



Heart

Winter 2004

A Journal of the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province



...to Heart

Hope

*I try to tidy up my soul,
Sweeping the floor of dreams
Dusting vision fingerprints that
Linger from a time when what could be
was hands-on, hands-down, welcomed.*

*I try to tidy up my soul
So that I might be content with
What is now, and ever shall be
When windows, shuttered tight,
Admit no light or Spirit breeze.*

*I try to tidy up my soul
But hiding in the corner is
Hope's web, spun one grace at a time,
Clinging fast, tenaciously,
Catching me.*

We are poised between two seasons as I write these lines, the season of the 2004 elections, now mercifully behind us, and the days of Advent that lie ahead. I find such a tension in the two.

Those of us in “swing states” experienced a barrage of advertising for one candidate or the other, each raising issues more dire than the last. But the rest of the country was not exempt from the raw issues of the election, issues that have seared our souls: war and terrorism; human life and how to reverence it at every stage; the international community and how to again become a partner with other countries on the world stage; how to become more modest in our leadership, more open to the peoples and cultures, to the divergent world views and religious beliefs in this century’s astonishing and growing pluralism; how to confront poverty and hunger in our midst.

And, as well, there are issues endemic to our age: environmental degradation, failing educational systems, corporate corruption, militarism, self-serving alliances, globalization with its ambiguities and mythologies, unjust and de-stabilizing economic systems, accelerated migratory patterns and dislocations, biotechnology and eugenics and the struggle of moral choices for life, post-modern attitudes of distrust and individualism, and the incredible polarization on moral values now dividing our country.

These issues have been growing among us, of course, but the campaign served to heighten our consciousness and perhaps our feelings of powerlessness. They are too much for us. Their scale is far beyond our comprehension. Their solutions seem well beyond our grasp.

In face of this reality I am reminded of the words of Sister Clare Pratt, Superior General of the Society of the Sacred Heart:

What can we really do to have an effect on our world? What is the call of this moment that is within our grasp, to which each one of us can respond? My response is ever so simple and at the same time not easy. ... I think it is a call to deepen our love. It is the call of every Christian, the one thing Jesus asked of his disciples with urgency just hours before his death, and now, 2000 years later, his prayer that all may be one seems an impossible dream. But we cannot give in to despair! We must continue to believe that another world is possible and that we ... have a part to play in its transformation.

Yes, another world is possible if we deepen our love. What a wonderful insight as Advent enfolds us, a season of hope and love and transformation, one grace at a time. ✦



Kathleen Hughes RSCJ

Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ
Provincial

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Correction: Sister Trudy Patch notes that a quotation about the importance of art and literature in her article on “Spirituality and New Fiction” (*Heart*, Summer 2004, page 22) should have been attributed to Yann Martel, who makes the statement in his author’s note to *Life of Pi*.



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U.S.-Mexico Border: A view from both sides

By Barbara Quinn, RSCJ



© NewsCom/Joë Ruedle

Crosses marked “no identificado” line the road and fence along the U.S.-Mexico border in this photo of a display sponsored by migrant rights groups. The display memorializes migrants who lost their lives trying to cross the border. Images of immigrants trying to scale the wall have been painted on the Mexican side of the fence.

Border: Such a simple, tidy word when spoken from a distance. Yet, in July, twelve of us discovered its complexity as we gathered for three days at the University of San Diego for the Border Immersion Program. It was sponsored by two Religious of the Sacred Heart: Nancy Koke, director of vocation ministry, and myself. Our hope was that each of us would come to a deeper understanding of the perspectives, challenges and fears of those desperate to cross the United States–Mexico border and of those determined to defend it. There is no substitute for

firsthand experience but perhaps the following collage of impressions and images will whet your appetite to come along the next time.

Coming from around the United States, from San Diego to Philadelphia, and from Canada, we began our journey, each with some experience of border crossings, however small. Each one carried stories of ancestors who had braved dangerous journeys in search of a better life. Some of us had experienced the helplessness of being unable to communicate in another language, or of knowing the language but finding the culture utterly foreign.

We hoped that these memories would help us truly hear the stories of those we would meet.

And so we began.

Early in the morning of the first day, we were on our way from San Diego to Tijuana. The route took us past the huge, rusting metal fence that marks the dividing line between the United States and Mexico. Jennifer Jimenez, a participant from Chicago, said that image, of “the imposing fence that swathed the borderline as we drove through Tijuana, was the image that has been indelible for me.” Made of corrugated metal from the first Gulf War, the fence was erected in 1994 to inaugurate Operation Gatekeeper, a U.S. government program intended to deter undocumented migrants from crossing. But the crosses and the skulls marked with names, or simply with “no identificado,” that line the roads and beach tell a different tale. The desperate will not be deterred; they will risk death by taking the more dangerous crossings: swimming against fierce ocean currents off the Tijuana beach or trekking through dangerous mountain passes or scorching deserts.

From Mexico, we gazed through the fence to the U.S. side where the U.S. Border Patrol surveyed the land, watching from Broncos atop the surrounding hills and from helicopters circling overhead. Huge stadium lights complement the hidden sensors in the ground, ready to signal alien footsteps.

“Seeing the surveillance, the fence, shocked me,” commented Reyna González, RSCJ, from Mexico. “And I asked myself on which side of the border am I? How do I see this situation? From the side of those who walk and risk their lives or those who make laws and have control?”

We saw the weary faces of the workers in a *maquiladora*, a factory near the border, persisting for long hours at repetitive tasks, work that would warrant much higher pay were it done in the United States. The American dream looms large for these workers.

“One of the experiences that touched me the most was visiting the *colonia* near the dump in Tijuana,” said Nancy Koke. There is no running water in the mostly broken down shacks of the area. The water has to be trucked in once a week, and people need to pay to take a shower. Despite the misery, ten years ago, in response to a challenge proffered by Sister Teresa, a Medical Mission sister living in the village, a group of women established a bakery, a beauty shop and a day care center in the *colonia*. They were bursting with pride as they showed us this treasure buried in the midst of dire poverty.

That night we shared a simple dinner with men from Casa del Migrante, a shelter for men who are preparing to cross to the United States. Some walk for days, hoping that they will be among the lucky ones to make it. “I listened to them, looking at their faces of sadness, desperation, frustration,” Reyna González reflected, “and in this contradiction” marveled at the faith leading them to seek “opportunities to improve their lives.”

We took a view from the “other side” on Friday. Two U.S. Border Patrol agents, good men who are fulfilling the right of every sovereign nation to protect its own borders, guided us along the border, showing us where people attempt crossing and how the agents respond to them. Contradictions in the law were



Peering through the border fence are (from left) Reyna González, RSCJ, Mexican province; Dr. Elaine MacMillan of the theology and religious studies department, University of San Diego; and Sister Quinn.

apparent. A member of our group questioned why agents do not apprehend undocumented immigrants when they are working in the fields. The agents explained that they have an agreement with the growers not to conduct raids when the men are working. “I realized,” Cheryl Clark, a member of our group, said, “that closing off the borders . . . is not to stop illegal immigration but to stop illegal immigration that does not benefit the United States.”

Such inconsistencies became poignant in the afternoon, when we met a couple and their six children who had crossed the border several years ago. The father was smuggled across first. Two years later, the mother, with baby in arms, walked the other five children through treacherous conditions at night, fortunately to freedom. Even now, after years of honest hard work, the parents live with the anxiety that they could be deported at any time.

We walked the dusty paths of the mountains, where poisonous spiders and snakes lurk, to place gallons of

water at stations marked by crosses. The stations are set up by volunteers known as border angels in hopes that migrants will not die of thirst during their treacherous passage.

