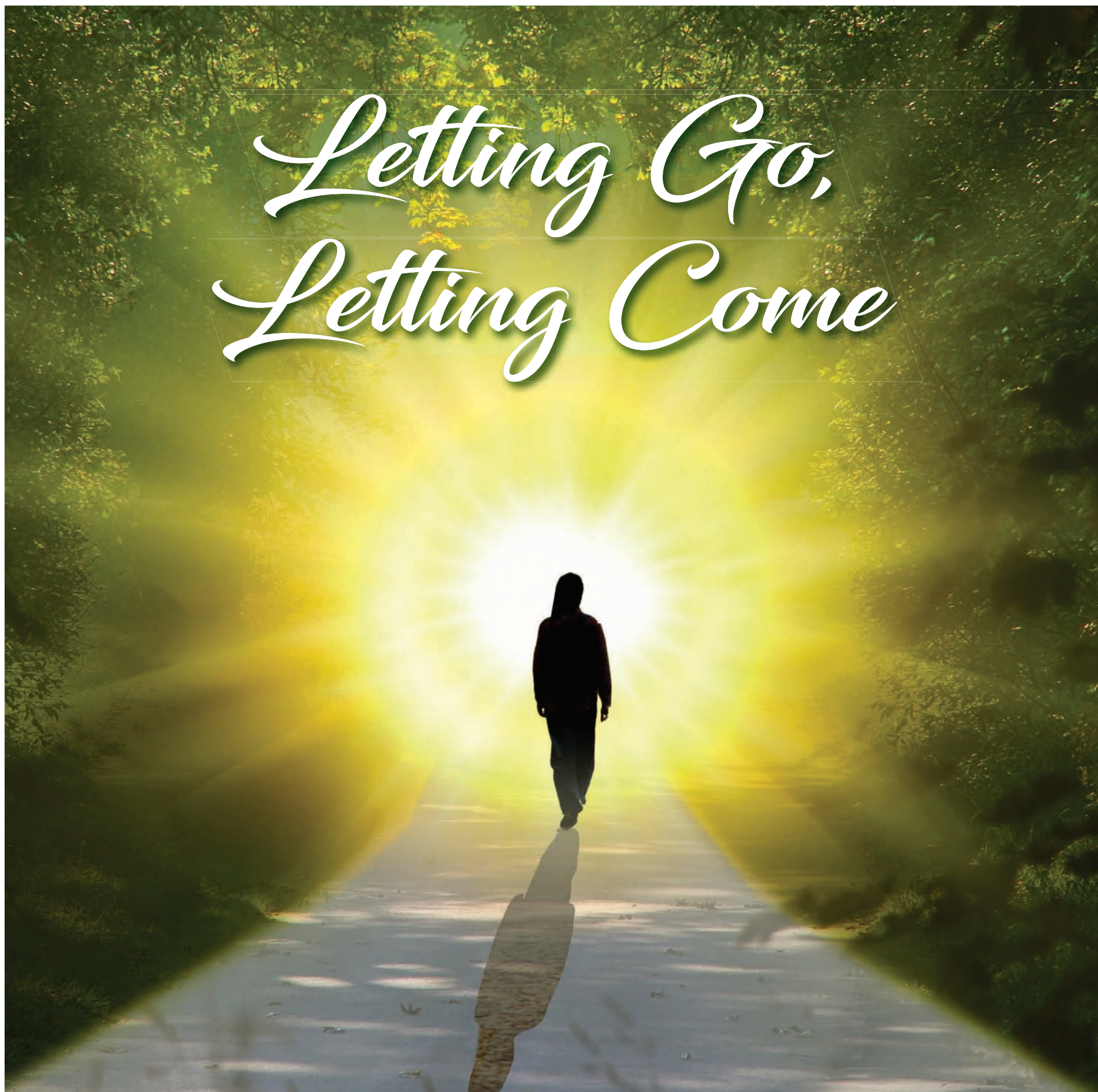


Journey

Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA Vol. 36, No. 2 Fall 2018

Letting Go, Letting Come





Hope in the Midst of Darkness

by Ellen Maroney, IHM

*God of the seasons, there is a time for everything;
there is a time for ending and a time
for beginning . . .*

*God of autumn,
the trees are saying goodbye to their green,
letting go of what has been.*

*We, too, have our moments of surrender,
with all their insecurity and risk . . .*

*God of harvest wagons and fields of ripened grain,
many gifts of growth lie within the season
of our surrender.*

We must wait for harvest in faith and hope.

Prayer for Autumn Days by Sr. Joyce Rupp, OSM

These beautiful words of Joyce Rupp relate the cyclical rhythm of nature to our own life journey into the mystery and promise of God's creative presence in our world. As we go about our daily routines, we often find ourselves immersed in the darkness of conflict, suffering, and loss that causes us to question our own purpose and commitment. Yet, just as the trees and flowers surrender their leaves and buds back to the earth in the fall to await the new life of the coming spring, so we too are called to deepen our contemplation of God's working in and through our doubt, sorrow, and even despair so that something new and unimaginable may be created, God's dream for our world.

The theme for this issue of Journey, "Letting Go, Letting Come," is rooted in the truth of the Paschal mystery experience of all life, the process of dying and rising, death and new life. Just like the trees and flowers, we have our own dyings and risings. Some may bring us to our knees, such as the death of a loved one. Others, such as the letting go of an old, dependable car or reconciling with a lost friend, are part of our everyday life events. For most of us, I think, learning how and when to let go is a lifelong process in the journey

of faith and grace. The writers for this issue seek to offer some insights and personal experiences that illustrate this search for hope and resurrection in the darkness of life.

Etty Hillesum was a bright, young Jewish woman working in Amsterdam when the World War II German occupation occurred. Her experiences, which she recorded in diaries, led her to examine and then claim her own humanity in the midst of the inhumanity she witnessed around her. This inward journey was a profound spiritual awakening for Etty and her writings tell of her deepening awareness of God's presence in herself and all of creation, including those responsible for the horrific crimes against her people: "I am in Poland every day, on the battlefields. I am with the hungry, with the ill-treated and the dying, every day. But I am also with the jasmine and with that piece of sky beyond my window."¹ Even after her own arrest by the Nazis, her writings continued to express her inner strength and peace in God as she sought to spread a spirit of love and forgiveness: "At night, as I lay in the camp on my plank bed, I was sometimes filled with an infinite tenderness and I prayed, 'Let me be the thinking heart of these barracks.' That is what I want to be. The thinking heart of a whole concentration camp."² In September, 1943, Etty and her family were sent to Auschwitz. She died there on November 30 at the age of twenty-nine.

The story of Etty Hillesum is a profound example of the power of love and compassion in the midst of untold suffering. Part of our IHM Chapter 2018 Direction Statement reads: ". . . we desire to be in the midst of the pain of our world and join with others in seeing and being the light that shines through the cracks of broken hearts." Those words hold an even deeper personal meaning for all IHMs because of the

domestic violence murder in April of our Sister Angela Miller and her sister, Rosemary Smith, who worked with us at the IHM Center. In the midst of our horror and grief, we received an outpouring of prayers, wishes, love, and support from so many in the Scranton community and beyond. Our own experience in this "letting go, letting come" process has enabled us to draw renewed strength from the promise of Christ's resurrection victory over death.

Like Etty, let us commit to walk alongside each other and see the light of Christ and be that light and compassion in the midst of our own and the world's suffering and darkness. Poet Jan Richardson offers the following beautiful insight into this journey:

*In the leaving, in the letting go,
let there be this to hold onto
at the last:*

*the enduring love,
the persisting of hope,
the remembering of joy,*

*the offering of gratitude,
the receiving of grace,
the blessing of peace.*

In the Leaving by Jan Richardson

¹ Dear, J. (2010, January 26). Etty Hillesum's Inner Journey. NCR Online. Retrieved from <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/etty-hillesums-inner-journey>

² Ibid

Sister Ellen serves as president of the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA.



Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, Pennsylvania

Our mission as Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Scranton, Pennsylvania, is to follow Jesus as a community of disciples, aware that we are sent to be a clear and understandable prophetic witness to the presence of God in the world. - from the IHM Mission Statement

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The Reality of Death

by Marie Lourdes Vanston, IHM

Several years ago, in a period of a few short months, I experienced the death of my only sister, my very best friend, my youngest brother and a very dear family friend. All these tremendous losses in such a brief time left me feeling empty, alone, depressed and sad.

Extreme violence was coupled with grief because my brother, Jim, had been brutally beaten over a period of eight hours with a tire iron from his own car, then buried alive in a backyard sewer drain and left to die. Three young men in their late teens had accosted Jim and tried to rob him, but their plan failed.

Jim was a gifted poet, writer, teacher, athlete, TV personality and loving brother. He had great compassion for those who experienced poverty or

to the governor of Illinois, the mayor of Chicago, the DA's office, the state attorney general's office, the police in charge of the investigation, the prosecutor's office, the Witness Assistance Program and others, asking that the young men be spared the death penalty. Having received no response, I wrote a second time, again, with no response. However, the day my brother, Tom, and I arrived at the courthouse for the first day of the trial, the lawyers for the three young men were waiting for me as I approached the entrance to the courtroom. They informed me that the men would not receive the death penalty and thanked me for saving the lives of their clients.

On entering the courtroom, I met the families of the men. I introduced myself, told them I was praying for them and their sons, hugged each member, and then asked them if they would join me in prayer before the proceedings began. One family asked for my forgiveness and then joined me in a short prayer; the others, including my brother, did not. Two days before the end of the trial, my brother (who until that day could not accept what I was doing) and all the family members present joined me in prayer.

Several court personnel told me after the proceedings were concluded that they had never before experienced such love and forgiveness in a courtroom. The

After each funeral, especially Jim's, I reminded myself time and again that death is a part of life and that I had to keep going. I went to work each day feverishly carrying out the responsibilities of my ministry. Many nights were spent with endless tears as I pondered the relevancy of this life.

What was the result of all these experiences? The most profound result was that it caused me to reevaluate my whole life. I saw all my years flash before me – my life as a child, a teenager, a young religious, a successful teacher and administrator, a joyful, caring and loving member of our Congregation, a person who had worked hard to make my family and the Congregation proud of me. But each loss created an attack on my personal independence, pride and freedom. Through those years I realized that a lot of things that happened to me were just as important as what happened through me. It made me realize that I worried about minute things and barely prepared for things that completely turned my life upside down. Most of all, remembering the lives of my loved ones made me recognize that I had to slow down and live life more fully and prayerfully to be ready to face my own death.

With God's help, the support of our congregational leadership, my loving brother, friends and a challenging, compassionate counselor, I found within myself the power to accept each death and final separation. I have come to know that I suffered so much because of the love I had for them. My life was changed! I will always miss them, but their deaths and the senseless death of Jim, only will have meaning in knowing that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ manifests the victory of love over death.

The words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer bring me comfort:

Nothing can make up for the absence
of someone we love—
and it would be wrong to find a substitute.
We must simply hold out
and see it through.
That sounds very hard at first,
but at the same time,
it is a great consolation—
for the gap—
as long as it remains unfilled—
preserves the bond between us.
It is nonsense to say that
God fills the gap—
God does not fill it—
but on the contrary keeps it empty
and so helps us to keep alive
our former communion with each other
even at the cost of pain.

Sister Marie Lourdes is a volunteer with Friends of the Poor in Scranton.



Vanston family 1962

injustice. He defended the rights of women at the corporate level and paid the tuition for many poor children to experience a Catholic education. His death created anger and sadness in my brother, Tom, and me.

Following the arrest of the three young men and their confession to committing the robbery, kidnapping and murder, I received a letter from the Chicago, Illinois, court system notifying me that this was a capital murder case and the grand jury would be seeking the death penalty for all three men. I was stunned by the information, not being aware that the death penalty was still in effect in the state of Illinois, the site of the murder. My brother, Tom, was relieved that justice would be dispensed, and felt the penalty would ease his sorrow and anger. For days I thought about the letter and finally decided that despite what had happened to Jim, I could not, as a Christian and a Catholic, be a part of condemning others to death. I began a letter writing campaign



L-R Thomas, Marian, Sister Marie Lourdes, and James in 1998

victim's assistant sent a letter after the trial noting that she would "forever remember the compassion and love" she witnessed during the days of the trial.

With the passing of time and the loss of each loved one, I devoted many hours to making funeral arrangements, planning music and scripture readings for wake services and liturgies, recalling fond memories for eulogies and tending to other details familiar to me as a funeral director's daughter.

Letting Go into the Slow Work of God

by Chris Koellhoffer, IHM

Recently, I came across a Facebook clip from St. Luke's Meridian Medical Center in Idaho. The video highlighted the Walk of Respect, a sacred pause that has become a cherished practice for honoring organ donors and their loved ones. Moments before a donor is moved to the operating room, an announcement is made on the public address system, inviting all available employees from every department to gather on the 4th floor. All stand in reverent witness on either side of the corridor as a surgical team escorts the organ donor and family in a solemn procession down the hall from the ICU to the OR elevator. The silence is reverent and profound, evoking both tenderness and respect.¹

What is so transparent in this poignant scene is that death and life are not standing in opposition to one another here. The long, slow journey reveals the deeper truth of which Ilia Delio writes, "Every act of physical death is an act of new life in the universe."² Where life seems to be breaking down, could it not, at the same time, actually be breaking through, breaking out, and breaking into something beyond our limited vision?

Might this interplay of death and life hold a learning for us about our commitment to doing justice and making peace? About how to define success in this arena? About seeing beyond the obvious standards our world offers to measure outcomes and calculate results? About letting go of expectations for immediate change and instead surrendering and entrusting our individual and collective efforts to the slow work of God?

When we work for justice over the long haul, we can easily become disheartened as we come up against powerful, relentless force fields of hatred, exclusion, and violence time and time again. In giving our lives over for the sake of a more just and inclusive world, we may find we can rarely point to any tangible difference we've effected. What to do, how to be, when the letters we've written, the phone calls we've made,

the demonstrations and protests and acts of resistance we've engaged in appear to be without a measurable impact?

Perhaps we might reframe and approach success as Teilhard de Chardin does. In *Letters from a Traveler*, he writes, "Success of personal satisfaction does not warrant that we stop there if we have it, or that we be troubled if it escapes us or if it's late in coming. The only thing that is of value is faithful actions for the world in God."³

Perhaps our letting go of notions of success can lead us to fresh thinking about just what those faithful actions might be. In the past few years of leading retreats for groups of committed activists, I've often witnessed a powerful transformation that speaks to this. As we come together in these gatherings, there's sometimes a sense of heaviness, an energy fatigue in response to the tsunami of violent and hateful attitudes and actions making headlines in our world. As this relentless flood of mean-spiritedness crashes over us and tries to pull us under in confusion and despair, we may wonder: What can we do? How must we resist? Perhaps most importantly, how are we called to be?

