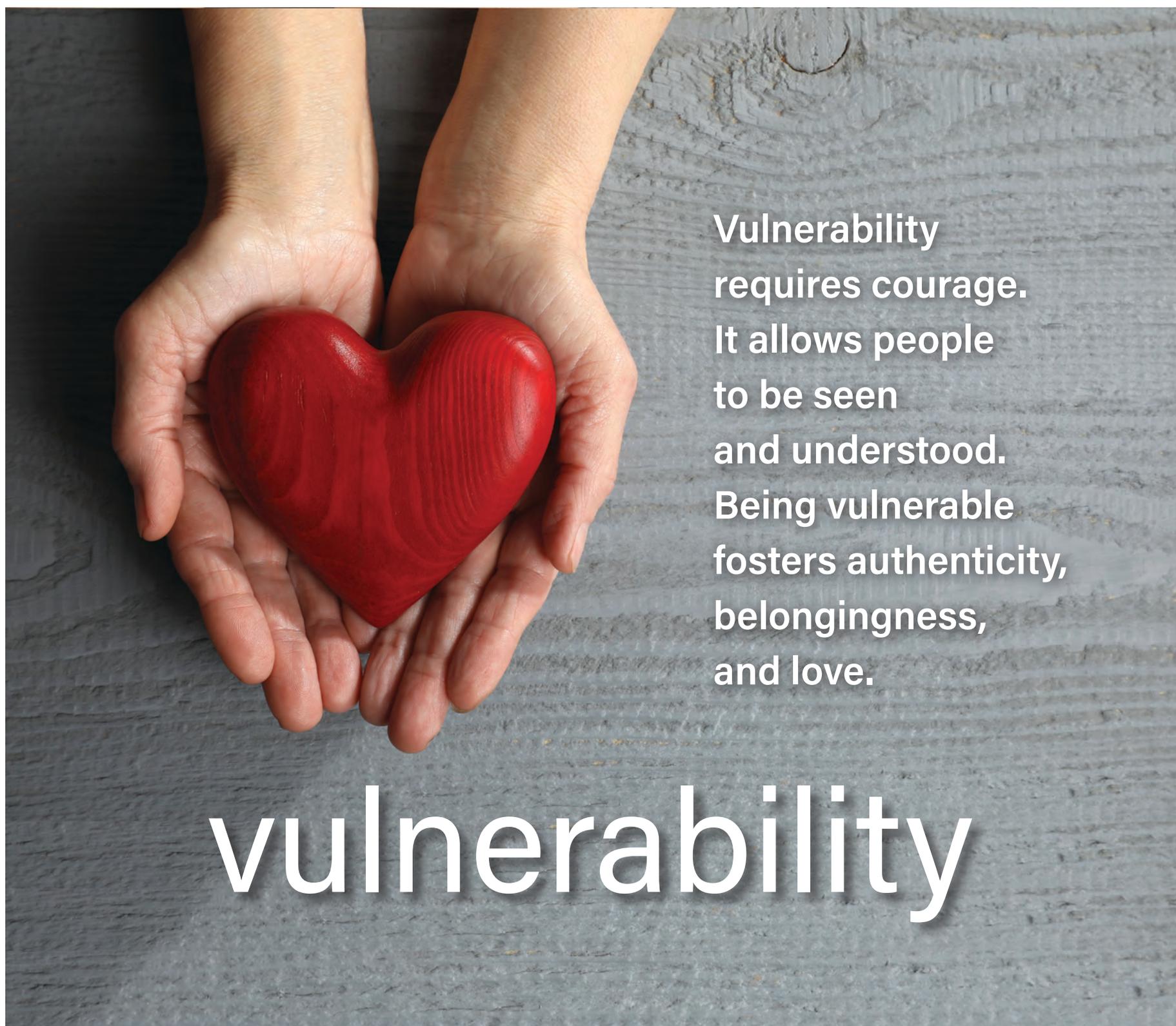




Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA Vol. 41, No. 1 Spring 2023



Vulnerability
requires courage.
It allows people
to be seen
and understood.
Being vulnerable
fosters authenticity,
belongingness,
and love.

vulnerability

The Gift of Mutual Vulnerability

by Sister Kathryn Clauss, IHM

On the weekend of October 14 through 16, 2022, Sister Jane Herb, IHM (President of the Monroe, Michigan IHM Congregation), Sister Mary Ellen Tennity, IHM (General Superior of the Immaculata IHM Congregation) and I, as President of the Scranton IHM Congregation, travelled to McAllen, Texas to visit three of our sisters. At the time of the visit, Sisters Mary Elaine Anderson and Elvia Yolanda Mata Ortega from Scranton and Sister Rose Patrice Kuhn from Immaculata were settled in and waiting for the arrival of Sister Carmen Armenta Lara from Monroe. As pioneer members of the new intercongregational collaborative mission, these sisters are fulfilling a dream shared by each of the three IHM Congregations. This mission is the first opportunity for sisters from our three branches to live in community and minister together.

Since our visit to McAllen, Mary Ellen, Jane and I have reflected on our graced experience with our sisters and those they serve at the border. Mary Ellen described this experience of opening a joint congregational mission as a “transformative experience” for her.

“It deepened my understanding of what it means to have a missionary heart. The sisters did not seem to be deterred by any obstacle or detail. They had the courage and conviction that all would come together. I saw the physical border on the outskirts of McAllen and the expanse of people waiting in makeshift tents outside the walls of the Casa Del Migrante in Reynosa, Mexico. The wall and the waiting penetrated my heart as it was crystal clear that there must

be a better solution... I think that our IHM Congregations have gained a broader perspective about the plight of the migrant. We have heard, from our sisters, the human side of this issue and we have become more aware of the value of presence in keeping alive the hope that so many of the women, men, and children carry deep within them.”

Jane remembered walking across the border with the five of us and a brief ride to Casa del Migrante in Reynosa.

“I was overwhelmed by the number of women and children at this shelter. Listening to the directors, I came to realize the challenge – yet the tremendous need – to make this shelter available to the women and children migrants. There were many children and pregnant women. These individuals are particularly vulnerable. Although I do not understand Spanish, as I looked into the eyes of the migrants, I came to realize their yearning and their desire for a better life. Each day our sisters come home after a day of serving the migrants in what may be considered simple ways. Yet, they carry the IHM presence with them. They also come home daily to reflect on the unjust system we have in our country that so often turns away this vulnerable population. What began as a dream of having sisters serve at the border has now become a reality. We are blessed to have this collaborative effort to serve those who are the most vulnerable.”



As pioneer members of the new intercongregational collaborative mission, these sisters are fulfilling a dream shared by each of the three IHM Congregations.

continued on page 19



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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A Peace and Justice Perspective

Touchstones

by Sister Chris Koellhoffer, IHM



We tend to collect and cherish them: a scallop shell scooped up from the beach during a healing retreat; a pin that celebrates the anniversary of sobriety; a framed photo of a loved one who's now living in risen life.

This penchant we humans have is not so much about collecting as it is about *highlighting* a moment or experience that's rich with meaning. The keepsake or symbol stands as a remembrance of something far deeper, perhaps a time when our hearts were most open, soft, permeable, emotionally receptive. Often that remembrance is also shaped around our desire to preserve in time and in memory what is fragile, beautiful, vulnerable, inspiring.

Story Corps, the podcast whose mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world, recently offered an episode that spoke to fragility and remembrance and the rituals we sometimes create and cling to as touchstones.

This episode was a story from the Holocaust that took place in the Theresienstadt concentration camp on the day that camp was liberated. The bones of the story are straightforward: Yehuda Czarnoczapka walked into a barracks and met a young woman, Mina, who had no shoes. She was starving and too sick to leave her bed. Yehuda gave her a pair of shoes and a potato, and won her heart. The survivors were married three months later.

Their story is told by the survivors' adult daughter, Susan, and granddaughter, Margot, who remember both the trauma and the legacy of Yehuda and Mina, who remember how the family still celebrates the day these loved ones were liberated from the camps. Every year, on that sacred liberation day, the parents buy each child a new pair of shoes. And they all eat potatoes. Everything flows from that single remembered act of compassion in a time of profound vulnerability.

In our work for justice, we also look for

these touchstones. Our common hope leads us to venerate relics of holy ones who have given their lives over to building a world that is more welcoming, more compassionate, more inclusive. We honor the saints' rooting themselves in the realities of their neighbors, often placing themselves in the place of deepest vulnerability, sharing the same fate as the poor and oppressed whom they call kin. We remember those who embraced their call to work for justice and identify completely with the human family in whom they recognized the face of the Holy One.

A few of the many touchstones that I have come to treasure in the work of doing justice and making peace include connections to El Salvador:

Archbishop Romero's vestments

St. Óscar Romero had long been under death threats because of his outspokenness on behalf of the poor and his call for peace with justice in El Salvador. During a 2010 delegation, I viewed the vestments he was wearing when he was assassinated while celebrating Eucharist. The vestments still bore the stain of his blood and his wounds.

The rose garden at the University of Central America (UCA)

After taking in the atrocities committed against six Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter at the UCA, it was a relief to stand in silence with the beauty of the rose garden planted by Obdulio Ramos, husband of Elba and father of Celina. The garden holds a plaque memorializing the names of his two family members as well as the six Jesuit priests who were murdered for identifying themselves with the oppressed people of El Salvador. The roses, blooming beauty and peace, remind us that the Paschal Mystery is not about suffering and death alone, but also about the fullness of hope, of resurrection and risen life.

The prayer of Thomas Merton

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Maryknoll Sister Maura Clarke's death, her nephew, Peter, spoke at my parish and gave me a small bag with soil from his aunt's grave. It has become one of my touchstones. He told us that soon after his aunt's death, Maura's family traveled to El Salvador to see and understand better what had captured her heart and why she could not bear to tear herself away from her beloved Salvadoran people. In her bare room, there was only one thing hanging on the wall, a sheet of paper. On that paper was Thomas Merton's prayer, so



Sisters Annmarie Sanders, IHM, Donna Korba, IHM, and Chris Koellhoffer, IHM traveled to El Salvador in 2010 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the deaths of the four North American Churchwomen. They were part of a delegation sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and SHARE El Salvador, celebrating the legacy of the martyrs and witnessing how the struggle for justice in El Salvador continues today.

appropriate for one who lived in a climate marked by civil war, uncertainty, and the constant threat of death for identifying with the most poor and vulnerable people:

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end... I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

We revere these holy ones not simply because of how they died but because of how they lived, with a full-throated, emphatic "Yes!" to solidarity with their neighbors. Because their lives embodied and resonated with the Paschal Mystery, the suffering, death, and rising of Jesus.

continued on page 14

Vulnerability: The Journey to Wholeness

by Sister Mary Persico, IHM

It's not a stretch of the imagination to consider that a provocative piece of art might be viewed as a manifestation of the artist's deep feelings. Likewise, the writer's most successful work might be interpreted as a reflection of the author's spirit, or a projection of personal life experiences. The splendor of art, in any form, can be contemplated as the result of the inner spiritual development of the craftsman. This development is a lifelong journey that is often recognized in the evolution of the artist's skill or technique, expression or capacity to change the mind or heart of the observer.

The IHM core value of *wholeness* invites IHM Sisters, Associates, and those who resonate with the essence of who we are to integrate the many aspects of our lives into a rhythm that brings peace and harmony to all our encounters. Being vulnerable may seem at odds with the concept of wholeness. Our instincts, as people, and as leaders, caution us to protect ourselves from becoming vulnerable. The image of the craftsman again shows us that from shards, and nature's elements, and paint, and clay, the raw stuff of life, emerge great masterpieces, whole and beautiful. Parker Palmer, in his enduring work *A Hidden Wholeness** writes: "A divided life may be endemic, but wholeness is always a choice. Once I have seen my dividedness, do I continue to live a contradiction – or do I try to bring my inner and outer worlds back into harmony?"