On our return, a border patrol agent saw our van, then turned his car around and followed us. This seemingly neutral action was not so for the Mexican RSCJ in our company. She immediately feared being stopped and questioned. Her reaction prompted another participant, Lisa Buscher, to note, “She was here legally and yet the look on her face when the police began to follow spoke so clearly that this ‘land of the free’ is really only the land of the privileged – those who happen to be born with their feet on the northern side of the border.”

No one left our program unchanged. The comments speak for themselves. One of the participants said, “I have been using some insights from our immersion program in our high school service program. I teach what I want to learn.”

Another said, “Every day, it seems, there is another article in our newspaper about the human tragedy of deaths in the desert. I find myself reading the whole article, having my heart broken a little more, and then praying for the family far away that has just lost a father, husband or son and may never, ever have that explained.”

Still another: “This experience challenged my comfort zones at many levels. In this regard, it gave me a mini-taste of what crossing the border must be like for those who do.”

Why not come and see for yourself? Persons interested in joining the program next year are invited to check <http://www.sandiego.edu/theo/ptpcc/ccs.html> for details. ✦

RSCJ set direction for future in Open Assembly

By Kay Baxter, RSCJ

On November 3, 2004, Religious of the Sacred Heart in the United States Province came together across four geographic areas and three time zones to consider direction for the future life of the province. Linked by tele-conferencing equipment, two hundred and fifty participants, nearly two-thirds of the province, grouped in St. Louis, Missouri; Houston, Texas; Albany, New York; and Atherton, California, to enter the third phase of the planning process initiated more than two years ago by the U.S. Provincial Team.

The team report for that month stated, "Aware of so many needs in our world and of our strengths and limitations in responding to them, we want to plan wisely for our life and mission. We think an on-going process that engages the whole province in planning will be of most help. We will appoint a task force to design a process and get this new phase underway."

Undaunted by the sighs and protestations of, "Oh, no, not again," voiced by many in the province, a planning committee composed of Sisters Georgie Blaeser, Irma Dillard, Imma DeStefanis, Melanie Guste Sheila Hammond, Susan Maxwell and Anne Wente set to work and designed a three phased process, "3-D: Dream, Design, Decide."



Sisters Carol Haggarty (from left), Patricia Steppe, Gin O'Meara and Maureen Glavin review a document in St. Louis.

Sally Stephens, RSCJ

A year later, on March 9, 2003, the members of the province embarked on the "dream" phase. Meeting in each of the eighteen geographic areas where RSCJ now live and minister, we began to identify our best experiences of the Society in the United States and to articulate our hopes for its future.

Following the "Appreciative Inquiry" model for planning, which has been used by many organizations, conversations focused on questions such as the following: What core factors give life to the Society of the Sacred Heart? What can past experiences teach us, especially those moments when we have been at our best and truest? What do we need to change or begin? What are those things we want to preserve even as we change?

Responses to these questions surfaced some common themes and

core values: the centrality of prayer in our lives; the importance of relationships and community; belief in the future and openness to change; a sense of internationality and living inter-culturally; a desire for fostering more open, inclusive, participative deliberation of critical matters.

Many people – alumnae, associates, co-workers and friends – who have an interest in the life and future of the Society of the Sacred Heart, responded to an invitation to reflect on their best experiences of the Society and to share their wishes for the future. Twenty-two groups met across the province. Input from these groups emphasized the importance of relationships, of handing on the tradition of Sacred Heart education, and of sharing in Sacred Heart spirituality.

The design phase then moved us to begin expressing our wishes for the future in concrete and realistic propositions. Five categories had emerged that seemed to encompass the concerns and hopes expressed to this point: educational mission, ministries and programs, finances and resources, membership and community, spirituality, and government and leadership. Members of the province joined "improvement teams" for each of the five categories for the purpose of crafting proposals for improving province structures and practices. Participation on an improvement team could take the form of joining a discussion group or a synthesis writing group, of praying for the process, tracking the process, or doing background research.

RSCJ met in small groups, either in person, where geographic proximity allowed, or via conference call or, where distance made face-to-face

meetings too difficult, a discussion group on the Society web page. These groups generated sixty-five formal proposals. These were submitted to appropriate improvement teams for further synthesizing and clarifying. Straw polls of the membership and a survey on the web clearly indicated which of these proposals had strong support from the membership and which the membership rejected.

This step reduced to twelve the number of proposals to be considered at the Open Assembly.

Concurrently with the planning process, the U.S. Provincial Team, in January 2003, commissioned a comprehensive actuarial study of the province to update our demographic, ministerial and financial projections. This report highlighted the urgency of taking steps to decrease costs and increase income and spawned additional in-depth studies. These included elder care, salaries and benefits, real estate, and mission advancement.

The Open Assembly in November marked a point of convergence for the work of the last eighteen months

On the evening of November 3, Sister Kathleen Hughes, Provincial, addressed the Open Assembly of the United States Province reminding us that “no matter the topic under discussion, whether we are considering rental properties, or the definition of community, or mission advancement plans, or government structures, the bottom line has to be mission; has to be how we will become more able to make God’s love known; has to be how we will serve the neediest and those on the margins; has to be how we will ultimately deploy our limited resources of personnel and finance to meet the needs of our country and beyond.



Mary Schumacher, RSCJ

Sisters Anita Villere and Mary Ann Foy ask to be recognized at the assembly in Atherton.

“How we address our most pressing financial issues has to help us, at the same time, more deeply identify with the vast majority of our brothers and sisters across the globe who have never in their lives known financial security.”

From the evening of November 3 to mid-day on November 7 the province’s Open Assembly met twice a day via teleconference to hear the proposals presented and clarified.

Discussion off-line in each of the four regional groupings followed these presentations. At a subsequent general session, a reporter from each region presented a summary of that discussion. The elder care task force and the province’s finance office gave reports to the entire assembly. Only once did a technological glitch necessitate an adjustment in the schedule.

What did all of this accomplish? What has changed? What bold new steps will the province take? It is too soon to tell. The Open Assembly itself marked a midpoint rather than the end of a process. In many different words, we expressed the conviction that we did not want to produce another document that would gather dust on a closet shelf. We hoped that none of

the voices that had been heard, none of the divergent hopes or seemingly way-out wishes, would be lost as we moved ahead toward implementation of the agreed-upon dreams and goals.

We realized that we had done a lot during these days and that a lot had been done unto us. We closed the assembly by naming some fruits of the experience:

- A deepened appreciation for one another and for the diverse gifts and skills that enriched and enabled the group;
- A strengthened sense of ownership and responsibility, both individually and collectively, for membership in the Society;
- A conviction of the need to design structures of governance that will continue to foster participatory decision-making.

Perhaps the closing prayer best expresses our feelings as we left the assembly.

God of our hoping, God of our dreaming, we beg your Spirit to dwell with us.

Fill us with trust as you lead us in love to dreams being realized and to visions still becoming.

Continue to stir up hope in our hearts. May it find a home in us and room to grow,

So that this little Society may be a manifestation of your reconciliation, compassion, communion and a sign of your love in our needy world. ✝

Response to appeal "gratifying and humbling"

As this fall/winter issue of Heart went to press, results of an appeal to Sacred Heart alumnae and alumni to help fund retirement needs for Religious of the Sacred Heart had surpassed \$500,000, with gifts still coming in.

Just as moving, according to Shirley Miller, RSCJ, director of mission advancement, contributions came from more than 2,000 alums, and several indicated they had included the Society in their estate plans or wills.



