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During the Pandemic

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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,



Is the pandemic over? Or is recovery, re-emergence, and re-adjustment proving to be a process of its own? We made progressively more stringent adjustments beginning nearly a year and a half ago, as the health crisis suddenly became urgent, as numbers of infections and deaths mounted, as public messaging from political leaders competed with the warnings and directives of medical experts. We learned new medical vocabulary--from "the pandemic" we transitioned to "COVID-19." We watched the news, read the papers, received instructions from state governors, and from county health agencies. It didn't matter what faith we were, what color, what national origin, what age we were. We found store shelves empty of alcohol, hand-sanitizer and toilet paper. We now can measure a distance of six feet by eye, no need for a measuring tape. The six-foot distance footsteps are still posted on the floors of banks, grocery markets, malls, restaurants, and places of worship. We went into shut-down at the orders of our state governors. Even Pope Francis adopted closure of the Vatican to visitors.

We adopted the mantra of COVID-19 preventive actions: stay at home, wear a mask when you go out, stay at least six feet distant from another person, and wash your hands frequently. Other precautionary measures: Avoid being with groups of people inside a room. Stay at home to do your work remotely as much as you can. Employers, adjust. Don't go to school. Don't have graduation events. Don't take road trips to national parks or vacations to the beach or to ski resorts. Don't travel by plane. Only go to grocery stores, not to malls. Don't eat out. Don't take cruises. Don't schedule wedding events. Don't have anniversaries or funerals where groups gather in one place.

In the wake of these directives, we became experts at using Zoom on our computers, and our lives shifted to virtual contact with other people. Parents of school-age children and schoolteachers suffered from a series of crises--how to transition to learning at home in front of computer, and how to adjust teaching to remote contact with students. Whole populations of children, especially those belonging to ethnic minorities, were technically disadvantaged. Many rural areas lacked access to the internet, and families living below the poverty line did not have computers at home.

Mothers left the workplace to supervise their children. Parents lost jobs in restaurants and food service, manufacturing, theatres, malls, hotels, airlines, car maintenance, travel and vacation services, entertainment, small businesses and real estate. Many families fell into an economic dark hole, couldn't pay their rent or buy enough food to feed their children. Food pantries arose all over the country and tried to provide boxes of staples for lines of needy people which snaked around the block.

Colleges cancelled on-site classes and professors conducted courses remotely. Graduation events turned into "drive-by's" so that students could celebrate without gathering physically together.

Those of us in religious life felt some spiritual advantage in having once experienced the self-isolation, withdrawal and inward turning of our novitiate years. We knew what to do with our time. There was an overabundance of it. Those vowed members who lived outside convents or motherhouses couldn't physically enter places they ordinarily called home. Inside, members couldn't eat together; for safety's sake, the protocol for dining rooms was completely revamped to keep residents separated from each other. Testing that showed any degree of the virus meant that a Sister was put into quarantine for fourteen days, and had to remain in her room, with meals delivered. It seemed a kind of imprisonment.

It was completely unexpected that religious services, sacramental life, and prayer together would be so severely impacted by the shut-down. But bishops adopted the public orders to close places where large groups ordinarily gathered--because medical experts acknowledged that crowds of people assembled inside a building would create a "pandemic spreader." Dioceses and parishes, when they were technically ready, offered Zoom Masses for parishioners. Synagogues adopted remote High Holyday services.

The degree of the social separation was searing. We watched on TV the anguish of adult children pressing their hands to windows, unable to physically hug their elderly, lonely or sick parents in nursing homes. What were once residences of calm and care became sites where infection ran rampant and tragic death-counts mounted. The elderly were the most common targets, trapped in retirement residences where infections spread rapidly, and already weakened by their age and physical frailties, they died in distressing numbers.

Minority persons with underlying health conditions were also more vulnerable to infection and death, and health statistics were grim--African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans suffered a disproportionate death rate compared with the Caucasian and Asian population. Persons from minority populations who worked in "essential services" like meat packing plants, suffered high infection and death rates. There was sociological soul-

searching about the increased infection rate connected with ethnicity, poverty, lack of good paying jobs, lack of decent health care, lack of educational opportunity and neighborhood ghetto-izing.

Doctors and nurses ran short on protective equipment as the number of patients overwhelmed the capacity of critical care units. Some health-care workers used garbage can plastic liners as a layer of protection over their clothes. They worked double shifts, short of staff support. Any number lost their own lives in saving the lives of others. Early on, as the infection and death rate mounted, oxygen supplies and ventilators ran short, even in major cities, and exacerbated the sense of national crisis. Health care professionals in rural area hospitals were overwhelmed. The cry for assistance went out and nurses crossed state lines to help in hospitals far from home.

Meantime, the flood of immigrants seeking refuge in the U.S. grew, the numbers of unaccompanied minors increased, border patrol officers were overwhelmed, and facilities proved grossly inadequate. The detention and separation of children from their parents became a national scandal.

Environmentally, wildfires raged across the western U.S., adding another dimension of crisis, and proving that climate change was not an optional belief, but that the earth itself was literally burning up. Riots broke out and demonstrations erupted world-wide over the killing of an African American man by a white police officer; a revolt against racial discrimination ignited the country.

There was a national election for President, with Biden defeating one-term Trump, twice impeached. This generated major political change, like tectonic plates moving underneath the health crisis. The fight against the pandemic began to yield a victory, just as politicians and the public were waging a fight for truth against “alternative facts.” The passions of Q-Anon and right-wingers erupted in an insurrection at the Capitol, with flag-waving rioters storming the very building and halls where elected members of Congress deliberate national policy.

Then several pharmaceutical companies produced vaccines. We listened day by day to the news that this or that vaccine had proved effective in over 90% of recipients. Then the vaccines received FDA emergency approval. This proved that thousands and thousands of people we will never know, early on, had stepped up, taken the risk to serve as medical test subjects, received the vaccine, and endured multiple testings, to prove that the vaccines were safe. Then the rush of persons over 70 or 65 to get vaccinated. Then over 50, and now the 12–16-year-olds.

This review brings us to the theme of this issue of MAST Journal: “During the Pandemic.” These articles are a very small sample of reflections composed during the last 15 months--when the swirl of events we summarize as “the pandemic” was unfolding. The purpose of this issue is not political commentary. It’s more a hint at the various ways the Sisters of Mercy and their colleagues coped, and some of the wisdom they offer readers.

Julie Upton, R.S.M. in “Reflections on the Pandemic: What Have You Learned?” reviews her own experience of suddenly having to adapt her teaching to a technical mode. She proposes “mystagogy” as a term that means slowing down and reflecting on the mystery of what’s happening, along with “apausalypse” which means asking what you have uncovered during this “Great Pause.” She offers an analysis of this period through adapting the Phases of Disaster paradigm applied to COVID-19, and then a Pandemic Personal Growth Inventory which lays out five themes: relating to others, recognizing new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life.

Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M. has transposed a reflection she gave several times remotely in retreat settings, which was also posted on the Institute web-site, “Pentecost Amid the Pandemic.” She takes the image of the Upper Room in the New Testament and uses it as comparison to our experience of being shut in and later revitalized like the disciples of Jesus. In the Upper Room they celebrated the Last Supper, hid themselves after the crucifixion of Jesus, returned there after the resurrection and ascension, then experienced Pentecost which empowered them for mission. She asks what has been your Upper Room during the pandemic, and what fears, gifts and spiritual strength has been yours?

Pastor Julie Webb, a Mercy Associate, leads a Lutheran congregation in northern California. She delivered a sermon on Reformation Sunday, October 25, 2020, which addressed the experience and challenge of living through COVID-19. She talked about how hard change is, and how we, like the ancient Israelites, would rather return to our old ways than go forward. What does a return to “normal” mean? She proposes we reflect on what old familiar patterns to let go of--what racial inequalities and injustices, what economic givens, and what climate crises need to be addressed? We are called to be agents of reform, and promoters of change in the world around us.

Michelle Gorman, R.S.M., has an unusual ministry. She was appointed chaplain for the California State Senate which meets at the Capitol in Sacramento. The land on which the Capitol is built was originally purchased by the founder of the San Francisco Mercy mission, Mother Baptist Russell. The State later declared eminent domain over

it. In past years, *The MAST Journal* has published prayers Michelle composed for this secular setting. This last year her spiritual ministry has touched elected politicians whose responsibility is to set policies and write laws which respond to the daily needs of California citizens. Readers will appreciate her use of poetry allied with a prayer theme, an instinct of her Irish heritage.

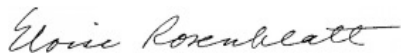
Janet Ruffing, R.S.M. addresses a common question people ask when they are moving and downsizing. In “To Shred or to Archive?” she encourages readers to take advantage of that time to recall shared ministerial history with colleagues, to forgive, but also to ask what could be the future of one’s personal legacy? Yes, some have an instinct for privacy. But for those of us who have lived through epochal change in church and society, we can ask, “Would this be helpful to someone else? Under what circumstances?” And “What have I done or been involved in that no one after me will ever know if I don’t leave an account of it?” She offers a helpful outline of the sorts of records the Heritage Center Archives in Belmont, North Carolina would gladly receive.

Edward J. Miller, Ph.D. is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at Gwynedd-Mercy University. His essay, “Encountering John Henry Newman” is a succinct summary of the life and work of recently (2019) canonized English scholar, preacher and poet John Henry Newman. He was at the forefront of the Oxford Movement in the 1830’s and 1840’s in which academics like himself were converting from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism--at the same time as Catherine McAuley was making new foundations in Ireland and England. He was made a Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII. The preservation of his legacy of letters, lectures, and books is a theological treasure. He wrote an autobiography of his intellectual and spiritual evolution--*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. He is well known for the lectures and addresses in Dublin which became *The Idea of a University*.

Mary Benignus Doherty, R.S.M. was the archivist-author who composed *The First Hundred Years of the Manchester Sisters of Mercy, 1858-1958*, published as a type-script volume in 1968. The excerpt produced here is taken from pages 174-177 and is titled for present readers as “Sisters of Mercy and the Spanish Flu of 1918.” The urgencies of the “Spanish flu” after WW I were met directly by Sisters of Mercy. Few were professionally trained nurses. They simply went where needed, especially to tend the sick poor in their homes, or in the Oak Hill Pest House where the poor were sent to die because they couldn’t afford better care. This excerpt is lightened by humor and the voice a delightful narrator. Mary Benignus relied on annals and records composed by her predecessors in Manchester. As she says in the Author’s Note, “Therefore, as we look to the future, let us learn from the past. Its value is immeasurable.”

As we come out of this pandemic, we offer this volume as a spiritual resource to our readers. Be well and thrive in spirit, mind, body and ministry.

Yours,



Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.
Editor, *The MAST Journal*

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Reflection on the Pandemic: Phases of Disaster Recovery

Julie Upton, R.S.M.

We had just returned from a refreshing spring break on March 9, 2020, when it was announced that in light of the growing pandemic, the university would experiment with using remote instruction for two weeks. Administration wanted to assess the situation in case it would be necessary to resort to remote learning for a longer period of time. However, the crisis was moving so quickly that there was no time to experiment, and we instantly moved to remote learning later that day-- never to return to the classroom, although we did not know that at the time.

At least I had my 50 undergraduates with me in person the day of the announcement. Because I had taught that course, Christian Worship and Sacraments, online previously, I was able to explain and demonstrate how the course would proceed. Students' anxiety was high, but I remained calm and supportive. The thought that I might not see them again in person never entered my head.