Leadership is no less an art than the work of a sculptor, musician, actor, architect, or poet.

Great leadership requires the deep, inner work of understanding self and the realization that the service of a leader is not about power, or control, or the exclusion of others. However, it is about opening one's heart and soul to those who are served, and the very act of opening oneself evokes the frightening reality that an open heart gives way to the gift and burden of vulnerability. It is about the arduous path toward wholeness.

Well-intended observers sometimes characterize leadership as "lonely at the top." The flaw in that statement is that spiritual, servant, or simply humanistic leaders are not "at the top." They exist in and fully participate within the community they serve, and they recognize that everyone in the group is vulnerable. Vulnerability is not reserved for the leader. It is a mutual condition that is embraced if lifting the group toward wholeness is the goal.

Of course, it's easy to name the circumstances that expose a leader's vulnerability. For example, leaders typically see a fuller picture than someone who performs a focused task within the larger landscape. That opens the leader to criticism when decisions are made that reflect a broader understanding of the situation and that don't align with the hopes and dreams of individuals in the



Vulnerability is not reserved for the leader. It is a mutual condition that is embraced if lifting the group toward wholeness is the goal.

group. This situation occurs frequently in the life of any organization and often places the leader on the defensive, introduces tension, and/or creates a division in the group. Division challenges the wholeness leaders strive to attain personally and among those they serve.

On the flip side, leaders can turn their vulnerability into a positive or more authentic side of their role. In the example given or in almost all other situations, a leader can express vulnerability openly and honestly. There are everyday opportunities for leaders to be transparent by sharing information, explaining the "whys" of what is happening, and simply expressing personal feelings that otherwise are kept close to the vest and out of reach for anyone to see or understand. A leader can shift the defensiveness caused by vulnerability by revealing self in ways that are holistic and sometimes even lighthearted! This ability to be open on the part of the leader gets at the inner work that moves closer to wholeness and further away from stress.

There is a third movement on this continuum of vulnerability. A position of defensiveness at first, then an opening of self to others, can lead finally to an invitation on the part of the leader for others to share their own vulnerability with

the leader and everyone else. The recognition that everyone in the group is vulnerable changes the dynamic and moves a leader from the proverbial and pseudo "top" to the center, where leaders most effectively do their work. When leaders say they are collaborative or inclusive, that is often cliché for something else unless the inner work of owning and embracing their vulnerability is at the heart of their willingness to lead.

In time, owning vulnerability is an entrée to courage, empowerment, and the ability to lead through the eyes of those who are served. It doesn't happen overnight and is often messy. Sometimes it is discouraging. It requires strategy of a different nature, not the strategy that points to objective performance indicators but one that leads to deeper human outcomes such as personal satisfaction, engagement among team members, innovation in a group, and ultimately a sense of belonging.

In summary, vulnerability exposes anyone to pain and defensiveness. If embraced and owned, leaders can move from this initial response by turning to those they serve and inviting them into a space that enjoys the give and take of open, honest dialogue and the sharing of feelings. It is a style of leadership that is transformational. Groups who experience this graciousness of a leader are successful in their enterprises, and they themselves grow as humans and teams. This is a longstanding hope of a leader. It requires the affirmation of Parker Palmer's statement that *wholeness is always a choice*.

Admittedly, none of this is easy because vulnerability almost always results from interaction between people, and interaction between leaders and the people they serve is a long, sensitive, even spiritual pathway that takes the craftsmanship of an artist. The next time you observe the beauty of a painting on canvas, admire the grandeur of a sculptor's completed image, or enjoy the magnificence of a composer's symphony, think about the leader whose craft is one of empowering people to be their best selves. Vulnerability is the stuff of a leader's craft. The inner work that is required to bring a leader's vulnerability to the fullness of the human experience is nothing short of a great blessing.

Sister Mary serves as the president of Marywood University in Scranton, PA.

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The Center Still Holds: Vulnerability, Courage, Compassion

by Sister Paula Gallagher, IHM



“I am stretched at every turn.
There are times I cannot see
how I will ever fill up again, and then I do.
We rise up. We are renewed.
We get a second wind, even in these
catastrophic times.”

- from *Dusk, Dark, Dawn* by Anne Lamott

Vulnerability: Here in the Southwest, we are experiencing the chaos of climate change firsthand. Spring 2022 took us into a wildfire season more destructive than any before. The Cerro Pelado fire of April – June 2022, was the result of many years of deepening drought. The federal fire service was conducting a controlled burn that quickly grew out of control in high spring wind. Two fires blazed and eventually combined. The megafire led to the loss of thousands of acres of land, deaths, evacuations, loss of homes. Later in the summer rains, run off from the burn scar polluted the water reservoirs. Fire moved to within 20 miles of Santa Fe for a nerve-racking couple of weeks. I, too, prepared to evacuate everything.

As persons of faith, we ask where God is in the midst of all these things that are happening. In prayer the Lord responds: “I am right there on the front line with the firefighters battling the blaze. I am in the car with families escaping through the flames to safety.” Deep faith assures us God is in our midst, with us in all things. Yet how do we take such upending, catastrophic experiences and find the grace and wisdom they have to offer us? This fall several of us in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe gathered to take a look at past, present and future, examining this paradox of vulnerability, and the courage and compassion that can emerge from it. We considered three ways the Center still holds during vulnerable times:

So let us consider how the Center holds for IHM:

Reaching to the Past

We are blessed, blessed, blessed to have a community that treasures our founding story, that archives the challenges and achievements of so many brave women before us. IHM raises its members on a diet of inspirational stories. We remind one another of the courage of the ones who wrote our story. The golden thread tying our generation with theirs is that rock solid belief in the Paschal Mystery – that out of dying comes new life. We lean into their stories. We ask the ones who have gone before what made them courageous, and how we can find some of that courage too. We love saying to one another, “We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before.” We pray to be infused with some of their stamina, vision and steady faith.

Courage is the ability to come through something that has frightened us, and out of that pain and grief, to discover a strength we never realized we had. It is bravery, mettle, determination, fortitude. Courage turns the challenge into fire, transforming us into new humility, insight and understanding. Courage gives us grace to see every experience through the eyes of faith, to move away from worry and plunge into life. Courage calls us to sink our roots ever deeper into simple, clear direction.

The greatest joy we can give our ancestors in faith is to follow in their footsteps. We touch the courage of the past to strengthen us for the many vulnerabilities we face today.

Standing in the Present

We pray the Lord grace us with clarity for our lives and ministry. Paradoxically, vulnerability opens the very path. From inside vulnerable times, we learn there is no way we can do life alone. We need our God more than ever.

We face many wildfires: there is plenty of vulnerability to go around and reasons for it—physical challenges: proximity to the source of disaster; economic challenges: lack of control or access to what we need to live; social challenges: isolation and weak community; lack of opportunity to participate in decisions; attitudinal challenges: a sense of hopelessness about it all. We hear that no one is safe today anywhere, anymore.

What difference can faith make to that? Can we learn to replace fear with curiosity? Courage is the ability to meet and do something that frightens us. Instead of looking for answers, sometimes it is more effective to surface the questions these times are asking us.

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With age comes the vulnerability of increasing bodily challenges: We become familiar with St. Paul’s image of a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 2:7-10.) We learn the paradox of God’s power is at its best in our weakness. It is when we are weak that we are strong. In our own bodies we learn the Paschal pattern of life, death and rising.

Many of us have died and risen more than once, through challenges of loss, health, and disappointments. We have gone through personal and communal times of transition; we are familiar with periods of organization, disorientation, reorganization. We have learned to ask that central theological reflection question: where is God in this which is happening? Christian life knows the mystery of God contains all of it, and the Center still holds.

Vulnerability means things fall apart. Over and over we are called to embrace life’s messes. It is what we do with them that matters. If we focus only on our own sorrow, it will be all suffering. If we can embrace all parts of our life story, broken parts too, we will experience the fullness of human experience. As we grow older, we come to respect the paradox: life is not either/or, it is both/and. It is darkness and light; it is suffering and peace. We die and rise many times before our final death, to convince ourselves that rising is always possible.

We need to press on in our own time and communities. To do that, we need a powerful courage. We follow a Lord who found the courage to die to teach us that what looks dead, over and done is grounds for further possibility. Endings can turn into new beginnings. So many brave men and women show us this grace: the very broken parts of our story become the gift we have to share with others.

continued on page 14

Vulnerability and Tenderness

by Sister Kathryn Kurdziel, IHM

Her tiny fingers, and pale, pink nails, were so delicate and her golden, almost transparent eyelashes, rested on her baby soft cheeks. She fit into the palm of her mother's trembling hand. She was perfect but born too soon to survive.

I sat silently with her parents as they wept and rocked gently, the pain of loss seeping deeply into their souls. They were a healthy-looking couple, staffers for a mid-western senator. Life in DC had fallen into place with good jobs and their first baby on the way. It was all wholesome and tidy. How could this cruel thing happen? I had no answers. Would I lead a prayer service for their baby they asked? Then they would take her ashes back home to Iowa, to the safety of their parents and families.

The morning of the memorial prayer, staff and friends gathered--standing room only. The couple had chosen a simple Belleek shamrock container for the baby's ashes. A poignant hush came over the room as prayer began. When the ritual finished, reverently, tenderly, the gatherers approached the parents with empathy, softly spoken words and loving gestures. A lovely, well dressed middle-aged woman approached me and said, "I had a miscarriage once but, in those days, no one acknowledged it or even blessed the child's existence. I was devastated and I still carry a silent pain within me. I realized today that what I needed was the tenderness of a loving community surrounding me in one of the most vulnerable moments of my young life."

Vulnerability in a culture like ours is often viewed as weak, undignified, or even shameful. Pain, hurt, tragedy, and deep loss make us vulnerable because these experiences quietly drill deep inside and leave us depleted. They exhausts us. Often, we have learned to hoard our pain, trying to pretend that we are strong and invulnerable. Tears and fragility show weakness and are often scoffed at. As a result, we learn to buck up, hold up or numb out, and are encouraged not to cry!

Only in the last few years have we, as a community, seriously opened our conversation to the topic of vulnerability. We learned how to spell it, and admit it; we learned how to own it ourselves and express it in honest and intimate conversation. I am so grateful!

Life-long friends die, community members become victims of domestic violence as when two of our friends were murdered. One of them, our Sister Angela, has never been found. We fall victim to serious and debilitating illnesses. COVID claims beloved family members. Financial instabilities begin to plague us; many of our communities of Sisters move



Truthfully, we are vulnerable at every stage of life, especially during often lonely periods of significant personal losses. What a gift and a need it is to cultivate adult friends whose thoughtful presence shapes our wellbeing, and uplifts our spirits. Trusted companions keep delight in our lives and soften the hurt in our hearts.

toward completion; our Haitian sisters are kidnapped! How could our safe and sheltered life have become so thoroughly threatened, even destroyed? We say, we have become like everybody else! As the shield of protection peels away, our eyes are opened. Yes, the vulnerability has touched us too. How can this be? How did we fail to understand, empathize, and reach out to those caught in such pain? How did we fail to access our own deep-seated pain and respond to others experiencing the same? Tenderness is nourished in such soil, prompting loving, gentle responses to others. An inner knowing of hurt and pain can sometimes heal another through great tenderness.

The gift of tenderness often starts with an ability to respond to infants and children. I remember several infants who cried incessantly and the tender attempts by their families to make that vulnerable little person more comfortable. They tried walking, rocking, dancing, singing, rhythmical patting, stroking, cooing, running the vacuum, and riding around in a car to comfort the crying child.