Sister Miller, director of mission advancement

The retirement appeal, the first appeal ever to alumnae/i by the U.S. Province, was the first step in the Society's mission advancement program, which began under Sister Miller's direction early this year. The mailing was sent to all alums on a mailing list provided by the Associated Alumnae/i of the Sacred Heart – more than 50,000 alums of Sacred Heart schools in the United States.

"The response has been truly gratifying and humbling," Sister Miller said. "We are deeply grateful to our alums for encircling the Religious of the Sacred Heart with their great hearts and joining us in such profound ways in caring for our elderly and in continuing our mission of discovering and making God's love known in the heart of the world."

"We want to acknowledge and thank the AASH executive committee, especially Barbara Lopiccio, Nancy Agnew and Jeanne O'Fallon for supporting our appeal in such a generous way," Sister Miller said.

"We also want to acknowledge and thank the executive committee of the Barat Education Foundation – Sheila Smith, Maureen Ryan, Catherine Meserindino – and all Barat alums for giving the Society the \$250,000 challenge grant from the foundation. With this grant added to the proceeds of the appeal, the Society has realized \$750,000

in gifts for the retirement fund so far."

A full annual report will go out to all donors at the end of the fiscal year, in September 2005.

Associates sponsor retreat

Kenwood Associates of the Sacred Heart, in collaboration with Doane Stuart School in Albany, New York, invite interested persons to an "Eastertide Retreat" April 8 to April 10, 2005, at Kenwood Convent of the Sacred Heart in Albany. Barbara Bowe, RSCJ, professor of New Testament at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, will be the presenter. Cost is \$225 for those staying at Kenwood, or \$125 for in-town commuters. To register, call Maureen Leyh, 518-465-5222, extension 222.

Sr. Hughes writes the President

In a letter to President George W. Bush shortly after his election to a second term, Sister Kathleen Hughes, Provincial of the U.S. Province, exhorted him to uphold moral values in his priorities and policies by ensuring economic and social justice for the nation's poor.

Sister Hughes also urged the President to use his position as a world leader to promote the Millennium Goals of the United Nations. For the full text of her letter, see www.rscj.org



In Memoriam

Please see www.rscj.org for biographical information on RSCJ who have died.

May they live in the fullness of God's love.

Anne Cronin
August 15, 2004

Mary O'Callaghan
August 30, 2004

Nancy Salisbury
September 27, 2004

Emily Butler
November 12, 2004

A paradise marred by poverty

Adirondacks ministry makes inroads in meeting needs



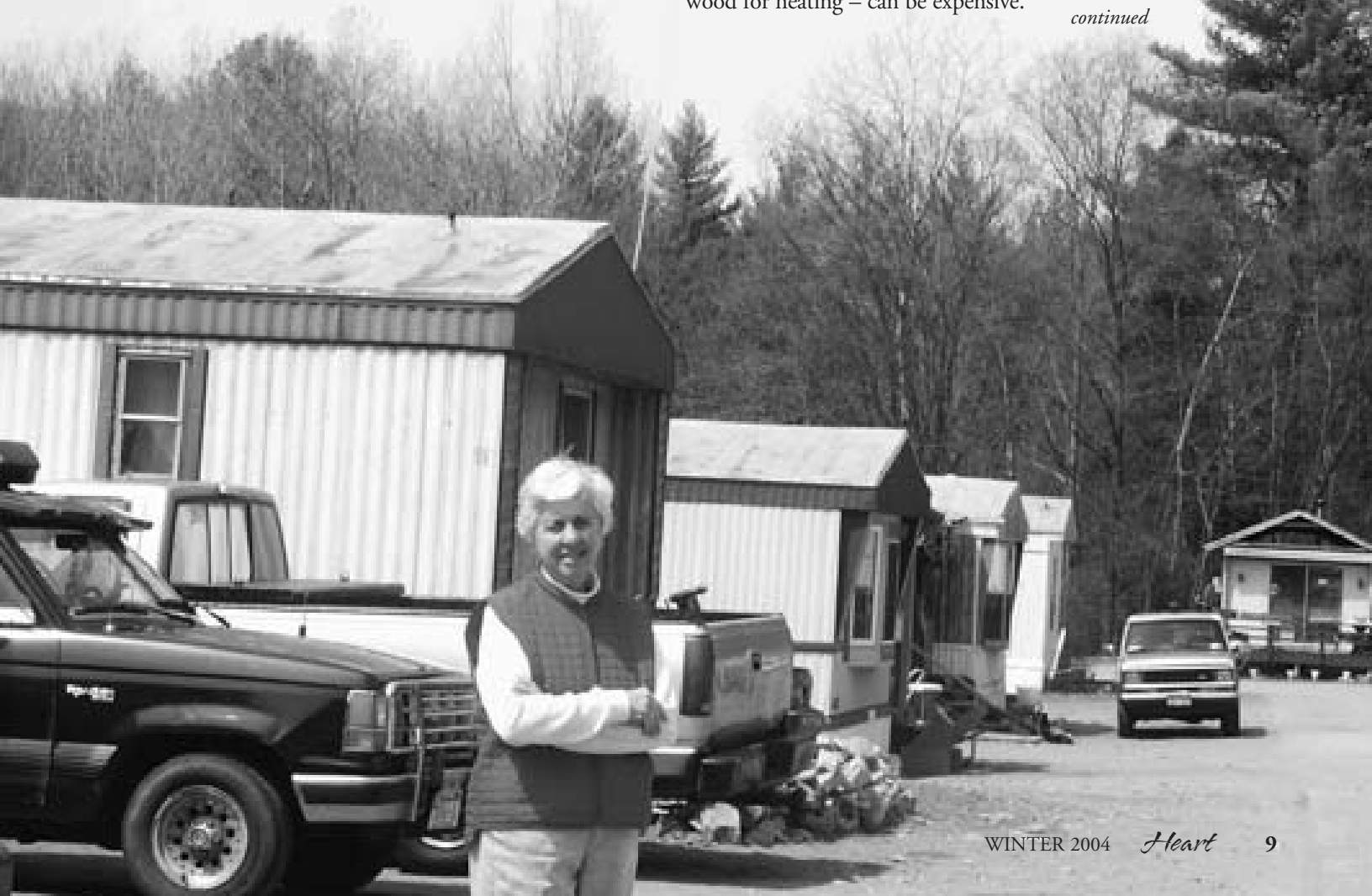
Client Kay Culver, left, holds toys she has gathered for her child as Sister Mary Brady talks with her about her family's needs. Below, Sylvia Rosell poses in dilapidated trailer park.

To vacationers and retirees who gravitate to Adirondack State Park for its outdoor pleasures, this six-million-acre preserve must seem a bit like Eden. Its heavily forested hills offer scenic beauty, fresh air, an abundance of ponds and lakes, four-star resorts, year-round sports and a thriving arts community.

To an uncounted number of locals, though – the isolated, rugged, often-proud people who grind out a living in difficult circumstances day by day, year by year, often generation after generation – the area speaks more of paradise lost. Unemployment is high, work minimum-wage and seasonal, living costs often well beyond the means of the marginally employed.

Hard-to-find housing for the region's poor is frequently substandard; services and basic commodities – ironically in these heavily forested mountains, even wood for heating – can be expensive.

continued



Homelessness in the region defies traditional definitions, as people move from one rundown trailer park to another, crowd into ramshackle houses with relatives or friends, sleep in lean-tos or their cars. Tales of exploitative landlords abound.