At such times, we name how we are as we come together and also name the energies we bring into the room. We then engage in an act that might appear to be a total waste of time, an exercise in non-doing. We sit. Together. With the Holy One. In contemplative silence. For 20 minutes. We remain together in this silent, wordless prayer of presence to our broken and beautiful world. In this space, we are not seeking solutions. We are not planning strategies. What we are about is letting go of our human and well-intentioned need to do and to save and to fix. We are simply setting our intention to be presence as the Holy One is, to be a countermovement breathing the energies of compassion and tenderness into the universe.

In a world crying out for justice, could there be any act more needed

than this prayerful, loving presence? During the time of contemplative sitting in a group, we experience a shift in the energy in the room. The shift is so palpable that we can easily imagine, even feel, a great wave of peace and spaciousness of heart sweeping over us and then wending its way out through the windows of our gathering space to wash over a wounded, waiting world.

Perhaps you, too, have experienced this and been blessed by these energies. Perhaps you, too, have breathed them as a prayer of blessing. Perhaps you, too, yearn for communion and desire to be part of the collective described by the poet, Adrienne Rich:

"My heart is moved by all I cannot save: so much has been destroyed

I have to cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely,

with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world."⁴

If you name your own heart as pulsing with desire to bring about God's dream for each of us, if you long to cast your lot with those who refuse to accept anything less than a universe becoming whole and healed by grace, then come, let us walk together into the slow work of God.

References

¹ Walk of Respect (Source: St. Luke's Health System via Facebook) Region 8 Newsdesk, October 1, 2018 at 12:21 PM CDT <http://www.kait8.com/2018/10/01/video-hospital-pauses-organ-donors-walk-respect/>

² Ilia Delio, *Making All Things New, Catholicity, Cosmology, and Consciousness*, Orbis Books

³ Teilhard de Chardin, *Letters from a Traveler*

⁴ Adrienne Rich, excerpt from *Natural Resources in Dreams of a Common Language*



What we are about is letting go of our human and well-intentioned need to do and to save and to fix. We are simply setting our intention to be presence as the Holy One is, to be a countermovement breathing the energies of compassion and tenderness into the universe.

Sister Chris is an author and spiritual guide who engages in mobile spirituality ministry, offering retreats, presentations, and enrichment programs throughout the U.S. and Canada. Visit her blog, *Mining the Now*, at chriskoellhofferihm.org

Trusting the journey — wherever love takes me

by Sister Regina Marie Dubickas SSC

It all began one hundred eleven years ago when three young women from Lithuania came to Marywood, carrying not much else but a dream in their hearts believing that they were called to establish a new religious congregation. What they found was much more—a warm welcome from Mother Cyril, IHM and all the IHM Sisters, a home and relationships that enabled them to grow in a deep sense of God's love for them and God's dream for the world.

That dream has lived on in the hearts of hundreds of women who felt called to religious life as Sisters of St. Casimir. Today with each visit to the IHM Center and Marywood, we continue to find not only a very warm welcome, but a very warm "welcome home." Even more importantly, the relationship between the Sisters of St. Casimir and the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters has come full circle. None of us, when we entered our religious community, expected that one day we would be the ones called to so much letting go. While each of us has always known our life here on earth would someday come to an end, none of us ever imagined that the life of our community would one day cease to exist.

We, as many other religious communities, are being called to enter a new season of our life as we experience the diminishment of our numbers and our energies. We have been called to so much letting go—of sponsorship, of corporate ministries, leaving schools we could no longer staff, and most difficult of all, selling our Motherhouse. Uprooting our very existence in this way necessitated moving most of our sisters to a continuum of care facility, helping them as best we could to adapt to these radical changes, and finding new homes for all our precious belongings, collected lovingly over the course of a century, representing our ties to three different continents.

But even as we let go, we recognized the opportunity to let come as well, and we welcomed the grace of this moment. We decided to share the burden and lighten the load, to do everything together as a community—meeting in a large group, in small circles of conversation, and one on one sharing, not only to discern what God was asking of us, but also to share with one another the deep emotions and the deep re-commitment this process was

calling forth in each of us.

All that we have done and continue to do externally is only part of the story – and the easier part at that – for each one of us, Sisters of St. Casimir, is also on an inner journey, one that is so much more personal and takes so much more time. What an appropriate title for this issue of Journey: Letting Go, Letting Come. Not only must we confront all the feelings of letting go but we must also be open to what is to come by making room for "the new" that God is offering to us. For several years we chose the words of Isaiah, the prophet, as our inspiration, "Behold I am doing something new. Can you not perceive it?" And, just as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious added, we too affixed, "Behold, I am doing it now."

As we made this journey together, each of us experienced all the stages of death and dying—denial, anger, bartering, sadness, and finally acceptance. We acknowledged and lived through these stages both as a community, and much more personally, as individuals. There was disbelief that this could be happening. There was anger—if only we had done more. There was bartering—we could work harder for vocations. There were tears and sadness because everyone grieved the loss, especially of our Motherhouse. Everyone found it difficult to leave. But eventually, we succeeded together where we may have struggled individually. With time, I witnessed the beautiful movement of grace and deep obedience, through tears of surrender. One more time God was asking something very hard to do; one more time each of us was being called to go deeper.

On one of the moving days, a group of IHM sisters came out to accompany our sisters to their new home. I passed by the room in which Mother Maria, our foundress, had lived and worked and spent the last days of her life, always a sacred space for us. Looking in, I saw one of our senior sisters sitting in Mother Maria's chair and an IHM sister sitting beside her on the floor, talking. I will never forget those special moments when we truly connected with one another in a fiat, the likes of which we never imagined.

I was in leadership during this challenging time and very concerned about our sisters; I was listening and trying to help them in whatever way I

could. Then the thought came to me: had I taken the time to make this inner journey myself? One day, after everyone had left the Motherhouse, I walked through the empty rooms remembering, thanking God for all that had been, crying my own tears, letting go as best I could and praying for the wisdom to recognize and be open to what was yet to come.

Sometimes, we may think we have come to acceptance and surrender, but the stages of grieving do not follow a linear path. They are circular, always calling us to go deeper. One such moment occurred for all of us when we read one part of the covenant docu-

In truth, experiencing the pain of letting go gave us the space we needed to welcome what was to come: the reassuring knowledge of being bolstered by the love and supportive presence of our IHM sisters. We were writing a new chapter of our life, a chapter that is both bittersweet and joyful, but we have decided to focus on the joy. We formed a circle with the IHM sisters who were present, and the IHM sisters on the large screen who, through the wonderful technology of Zoom, were present for this historic moment. Together we sang our Chapter refrain, "We are together for a great love." Afterwards, glancing around the room



Every SSC who moved into assisted living or skilled care received a rose and a prayer shawl lovingly made by our Sisters. Pictured is Sister Regina placing a prayer shawl on Sister Milda as Sister Immacula and Sister Margaret say a blessing prayer.

ment we had prepared and celebrated in a beautiful, deeply emotional ritual with our IHM sisters. This document, to which we had all signed our names, asks the IHM sisters to accompany us once again in whatever way may be necessary, just as they had done at the beginning of our community one hundred eleven years ago. There is a part in the document that reads as follows: Upon the time when the last Sister of St. Casimir dies, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary shall petition the Holy See to formally suppress the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Casimir of Chicago.

As we signed the document at our General Chapter this May, we all had tears in our eyes, tears that reflected deep emotions. The sadness of an ending certainly, but more, the peace and security of knowing we are not alone.

and up at the screen, I was moved to say, "We are now 400 strong!"

While it may seem that I have focused on the letting go, I have to say the letting come was always there. Every step of the way we focused on discerning God's call. Every step of the way we felt we were being called to something new. We are not finished. We are writing a new chapter of the story of our community. When we were beginning to move our sisters from the Motherhouse to the continuum of care community, we gathered in chapel, not to say goodbye, but to be missioned to a new place where we are being called to continue to live this new season of our life. This is indeed new territory for all of us and we are creating the path as we walk it.

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Grief and Anger, Learning and Imagination

by Gail Cabral, IHM

Some time ago, I read a statement that the only antidote for sorrow was to learn something. I no longer remember the exact words or the source. At the time, I took this idea to mean that the process of putting ourselves into some learning situation, into some practice that engages us and that we enter with curiosity and mind, can relieve long-term emotional pain. Upon reflection, I have two corrections to my initial reactions to this idea of the importance of learning.

Even as a healthy engagement that involves our curiosity, energy, and motivation, learning something new will not eliminate the raw pain of grief. It may, however, keep us from the harmful cycle of hopelessness and self-pity in our grief. The second correction in my thinking involves another way of looking at learning. We need to learn what grief itself can teach us, about ourselves, the thing or person we've lost, and our relationships.

Grief is the word we use to describe our reactions to loss, or bereavement. Loss can be the absence of many things, a friend, a ministry, a process we are used to, a loved object. However, I want to reflect on bereavement, meaning being deprived of a loved one through a profound absence, especially death; bereavement is to lose someone who was likely the source of love and acceptance.

As adults, our emotions are very often complex interactions of many feelings; they are often intricate, mixed-up, inchoate, and ambivalent. This is made clearer to me when I think of the reactions of toddlers. Their reactions are crystal clear. When something is taken from them they react with sadness, anger, or both. Their reaction is immediate and intense. There is no filter, and little thinking. If the loss continues, the anger and sadness may be accompanied by fear. She (the loved one) is never coming back, and I am lost and alone.

It seems to me that sadness, anger, and fear are quite basic to grief. We are not that different from the two-year old. Of course, the two-year-old wants the toy back, immediately, and

is immensely angry if it is withheld. Our reactions are not quite like that! We have a long history of developing filters, of being taught to control ourselves and our reactions. Our long habits of using our minds to modify and weaken our reactions sometimes lead us to the point of not recognizing what is truly within us.

Although sadness seems to be the central feeling of bereavement, anger and fear are very common companions. Anger is related to ideas of injustice, to expectations, and to lack of control.

We have minds that attempt to apply logic to any situation; we automatically analyze how things ought to be. Even with experience of complex evils in the world and warring impulses in ourselves, we hold in some deep part of our psyches the idea that things should be fair. It is very hard to conclude that death is fair. It's easiest when we are prepared for timely death; even then, it is rare that death seems like a friend.

Death may not seem fair, but it is a journey we share. We pray in a popular song, "Let no one walk alone." Despite the fact that death is the most universal of experiences, the U.S. culture is not comfortable with death, and friends and acquaintances may avoid talking to us about the person we grieve. This is in part because of a mistaken belief that they will increase our pain, and also because they do not feel they know what to say. Better than speaking, of course, are the gifts of presence and listening.



Our imagination can be used... to put the person back in the spaces of our lives. We can imagine them with us as we actively manage our day. We can imagine their reactions to the decisions we are now making. We can imagine conversations with her. Even if these imaginings seem strange, they are useful, and faithful to our memories. We are conserving the living force of our loved one...

One of the strategies for dealing with our grief, including our anger, is to be able to speak and be listened to. We are blessed by those who will listen to us. We are doubly blessed if there are people who knew our deceased loved one and are willing to speak about him/her. We ourselves need to embrace our loved ones as they really were—people with real flaws and real virtues. Although our loss will remain, so will the three-dimensional aliveness of the person. To really remember is to be fair to them, and to what has been.

Many strategies for dealing with grief involve writing or creative memorials, rather than talking. Writing a letter to a deceased loved one, deciphering either in writing or thought the ways the loved one helped us grow as a person, remembering special times and reflecting on why they were special—all are ways in which our relationships may become clearer to us. Though we may fear these reminiscences will increase our grief (they may, in the moment), they help us to write the story of ourselves and our relationships. Reflecting on our past and our present will assist us in tracing, lightly and tentatively at first, the future meaning of our lives.

For other kinds of losses, job changes, ministry closings, or material things, the issue of fairness also comes up. Our grief is intensified by our belief that things might have been different if we or others had done things differently. We are ready to blame the newer or older adminis-

tration, the new or older generation. We are quick to compare the contributions of others to our own, with results that show our greater usefulness or quality. Sometimes when we are unable to make that type of judgment, we make other attributions that lessen the worthiness of others and allow us to persist in complaining that our perceived loss was unfair. Blame, self-pity, and envy can make grief toxic, especially when comparisons are used.

A second main issue related to loss is the matter of expectations. Regarding the loss of loved ones and our own life, we have expectations about the length of life, and how things will unfold. We have high expectations of medical professionals and health care. We may have idealistic imaginings about how life will end, or should. Both anger and fear can be reactions to disappointed expectations. "I thought we would have more time," or "I thought I would have a chance to ..." imply our expectations.

In our desire that our expectations should have been fulfilled, there is an underlying belief in our control, or in our expectation that we should have had control. Death shows us how little control we have in life. Like the toddler we want to be in control, and as human beings we often imagine ourselves as having more control than we do.

Not having control brings fear and feelings of vulnerability. Anger helps us to get back a feeling of control and power; it seems to demonstrate our strength rather than our vulnerability (Jose, 2016). It's difficult and fear-producing to admit how little control we have in life. Anger seems like a useful response. Something or someone must be to blame. Therefore, other people, or I myself, or God can bear the brunt of my anger. Another pattern which may lead us to anger comes from the strain of dealing with a host of conflicted feelings. As we try to control these feelings and ourselves, the strain may produce irritability and over-sensitivity.

One of the ways in which grief can become an unending and increasingly difficult cycle is the way we

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Companioning the Dying

by Joanne Madden, IHM



Recently, I reflected on the beauty of the morning sky and was moved by the trace of God's presence. It was not unlike what I experience in companioning those facing terminal illness. In the early hours, the darkness was transformed as light broke through. At dawn, beautiful streaks of color appeared, then the sunrise. It was symbolic of the transforming process I witness among patients as they prepare to surrender their whole selves and cross the eternal threshold.

Diagnosis of terminal illness brings a stunned feeling resembling the early morning darkness. Questions swirl in patients' minds and hearts and those of their loved ones. How? Why? Where do I turn? Some express these questions revealing their feelings; others not so much. As a pastoral caregiver, I discovered that presence and deep listening to movements of the heart bring the light each dying person most needs.

Years prior to my own call to hospice care, I was mentored into it. I observed my own sister, Elizabeth Ann, a Mercy sister, dedicated to Christ's healing ministry as nurse, medical technologist, and hospital administrator. Her responsibilities took her into the core experience of suffering. When she herself received a terminal diagnosis at age 40, I witnessed her personal growth from darkness to light. She accepted experimental treatments, not so much for herself, but to benefit future patients. During that period, she received profound grace through loving reflection on Christ's redeeming mission: total surrender to the Father's will through his passion, death and resurrection. Becoming one with Christ's transforming mystery of suffering became evident as Elizabeth Ann's Christ-consciousness directed her journey and her continu-

ing ministry. The Father's/Mother's healing love transformed her. She gave witness to Catherine McAuley's words: "Availability to others in their needs is the touchstone of the ministry of healing based on the Gospel message."