Children almost always crave gentle, loving tenderness to sooth the hurts and disappointments of childhood. They are softhearted and vulnerable beyond belief, and many wounds result from insensitive treatment or the dearth of tender responses to their childhood needs. Besides parents, other adults can gently shield children from the wounds of childhood vulnerabilities. Pets, too, often provide tender, emotional support with their warm, soft, licks and cuddling behavior.

Teens, who find themselves in a confusing, sensitive and vulnerable stage of life, often require tending by patient, caring adults and significant peers who provide affirmation, affection, companionship, and unconditional listening during many teen dramas and transitions.

Truthfully, we are vulnerable at every stage of life, especially during often lonely periods of significant personal losses. What a gift and a need it is to cultivate adult friends whose thoughtful presence shapes our wellbeing and uplifts our spirits. Trusted companions keep delight in our lives and soften the hurt in our hearts.

Incredibly necessary is fidelity to our personal relationship with God. Habits of daily prayer, nurturing spiritual reading, and praying with a community, enrich life and take the sting out of loneliness. Believing that our loving God awaits us at the end of the day, greets us at the rising of the sun and accompanies us at every moment sustains us through our vulnerabilities

As I age, I realize how much the tenderness of friends anchors me. Simple, sensitive words and gestures have sustained me along the way; like my dear friend piling up five blankets to warm the chills left by a major illness; my life-long friend presenting me with a hand-calligraphed book of our favorite poems; holding the hand of a dying friend surrounded by a room full of our newest members singing the Salve as she peacefully moved into paradise; midnight sharing with friends over a glass of wine; spending holidays with my brother and sister, their spouses, their children and their children's children. Living community, committee work with sisters and associates who share my concerns for our earth; being inspired by women I met in vocation/formation discernment, watching them make vows and live the mission with generosity and integrity; and in all of my vulnerability still feeling embraced by the tender love of God for these last 77 years. Amen, it has been so.

Sister Kathryn serves as Delegate for Religious for the Diocese of Scranton and as editorial consultant for the IHM Congregation.

The Sacrament of Vulnerability

by Sister Elizabeth Pearson, IHM

By our human nature, we are physical and spiritual beings. By our nature we are individual creations meant to be in relationship with others—we are social creatures. By our nature, we have been endowed with talents and gifts—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual—albeit with limitations. Not all of us become Olympic stars or spiritual directors. As I grow in life, I come to know myself in what I can do and not do, what I value and reject, what I am willing to fight for. One avenue of this development is through self-reflection, one of the greatest capacities of the human being which gives us insight and joy. Have you ever watched a baby who realizes for the first time that the reflection in the mirror is his own? As my sense of self develops, as I come to accept my talents, limitation, my strengths and weaknesses, hopefully I can accept that it's ok to make mistakes. I learn from my errors. I try my best. To accept my humanness—to accept who I am is a blessing. There is joy, insight, as well as a freeing feeling in accepting who I am as God has made me. How many times have I said, "Thank you" to God for just being—being human?

Living our human life, naturally, involves risk taking. As Maslow indicates, our basic human needs are our life's motivators to be safe, to love and to belong, to feel respected, to achieve. Meeting these needs, growing into a healthy personality, means asserting myself, means risking to take the next step forward, means being vulnerable, having courage, trust and confidence. There is excitement as well as anxiety in risk-taking. Even if I know that failure to reach the 6' mark on the high jump might be the outcome, I'm willing, I choose to try. The outcome may bring deflation, embarrassment, or a sense of accomplishment. Fear of failure, the need to be right can be motivating forces to "achieve." To what ends will I go to ace a test? How much effort do I apply to ascertain the correct set of directions for a trip? Or am I willing to get lost on the road without being certain of every turn in the road? Risking is an ordinary part of living, of becoming who God meant me to be.

Dealing with interpersonal situations requires another level of risk-taking. The risk might be criticism for my personal response to a discussion question. Or I might be rejected by the new group of friends because of my unconventional opinion. Do I risk accepting an invitation to dinner when I know the conversations with this friend frequently get testy and I am challenged in these circumstances? Do I accept the possibility of making the dinner experience a pleasant one? Making the choice (deciding intentionally)



Expressions of apology, forgiveness, gratitude lead to another level of relationship, important for continued growth personally, socially, spiritually. It is a healthy process to do a daily review of my actions, especially in my relationships with other people.... An examen of consciousness can reflectively provide insight into myself and others, along with behavior changes to improve relationships with other people and between God and myself.

involves reflection on circumstances, my courage and confidence to accept or turn down the invitation. Accepting the invitation opens me to being rejected, put down, failing in my goal, or to making good on my aim. Being vulnerable is part of ordinary life.

Frequently, I don't have time to reflectively determine my choice of words, e.g., in a tense conversation. I can be deliberate in my pace so that I don't regret harsh or angry words. After the conversation, with some distance from the event, my reflective review may reveal that an expression of gratitude or apology is appropriate from me. If I have forgotten/omitted/broken a promise with a friend/co-worker, am I open enough in our relationship to acknowledge my error and say "I'm sorry, I apologize, I did make a mistake in giving you the wrong information?" Or "I understand that you forgot we changed the dinner time." Expressions of apology, forgiveness, gratitude lead to another level of relationship, important for continued growth personally, socially, spiritually. It is a healthy process to do a daily review of my actions, especially in my relationships with other people. When I step away from the day's busyness, I am more likely to see my accomplishments and failures and foibles. An examen of consciousness can provide insight into myself and others, along with behavior changes to improve relationships with other people and between God and myself.

Experiences of risk-taking, of opening myself to the world of possibility, or being vulnerable are elements of ordinary living. In the words of Miriam Ukeritis "...it is in the very statement of our vulnerability that we invite the other to relationship, to exploring the truth, to arriving at greater potential. Such is the action of graced vulnerability." These occasions of vulnerability are sacramental, conduits for receiving God's grace freeing me to be at home with my Maker and myself.

Sister Elizabeth serves as the archivist for the IHM Congregation.

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CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INTIMACY AND VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability means, of course, the ability to be wounded or hurt. It is the opposite of invincible strength, of being indestructible. We may, for a time, have the illusion of being invulnerable: the unthinking energy of the two year-old and the risk-taking of adolescents comes to mind. Vulnerability means not only our physical limitations, but also our emotional, social, moral and religious weaknesses. Our growth in self-knowledge reveals to us strengths and weaknesses. Knowing ourselves is itself a daring adventure, which sometimes brings gratitude and pride, and sometimes chagrin and embarrassment.

Dictionary definitions of intimacy include “familiarity” and “something of a personal or private matter.” Intimacy means the “closeness between people in personal relationships.” Friendships and relationships can be viewed along several dimensions. Relationships can be of different types, so that we share certain interests with some friends but not others. Another dimension concerns the depth of the relationship from casual acquaintances, to “just friends,” to close friends.

Before discussing close friendships, I’d like to comment on the idea of familiarity and acquaintances. There can be a closeness with those whom we see very often, even if the relationship wouldn’t be characterized by either party as a friendship. I think this is true of neighbors and co-workers with whom we have frequent, pleasant small exchanges. A former colleague once called them “friendlies.” The idea of “just acquaintances” doesn’t fit. We miss simple interactions and would grieve their loss. The isolation imposed by the coronavirus included the loss of natural, everyday connections.

On the other hand, intimacy is usually thought of as including mutual and shared affection, and a deeper connection, the kind found in close friendship, love relationships, and marriage. Erik Erikson, in explaining the adult task of developing intimacy, includes generosity as well as sexuality. Sacrifice and mutual compromise are expected in Erikson’s description of intimacy. And unlike love, which can be one-sided or unrequited, intimacy must be mutual.

Although Erikson’s work is organized around times of the lifespan, his theory is not a strict stage theory. All of the tasks he mentions have repercussions or actions at each of the stages of life. For Erikson, the task of forming (or re-forming) one’s identity is connected to his description of intimacy. Intimacy, for Erikson, means having enough confidence in knowing who one is that one is able to share that identity with another. Intimacy involves both a fusing and a



counterpointing of identities. One is able both to give up, and hold onto, one’s identity, in a healthy intimate relationship.

This brings us to the connection with vulnerability. If mutual sharing and mutual self-disclosure are central to intimacy, reasons for fear of intimacy become clear. We need to expose our thoughts and feelings. The example of the development of identity and intimacy among youth provides a clear picture of the relationship between vulnerability and intimacy. Young people (and all of us) have to form a cohesive sense of self which will necessarily have both positive and negative features. (It does not matter if these are truly negative or positive; the individual will have judged them in some way.) Teenagers are famous for having idealistic and perfectionistic views of how other people should be. Though they may be most irritating when we see their unrealistic expectations of us, the adults in their lives, they also have highly unrealistic views of themselves. Therefore, how they project themselves to others is very important to them.

Well, we are not very different from youth. We also have images of ourselves we want to convey. We also have aspects of ourselves we’d like to conceal. Often, because we live in a society that overvalues independence and strength, we want to conceal weaknesses of any kind. We want to be invulnerable. We want to be indestructible.

In developing relationships, we cannot be certain of the response our sharing will elicit from the other. We do not know if the other person, who seems to care for us, would care for us if they really knew us. The ways in which we think, believe, or feel differently than the way we present ourselves may vitiate our worth in the eyes of the other. However, if the other does not know us, and we do not know the other, we may have pleasant interactions, but are not sharing selves; we are sharing something like social media selections of ourselves.

One of the joys of friendship is finding out that you are not the only person, or the only woman religious, or the only senior, to feel, act, or think that way (whatever way that is). I think it is a truism, though one not immediately apparent: “The more personal something is, the more

by Sister Gail Cabral, IHM

universal.” Sharing in friendship can help us to know we are not singular, or absolutely unique. Some aspects of each of us are shared by others. A very great joy of friendship is finding out that you are accepted and loved as you are, not necessarily as you wished to be.

I once heard a young person complain that for people who were supposed to be following Jesus, sisters did not speak of Jesus very often. I have suggested that the deeply personal is likely to be the most universal. However, the most personal is also what is likely to make us feel most vulnerable. What is highly personal will differ from person to person. My favorite sports team may be very important to me; your favorite sports team may be less important to you. Now substitute political belief, prayer practice, religious devotion, thoughts about God, beliefs, and doubts. Now we are treading on (1) more deeply held areas of our life, and (2) areas of varying import for people. No wonder discussion of personal spirituality has seemed for many fraught with difficulty.

However, the fact remains that we are vulnerable even in those areas of central importance; less believing than we would like, more broken and more unsure. IHM sisters have increased their sharing of spirituality (not to be confused with spiritual or religious topics) in recent years. Somehow, we (that is, I) need to believe, not only that God loves me in my weakness, but comes to be with me. That idea is central to our personal spirituality. However, sharing my vulnerability with others brings another dimension to my spiritual life.

Another truism from a graduate class: “Relationships are all there is.” To the extent to which we try to be authentic, to that extent we hold ourselves open to our loving God, and to the companionship of those around us. We do not go to God alone. We are responsible for knowing and helping and being helped by others. We find God in others and God seems to find us in our relations with others. Our openness to sharing our vulnerabilities provides the intimacy we need for this journey we make together. “Let no one walk alone; the journey makes us one.”

Sister Gail retired in 2022 after teaching in the Psychology Department at Marywood for more than 50 years. She occasionally teaches Developmental Psychology as an adjunct faculty member.