Mary Lamphier Brady, RSCJ, talks knowledgeably about the underbelly of this land of contrasts as she drives a visitor along Route 87, “the Northway,” where postcard vistas unfold ahead and the Hudson River, here just a shallow rapids alongside the road, bubbles over a bed of rocks.

Three weeks a month, Sister Brady lives with two St. Joseph sisters in a parish rectory in Warrensburg, New York, just five miles from Lake George, while working for North Country Ministry, based in the tiny Adirondacks town of North Creek. The fourth week, she lives in Albany, New York, in her community of RSCJ.

North Country Ministry was founded a dozen years ago by Religious of the Sacred Heart and three other women’s religious orders – sisters of St. Joseph, Mercy and Holy Name – along with the Diocese of Albany and Catholic parishes in or near the Adirondacks.

Sister Brady was among those who helped set up the ministry, and five years ago she joined its staff. She and four other staff members struggle to meet a wide range of needs that emerge in a staggeringly large area, more than six hundred square miles. The other staffers are Holy Cross Brother James Posluszny; Thersa Dunkley and Jill Harrington, part-time administrative assistants; and two lay professionals, Caroline Sgranno and Susan Forrest, replacing Sylvia Rosell, a former employee who now works in an ARC program for handicapped men and women.

Headquarters for the ministry is Leaven House, a modest house originally sold through a Sears and Roebuck catalogue, in North Creek’s tiny commercial district. On the main level is The Baby’s Place, where new parents can come for supplies, support and advice; a food pantry; and a small living room, where a pull-out couch serves as the area’s only homeless shelter. Nearby, in a building refurbished by an area Methodist church, the ministry operates a “furniture barn” packed with donated furniture and household goods. These are free to any area resident in need.

“There are more and more demands as we get better known,” Sister Brady said. “We are usually the last resort, the place people come when all of their other options have failed.”



Disrepair is evident at this rental property in an Adirondacks town. Social workers say less visible interior problems are common, such as faulty wiring and malfunctioning heating systems.

Services of all kinds are in particularly high demand in winter, when tourist-driven jobs are on hold, heating bills are mounting, and firewood is reserved by sellers for the higher paying tourist trade. Hardships are common in summer months, too, when the locals often have to pay tourist prices for such everyday commodities as food and gas.

At the same time, Sister Brady said, it’s the “flatlanders” – the tourists and affluent retirees – who, along with the more economically stable locals, “make the ministry possible” through contributions of money and service.

“Life here is loaded with Catch-22s,” Posluszny said. “People work enough that they don’t qualify for welfare, but not enough to pay their

bills in winter.” Government subsidies for heat are allotted evenly across the state, though in the mountains of the North Country, the cold sets in much earlier than it does downstate.

“There are no statistics on homelessness in the Adirondacks because people take each other in. What you do have is multiple generations living in substandard housing. So there’s a great need, but because there are no statistics, it’s hard for us to get government money to help improve the housing.”

Native Adirondackers are by nature self-reliant and reluctant to ask for help, he said. Often people will visit Leaven House on behalf of a neighbor or friend, or they will come in with a specific request and as they talk, a panorama of needs unfolds. “When people live under constant pressure, they come to you with the latest need, but when you start talking to them, they may say, ‘Oh, yeah. I haven’t had electricity for eight months. But that wasn’t the need they came in for.’”

The Society of the Sacred Heart has helped to support the ministry over the years, providing a total of \$51,000 for projects and planning since 1993 through its Fund for Ministry and Philippine Duchesne Fund. Recently, with seed money from the Philippine Duchesne Fund, the ministry moved into the housing arena with Project HOPE (Housing Ownership and People Equity). The program will link volunteer mentors with people who want to become home or small business owners.

A future dream is a revolving loan fund with \$200,000 in grants from area banks. “Most people here can’t qualify for traditional loans, and getting government housing assistance often requires making repairs that people can’t make without



In photo at left: Sister Brady points to a sign describing services offered at the new North Country Outreach Center in Johnsburg, New York. At right, Brother James Posluszny talks about North Country Ministry's programs.

help," Sister Brady said. Or, said Posluszny, "some people can pay on a loan during the summer months when they are working, but not every month. No bank would touch that."

Both Brother Posluszny and Sister Brady are former educators. He taught at his order's schools in the northeastern United States and Canada; she was a teacher and administrator in Sacred Heart schools in the Northeast until the mid-1970s, when she moved into the field of social work.

Between 1976 until 2000, the year Sister Brady began working in the North Country, she successively taught in a Sacred Heart school and worked in a psychiatric center in Buffalo, New York; did outreach for Buffalo Catholic Charities; earned a master's degree in social work at the University of Chicago; and worked in an alcoholism unit in a hospital in Evanston, Illinois. After earning her degree, she returned to upstate New York, where she worked in Schenectady in a diagnostic center attached to an emergency shelter for young children; in a residential treatment facility for troubled boys; for Catholic Charities, where, for ten years, she assisted families at risk of losing their children to foster care; and in an educational program, where, for two years, she worked with first-time mothers and their infants.

In those years she gained the experience, skills and knowledge that enable her to respond to the range of needs she now deals with every day.

North Country Ministry's most recent accomplishment is the North Country Outreach Center, which officially opened in July in a former restaurant. Sponsored by a variety of area organizations, religious and secular, the center's services range

"We are usually the last resort, the place people come when all of their other options have failed."

— Sister Mary Brady

from a tax-preparation service for low-income adults to a literacy program provided by the area's Rotary Club. A thrift shop and food pantry, already serving three hundred families a month, are part of the complex. A large meeting room will accommodate community gatherings and small meeting rooms provide space for people to meet with social workers much closer to their homes. Formerly, people had to drive an hour south to Glens Falls in order to apply for food stamps or other government services.

As needs have grown, so has the generosity of donors and volunteers, Sister Brady said. For instance, volunteers spent thousands of hours renovating the building for the new center. The ministry's budget for direct cash support to meet critical needs has expanded from \$3,000 five years ago to nearly \$20,000 in 2004, largely through donations from more affluent area residents.

Among the joys of North Country Ministry, as Sister Brady sees it, is the opportunity to live out St. Madeleine Sophie Barat's vision by enabling people of means to help the poor, and, in working with the poor, "to show forth the love of God," which is the Society's mission.

"When people see what we do, they open their hearts and their pocketbooks; they give us their time, their money and their talents. The educational piece of it is that we are helping people to develop their own potential and to meet their basic needs so that they can live a truly human life."

At 78, Sister Brady is finding the work immensely satisfying. "This probably will be my last active ministry," she said. "I feel so extraordinarily grateful. It is as if God has saved the best wine until last." ❖

Love and quality education - ingredients of success

Center bears St. Madeleine Sophie's name



A day at St. Madeleine Sophie's Center for Developmentally Disabled Adults in El Cajon, California, can be viewed through many windows.

One window might overlook the acre-plus organic garden, where students learn to nurture the fruits, vegetables and herbs that are used in the center's kitchen or sold for income. The garden includes a citrus orchard, a greenhouse and a worm farm. Worm castings are packaged for fertilizer, and worm kits are assembled for sale nationally to schools.

Another window might overlook the professional kitchen itself, renovated with financial help from area organizations. Eleven center participants recently passed the center's food handling program, qualifying them to prepare and serve daily meals.

Another might afford a view over the contract work area, where participants are matched with requests from companies willing to outsource projects involving routine tasks. Projects have included

preparing bulk mailings, distributing flyers, painting curbs and clearing litter. When necessary, students are transported to job sites by the center's fleet of vans, as well as to area businesses for shopping and banking. Community integration is a priority for a population that is often rejected or misunderstood.