While in the classroom it appears as though students are on a level playing field, once we moved to remote learning, the inequities quickly surfaced. Students were logging in from their kitchen tables with boisterous siblings clamoring for attention in the background. Internet connections were of varying qualities. Expectations shifted almost daily. Presentations that were to be given in class now had to be re-designed for remote access. Although our course proceeded asynchronously, we met occasionally on Zoom just to check in and reflect on our experiences.

The other course I was assigned to teach, Religion and the Fine Arts, was already online so the only accommodation needed for that course was for me to be more understanding. Having one course online is very different from having all

one's courses suddenly become remote. Professors with limited or no experience of teaching online had a variety of ways to connect with the students, supported by a series of programs through the university's Center for Teaching and Learning. The staff there drew on other professors' experiences who were willing to share whatever expertise they could with others. The array of resources available was truly amazing.

When a colleague needed to go on medical leave suddenly, I agreed to take on his graduate course as well. I had also taught that course before, both online and face-to-face, which helped me, but not the graduate students. Initially, I needed to respond to their extreme disappointment

that the beloved professor they were expecting was replaced two weeks into the semester. Three of the students had been in my courses in previous semesters and tried to keep the others calm. Going remote, however, changed the dynamics even more. Only one of those former students had been in one of

my online courses, and several lacked even basic computer literacy. The age gap and the culture gap became chasms.

We all survived the year, we learned, we struggled, and most of us thrived. During the summer, faculty worked hard adapting courses to a new online platform to help standardize the student experience. Since I had retired from the faculty in June, I used the summer to adjust to a new ministry as writer and consultant.

One year later there have been many commemorations of the anniversary taking place in a variety of platforms: memorials for those who died; support for those long-haulers still suffering from after-effects of the disease; compassion for

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those who suffered such great losses—family, friends, jobs, and dreams. The tone of the remembrances sometimes felt too celebratory for the actual time. While the vaccines have arrived and are being administered broadly, the health inequities remain as does the virus. People are exhausted by this year-long experience, and the temptation to throw off the shackles of lockdown is both alluring and dangerous.

In a passage that “points to the human propensity for ignorance, self-delusion and inattention to the important things,”¹ T. S. Eliot reminds us “we had the experience,” but might have “missed the meaning.”²

Mystagogy and Mystery of This Year

When the rites of Christian Initiation were revised in the 1970s, I feared two things: that translators would use a more relevant word than mystagogy; and that the last stage in the process would be completely eclipsed. While we survived the first hurdle and the word “mystagogy” remains in our texts if not in our hearts, I am not so sure that we yet understand the spiritual significance of the last stage, or the importance of engaging in the practice more systematically in other areas of our lives. Until recently mystagogy has seemed far beyond the pale of our cultural horizon and moving even farther away at a lightening pace.

In the third millennium, we had come to expect easy answers and quick solutions to questions and problems we barely had time to frame. Technology moves at such a numbing pace, that before we can even master the latest piece of electronic equipment it is obsolete. Often it seems that people do not want to be engaged by mystery but entertained in spite of it. There are life experiences, however, that plunge us into mystery with a suddenness that we

are unable to escape. Once amiable rivers turn tyrant. The child next door is abducted and brutally murdered. Fires burn out of control swallowing up not only homes and lives, but nature’s protective sheathing as well. A virus of unknown origin spreads to pandemic proportion in what seems like overnight. We stand speechless. Such are the times for mystagogy.

In 1929 someone at The Coca Cola Company came up with the advertising slogan “... the pause that refreshes.” Although the slogan was only in active use by the company for three decades, it remains associated with the brand, and has found its way into the cultural vocabulary. How can a pause for mystagogy refresh us?

“Apausalypse”

A sobering multimedia presentation appeared in the Summer 2020 issue of *Emergence Magazine*, an online publication featuring innovative stories connecting ecology, culture and

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spirituality.³ “Apausalypse” begins with the observation with which most of us can relate, that “there is a turbulence in the air . . .” involving dancers, musicians and philosophers from across Iceland. It notes that “we are going through the greatest social experiment in human history” and asks, “Are we just going to go back like nothing happened? Or are we going to see and use the opportunity of having found the pause button?” It poses a key question: “What is the meaning of this great stop, the

apausalypse?”⁴

Using that play on words, (apocalypse, which means “to uncover something”) what have you personally uncovered during this Great Pause? As a country we have uncovered violence, racism, and health inequities that have been seething beneath the surface of our everyday lives. What we will do with that realization has yet to be seen.

As a theologian, however, my growing list of discoveries includes the importance of liturgy, ritual and family.

Liturgy is Life

Did you have any idea when the United States followed many other countries into lockdown-mode in March 2020 that we would still be relatively sequestered a year later? I certainly didn't. As a country we needed to be prepared for the long haul, but our leadership did just the opposite with the president declaring he wanted everyone back in church for Easter Sunday. The psalmist asks plaintively, "How can we sing the song of the Lord in an alien land?" (Ps. 137:4). How could we celebrate the Sacred Triduum with all the churches closed? Yet the way was shown. Technology made way for many possibilities.

Initially some priests livestreamed daily Mass from private rectory chapels—an abrupt return of the *missa privata*. For a time besides the priest presiding, some parishes involved a musician and lector to livestream Sunday Eucharist to an empty church. When churches began to open with reduced capacity, many parishes continued to livestream services for those who remained at home. In time all these methods should be assessed by parishioners and pastoral staff.

Since 1987 I have been a regular visitor to Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham, Massachusetts, which is about 250 miles from where I live. Not only have I made an annual directed retreat there, but I used to spend a weekend there every few months for a "tune up," as Br. Daniel called it. In mid-March 2020 the Abbey closed to all visitors, but within that week the community of 10 monks began streaming their daily Mass at noon each weekday and Sunday Mass at 9:30 a.m., their usual times.

Mass one year later remains LIVE on the Abbey's Facebook page. At first one of the monks used his iPhone for this, but in time donors came forward and the community was able to invest in more professional equipment. This has been such a blessing for me and for the 35 or so others who gather online each day for Eucharist. Although we are not able to consume the consecrated host physically, we are nonetheless nourished deeply by the Word and words, and the presence of others. Some I know personally, but most just virtually. We gather together from Hawaii, several New England states, Ireland and England, most with some prior experience of life at the Abbey. Although I always participate in liturgy live, Mass is recorded and remains on the Abbey's Facebook page. By the end of a weekday, it has often had more than 300 views and Sunday mass this week had 469 views by 3 p.m.

To ensure I wouldn't be elevating my personal experience to the universal, I invited

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some of the members of that virtual community to engage in theological reflection with me, describing their experience—their setting, prior experience of daily mass, and what they have gained from the livestreamed Eucharist. Most of us have been sitting in front of our laptops or iPads, some make comments on the page—greeting each other, making observations on the feast, prayers or homily, adding intentions to the universal prayer, making the usual responses, exchanging peace and

the like. While we all miss receiving Holy Communion, we share having discovered a deeper appreciation for the liturgy as a whole, and we each found it easier to be attentive in the virtual world. Some even found themselves taking notes on the homilies. On Sundays the monks distribute Holy Communion in the parking lot outside the

Abbey church for 30 minutes or so shortly after Mass for those who live in the area. We are not merely “watching,” but actively singing and praying with and for each other and our brothers in the monastic community.

Quickly I saw that the livestreaming gave me a perspective I never had before—literally standing at that altar, when I would usually be tucked in a corner behind the stalls. For me this new vantage point raised participation to a higher level. I was riveted! I will admit that feeling has waned some days, but it also sent me back to reading Odo Casel and Teilhard de Chardin, wishing that I could have a conversation with them both.⁵ They both get me to thinking more deeply about presence and re-discovering the Mystery that is our life in Christ—given not just for us, but for the life of the world.

We know that Liturgy is all about presence. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* speaks of its many dimensions:

Christ is always present in His Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister . . . but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a person baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the church. He is present, lastly when the Church prays and sings.... [SC § 7]

But presence is dynamic, not static. You have probably had the experience of being present to something but having your mind somewhere else completely. It happens often with students.

Odo Casel died in 1948 and Teilhard de Chardin in 1955. What would their reaction be to virtual presence? In 1923 Teilhard wrote “The

Mass on the World,” which was published in 1961 as the first chapter in his *Hymn of the Universe*. It is a beautiful meditation, celebrating Eucharist ON the world. He began, “Since once again, Lord, I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself ... and will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and sufferings of the world.”⁶ He might help me ponder this question, “Can virtual presence be real?”

Our sense of liturgy has been challenged as never before. Through the blessing of advances in technology and the skills we continue to hone in using them, we have found ways to pray together and support each other. It is important for all of us to mine those experiences we have had personally and to invite others to do so as well first of all by listening to their stories. “And how are YOU doing?” is a good place to begin.

Ritual to Hold and Heal

More than forty years ago Paul Ricoeur noted that we live in an “age of forgetting the signs of the sacred.” His response to the “forgetting” was not to abandon the old symbols and search for new ones, but rather to work toward what he called a “second naivete” by reinterpreting the symbols—a “hermeneutical circle” that renders “old symbols newly accessible—without sacrificing either the symbol’s integrity or the believer’s modernity.”⁷ His challenge still lies before us.

Defined as a performance intended to amuse or divert, entertainment is the exact opposite of ritual prayer, which is intended to focus and redirect us. No wonder there is so much personal disillusionment with the liturgy. It puts too many demands on us in a world which increasingly

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requires less and less. We expect up-beat music, relevant homilies and a service that makes us feel good.

Who has room for God?

Who comes to prayer with an emptiness that only God can fill?

On March 27, 2020, Pope Francis gave us a fine example of that kind of prayer.⁸ On a rainy night, he addressed the city and the world in an empty St. Peter's Square. After proclaiming the story of Jesus calming the storm from the Gospel of Mark 4: 35-41, Pope Francis began his *Urbi et Orbi* address:

For weeks now it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice it in people's gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost. Like the disciples in the Gospel, we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm. We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other.⁹

The burning desire and deep need for ritual to hold and heal has not dissipated. We might have missed the moment back then, but we have not yet missed the only opportunity. The stage is set. The need is genuine. If we do not step into the void, someone or something else will. Here in the U.S.A., we see that need to ritualize in roadside shrines when someone has died or in writing messages on a coffin.¹⁰ Although we know the liturgy is the outstanding means by which we express faith, it is not the only one. The home, the domestic church, is actually where faith is first

nurtured—learning to say night prayers; saying grace before meals; lighting the advent wreath. We should be reminding people often of the importance of the domestic church.

One of my colleague's responses to the closure of churches was to gather for Sunday worship as a family. Incorporating music into their celebration, together they proclaimed and reflected on the readings of the day. Keeping in mind all the needs of the world's people and the earth itself, together they offered the universal

prayer. Remembering the meal Jesus shared with his apostles that last night, together they broke bread and prayed for a safer, healthier world. They found themselves nourished more by liturgy with the domestic church than what they experienced in their local parish, and continue their weekly celebrations at home even when local parishes began to reopen with 25% capacity. They purchased copies of the Holy Week Liturgy to celebrate the Triduum together at home. In

time other accounts of how the domestic church celebrated during the pandemic and what they learned from the experience will likely emerge.

The most difficult part of these months for people has been the absence of our familiar “go to” places for comfort and support—churches, libraries, theaters, and especially the embrace of others. What used to be simple aspects of daily life, such as grocery shopping, became, overnight, dangerous ventures into an infectious swarm where too many were buying up and hoarding essentials like toilet tissue and hand sanitizer.