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Being Human

by Sister Delia Marie McNeirney, IHM

Being human equates to being vulnerable. Being human with a disability hits the vulnerability ball out of the park. As a child I remember when I saw a disabled person, I would be told not to stare because that would cause the other person to be uncomfortable. Not to stare to my child mind meant to put my eyes down and not look at the person. So, I grew up following this advice of not staring, i.e., not looking at the person with a disability. After a while, I began to understand that I was not making the other person uncomfortable by looking at him or her; it was I who was uncomfortable. The question became "Do I look up and say hello? Do I wave? Do I simply walk by?" How many of you have ever looked down or away when a person with a disability was approaching? How many of you have thought, "Oh the poor thing." No harm is meant but we don't fully understand that a person with a disability is a human being, different in some ways but a human being, created in the image and likeness of God and therefore, perfect in the eyes of God. If we strive to "see with the eyes of God" then we can see a disabled person as perfect not only in God's eyes but in our eyes also. How do you respond to persons with disabilities when you see them anywhere? The answer to that question is simple: do what you would want done to you.

The residents at St. Joseph's Center have physical and/or intellectual disabilities to varying degrees. Some can walk, some can talk, some can feed themselves, and some cannot do any of these daily tasks. This makes them very vulnerable especially in the world away from St. Joseph's Center. They may not be able to express it verbally; however, they know when someone is unkind to them. They hurt just like we would in the same situation.

What makes the residents one of the most vulnerable groups of people is that they do not know they are vulnerable. This same lack of knowledge can also make them the happiest people in the world. They can approach others with joy and love written all over them and hopefully, others respond with the same joy and love. All the residents of St. Joseph's Center have to rely on others for something. They also have to be protected from harm, if possible. By example they learn to social distance, to recognize personal space, to be kind and caring to others. The direct support personnel look after each individual person in their care. They see that essential needs are met; they joke with them and encourage them to be happy and kind to the other residents in their unit.

I have lived and worked at St. Joseph's for almost three years, and what I see is the blessing the residents are to the staff who work here and the blessing the staff is to the residents. The staff here treat each individual with respect, kindness and concern. It is a joy for me to see so many smiling residents go by in the hallway on their way

to programs, dance parties, ice cream socials, or simply to go for a ride in a wheelchair to visit other residents or to have some time out of the unit they call home.

The spaces in the units are decorated to show the personality of the individual resident. They are filled with pictures of family or friends, and things they enjoy such as animals or flowers. I am often impressed at the attentiveness of the staff when it is a special day like a birthday or holiday. The residents are dressed in a special outfit and receive balloons for their birthday. The residents might be the most vulnerable among us; however, they are not treated in that manner. They are encouraged and challenged to develop to the best of their ability. The residents are open to so many enjoyable, educational and challenging experiences. Each resident has specific goals to meet his or her needs. Even the youngest one here, the baby, is challenged to assume different positions and encouraged to hold his head up and move his arms and feet more. I know him the best because I try to hold him every day. Earlier, I said the residents are not verbal; however, they are able to communicate emotions by the noises they make as well as facial expressions. I used a baseball expression in the first paragraph for a reason: the theme song for the Pittsburgh Pirates is "We are Family." That is the way it seems here at St. Joseph's Center. We are a family bonded together by the charism of St. Joseph's Center. The closing information will give you some additional information about this wonderful place.

St. Joseph's Center is an independent Catholic agency sponsored by the Congregation of Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, rooted in the values of care, concern, compassion and commitment. The Center strives to provide individuals who have special needs the opportunity to develop their abilities and potential to the fullest extent possible. We do this through residential, community and home-based services, outpatient therapy, and maternity, family and adoption services. For decades, St. Joseph's Center has been a recognized leader in providing quality care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The continuation of such care depends upon the retention and recruitment of a highly qualified workforce. While St. Joseph's Center currently employs over 600 staff members, the need for additional staff continues to rise. If you feel drawn to this family, don't look away. Reach out for a child just waiting for your smile and a hug!

Sister Delia Marie serves as the human resources assistant at St. Joseph's Center in Scranton, PA.



How do you respond to persons with disabilities when you see them anywhere? The answer to that question is simple: do what you would want done to you.

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Called to Mystic

The words mystic and mysticism tend to perplex many people. This is unfortunate because every world religion, and all Indigenous peoples have members who are considered mystics and affirm mystical practices. When Christians hear the word mystic they usually think of Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, and John of the Cross. These mystics' writings are catalogued and in countless libraries.

There are many definitions of mysticism and variations of mystical experiences, but the Spirit is at work in all. Mystics have a deep sense of God's transforming presence, which is always a free gift. This union with and knowledge of the transcendent might be accompanied with visions or moments of ecstasy and it always produces more generous love toward others. What is required is that one "surrender" oneself to what is taking place. The urge to control the experience must be resisted. This is a very vulnerable time for the person being swept away by the intimate experience of deep love. It asks for considerable trust and the ability to let the mystical journey be the guide. What begins as a very private personal experience always has the potential to become a catalyst for social change.

There is a relatively new term being used to describe individuals whose deep mystical experiences of God have led and guided them to a particular kind of ministry in the public forum. These individuals are not monastics or hermits. They do not choose to withdraw from the world, but find their vocation among the challenges, joys, and sufferings of life in society. They are called public mystics. This article will focus on four women whom I believe are public mystics. They are also women who had to face their own vulnerability as they responded to God's love and call. We are fortunate to have many of their letters and writings along with historical records of their lives. They are Harriet Tubman, Etty Hillesum, Caryll Houselander and Thea Bowman.

Harriet Tubman experienced vulnerability from the moment she was born into slavery in 1825. Little did she know that one day she would be called by the name Moses. Within her DNA were the traditions and mystical beliefs of her African ancestors who traveled the Middle Passage. The vulnerability of slavery included isolation from family and physical and emotional abuse. At the age of twelve she was struck in the head by a two-pound lead weight that was being thrown at a slave boy. The ramifications from this incident were lifelong. Tubman had dream-like spells from which it was difficult to awaken her. She believed that God and her ancestors spoke to her through these dreams. Having such physical challenges created a very real vulnerability for her.

However, it was during some of these "episodes" that Harriet had a recurring vision of a "flight" to freedom. She saw herself flying over fields and towns, rivers, and mountains. Harriet always knew that she was a child of God. She experienced the pull of the divine, not only for herself but for all who were enslaved. She tried to flee to freedom three times but was too afraid. Finally, she chose to put herself in a vulnerable place and opt

for freedom. She would state in 1859, "God's time is always near. He set the North Star in the heavens; He gave me the strength in my limbs; He meant I should be free."

Not only did Harriet Tubman reach freedom in Philadelphia, but she also returned countless times to lead southern slaves out of bondage. She liberated over three hundred slaves, and none were captured. It was her mystical prayer and union with God that inspired her and gave her the strength she needed. During the Civil War she worked as a spy, and she extended the Underground Railroad north to Canada. Harriet teaches us to trust the many ways God wishes to communicate. She teaches us that the human spirit cannot be limited by physical challenges and personal vulnerability. As Fredrick Douglass told her, "The midnight sky and the silent stars have been witnesses of your devotion to freedom." She stood in the swamps and prayed to her God. The waters parted before her.

On September 7, 1943, a young Dutch Jew was put into a train car at Westerbork transit camp in the Netherlands. As the train headed East, she slid a postcard through the slats of the car, informing a friend that she was on her way to Auschwitz. Her name was Etty Hillesum. We are fortunate that this incredible woman and mystic bore witness to what was happening in her life and in the world by keeping a journal and writing in it, almost daily from March 1941 to August 1943.

As with Harriet Tubman, Etty Hillesum faced many challenges and vulnerabilities throughout her short life. Her family was deeply disturbed and as a result Etty was a very anxious and fearful woman. Eventually she would join a group of intellectuals in Amsterdam which gave her stability and spiritual nourishment. She became a patient and partner of the therapist Julius Spier. His guidance and care along with her contemplative being in love with God, helped liberate her from the inner forces that kept her emotionally and spiritually unfree. Her life became an uninterrupted dialogue with God. She knew that she must chronicle what was taking place in Amsterdam as the Nazis took over. "If I have one real duty in life, in these times, then it is to write, to record, and to retain."

Hillesum chose to see the beauty in life in the midst of horror. She was willing to be vulnerable and loving in a climate of fear and hatred while resisting the evil around her. Little did she know that years after her death, Dorothee Soelle would embrace the concept of mysticism as resistance writing, "Trust in God and resist, is becoming the new imperative!" Etty's relationship with God was her protective shield. Addressing God she stated, "I love people so terribly because in every human being I love something of you." She was often criticized for this stance but deep down she realized that authentic intimacy and suffering demand the embrace of powerlessness and vulnerability. Pope Benedict XVI wrote of Hillesum, "In her disrupted, restless life she found God in the very midst of the tragedy of the 20th Century." We are



ETTY HILLESUM



CARYLL HOUSELANDER

Drawings by Sister

fortunate to have her for our guide as we face our own times.

When I was a novice in the IHM community, I was introduced to a book entitled *The Reed of God* by an author with whom I was unfamiliar. Her name is Caryll Houselander. I learned over the years that Houselander was also an art therapist, illustrator, wood carver, visionary, and healer. She was born in 1901 in Bath, England and lived through two world wars. She was baptized but left the Catholic Church at age 16 only to return later after years of exploring other religious traditions. Like Etty Hillesum, Houselander had a difficult childhood. She was a natural introvert who was often anxious. She experienced the hardships caused by the wars, often had panic attacks, and probably suffered from PTSD due to the bombings

al Vulnerability

by Sister Nancy Hawkins, IHM



THEA BOWMAN



HARRIET TUBMAN

Fran Fasolka, IHM

of London in WWII. Some call her a divine eccentric.

Houselander's first two visions took place when she was young, and they both involve her "seeing" Christ suffering in another person. Throughout her life Caryll experienced a heightened intuitive sense and could discern when others needed to be healed. She would write, "To try to avoid suffering is useless, for the seed of it is in the human heart." Her mystical call was to bring divine love into the world. "Divine love is to be lived at home, at work, in any place, any circumstances. Through our natural human relationships, through the people we know and the neighbors we see." Houselander's vulnerability facilitated her healing abilities and her writing. This gift impacted her greatly when she was at liturgy. She believed the liturgy expresses

every passion, emotion, and experience of the human heart.

The third vision Houselander experienced took place on the subway in London. This vision lasted a few days. Much like Thomas Merton who had his vision on the corner of 4th and Walnut Streets in Louisville, Kentucky, Houselander "saw" Christ in everyone on the train. Being able to see this and speak of it to others was one of the mystical gifts she offered to the world. Houselander chose the reed to be a symbol of Mary. She writes, "The reed is the simplest of things, but it must be cut, shaped and pierced before it can utter the shepherd's song." In other words, it must become open and vulnerable. It dawns on me that this description of Mary can also be used to describe Houselander's journey with her God.

On December 29, 1937 a baby girl named Bertha was born to Theon and Mary Esther Bowman in Mississippi. She would later go by the name Thea and call herself an "old folks child." It was from the old folks that Thea learned the story of slavery and the ways her people fought to survive. She also discovered that God was a God of the oppressed. It was Thea's choice to be baptized a Catholic at age 10 and to enter the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Wisconsin in 1957. Thea would be the only Black sister in the congregation. While her upbringing was joyful and loving, the fact that she was a woman of color would make her quite vulnerable. She already knew that she had to guard her feelings, speech, and thoughts in certain company.

From the moment the Civil Rights Movement began, Thea Bowman was a part of it. Her life opened up as she did further studies and formed a sisterhood with other Black women religious. Her creative abilities blossomed as she wrote, sang, taught black spirituality and indigenous literature to college students. She declared, "When God is on our side, when we walk in faith and hope and love, no wall, no obstacle can stop us."