In time, Elizabeth Ann's contemplation of Christ's healing miracles bore fruit in the commission of the "Christ the Healer" sculpture beautifully executed by Philip Picard.¹ It includes thirteen miracles, the Last Supper and the Resurrection. A source of inspiration and hope, it graces the lobby of Pittsburgh's UPMC Mercy Hospital. Working with the sculptor, Elizabeth Ann conveyed that through faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ, we see what we all anticipate in hope: the full restoration of all creation to the Father. What was made new in each miracle, foreshadows what will be true for all in the final coming of God's kingdom.² As Elizabeth Ann's life ebbed, we witnessed her loving surrender in joyful hope to Christ, her healer.

Subsequent to this mentoring journey, I was invited into hospice when a second loved one, who had survived one life-limiting diagnosis, then received a second one. Dedicated to her call as a nurse, Mary revealed Christ's presence through her extension of care from newborns to the frail elderly, to the homeless and the dying. When she chose to receive hospice care, I became her primary caregiver along with two other sisters—a nurse, and a chaplain. Mary's journey of acceptance, and her choice to live her final months in joyful hope, were evidence of her personal surrender to the Christ she lovingly served.

The mentoring and care-giving inspired my desire to become a spiritual companion with the dying. Initially, I became Mercy Hospital's

volunteer coordinator. In this role, I engaged in Christ's healing work in its "No One Dies Alone" service; called to be a prayerful presence to the dying. Later as a Catholic Chaplain in a long term care facility, I served as the spiritual member on hospice teams – ministering to residents and their families. Presence to those suffering in the latter stages of life connected me with the lives of faith-filled people, as well as with those of weak faith, or no faith at all.

Ann, a gracious woman of 106 years, felt God had forgotten her. Through guided reflection, she gradually discovered her greatest blessing: God's loving care in all her joys and sorrows. She fell in love with God once more. Ann was ready to let go and let come and surrendered peacefully into God's loving arms.

JB, a widower, suffering from Parkinson's disease, possessed a joyful spirit that brought hope to all despite his own condition. Surrounded by his loving children, he struggled to let go. The morning he was actively dying, I visited him. He kept whispering, "Sister, push me! Push me!" "Do you want to be pushed into heaven?" I asked. His face lit up and I heard his firm, "Yes!" During Mass, we prayed that doors would open for him. By late afternoon, JB peacefully passed over, his children at his side. His "push me" revealed this loving father's readiness to let his eternal Father

welcome him home.

A Korean Veteran appeared aloof about his faith. He was deeply traumatized from his actions mandated under military command. After his military discharge, Lou also experienced tragic alienation from his faith. Gradually, we formed a bond of trust. One Holy Thursday during our Communion Service, he slipped in to observe. He returned for Good Friday. Lou's terminal illness resulted in his being deaf and partially blind. Since Christ's passion was being shown on video, I offered him a front row seat. He said, "I can't hear but maybe I'll see a little." He was deeply touched; tears flowed as if washing away his wounds. Afterwards, Lou shared how he saw Christ suffering with him – an extraordinary blessing. Easter came. He agreed to a visit from our chaplain. Father's compassionate understanding was indeed a Christ encounter. Lou's transformation was palpable. He lived his remaining days as the loving, compassionate person he truly was.

These experiences, and my current ministry, are the "best wine saved until last." As Mary at the wedding feast, we are instruments of God's loving care. Ministry to the dying is truly a privilege, and a sacred trust, a call to hold each person, God's beloved, with reverence and tenderness. As the sun sets for each, the Son reveals God's loving face and she/he hears:

"Come, blessed one. Receive the place I have prepared for you."



The Wedding Feast at Cana by Philip Picard

¹ Connors, OFM Conv., Canice. Unpublished Commentary for the dedication of Christ the Healer Sculpture, (1977).

² Picard, Philip, (1935-2009), illustrator, sculptor; Picard Didier Studio

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The Gift of Story:

Processing Grief and Suffering at the Movies by Nancy Hawkins, IHM

Why do we go to the movies? I suspect that one of the answers is that we want to sit in a dark room with popcorn, escaping from the reality of our life for an hour or two. We also like to be entertained. But we human beings also love stories, and the movies offer us creative, insightful, challenging, and often poignant stories about our lives. We see ourselves on the screen and we engage with the struggles of humanity. There are wonderful films that focus on the reality of grief, loss, death and suffering. They can be used for personal inspiration, in the classroom, for retreats, or simple discussions among friends. I am going to describe five of them that have touched me deeply.

Rabbit Hole, starring Nicole Kidman and Aaron Eckhart was made in 2010. It is the story of a couple who have lost a child and the way their grief impacts every aspect of their life together. This serious film is sensitive and considerate. As viewers, we come to understand how a relationship cannot be “put back together” in the same way after a tragic death. Rabbit Hole also focuses on the struggles of the person who unwittingly is involved in the accident that took the child’s life. Most films bypass how grief impacts the secondary characters in the story. This one does not. Rabbit Hole does not offer easy answers to loss and grief. We visually see how Kidman and Eckhart fall into the “rabbit hole,” a metaphor for dealing with the unknown, and try to come out on the other side. We wish them well at the end of the film because they deserve a chance to find

peace.

Margaret Edson won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1999 for her one woman play, Wit. In 2001 it was made into a movie starring Emma Thompson and Eileen Atkins. Everyone involved in the medical field needs to see this powerful film. Thompson is a literature scholar who is diagnosed with cancer. Atkins plays her demanding mentor. As Thompson’s character goes through treatment she encounters matter of fact doctors who lack personal skills. This film is not for the faint of heart. I show one particular scene in Wit when I teach my course on suffering. Eileen Atkins visits her student who is dying and sits beside her on the hospital bed and reads her The Runaway Bunny that she bought for her great grandchild. She offers her student the love and care that the medical field, save a wonderful nurse, does not. Atkins gives Thompson permission to follow the angels into paradise. That would be a perfect ending we think, but Wit has a final scene that reminds us that our wishes concerning our death need to be honored so we can go to our Maker in peace. Take a chance on Wit, you won’t regret it.

In 1999 the film Shadowlands was made with Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger, playing C.S. Lewis and his American wife, Joy Davidman. As most know, Lewis married Davidman when he was older and they only had four years together before she died, leaving him to raise her two sons. This is a wonderful movie that not only sheds light

on grief, it brings to the fore the question of why an all-loving and benevolent God allows humans to suffer. We will identify with Hopkin’s character as he struggles to reframe his relationship with God and help Joy’s child cope with her loss. (In reality Lewis was left with two children to raise, not one). We also hear the unsatisfactory religious statements about suffering that do not help those who are grieving. Lewis eventually comes to see that there are no easy answers to death or to the pain of loss. Grief is the price we pay for a love that blesses our life. I cannot say enough about this film. I do suggest that one read Lewis’ A Grief Observed after viewing the movie. Lewis, the eternal scholar, observes his own grief and shares its lessons with the reader.

One film that takes a very creative approach to the reality of loss and grief is Collateral Beauty, made in 2016. This film will appeal to many age groups because of its all-star cast which includes Will Smith, Helen Mirren, Kate Winslet and Edward Norton. Will Smith plays a man who has not recovered from the death of his daughter. He has been writing to death, love, and time so his friends hire actors to play these roles and speak to Smith. It turns out that Smith is not the only one in the film who needs healing. One of the messages of this movie is that while there is always collateral damage after loss, there is also collateral beauty, if we but have the eyes to see.

Finally, I want to mention a very moving and sometimes amusing



Japanese film named Departures. It was made in 2008 and won the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Film of that year. It focuses on a man who loses his job playing the cello in an orchestra and finds a new job learning how to “dress” and honor those who have died, to prepare them for their burial or cremation. The care and concern that he learns to give the dead and their families parallels the care and concern he gives to playing his cello. You will come away from this film realizing the importance of those who help us mourn our loved ones. An added benefit of this movie is that you learn the customs of another culture and realize that grief and loss are universal.

There are many other films that I could recommend to you, but these five are my favorites. I invite you to watch them and let their message speak to you.

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Cabral, continued from page 6

imagine our past relationship and our present. We imagine being together, perhaps a picture of ourselves and the other person walking along a beach. Then we imagine the empty space, like a picture that has had a piece cut out. We are focused on what is missing. Our imagination can be used to do the opposite, to put the person back in the spaces of our lives. We can imagine her with us as we actively manage our day. We can imagine her reactions to the decisions

we are now making. We can imagine conversations with her.

Even if these imaginings seem strange, they are useful, and faithful to our memories. We are conserving the living force of our loved one, as well as we are able. At the same time, we are being faithful to who we are now and who we are becoming. Our personal values, and the complex array of feelings that are part of any lasting relationship or situation, become clearer to us. None

are wrong, they just are. None are imprisoning; they are freeing. We are liberated, not from grief, but from being caught in an unending cycle. We will still have repetitions of the reactions of grief, but they will not be like being trapped in a running wheel. Our sharing and our speech, our thoughts and our imaginations can open us to continued love of what has been, as well as opening love to what is and what is to come.

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The Final Journey

by Walt Kozlowski

Mary “Mae” Kozlowski hit 80 doing 80 mph, active, fun-filled, faith-fulfilled. Then, her life’s journey came to an unexpected detour on April 1, 2008, in a cubicle in the emergency room.

In her ninth decade, our mother was told that an MRI showed she had a brain tumor. For a woman whose day always found her, as her Irish ancestors would say, “working the beads,” the dire diagnosis did not stop that devotion or other daily prayers. The cancer eventually robbed her of speech and mobility, but not her faith.

She followed the advice of a Prayer to St. Francis de Sales in offering each day as a “living rosary of love” to Jesus and Mary. The mysteries of each day varied – joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious – but her acceptance of God’s will remained unchanging.

It was only natural that some of those days in the eighteen months from diagnosis to death would reflect the sorrowful mysteries. Mother imitated Jesus Christ in the way she bore her trials in the same way Jesus carried his cross. There were only eight days between that fateful day in the emergency room until she was scheduled for the operating room for a brain biopsy.

By an unsettling coincidence, it was April 9, the same day her mother had died of a brain aneurysm sixty years before. Her sister had died after surgery in the same medical center only two years before. One of the two times we saw her cry during that year and a half period was in pre-op that morning when she said good-bye to my two brothers, sister and me, thinking she might not see us again in this world. The other was many hours later in post-op when she cried for joy, realizing she had survived.

This bearing of trial and the patience of another sorrowful mystery, Crowning with Thorns, was reflected in the way she coped with what

followed. She went through chemotherapy, radiation treatments, was hospitalized three times, spent rehabilitation time in two nursing homes, received home health care in her own home, sustained a broken hip and spent the last eleven months of her life in a long-term care facility. There she almost sustained a broken neck when an aide accidentally rolled her out of bed.

Yet, in all that time, she did not complain or ask the seemingly inevitable question of God, “Why me?” The only time she made any comment was when we were taking her from the hospital to a nursing home for rehab. “It all happened so fast,” was all she said.

The faith of the first glorious mystery, the Resurrection, was undoubtedly the reason for her acceptance and patience. The time she was able to remain at home found her sitting first in her usual rocking chair and then in a wheel chair beside the table where she kept her mother’s rosary and her books of prayers.

As her condition worsened, we would have to help her into a hospital bed in the living room. She made sure that we handed her a rosary, plastic and glow-in-the-dark, before we said good night. It is left to the imagination to ponder what she said to God and God said to her in those nighttime conversations.

Sometimes, there was a mixing of the mysteries. Such was the case for her month-long series of radiation treatments when the perseverance of the Crucifixion, the fifth sorrowful mystery, was paired with the humility of the Annunciation, the first joyful one. For the first week, mother was able to walk into the hospital and to the radiation treatment. The next week, she navigated the same route with the aid of a walker.

However, in the final two weeks she needed to ride in a wheelchair because the treatments had weakened her. For someone who strode through

life despite knees that required a double replacement at seventy-nine and a half, this must have been a humbling experience. She did it without complaint, but the first thing she did when we got back into the car was to remove the handicapped placard from the rearview mirror.

No doubt much of her spiritual strength came from her love of Holy Communion, and the luminous mystery of the Institution of the Eucharist. She was quietly proud of becoming an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion in the last decade of her life. My wife JoAnn and I were honored to serve with her and grateful that our pastor allowed us to bring the Eucharist to her when she was no longer able to attend Mass.

The glorious mystery, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, epitomized the love she had for her family, which was exceeded only by her adoration of God. Despite her weakening medical condition, her love was certainly at full strength during Christmas of 2008 when her children and their families gathered one last time in her home to celebrate both family and divine love.

That was also the case on September 4, 2009, her eighty-second and last birthday, when we gathered in her long-term care room. On that day, there were presents but the real gift was to enjoy her presence.

Certainly, her faith was based on her devotion to Jesus through Mary. As a daughter and granddaughter of a Mary, Mary Kozlowski had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother as commemorated in the glorious mystery of the Assumption.



The ninth and last decade of mother’s final journey was said on November 15, 2009, after she received Anointing of the Sick and passed from this life to the next two hours later. It was the glorious mystery of the Crowning of the Blessed Virgin Mary, eternal happiness.

If you have been keeping count, you have noticed that the glorious, joyful and luminous mysteries in mother’s final illness far outnumbered the sorrowful ones. How else could it be? Mother finally got to meet God after living her lifelong rosary of love.

Walt Kozlowski is a high school teacher. He is also a candidate for the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Harrisburg.; prayers are appreciated.

The Uses of Sorrow

by Kathryn Kurdziel, IHM

The Uses of Sorrow
a poem by Mary Oliver

(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)

*Someone I loved once gave me
a box full of darkness
It took me years to understand
that this, too, was a gift.*

Four and a half—young, very young, but old enough to know that something was wrong—very wrong—and frantic—the sound of breathing so un-natural—so strange, I heard later they call it a coma. Wind and snow blew in the middle of that January night. The doctor arrived and hurriedly wrapped the two and a half year old child, my brother, in a blanket and headed for his car while Dad wrapped me in a blanket and took me across the road to our neighbor's home to sleep overnight with her girls.

Three days later, standing on the same neighbor's porch, I stood in the frigid air silently whimpering, for my grieving parents had carefully left me behind and driven off to Frankie's funeral. In those days, people didn't take children to funerals; it was assumed that children didn't understand death and that a funeral would be too much for them to bear. For me, I just felt abandoned!

What I knew then, and what I still know now, is that four and a half is not too young to wake up each morning in my bed next to the empty crib feeling utterly forsaken, barely breathing in the dreadful silence of the tiny house bereft of the chatter of my little brother, robbed of my smiling mother's happy countenance; even my father's calm reassuring voice went mute in the absence of the child named after him. Life could not have been more barren or still than in that little, three room home surrounded by dark woods with one lone house across the road, and thick forest stretching more than half a mile beyond. Who had so stealthily sent me a box full of frozen darkness, soundlessly wrapped in the coldest, blackest season of the year?