A Self-Advocacy program, funded in part by The Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities, Inc., prepares qualified students to develop a resume, which gives them a perspective on their own accomplishments, and to hold jobs outside the center. For example, one student, Chelsea Voisard, practiced her interviewing skills and was hired by a McDonald's restaurant, where she received on-the-job coaching by a member of the center's staff.

There is the computer room, where students produce a monthly newsletter while upgrading skills; the Junior Olympic-sized outdoor pool, where students can learn to swim or train to compete in Special Olympics; the Senior Center, where programs engage people of retirement age in volunteer work and help them develop leisure and recreational skills.

The painted bowl, above, was on display last spring during the annual exhibit of works by St. Madeleine Sophie Center students at Bread & Cie. At right, Herb Hillson, participant in the center's programs, works in the organic garden.





Perhaps the most engaging window looks into a storefront in downtown El Cajon, home to Sophie's Art Gallery. It is a place for showcasing student wares: paintings and quilts that sell for hundreds of dollars to a wide assortment of gift items, including wire mobiles, painted bowls, and brightly colored cards sporting students' designs. Behind the gallery are work areas for artists and guest instructors.

A creative population

Each year, the center's artists lend their vision and talent to preparing an exhibition at Bread & Cie, a popular bakery and lunch spot in the Hillcrest area of San Diego. For this year's show, brightly painted wooden bowls lined the walls.

One of the best known of the center's artists is Mark Rimland. A handsome man in his late 40s who has autism, he served as prototype for the character of Raymond Babbitt in the 1988 Academy Award-winning movie *Rain Man*. Rimland took his first art class at the center many years ago and went on to gain national recognition and financial success. He is also a savant. Give him

Ray Felix, top left, displays a quilt decorated with an angel. The quilt is one of his art works for sale at Sophie's Art Gallery. At right, Sister Maxine Kraemer looks through The Secret Night World of Cats, a children's book illustrated by Mark Rimland and written by Helen Landalf, his sister.

the day and year you were born, and he will accurately shoot back the day of the week.

In fact, from the best of all perspectives, the center can be seen in terms of each of its 240 participants, the people who come daily to learn or upgrade marketable skills, develop creative outlets, earn some money, make new friends, and gain a sense of independence and self esteem. They range from recent high school graduates to seniors in their 70s.

"This is a very creative population," said Debra Turner-Emerson, executive director. "They have goals and dreams just like you and I do. They are able to do a lot if people just give them a chance. We try to create a place that is friendly, safe and secure and that gives people an opportunity to grow."



Sister Kraemer's reinventions

When viewed through the window of history, the center is an amazing story of success.

St. Madeleine Sophie's Center got its start in 1966 when parents of children attending Convent of the Sacred Heart in El Cajon asked the sisters to provide religious education for the students' developmentally disabled siblings. Sister Mary Mardel opened a school for students 3 to 9 and appointed Sister Sara Ann Rude as its first director. She was succeeded in 1968 by Sister Maxine Kraemer, who became the school's driving force.

A native Californian, Sister Kraemer had spent thirteen years teaching at Sacred Heart schools in San Francisco and Menlo Park, California. She had come to El Cajon to teach in 1961. She had a master's degree in music from Stanford University, but no experience to draw on for teaching students with special needs; only a philosophy that has seen her through many a difficult day: "When God asks you to do something, he shows you the way."

"The way" involved reinventing first herself, and then the school.

She recalls facing the first class. Some students were barely able to talk. She asked a group of rowdy boys to be seated. Only one complied. Finally, in desperation, she said, "If you want to become an altar boy someday, please sit down."

It was at that moment, when all sat, that she recognized a strong desire for learning and for recognition in these students.

Gradually the age range at the school expanded to include children both younger and older, up to 18 years, a change that turned Sister Kraemer into a fund raiser. She asked for another building; she

In photo at left, center participant Sandy Jimenez, embraces a longtime friend, Sister Kraemer. Above, student Nicole Griffin carefully paints designs on a brightly decorated chair.

got another challenge. She was told she would have to raise \$100,000 for construction costs.

Her efforts to provide quality education for young people with special needs, students who by now had captured her heart, required that she broaden her own resume. She learned to oversee construction, to speak to community groups, to ask for money. She even learned to drive a bus.

Along the way, she earned a second master's degree – a master's in special education from the University of San Diego.

Two events in 1972 were foundational to the next phase. The Society decided to close the Sacred Heart School in El Cajon, and new legislation required California's public schools to educate children with special developmental needs.

Sister Kraemer saw, though, that for the developmentally disabled, just as for the rest of the student population, education didn't end with a diploma. The program for developmentally disabled children was reinvented as a center to serve developmentally disabled adults.

Sister Kraemer served as director until she retired in 1992. She then turned her attention to helping fund the center's quality programs. She established the Kraemer Endowment Foundation, reinventing herself yet again to become its overseer until 1995, the year she turned 71.

Educating "the whole person"

St. Madeleine Sophie's Center is situated on five acres adjacent to the former Sacred Heart School, now home to a private elementary school. It has a staff of more than eighty and an annual budget of \$4.3 million, funded mostly by the state. In addition, the Kraemer Endowment Foundation provides about \$115,000 annually. Other forms of fund raising include an annual appeal, garden and fashion shows, art events and grants, including grants for special projects from the Society's U.S. Province.

St. Madeleine Sophie's vision of educating the whole person is alive and well at the center that bears her name. "One of the things the center excels at is looking at the whole person," Merri Robison, program manager, said. "We have a wide range of educational opportunities for people; we are able to take into account many types of vocational goals and aspirations." That contrasts with many other good programs that operate within a narrower framework, she said.

For example, Herb Hillson, one of the center participants, loves to work in the garden. He also serves as the campus safety monitor and writes a monthly report on safety tips for the center's student newsletter, *Heart to Heart*.

Ray Felix, a participant for more than twenty years, is making a serious pursuit of art these days, though Robison said he has enjoyed a variety of activities, such as kitchen and contract work. But recently, she said, he has focused on expanding his artistic abilities by exploring different techniques. Last spring, he proudly displayed to a group of

visitors a charming quilt he had decorated with a life-sized angel.

Nicole Griffin, in the program for about three years, was skilled at painting when she arrived, but is now experimenting with other media, such as sculpture and mosaics.

Sandy Jimenez, a student since 1987, has taken classes in cooking, art and swimming, but eventually realized that her first love is the contract room. Some of her recent tasks have included sterilizing medical trays for sorting medications and preparing mailings. "She loves to earn a paycheck and this gives her a sense of independence," her parents wrote in a recent fund raising appeal. "She looks forward to attending class and doesn't understand why she can't work seven days a week."

The center's programs are structured so that students earn income as they perform their chosen tasks. For example, the center's artists receive forty percent of the price of their creations when they are sold, according to Wendy Morris, manager of Sophie's Gallery. In other areas, participants are paid according their skill level and work, whether they work for area businesses on contract projects or for the center in food service or garden maintenance.

"More than seventy percent of our students earn a paycheck here," Debra Turner-Emerson said. "Our goal is to see that everybody gets a paycheck of some kind."

What Turner-Emerson likes best about the center, what has kept her there for nearly a decade, is its spirit, particularly "the spirit of the people, who have the opportunity to fulfill their dreams."

"These people are fun," she said. "They are happy. They greet and hug you. There is a real sense here of everybody helping one another to grow." ❖

Debra Turner-Emerson, above right, is the center's executive director. At left, Wendy Morris, manager of Sophie's Art Gallery, holds a coiled wire hanging made by one of the students and for sale at the gallery.