Vulnerability came to the forefront of Thea Bowman's life in 1984. That fall her mother Mary Esther died, and Thea's father followed shortly after. As an only child she felt lonely and alone. That same year, at age 47, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. "I went through a struggle in the beginning," wrote Thea, "I did not know what to pray for; I didn't know how to approach it." Faced with the vulnerability of illness, Thea declared to all "I pray to live until I die," and "I want to find ways to make the most of the time I have left." These decisions transformed her vulnerability into a forceful ministry to God's people. She preached and spoke to groups, including the American Bishops, for as long as she could. Thea Bowman is clearly a public mystic. Recognizing the life she led, the Diocese of Jacksonville, Mississippi, in 2018, opened the cause for her sainthood. At that time, she was declared a Servant of God.

The lives of these four women demonstrate that vulnerability can be both a challenge and a blessing. They each embraced mystical vulnerability. They were "ordinary" people who taught, built, cooked, nursed, and advocated for others and who were often overlooked. In fact, "we are all mystics" insists the late German



*Authentic intimacy
and suffering demand
the embrace of
powerlessness and
vulnerability.*

theologian Dorothee Soelle. And we cannot forget the poignant words of another German theologian, Karl Rahner, who in his book *Encounters with Silence* wrote, "In the days ahead, you will either be a mystic (one who has experienced God for real) or nothing at all."

Sister Nancy serves on the faculty at Marywood University in Scranton, PA.

Suggested Readings:

Walking the Way of Harriet Tubman by Therese Taylor-Stinson. Broadleaf Books, 2023.

An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork by Etty Hillesum. Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

Caryll Houselander, *Essential Writings* by Wendy M. Wright. Orbis Books, 2005.

Thea Bowman, Faithful and Free. (People of God Series) by Maurice J. Nutt. Liturgical Press, 2019.

The Gifts of Vulnerability

by Sister Ann Barbara DeSiano, IHM



it has so much to teach us... having a relationship to things falling apart can be life changing.” She goes on to say that this relationship can lead us to gratitude and joy. She identifies three ways to be vulnerable: 1) Acknowledge your emotions, 2) Live with integrity, being true to what you value in life, 3) Celebrate what you achieve.

Such practices can lead to confidence, serenity, joy and growth. Vulnerability does slowly bear fruit.

During the next two years of Covid, life settled into its own strange rhythm. We lost Joe, our brother, that first year, not to Covid, but to cancer. It was the largest void I had yet to enter and one I am still processing. Year two brought my own Covid infection, which I recovered from slowly but steadily thanks to the infusion drugs. Virtual life continued. In the final year we slowly began making small efforts to open the spiritual center. Guests were very tentative in their initial response to gathering in person, but the return slowly began. Our cook departed because of her husband’s illness and we lost our housekeeper due to her own ill health... blows from which we have yet to recover.

I credit two spiritual directors, Carol Mackey and Joan McGovern, for saving us through their generous offer of Zoom retreats and reflections. Through these three years their support and spirituality enabled us to gather people from near and far to feed their spiritual needs and desires.

In this same period my own health began to slowly deteriorate. Tests, therapy and injections all failed to provide relief. I began to walk with one cane and eventually moved to two canes. A test finally showed that the issue was not my back but a hip destroyed by arthritics. After surgery, I was invited to recuperate at Our Lady of Peace Residence in Scranton, PA, where our ill and retired sisters reside. I expected to be here for four or perhaps five weeks at most... and here I sit typing this, six months into my little journey. My one surgery was soon followed by two more separate surgeries, each requiring weeks of healing and recovery time. I am now relearning how to walk with physical therapy and every tiny step forward is rewarding. I am also relearning how to use a computer since these six months have eroded my slight tech skills to a degree that astonishes me. Let me welcome “humility” who shows up so frequently that we are becoming fast friends.

This period introduced me face to face with my own vulnerability in a way never before experienced. Here, among my suffering elders, I faced the reality of my limitations, allowed myself to find joy in the kindnesses of many as well as in the crumbs of joy hidden in a million unexpected places. That’s quite a bit of joy

and lots more than my greatest hopes. Sister Eleanor Mary Marconi shared a reflection at a prayer service this week and I asked for a copy for deeper reading. In it, Joan Howard writes, “When I recall some of the beautiful, loving, gentle people I know, a good portion are elderly. Some seem exquisite like a supple ancient tapestry- worn in spots, often thread-patched in places. Yet having a soft patina emanating from them. In the loneliness of illness and limitations, they seem whole and holy.” Yes, my heart echoed, this is exactly what I discovered here at OLP... the whole and the holy.

Two groups must be celebrated: First, the sisters who reside here, as diverse a group as you might find in any nursing home, but wise, centered, generous souls who let fun and learning shape their lives, who stay close to their Creator in prayer, reflection groups and meditation. They are prayerful, playful, well-read and smart, have their favorite games and are always ready for a party. They love to talk and they love to win. They are also accepting, open-minded and supportive. They are fulfilling *the ministry of accompaniment* as together they walk each other to their eternal home. They see the limitations those living with them face, and they see past these, in a heart-to-heart sharing that knows how to surpass those limits. I am not sure we will ever see their like again.

The second caring group to be celebrated are the nurses, caregivers and aides. They consider the physical and emotional well-being of each sister they care for, and respect the dignity of each person they assist. The sisters are moving into the most vulnerable period of their lives. Through their caregivers, sisters experience daily support and concern for their well-being and frequent efforts to relieve their suffering and pain. Our sisters are looked after as God would himself look after them, with open-hearted generosity. They are cared for in a spirit that is grace filled and motivated by love. They are full of encouragement and seemingly endless energy, and they are ever mindful of their need to assist diverse sisters in forming themselves into a true community of grace. They carry heavy loads daily, drive home in all kinds of crazy weather conditions, and return for the next shift ready to do it all over again. They create circles of fun and joy. Some of these women have been caring for IHM sisters for over 40 years, and I often think they know us better than we know ourselves. What a legacy of skill, care, integrity and devotion they’ve built over their many years of service. Their impact cannot be measured... our gift and treasure!

My awareness of my own vulnerability has sharpened quite a bit in the past several months, but a deeper reflection led me to look back several years and see its earlier, hidden roots. Three years ago in early March, I was visiting my brother Joe and his wife, Judy, in Bonita Springs, FL, for a week of sunshine and family fun. This week away guaranteed many activities I had come to love: time to truly rest, a swim in the pool, family outings, trolling the nearest thrift shops for great sales, and gulf side dining each evening. Relaxation, beauty and fun with loved ones! Perfection.

“Another day in paradise,” Joe would call out. And it was! Yet it was on my return flight I heard the first warnings of a strange, new virus and by the time I landed back in New York I felt fear starting to stir. How could I leave Florida with its packed beaches and shops and have so little knowledge of the word Covid? In Manhasset, the sound of sirens began to shatter the air as our local hospitals began to fill up, as hundreds a day began to die. And slowly, the entire city came to a grinding stop. We had barely an inkling of just how vulnerable we really were.

My retreat ministry at Our Lady of Grace Spiritual Center came to a halt too. Who wanted to gather in person in such challenging days? Temperature checks. Hand sanitation. Contact information. Deep cleaning products. All with no guaranties of safety. Covid put the entire world population at risk. We were all vulnerable. Yet it took a great deal of pain and loss before we could begin to understand it.

Pema Chodron calls vulnerability a part of the human experience. In her book, *Living with Vulnerability*, she writes, “If we move towards it,

continued on page 14

Strangers no more... Beloved... Blessed

I have called you by name; you are mine. -Isaiah 43:1

by Sister Mary Elaine Anderson, IHM



My name has always been important to me. During my lifetime, I have had several names. For the first twenty years of my life, I was called “Mary” by family, teachers, classmates, and friends. It was a “common” name and one that I shared with many Catholic girls my age. When I entered religious life, I was given the name “Bernadette Joseph” and for the next fifteen years was called a variety of names ... Bern, Bernie, Bernadette. When my religious congregation gave sisters permission to return to their baptismal names, I reclaimed my first and my middle name and became “Mary Elaine.” I soon discovered that because it was an “uncommon” name, people often mistakenly called me “Mary Ellen” or “Mary Eileen” or just “Elaine.”

Why is being called by name, that is, my correct name, so important to me? Maybe it is because when I am called by name, I feel seen, known and invited into relationship. I believe that is true, not only for me, but also for those whom I meet daily in my ministry at the US-Mexico border. Society tends to “look at” migrants collectively rather than “see” them as individuals who are human like us with similar feelings, needs and aspirations. When a person is faceless and nameless, it is easier for us to name call, demonize and see him or her as a stranger to be feared and deported. It is only when we have the courage to look into another’s eyes and call him or her by his or her given name that we see the person as brother or sister and as friend to be welcomed and embraced.

Recently, I met a woman named “Merylin” (mā rē lēn) at the Humanitarian Respite Center (HRC) in McAllen, Texas. She had been interviewed by Immigration two days before we met and had been permitted to cross the border. Merylin was waiting anxiously to be reunited with her nineteen-year-old daughter Andrea whose interview with Immigration was that day. I had the privilege of being with her when Andrea arrived at HRC. Amid their tears of happiness were also tears of sadness. Merylin’s husband and fourteen-year-old son had not yet successfully obtained their interviews with Immigration using the CBP One App. Knowing that I would be crossing into Reynosa, Mexico, the following day, Merylin asked me to look for her husband and son in Senda de Vida II. So, the next day I walked

through the encampment of about 2,000 migrants asking for Roger and Mario Rivera. After I made several inquiries, a young man finally said to me: “You know ... many of us here have the same name.”

His words have haunted me. How can one be found, be seen, be called if one’s name is like that of so many? How do we not allow people, many of whom have the same name, to become faceless? How do we break through the faceless flesh of humanity and our own indifference? That day in Senda de Vida II, I knew that I might never find Roger and Mario Rivera. I stood in the midst of the collective vulnerability of 2,000 people waiting to be seen and called by name, and I heard God whispering “Beloved,” God’s name for all of humanity. At that moment, my eyes were opened, and I recognized all, those I knew by name and those whose names I did not know, as my flesh, my family, my brother and my sister.

In that brief moment of recognizing God’s abundant love for all of humanity, I caught a glimpse of a world where there would be no more strangers, where we would embrace the most vulnerable and welcome all, where we would build bridges that unite rather than separate countries and families. How do we initiate the needed paradigm shift to make this new world not only possible but also a reality? We will need to

call into question and let go of all our current assumptions about money, power and relationships. We will need to become vulnerable and expose ourselves to the ridicule and criticism of those who represent the status quo and the powerful. Many of us will need to recognize when and how we are privileged.

Some will say that “privilege” has nothing to do with the situation at the border. But my experience every Thursday crossing the Hidalgo International Bridge on foot tells me that privilege is a key component. In the morning, when I enter Mexico, no one asks to see my passport nor any form of identification. But a few hours later, when I leave Reynosa, Mexico, and cross back to the US side of the Rio Grande River, I need to show my US passport twice. Although it can be anxiety-provoking (*Sometimes I worry what would happen if I forgot or lost my passport.*), I also know that being a US citizen and showing my US passport are a sure guarantee for a quick entry into the US. Two of the sisters with whom I cross the bridge are Mexican. Although they have visas that also allow them to enter the US, at times they are questioned by Immigration and it takes them a little longer to gain their rightful entry into the US.