In mid-February, we left our home and moved in with friends to care for Frankie's godmother who had had serious back surgery but the move just made me lonelier. Then one night, my throat became raw and sore and my fever shot up and my mother went frantic. Once more our faithful, country doctor wrapped a sick child with strep throat in a blanket and drove me to the hospital. It was in the time before antibiotics. Three delirious nights passed in the pediatric ward in the same bed by the window that had cradled my dying brother. I thought, like Frankie, I would never go home but in my fever dreams we played together in the yard. My fever finally broke; my mother smiled and my father spoke in his soothing tones and carried me to the car.

Little by little the days lengthened, the snow slowly melted. Mom planted seeds in the little boxes and placed them in the sun on the kitchen table readying them for our big summer garden and she sewed me a patchwork jacket for the spring. Liberated from the house and the cold dark winter, I wandered outside and found solace behind the huge bolder near the spreading maple tree by the garden. I hid there when I felt lonely and babbled on and on to Frankie, telling him all about the turkeys we were raising, and about the neighbors' cows that were coming up to the fence again and about Aunt June's wedding I was going to be in during the summer. I missed his beautiful brown eyes, his dark hair, and the way his dimples appeared when he smiled, and though he was gone, in those years, I never doubted that his presence was hidden with me behind the rock.

Seventy plus years have passed but time

has not dimmed the clarity of those memories, the intensity of those feelings, nor the paralyzing darkness of those days. Was the loss the gift? No, it was not the loss. It was the life; the gift of the child that was like no other. The gift was and is coming to cherish the long life of my parents and the continuing companionship of my brother and sister, their spouses, my ten nieces and nephews, my twenty-four beautiful grand nieces and nephews so perfect and full of life, my dear friends and community members—all life's greatest gift and blessing. The gift is the inner knowing of pain and loss and the acute ache that builds compassion and bonds me to all of humanity. The gift is fidelity in suffering and finding stars in the heavens on the darkest nights of the year.

I was given the gift of teaching others how to navigate the darkness of night by finding the North Star. I found a place to serve the most abandoned and make a difference at Mary



Carroll Lodge, a vacation venue for severely, physically disabled adults where Sister Robert Ann von Ahnen and I served as administrator and staff supervisor for eight summers. The bodies of many of our guests were unmercifully twisted and weak but we forged wonderful companionships through shared heartache and uproarious laughter, chronic pain and tender listening. We schooled our young staff in the art of tending to the whole person. On two different occasions, we surrounded one of our guests, abandoned by all others, tenderly supporting her as she surrendered her wounded life into our compassionate hands. What wonderful life lessons we shared; lessons about faith and grace, about consoling each other and celebrating courage so vibrant in deformed bodies, about respect and remembering, about vulnerability and strength.

My tears, my vulnerability, I've never really lost them, but the uses of sorrow and the poems I dream in my sleep, remind me that someone I loved gave me a gift wrapped in darkness when I was very young and I have come to cherish it with all my heart.

Sister Kathy serves as the editor for IHM publications.



Day of the Dead in Mexico

by Elvia Mata Ortega, IHM

The Day of the Dead festival is one of the most transcendent and popular festivities of our ritual calendar, both civic and spiritual. During these days, our dead, according to popular belief, return to the world of the living to live with their families for the exchange of goods that are offered to them, ensuring their help and support throughout the year.

The celebration of the Day of the Dead is a day of encounter, a day of reflection and prayer for those who were part of our earthly life. This day is marked on the calendar November 2, but in reality, in some Mexican towns it is celebrated from October 28-November 2.

Celebrating the day of the faithful departed causes us to reflect on the fact that once our loved ones were with us, they shared their lives with us but they have already gone to the Father's house where there are many dwellings. (John 14:2)

There are many ways to celebrate this day, from placing candles in the streets to illuminate the path of the deceased who will come to celebrate with their loved ones who are still alive to the greatest celebrations with mariachi music, food, and prayer.

The distinctive features of this day are the altars dedicated to the dead. This tradition of the altar of the dead is full of meaning and laden with symbolic elements. Generally, the altars are of two, three or even seven levels. In all cases, the lower levels represent the earth and the underworld, and the upper levels symbolize the heavenly dimensions. Most of the altars have an arch that indicates the entrance to the world of the dead; it is adorned with flowers of cempazúchitl (from the Nahuatl, the language spoken by the Virgin of Guadalupe). Their yellow and orange color symbolizes the light that streams through the souls of the deceased. The flower only grows in the autumn months.

For our ancestors and for current generations, it is very important to represent the natural elements on the altar of the dead. The wind is represented

by colorful paper that also gives a sense of celebration and joy. An altar dedicated to a deceased person should always have a glass of water that serves to quench the thirst of the spirit. Fire is represented by lighted candles, and the earth is represented by seeds and fruits that are placed on the altar. The aroma is another one of the essential elements. Incense was considered a sacred essence in pre-Hispanic cultures. It symbolizes our prayers that rise up to the altar of God. Other aromas present are: cempazúchitl flowers, and the smells of various foods.

The foods that are placed on the altar should be foods that the deceased enjoyed in life because they can only enjoy them once a year. Traditionally, typical dishes such as mole and tamales are present. "Calaveritas" or little skulls are made of sugar, chocolate or amaranth and signify that death can be sweet. Alcoholic drinks that the deceased enjoyed in life such as beer, tequila or "pulque," are placed on the altar.

On the earthly levels of the altar, belongings of the deceased are usually placed, especially if they were loved and appreciated objects. It is also customary to place a photograph of the deceased in the central part. Religious objects are never missing from the altar of a dead person. They

occupy the upper levels of the altar and are made up of crucifixes or images of saints or of the Virgin.

Another very peculiar characteristic of this day is that Mexicans celebrate it as if they are not afraid of death. From very young ages, children are taught to write "Literary Skulls." They are verses in the form of funny and satirical rhymes that refer to a character who meets death. I think that, when writing in this way, the great fear of death is there but it is disguised with good humor.

The writer, Octavio Paz (2002), in his famous "Labyrinth," devotes a specific section to the theme of the Day of the Dead and the relationship of the Mexican with death. Thus, he explains that for people from other parts of the world, death is a forbidden topic. Mexicans, on the other hand, visit it and celebrate it. In their attitude, there is perhaps as much fear as in that of other cultures, but they do not hide it or hide from it; they contemplate it face to face. (Paz, 2002, p.63)

Finally, another of the peculiarities of this celebration is that it is customary to dress as "catrina." The character of the "catrina" is dressed as a skeleton wearing the typical Mexican dress. This is a disguise that is not meant to scare, but to show death in an elegant way and with a



sense of humor.

Finally, the celebration of the Day of the Dead is a party where the living meet the dead, offering them an authentic feast of smells, colors, flavors and music, so that those who follow the earthly plane do not forget that death is only a transition to the eternal, while the dead "return" to live with their friends and family. This custom gives a taste of hope to death. I think that the film, *Coco*, shows a bit of what the celebration of the Day of the Dead means for the Mexican people.

Finally, I want to highlight an aspect that is very important to me. On this occasion, Mexico has decided to dedicate the holiday to all those migrants who, in their transit to other lands, have lost their lives. In the same way, Mexico dedicates this day to all those groups of migrants who have come to Mexico, that through time, they may enrich and beautify it.

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Sister Elvia is currently the Deputy Director of Padre Severiano Home for Children, in Guadalupe, Nuevo Leon Mexico.





by Annmarie Sanders, IHM

A recent issue of *Kosmos Journal*¹ contained an edited transcription of a dialogue between William Ury and Thomas Hübl. The two spoke in part about what could happen if more people were willing to witness, rather than turn away from, the painful and traumatic events that impact the world. A portion of the dialogue grabbed my attention:

Hübl: “What is the power of enough of us truly witnessing with a felt sense of awareness and energetic connection...? I am wondering what would happen if more and more of us really turn toward the events that happen instead of joining the majority who do not witness world events.... What is our capacity to witness the atrocities in Syria, Colombia, or in our closest communities or neighbors? I believe being a citizen of the world comes with a witnessing responsibility.”

Ury: “... Can we all together as a community move forward and heal the wounds? If we can develop those skills and competencies, which are innate in human beings, more globally, collectively, then I think we have a chance to bring about the world we’d like to live in.”

The IHM congregation took a significant step towards that collective witnessing for which these two men are calling when it held a day entitled, “Bearing Witness: Embodying Our Desire to Live and Love the World.” The day was designed in response to a collective trauma that the congregation experienced that began for us on April 28, 2018 when we learned of the death of Rosemary Smith, a beloved member of the IHM Center housekeeping staff, murdered by her son who it is believed took his own life after shooting his mother

and setting her house on fire while he and his mother’s corpse were inside. On that day, we also learned of the presumed death of Rosemary’s sister, Angela Miller, who is a member of our congregation. The police believe that Angela had been in her sister’s home the night before the morning fire, however, her body was not found with those of her sister and nephew despite a meticulous search through the charred rubble of the house. As the police searched for Angela’s body in and around Scranton during the days following the fire, we anxiously awaited word that her remains had been found. Thirteen days after the fire, the police enlisted the help of several hundred volunteers to join the search as well. And, yet, even with this assistance, no trace of Angela was found. To this day, her remains have not been recovered.

Angela’s disappearance and presumed violent death at the hands of her own nephew remains a chilling, almost incomprehensible event in the life of the IHM congregation. While many of us have accompanied and consoled others whose loved ones have disappeared or who were victims of violence, most of us had not experienced this type of trauma in such a personal way as we did with the deaths of Rosemary and Angela.

The Invitation to Deeper Communion

As the weeks wore on after April 28, our congregation leadership team recognized two facts. The first was that we were in a state of collective grief. The loss of both Angela and Rosemary in such a tragic and violent manner left us with a grief that was raw and unrelenting. Questions haunted us: How could we not have known that these two women were enduring the dreadful pressure and worry over a family member who had become capable of such violence? What had life been like for them in the face of this stress? What did they endure before they were killed? What really did happen to Angela? Where is her body, and will it ever be recovered? Could we have



helped prevent this?

The second fact was that our congregation had been given an extraordinary opportunity to deepen our capacity to be in communion with the thousands of people throughout the world who have endured violence and its aftereffects. We had entered the ranks of those who now feel the impact of a violent act in the very marrow of our bones.

With these two insights before them, our leadership team began asking: What might help us to collectively grieve? How might we respond to the opportunity for interior transformation that these deaths offered us?

The outcome of their discernment was to ask Sister of St. Joseph Liz Sweeney to lead the congregation in a day of contemplation, ritual, prayer, and contemplative dialogue to face the loss the congregation endured. Liz, who has journeyed with our community for the past few years as a contemplative guide, designed a day that led us to do exactly what Thomas Hübl and William Ury discussed: witness to—rather than turn away from—a painful and traumatic event.



Desire to Live and Love the World



One with the Grief of the World

The day, September 8, began with more than 100 sisters and associates gathering in silence in the IHM Center chapel. Before entering the chapel, many deposited in a large bowl at the chapel entranceway flower petals that they had brought from their own homes and gardens. The bowl became a visible symbol of the new life and hope that was present throughout the day.

Liz opened the gathering by setting a context that connected our grief with that of the larger world. The opening included an expression in dance, of which I was a part, created and executed by a group of four sisters. As we created the dance, we tried to physically feel the weight of the grief of the world and of our community. As we allowed ourselves to feel that weight, we knew that the pain of bearing such a heavy load could only be relieved in relationship with others. And so we attempted to create movements that showed how our hearts can be opened when we allow our grief to be expressed within the safe space of

loving companions. As we did so, we felt as if space within us individually and collectively opened up and we could invite in the pain of others. As that pain mixed with our own, we were able to experience a slight lifting of the heaviness of the burden as we carried the mingled pain close to our hearts and offered it all before God.

In our dance we took two cloths that symbolically carried our pain and transformed them into a large white cross, which we carried from the chapel to our conference center and placed on the floor in the middle of our meeting space. The participants followed us to the conference center carrying small white paper crosses, reminiscent of the crosses carried by the thousands of people of Latin America in prayer vigils that mourn their loved ones who have disappeared. Once in the conference center, we viewed a series of images that connected the disappearance of Angela with the many events over the course of just the previous few months around the world where people suffered violent deaths as well as the disappearance of loved ones – through natural disasters, war, and violent acts. Liz then invited us to use color markers on our own white crosses to express how we felt in light of all we had experienced.

Three members of our community offered testimony on their experience of Angela's disappearance, and the deaths of her sister and nephew. Their poignant stories of integrating the reality of this violent loss into their own lives spoke clearly of how deeply they had turned toward the suffering and not away from it, despite the searing pain that doing so sometimes aroused within them.

The Invitation Forward

As we participants acknowledged the depth of our loss and grief, Liz reminded us of how trauma is eventually healed. We do not heal trauma ourselves, she said, but we can let light into the cracks of our individual and collective lives that traumatic events cause and allow the

light to heal. Trauma, we learned, has to flow through us to completion and, if it gets stuck, it can stay in the body for a long time. It is released through kind and merciful presence to the pain that the trauma has triggered. That presence may come from ourselves, and it may come from the experience of another's goodness and love to us. Our hope is that our work with our own individual and communal trauma will deepen and widen our capacity to be with the suffering that is rampant in our world.

Liz invited us to ponder questions that required our careful attention. Now that we have experienced this violent action and loss of life that was so dear to us, what is the invitation to us as a body? How is this experience part of our evolution as a religious congregation? How are we being invited forward in new ways?

As we reflected on these important questions, Liz asked us to be attentive to any feelings of hope stirring within us. As we felt those emotions, we approached the bowl of flower petals – symbols of possibility -- and placed some on the large white cross. We concluded the day by carrying the petals outside and scattering them at the base of a tree that had been planted on our property in memory of Angela.

I would like to believe that this day of prayer, conversation, and simple, symbolic action has somehow strengthened our individual and collective capacity to assume our "witnessing responsibility." Through our collective reflection as well as our commitment to live into the questions this day offered us, perhaps we are helping "bring about the world we'd like to live in."

¹ *New Approaches to Healing Collective Conflict and Trauma: Our Responsibility as Global Citizens*, by William Ury and Thomas Hübl, Kosmos Journal, Summer 2017

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God's Promise of Eternal Life

by Redempta Sweeney IHM

The theme of this Journey's issue "Letting Go and Letting Come" speaks to our contemplative journey. At the heart of contemplation is a spirit of "letting go"—surrender. John of the Cross speaks of "an inflow of God's love" "coming" to the person as a sure sign of God's promise of eternal life. The Word of God is replete with assurances of God's promise of eternal life. The Gospel of John, perhaps, contains the greater number of these assurances.

Along the way of my own spiritual journey, the priestly prayer of Jesus, (John 17), led me to an awareness that eternal life is now. We can experience heaven on earth now. The overwhelming love of God can fill us now if only we can "let go and let come." This certitude is found in these words of Jesus: "Now this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God and the One whom you sent, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3). This knowing in the scriptural sense is an intimate knowledge of each other. Much self-knowledge and self-emptying of the false self leads us on the path of unitive love, the fruit of infused contemplation. This is a pure gift of God. We cannot earn it except to be totally available, open in mind, heart, body and spirit to the great work of God and all that God in the Spirit desires to accomplish in and with us through God's perfect love.

