



Homecoming

Bethany Retreat House

Volume 14, Number 1

February 2010

Prayer, a Connecting Web

by Joyce Diltz, PHJC

During the experience of recent cataract surgeries, I found myself encouraged and comforted by the awareness that so many people were praying for me during that time. Before the surgery I had a visual sense of that prayer as holding me in a “web” of love and care and concern, an image that was very comforting, and I found myself returning to it again and again.

It is this image and the reality behind it that continues to invite my reflection. Prayer is a mystery, and there are many ways to think about what prayer does and how it influences God and the world and life around us. What I like about the gift of this particular image of being held in a web of prayer is that it depicts a very relational sense of the mystery of prayer. It suggests that our prayerful concern entrusts the one prayed for to God’s care while at the same time joining together all those who pray for that person. Even though these many people may not know one another or even know of each other’s prayer, they are united in heart and purpose around the one in need. If we could visually *see* this loving, prayerful connection among the many pray-ers, it might well look like the web image that I sensed.

Scientists and those who do body work tell us about the energy that our bodies and spirits hold and convey, and we know that love is an energy. In the case of common prayer for someone, that love forms an energetic web of connection among those who share prayerful concern. That web has a life of its own if we believe John who writes that “God is love” and “where love is, there is God” (1 Jn 4:16).

I think of the world’s prayer for the people of Haiti in this past month, and how in so many ways it must be the web of love formed by our common prayer that sustains and nourishes those who have experienced such incomprehensible suffering. May that web also gift all whose prayer helps to create it, transforming us around the globe into a people whose love encircles the earth and embraces the reality of our interdependence and our shared life together.

Lent Invites us to Choose Life

by Joyce Diltz, PHJC

“I am come that you may have life, and have it to the full!” (Jn 10:10) summarizes Jesus’ life stance. As he met people who were ill or handicapped or grieving, he restored life. As he preached, he shared stories of life in the kingdom of God. Jesus was all about life, and this is our guiding principle in all that we do and are as Christians.

We are people about life, in search of life, wanting to nurture life wherever we can and to hand life on to others. As such, we can approach at the season of Lent in that context.



Photo by Bonnie Boilini, PHJC

Many of us have lived Lent from the perspective that it’s a time to suffer, to take on hardships and make ourselves like Jesus on the cross. So as children we gave up candy and the movies. As adults we give up beer or snacks or desserts.

Though this approach has served us for many years, I’d like to suggest

another way of approaching Lent, as a way of helping us be more open and receptive to the life that God offers each of us. Lent happens as our midwest world longs for spring. It spans the end of winter and the beginning of spring, when life begins to burst out all over. So we get ourselves ready in Lent for the bursting forth of new spiritual life. We are something like a gardener who goes around pruning her plants, cutting them back so they’ll produce more. To do our own pruning, we have to take stock of our lives and ask, “What gets in the way of life for me? What keeps me from growing?”

We may come up with a variety of answers. Maybe I’m so tired all the time that I’m a first-class grouch. Maybe I hate the people next door, so I’m always cutting them down or yelling at their kids or their dog. Maybe I frequently criticize people. Maybe I’m impatient more than I’d like to be, or maybe I realize I don’t turn to God enough. Perhaps I have become pretty comfortable in our American convenience culture and am unaware of my struggling brothers and

See Lent, p. 2

From the Director's Chair

by Joyce Diltz, PHJC



Lent comes so quickly on the heels of Christmas! As sudden as it seems, this new season invites us to look at how deeply we are committed to following the one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. It is a time to look at what gets in the way of hearing and responding to our God who continues to live among us and who wants so much to be in close relationship with us.

Thank you to all who prayed for me for successful eye surgeries. I am deeply grateful to each of you for your concern and your prayer. The brighter, farther vision that results is a joy and a marvel! And the experience of your prayer for me has given me a new sense of prayer which I describe on page one.

In an effort to further help the people of Haiti, our bookstore has for sale some handmaid items from the Haitian Connection Art Project: cards, tote bags, and napkins. These are provided by Renate Schneider, a frequent retreatant here, who has spent the last six years in Haiti and has recently returned to the States to study theology.

May your Lenten journey deepen your presence and responsiveness to God and God's personal invitations for you.

Homecoming

a newsletter of Bethany Retreat House
published four times a year at
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The newsletter is currently funded
by a grant for 2010 from
the Foundations of East Chicago.

Bethany Retreat House
is a ministry of the
Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ
(Ancilla Domini Sisters, Inc.)
congregation of women religious.

Lent *contd from page 1*

sisters in less advantaged cultures.

When I take stock and find something that gets in the way of life and growth, then I look at what's going on so I can decide what I want to do with it and what God's invitation may be to choose life in this situation. If I'm grouchy all the time, or impatient a lot, maybe I'm really tired and I need to get more sleep. If I'm frequently angry with the people next door, maybe I need to trace my anger back and see what's really bothering me. Perhaps it's an incident long-past that's not worth being angry about any more. Possibly it's something we need to talk over so the hurt can be healed. If I realize I don't turn to God enough, maybe I could set aside some time every day to spend intentional time with God. If I have become too comfortable, maybe I need to find ways to reach out to those who struggle.