For many, the Hidalgo International Bridge is a place of vulnerability. The asylum seekers who walk across it have no guarantee that their journey will have a happy ending. Every day there is a long line of migrants who, after successfully accessing the CBP One App, wait on the bridge for their interview with US Immigration. As we make our way across the bridge to return to the US, we pass migrants who have been turned back and families with small children who have been standing in the heat for hours waiting their turn to meet with Immigration and learn their fate. It is tempting to cast our eyes downward and pretend not to notice the pain, worry and desperation on their faces. But I have learned from one of the sisters with whom I live not to let my personal feelings of powerlessness overwhelm me.



Sister Mary Elaine Anderson playing with children at the Casa del Migrante, Reynosa, Mexico

continued on page 19

Sister Chris Koellhoffer, continued from page 3

Because they remind us that just as Jesus chose to fully inhabit our human condition with all that it entails, we, too, are called to embrace the fullness of our humanity with its beauty and its limitations.

What might the witness of these martyrs have to say to those of us who are fully planted in the land of the living? After all, most of us will not be called to give our physical lives away as these holy ones did. But all of us are summoned into daily discerning around what it is that we want to *live*—truly *live for* in our time and place. We are summoned into deep listening so we might hear the cries of the poor and act with justice. We are summoned into breathing compassion and love into a world that longs for both. We are summoned into deep and prayerful living that moves us closer to the abundant life that is God's dream for every one of us.

The questions remain: How will we move forward now, living lives of compassion and peace and inclusion? How will we create with our lives a field of healing presence for our beautiful yet wounded world?

Sister Chris is a writer and spiritual guide who offers retreats and presentations internationally through her Mobile Spirituality Ministry. Visit her blog, Mining the Now, at chriskoellhofferihm.org

¹ *Story Corps*, "On the Day Their Concentration Camp Was Liberated, Two Former Prisoners Found Love." To listen to a recording of the story told by Margot and Susan Moinester, go to <https://storycorps.org/stories/on-the-day-their-concentration-camp-was-liberated-two-former-prisoners-found-love/>

² "The Jesuit Martyrs of the UCA," The Archbishop Romero Trust, <http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/martyrs/uca-martyrs>

³ Prayer of Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, The Abbey of Gethsemani, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1956. To read the full text of the prayer, go to https://www.appleseeds.org//Merton_Solitude.htm.

Sister Ann Barbara DeSiano, continued from page 12

A Prayer for Caregivers

May you see with tender eyes the wounds of those before you. May you hear with well-tuned ears the unspoken needs of those whose voices are muted. May you hold with gentle hands the bodies and the spirits of those you care for. May the beauty of soul, the strength of spirit, the wholeness of being, lead you, inspire you and let you know your own beauty of soul, strength of spirit, wholeness of being. May you know that as you care for others, God cares for you, sees you, holds you tenderly. Amen.

Sister Paula Gallagher, continued from page 5

Hoping for the Future

Transformation happens when something old falls apart. The pain of the disruption and chaos we have known invites our soul further on. We are forced to move to a new place, because the old place is not working. We need a share in God's imagination for what lies beyond this time in history.

Our world view has been hugely expanded. All over this earth, persons still suffer for faith. Churches and congregations flourish and then diminish. We see the huge challenges and persist with a desire to meet the real needs before us. We study the issues; we stay with the problems; we discern what is needed for our times. We challenge one another to move, not backward in fear, but forward in courage.

The Lord is present at all points of history and beyond. Every generation has had their pain, sorrow, challenges and disappointment. They were given grace to meet those challenges and come up with solutions to the problem. Getting through these times feels like it requires a miracle, but we believe in miracles. The good Lord gives us the grace to handle what these days ask for, one step at a time. God is carrying us. Let us pray to make wise choices, and have the courage to act. The Lord is the solid foundation under us, and the Center still holds.

Prayer

More than ever we find ourselves in the hands of God. It is a profound spiritual experience to know and feel our vulnerability. Lord, turn our weakness to strength and confidence in your loving care. When nothing seems sure, give us trust. Light that redeems, Light that restores, Light that heals, Light that protects, Light that saves, be with us now and always. Build in our spirits a quiet confidence that no matter what happens, the Center holds. Amen.

What have I learned here? Two of the greatest gifts, patience and surrender, both showed up in full bloom to help me keep moving forward. And I have seen in others such courage, empathy, strength, and acceptance that I realize that the very vulnerability on which OLP is built is the source of these many virtues.

If in the next weeks I take my leave and return to New York, I will return a changed woman, shaped by my many experiences here these past six months. My time here has been one of healing and I will carry the blessings of this time with me long into the future. I pray for those who have been so good to me, and I will hold each retired sister a little closer in prayer. It was sisters on our leadership team who first suggested I come here. Thank you. My days at OLP were the perfect antidote to those long, endless Covid days I first

Reflection

- What are some areas of life in which you feel vulnerable right now?
- Think of a recent situation that demanded your courage.
- What were you feeling and thinking as it began?
- What did persons around you say and do to help you face your fear?
- At what point did your fear begin to diminish?
- What is an earlier point in your life when you faced a fear?
- How did you get through that period, and what were the long-term results in your life?
- Is there anything you are facing now that creates fear and anxiety?
- Is there something you have learned in the past as a skill to get you through?

Sister Paula serves as an adult faith presenter for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, director of RCIA for San Isidro Parish in Santa Fe, NM, and a core group member/spirituality presenter at the Shekina Spirituality Center.

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experienced three years ago. They have allowed me to live more fully in hope and gifted me with a gladness I hardly deserve, a small taste of Resurrection and new life.

Sister Ann Barbara serves as the director of programs at Our Lady of Grace Spiritual Center in Manhasset, NY.

A Prayer for Caregivers: <https://www.chausa.org/>

Living with Vulnerability by Pema Chodron Joan Howard (Creighton University Online Ministries): <https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Archive/2001/081601.html>

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.



Margaret Gannon, IHM
June 2, 1937
October 14, 2022
by Mary Persico, IHM

It was Saturday, May 13, 1967, at about 2:00 in the afternoon. I was on the second floor of the Marywood College Library, which was located in the Liberal Arts Building off the Rotunda. There was one other person in the vicinity, who was quick to ask me my name and tell me hers, Sister Anina. She was doing research for her doctoral dissertation, which was entitled *The influence of the Permanent Mandates Commission in the administration of the class A mandate*. I still don't know what that means. We began to talk until we were shushed by the librarian, and so we moved to Sister Nazarene's office, which was on a landing of that same building. Today that office location would be considered a serious fire hazard. We talked for four hours until dinner time and promised to meet again. That afternoon changed the trajectory of my life.

And that conversation – alternately light-hearted, prayerful, thoughtful, searing, personal, and caring - continued for 55 years and five months to the day. Throughout decades of ministry, congregation events, personal and family experiences, and all that goes into a lifetime, at each encounter, the conversation picked up where it left off, and on last Thursday, October 13, at about 9:30 in the evening, it came to its conclusion. All those words of that first encounter many years ago were no longer necessary. This time it was a brief, loving exchange. Words, superfluous, were few, but they were enough.

I tell you this story knowing full well that many people here and elsewhere have a similar story about the person whose life we celebrate

today. Margaret's love for people was all encompassing. Sheryl Sochoka, an Associate and a member of the Marywood staff, in a posting on Facebook, referred to Margaret as fierce. She was fierce, fierce in her loyalty to her dear friend, Dorothy, to her family – her mother and her sister, Eileen while she was still living, her brother Bob and his wife Ann, her brother Jerry and his wife Mary, and their children; she was fierce in her loyalty to her Sisters in our IHM Congregation and particularly, to the Sisters in Shalom Community. She was fierce in her loyalty to the many faculty, staff, alumni, and her students whose lives she touched for nearly five decades at Marywood University.

Margaret believed beyond any shadow of a doubt that she was loved by a compassionate and just God. That belief compelled her to be relentless in her advocacy for all persons who are poor and hungry, homeless and marginalized in any way, for people who deserve to be lifted up by the power of education, and for the healing of Earth. Shortly after I met Margaret, we began going to the migrant worker camps north of Scranton in the evenings. I immediately realized that for her this was not a service project, not simply a humanitarian thing to do on a Tuesday evening. It was the essence of life. She somehow sensed people's anguish, their pain, their sorrow. She was relentless in her belief that there is no "other." We are one human family who all deserve to feel God's love the way she felt it, and she was tireless in her desire to give people what they needed to experience God's love through her.

Margaret's commitment to the African Sisters Education Collaborative can never be minimized. From the very moment the idea was conceived and the process begun by the founders in 1999, she was all in. It was nothing for her to go to a country in sub-Saharan Africa. Because when she arrived there, whether alone, with colleagues or students, she was dauntless in her pursuit of giving Sisters the tools they needed to become professional, educated, skilled, and competent workers in the service of their people. When she was among the African people, she revered their way of life and appreciated the culture and traditions that animated their spirit. There was no worry about mosquito netting, cold water in the shower, intermittent electricity. There was only the desire to raise people up, because for her there was no "other." We are one human family.

When Sister Draru, the Executive Director

of the African Sisters Education Collaborative, wrote to the Board and supporters of ASEC about Margaret's death, she referred to her as our "icon." A person who is characterized as an icon influences and inspires others. Most people who knew and shared life with Margaret will tell stories of the wisdom she imparted, humbly and simply, in the ordinary comings and goings of life. It wasn't unusual for her to interject a wise thought that seemed to come out of nowhere but then left a lasting impression.

Margaret's wisdom was enhanced by her humanness. And her humanness was attractive. She loved the sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay, playfully recited the prayer to St. Thomas Aquinas - in its entirety - every year on January 28. She ate dark and not milk chocolate and thought that left-handedness opened one up to all kinds of secret psychological insights, only kidding. If you want to know how Margaret's wisdom interplayed with her humanness, read the myriad comments posted on Facebook. You will conclude - she inspired, influenced, attracted, loved, and touched the lives of countless people.

Last Monday, I visited Margaret and she was sitting at her desk in front of her computer. A bit incredulous, knowing her physical condition, I asked: "What are you doing." She answered that she was deleting her emails and added: "They want either my money, and I have none, or my vote, which I have already sent." That vote was her last bid at standing in solidarity with people in need but what's more, it gives just a little bit of credibility to the time-honored Dunmorian legend that people from this town vote from the grave.

To conclude, Margaret was fierce in her loyalty—to all of us. She was relentless in her advocacy for anyone who sought justice, equity, and a sense of belonging. She was wise because she owned her humanness. She knew the love of a God who called out to her: Margaret, when I was hungry, you gave me to eat; when I was thirsty, you gave me to drink; when I was homeless, you opened your door; when I was naked, you gave me your coat; when I was weary, you helped me find rest; when I was anxious, you calmed all my fears; whatever you did to my sisters and brothers, you did to me.

Now, Margaret, come home.



M. Romaine Krug, IHM
September 12, 1913
November 18, 2022
by Kathryn Clauss, IHM

We come to this celebration of the life of our Sister Romaine with great gratitude for her 109 years of life, and her 79 years as an IHM Sister. We welcome Sister Romaine's brother Edgar and members of the Krug family who are joining us on livestream and those present with us: We have Dennis and Kim, Cindy and Mike, Jane and Tim, Karen and Steve, and Earl. You are so welcome and we are thrilled that you are here with us.

We also welcome all IHM sisters, associates, and friends of Sister Romaine, especially her dear friend, Kenny Noll, who are present and those joining us virtually.

We are grateful for our Passionist brother, Father Lee Havey, our presider, a long-time friend of Sister Romaine and his mother, Mary Joy Havey, who joins us today.