I have been fascinated by the book and also the film, *Heaven Is For Real*. Many of you may have read the book or seen the film. Young Coltan Burpo, four years old, claims to have visited heaven during a near death experience. He can describe seeing Jesus, angels, his

paternal grandfather and even a sister who died in a miscarriage. Colton's father, a Protestant pastor, has many doubts, until he sees a picture of Jesus on the internet, drawn by a young girl in Yugoslavia who had had a similar near death experience. When young Coltan sees the picture of Jesus he says, "That's him!" The faith of this little child is astounding and does give us hope that God promises us eternal life.

In his daily reflection Richard Rohr shared this: "You can't accomplish or work up to union with God, because you've already got it. Before the world began you were chosen, chosen in Christ to live through love in God's presence. (Eph. 1:4). You cannot ever become worthy or "perfect" by yourself; you can only reconnect to your Infinite Source. This biblical revelation is about awakening, not accomplishing. It is about realization, not performance. You cannot get there; you can only be there. Only the humble can receive it and surrender to such grace."

In the Christian practice of spiritual direction, as a director walks the journey with us towards deeper union with God, the director listens for what may be blocking this inflow of God's love. Our blocks may keep us from experiencing heaven on earth, intimate union with our loving God. These blocks in contemplative prayer may be an unforgiving spirit, jealousy, greed, envy or the need for control. Letting go of these can take many years for some. In a book by Jeffrey Imbach, *The Recovery of Love: Christian Mysticism and the Addictive Society*, the author turns to four fourteenth century mystics, Julian of Norwich, John Ruusbroec,

Meister Eckhart and Dante Alighieri. Mr. Imbach is a pastor, a husband and a father of two daughters. He was a trusted friend of Henri Nouwen. In his forward Nouwen speaks of this book as a wise, pastoral and healing book. Born of Jeffrey's personal struggles and lived in the light of the Gospel, this book is shaped by the great mystics of the Church.

The fourteenth century was chaotic and the four mystics that Imbach addresses lived through a cataclysmic collapse of the old and an emergence of an uncertain future. We, too, in this twenty-first century are living in such times. Imbach refers to his book in these words: "The recovery of love, then, is about our contemporary search for intimacy and about our communal memory of a full-bodied vision of passionate love."

Our personal longings for intimacy with God now were placed by God in the depths of our being at the moment of conception. I think of the paths that St. Augustine and Thomas Merton took, to mention two in the Church's salvation history story. Both men, and many of us, go by way of many unwholesome and addictive paths to find this intimate and passionate love of God. Augustine would say, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You, our God." Merton was drawn to the Monastery in Gethsemane in his desire for that unitive love, and yes, they both found their heaven on earth. God's love did fill them in their contemplative journey. This requires much "letting go and letting come."

We return now to the four mystics of the fourteenth century. Over seven hundred years ago, the writing of

Julian of Norwich, John Ruusbroec, Meister Eckhart and Dante Alighieri initiated the greatest exploration of love ever found. As a woman, I am most attracted to Julian and her grasp of the Love found in the Trinity. In her book of Revelations, Julian shares: "Suddenly, the Trinity filled my heart with the greatest joy and I understood heaven will be just that joyful without end – to all who live there – because the Trinity is God and God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, protector, ever-lasting lover, and unending joy and happiness, by our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Finally, we as Christians, experience two very mystical moments in our lives. First, at Baptism, clothed with Christ, we are filled with the fullness of God's love, heaven on earth, whether we are aware of this or not. Second, in every reception of the Eucharist, we are immersed in Christ's love, drawn into the fullness of the love of God as Trinity. This is heaven on earth for me, and the fulfillment of God's promise of eternal life. May our awareness of this unitive love transform us more and more.

"Ah, but when Love grows unitive I know, joy will up soar, my heart sing far more free, having come home to God's Infinity." (Unknown)

Sister Redempta resides in Bear, Delaware, and is engaged in the ministry of spiritual direction. She also serves as a presenter in the weekly RCIA program at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish. She leads a book discussion group and prays with eight IHM Associates in a Circle of Grace.



Much self-knowledge and self-emptying of the false self leads us on the path of unitive love, the fruit of infused contemplation.

How do you honor the memory of a loved one who has died?

I feel very close to my Mom. When she was alive, many times she would call me when she suspected I was feeling low about some problem or conflict in my life. Now that she's in eternal life, I call on her when I'm in need, and it would take a book to tell how many times she's interceded for me.
Sister Eileen Egan, IHM

I have been so blessed for so long to have had my three brothers and my sister. At every family event, we had a photo taken of the five of us. It all started when our mother passed in 1975. Now, because I am the fifth and last one, I look back at those pictures with deep love and remember.
Sister Jane Mary Duke, IHM

As a young girl, my Mom used to tell me to wear my sky-blue pink dress, so in the evening when the sky is a pinkish blue, I remember the sweetness of my relationships with my family.
Sister Carol Loughney, IHM

Sharing stories and memories (mostly funny and awesome) of my great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and uncles is the way I connect with the Communion of Saints in my life. Pictures are also an endearing way of keeping them close. Praying to them and for them is helpful as well. It keeps them alive in my heart.
Sister Mindy Welding, IHM

On the feast of All Souls, I go through my collection of memorial cards for those I have loved and known that are no longer among us. I pray for each person, think about them and remember how they touched my life. As I do this, I know I am experiencing the Communion of Saints.
Sister Nancy Hawkins, IHM

For me, it's all about pictures--close at hand--that continue to touch my heart and make me smile in gratitude.
Sister Maria Rose Kelly, IHM

Whenever I have the opportunity, I tell a story of something wonderful one of my deceased loved ones did while alive; for example, my sister Evie, who spent 50 years of her life as a quad-

riplegic, won seven Olympic medals competing in four para-Olympic games: swimming, bowling, table tennis and archery.
Sister Loretta Mulry, IHM

I honor them through conversation about those who have died (especially exchanging stories with others who have also known them). I also keep their memorial cards in calendar order so that I can pray especially for and to them on the anniversary of the day they died.
Sister Carol Lubas, IHM

I honor their memory through donations of money or time to their favorite charities (and encourage others to do so). Music is always a way through which I remember them. When I hear their favorite songs on the radio or see a video of their favorite musician, I pause and say a prayer of gratitude.
Sister Grace Surdovel, IHM

Memories are such a great gift from God to those who are left behind. They bring joy, peace, comfort and even laughter. I find that through them, loved ones who have died are able to live forever in my heart.
Sister Michael Marie Hartman, IHM

I often remember the words of singer/songwriter, Joe Wise, and his version of the Hail Mary. He sings, "Hail Mary full of grace.... Pray for us pilgrims now and at the hour of our birth. Amen. His words help me to hold a little deeper to the Paschal Mystery. When one of our IHM Sisters dies, I sometimes go to St. Catherine's Cemetery and contemplatively walk through the rows of those who have gone before us and on whose shoulders we stand and experience the mystery of the Communion of Saints a bit more profoundly.
Sister Donna Korba, IHM

When I was born my father was our church organist. I honor his memory whenever I play an instrument for liturgy at OLP.
Sister Patt Walsh, IHM

Sister Joan Ciraula's last days and death are a sacred memory to me. I honor her by remembering her in prayer every day.
Sister Dolores M. Filicko, IHM

In preparing my calendar each year on New Year's Eve, I write the names of family and friends who have died and put a star next to each name. As part of the Communion of Saints, they are now the bright stars who continue to influence and intercede for me. On their anniversary, I honor them by doing something they enjoyed doing in this life. Those who knew Mary Ellen Downing know her favorite meal was breakfast so I usually go to breakfast and have her favorite bagel and coffee while reflecting on the memories of our friendship.
Sister Suzanne Delaney, IHM

Every morning before Mass begins, I try to spend some quiet time talking with God about the events of yesterday and about what will be going on in my "today." That's also when I greet each by name, my loved ones who have entered heaven.
Sister Angelique Vannicola, IHM

Over 60 years ago, my brother Michael was killed by a drunk driver as he was crossing the street. He was five years old. I kept his memory alive by naming my second oldest son, Michael.
Ray Wheeler, IHM Associate

I read my parents' letters and cards to me and I feel as if they are right there with me -- and I tell stories about them.
Jane O'Neill, Director of Associate Relations

Although I do not physically have my parents nor grandparents with me now, I find myself frequently calling on them to intercede for me for the grace or wisdom that I need at different times in life.
Sister Mary Ellen Higgins, IHM

I have photos of my loved ones in many places and whenever I come across them, I talk to them about how much they mean to me or in what ways I need their help at the moment.
Sister Jo Ann Trama, IHM

I truly enjoy looking over pictures on certain anniversaries, deaths, jubilee times, novitiate, different missions; to help me remember all the different stages of my life's journey with com-

munity, family and friends. It helps to keep me in touch with where I was and remember how God's hand was very present in good times and hard times. I give thanks for the memories.
Sister Lila M. Sciabica, IHM

I honor my grand-nephew Chris, who recently committed suicide, by remembering his loving nature, his tricky antics, his periodic stubbornness, and his gentle and fun-loving manner. I honor Chris by reflecting on these memories and being grateful to him for sharing 18 years of life with us, his family, who will forever miss him.
Sister Regina Burns, IHM

I honor their memory by not only praying for them but, more often, praying to them. In addition, I often recall and share inspirational or humorous stories about the deceased thus keeping them a part of my life. For as St. John Chrysostom said, "Those whom we love and lose are no longer where they were before. They are now wherever we are."
Sister Mary Ann Adams, IHM

My dad died on February 14. On the fourteenth of each month, I honor my dad by recalling his virtues and trying to imitate at least one virtue in particular each month. In the same manner, I honor my mother on the 23rd of each month. Using this method allows me to remember the virtuous living of deceased relatives and friends.
Sister Ann Rosalia Devlin, IHM

Each year, my nieces, nephews and I take a cemetery pilgrimage to the various burial places of our family. At each resting place, flowers are placed to show our love and loss of the family member. After prayers are said, we recall happy memories of our loved ones.
Sister Eleanor Marie Malanaphy, IHM

Since our loved ones do not ever leave us, I honor them by acknowledging their continued presence in my everyday life.
Sister Anita Maleski, IHM

How do you honor the memory of a loved one who has died?

Daily I lift up my loved ones in prayer to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. My prayers include my husband, parents, brother, four nephews, three sisters-in-law, and a brother-in-law, plus all my aunts, uncles and cousins who have gone before me. I also visit my husband's gravesite and let him know that he is still in my heart. *Joan Morey, IHM Associate*

We have a box in our chapel with the death notices arranged by date. Every morning as part of our prayer, we pray for the Sister(s) who have died on that day. *Sisters Ancilla Maloney, Eileen Egan, and Norma Poma Arpi*

When I was little, one of my sisters asked my Mother if she was afraid to die. My Mother answered: "No, why should I be? I'm going home to my Father." I was happy that I was there to hear that answer because ever since, that is the way I look at death.
Sister Theresa Bonanza, IHM

In terms of honoring the memory of a loved one, my thoughts are simple and probably the same as other associates. Losing a close loved one leaves us with a deep sense of loss—an emptiness that can never again be filled. While, of course, we keep them in our hearts, we must also keep them in our daily lives both in thoughts and in conversation. We need to keep those memories we cherish alive.

Gale Jaeger, IHM Associate

I honor the memory of loved ones who have died by sharing their words. At my confirmation retreat as a junior in high school, I was working hard to stay strong in my faith. My Aunt Mary shared with me a simple message from my deceased grandfather that said, "When you feel lost, just reach out your hand and He is there." My grandfather's words, meant for my aunt, were passed on to me, and I continue to share this message today, twenty-three years later. How comforting to know that finding Christ can truly be that simple! Our loving God is always there.

Kristina Tomlinson, IHM Associate

Every evening we remember our beloved dead in our rosary together. And, on Mom's birthday and on Mother's Day, we enthrone her picture on the table with a bouquet of roses. *Sister Dolores Banick, IHM*

Sunday is Family Day on my daily blog. It's a time to recall the past and "what was" with humor and reverence. Deceased family members are raised up with stories and challenges to carry on their legacy. This custom is also a great way for others to remember and to engage in conversation with grateful thanks. *Sister Nancy Elder, IHM*

Every time I think of my mom and dad, I thank God for them and for the gifts and qualities they instilled in me. I feel they are with me all the time. They were and are such a blessing to me. *Sister Mary Rita Smith, IHM*

With loving gratitude for those in my family and those who were close to me who have passed—I find it consoling to have Mass said for them on important dates and holidays. I also like to place flowers in the cemetery on special occasions. *Mary Kay McHale, IHM Associate*

The loss of parents is difficult but natural. The loss of siblings, I believe, is more difficult. Each year I get a new calendar and place family birthdays and death anniversaries on it for remembrance and prayer; remembering them on their special days twice a year is important to me.

Sister Lenore Thomas, IHM

I honor loved ones upon death by gazing at pictures and hearing my Mom say, "Shun not the struggles—be strong." I also recall my older sister, Margaret's reminder, "Nothing is forever." Both help me deal with life's realities.

Sister Mariam Pfeifer, IHM

For me, there are people who will never die—my mom and dad, for sure, but many of my aunts and uncles as well. I hear their expressions; I see the way they walked, or the way they did different things. I see it in me and my

siblings all the time. After my mom died, I bought a small glass prism that I have hanging in my bedroom window. On a sunny day, it splits light and rainbows dance on the walls. It reminds me how those who have loved me saw me and each child in our family as a separate ray of light, unlike all others. How blessed I am to have been raised to be myself by so many loving people. *Sister Jane Snyder, IHM*

When I meet people who knew my parents, Francis and Catherine Haggerty Shields, or when I recall comments made to me about their being kind, caring, compassionate, courageous, helpful, personality plus, funny, loving, generous people (to name a few qualities!), I, too, remember them embodying these qualities! When I live life with the intention of *being* these virtues, I honor and remember my wonderful parents!

Jean M. Shields, IHM Associate

Loved ones have a very special remembrance at my daily Eucharistic celebration. Their pictures and memorial cards that I have are on display. This keeps them every present in my life.

Sister M. Rosella Salvato, IHM

I honor the memory of my family through gratitude. I often reflect and thank each of them for the love, care and kindness that each gave to me.

Sister Kathleen Hassett, IHM

My mom, dad, and brother are always very present to me. I would like to reflect on my brother, since his death was so unexpected. As I am writing this, I am hearing train whistles. He loved trains. Whenever I need to write something, I can count on my brother to help me with the wording. I am grateful!

Sister Frannie Rose Lapitino, IHM

We remember my parents by sending texts to the family members on their birthday, wedding anniversary and their date of death and include comments about them. When something reminds us of either one—by some word or action—again a text will go out saying, "Joe or Helen is/are alive and well." Their memory is always

among us and we celebrate by commemorating who they were and how they lived! *Sister Helene Hicks, IHM*

A loving awareness keeps Joan an integral part of my daily life. I see my sister in pictures around my room. I feel her in the fabric of clothes that she gave me. I hear her meticulous instructions as I prepare one of her recipes. These memorials are the tell-tale tear that spontaneously escapes from missing her.

