methodius

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441



St. Cyril and St. Methodius

Feast Day: February 14th

by Jake DeMarais

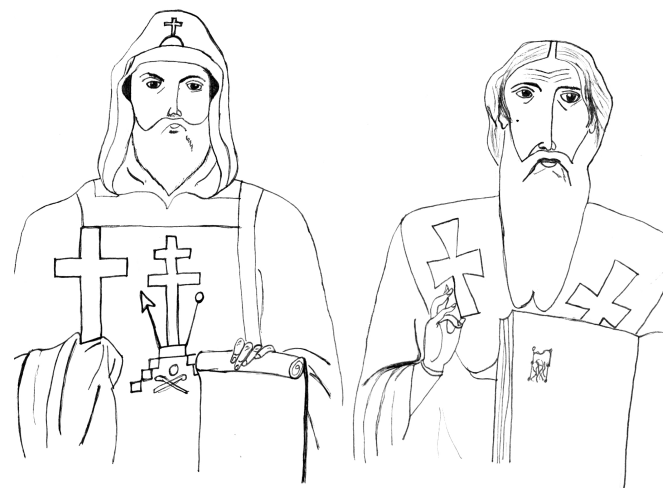
Patron: Slavic People and Ecumenism

Often overshadowed by St. Valentine in the Roman Catholic calendar, these two brothers, Cyril and Methodius, are also celebrated on February 14 – the day we all know as Valentine’s Day. Having four brothers and a sister of my own, I have always been drawn to sibling saints like these two. I love imagining how their relationship as brothers played out – both the possible “brotherhood rivalry” as well as their ability to connect and minister together! It’s a wonderful reminder to us all that the families we are born into, become a part of, or even create, are places where we are often challenged, annoyed, frustrated, even hurt tremendously in some situations. But, they are also “places” or relationships, where so many of us encounter and find love in all its forms. They are the people in our lives who can hopefully provide us strength and courage to continually seek, explore, and encounter God and fulfill our own vocation in life whatever that may be.

Both men were born into a high status family in Thessalonica (Northeastern Greece) during the 9th century, but eventually renounced their positions/honors and became priests / missionaries. Methodius played the role of the big brother and entered a

monastery first, paving the way for his little brother. But Cyril, who apparently was the more “intellectual” one according to sources, loved sharing his intellectual abilities and apparently even spent several years as the official librarian of the most important church in eastern Europe, the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. He was a philosophy professor for a time at the imperial university and was once sent by Patriarch Ignatius to the Arabian caliph’s court as a member of a delegation to discuss theology with those of different faiths – particularly those of the Islamic faith.

However, what they are most known for and celebrated for is their work and mission to the Slavic people in the region of Moravia. At the time, the use of other languages besides Latin for the divine liturgy was highly frowned upon, particularly by the German Missionaries sent by Charlemagne to minister to the Christian church there. But when the King of Moravia, unhappy with the missionaries who only spoke and taught in Latin, asked Constantinople for help – Cyril and Methodius were summoned and sent as missionaries since they had spoken the Slavic language their whole lives.



On this mission, Cyril’s first work was to invent an alphabet still used in some Eastern liturgies today! And together they translated the Gospels, the psalter, Paul’s letters and the liturgical books into Slavonic, and even composed a Slavonic liturgy. In addition, they often preached in the Slavic language. All of this was met with great dissent by the German bishops and missionaries of the time. More than once, the brothers had to defend their use of the Slavic language to the Pope of the time. But it is clear they relied on one another constantly and met the challenge with zeal.

Upon their deaths, many of their disciples were scattered into many different places, but these expulsions had the beneficial effect of spreading the spiritual, liturgical, and cultural work of the brothers to Bulgaria, Bohemia, and southern Poland. To this day, Cyril and Methodius continue to be symbols of the long-desired unity of East and West church. They are

especially venerated by Catholic Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians, Orthodox Serbians, and Bulgarians, and in 1980, Pope John Paul II named them additional co-patrons of Europe (with St. Benedict).

May we all take from Cyril and Methodius the example of meeting people where they are at – using their “language” to speak with them. Always remembering to rely on our own brothers and sisters in Christ - working past the “rivalry” or differences between us and instead - strengthening and encouraging one another to bring out and share the gifts/talents/personality/unique identity given to us by our God.

Sts. Cyril and Methodius, pray for us.



Jake DeMarais and his family - Stacy, Philip, Jude, and Simon - are parishioners at St. Dennis parish in Lockport.