On your behalf, I would like to thank Sister Romaine's community in 2C for their loving support of Sister and the administrators and staff at Our Lady of Peace Residence for their tender care for Sister Romaine. Danelle Hill, our Director of Nursing, was with Sister at the time of her death. She shared that as Sister took her final breath, her eyes opened and a beautiful smile illuminated her face. We can only imagine what she saw and the overwhelming joy she experienced in God's presence.

As we prepare to enter into the Liturgy, I invite you to hold the reflections that were shared during the prayer, and let them connect with your own experiences of Sister Romaine. Allow these memories to bring you to a sense of joy and gratitude as you remember her. Let the joy and gratitude enfold the sadness you experience as you feel the loss of her physical presence.

Let us together hold the life of our Sister Romaine with deep gratitude for her long, full, and faithful years of service to God and God's people.

In numerous conversations with Sister Romaine over the years, I came to appreciate her strength, her deep spirituality and the ways they were rooted in the faith life of her family and her closeness and respect for all creation. She was the daughter of Herman and Matilda Krug and one of 15 siblings: brothers Herman, Leo,

Robert, Douglas, Francis, Edgar and her sisters Helen, Mary, Marian, Jane, Dorothy, Theresa, and Hermine and Franceline who followed Romaine into the IHM community. Sister is survived by her brother, Edgar and her sister, Theresa; by many nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, great-grand nieces and great-grandnephews.

As the third oldest of 15 children, Sr. Romaine had the opportunity to develop servant leadership, communication skills, and a strong work ethic which flowed throughout her life in community and mission. Her bachelor's degree in education and social science from Marywood College and master's degree in home economics and food from New York University paved the way for her service as a teacher at St. Joseph High School in Danville, PA, faculty member at Marywood College, and her role as a dietician at the Marian Convent. Sister brought to her teaching and accompaniment of students, sisters, and the women and men in the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart Guild and all of the prayer groups to which she belonged, her great heart and steadfast hope that was fortified by her trust in God and God's ways.

During her lifetime, Romaine lived out the call that Jesus offered to his disciples in today's Gospel passage: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and have faith also in me." She lived out her belief that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, a belief that she surely learned and lived out in the context of her family and throughout her years as an IHM Sister.

As I have been reflecting on Sister Romaine's life, I believe that it was her strong faith-filled heart that enabled her *to reflect God's unconditional love* in her active service, prayer and engaging presence. Hers was a heart that could hold the joys and sorrows of her family and all those she knew and loved by remembrance in her prayer, confident that God would hear and respond. Hers was a heart that inspired others "to keep some room in their hearts for the unimaginable," – to rephrase the poet Mary Oliver. Her heartfelt and hope-filled way of living motivated and challenged those she served to be their best, to do their best for their own good and the good of others. Hers was a sacred heart.

Romaine's youngest brother Edgar will place Sister Romaine's bible on the coffin. It is open to the passage from John's Gospel that resonated throughout Sister's life, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and have faith also in me."

Sister Romaine staked her life on the Word of God and it is the Word who now welcomes her home.

Go in peace Romaine. Memories of you will warm our hearts and inspire us to continue to grow in and share God's love as you did.



M. Daria McGinn, IHM
December 11, 1918
December 27, 2022
by Kathryn Clauss, IHM

Welcome to the celebration of the life of our Sister Daria. We are grateful to welcome some of Sister Daria's family members and close friends who are here with us and those who are joining us via livestream. We welcome her nieces Lona, Laura, and Daria; nephews Eric and Michael and Sisters Dotty Kibler, Maureen Willis, and Mary Alice Kane, long-time friends of Sister Daria who have continued to surround her with love.

We welcome our sisters and associates, friends, former colleagues and past pupils of Sister Daria, who are joining us online. We welcome Monsignor Joseph Quinn, today's celebrant and Frank Walsh, our cantor, who are former students of Sister Daria. How she loved each and all of you! Thank you very much for your presence among us.

As I reflected on Daria's long and well-lived life, I was reminded of a poem by Tagore:

*I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was duty.
I worked and behold, duty was joy.*

After reflecting on the poem as written, I sense that Daria would reframe some of the language. I will take the liberty to offer what she might suggest:

*I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was about
faithfulness.
I served and I came to see that faithfulness
was joy.*

Daria's 104 years included 81 years as an IHM Sister and 62 of those years ministering in elementary classrooms in Pennsylvania and New York. Her rootedness in God fortified her for living the mission as she provided service, faith-filled and faithful service with joy as she walked with and taught her students.

Today's responsorial psalm, based on Psalm 23, places before us the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. What a wonderful vision to use as we remember tenderly the memories we have of Daria. She was a faithful shepherdess as she actively nurtured the intellectual, spiritual, and relational growth of her students; as she

encouraged and cheered for the school sports teams where she served; as she provided support for parents, colleagues, friends, and her IHM sisters.

During her 81 years in the congregation, Daria would have prayed Psalm 23 many times in community prayer. I can only imagine that she found great comfort as she prayed the meaningful words and inspiring verses. As you listen to some of the verses from Psalm 23, imagine Daria praying them for herself, praying them for you at different times in your lives, praying them for her sisters, for her students and their families, for her colleagues and friends.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Take a moment to imagine how Daria might pray with this verse: God, help those whom I love who are finding the day difficult. Please let them experience your abundant love and know that you are with them.

Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil, for you are at my side giving me courage.

Take a moment to imagine how Daria might pray with this verse: As I wait for you, God, help me to know that you are walking with me. Help me to wait with courage.

You spread the table before me, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Take a moment to imagine Daria praying with this verse: Help me and all of my sisters to be grateful for what we have received. Inspire us to be generous and to share our blessings with those who are in need.

Only goodness and kindness will follow me all the days of my life; I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.

Take a moment to imagine how Daria might pray with these words: For as long as my family, sisters, friends, and past pupils live, dear God, let your goodness and kindness follow them. Give them the courage and grace to remain in your presence as long as they have life within them.

Lona will place Daria's scripture on the coffin as a reminder that our Sister Daria was a woman of faith; she heard and responded to the word of God. She staked her life on it. It is the word of God, Jesus the Good Shepherd, who now beckons her home.

Go in peace, Daria, May the Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! May the Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace! Amen.



Mary Barbara Campbell, IHM
October 20, 1927
December 29, 2022
by Grace Surdovel, IHM

We gather this morning to celebrate the life of Sister Mary Barbara Campbell, a proud daughter of Pittston, Pennsylvania, the loving daughter of Allen and Mary and sister of Helen. In her 73 years as an IHM Sister and 47 years as a teacher and counselor, Mary Barbara willingly shared her many gifts and great love for her students and their families, her fellow teachers and her IHM sisters. As someone who spent over 30 years teaching high school and college students, I have a great fondness for those who minister in the elementary grades. I can recall the sisters I lived with sharing stories of how the little ones in their care would struggle with learning to read or write or interact with the other children. I have often reflected upon how blessed I was to have these sisters teaching and preparing these children for the day when they would arrive in my own classroom. Sister Mary Barbara was among our many gifted sisters charged with molding and shaping these wonderful little souls into the adolescents and young adults I had the pleasure of teaching. The importance of the foundational work of early educators can never be overestimated.

While Sister Mary Barbara spent many years teaching in elementary, middle, and junior high classrooms in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York, she was also a trained school counselor, and I am sure that she offered guidance to all who sought a listening ear or recommended career or academic pathway. I have no doubt that those to whom she ministered found a place of welcome, love, wisdom, and support. Much like our blessed mother who sought the sage advice and support of her cousin Elizabeth, the students and colleagues blessed to receive the support Mary Barbara offered found an open heart and listening ear upon their arrival. She was a wonderful model of hospitality and sanctuary to all she encountered.

In her book, *Circle of Grace*, poet Jan Richards offers a prayer of blessing entitled, *A Blessing Called Sanctuary*. I share her words with you now in closing. I believe they resonate well with our Sister Mary Barbara's vocational journey and ministry as an IHM Sister.

You hardly knew how hungry you were to be gathered in, to receive the welcome that invited you to enter entirely—nothing of you found foreign or strange, nothing of your life that you were asked to leave behind or to carry in silence or in shame.

Tentative steps became settling in, leaning into the blessing that enfolded you, taking your place in the circle that stunned you with its unimagined grace.

You began to breathe again, to move without fear, to speak with abandon the words you carried in your bones, that echoed in your being.

You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing is that it will not leave you alone, will not let you linger in safety, in stasis.

The time will come when this blessing will ask you to leave, not because it has tired of you but because it desires for you to become the sanctuary that you have found—to speak your word into the world, to tell what you have heard with your own ears, seen with your own eyes, known in your own heart: that you are beloved, precious child of God, beautiful to behold, and you are welcome and more than welcome here.

May Sister Mary Barbara know the sanctuary she offered to so many as she is welcomed home to the arms of her loving God.

I now ask her dear friend John to place Mary Barbara's bible on her casket. This custom reflects our belief that our Sister Mary Barbara heard the word of God in her own life and this word now calls her home.



M. Francis Xavier Grieb, IHM
June 16, 1931
January 10, 2023
by Anne Mary Boslett, IHM

Sister Francis Xavier and I worked together for twenty years at our retreat house in Cresco. Since she had a degree in home economics, Francis was always in charge of the kitchen and the menus. She did an excellent job of training our cooks. Most of the people we had as cooks were very good cooks but only one knew how to bake. So, Francis would tell them that was okay and she would make the desserts if it were something that was baked. She usually started by making cookies; the cook would watch her and decide that wasn't too hard, so she would learn how to make cookies and so for the next week we

continued on next page



Obituaries for IHM Sisters can be found on our website at www.sistersofihm.org and on Find a Grave <http://tinyurl.com/yb3mp9ds>
Search by last name

would have cookies every night. Then she would show them how to make a pie, which they all said they couldn't do. However, in another week the cook was making pies. Francis was a good teacher because she was very patient.

She showed her patience when I would mess up the remote for the TV. She would always say "Bring me the book," and she would sit and read the directions and she would patiently fix the remote.

Fran also used her Home Economics education to make beautiful suits and other clothes. She taught the candidates how to sew and they also made beautiful clothes.

Francis was very laid-back; she never hurried; she always took her time. She did not like to drive; she drove when it was necessary but she never drove fast.

When we had days of prayer at the retreat house, Francis diligently prepared her part of the day. She had a knack for knowing how to answer the retreatants questions that left them satisfied. She usually started her answer by asking them a question which clarified their question and made her answer appropriate.

The last few years that we were in Cresco, we could not afford to have an outside person come in to give the retreats, so we conducted the retreats ourselves. Francis always did her part and was very successful.

Francis also had a degree in science which was why she taught that subject in different high schools.

When Francis went to Our Lady of Peace, she loved having company. She was gracious to anyone who came to see her, even if she wasn't aware of who the person was. Toward the end of her life, I knew she recognized me although she could not name me.

Francis had a long and full life. I am sure that she is now resting in the arms of our loving God, receiving the reward of her many labors. May she rest in peace.



M. Elsa Eckenrode, IHM
January 27, 1924
January 17, 2023
by Judith O'Brien, IHM

Every once in a while, a gentle, quiet soul walks among us. Going about her daily ministry tending to the needs of others, unassumingly faithful to her vocation call of service and love.

In the last few days, I have had the privilege of getting to know Betty Jean Eckenrode, our Sister Mary Elsa, posthumously through the eyes and experiences of others who shared our IHM life with her along the way.

Elsa's life began and ended somewhat tumultuously, but in between she touched the lives of many, starting with her grandparents, parents, ten siblings, many nieces, nephews, and many, many grand-nieces and nephews who were her roots, her family. She entered the congregation from Cresco, PA in 1943 and began her teaching career in New Bern, NC. Over the next 68 years, Sister Elsa would touch the lives of approximately 1,500 elementary school children and their families, countless numbers of sisters and everyone else she met along the way.