Sister Jean Louise Bachetti, IHM

I remember loved ones in prayer each morning and often use memorial prayer cards. I also try to honor their memory by reaching out to family and friends on birthdays and anniversary dates. A card, note, or phone call on these special days means a great deal. *Sister Connie Wilt, IHM*

When my mother was alive and we gathered as a family, she wanted to make sure lots of pictures were taken. Needless to say, I have a variety of pictures around my room. Pictures taken over the years show those who are no longer present to me. Looking at them gives me the opportunity to pray for the deceased and to remember the many happy memories.

Sister Flo Marino, IHM

I honor those I've loved and lost by trying to live the lessons they've taught me. Among them are many nursing home residents to whom I've ministered... or who've ministered to me. They taught me to be grateful: I can walk; I can talk; I can go home at the end of the day.

Thank you, God, for all of them!

Sister Jane Connolly, IHM

I remember my sister, Beth, when I retell her goofy jokes. The telling makes me smile and laugh and remember my beloved sister.

Sister Fran Fasolka, IHM

I hold them in daily prayer and, especially, use their prayer remembrance cards on the anniversary of their death. *Sister Janet Jeffers, IHM*

In Memoriam

As women of faith, we find ourselves in communion with all who stand at the crossroads where death is giving way to risen life. As we grieve the loss of our own cherished IHM Sisters, we also celebrate their lives poured out in love and service to our beautiful yet wounded world. We invite you to join us in honoring the memory of these beloved and holy women.



Sister Maria Voorneveld, IHM
January 29, 1923
March 27, 2018
by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

Beloved – Curious – Fulcrum – Basilic – Enjoyer – Teacher: You may think these words are good descriptors of Maria, but in fact, as any good Scrabble player would know, they are key seven-letter words that are proven winners in the game; they can lead to as many as 50 points!. Maria was an avid player, and her almost daily game with Marionette is legendary here. I am told that she has already grabbed up all the seven-letter words in her games in heaven.

We give Maria back to you, O Lord, who first gave her to us, and as You did not lose her in the giving, so we do not lose her in the return.

As we gather this morning as one family to celebrate Maria's life, I recall the beautiful sharing at yesterday's wake service and understand again the truth of these words. How appropriate that we celebrate Maria's resurrection story during this beautiful Easter season, our ultimate victory over death through Jesus Christ. In our sharing, in our memories and in our hearts, Maria lives on, that is true, but most especially, she lives on in the way we live out in our lives each day the lessons and values she taught us by her example.

Maria was from Long Island, NY and remained proud of that fact her entire life. She learned early on the value of a strong faith grounded in prayer, family, and service to others. These principles were life-long hallmarks of Maria's life. As we heard yesterday, she loved her family deeply and eagerly looked forward to the special vacation times when she would

share her humor and wisdom with them. I'm still enjoying the story of her going camping with the boys when they were young. I think she saw life as an adventure to be enjoyed, not just endured, a lesson for all of us.

That same spirit marked her life as an IHM. Maria was at heart a missionary. Her faith rested on a great trust in God and she yearned to share that faith and love with others. For forty-seven years, she ministered as teacher and principal in schools in six different states, and in Puerto Rico and Peru. She was a gifted educator who loved teaching children wherever she was, but she had a knack and a special patience for the most vulnerable children and truly felt blessed to help them. Her stories of her experiences as an educator reflected her passion for these children and her desire to provide them with a path to success.

Maria's gifts were many, as we heard yesterday. Her example taught us about unselfish love, the belief in each person's potential, the joy of service, the impact of faithful friendship, and above all, God's compassionate and everlasting love. Maria lived these values and sought to teach them to us. She was, as Skip said, "Often imitated, never duplicated." We will miss Maria's presence but it is our responsibility now to live these values as Maria did throughout her life.

We pray very specially today in memory of Maria's parents, Stella and Theodore, her sister, Doris, and her brothers, Albert, Cornelius, and Charles, who have gone before her and with whom she is celebrating a wonderful reunion in heaven today.

We pray for those people whose lives were touched by Maria's kindness and dedication, especially her nieces and nephews and their families, her grandnephews and families, and her dear friend, Ethel. We pray also for the sisters, staff, and administrators here at Our Lady of Peace Residence, especially those in Household 3B, those who lived and ministered with Maria, and all who knew and accompanied her on her life's journey.

On the table next to her bed, I found the following handwritten words with the title, "Finally Home":

Just think of stepping on shore
And finding it Heaven!
Of touching a hand
And finding it God's!
Of breathing new air
And finding it celestial!
Of waking up in glory
And finding it home!

Today we rejoice that Maria is finally home and we give abundant thanks to God for the gift of her life.

I now ask her nephew, John, to place the scriptures on Maria's casket, for she heard the Word of God; indeed, she staked her life upon it, and received life to the full ... the Word now beckons Maria home.



Sister M. Jamesella Mawhinney, IHM
May 5, 1929
May 2, 2018
by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

"The miracle is not that we do this work but that we are happy to do it"
Mother Teresa

Yesterday, as we listened to some wonderful stories about Jamesella during her wake service, these words of Mother Teresa captured for me the true source of her impact and also her sense of vocation and mission as an IHM nurse. Her love for others, her dedication to her call as an IHM and the profession of nursing, her commitment to serve others, and her ever-generous heart all came from her deep inner joy and faith in a God she loved deeply and unreservedly and who she knew loved her in the same way.

Jamesella touched and helped to heal countless lives and hearts by the way she lived hers. During her sixty-five years as an IHM, she ministered as a third grade teacher, a nurse, nurse

supervisor, and director of nursing at the following places: our Marian Convent, the Catholic Child Care Center in Holidaysburg, St. Joseph's Hospital in Carbondale, Carroll Manor in Hyattsville, MD, and at the Lisner Louise Dickson Hurt Home in Washington, DC. For the past six years she was a prayer minister at OLP. In each of these places, Jamesella left an indelible mark of professionalism, joy, and kindness. It was not so much what she did, but how she did it that impacted us deeply. There is no doubt that she absolutely loved being a nurse. Her energy (someone remarked yesterday that Jamesella never walked – she ran) conveyed her sense that each person was a sacred gift in her care. Her generous spirit led her to the bedsides of her patients and her sisters at all hours of the day and night, even volunteering to take other nurses' shifts at the nursing home during snowstorms when it was difficult for some to get into work. That graciousness of spirit and commitment to serving others was entrenched in Jamesella's DNA. We heard yesterday how her BP cuff and stethoscope were always with her in case there was a need – even if you had just a slight cold! Of course, her love for her Most Holy Rosary parish in Syracuse was boundless, and she always kept me informed about what was happening there. Her first question whenever we would meet was always, "So what's new at Rosary?" and always, she would answer her own question before I could say anything! I'm not sure where she got her information, but she got it!

Jamesella's love and concern for others reached beyond her nursing duties. She was a wonderful caregiver, taking care of others before caring for herself, whether you were her patient or a friend or someone she just met. She was the first to volunteer to drive someone who needed a ride (though I'm told the passenger could often be heard praying out loud during the ride) or to do whatever was needed, no matter what. I am thinking today especially of her brother, Don, with whom Jamesella had such a wonderful relationship and for whom she took such extraordinary care, especially in his last years. They were devoted to

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each other. I'm told when they were together, they'd be having a conversation - and both would be talking at the same time!

We remember very specially today Jamesella's parents, Genevieve and James, and her brother, Don. I'm not sure they or anyone else, including God, has had much chance to get a word in since Jamesella joined them last Wednesday, but I think we can all imagine the great joy in heaven at this reunion.

We pray especially for her cousins, Ellen and Patricia, her dear friend, Carleen, and all her band members, the sisters who shared life and ministry with her, especially those in Bethesda and here at OLP, and all whose lives were touched by Jamesella.

Yesterday so many remarked about how proud Jamesella was of her nursing profession. Ritamary said she was sure that when Jamsie met God in heaven last Wednesday, she began by saying, "I'm Sister Jamesella and I'm the nurse." I found the following excerpt from a prayer for nurses that truly illustrates Jamesella's life among us:

Let [me] not forget that nursing is fundamentally about being with people in need.

It is about touch ... a listening presence ...

a willing and compassionate heart that sees beyond symptoms and signs of illness to a person in need and to their community of concern.

Help [me] to embrace the charism that is nursing ...

to make it [my] own and in so doing to bring your healing presence into the lives of people in need.

"A Nurse's Prayer"

by Jean DeBlois, CSJ

As we gather in prayer today, we know for sure that Jamesella lived these words each and every day, and that when she did meet God in heaven last Wednesday, no introduction was needed.

Ellen, Jamesella's cousin, will now place the scriptures on Jamesella's casket, for indeed she heard the Word of God, she staked her life upon it and received life to the full ... the Word now beckons Jamesella home.



Sister M. Helen Hemmer, IHM
October 6, 1927
May 18, 2018
by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; My spirit rejoices in God my savior.

This excerpt from the Magnificat is on the back of Helen's prayer card and sums up so beautifully her focus throughout her life. During her sixty-nine years as an IHM, she fashioned an amazing life grounded in an unwavering faith and trust in the God she loved.

A woman of many gifts, Helen was an excellent teacher and administrator for twenty-six years in schools in New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Her students and faculty appreciated her care for each individual person and her joy and thoughtfulness. Helen's planning and organizational skills were called upon even further when she became religious education consultant, and later consultant for spiritual formation, for our IHM congregation. She also served as coordinator of religious education for the Archdiocese of Baltimore for three years and consultant for the Sadlier Publishing Company for eighteen years. In between, she was a C.N.A. at the Marian Convent for two years and an assistant to the curator of the Marywood art gallery for another two years. For the past nine years, Helen was a prayer minister at Our Lady of Peace.

Though her gifts were many, Helen especially treasured her roots as an educator. She was very proud of her role in training students and teachers who would inspire others to become leaders in the field and she was meticulous in planning the many workshops, seminars, and presentations for them. In all of Helen's endeavors, her professionalism, dedication, and genuine humility were the guideposts that paved the way for success. She wanted the best for others and expected the best from them. A real 'people' person, she

valued the presence and good conversation of others and was inclusive of all wherever she went. Her presence exuded energy and, as was noted yesterday, life was never dull around her.

Helen's life was certainly "other centered" – on God first, then family and those with and to whom she lived and ministered. She was especially caring and faithful to her loving sister, Rosarii, with whom she shared a life full of many wonderful adventures. We rejoice today in the gift of Helen's life with all of us. She brought God's love and joy into the lives of countless people through her generous and grateful spirit. Her love of beauty and poetry brightened our lives. Her dedication and untiring belief in the value of learning drew others to her, and they were also blessed to share the depth of her unwavering trust in God.

We rejoice today that Helen is now at home with her God and enjoying eternal life with her parents, Helen and Nicholas, her sister, Helen Rita, and her brothers, Francis and Paul, who are now reunited with her as she is welcomed into the joy of eternal life by the God she loved and served so faithfully.

Today very specially we gather our Sister Rosarii into the heart of our prayers as well as her brother, Nicholas, and her nephews and their families as we share their loss. We pray for all of us whose lives have been touched by Helen, especially her band members, her IHM sisters, her countless friends, and the administrators and staff here at Our Lady of Peace. We ask the God of all consolation to comfort us.

Through the sharing of her dedication, fidelity, and giftedness, Helen was a blessing to family, friends, our IHM community, her students, and those she served in her ministries. We thank God for her. I suspect she has already gathered a group in heaven and is reviewing their resumes in religious education – and I'm betting she asked Jesus to sit in on her class.

Maggie will now place the scriptures on Helen's casket, for she heard the Word of God, she staked her life upon it and received life to the full ... the Word now beckons Helen home.



Sister Angela Marie Miller, IHM
February 19, 1942
April 28, 2018
by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM



Rosemary Smith
February 23, 1946
April 28, 2018
by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

The poet, John O'Donohue, wrote the following: Though we need to weep your loss, you dwell in that safe place in our hearts where no storm or night or pain can reach you.

We gather this morning in faith yet with hearts heavy with sadness and uncertainty. We look for answers and we find more questions. We have experienced the horror of domestic violence perhaps in a way never imagined before. Yet, in the midst of this darkness, we do gather in hope because our faith and the lives of these two women show us how.

Yesterday at the memorial prayer for Angela and Rose, many friends and neighbors shared some wonderful moments about how these two women touched their lives: their joy, their kindness, their spirit, their generosity, their simple goodness. That prayer drew our individual memories into a new collective one that comforted and strengthened us, yes, but also gave us a window to see beyond our own pain, anger, and sorrow to the beauty and inspiration that Angela and Rose were for us. Their example serves to encourage us to practice with deeper awareness those simple acts of kind-

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ness and love that can make such a difference in one another's life.

I noted yesterday at the memorial prayer that I was struck by the variety and number of connections Rose and Angela had in their lives. Their relationships with so many tells us the story. They were bright lights in our lives. They were givers and doers who were joyful and caring, warm and friendly, generous and resilient, and, oh yes, did I mention that they could talk forever – even at the same time! They both had the knack of engaging anyone, friend or stranger, in conversation, and after 10 or 15 minutes, could tell you the entire history of that person. Their circle of relationships just kept getting wider every day and they treasured their connections for the life and joy they both gave and received. They taught us about the deep value of love for others not just by words, but by the way they lived their lives each day.

As I look around this chapel, I think that is what this community of believers is for one another during this time of our own sorrow and uncertainty. We come together, Angela's and Rose's family of origin, their IHM family, the family from St. Clare's-St. Paul's, their diocesan family, and their community of friends, to offer support as we seek to understand the sudden and tragic loss of such vibrant people in our lives. As a faith community, our heads assure us that they are with their God enjoying the fullness of eternal life and we rejoice in that certitude. Our hearts, however, are broken and we struggle with our loss. We come together this day to share our faith, our support, and we pray for an increase in our own deep trust in the God who calls us before we are even born, who loves and cares for us no matter what, and who sent his Son to overcome death and fulfill his promise of resurrection for all of us.

Angela and Rose were resurrection people. Their relationship with God was drawn from a deep trust and love. Both spoke easily about their own spirituality and their love and trust in God in a way that invited that same faith in us. Rose was always the first to say, "I'll say a prayer for that," whenever something was going on with the sisters, or her family, or especially some tragedy in the world. Angela was the same, whether in the classroom or with those to whom she ministered. From their own inner pain and sorrow, they perhaps understood suffering and need in others better than most of us, and through their own experience, were able to reach out to

others and to each other. Their love of and trust in God is what sustained and carried them each day and enabled them to live the mystery of that deep faith with a strength that continues to sustain each of us during this time. "A blessing," wrote author Jan Richardson, "meets us in the place of our deepest loss. . . offers us a glimpse of wholeness and claims that wholeness here and now." This is her "Blessing of Hope" for each of us today:

So may we know the hope that is not just for someday but for this day – here, now, in this moment that opens to us:

hope not made of wishes but of substance . . .
 hope that has breath and a beating heart,
 hope that will not keep quiet and be polite,
 hope that knows how to holler when it is called for,
 hope that knows how to sing when there seems little cause,
 hope that raises us from the dead – not someday but this day, every day, again and again and again.