SWEEP: Women's work includes college in southwest Detroit



Donnie Barnes



Jacquelyn Jones-Dodson



Katrina Woodward

During thirty-two years as a resident of southwest Detroit and a community outreach worker for Holy Trinity, one of its parishes, Sister Annette Zipple has befriended families through multiple generations and gained an intimate knowledge of the area's problems, politics and gifts. She has established community programs, worked with numerous groups and agencies, and mentored college students doing field work for social work degrees.

Southwest Detroit has a high concentration of immigrants and the city's highest percentage of families living at or below the poverty level. Many residents are Latin Americans or African Americans striving for economic betterment, but lacking the education to attain it.

Though Sister Zipple recognized many needs, her deepest concern, reflecting her commitment to the vision of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, was to empower the women of the area by giving them access to a college degree. "I was so moved by the struggle of women to work, raise a family and maintain their dignity," she said.

About nine years ago, with the support of numerous community organizations, including Holy Trinity, and a promise of financial help from the Society's U.S. Province, Sister Zipple – known locally as Sister Annette – approached administrators at Madonna University in suburban Livonia, Michigan, with the seed of a plan.

"I was acquainted with the Felician Sisters, who run Madonna University, but I wanted to do outreach into another population," she said. She knew that if the women

*The graduates
"have strengthened
the fabric of this
entire community."*

– Sister Annette Zipple

of southwest Detroit were going to receive the benefit of higher education, they would not be able to go to Livonia; the classes would have to come to them.

The vision clicked with Madonna's future goals. "They told us if we would help recruit and tutor students and provide funding for ancillary services, such as child care, books and fees, they would send their professors into the city to teach," Sister Zipple said. "They asked us to find twelve students to start the program."

The program was given a name suggesting both women's work and a new start: SWEEP, as in "refresh, renew." The letters stand for Southwest Women's Educational Empowerment Project. Classes began with twenty-seven students in the spring semester of 1998. Today there are a hundred students, nearly all of them women, and last spring the program had its first graduation: ten women who had completed requirements for a bachelor's degree.

SWEEP grew rapidly as women learned that they could attend classes in their neighborhood, get federal and state grants for tuition, and get some help with other costs from the Religious of the Sacred Heart. Recruitment was done through advertisements, word of mouth, and prodding by advocates, including Sister Zipple. Classes have been held at various locations, most recently at a middle school.

"The women had low-paying jobs and no degree, and most realized that a degree was the way to make a living wage. So they would work all day, run home, get supper on the table, get their children to child care, and take classes from 6:30 to 9:30 at night." Sometimes mothers even brought their children, or their dinner, to class. "It was very family-like," said Marianna Vassallo, one of the recent graduates, in a telephone interview. "A lot of us came from our jobs and didn't have a chance to eat. So sometimes we'd



Bernada Bailey



Carmen Ramos



Carmensita Buentello

No photo was available for the tenth graduate, Marcella Paffhausen.



SWEEP student Socorro Magdeleno (center) and her three daughters enjoy a visit from Sister Zipple.



Kimberly Averett



Linda Harper



Marianna Vassallo

have a little potluck and we'd include the teacher. I live so close, I'd run home for butter, or whatever we needed, or to heat stuff up. It is an unusual, special, unique program. I know I'm very grateful for it."

Vassallo, 61, works as a licensed practical nurse at the Detroit Medical Center. Her degree is in social work. She hopes in a couple of years to begin work on a master's degree.

Julia Hernandez, who is still a student, said she had been attracted to the program by a flyer she picked up in the neighborhood. "I had been thinking of trying to go back to school, but I come from a small town in Mexico, so the big city, big schools, frightened me a little. Also, since English is my second language, I was afraid I might not understand. I read a little slower. I didn't want to set myself up for failing. When I saw the opportunity to take classes in my neighborhood, it felt more secure for me."

SWEEP offers bachelor's degrees in social work, child development and education. A favorite motto of supporters is, "Educate a woman and you educate an entire family."

Another graduate, Carmensita Buentello, said her new degree in social work resulted in a job at triple her previous salary just one month after graduation. She is working as a fetal alcohol prevention specialist for the Detroit health department.

Buentello, 39, a student in the program since 1998, has four children, between the ages of 5 and 17. Furthering her education had been a life's dream. "It became possible because the classes were so close to home. I commuted maybe a half mile. If my children needed me, I could get to them

right away," she said. "It was the most wonderful experience of my life."

In addition to offering degrees, SWEEP has been the impetus for a variety of other empowerment projects for people of the area. For example, a new interactive television facility will make it possible for people to get help with English and study skills. In partnership with a community college, associate degrees are on the horizon, two-year programs offering certification in various fields.

"It took the majority of our SWEEP graduates six to seven years to finish," Sister Zipple said. "For many, it's too long. The discipline of study and research, use of the computer, is brand new to a lot of the women. Though they struggle and manage, it's more of a burden than it needs to be."

Socorro Magdeleno is one of the SWEEP students who expects to benefit from the extra help with language. "I am taking only one course per semester, because my English is not so good," she said. Still, she is grateful to Sister Zipple for giving her encouragement. "She pushed me and pushed me. She always says, 'Come on Socorro. Go take classes. Do you need this or that?' She is like an angel for me. She is like my mom."

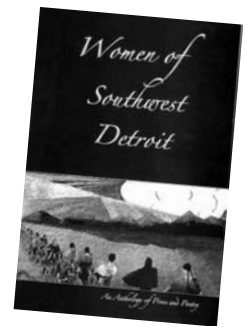
Another SWEEP-related project is a recently published book: *Women of Southwest Detroit, an Anthology of Prose and Poems*, containing the work of sixteen women, including Buentello and Hernandez. Proceeds will go to support SWEEP.

"There is big excitement about the graduates and about the book," said Sister Zipple, who, at age 81, continues to live in southwest Detroit. She meets regularly to share a meal with eight other Catholic sisters from five different religious congregations, and a lay woman who live nearby.

"I was able to get a small grant, maybe five years ago, and the money has been sitting here while the writing professors gathered work from the women and got it ready for publication. The women who submitted pieces have formed the Southwest Detroit Women's Literary Guild. They keep saying they feel empowered to do this now that they have their college education."

It is a direct application of St. Madeleine Sophie's own dream to educate the underserved.

"It was so exciting because we [the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Detroit] wanted to do something for the women of the area, to give them access to higher education, and here they were: ten women who have gained not only strength for themselves, but who have strengthened the fabric of this entire community." ❖



Going where the Spirit leads: to cyberprayer

By Dawn Stringfield

It was through Ann McElhatton, RSCJ, my spiritual director from 1997 until 2002, the year she died, that I was first introduced to the charism and spirituality of the Society of the Sacred Heart. I felt especially drawn to the Society's desire to integrate the contemplative and apostolic dimensions of the spiritual life. During my early adult years, while working as a consultant in business and technology, I felt a constant pull to withdraw and pray, usually alone. Although Ann always said it was a false dichotomy, it seemed there was a division between my spirituality and the rest of my life.

When I accepted the position of executive director of Lydia's House, a transitional housing and support services program for abused women and their children in St. Louis, my life seemed to be more integrated. With the chance to use my business and administrative skills to make a difference for these families, I felt I was where God wanted me to be. Yet I recognized even more clearly a need to withdraw and pray, and then to return, energized and renewed.

Equally critical, I have come to realize that I am not a loner in this world; I am called to be in community. It is in coming together with other people that I have learned compassion, humility, and a genuine appreciation for the gift of others and myself.