Elsa came into the world prematurely 99 years ago with very little hope of survival. Her grandmother, who would hear nothing of her not surviving, took her home, swaddled her in blankets and placed her near the warmth of the coal stove to keep her alive and warm, and by all accounts, Elsa thrived. As a grandmother myself, I fully appreciate the love and belief her grandmother felt, doing anything she could to protect that child no matter the method or the cost. I would like to believe that Elsa's call by God began there by that coal stove with her grandmother's loving care.

In her final days, illness consumed her mind and body causing her to behave in ways that we cannot understand. But during those days, Elsa lived with her Sisters here in the 1A household, and was cared for by our exceptional staff at Our Lady of Peace, and the LIFE Program caregivers, who didn't know Elsa in her hay days, when she walked among us as a sweet woman described by someone who knew her well, to be "as quiet as a mouse." But that mattered not to the people who fed her, dressed her, spoke gently and quietly to her, actually, and without knowingly, mimicking the very way that Sister Elsa had lived her life. What have I learned by preparing this reflection? I have learned that a humble and quiet woman named Elizabeth, Mary Elsa, who loved to drive and to walk, roamed this earth quietly yet powerfully impacting thousands of lives and modelling beautifully by:

- Embracing the Paschal Mystery
- Living a mystical presence while engaging in relationships and accepting the letting go moments that life presented
- Fostering mutuality in community life and ministry
- Walking her whole life into a future unknown.

In her last will and testament, Sister Elsa wrote, "Just let me go to God quietly." Today those words are fulfilled for her. Go quietly, Elsa, into the loving arms of God and all those awaiting you. Amen.



Vincentia Dorsey, IHM
May 9, 1935
February 7, 2023
by Therese O'Rourke, IHM

I had the good fortune about fifty years ago to share community life and ministry with Vincentia, and our paths crossed again years later when she welcomed me to St. Joseph's Center. I came to believe that what she hoped for with this reflection was that all of us would come to an understanding of how this liturgy came to be and how it flowed from her life. She was also asking us to share her journey.

Vincentia planned this celebration of life. To understand her hopes we need to travel back in time to her teenage years in Nyack, NY.

She was a Mariner and quite proud of it. The Mariners were an elite group of girl scouts who lived on the Hudson River for a significant amount of time each year. The highlight of the season was a two week cruise. She would add with a twinkle in her eye that although they traveled by sailboats on the river, they spent as much time as possible in the Hudson.

One beautiful, crisp night Vincentia was given a very serious responsibility. She was to make sure that once all of her companions were safe for the night that the two precious sail boats were properly anchored and at no risk of drifting into deep, dangerous waters.

The night was extravagantly beautiful. The moon and stars were especially bright. A slight breeze seemed to play very gently with the sail boats. She was there, on duty and alert. A deep peace seemed to enter her. The beauty overcame her very self. She was powerfully aware of the presence of the Creator of it all. She sat still and let the moment own her. She could never have imagined the implications of that evening. It was a profound, personal encounter with her God that left her transformed. She would articulate it in this way, "There was no doubt in my mind. I was His." She would spend her life serving Him. It was also clear to her that He would make it possible. The other awareness that she experienced with great clarity was that she did not feel worthy. All of this would direct her life, there would be for her "no lesser God." She was His!

continued on next page

The cover of the program, created by Sister Donna Korba, grew from a retreat Vincentia made not long ago. She identified with Mary Magdalene, serving and comforting Jesus but in tears of grief knowing she could never be worthy. Mary's love was so great that her sins were forgiven her. The scriptures tell the story. Vincentia saw it as her own.

Her request for gifts to be given to the poor at the time of the offertory is just like her. She sought out the needy, less fortunate and abandoned all of her life. Long before it was politically correct she found that call lodged in the very Gospel of the God she met on the Hudson River.

The lights bouncing off the river that evening were a foreshadowing of the promise of eternal light to come and a welcoming home of Vincentia into the arms of the God who sought her out and claimed her.

She invites us at the end to share her journey.

If I may speak for all of us. Thanks, Vincentia for inviting us. Thank you for your willingness to share your transformative story.

We see you now wrapped in the vision on the Hudson, a vision ever bright and new.

We ask you to see us through to our journeys' end. You who were always worthy to be his. God's love and abundant mercy have made it so for you and for each one of us.

Dear friend, at last, welcome home!



Sister Kathryn Clauss, continued from page 2

I remember clearly being inspired by the experience.

I watched the sisters engage with the women and children at Casa del Migrante and saw how quickly and easily they responded to the sisters. It was as if the sisters, women and children had become able to render themselves vulnerable to one another, able to receive the best of what each had to offer. I remember hoping that on some level the women and children would believe that we desired to be present and open to them as well. Without the capacity to speak Spanish or Creole, we counted on our ability to create a safe place using the warmth of facial expressions and tenderness of body language to signal our desire to be available to them. It was a privileged moment to be one with the women and children and to see the compassionate engagement of our sisters in ministry. The hopeful experience remains with me. I carry it along with the feeling of bone-deep sadness about the plight of these young and vulnerable persons. I pray that we, in our advocacy, and those making decisions regarding the lives of refugees will be more compassionate to the plight of those who are fleeing war and violence and more active in seeking refugee status for them.

As I reflect on our experience at the Casa del Migrante, I believe we learned something about the mutuality of vulnerability. Jane, Mary Ellen, and I were new to the women and children and



L-R: Sisters Mary Ellen Tennity, Jane Herb, and Kathryn Clauss

perhaps we were also an extension of the sisters they had come to know and trust. Entering into their world, even for a brief time, rendered us vulnerable. Sensing our vulnerability, perhaps they felt some degree of safety to welcome us into their space. The experience leaves me wondering. Is it *mutual* vulnerability in our encounters with others that breaks hearts open to receive and share God's unconditional love?

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

Sister Mary Elaine Anderson, continued from page 13

Rose has taught me to look into the eyes of our brothers and sisters, to smile and to say the heartfelt and hope-filled word, "Bendiciones" (Blessings).

You may wonder whether a simple word of blessing can generate hope where there is so much vulnerability. Yes, it can! Asylum seekers who successfully crossed the Hidalgo International Bridge and who have met Rose at the Humanitarian Respite Center have told her, "You blessed us on the bridge, and no one was turned back!"

Sister Mary Elaine is the director of candidates and novices for the Scranton IHM Congregation. She is a member of the OSP-IHM core community in McAllen, Texas, an inter-congregational initiative that accompanies asylum seekers on the US-Mexico border.

Pictured left is Lance, a volunteer from the Humanitarian Respite Center, and Sister Mary Elaine on the Hidalgo International Bridge.



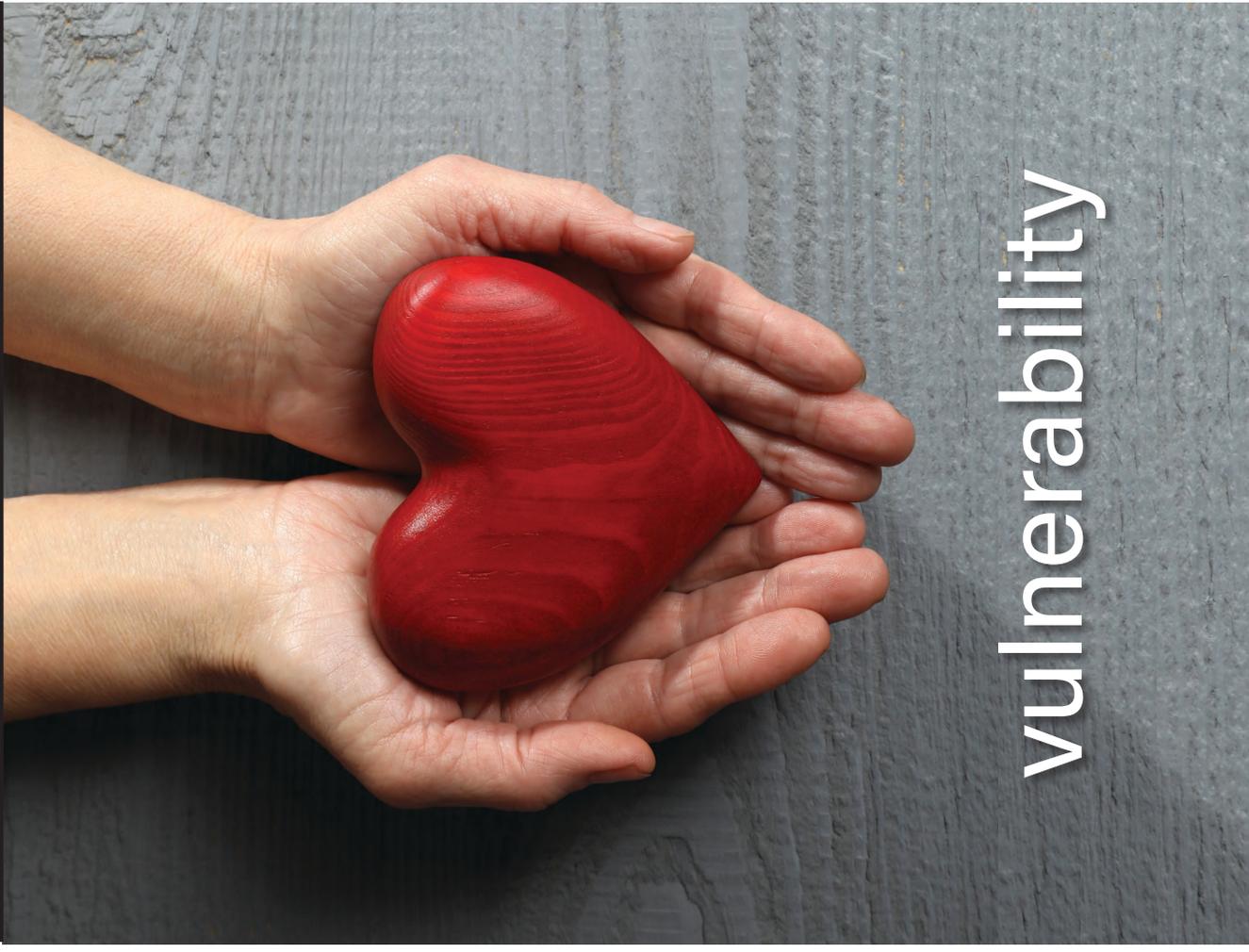


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Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, Pennsylvania



Sister Elizabeth Ann DeMerchant Professes Perpetual Vows



On April 15, we celebrated Sister Elizabeth Ann DeMerchant, IHM who made her life-long commitment as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. During a public ceremony, in the presence of more than 150 Sisters, students, family members and friends, in the context of a special liturgy of religious profession, Sister Elizabeth professed: "In personal response to the promise of the living God, and guided by the Holy Spirit, I, Sister Elizabeth Ann DeMerchant, vow chastity, poverty and obedience for the rest of my life according to the Constitutions of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In the hope of a deeper relationship with Christ, and with others in Christ, I promise to bear witness to the reign of God, both present and to come, by living in the spirit of these vows and by manifesting true devotion to Mary the Mother of God." Sister Kathryn Clauss, President of the IHM Sisters, accepted Sister Elizabeth's vows and received her as an IHM Sister for the rest of her life. Thank you, Sister Elizabeth, for your "yes" to God, to the Church, and to us, your IHM Sisters.

View the perpetual vow ceremony and liturgy at: <https://video.ibm.com/channel/ihm-tv>
Pictured L-R: Sister- Kathryn Clauss, IHM President and Sister Elizabeth Ann DeMerchant