For those sequestered in senior-care homes where even the routines of communal meals or leaving one's room have been disrupted, the pastoral needs are even greater. Many of those who have recovered from COVID-19 are

The most difficult part of these months for people has been the absence of our familiar “go to” places for comfort and support—churches, libraries, theaters, and especially the embrace of others.

experiencing a mysterious array of after-effects. Those who lost loved ones during the pandemic might be laden with guilt as an aftereffect—because they weren't able to comfort their loved one physically and too many people died alone. I do not believe that anyone dies alone, even if it appears to be so. I firmly believe that there is a presence—Jesus? A loved one? Our guardian angel? Sorry, I don't have that answer, but I have heard and seen this happen—this mystery of death become life as one crosses over from this world to the next.

Family Ties

My immediate family stretches all across the United States. My sister and I live in New York while her two sons and their families live in California. Although there had always been occasional FaceTime calls among us, during lockdown we began to have Zoom visits every few weeks with everyone on the call. It was wonderful to spend an hour or so together simply sharing ordinary life together using technology. We were never before able to all just sit together and chat for an hour, children included. When one of my nephews married in June 2020, Zoom was the only way any of the rest of us could attend. We also managed to be present in a more permanent way by recording videos with each of us (children included) talking directly to the bride and groom, wishing them the best. These were pieced together with music, poetry, and art into a treasured heirloom. The sorrow of not being there in person dissipated in discovering a different, more lasting mode of presence.

One of my first cousins rediscovered me through one of those DNA kits. We had not been connected in many years primarily because we live at a great distance. She suggested we invite all the other first cousins to a Zoom session. Our four mothers were sisters, and we are their seven daughters stretched out across the country from New York to Georgia to Colorado and California.

Although we had individual relationships with each other, some closer than others, we had never all been together in one place. The age range among us is probably no more than a dozen years. That one-time event quickly morphed into a monthly gathering. Surprisingly to date we have focused more on our mothers' lives than on our own, and calculated that the last time our mothers were together was probably in 1969 when they all flew to Denver to attend their teen-age nephew's funeral, and twenty years before the first of them died. There is so much more to learn about our mothers, each other, and ourselves that these monthly gatherings might continue in perpetuity.

The irony is that the pandemic which separated us from our closest neighbors also drew us together in ways we could not have imagined. Although I am always searching for the positive in events, not everyone digs for the gold in such experiences, or looks for the silver lining. Michelle Goldberg, a *New York Times* columnist, recently confessed that she

...handled this past pandemic year worse than most people I know. Emotionally, I more or less fell apart. Unlike my friends and acquaintances, I developed no new domestic skills or hobbies. If there were silver linings, I was too mired in hysterical grief for my old life to appreciate them. Knowing how little I'd lost compared to others didn't lessen my misery, it just added to a slimy coating of shame to it.¹¹

Have you been "too mired in hysterical grief for your old life" or have you come to see the blessings that lie beneath that grief? As restrictions begin to ease, what learnings do you want to carry into your life beyond this pandemic?

Beyond the Pandemic

Public health experts tell us that we will be a long time recovering from this trauma. The chart [Fig 1] from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration¹² will give you some idea of our common journey.¹³ What

makes these times particularly difficult is that we are all experiencing this simultaneously, granted some to a greater degree than others. It is important for each of us, particularly those entrusted with the care of others, to acknowledge what we are feeling and where we might be on the continuum. Journaling about it or using another creative means of expression helps us tap into our own feelings so as not to muddy the waters when we go to support others. After reading and reflecting on the description of these phases, you might want to re-draw this graph to describe better your own experience.

In applying the Phases of Disaster paradigm to the COVID-19 Pandemic, I write from the United States' perspective. Although the U.S. has only 5% of the world's population, at this writing it has suffered 25% of the world's deaths from COVID-19.¹⁴ The severity of the disaster, of course, varies from state to state and the resources available, both personal and communal.

Phase 1, the pre-disaster phase, is characterized by fear and uncertainty. Now I see that for me this phase encompassed the early weeks of 2020 as I watched the evening news with reports of the then horrifying death toll in Italy spreading quickly to other countries.

Phase 2, the impact phase, is characterized by a range of intense emotional reactions. Although not as sudden as an earthquake, for me this phase of the pandemic struck suddenly when the university and businesses shut down and the

community went into lockdown. The intensity here varied widely depending on where one lived. Daily life during lockdown in our spacious convent in the country was not as intense as for those living alone in small apartments in the city's high-rise buildings.

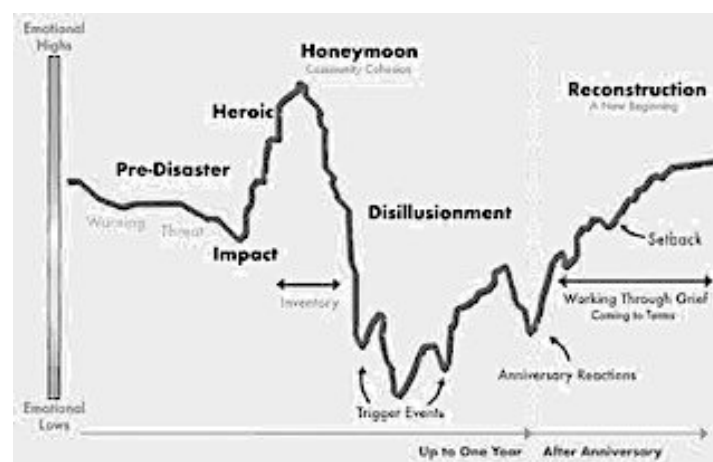
Phase 3, the heroic phase, is characterized by a high level of activity with a low level of productivity. As the youngest and ablest, I took on the responsibility for doing the grocery shopping for us and others without the same freedom of movement. We did a good deal of ordering online, and friends leaned on the support of Instacart, Moink, and other food delivery services.

Phase 4, the honeymoon phase, is just characterized by a dramatic shift in emotion. Disaster assistance is readily available and community bonding occurs, and there is an air of optimism that things will begin to return to normal soon. In our case it probably began once we saw the promise of vaccines turn to reality. We begin to think about travel again and visiting with family.

Phase 5, the disillusionment phase, is when reality strikes. Communities and individuals realize the limits of disaster assistance and the inequities that still exist. Surges in infections rise again and again in various parts of the country dragging us down into what feels like quicksand.

Phase 6, the reconstruction phase, is characterized by an overall feeling of recovery.

[Fig 1]



Individuals and communities begin to assume responsibility for rebuilding their lives, and people adjust to a new “normal” while continuing to grieve losses. Are we there yet? Are you?

Personal Growth Inventory

Since 1997 the Pioneer Network has been advocating for changing the culture of aging from a medical institutional model to a person-centered model with person-directed living.¹⁵ In a recent online symposium focused on exploring lessons

learned during the pandemic, Dr. Susan Wehry not only shared lessons learned but also looked beyond the crisis to discuss resilience. Although no one has been untouched by this pandemic experience, resilience-ranges vary widely as do our personal experiences of the pandemic. Usually, one thinks of resilience as the ability to “bounce back” from difficult experiences, but it can also involve significant personal growth. Being resilient does not mean that a person will not experience distress, but because it involves

(Post) Pandemic Personal Growth Inventory

Possible Areas of Growth and Change	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life.						
2. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.						
3. I developed new interests.						
4. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.						
5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.						
6. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.						
7. I established a new path for my life.						
8. I have a greater sense of closeness with others.						
9. I am more willing to express my emotions.						
10. I know better that I can handle difficulties.						
11. I am able to do better things with my life.						
12. I am better able to accept the way things work out.						
13. I can better appreciate each day.						
14. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.						
15. I have more compassion for others.						
16. I put more effort into my relationships.						
17. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.						
18. I have a stronger religious faith.						
19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.						
20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.						
21. I better accept needing others.						

L. G. Calhoun and R. G. Tedeschi

0 = I did not experience this change as a result of this crisis... 5 = I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of this crisis*

[Table 1]

behaviors, thoughts, and actions anyone can develop, it is possible to increase one's capacity for resilience. These strategies include building connections; fostering wellness; finding purpose; and enhancing healthy thoughts.¹⁶

Wehry shared a "(Post) Pandemic Personal Growth Inventory," [Table 1] based on the work of L. G. Calhoun and R. G. Tedeschi.¹⁷ Their instrument, a 21-item scale, has five sub-scales: relating to others; new possibilities; personal strength; spiritual change; and appreciation of life. Each factor is linked to one of the questions in the inventory.¹⁸ The damaging sequelae of trauma [PTSD] have been thoroughly studied and discussed, which makes the more positive PTGI developed by Calhoun and Tedeschi all the more valuable. For our purposes, the inventory can be a valuable source for journaling, self-reflection, or sharing with others.

In his March 2020 *Urbi et Orbis* talk, mentioned earlier, Pope Francis reminded us that embracing the cross "means finding the courage to embrace all the hardships of the present time, abandoning for a moment our eagerness for power and possessions in order to make room for the creativity that only the Spirit is capable of inspiring."¹⁹ Let us pray for one another, that we embrace the creativity the Spirit is breathing into our world at this time. ♦

Endnotes

¹ Jane Dawson, "Lifelong Learning and T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*," Paper presented at SCUTREA [Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults] July 2001 <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00002444.htm#:~:text='We%20had%20the%20experience%20but,i nattention%20to%20the%20important%20things.&text=You%20must%20go%20by%20a%20way%20which %20is%20the%20way%20of%20ignorance.>

² T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1971), 39.

³ <https://emergencemagazine.org/>

⁴ "Apausalyse: Dispatch from Iceland," *Emergence Magazine* (2020)

<https://emergencemagazine.org/story/apausalyse-dispatch-from-iceland/>. Accessed 05 October 2020.

⁵ Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christ Made Present: Selected Texts for the Christian Year* (Petersham, MA: St Bede's Publications, 1999).

⁶ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "Mass on the World," in *Hymn of the Universe* (New York: HarperCollins, 1969).

⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "The Symbol: Food for Thought," *Philosophy Today* 4:3-4 (1960): 196-207; here 203.

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⁹ Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* Address, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/urbi-et-orbi-pope-coronavirus-prayer-blessing.html>.

¹⁰ See Lizette Larson-Miller, "Holy Ground: Roadside Shrines and Sacred Space," *America* 192 (2005) 11.

¹¹ Michelle Goldberg, "The Johnson & Johnson Shot Was My Ticket Out of Hell," *The New York Times* (March 22, 2021), Section A, p. 22.

¹² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/recovering-disasters/phases-disaster>. Adapted from Zunin & Myers as cited in D. J. DeWolfe, *Training Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters* (2nd ed., HHS Publication No. ADM 90-538). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, 2000).

¹³ Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christ Made Present: Selected Texts for the Christian Year* (Petersham, MA: St Bede's Publications, 1999).

¹⁴ Our World in Data (<http://ourworldindata.org>) is an open access and open-source website with 3132 charts across 297 subjects updated daily.

¹⁵ See <https://www.pioneernetwork.net/about-us/overview/>

¹⁶ "Building Your Resilience," *American Psychological Association* (2012) <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>

¹⁷ R. G. Tedeschi and L. G. Calhoun, "The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the Positive Legacy of Trauma," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 9 (1996) 455-471.

¹⁸ <https://www.careinnovations.org/wp-content/uploads/Post-Traumatic-Growth-Inventory.pdf>

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* Address.

Pentecost Amid the Pandemic

Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M.