So as we gather around this table today, may we resolve to be examples of God's love and care for others and may we be blessed by our own faith and hope in the resurrected Jesus and rejoice in the same God who today enfolds Angela and Rose in loving arms of eternal peace and joy.



Sister M. Chrysta Lerhinan, IHM
 October 15, 1927
 May 23, 2018
 by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

O Lord, you are the center of my life...
 I will always keep you in my sight.

These words from the opening hymn at our wake service for Chrysta yesterday capture the true source of her goodness and profound spirituality and define how she lived every day of her life. Her joyful, humble,

and welcoming spirit came from her deep inner trust and faith in a God she loved unreservedly and who loved her in the same way. Chrysta lifted us Godward through her goodness while at the same time revealing her own inner peace and beauty. We knew her as a person of vibrant faith and keen intelligence that sparked her life-long love of learning, especially in the study of theology and spirituality. We witnessed her genuine kindness and concern for others, her generosity and deep compassion, her gentle humor and willing availability.

Chrysta was a bearer of God's love and light wherever she was. She taught in elementary and high schools in Pennsylvania and New York, and also for twelve years as a faculty member in the mathematics department at Marywood College. She travelled to the diocese of Kelowna, B.C. and founded a spiritual renewal center in her parish which offered programs in spirituality and religious education training and enrichment. Her efforts caught the eye of the bishop and she was appointed diocesan spiritual formation director. After ministering in Kelowna for seven years, she next went to the diocese of Venice, FL, to minister at a spiritual renewal center there. After three years, she was appointed associate vicar, then vicar, for religious in the diocese of Venice. In 2002 Chrysta returned to Scranton to minister as spiritual director at our IHM Center for the next eight years. From 2010 until the present she served as a prayer minister here at OLP.

We rejoice in the gift of Chrysta's life with us. Her trust in God and her great gratitude for all that God and life gave her defined every day of her life. She was always ready with a word or act of kindness or support whenever needed and her generosity was never-ending. Her integrity and unassuming manner drew others to her, and they were blessed to share the depth of her unwavering faith in God. Her capacity to love others was rooted in her love of God, and she shared that love tirelessly and faithfully.

Chrysta will be missed by all of us, but we rejoice that she is now at home with her God and enjoying eternal life with her parents, Delia and John, her sisters, Mary, Margaret, and Agnes, and her brothers, Father John, Joseph, and Gerard, who are now reunited with her as she is welcomed into the joy of eternal life by the God she loved and served so well.

Our prayers are with her nieces and nephews and their families. We pray too for her many friends, the sisters at

OLP, especially those who lived with her in 2B, her band members, with whom she celebrated her seventieth jubilee this year, all her IHM sisters, her former students, and the administrators and staff at Our Lady of Peace, and all who knew and loved her. We ask the God of all consolation to comfort us all at this time of loss.

Chrysta chose the booklet covers and all the music and readings for her wake service and her funeral mass. This quote from Pedro Arrupe was on the cover of yesterday's service:

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. . . Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

Chrysta taught us the deep meaning of these words by how she lived every day. She inspired us and blessed us. Today she is with her God whom she loved so totally all her life.

Susan will now place the scriptures on Chrysta's casket, for indeed she heard the Word of God, she staked her life upon it and received life to the full . . . the Word now beckons Chrysta home.



Sister Mary Lambert Rossi, IHM
 March 4, 1930
 June 5, 2018
 by Sister Kathryn Clauss, IHM

Before moving into the Liturgy, I invite you to recall yesterday's sharing of memories. There was a foreshadowing of today's first reading from Isaiah, where we hear that the Lord of Hosts will provide a feast of fresh food and matured wines. In the memories shared we learned of the spacious hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Rossi and Lambert as they shared fresh baked goods and home grown tomatoes with IHM sisters in Pittsburgh. Lambert carried on the tradition by providing lavish spreads for her mission group and for all who visited St. Rita's Convent. Food for Lambert was a

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gift, something to be shared. We were reminded that while Lambert lived in Dundalk, she would prepare and distribute bags of food to men and women who missed the scheduled hours at the Vincent DePaul Society office. When she moved into OLP, her trips to the dollar store often included other stops to pick up snacks for the sisters in her household.

Now, Lambert's generosity was not limited to food. I can only imagine the feast her classroom was for the children she ministered to for over 62 years. The joy, the love, the excellent and exciting learning environment she created with and for them and how it continued to influence their lives into adulthood. In her generous service to the Dundalk Historical Society, Lambert warmly welcomed those who visited the center. Her participation in the yearly reenactment of the War of 1812 surely inspired others in the Dundalk community to become more involved and to join in the endeavors of the Society.

Yesterday, we were reminded about Lambert's generous gift of time and presence to her good friend, Sister Mary Mark Carnes. One day they were together in the presence of some women and a young child. One of the women, referring to Lambert, asked who the small sister was, the child replied, "She's Sister Mary Mark's body guard."

Perhaps that posture of standing with and by another and responding to the needs she noticed was Lambert's way of being Christ for others, of pouring out her life so that others would have something more, something they needed, some reminder that they were being loved by God. As we celebrate Lambert's life, and her fidelity today, let us remember that she was a feast of all that was good and human and holy and let us thank God for the Christ-centered witness of her life for the life of the world.

Sister Lambert has completed her mission of 64 years as an IHM sister and is united in the heart of God with her parents, John and Mary, her brother Frank, and with her family, friends, and all IHM sisters who have gone before her. Sister Lambert will return to Pittsburgh for the last time and will be buried there with her family. After the closing hymn we will sing the *Salva Regina* and then process out of the chapel.

Sister Michael Marie, Sister Lambert's dear and faithful friend, will now place Sister Lambert's bible on her coffin as a reminder that Sister Lambert heard the Word of God. She

staked her life on it. It is Jesus, the Word of God, who now welcomes her home.



Sister Carol Sukitz, IHM

February 28, 1946

July 4, 2018

by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

"Peace I leave with you,
my peace I give to you."

These were Jesus' words to his disciples as he was preparing them for his return to the Father and they are words of encouragement for us in the face of loss, in the face of death. They came to me almost immediately last Tuesday when Carol died. Her suffering in these past weeks was apparent to all despite her efforts to remain strong, and it was the prayer for peace we all wished for her. It also happened to be July 4th, Independence Day, and that fact seemed a bit too coincidental, especially for those who knew Carol and how strongly she valued independence (and control) in her own life. In fact, I have no doubt that at any moment she is going to pull the plug on this mic because I'm talking too long.

Carol lived and ministered among us as an IHM for fifty-one years. She taught in schools in Puerto Rico, New York, and Pennsylvania. She enjoyed her students and her commitment to social justice awakened in them a desire to reach out to those in need too. She earned her degree in social work and ministered as such at parishes and retirement communities in Pittsburgh and at UPMC/Jefferson Regional Home Health System. She became director of parish services at Pittsburgh's Catholic Charities, deputy director at Ministry of Caring in Wilmington, DE, and program manager at Step by Step in Pittsburgh. In each of these ministries, Carol reached out to the most fragile in our society with energy and empathy and a determination to get things done for and with them. She was a caring presence for many, often in times of distress and tragedy. For this past year, Carol served as a prayer minister at Our Lady of Peace Resi-

dence.

Carol's passion and determination to make a difference in our world were in her DNA. Jane Snyder shared that after the shootings at Parkland High School, Carol made calls to the members of Congress. She asked each one if he/she received any donations from the NRA. If any answered 'yes,' she asked when he/she was going to return that money. She called over 200 representatives. Jane also shared that as avid Jeopardy fans, she and Carol set off one Friday evening from Wilmington to go to Atlantic City to try out to be a contestant for the show. They each took their turn for the 60 second quiz, then went to the casino to wait to see if they would be chosen. While they never received the call, they did manage to spend all their money on the slots before returning home. However, they did make a pledge to try to go to California for a week or so and keep trying to make it on any game show they could get on!

Today we join our prayers with and for Carol's cousin, Marie, and all her relatives, her IHM band members and friends, the sisters at Our Lady of Peace, especially those in Household Four B, and all who knew and cared for Carol. We remember in prayer her deceased parents, Elizabeth and Harry, as well as her brother, Robert.

We celebrate and give thanks today for Carol's life among us. She challenged and pushed us, disturbed and stretched us. Her compassion for the most vulnerable softens our hearts; her searching for life's meaning through service to others opens for us the heart that drew others in and ever closer to God; her illness reminds us that we have a limited time on this earth to make some little bit of difference and now is that time; her woundedness calls us to a deep awareness of God's love and mercy in our own lives and assures us that despite our own fragility, we can each make a distinctive contribution to our world that is good and sacred. We are forever changed and forever grateful that Carol was in our lives.

The gift of life Carol shared with our world was a reflection of her love for God's presence and goodness in her life despite times of personal struggle and loss. We celebrate and give thanks for her courage and her steadfastness. The ancient Greeks didn't write obituaries, they only asked one question after a person died: 'Did he/she have passion?' because that was the mark of a person whose life was well spent. Carol was a woman of unsurpassed passion! I pray this prayer of Jan

Richardson entitled, "In the Leaving":

In the leaving,
In the letting go,
let there be this
to hold onto
at the last:
the enduring love
the persisting hope,
the remembering of joy,
the offering of gratitude,
the receiving of grace,
the blessing of peace.

Sister Joan Bastress will now place the scriptures on Carol's casket, for indeed she heard the Word of God, she staked her life upon it and received life to the full . . . the Word now beckons Carol home.



Sister M. Francis Regis Vagt, IHM

September 10, 1932

July 28, 2018

by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

Do your little bit of good where you are;
it's those little bits of good
put together that overwhelm the world.
(Bishop Desmond Tutu)

These words speak to what I think Francis lived to be and do each day. She was a person who loved and trusted in God, expressed gratitude for God's graces in her life, and dedicated each day to doing maybe not extraordinary things, but doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way. Those same qualities were referred to by many sisters when they heard of Francis' death last Saturday.

Francis' journey to our congregation began in Savannah, Georgia, where she was born. Her family moved to New York City, where she attended Sacred Hearts Elementary School and St. Alphonsus High School and met the IHMs. Growing up, she developed her deep faith in God and an awareness of the importance of education in order to be able to make a difference in the world. She was also encouraged to be an objective thinker who would be true to her own unique gifts and talents.

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Those who knew Francis as sister, educator, mentor, and friend know that she was indeed dedicated in her commitment to her calling as a teacher. She taught for over sixty-two years in schools in Pennsylvania, Maryland, North Carolina, and New York, and left her heart in Saint Ephrem's Elementary School in Brooklyn. She sought to instill in her students at an early age a desire to develop to their full potential as individuals. On the surface, Francis could sometimes seem demanding of her students, but underneath was a kind, sentimental core that showed itself in so many acts of thoughtfulness and kindness. Her goal was fundamentally to help the students become better human beings, and in so doing, to draw closer to their loving God.

Francis was a person of integrity, who lived and spoke the truth as she knew it, even if it was not always popular. She was a loyal friend who could relax and enjoy being in the company of others. Francis was a wonderful listener who took the time to be a patient, non-judgmental presence with others. Of course, her infamous rabbit, "Meep," held a special place in her heart. Those who lived with Francis recount the way she would carry on a conversation with Meep, and truly, it seemed Meep knew exactly what she was saying! I mentioned yesterday that I've heard there are some wonderful stories about the shopping expeditions that Francis and her dear friend, Sister Edith Fondecchia, would take. That love of shopping was put to good use when Francis came to OLP because she so generously offered to take sisters shopping or go herself to get whatever someone needed. Francis was a constant visitor to the sisters here, offering companionship and a presence of prayer and love especially when a sister was dying.

We pray very specially today in memory of Francis' parents, Estelle and Henry, and her brothers, C. Edward and Joseph, and her dear friend, Sister Edith Fondecchia, who have gone before her and with whom she is enjoying the eternal presence of her God.

We pray for those people whose lives were touched by Francis' kindness and dedication, especially her friends, Mary Jane, Felicia Ann, and Cecilia, and the sisters in Household 2B here at OLP, and all who knew and accompanied her on her life's journey.

I think we can say with certainty that Francis did a lot of "little bits of good" wherever she was, and together, those acts of kindness and generosity

had a significant impact on those of us who knew her. And so today we give abundant thanks to God for the gift of Francis' life and celebrate the beginning of her eternal life in heaven.

I now ask Felicia to place the scriptures on her casket, for she heard the Word of God; indeed, she staked her life upon it, and received life to the full ... the Word now beckons Francis home.



Sister M. Lisbeth Hartnett, IHM
May 22, 1921
August 8, 2018
by Sister Kathryn Clauss, IHM

Today's text from the Luke's Gospel recalls the Visitation. It places before us the challenge and promise of Elizabeth's words to Mary which speak to persons of faith and have deep meaning for us as women religious, "Blessed is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled." Over a lifetime of 97 years, Lisbeth surely experienced the impulse of God's word in her heart. Perhaps it evoked in her wonder, maybe worry, "Why me, why now?". Maybe she had a feeling similar to Elizabeth, "Who am I that God would come to me?" We don't know how Lisbeth experienced God's Word but when we listen attentively to what she said about herself and what others experienced in their relationships with her, we can sense that she trusted that God's promise to her would be fulfilled.

Yesterday we heard a few stories that reflected how Lisbeth could respond with confidence by entrusting herself to the providence of God. She had the courage and confidence to let Msgr. Gilbert, her larger-than-life pastor in North Carolina know who she was, "I am your new principal." Perhaps it was her clear declaration or her calm demeanor, or self-assured tone in her voice that gave rise to his response, "You look like you know what you are doing."

On completing 51 years in the ministry of education, Lisbeth felt the impulse of the spirit to move on. She indicated on the ministry form that

year, that she was willing to learn new skills if needed and that she would prefer some type of active ministry for as long as she was able. Well, wish granted! Lisbeth was assigned to serve as the assistant to the IHM Center Administrator. Here she continued her ministries of hospitality and leadership for 17 years and as a life-long learner she continued to strengthen her computer abilities and developed other interests. What a gift Lisbeth had in being able to balance her self-awareness with the common good and to approach life open handedly. Her life experience and expertise as a bridge player taught her the importance of not focusing on the hand she could have been dealt but to concentrate on getting the best possible results with the hand she had. Lisbeth modeled for us what it means to live in the providence of God.

And so we rejoice with our Sister Lisbeth this day. As she is welcomed into the heart of God, she joins her parents, Maurice and Anna, her sisters Patricia and Jane, our Sister Maurice, and her brother Maurice. We offer our prayerful support to Charlene and Ralph, the Sisters in household 3A, and all those who loved and cared for Lisbeth and grieve her passing, in particular, her faithful friend, Sister Monica Byrne.