Three years ago, I deepened my connection to the Society by becoming a Sacred Heart Associate. Membership in this group has become my touchstone as I work to live out the Society's mission of discovering and making known the love of God in my daily life. I cherish our small community of associates in St. Louis, where once a month we come together to share our life's journeys, communal prayer and a simple meal. I am always fed physically, emotionally and spiritually at those times.

Perhaps as a result of these experiences, I have felt over the past year an even deeper longing for commitment, community and involvement. In particular, my prayer life had come to a place where I wanted to be able to pray weekly with a community committed to living the Society's spirituality.



Last spring, during my regular time of morning prayer, I thought of creating a virtual community of prayer. I knew from my experience with technology that the words "where two or three are gathered" did not have to mean in the same physical place. Participants could use e-mail as a way to connect people from around the world, recognizing that the Spirit knows nothing of the barriers of distance. I wondered if others linked to the Society might want to come together in cyberspace.

My idea was to send out reflections and related questions on Saturday to participants, who would come together on Sunday to pray and reflect on the readings and questions. The readings would be based on Scripture, on the writings of Saints Madeleine Sophie Barat and Philippine Duchesne, and on the works of contemporary writers. The themes would reflect the Society's spirituality and our call to love, peace, justice, and solidarity with the poor.

My initial contact was the listserv for Sacred Heart Associates and the RSCJ who serve as coordinators. Eight

associates and RSCJ responded to my invitation. Then my vision expanded. I found myself thinking that if we could connect in prayer around the country, why not to other parts of the world. I contacted Jane Maltby, RSCJ, whom I had met when the Society's Central Team visited the United States from Rome last year, and asked how I might be in touch with RSCJ and Sacred Heart Associates internationally. She suggested contacts in the provinces of England/Scotland and Australia/New Zealand. In addition, she proposed submitting the information to www.rscjinternational.org, the Society's then-new international web site.

Thanks to the support of Sheila Hammond, RSCJ, a member of the U.S. Provincial Team, and Lolin Menendez, RSCJ, who oversees the international web site, an announcement about the virtual community of prayer was posted in the spirituality section under "Resources."

The group's first time of prayer together was in mid-July. We were thirteen in all: associates, RSCJ and other interested persons from various parts of the United States and Australia. Many new people joined us during in the following weeks, and a couple of people left after determining that this type of prayer was not a good fit for them. By early October, the community had grown to thirty-five associates, RSCJ, and others, with representatives of Puerto Rico and Scotland added to the mix.

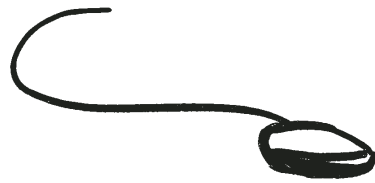
The format has remained consistent through the first twelve weeks. We open each time with this prayer:

O Holy God, may our minds be opened to Your truth and our hearts be opened to Your love. In all that we are and in all that we do, may we be Your Heart in the world – a Heart of justice and peace, a Heart of courage and compassion, a Heart of love. With our sisters and brothers around the world we pray, Amen.

Then come three or four readings, followed by questions for reflecting during the quiet time of prayer. Finally, there is a closing prayer that, most often, I compose with the hope of bringing together the images and intentions of the readings.

The readings relate to a theme in the lectionary for Sunday. After drawing from the lectionary, I look for quotes from a variety of other sources. These have included the Society's Constitutions, the writings of St. Madeleine Sophie or other Superiors General, or such contemporary spiritual writers as Joyce Rupp. In all cases, I do my best to remain open to what the Spirit wants to reveal.

Members of our virtual community are always invited to share. We have all benefited from the responses that



Whether I share an intention or hold unspoken prayers in my heart, I am connected.



have come. In addition I have heard about, and personally experienced, occasions when community members have used the reflections in other moments of faith-sharing or in other prayer groups to which they belong.

It is a remarkable gift to realize that men and women around the globe are coming together in this way. The process has strengthened my own spiritual life and my appreciation for the wisdom of the founders and leaders of the Society. There is a depth of understanding reflected in their words about faith, love, trust, compassion and call that resonates still today.

Meanwhile, as this virtual community of prayer has evolved, I have had the wonderful experience of praying with the U.S. Provincial Team, along with others at the Provincial House, who gather for daily morning prayer in a chapel on the third floor. Once a week I join them. Sometimes we sit in silence. Sometimes we read Scripture and share our intentions for prayer. Sometimes quiet music and communal readings weave around our silent prayer; at other times we bring songs and scarves and celebrate birthdays. Throughout summer and fall, our closing prayer has focused on topics related to the planning process underway in the U.S. Province.

Initially, when I joined the group, I relied on the hospitality of those present to make me feel welcome. Now I feel welcome as a sister in prayer. Whether I share an intention or hold unspoken prayers in my heart, I am connected. Whether I am exhausted and able to just breathe in the Spirit, or have been in emotional pain and am able only to weep, I am aware not only of those gathered in the chapel, but also of the larger community of which we are all a part. There is a connection with each person in the room, in the province, and in the Society, extending back to Sophie and Philippine.

I know that my commitment to be in prayer with others has deepened my relationship with God. I know, too, that the Spirit has been at work in my deep longing for something more, which led me to create the virtual community of prayer. The Spirit has given me the commitment and strength to prepare for the Sunday reflections. And the Spirit fills me with grace when I gather in community, whether virtually around the world or physically at the Provincial House.

For all of it, my heart is filled with joy and gratitude. ✚



Dawn Stringfield, a Sacred Heart Associate, is executive director of Lydia's House in St. Louis. Readers may request information on the virtual prayer community, or receive samples of previous prayer reflections, by e-mailing Dawn: drstringfield@fastmail.fm

Thérèse of Lisieux and the Sacred Heart

“Little Flower’s” spirituality rooted in the metaphor

By Mary Frohlich, RSCJ

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the French Carmelite who lived from 1873 to 1897, made few references in her writings to the Sacred Heart. As a result, it is often asserted that she had little personal attraction to this devotion. Yet, even if this were true, a study of Thérèse’s response to the story of the Sacred Heart would be important in view of how large a role it played in the public life of France during her era.

Throughout the nineteenth century the French nation was deeply split between those who favored the secularizing vision of the Revolution and those who regarded it as a direct attack upon God and Church. For the latter, the Sacred Heart was insignia and rallying cry. For these devout Catholics, the Sacred Heart evoked a heroic story of pure souls offering themselves in reparation for the blasphemies of the Revolution and its aftermath. This story was also strongly linked with older stories of heroism and martyrdom on behalf of the French nation, especially that of Joan of Arc. From childhood, Thérèse’s identity and sense of mission were shaped by these cultural stories and images.

Moreover, one of the first things I discovered in my research on this topic was that, despite the relatively small number of direct references to “Sacred Heart” in Thérèse’s writings, the image of the “heart” is in fact very central for her. A search of the concordance of her writings reveals that among nouns, the word “heart” (*coeur*) is second only to the word “Jesus” in number of uses. While the majority of these refer to the hearts of human beings, a significant number refer to the heart of Jesus or to the Divine Heart. The more I explored this, the more I became convinced that “heart” may be, far more than is commonly realized, a “root metaphor” and special key to Thérèse’s spirituality and theology.

Thérèse’s heart language

As in the tradition of Saints Francis de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal, for Thérèse the heart is the spiritual core and affective center of the human person. It is the locale of the human capacity for intimacy, of fidelity in relationship, of the most powerful memories and the most profound convictions. Its knowledge is more profound than language. The heart experiences ranges of rich and subtle feelings, from deep suffering to joyous expansion and oceanic peace. Yet the heart can also be small and hardened; it can be the locale of “bad faith” as well as good.