All of us have experienced the fear, isolation and pain of the months of living through the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of that reality, I hold out for you the significance of the “Upper Room” (Acts 2:1-12) in the lives of all followers of Jesus. Although there is not a great deal known about the upper room, some generally accepted aspects of what we know include:

- It is the room where the Last Supper took place. It held treasured memories of Jesus and was where the apostles returned in fear after Jesus’s arrest, locking the doors and hiding.
- On Easter, with the doors still firmly locked “for fear of the Jews,” Jesus came to the apostles in the upper room with his message of “Peace! Do not be afraid.”
- Even forty days later, after Jesus’s Ascension, the apostles went back to the upper room.
- And, another ten days later, we read in the first reading for Pentecost from Acts of the Apostles (2:1-11) that the room of isolation and fear exploded with wind and fire as the disciples burst forth in the Spirit to witness fearlessly and joyously to the grace of God within them. Everyone who heard the disciples speak understood what they were saying, no matter what their own native language was, or what province they came from.

I can’t help but draw the parallel to our experience of the last months of isolation due to the pandemic. What has been your Upper Room in all this? The disciples entered

their self-imposed quarantine with fear, loss and confusion. How have you spent your time during this pandemic? Have you spent any time allowing the Spirit to remind you of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit? There is still time. How do you want to be during this time? Why not start with this very day – Pentecost?

If we choose to live in the Spirit, what choices might we need to make? Regardless of how we entered into the pandemic, how do we want to leave this time of restriction? The gifts of the Holy Spirit are important for us because they help us to:

- Make **wise** decisions about important matters
- **Understand** the real meaning of life
- **Advise** and **help** others to make the right decisions
- Be **strong** to uphold and do what is right and to condemn and avoid what is wrong.
- To **know** the teaching of God and our true destiny
- To give **true worship** and praise to God
- To **fear offending** God who is our loving father.

Regardless of
how we entered
into the
pandemic, how
do we want to
leave this time of
restriction?

In addition to these Gifts, we will know when we are living from the Fruits of the Holy Spirit when we are loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, generous, gentle, faithful, modest – and when we exercise self-control and are chaste and pure. Conversely, someone who is not living according to the Holy Spirit manifests a different quality of life-- through lewd conduct, impurity, idolatry (putting someone or something in God’s place), hostility or violence, fighting or bickering, jealousy, rage, selfishness,

factions, dissention, envy, drunkenness and orgies. Paul distinguishes the “works of the flesh” from the “fruits of the Spirit” in Galatians (5:19-25). Which list best describes you?

The disciples of Jesus burst forth from the Upper Room on fire with the Spirit’s light and truth. We can each reflect on this time when we felt restricted and concealed in our own Upper Room. Now that we think about this as an Upper Room what we may not have realized otherwise. What happened because we allowed the power of Jesus’s resurrection and the action of the Spirit to work in our lives? How did you enter the time of this pandemic? Did you experience fear, confusion, loss? How have you left your Upper Room, or how will you leave it?

If we are authentic, we must admit that living through this is hard. There is bad news in abundance. How has all of this affected us? If you experienced fear, of what were you afraid? Was the fear realistic? Did you experience sadness? How did you deal with it? There is certainly much to grieve. What have been your coping mechanisms? What helpful choices have you made? Like the disciples, have you turned to prayer? Talking with friends, adjusting medications, getting professional help? And yet, each of us realizes that we are blessed in so many ways. We have health, safety, and more than basic needs. For what are we grateful?

There is not one of us who does not know and love someone who has died during this pandemic. Each of us experiences loss and grief in different ways. I am indebted to Lutheran minister, Granger Westberg, for insights from his classic book *Good Grief*, first published in 1962. Pastor Westberg notes that grief is our response to the loss of something or someone we love. He notes that faith can play a major role in grief of any kind. Those blessed with strong faith still grieve, but not without hope. People who have been able

to face grief, secure in the knowledge that God still cares about them count grief as one of the great deepening experiences of life. Westberg outlines some common aspects of grief. They are:

- Shock--expressed in “I can’t believe this is happening.”
- Emotion – waves that one must experience, whether alone or with friends or loved ones.
- Loneliness and depression-- these are very normal.
- Physical symptoms.
- Panic – often expressed in an inability to focus.
- Guilt – asking “What could I have done?”
- Anger – often experienced because we humans look for someone to blame.
- Resistance to return to the “before.”
- We ask, “What will the new normal be like?”

In the midst of all of these feelings and questions, each of us needs to struggle to adjust to our new reality and to focus on hope in the promises of our God.

How will you leave this strange, unsettling time? The disciples left their Upper Room filled with the Holy Spirit! What would it look like if we lived, even during this time of confinement, according to the gifts and fruits of the Spirit bestowed on us at baptism? The gifts of the Holy Spirit, found first in Isaiah (11:1-3), incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, and then offered to each of us as “essential in our following of Christ.”

We might reflect on the following questions:

- Which of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit do I need most during this time in my life?
Ask the Spirit to grace you with more of that Gift.

- Which of the Gifts of the Spirit is evident in me as I deal with the challenges of my present reality?
- Reflect on the list of the Fruits of the Spirit. Which of these Fruits are evident in my daily living during this pandemic?
- How might I make these Gifts and Fruits more operative in my present circumstances?
- Where do I see the Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit at work in the lives of others during this time? What effect do these persons and actions have on me? ♦



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Chaplain's Prayers for the Opening of the California Senate During Pandemic Sessions

Michelle Gorman, R.S.M.

2020- 3- 16 Senate Prayer

While we can't celebrate St. Patrick this year with our usual festivities, we pray today for his intercession to help us be people of hope as we navigate the challenges of the coronavirus. May we find consolation in this traditional Irish prayer, (loosely) translated from the Gaelic (*Ag Chriost an Siol*):

God of all mystery,
Yours is the seed,
Yours is the harvest:
Gather us one day into your granary.

God, as vast as the ocean,
Yours are the waves,
Yours are the fishes:
Gather us up into your entwining nets.
From birth to age,
and from age to death:
Cradle us in your great and loving arms.

From death to the end,
not end, but new life:
In your presence may we reside- eternally.

We ask you, Patrick, to pray for us, especially our health care professionals, first responders, and our legislative leaders throughout California and the world- may all be well. Amen.

(Ag Chriost an Siol can be found on You Tube.)

2020- 6- 11 Senate Prayer (Read by Senator Bradford)

Gracious God of mercy and compassion, we come before you this day in sorrow and humility as we once again recall our failure to live up to our promises of liberty and justice for all:

Help us seek out and acknowledge the reasons for our slow progress in dismantling systemic and institutional racism.

Teach us to face our fears, resistance, pride, shame- whatever conscious or unconscious motives hold us back from valuing an anti-racist, intercultural society.

Guide our civic and religious decisions to uphold and promote the rights of all persons, especially those experiencing marginalization, racism, bigotry, and prejudice.

Continue to remind us that diversity is the hallmark of your creation, the manifestation of your presence, in myriad sparks of your divine life on earth. We ask this in your name, Amen.

2020-6-18 Senate Prayer (Read by Senator Monning)

Gracious and loving God, as African Americans celebrate Juneteenth tomorrow, we give thanks for their hope, their perseverance, and their contributions to the advancement of society. May we remember and act on the words of civil rights leader, Howard Thurman. He says:

*Look well to the growing edge!
All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born.
The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth
Against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit.
Such is the growing edge!
This is the basis of hope in moments of despair,
The incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and people have lost their reason,
The source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten to ash.
Look well to the growing edge!*

Loving God, may we not close our eyes to the growing edges in our own way of life. May we actively engage in dismantling the systems of injustice that prevent all of us from living in truth and integrity. Amen.

2020-6-28 Senate Prayer (Read by Senator Portantino)

At the beginning of the play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry uses Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem" as an epigraph:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes, "Harlem," *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, Harold Ober Associates, Inc., 2002.

God of mercy and compassion, in the midst of too many broken and deferred dreams, we ask for the grace and courage to face the injustices of our time with integrity of word and deed, for the sake of the common good and the future of our society. We ask this in your name, Amen.

2020- 7- 27 Senate Prayer

Gracious God,

As the late congressman John Lewis lies in state at the U.S. Capitol, we remember how he dedicated his life to bring about racial reconciliation through non-violence. And as we resume our work in the midst of the COVID-19 epidemic,

We have a sense that we are at the crossroads of a new future,

Linked with our past, yet different from it.

We have a sense that something is aching to be born anew.

Many are calling us forward.

We trust that you are leading us onward.

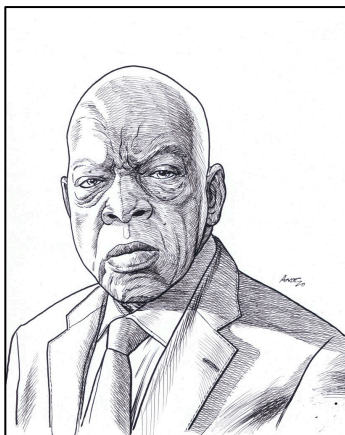
We commit to each other to enter deeply into the richness and complexity of this journey:

To walk where there are no paths,

To listen to the cries of the desperate and the disruptive, the stray and the strange,

To seek for answers to questions that have followed us in dreams and waking hours.

Gracious God, this time, help us to find new ways to bring justice and peace to the new world that borders on our doors, this new world of grief and sorrow, of fear and anxiety, and yet of tremendous hope in a future greater than we can ask or imagine, Amen.



2020- 7- 30 Senate Prayer (Read by Senator Gonzalez)

Loving and merciful God,
The Gospel according to Matthew tells us that

The mustard seed is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs.
(Matthew 13:32)

God, with your help,
we are a mustard seed of justice.
Never mind the smallness of our witness.
The wounds are deep, the sickness is awful, the hunger is great.

But we are a mustard seed of healing and justice.
Immeasurable divine fruit is hidden
in our smallest acts of courage and love.
It's not about us.

It's about the power released when we are sown.
In these days of the devastating effects of the coronavirus
we are sown,
and with your help,
we will be mustard seeds of leadership, justice, and love for the people we serve.
Amen.

(Adapted from Steve Garnaas-Holmes, www.unfoldinglight.net)



2020- 12- 7 Senate Prayer (Read by Senator Laird)

Gracious and mysterious God of all,

Today we come into your presence with gratitude for our past, sincere prayers for our present, and a hopeful outlook for our future.

Pearl Harbor Day of Remembrance reminds us of those who sacrificed their lives to keep us safe in the past. Those many lives lost and the witness of their families allowed for the transformation of harsh conflict into freedom and peace for many.

We come to this day heavy-hearted for all those afflicted in body or spirit because of the coronavirus pandemic. We ask you to grant relief to

- The elderly, who depend on the gentleness and kindness of others to care for them;
- The young, who find themselves separated from their schoolmates in less than ideal learning situations;
- Essential workers- in healthcare, education, food production, security- who risk their own health to meet our daily needs;
- And those who are losing hope, not seeing how they can survive the spiritual and economic effects of this pandemic.

Gracious God, today, as we begin this session of the legislature,

- Give comfort and peace to our senators and their staffs as they work to discover new and surprising solutions to the mounting challenges ahead.
- Give them political courage to create laws that benefit the common good.
- Give them broad vision and holy wisdom to help them persevere through days of uncertainty and struggle.
- And each day, may they hear you speak words of encouragement in the depths of their hearts:

Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world.

All things break. And all things can be mended,

Not with time, but with intention.

So, go now. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally.

This broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you. (L.R. Knost)

AMEN.