Sister Leonnette will place Lisbeth's scripture on her casket. It is open to Proverbs 31 reminding us that Lisbeth, a valiant woman, heard the word of God as she lived her life with joy, strength, patience, love and outstretched arms that generously gave her gifts and treasures to all whom she met. Lisbeth heard God's word and trusted that God's word would be fulfilled in her and so it was.



Sister Mary Mark Lowery, IHM
February 10, 1930
August 17, 2018
by Sister Kathryn Clauss, IHM

What a feast of love we experienced yesterday as stories were told and memories of Mary Mark were brought

to life through words, tears and laughter. We witnessed how she was rooted in God and lived life as a clear and prophetic witness to the presence of God in our world. We heard how she modeled compassion in her attentiveness and response to the joys and sorrows of those she encountered. Stories witnessed her spacious hospitality and deep respect that were hallmarks of her service to children and adults. As the stories were told, I had a sense that each of us remembered Mark's quiet way of embracing you in her gaze, of attending to you in her careful listening, and leaving you with an awareness of God's loving presence in your time together.

Yesterday's stories prepared us to hear anew today's scripture passages. Like Abram in the book of Genesis, Mary Mark went forth from her family and from her parents' home to the many places where God drew her and where those she met found blessings in her. Like the early community of believers, Mark spent a lifetime being of one heart and one mind with her family, her IHM sisters, her friends and those she served. Like Mary in Luke's Gospel, Mark was deeply aware of Jesus' presence and listened closely to his words. Like Martha, she was sister and servant as she attended to all the details of hospitality while never losing sight of those she served. Over the course of Mark's life in ministry and in communion with others, she learned and modeled for us the delicate balance of spirituality and action. Her life of prayer drew her to God and opened her eyes to the needs of the world expressed by those around her. Her response to prayer was a life of joyful, loving service. Mark's life of service drew her back to her need for God and her deep desire for and commitment to contemplative prayer.

Today, as we accompany Sister Mary Mark on her final journey to God let us be aware that she fulfilled her covenant with God. Sisters Gracette Baker and Judy Ziegler will place Mark's bible on her casket as a reminder that our Sister Mary Mark heard God's Word, she staked her life on it and it is Jesus, the Word of God, who now welcomes her home.



Sister Theresa Ann McElroy, IHM

July 31, 1931

October 6, 2018

by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM

*May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing that you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
Teresa of Ávila*

All who knew Theresa can attest to the fact that she fully lived these words from the prayer of Teresa of Ávila every day. Her life was a gift to and for others; she did not seek personal attention or gain, but put the well-being of others first, even at her own expense. In one of her letters from Peru, she wrote how, after a long,

very busy day at school followed by an important parish meeting, the sisters finally got home, starved and looking forward to the leftover beans and rice from the night before. However, that afternoon, Theresa had given the meal away to a poor mother who had come begging for food for her children. Needless to say, she wrote in her letter, the other sisters, with tongue in cheek, continually reminded her for the rest of the evening how happy they were to be practicing HER vow of poverty.

When we came into Theresa's presence, we were welcomed always by a wide smile, laughing eyes, and her customary, "How be's you?" greeting. She blessed us with infinite kindness, compassion, love, and a few practical jokes thrown in for good measure. Throughout her sixty-eight years as an IHM, her single-minded goal was to serve God through service to others. As we heard in the stories yesterday, her 'yes' to God and others was the simple but profound act of belief and trust in that love and presence in all. For Theresa, this trust formed the core of her deep relationship with God which was the source of her determination, love, and joy throughout her life. This was a person so in love with God and God's goodness that she was able to give herself freely and totally in goodness to all.

We rejoice in the gift of Theresa's life with us. As a teacher, Theresa uniquely touched the minds and hearts of her students. She saw each as a spe-

cial gift to her and to the world, and, as I mentioned yesterday, she taught her students to measure success not by the number of 100s they got on their tests, but by the way they shared their gifts and talents with others. Theresa lived her own life by that same yardstick, whether it was in a classroom in Lima, Peru or as youth minister in Kelowna, British Columbia or organizing community outreach in Carbondale, or ministering to the sick and elderly in Silver Spring, Maryland. She taught Gospel values and lessons not just through her words, but by her simple, yet profound example of respect and love for all, with a dose of humor always at the ready. That was one of Theresa's most endearing qualities: she never took herself too seriously and that wonderful gift of acknowledging her own vulnerabilities allowed us to be ourselves more freely as well. She modeled for us the awesome grace of understanding that it is God, not ourselves, who makes all things possible, who is the center of all life, and she did this simply by who she was. Her witness of love and joy continued when she came to Our Lady of Peace as a prayer minister several years ago.

Theresa absolutely treasured her family. She is reunited now in heaven with her parents, Louise and Raymond, her sisters, Katherine and Esther, and her brothers, Raymond, James, and Joseph. We can only imagine the joyous celebration they shared. We pray today for all those whose lives were

touched by Theresa's kindness and dedication, especially her nieces and their families. We also pray with and for her many IHM friends, especially her band members, her many friends in community, and those with whom she shared life, especially the sisters in Household 4A, the staff who cared for her here at Our Lady of Peace and from Hospice of the Sacred Heart, and of course, her Bingo partners. We trust that the kindness and joy that were always a part of Theresa's life will live on in each of them and all of us.

So we gather this day to celebrate Theresa's life and the goodness she was in our world. We mark the end of her journey among us, and we will surely miss her presence, but if we truly take to heart the lessons she taught us, we can say that today is a good day. Teresa of Ávila's last words before she died were: "My Lord, it is time to move on. Well, then, may your will be done... It is time to meet one another." Theresa's earthly journey ended last Saturday—it was time for her to move on, to meet her God face to face, in the heavenly home reserved for her. And rest assured, somewhere in heaven, a Bingo game or two is underway and very probably Theresa has the winning card!

I now ask her niece, Therese, to place the scriptures on Theresa's casket, for she heard the Word of God; indeed, she staked her life upon it, and received life to the full ... the Word now beckons her home.

Trusting the Journey, cont. from page 5

It is an amazing journey, and it truly has its seasons that we are called to live, and so become the persons God has called us to be

The Springtime: when Mother Maria, our foundress, heard God's call and when each Sister of St. Casimir heard the call, when the story began in each of our hearts, our roots sinking deeply into the heart of our God and into the life and legacy of Mother Maria; her years at Marywood, her friendship with Mother Cyril, and the spirit of the IHMs that has remained with us throughout the many years that have passed;

The Summer: when each of us began to live the dream, receiving a good education from the IHM Sisters who often held summer classes at the Motherhouse and at Villa Joseph Marie in Holland, PA, that counted toward earning our degree from Marywood—way ahead of the time when long distance



Sisters of Saint Casimir in 1961 with their diplomas from Marywood College

learning would become commonplace; summer, when everything became radiant with life and we felt the joy of being sent on a mission to make a difference in the world, and we drew easily on the courage to love and the generosity of our spirit;

The Fall: when our idealism and vision were tried and tested by the reality of situations and people, and the challenges of the times in which we lived, and we had to do deep inner work to continue to trust the journey and all that it called forth in us; the fall, when we were called to be faithful and to surrender in wisdom and hope;

The Winter: when in the silent depths of our hearts, a power deep within was growing into the fullness of life and love, our personal journey of experiencing our vulnerability and diminishing energy and seeing our sisters experiencing the same, wondering how we would go on; deciding to act, to choose our future, coming full circle to Marywood and to our beloved IHM Sisters in the enduring bond of love.

Sister Regina Marie Dubickas SSC is currently General Superior of the Sisters of St. Casimir of Chicago.

Día de Muertos en México

by Elvia Yolanda Mata Ortega, IHM

La fiesta del Día de Muertos es una de las festividades más trascendentes y populares de nuestro calendario ritual, tanto cívico como espiritual. Durante esos días nuestros muertos, de acuerdo a la creencia popular, regresan al mundo de los vivos para convivir con sus familiares a partir del intercambio de bienes que se les ofrendan y con ello asegurar su ayuda y apoyo durante todo el año hasta renovar el ciclo.

La celebración del día de muertos es un día de encuentro, un día de reflexión y oración por aquellos que formaron parte de nuestra vida terrena. Esta celebración, el calendario la marca el día 02 de Noviembre pero en realidad en algunos pueblos de México abarca desde el 28 de Octubre hasta el 02 de Noviembre.

Al celebrar el día de los fieles difuntos nos hace reflexionar que un día estuvieron con nosotros, que compartieron su vida pero que ya se han ido a la Casa del Padre donde hay muchas moradas. Cfr. Jn. 14,2

Hay muchas formas de celebrar este día: desde colocar veladoras por las calles para iluminar el camino de los difuntos que vendrán a celebrar con sus seres vivos hasta las más grandes celebraciones con música de mariachi, comida, oración, etc.

Una de las principales características de este día son los altares dedicados a los muertos. Esta tradición del altar de muertos está llena de significado y elementos simbólicos.

Generalmente los altares son de dos, tres o hasta siete niveles. En todos los casos, los niveles inferiores representan la tierra y el inframundo y los niveles superiores representan las dimensiones celestiales.

La mayoría de los altares tienen un

arco que representa la entrada al mundo de los muertos y está adornado con flores de cempazúchitl (Palabra Nahuatl, el idioma que habló la Virgen

de Guadalupe) cuyo color amarillo y anaranjado simboliza la luz por la que entra el alma del difunto. Solamente se cultiva en los meses de otoño.

Para nuestros antepasados y las generaciones actuales es muy importante representar los elementos naturales en el altar de muertos. El viento está representado por papel picado de colores que además le da un sentido de fiesta y alegría. Un altar dedicado a algún difunto siempre debe de tener un vaso de agua que sirve para calmar la sed del espíritu. El fuego se representa con velas, veladoras y cirios encendidos y la tierra, se representa con semillas y frutos que se ponen sobre el altar.

Otro de los elementos indispensables son los aromas. El incienso era considerado una esencia sagrada en las culturas prehispánicas. Simboliza también nuestra oración que se eleva hasta el altar de Dios. Otros aromas presentes son: flores de cempasúchil, y los olores de diversos alimentos.

Alimentos. Deben ser del agrado del difunto, quien solo puede disfrutarlos una vez al año. Tradicionalmente, platillos típicos como el mole y los tamales están presentes. Las calaveritas hechas de azúcar, chocolate o amaranto representan que la muerte puede ser dulce.

También se colocan bebidas alcohólicas que el difunto disfrutaba como cerveza, tequila o pulque.



Objetos personales. En los niveles terrenales, suelen colocarse pertenencias del difunto, especialmente si eran objetos queridos y apreciados. También

se acostumbra colocar una fotografía del difunto en la parte central.

Nunca falta en un altar de muertos los objetos religiosos. Ocupan los niveles superiores del altar y está conformada por crucifijos o imágenes de algún santo o de la Virgen.

Otra característica muy peculiar de este día, es que los mexicanos celebramos este día como si no le tuviéramos miedo a la muerte. Desde edades muy pequeñas, se enseña a los niños a escribir "Calaveras literarias." Son versos en forma de rimas de manera chusca, divertida y satírica que hacen referencia a algún personaje que se encuentra con la muerte. Creo que, al escribir de esta manera, es en el fondo el gran temor que le tenemos pero que lo disfrazamos de buen humor.

El escritor Octavio Paz (2002), en su famoso *Laberinto*, dedica un apartado específico al tema del Día de Muertos y a la relación del mexicano con la muerte. Así, explica que para las personas de otras partes del mundo la muerte es un tema prohibido. El mexicano, en cambio, la frecuenta, la festeja. En su actitud hay quizá tanto miedo como en la de los otros; más al menos no la esconde ni se esconde; la contempla cara a cara. (Paz, 2002, p. 63)

Por último otra de las peculiaridades de esta celebración es que se acostumbra a vestirse de "catrina." El

personaje de la catrina es vestirse de esqueleto portando los vestidos típicos mexicanos. Este es un disfraz que no pretende asustar, sino mostrar la muerte de una manera elegante y con sentido del humor.

En fin, la celebración del día de muertos es una fiesta en donde los vivos se encuentran con los muertos, ofreciéndoles un auténtico banquete de olores, colores, sabores y música, con la finalidad de que quienes seguimos en el plano terrenal no olvidemos que la muerte es sólo una transición a lo eterno, mientras que los muertos "regresan" para convivir con sus amigos y familiares. Esta costumbre le da un sabor de esperanza a la muerte.

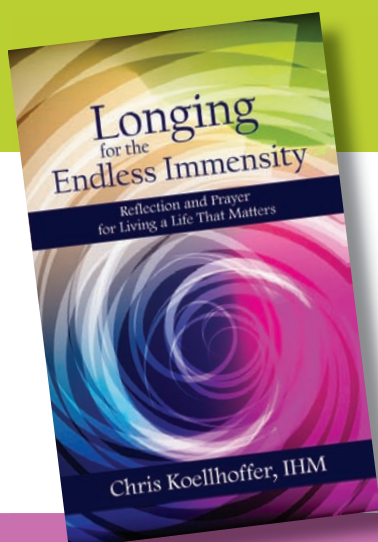
Creo que la película de Coco, nos deja ver un poco lo que significa la celebración del día de muertos para el pueblo mexicano.

Por último quiero resaltar un aspecto que me ha parecido muy importante: En esta ocasión, México ha decidido dedicar la festividad, a todos aquellos migrantes que en su tránsito hacia otras tierras han perdido la vida, de igual forma a todos aquellos grupos de migrantes que han llegado a esta ciudad a través del tiempo para enriquecerla y embellecerla.

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Sister Elvia Yolanda Mata Ortega IHM es actualmente Directora Operativa de la Casa Hogar Padre Severiano Martínez en Guadalupe, Nuevo León, México.



Longing for the Endless Immensity

Reflection and Prayer for Living a Life That Matters by Chris Koellhoffer, IHM



Within our hearts is a profound longing to live a life of significance, to make meaning out of our inner experience in ways that will enrich and influence our world.

Longing for the Endless Immensity speaks to this collective desire and invites us to enter every moment of our lives as an arena for living contemplatively, for doing justice, for moving forward with intention. This book underscores the wisdom that no aspect of our everyday living is without impact on our evolving universe.

Each section begins and closes with breathprayer, offers a reflection, invites time for stillness and personal prayer, and suggests questions for journaling or group conversation and sharing. *Longing for the Endless Immensity* is recommended for parish groups, religious communities, adult faith formation, faith-based gatherings, peace and justice groups, and anyone hoping to leave a graced footprint on this earth by living a life that matters.

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Letting Go, Letting Come



Sister Elizabeth DeMerchant, IHM, professed first vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a Eucharistic celebration on July 28 at the IHM Center in Scranton. Serving as her witnesses are IHM Sisters Donna Korba (left) and Kathryn Kurdziel (right).

Sister Elizabeth Professes First Vows



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