Each of these decisions is a choice for life. Each is also a way of doing *penance*, the choice to make

room for God in our life by eliminating what gets in the way of our noticing and responding to God's presence. This kind of penance has such a different feel from saying, "It's Lent so I have to do penance." Instead, we choose to change our lives so we become better people. And that's the kind of penance God asks of us, a penance that changes our hearts to be more open to God and God's ways and to God's people with whom we share life. It's not tacked-on penance grabbed out of the sky, but penance that flows from who we are as people and from our current life situation. I choose *this* penance because it's going to help me be more open to God and to life. Someone else will choose what helps *him* listen and respond to God at this time in his life.

Our Scholarship Fund is available for those who need assistance paying for spiritual direction and retreat.

Often enough, in the daily flow of life, in our experiences of difficulty and suffering, God presents us with the next invitation to life and growth. When we find ourselves in life's hard places, invitations to growth and transformation arise without our needing to look for them at all. We only need, then, to lean into God who is with us, encouraging and guiding us to choose life each step of the way.

Suggestions for Lenten Reading:

Come Home: a Prayer Journey to the Center Within by Marie Schwan. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2010, 119 pages, paper, \$12.95.

The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See by Richard Rohr. New York: Crossroad, 2009, 187 pages, paper, \$19.95.

BRH Bookshelf



To Bless the Space Between Us:
A Book of Blessings
by John O'Donohue
Doubleday, 2008, hardcover, 222 pages
Reviewed by Deb Szrom Steppe

In this work John O'Donohue, poet and best selling author of *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*, brings a fresh light to blessings as a way to live, to face the sometimes unkind realities of life and to connect with one another in a way that seems almost lost. In his prose about blessings he describes them as intimate, kind, evoking warmth and protection and a "gracious invocation where the human heart pleads with the divine heart."

Each blessing is carefully crafted. I found that reading them silently isn't enough. The blessings need to be read out loud – to savor their meanings.

The author writes the blessings with an incredible awareness of the emotional landscape one is facing. Whether it is "For One Who is Exhausted," "For a New Home," or "For Someone Awakening to the Trauma of His or Her own Past," I found myself amazed at his understanding of each circumstance.

I think the best way to get a sense of this work is to actually sample one of the blessings. The following is the shortest one in the book, and a good example of the depth of the author's writing:

To Come Home to Yourself

*May all that is unforgiven in you
Be released.*

*May your fears yield
Their deepest tranquilities.*

*May all that is un-lived in you
Blossom into a future
Graced with love.*

This book is a treasure and would be an invaluable addition to any spiritual bookshelf!

This and many other fine books can be purchased through Bethany Retreat House bookstore: 219-398-5047.

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inadvertently omitted someone's name.

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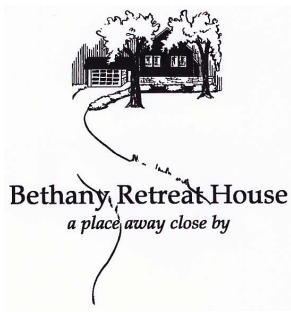
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consider spending some retreat time
at Bethany
for a day or two away
to be scheduled
at your convenience.
Gift certificates are available.**

Call 219-398-5047 for details.

Someone You Should Know by Mary Wysock

It will be two years this May since Marianna Pazik has added a new sparkle to our lives and our home at Bethany Retreat House. She came to be part-time housekeeper after applying to an ad she saw in the *Northwest Indiana Catholic*. She was looking for part time work that allowed her to continue her responsibilities to her family and is grateful to be working in a faith based environment since her faith is an integral part of who she is. We are very grateful for her deep faith, cheerful disposition and dedication to managing the household tasks at the retreat house to near perfection.



Marianna Pazik

Marianna is currently a parishioner at Saint Thomas More Church in Munster where she serves as Eucharistic

Minister. She enjoys the reverence of sharing the body of Christ with others. She is a stay-at-home Mom and is devoted to her family which includes her husband and two daughters as well as her own mother who resides nearby. She takes great pride in caring for her home and family and extends the same to her work here at Bethany. "I take care of the retreat house as if it's my own. I have dedicated my life to the Lord and any task – whether big or small – I dedicate it to the Lord."

Marianna likes working at Bethany because she sees her work as part of the broader ministry of the retreat house. She says housekeeping can be drudgery, but she chooses to treat it like "sacred work." Her hope is that her efforts allow people who come to the retreat house for spiritual direction, groups and retreats to be comfortable and be in the Lord's presence. She also enjoys the quiet and being in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament while she works.

A new brightness stepped into our world at Bethany when Marianna chose to join us. She is an example of living a life in service to others and turning over the struggles of everyday life with a focus on faith and a joy for living. Thank you, Marianna, for your beautiful smile, cheerful disposition, dedication, and hard work. We are truly blessed to have you with us.