2021- 1- 15 Senate Prayer (Read by Senator Bradford)

Loving God of mercy and justice, as we celebrate the birthday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we are reminded more than ever of his words to us:

*We are tied together in the single garment of destiny,
caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.
And whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*

Mysterious God, if this is the way our universe is structured, then

- May we refuse to believe that we are unable to influence the events which surround us.
- May we refuse to believe that we are so bound to racism and war, that justice and peace are impossible.
- May we learn to acknowledge the privileges that some of us have come to accept at the enormous cost to our African American brothers and sisters.
- In this year when COVID-19 has made of our world one neighborhood, may we have the ethical commitment to live together aware of our interdependence on one another.
- And through your goodness at work within each of us, may we reach out with healing hands to one another.

We ask this in your name, Amen.

(Letter from Birmingham Jail, August, April 16, 1963.)

(Adapted from GodWeb- The United Presbyterian Church)



2021- 2- 16 Senate Prayer (Read by Senator Bradford)

Loving God,

As we celebrate Black History Month 2021, inaugural poet Amanda Gorman (22) helps us become more conscious of our obligation to step into the past in order to redeem our future.

We pray in gratitude that our African American ancestors did not lose sight of their spiritual center even as they experienced systematic oppression: people like

Jenna Lee (1783-1864) who became the first authorized woman preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church;

Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795-1871) itinerant preacher who founded the first Black Shaker community; And **Sr. Thea Bowman** (1937-1990), the first African American woman to address the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1988.

Gracious God, we pray in gratitude for those African Americans who have enlivened our hearts with song: people like

Sam Cooke (1931-1964) (A Change is Gonna Come);

Mary Wilson (1944-2021) founding member of the Supremes- (may she rest in peace);

And **Kendrick Lamar** (1987-) who won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Music.

Merciful God, help us to embody the faith, courage, and love of those who have led us to this moment:

May we have the faith to trust that we can become an anti-racist society;

May we have the courage to “step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid:”

And may we make love a spiritual practice until,

in the words of Amanda Gorman, we can

Merge mercy with might;
And might with right,
Then love becomes our legacy
And change our children’s birthright.
Amen.

Amanda Gorman, “The Hill We Climb,” Inaugural Poem, January 20, 2021.



Reformation Sunday Sermon of 25 October 2020

Pastor Julie Webb

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 46; Romans 3:19-28; John 8:31-36

Reformation Sunday! And a Sunday before a presidential election. If ever there were a time to be re-formed (formed again, shaped anew), it's now.

And if ever there were a time when we needed a stronghold and refuge, it's now!

The year 2020 has been re-forming my life. I mean, I haven't had someone else cut my hair since January. I haven't had a hug since February 2nd, when Bob Hamilton's brother and his wife helped me bury my cat Tigger.

I feel I'm living in solidarity right now with folks who live alone or in nursing homes.

The other day, my friend Nancy shared on Facebook a photo of a bloodmobile bus from a children's hospital in the western U.S. It was painted blue, and bore in big white letters on its side this message: "Help us score the gift of life"—and then in all caps—"DONATE BLOOB." B-L-O-O-B. Above the shared photo was the caption, "Oh, c'mon, 2020! Now there's a Bloob shortage, too?" . . . "Two more months to go!" added my friend Nancy. And for some reason, I can't stop laughing about this post—a little hysterically, I think.

2020 has been changing me. Changing my awareness of my interdependence with the rest of creation. Some of you know that I've been studying animal communication—learning that I can often understand what other animals are thinking and feeling, even if they are many miles away. That's mind-blowing.

This year has been changing my understanding of what I need in order to be

healthy. It's been demanding that I alter the pressures and expectations I place upon myself, even as pressures change all around me. I've been learning new spiritual and self-care practices, and trying to discern each day which ones will help me to stay grounded, centered, and loving.

But, you know, folks can only sustain a new thing for so long without getting homesick for the old thing. Think of the Hebrew people after their liberation at the Red Sea: when they found themselves wandering with Moses for years in the desert, they even longed to return to slavery rather than stay in their new reality! Adapting to change can be exhausting.

So, all around, we see humans beginning to return to "normal"—even though the COVID-19 infection rates are rising all over the world and we know the best way to hold them down is to stay home and remain physically distanced as much as possible.

There are, after all, so many good reasons to resume some of our old patterns: economic ones, mental health ones, child development ones, and so on.

But there are some old patterns that shouldn't be resumed. We know this, too. As soon as we humans restrain ourselves just a tiny bit, the rest of the natural world around us begins to emerge from its decades-long quarantine and heal itself. We've seen it in things like clearer skies as we travel less, and in more active, visible wildlife.

COVID-19 has also revealed some truly awful habits in this country with regard to healthcare, and especially about caring for the

**As soon as we
humans restrain
ourselves just a
tiny bit, the rest of
the natural world
around us begins
to emerge from its
decades-long
quarantine and
heal itself.**

most vulnerable humans in our society: elders, people with disabilities, people with chronic illness, uninsured and underinsured people, undocumented immigrants, unhoused people, and more. We have an opportunity here to learn that all of us are only as safe and healthy as the least-protected member of our society. Many of our patterns need to change.

We need to re-form our way of life in the world, to be more in harmony with God's loving will for all of creation.

But I know that many, if not most, people are not going to be able to hold that change-idea in their heads for long. They are going to bounce right back into old, familiar patterns.

So, I've been reflecting that those of us who are aware of that fact are probably going to have to be the ones to hold the new vision and work toward it, when everyone else just tries to go back to what we used to think was normal. We need to become modern agents of reform.

Why? Because you need the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain big changes like these. You need to be living a life that's surrendered to the loving will of the Holy One. And that takes practice. Disciples are people who practice faith.

That's why we call things like Bible study, prayer, meditation or Centering Prayer, acts of kindness, and almsgiving "practices." If we repeat them with regularity, the way a music student practices a piece on the piano, then they begin to flow more smoothly out of us. They begin even to shape who we are, and to shape the world around us. For this reason, I'd also call voting a spiritual practice!

What a perfect time this is to be in a Lutheran church, too—in a denomination that has a history of reforming! We know how this goes. For us,

doing a new thing is not necessarily a new thing. It's a 500-year-old thing.

"If you continue in my word," says Jesus, "you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

The "truth" Jesus mentions in today's Gospel reading isn't something that's external. It's not some outside thing you know. No, remember. Jesus also said, "I am the . . . truth". Christ Jesus embodies divine truth. And knowing him is not an intellectual exercise. Instead, it's the kind of

intimate relational "knowing" that happens between those who love each other. It's letting the relationship with Christ Jesus get all in amongst us as a people, until there is no separation between us and him. Our whole identity changes. What we practice changes.

Now, the Lutheran church hasn't always behaved like it knows about reformation. We have gotten stuck in our ways of thinking about

ourselves and God. For way too long, we have been a church that tends to preach some weird kind of individual salvation, like, "Jesus died so that I can go to heaven if I believe." Do you see how that kind of viewpoint ignores our complete interdependence with the rest of life on this planet? Do you see how impossible it is that my healing (and "healing" is at the root of the word "salvation") can ever be separate from yours, or, worse, achieved at the expense of your healing?

In traditional Jewish teaching, healing and salvation are community and even global concepts. This is why the work of racial justice and healing is so important right now for our predominately white denomination. Same for the work of climate justice and healing.

We have also been a church that tends to talk about atonement—which is a concept Paul mentions in today's reading from Romans—as

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some kind of external, historical act. “Jesus died on the Cross and that was the end of God’s work to reconcile the world to Godself.” But really, while the gift of at-one-ment with God is “brought home to us” in Christ Jesus, his resurrection is only the starting place. The process continues as we integrate the gift into our bodies, minds, relationships, world. We need to come to know it.

Even for Lutherans, then, there are plenty of opportunities to embrace reformation anew. And we are called to it, every day, as a practice of discipleship, so that when our weary neighbors want to give up, we can be ready to hold the vision of healing for them—and to hold it for each other.

Galilee, your congregation is pretty small, but does that matter? You are only called to be faithful to the gift of grace that the Holy One has given you. You have been set free, and you are called to “live free”—which doesn’t mean to live

like gun-toting individualist militia members. Instead, you live like people who have been freed from self-centeredness, freed from fear, freed from patterns of sin, freed from the control of what hurt you in the past, and freed at last from the illusion that your life is in any way separate from the rest of the planet. You have been freed for loving kindness, freed for mercy, freed for simplicity of heart, freed for justice, freed for service, freed for community, freed for joy, freed for reform.

If you take the gospel stories into your heart, you always find that the word of Christ is a word of love and liberation. Continue living out that love and liberation, and you will truly

be disciples of Christ. Then, you will know the One who is ever true, and you will find that you are free.

And if Christ has set us free, we are free indeed. ♦

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To Shred or To Archive: Why It Matters

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M.

For some time now, many of our sisters spend a considerable amount of time after moving into our assisted living facilities, going through their personal papers, letters, diaries, and photo albums if they still have them. They also might review their prayer journals before shredding them. Time spent in this way can fruitfully lead to a personal review of life. A Sister looks back at the extraordinary good she has accomplished and the marvelous creativity of all of the social justice ministries developed during and after Vatican II, along with entirely new ministries in housing, and creative ways of serving women and girls beyond the U.S.

This exercise might also become an occasion for forgiveness toward those who might have caused personal suffering and offer an opportunity for peacefully letting go of old injuries. And it will likely lead to gratitude and affirmation of a life well-lived under the mantle of Mercy. It has been a life that was filled with challenging, meaningful, and tender experiences mediating the mercy of God to others in often more than one kind of ministry.

It can also be an exercise in choosing how to remember the past. Remembering challenging and difficult experiences offers an opportunity for forgiveness and releasing vestiges of resentment. It can nurture the freedom to move toward an openness to new experiences in the present and open the space for a deeper appreciation of the fruits and gifts of ministry, the joys and challenges of communal living and an appreciation of the extraordinary, shared history she has shared with community members and co-workers in ministry. She may also celebrate a thousand and one works of mercy performed by herself and her companions in ministry.

Valuing Our Histories During Decades of Change

A second group of sisters who are faced with decisions about personal papers are those among us who are retiring from longstanding ministries and faced with a need to dramatically downsize. Again, it is a question about what to keep and what to dispose of. In my own case, I have “retired” twice, from Fordham in 2009 and from Yale in 2020. One summer I toured our national congregational archives in Belmont, South Carolina during a MAST meeting. This tour inspired me to save and send to the archives professional awards, and selected photographs from the many national and international courses or lectures, as well as the lectures themselves that have taken me all over the world.

For those of us who are or who have been in academic life, there is a question about preserving professional papers. I might not have preserved my own papers, or kept track of presentations as well as published work were it not for a brief conversation with Collette Baldwin, R.S.M., who brought up this topic when I arrived in Omaha to give a keynote address in 1994, early in our journey of becoming one Institute. That was only eight years into my own scholarly life, and I am grateful for her guidance at that time. Otherwise, I might not have preserved the texts of presentations I have given over the years as well as the published materials.

We have lived through a particular arc of history in our countries, in the church, and in our communities. While many are intent on protecting our privacy and the privacy of others as we shred our papers, might we consider the question what might we consider saving for those who come

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after us? While this concern about privacy is certainly understandable, we as women religious constitute the generation who bridged the decades before and after of Vatican II. We lived our religious lives during times of rapid and continuous change in community lifestyle, at the same time our ministries underwent epochal change both within the church and in our respective national cultures.

The arc of change has been so continuous that a sister's starting point in religious life and her gradual or rapid movement toward the end of this arc might look quite different to one of our sisters twenty years from now or a century from now. A future reader might be emboldened, encouraged, confirmed, and inspired by the stories she finds in our archives. What if sisters thought about future readers when deciding what and how much to shred and what to save for the history of religious life and of women in the church?