Above all, the heart is the place of relationship. People can enter with their hearts into one another. Heart-bonds formed by Jesus are stronger than blood. People can understand one another from the heart; two hearts can even beat as one. People can be near in the heart even when they are distant in body. Those one loves have a special power to move one’s heart. Thérèse writes of her heart being “pierced” by her father’s critical words, and later by his sufferings.



The heart is also the special and profound place of relationship with God. God holds the hearts of all his creatures; God wants each heart totally. Our calling is to love God with all our heart. Only God sees to the bottom of the heart; only God can fulfill the heart. God wants to rest in the heart. Jesus hides himself in the depth of the heart. Prayer itself is an *élan du coeur* – a movement of the heart. Thérèse wants to offer her whole heart, to give it totally to Jesus.

This is only a pale sampling of the hundreds of references to the human heart in Thérèse's writings. It suffices, however, to demonstrate that the primary meaning of "heart" for Thérèse is that it represents the core of personhood, capable of the deepest affectivity and intimacy. It is not surprising that she easily applied this interior and relational way of understanding the heart to Jesus's human heart, and to his relationship with her.

Mutual Belonging

In the short compass of this article we cannot explore all of Thérèse's references to the Sacred Heart, so we focus here only on the most significant ones. During what the critical edition of Thérèse's writings calls her "great year of the Sacred Heart" (1895), Thérèse twice referred to the beating of her own physical heart united with the infinite offering of Jesus. She also composed two poems (Poems 23 and 24) that meditated profoundly upon the Sacred Heart.

The first of these poems, "To the Sacred Heart of Jesus," begins with a meditation on Mary Magdalene's search for Jesus in the Garden. Thérèse wrote that when Jesus comes, "First He shows his Blessed Face, then a single word wells up from his Heart." Thérèse's meditation on the Sacred Heart is centered not on Calvary or Gethsemane, as was traditional, but on a woman's passionate search for her lost Beloved. Moreover, what flows forth from Jesus' Heart is not blood and water, but a word of intimate recognition and calling.

A few stanzas further on, she adds: "Even if I cannot see the radiance of your Face, and hear your sweet voice, I can, O my God, live from your grace – I can rest on your Sacred Heart."

In her second Sacred Heart poem as well, Thérèse wrote: "Rest in my heart, it is yours . . . I fall asleep on your Heart, it is mine." Typically for Thérèse, the heart is above all a place where two who love each other can rest together in total trust and mutual belonging.

A few months after composing her poems on the Sacred Heart, Thérèse entered the dark night of faith that obscured the last eighteen months of her life. In the midst of that night, she wrote a text that climaxes with her discovery that "the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was burning

with Love . . . in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love." Even as she boldly claimed her own identity with that Heart, she affirmed that "in order that Love be fully satisfied, it is necessary that it lower itself to nothingness, and transform this nothingness into fire."

In the months to come, as the ravages of tuberculosis took their toll and as the spiritual night crumbled the imaginative foundations of faith, Thérèse found herself indeed "lowered to nothingness," sitting at the table of sinners as one among equals.

Metaphorical Tension

I see several major insights that an exploration of Thérèse and the Sacred Heart can bring to the fore. First, it highlights the importance of what has recently been termed "story theology," which affirms that stories themselves are a foundational genre of theology. Thérèse did her most creative theological work as her own life-process interacted with and transformed the received stories – both sacred and secular – of her traditions.

From early on Thérèse had a personal attraction to two aspects of the public "story theology" of the heart. One was the basic Salesian tradition of the heart as the affective core of personhood and the central locus of intimate relationship. Human relationships, rich in depth and feeling and fidelity, were profoundly formative for her, and the language of the heart articulated this. The other aspect of the Sacred Heart complex that attracted Thérèse from childhood was the heroic story of France, threatened by evil forces yet saved by the willingness of pure souls to deliver themselves over to martyrdom for the sake of repairing the scourges of the age.

But just as the Church of her time had trouble integrating these two, so did Thérèse. Nonetheless, we can observe in her development a gradual discovery of the root of integration between the relational and the reparative thrusts of the Sacred Heart spirituality that permeated her milieu.

Stage One: As a girl of 13, Thérèse had a special experience of grace in relation to the flowing wounds of Jesus. She had a deep interior experience of his "thirst for souls," in which she was invited to participate. Not long thereafter, she participated in a group consecration to the Sacred Heart. At this stage, she was somewhat passively being initiated into the story of the Sacred Heart, both in its public and its mystical aspects.

Stage Two: When she entered Carmel in 1888 at age 15, Thérèse was more directly confronted by the pervasive use of language about the Sacred Heart. A personal crisis over the way this language was used by others came to a head in October 1890, at the time of the second centenary of the

continued



Sister Frohlich illustrated a talk last spring to retired Religious of the Sacred Heart at Kenwood with a poster portraying Saint Thérèse.

death of Margaret Mary. Thérèse stated explicitly that she had her own way of understanding the Sacred Heart, not as one offended by sin and awaiting compensation but rather as “Spouse.” Yet she meditated deeply on the words of a priest who described the wound in Jesus’s side as a “Holy Door” from which love flames out to consume all our faults. This text, focusing her attention on the biblically-based image of the pierced side of Jesus (John 19:34), may well have been the catalyst that initiated a reflective process that would culminate in the developments described below.

Stage Three: During 1895 Thérèse’s unique theological vision, creatively integrating the relational and the reparative aspects of the devotion, began to see the light of day. Its key elements included the conviction that it is because Jesus has given himself completely to her that she can give herself completely to him as “victim” to satisfy his thirst for souls. She and her Divine Spouse rest in one another, their hearts beating together at the origin of infinite waves of love. The theological insight that Thérèse embodied at this point in her

process was the lived awareness that the most intimate union with God is also the most profound reparative act. Just as the cross and the glory are one for Jesus in John’s gospel, so for Thérèse, giving herself as “victim” and being consumed in waves of divine tenderness are one.

Stage Four: Her retreat of September 1896 – which occurred in the midst of her “night of faith” – brought a breakthrough to yet another level. The Heart where she rested with her Spouse broke open into the Heart of the Church. She now knew that Love must “lower itself to nothingness, and transform this nothingness into fire.” Soon, deep in the night of the loss of all consolation, she would discover that the heart must break open even further; for she must learn to sit at the table with sinners as an equal. No longer does she have the satisfaction of experiencing herself as God’s special “victim” who can give herself on behalf of others – and, in doing so, can remain apart from them in some way. Instead, she knows a radical solidarity with the most miserable of sinners.

Source of unity

What Thérèse finally learned, then, is that union with the Heart of God is union with the heart of all, without exception. Only thus will God’s wounded creation be “repaired” and God’s “thirst” for love be allayed. The drama of the Sacred Heart is, finally, not a story of evil sinners and heroic victim-saints. It is, rather, a story of love as humble as the earth itself, letting go of all special claims in order simply to be with the people of the earth.

In the context of Thérèse’s own time, this culminating insight, if applied in the public forum, would have entailed a major revision of the “us-them,” “good-evil” drama that both Catholics and secularists were so invested in living out. It is an even more crucial theological insight for our present global and ecological age, which is so tragically caught up in innumerable similar “us-them” dramas. Indeed, Thérèse’s “story of a heart” invites us to live an equally radical journey. It remains for each of us to discover how this will change the story of our hearts and the story of our world. ✚

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