What Replaces Community Annals?

During the years when the vast majority of sisters ministered as a group within institutional ministries which were owned or operated by the Sisters of Mercy--high schools and hospitals--someone within the community was charged with keeping the annals. If one or another sister was the only one serving outside of the shared ministry of the house, the annalist would be encouraged to incorporate her ministry story within that of the house. Some kind of historical record was expected to be maintained about that ministry. Sisters of Mercy have always been not only contemplative but also very busy. Many served not only in the school, parish, or hospital to which they were assigned. They reached out to the families of the students they taught, those perhaps too poor to afford the tuition for school, and others they met who obviously were in need.

But as most sisters remember, it was not always easy to recruit or assign a sister to the job of annalist for the house. As more and more sisters began to minister in works not directly sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, the annalist was asked to keep an account of her own ministerial activities within the primary institution to which she was assigned, as well as others in which she may have participated.

In 2007, the archivists as a group decided to end this practice. Our regional community archivist at one point told me that she was putting my annual Christmas letter into "my file." This puzzled me because the genre of "Christmas letter" probably accounted for reference to about twenty-five percent of my writing or ministerial activities beyond my teaching in a given year. Many activities and adventures would not necessarily have been of general interest to diverse

friends and relatives who received the letter. I only recently discovered that archivists were collecting such "letters of significance" that gave some insight into the personal life of a sister or associate.

What We Could Be Saving as Records

I am convinced that we should be archiving our occasional and not so occasional preaching. I have never heard a bad homily preached by one of us. But I have surely heard

plenty preached by some of the ordained. The preaching of Sisters of Mercy is historically important since women are not "allowed" to preach at Eucharistic celebrations at the present time. I think it is important to document that we have been preaching for a long time--at Chapters, community gatherings, jubilee celebrations, funerals, and as guests in the pulpits of our Protestant brothers and sisters.

When it comes to personal journals and prayer journals, the choice is more complex.

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There may be much that feels too private to share, depending on some of the content in a journal. The question to ask is, “Would this be helpful to someone else? Under what circumstances?” It is possible to send journal material or letters to the archives and specify which pieces are not to be made public until a certain amount of time has passed. And it is always possible to edit material in a journal that a sister wishes to keep private and send the story edited in some way for a more general audience.

Sisters who have initiated entirely new ministries are really the only ones who know that story, and there are many. Marilyn Lacey’s founding of Mercy Beyond Borders is one such example. She has already written an autobiographical account of how her experiences with refugees led her to this project—*This Flowing Toward Me* is a beautiful story.¹ Many sisters have such stories or have played a role in one along the way.

Some ministry-history stories of individual sisters are set within established Mercy institutions. Others have been foundresses of entirely new ministries. Former novitiates have become spirituality and retreat centers. Sheltering the homeless led to Mercy Housing beginning in Omaha, Nebraska, and then spread to many locations throughout the country. Various prison ministries have emerged, such as leading centering prayer in prison settings. Eileen Hogan, R.S.M., was the first woman religious to be permitted to minister inside of the prison on Riker’s Island, New York City. Camille D’Arienzo, R.S.M., had her own weekly radio broadcast, also in New York City.

Some of these stories may have been told in one or another of our community publications like our current *Viva! Mercy* and its precursors, and perhaps those involved did write up some kind of

account. But many of these accounts are partial and may not necessarily include the points of view of others who participated in the same events. Each of us might ask ourselves “What have I done or been involved in that no one after me will ever know if I don’t leave some kind of an account of it?”

What is Unique to My Life as a Sister of Mercy?

It might be useful to reflect on how my life as a Sister of Mercy is like everyone else’s and distinguish what has been unique to me? One sister happens to be called to minister in a university, another in a border ministry, another to collaborate with others in a social justice ministry. Some have ministered with members of another religious community. Some have served in diocesan roles. Many have contributed to parish life in a significant way through coordinating

Sunday worship, serving in liturgical roles, preaching, or directing outreach to the sick. None of these may be explicitly Mercy sponsored ministries, but this collaboration and participation is characteristic at the present time of the activities of many sisters and associates. There may also be interesting experiences unique to an individual sister or associate. How will anyone looking at our historical

records in the future ever know what was done in service of the Church if no written record, photograph of liturgical art, or scripts are saved?

The only way the story of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas will be preserved is if each of us contributes the documents from our scholarly work and some account of our unique and communal experiences as a Sister of Mercy to our archives.

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What the Heritage Archives Would Receive

Our archivists have been very busy these last few years thinking about and organizing archives from the regional communities for deposit to the Heritage Center in Belmont, North Carolina. In my tour of the archives there, I discovered the archivists were collecting more than written materials. Some examples include artifacts, objects from community history, and published materials by sisters both recent and from decades past. The collection includes original creative work, such as musical compositions, quilts, sculpture, graphic arts, icons, and fine needlework.

From individual sisters, archivists are welcoming items related to the history of their personal ministries. These include a wide range of artifacts and activities beyond a sister's written summaries of her work. Photos are welcome as well as personal correspondence, and newspaper clippings. Archivists will receive records of significant influences on one's spirituality, such as

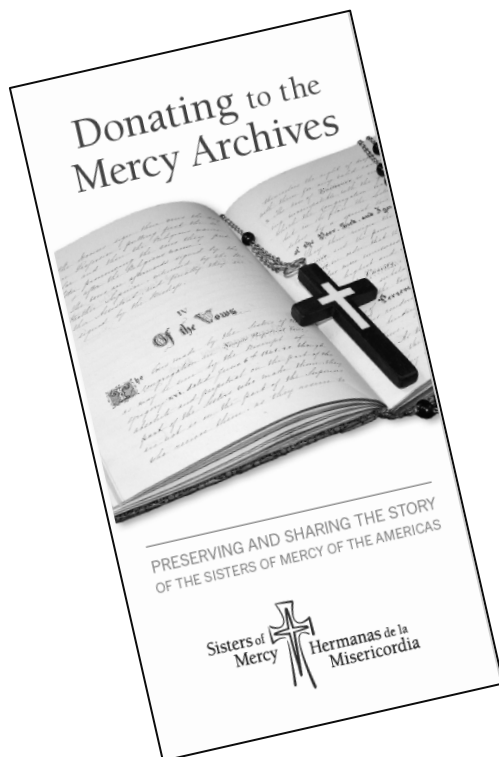
journals, tapes of talks, scrap books and objects, such as awards received for different accomplishments or activities.

Our archivists have already developed their second iteration of a flyer that describes in greater detail the items briefly described above and more. The flyer also offers guidance about creating long-term records and how materials sent to the archives need to be prepared for long term preservation. There is advice on how to avoid damaging materials in the process of sending them to Belmont. The current flyer is titled, "Donating to the Mercy Archives" and can be obtained either from archivists in any of the former regional communities or from Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, North Carolina.² ♦

Endnotes

¹ Marilyn Lacey, *This Flowing Toward Me*. (Notre Dame, IN.: Ave Maria Press, 2009).

² Mercy Heritage Center, 720 Heritage Center Place, Belmont, NC 28012.



**Feel free to contact the archives
to request a flyer:**

Mercy Heritage Center
720 Heritage Center Place
Belmont, NC 28012
704.755.2085
sistersofmercy.org/heritage



Encountering John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

Edward J. Miller, Ph.D.

When Pope Francis canonized Newman on 13 October 2019, most Catholic laity probably responded to him the way I, present for the ceremony, responded to Giuseppina Vannini and Margarita Bays, two others canonized that day: I know nothing about these saintly women. He's more recognizable, at least as a prominent name, to people in Catholic higher education and even to theologians. But the grip on him may not go further than the vague awareness one has of a Francisco Suárez or Johann Adam Möhler, theologians who function critically for specialists. Part of the fog surrounding Newman comes simply from his having lived so long ago. He was born in 1801 when John Adams still had a month to go as U.S. president. He died in 1890, his life having spanned the nineteenth century much as Queen Victoria's life did. That date doesn't seem so distant, but his story probably attracts as much attention as hers does, in a nostalgic sort of manner.

Newman's story on the surface can be laid out briefly. He was the oldest of six children. One sister, nineteen-year-old Mary, dearest to him of the siblings, died prematurely, which devastated him. Another sister, Harriott, disowned him when he became a Roman Catholic, blaming him for her husband's "Roman fever," when in fact it was John who successfully kept Tom Mozley from becoming Roman Catholic. His sister Jemima remained a lifelong confidante. His two brothers, Charles (b.1802) and Francis (b.1805) never settled down and gradually disowned religion.

He went up to Trinity College Oxford in 1817 as an evangelical Protestant. He won a prestigious fellowship to Oriel College in 1822,

His study of Patristic thought and even the Council of Trent led him to conclude that "it is more likely the Established Church has fallen into schism than that Rome added novelties of doctrine."

falling at first under the influence of influential "liberals" (Newman's later term for those watering down of Christianity's dogmatic element), then under the influence of friends we today would call High Church Anglicans. He came to be their recognized leader in reclaiming for the Church of England its older pre-Reformation Catholic roots. He did this through his preaching in the University's church, St. Mary the Virgin, and through his scholarship by publishing tracts (essays) with them (Keble, Pusey, et al.), hence their sobriquet, the Tractarian Party. His study of Patristic thought and even the Council of Trent led him to conclude that "it is more likely the Established Church has fallen into schism than that Rome added novelties of doctrine."

The Anglican hierarchy disowned his positions. He finally followed his conscience, at great personal pain of loss of friends and influence, to be received into the Roman Catholic Church on 9 October 1845 by Passionist missionary, Blessed Dominic Barberi. This was a period when many other Oxford academics became Catholics. He felt called to remain celibate and to become a priest. He and lifelong friend, Ambrose St. John, left for Roman studies. It was surely embarrassing for this great Oxford scholar being made to sit, like a young seminarian, in classrooms with them, taking notes from professors far less learned. Should he become a diocesan priest, a Jesuit, a Dominican? These he considered, but he made the wise choice, for his personality, to become an Oratorian of St. Philip Neri. Pope Pius IX authorized him to begin an Oratory back in England, which he did. He was ordained on 30 May 1847.

The nascent Catholic Church in England—a reestablished hierarchy only began in 1850—did not know how to utilize Newman’s great theological mind. He really ought to have been given a mission in Oxford to support young Catholics or been permitted to set up in London. Instead, on his own initiative, he gave some lectures (see *Present Position of Catholics*, the best study of prejudice that I know) and cared for Irish immigrants working in Birmingham where his Oratory was (and still to this day is).

The first real call for his talents involved the Catholic University of Ireland in the mid-1850s. To counter the secular universities recently set up by the government, Rome directed the Irish bishops to set up a Catholic University modeled on the Louvain in Belgium. The bishops asked Newman to lecture in Dublin and be its first rector, but Newman was never given a free hand to fashion what he wanted. Except for the School of Medicine, it was a failed effort. Nevertheless, his public lectures and student addresses, while he was rector, became the celebrated Idea of a University. Often overlooked are Newman’s provocative essays that appeared in the *Catholic University Gazette*, now found in *Historical Sketches III*. (For readers interested in the full scope of Newman’s educational ideas, see references in the Contributor’s section).

Newman’s Apologia and Prophetical Office

The year 1859 saw Newman under a cloud. His essay, “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,” in a progressive periodical—ideas utilized at Vatican II—was denounced as heresy. The Vatican sent Cardinal Wiseman questions for Newman to answer, but Wiseman never showed them to him. There Newman lingered until a popular novelist wrote that Newman’s writings

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encouraged priests to lie. How could Newman refute the charge if whatever he wrote could be thought another lie? Instead, he produced a history of his religious thoughts, using letters to and from Anglican colleagues that became the *Apologia*, an autobiography that rivaled St. Augustine’s *Confessions* in power. His stature among British people, lost in 1845, was restored in 1864. His *Apologia* won the respect of fair-minded Anglicans, for his fellow Catholics, and for himself.

From this point, he became the champion for a progressive Catholicism, a Catholicism English in style, which opposed the rigidity of ultra-right Romanism, especially the variety in England led by Archbishop Manning and William Ward. In 1879, the new pope, Leo XIII, made Newman a cardinal in his very first consistory and the cloud was forever lifted. Laity who have heard his name think of him as Cardinal Newman, a “safe” kind of churchman, who also gives his name to Catholic centers on state university campuses. But Father Newman had a more checkered and painful life.

Newman’s theology is vast and rich, found in 39 books and in over 20,000 letters in the manner Victorians wrote letters—long and very thoughtful. Laying it out is beyond the scope of my charge. I’ll select one feature of his characteristic way of thinking about religion that is crucial for theology and sadly lacking in certain polemics today: the aim for balance, or more pointedly, for balancing off.

The clearest example comes from his 1877 re-edition of 1837 lectures on the *Prophetical Office*. In a deftly worded ninety-page preface, he argues that the priest/king/prophet features of Christ are sacramentally present in the church respectively as worshiping, as governing, and as the work of

theology. Their instruments are our devotional nature, commanding and coercing, and reasoning. But taking people as they are, which reflects Newman's empiricist bent, devotion tends to superstition and enthusiasm, authority tends to ambition and tyranny, and reasoning tends to rationalism. These features clash, and Newman resisted the temptation to ground the conflict in simply sinful tendencies. Instead, "each of the three has its separate scope and direction; each has its own interests to promote and further; each has to find room for the claims of the other two." Theology and church authority trim the excesses of devotion; theology and the experience of worship confront the heavy hand of authority; devotion and church authority check theology's drift to heady speculations. But Newman calls theology the "fundamental and regulating principle" of the whole dialectic because its direct subject matter is revelation. God's word rules. So runs his ecclesiastical checks and balances.

Promotion of Independent Research

Newman had the utmost respect for church authority, but he defended free theological investigation. "Life has the same right to decay, as it has to wax strong. This is specially the case with great ideas. You may stifle them...or you may let them have free course and range, and be content, instead of anticipating their excesses, to expose and restrain those excesses after they have occurred." Church authority needs to hesitate before jumping to condemn theologians.

He balanced being a loyal British citizen—he was a Tory to the hilt—and being a loyal Catholic. He was always ready to back off a position if his bishop insisted. (Oratorians belong to the diocese of their Oratory and serve its bishop.) He valued celibacy and esteemed, as well, the married life. Many of his letters are to married Catholics supporting them in their faith and in their demanding lives. He balanced being an object of

hostility or suspicion with an unbounded trust in God's Providence. Providence, in fact, is the leitmotif of his spirituality. "Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on...I do not ask to see the distant scene."

Another balancing off was between cultures. The Germanic mind was lost at the Reformation, regretfully. In the meantime, the Mediterranean mind (Italy, Spain) predominates in theology and devotions. This much becomes clear: Newman's world of ideas is organic. Ideas are alive. They make their way forward in a dialectical dance between balancing forces. How warily he surely came across to the Neo-Scholastic theologians in Rome, Giovanni Perrone excepted.

No description substitutes for reading Newman himself. His words mesmerize. But knowing their context is a challenge. One can always start with a couple of his sermons without difficulty. If you want to "read Newman" more extensively, I recommend starting with C. S. Dessain's book, *John Henry Newman* (London, 1971). It's a superb and somewhat short entry into what he wrote and why. It was Dessain who gathered all the correspondence to and from him, and planned out the 31 volumes of the *Letters and Diaries of J. H. Newman*. Other extensive biographies exist: Meriol Trevor's two tomes and the large volume from Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman* (Oxford Press). Ker, trained in English literature, splices onto Newman's life story synopses of his major works. Finally, when you feel comfortable enough with Newman's world of Oxford and nineteenth century religion, which Dessain will provide, read the *Apologia*. You won't be able to put it down, I predict.

I leave you with some gems from Newman. (The pagination is from his Uniform Edition.)

* "In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." *Dev. of Doctrine*, 40.

* “Logicians are more set upon concluding rightly, than on right conclusions...man is not a reasoning animal; he’s a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal.” *Grammar of Assent*, 94.

* “Life is for action. If we insist on proofs for every thing, we shall never come to action: to act you must assume, and that assumption is faith.” *Grammar*, 95.

* “Conscience...is a moral sense, and a sense of duty; a judgment of the reason and a magisterial dictate... [which is] the creative principle of religion, as the Moral Sense is the principle of ethics.” *Grammar*, 105, 110.

* “The Athanasian Creed...is the war-song of faith.” *Grammar*, 133.

* “From first to last, education, in the large sense of the word, has been my line.” *Autobiographical Writings*, 259.

* “What I desiderate in Catholics is the gift of bringing out what their religion is....I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity.” *Present Position of Catholics*, 390.

* “We believe...that their Lordships really desire to know the opinion of the laity on subjects to which the laity are especially concerned.” Newman in *Rambler* magazine on the obligation of bishops to consult the laity, quoted in *Letters and Diaries*, XIX: 129-130, n. 3.

* “I said in answer, that he saw one side, I another....He said something like ‘who are the laity,’ I answered that the Church would look foolish without them.” Newman’s memorandum on Bishop Ullathorne’s visit to him after his *Rambler* article. See *Letters*, XIX:142.

* “The Latin race [having with the Reformation

lost the “Teutonic races”] will not always have a monopoly on the magisterium of Catholicism. We must be patient in our time; but God will take care of His Church—and when the hour strikes, the reform will begin.” *Letters*, XXV:327.

* “[Be] content to wait, knowing that error is like other delinquents; give it rope enough, and it will be found to have a strong suicidal propensity.” *Idea of a University*, 476.

* “The only effect of error ultimately is to promote truth....Speculations are started; perhaps they are to die, still not before they have suggested ideas better than themselves.” *Idea*, 478.

* “It is a contradiction in terms to attempt a sinless Literature of sinful man.” [Newman against any sort of heavy censorship] *Idea*, 229.

* “A [university] without personal influence of teachers upon pupils, is an arctic winter; it will create an ice-bound, petrified, cast-iron University, and nothing else.” *Historical Sketches III*, 74.

* “Deductions have no power of persuasion. The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions...voices melt us, looks subdue us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion.” *Grammar*, 92-93.

* “May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done! Then in His mercy may He give us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last!” Sermon XX, “Wisdom and Innocence,” in *Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day*, 307. JHN kept the words in his desk. ♦

Sisters of Mercy and the Spanish Flu of 1918

New Hampshire Archives

Sister M. Benigna Doherty, R.S.M.

But it was no scattering of Mercy that the Sisters are said to have done throughout the State in the never-to-be-forgotten days of October, 1918. New Hampshire felt the full impact of the terrible suffering and anxiety caused by the ravages of the European influenza, which raged throughout the whole country at the close of World War I. Such havoc did the disease play and so high were the fatalities that Church authorities in most places suspended for the duration, all services except Sunday Mass, which was offered out-of-doors. Schools were closed to prevent the spreading of the dread sickness among the young who, strange enough, were its most numerous victims. Nor did this impartial plague fail to take up its abode in Mercy convents. Here, however, its sting was tempered. Our Lady's mantle, which had ever proved a protective for her daughters, warded off casualties now. During the strife but one "flu" victim was borne to God's Acre -- Sister M. Annette Duffy.

The many nuns who were attacked gallantly fought the enemy with the "spiritus frumenti" which was poured down their reluctant throats by doctors who found it the germ's only unscrupulous killer. The religious at the Motherhouse who stayed on their feet during the epidemic invariably gave three reasons for their immunity. The first was, of course, Our Blessed Mother's protection; the second, the consumption of cup upon cup of Sister M. Bernardine Grime's hot porridge, which brewed from morning until night on the diet kitchen stove; and lastly, the need for their services among the afflicted people. Indeed, it was

in a truly Christlike spirit that these religious, as well as the Sisters throughout the diocese, generously answered the summons of physicians and others to visit the homes of sufferers whom the hospitals could not accommodate. There the nuns sought to give physical as well as spiritual relief to families, all of whose members in many cases had been stricken,

Upon entering the hovel, the nuns found the man of the house just recovering from the "flu," and the little mother so weak that she could not care for her baby.

The memories of Sisters M. Inez Bernier and Lumina Lemire furnish us with an account of the doings of a typical day spent with the suffering poor. The Sisters had been summoned to a Claremont home where a wood chopper, his wife, a boy of three, and an infant of only a few days, lived in three rooms of a damp basement. Upon entering the hovel, the nuns found the man of the house just recovering from the "flu," and the little mother so weak that she could not care for her baby. The Sisters donned aprons and precautionary masks and went to work. After freshening up the sick woman's feather bed, which boasted but a raggy comforter, they turned their attention to the husband and children, whose condition gave every evidence of neglect. Once the temperature of the rooms had been raised by throwing wood on the kitchen stove, Sister M. Lumina applied herself to preparing some hot "stir-about" for the father and son. Sister M. Inez, meanwhile, performed a task entirely new to her -- bathing the infant. She held the precious bundle on her lap before the open oven door, and, in fear and trembling, performed the ablutions. Marvelous to say, the babe neither screamed nor kicked during the procedure carried out by unfamiliar hands. Did

Our Lady have anything to do with this good behavior, Sister wondered? Sister M. Lumina suggested to the father that it would do him good to go for a little walk. He might even, she encouraged, step into a barber shop to get a shave. With him out of the way, the two nuns gathered up the soiled clothes, threw the ragged carpets into the yard, swept, dusted, and scrubbed the house. By dinner time, the washing was on the line, the house tidy, and the table set.

The wood chopper, shorn of his heavy beard, and looking for all the world like Lazarus, was happy to sit down with his son to a substantial meal of hash, bread and butter, and tea. The repeated "God bless you's!" of the man, the smile on the mother's wan face, and the happy chuckles of the little boy were more gratifying than any reward the Sisters might have received. They went back to their convent in the evening, glad that they had bowed politely but defiantly at the woman who had hung out of the upstairs' window that morning. She who had shaken her finger at them, her countenance bespeaking fear and apprehension for any who entered that basement hovel, two weeks later became, by a sad coincidence, a prey to the disease. Death claimed her. The Sisters, however, continued their work of charity throughout the city.

In some instances, the works of the religious were of a strictly spiritual nature. In Keene, two nuns were called to the deathbed of an officer from Camp Devens. As they entered the house, they heard him in his delirium drilling his soldiers. "Left! right! left! right!" he kept on, never a pause for breath. A non-Catholic nurse attended the patient; all of his family was present. In vain did they try to quiet him. The Sisters knelt, said a few prayers, then pinned a Sacred Heart badge on him.

Immediately he became calm, and, as a child going to sleep, he silently stole off to God.

Such cases as these the Sisters also attended in Manchester, but the ringing of the Motherhouse telephone one night opened up for them still another field of work. Mother M. Eugenia O'Shea, up later than the rest of the Community because of her anxiety for her sick novices, took the phone from its hook. The voice on the other end of the wire presented to her a plea for the help of the Sisters at Oak Hill Pest House, in which the poorest of the poor, most of whom were doomed to death, were being cared for. Mother M. Eugenia assured the petitioner that although it would be

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impossible to act before morning, help would then be sent. After Mass next day, Reverend Mother M. Beatrice, to whom the message was relayed, called for volunteers. Sisters M. Assumpta McQuillen, Dolores Schneider, Mechtilde McCarron, Margaret Colgan, and Damien Niles were accepted for duty and dispatched to this isolation hospital, every available hall and corridor of which was filled with beds. The religious turned their hands to any task which they saw to be done, but

mostly they comforted the languishing patients, whose greatest need, in most cases, was to be prepared for death. From bed to bed they went moistening parched lips and pressing to them the image of the Christ, who died that they might live in Heaven. True angels they were; just as truly angels "midst the vapor of death" as were their Mother Foundress and elder Sisters who heroically nursed Dublin's cholera victims, in 1832; or as were others of their Institute who, in 1854, worked side by side with Florence Nightingale, caring for the wounded and sick soldiers of the Crimean War. We wonder if the little public-school teacher

who performed so many menial tasks in that pest house where the Sisters labored did not at that time get her desire of one day becoming our Sister M. Andre O'Donoghue. When the Oak Hill Isolation Hospital could take no more of the sufferers, the Knights of Columbus Hall on Hanover Street was turned into another infirmary where more patients were treated by Mother M. Fidelis, Sister M. Genevieve, and a corps of helpers.

We could fill our book with the dismal stories which have come down to us from those heartrending days of October 1918, but we shall close this episode instead by recalling a happy memory. Just when the Sisters who staff our own Sacred Heart Hospital were praying desperately for help to fill the places of their sick nurses and attendants, the Sisters of Holy Cross from St. George's Parish came to the hospital to offer their assistance. They were not nurses, they told the superior, Sister M. Michael Noonan, but they could do dishes, carry trays, man the laundry, and take care of all the incidentals which would free the Sister-nurses to minister to the patients. The combined efforts of Mercy and the Cross soon brought the hospital out of its difficult straits. In time, too, God's chastening hand was lifted from all other quarters visited by the epidemic. Schools and churches reopened, and the Sisters resumed their customary duties

among the little ones.

Mother M. Beatrice, eager to lighten the hearts of her Sisters, many of which were heavy with sorrow because of losses in their own families during the recent strife, seized upon the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Mother M. Francis' religious profession, in April 1919, to give them a pleasant distraction. She invited

Mother M. Francis, then Superior of the East Boston convent, home to the Motherhouse, where Bishop Guertin, assisted by his chancellor, Reverend Jeremiah S. Buckley, celebrated the Jubilee Mass and, later in the day, gave Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. That evening an entertainment was held in the Academy Hall. It took the Sisters back to happier, brighter days. Furthermore, in manifesting the cordiality which charity required of them, to make Mother M. Francis' day a happy one, they all became aware of little miracles

being worked in their sad hearts. From then on, they would remember what sorrow had allowed them to forget temporarily: God's yoke was sweet, His burden light. ♦

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Endnote

¹Sister M. Benigna Doherty, R.S.M., *The First Hundred Years of the Manchester Sisters of Mercy, 1858-1958* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sisters of Mercy, 1968): 174-77.



Discussion Questions

(Doherty) *The many nuns who were attacked gallantly fought the enemy with the "spiritus frumenti" which was poured down their reluctant throats by doctors who found it the germ's only unscrupulous killer. The religious at the Motherhouse who stayed on their feet during the epidemic invariably gave three reasons for their immunity. The first was, of course, Our Blessed Mother's protection; the second, the consumption of cup upon cup of Sister M. Bernardine Grime's hot porridge, which brewed from morning until night on the diet kitchen stove; and lastly, the need for their services among the afflicted people.*

When you have gotten sick, or faced the likelihood of it, what got you through the crisis? What were the beliefs you held, the convictions you had, the hope you clung to, and the sense of necessity that kept you going? What did you observe in your Sisters or co-workers, friends or family members that inspired you?

(Donnelly) *If we are authentic, we must admit that living through this is hard. There is bad news in abundance. How has all of this has affected us? If you experienced fear, of what were you afraid? Was the fear realistic? Did you experience sadness? How did you deal with it? There is certainly much to grieve. What have been your coping mechanisms? What helpful choices have you made?*

Describe some of your ups and downs during the pandemic isolation in your "upper room," and what choices and adaptations you made that helped you. If you have physically been able to leave your "upper room" is there any part of you that doesn't want to leave too soon?

(Gorman) *May we all acknowledge that we have not noticed carefully enough our complicity in the unjust structures of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, to name just a few. May we not be overcome with guilt; rather, let us be the generation that breaks the chains that keep us all bound in fear and smallness of heart. (Prayer for July 27, 2020)*

During the period of the pandemic, what social issues were most compelling for you? What happened in the church that made you glad or caused a feeling of resistance? What in the political life of the country inspired you or aroused concern?

(Miller) *He finally followed his conscience, at great personal pain of loss of friends and influence, to be received into the Roman Catholic Church on 9 October 1845...*

Have you known anyone who followed his or her conscience at great personal sacrifice?

(Ruffing) *A future reader might be emboldened, encouraged, confirmed, and inspired by the stories she finds in our archives. What if sisters thought about future readers when deciding what and how much to shred and what to save for the history of religious life and of women in the church?*

What have you decided to keep and transfer to the Archives of your personal writings, your professional records, your ministerial history, your creative work? Why?

(Upton) *Can virtual presence be real?*

We have had more than a year of Zoom meetings online, attending Mass and funeral services online, teaching lessons, meetings, workshops and presentations, family events, and ministerial service all on line. Have you come to value “virtual presence” for any of these aspects of your life, or are you “zoomed out”?

(Webb) *This year has been changing my understanding of what I need in order to be healthy. It's been demanding that I alter the pressures and expectations I place upon myself, even as pressures change all around me. I've been learning new spiritual and self-care practices, and trying to discern each day which ones will help me to stay grounded, centered, and loving.*

Can you share some of your new spiritual and self-care practices that you developed during this past year? Or older, familiar ones that proved durable and reliable?

MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines. This work is meant to serve women, the Church, and the Institute.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Julia Upton, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST'S Executive Director. **The Annual Meeting is *TENTATIVELY* scheduled to be held at Mercy Heritage Center in Belmont, N.C., from June 19-21, 2022.**

Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the association's Executive Director, Julia Upton, R.S.M. by e-mail at uptonj@stjohns.edu or by mail at St. Mary of the Angels Convent, 600 Convent RD, Syosset, NY 11791-3863.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., Holy Spirit Convent, 3920 West Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822-1123. E-mail is mkdoyle@sistersofmercy.org.

Since 1991, The MAST Journal has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have, over the years, taken on responsibility to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Contributors

Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M. is co-director of Mercy Ministries in Philadelphia. She provides preached retreats for parishes, school faculties, ministry groups, ecumenical groups and religious communities. She is a frequent presenter for parent and parish groups. She has been a keynote speaker for large groups across the United States. She presently serves on the board of trustees for several institutions, including Gwynedd-Mercy College, Mercy Health System, Georgian Court College and Waldron Mercy Academy. In her long history of college teaching, she has taught religious studies at Gwynedd-Mercy University since 1983, also serving a term as Dean of Students. She holds an M.A. in theology from Villanova University. She has both an elementary and secondary education background, which included teaching high school Latin from 1968-1980. She was in elected leadership for the Merion, Pennsylvania regional community for a decade. As a founding member of MAST, she had a term as Executive Director and presently sits on the Executive Committee.

Michelle Gorman, R.S.M. left County Mayo, Ireland in 1971 to enter the Sisters of Mercy in Auburn, California. She holds an M.A. in English from Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington, and a diploma in spiritual direction from Shalem in Bethesda, Maryland. Michelle has ministered as a high school teacher, vocation minister, and held elected leadership in Auburn and Omaha. A sabbatical year was spent at Lebh Shomea House of Prayer in Sarita, Texas and at the Cultural Institute of Oaxaca. Currently, she ministers as Chaplain for the California State Senate, and is a member of several boards of trustees for Mercy institutions. She has recently been appointed Institute Minister for the Sisters of Mercy. She remarks, "I have learned a great deal through my ministry as chaplain at the Senate. Having to limit my prayers to about a minute means that I have to consider every word carefully. Poetry is a wonderful vehicle for prayer because it is non-denominational and appeals to the deepest spirituality of each person whether or not they are "believers." My goal as Senate chaplain is to facilitate the senators' connection with their God. I like Anne Lamott's 'three essential prayers': HELP, THANKS, WOW!

Edward Jeremy Miller, Ph.D., S.T.D., is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies Gwynedd Mercy University. He studied at The Louvain, mentored by the distinguished Newman scholar, Jan Hendrik Walgrave. Upon return from Belgium in 1975, he became Divinity School professor and chair of the Constructive Theology doctoral program at Emory University, followed later by a graduate school deanship in New Rochelle. He was recruited by Sr. Jean Burns, R.S.M, and appointed by President Isabelle Keiss, R.S.M., to join the faculty of Gwynedd Mercy University in 1992. After nearly twenty-five satisfying years as teacher and administrator, he retired as an emeritus professor of the University. Newman's ideas on university work and their current relevance can be found in E. J. Miller, "Newman's Idea of a University: Is it Viable Today?" *Discourse and Context: An Interdisciplinary Study of John Henry Newman*, ed. Gerard Magill

(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 109-125. For interested readers unable to secure it, contact miller.e@gmercyu.edu for a digital copy of the article.

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M. recently retired from Yale Divinity School in June of 2020 and returned to California. She holds the Ph.D. in Christian Spirituality from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA and the S.T.L. from Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, California. She is Professor Emerita of the Practice of Spirituality and Ministerial Leadership at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, as well as Professor Emerita of Spirituality and Spiritual Direction at Fordham University, Bronx, New York. She is a Past President of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality and one of the founders of Spiritual Directors International. She has published five books. She received the Holy Wisdom Award from Washington Theological Union in 2003. She has given presentations or workshops for Sisters of Mercy in Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Guam, the Philippines, and across the Institute in the U.S., as well as presentations for chapters of other religious communities. She has also given workshops or lectures with colleagues in India and Ireland, as well as solo invited lectures in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and for religious educators in Australia. She has taught full courses in spirituality, spiritual direction, or supervision in Hong Kong, Australia, Thailand, and Korea.

Julie Upton, R.S.M. is Provost Emerita and retired Distinguished Professor of Theology at St. John's University in New York where she taught from 1980 to 2020. She holds a Ph.D. in Theology from Fordham University and completed a Master's in Public Health from St. John's University in 2019. She continues to write and consult, particularly on issues related to spirituality and care of the aged. She has written several books on sacraments and history of liturgy. She has been a frequent contributor to *The MAST Journal* and serves as Executive Director of MAST the organization.

The Rev. Julie Webb is a Mercy Associate, an ordained Lutheran (ELCA) pastor, and the founder of Saint Francis Animal Communication & Healing. She received her M.Div. from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (at the Graduate Theological Union), Berkeley, in 1999. Since then, she has served in jail, hospital, and congregational settings. Having just completed fourteen years of service to Napa Valley Lutheran Church, she spent 2020 exploring a new aspect of her vocation: ministry that includes non-human animals and our relationship with them. Her recent studies include Pet Chaplaincy®, Animal Communication, Reiki (with humans and animals), EFT/Tapping with Animals, and other approaches to healing. She has just accepted a call to serve Galilee Lutheran Church in Kelseyville, California, part-time. The rest of her time will be spent in animal-related ministry. You can find her on Facebook @SaintFrancisAnimalCommunication and on Instagram @critterpastor.

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