



# Spiritual Journey to the Associate Relationship



Sisters of Divine Providence  
Marie de la Roche Province



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# *Acknowledgments*

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It is hoped that those who participate in the inquiry and candidate processes will not only benefit from these sections, but will return to them frequently on your Providence Spiritual Journey!

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# *The Associate Relationship*



*The Associate Relationship*

# Introduction to the Associate Relationship

## Welcome and Introductions

### Call to Prayer

#### **Leader:**

We gather today (tonight) at your invitation, O Provident God.

#### **Response:**

Help us to be open and attentive to your calming, healing yet challenging voice in this prayer. (Take turns reading each paragraph out loud slowly)

Believe in your questions, no matter how trifling;  
they are the gateway to knowledge, wisdom, and enlightenment.

Believe in your gifts, no matter how small, they are God's Providence to  
your world, to enrich it, to ennoble it, to bring it love.

Believe in your past, no matter how painful,  
it is a unique book of history, a gospel revelation of God's mercy and faithfulness.

Believe in your yearnings, no matter how subtle,  
they are energy, urging you forward in your quest for God.

Believe in your sinlessness, no matter pointed fingers, they are only passing  
vestiges of fear reminding you to forgive, to remain rooted in love's reality.

Believe in your vision, no matter the climb,  
it is a mountain peak calling you to experience God.

Believe in your ideas, no matter the doubts,  
they are seeds, seeking nourishment, sunshine, life-giving water.

Believe in your neighbor, no matter the risk,  
she is sent from God to walk with you.

Believe in your God, no matter the mist,  
God is strong and trustworthy and cares for you. (By: Joan Metzner, M.M.)

### Quiet Reflection on the above prayer.

#### **Shared Response:**

What word or phrase in the prayer spoke to you and why?

#### **Reading:** (Read all together or choose one person)

"Through the centuries, Providence has been a symbol which speaks to us of the creative activity of God who calls into being, sustains, nourishes, challenges and lures all creation toward its final fulfillment. Providence is not the mystery of a God who plans everything handing it down to creatures. Providence is rather, the name of the God who makes all things possible. It is the mystery of dialogue and relationship in which divine activity and human response are joined." (Marie McCarthy, S. P.)



## The Journey begins...

In 2001, Sister Myra Rodgers, then General Superior of the Sisters of Divine Providence, wrote to an inquiry group, “We meet together to begin another leg of the Providence journey begun” in 1851. “It is a graced Providence journey, we call the” Associate inquiry journey. “But it is a journey which will take us on a course that will help define our future as women and men of Providence.

The star of Providence is our guiding light. We walk in the energy and faith of our founder Bishop Ketteler and with the courage and abandon of Mother Marie and our fore-mothers. But let us not fool ourselves, the journey may be arduous at times. The pebbles of business may cause us to limp; the weeds of insecurity and what it means to be an Associate may try to block our path, and our countless questions may leave us winded and struggling for the breath of Spirit. There will be moments along the way when we will want to pitch a tent or stay and build a house, take an easier road or a wider path, or even leave our sister travelers and return home to the ideas and glories of yesteryear. But more often than not, there will be Providence moments when we will know together the peace that comes in the wake of the struggle to follow the signs of hope and be united through the gifts of Providence.

So, let us lace up our walking shoes of courage, leave behind the old baggage of believing I am in charge of what happens in my life and strap on the backpack of trust and providence and firmly commit ourselves to the journey and our companion travelers. Let us take hold of the walking sticks of prayer. Let us resolve today to ‘Journey Together as Providence into a Future of Hope.’ Now let us begin!”

### ***Mission Statement of the Associates, Marie de la Roche Province***

We, as Associates, proclaim to be a part of the International Congregation of Divine Providence. Our participation calls us to live in a spirit of unbounded trust in, and openness to, the Providence of God. We challenge ourselves to an ongoing discovery of the richness of the charism entrusted to us by Mother Marie and Bishop Ketteler. We support each other in our diversity of lifestyles, while we strive to creatively confront the problems and issues of our time. As prophetic witnesses, we respond in compassion, holding all life sacred.

### **Associate Relationship Symbol**

The symbol design represents the earth enclosed in an open trefoil. The trefoil is a symbol for the Triune God we call Providence. God’s Providence is made visible through acts of justice and compassion and through an inclusive, hospitable presence. Associates of the Sisters of Divine Providence wear this symbol as a sign of our commitment to God’s Providence in our world.



## ***An Associate Is...***

Associates are women and men, over 18 years of age, who find a deeper connection with God and with others through their relationship with the Sisters of Divine Providence. Associates choose to share the spiritual, communal and/or ministerial life of the Sisters. They develop, maintain and deepen their relationship with the Community members and participate in activities that further the goals and mission of the Community and Providence spirituality. Associates are a diverse group, varying in lifestyle, occupation, and religious tradition. Some Associates are single, others married, divorced, or widowed.

Associates are invited to participate in:

- Life-giving liturgies and prayer rituals
- The challenging call to social justice
- The presence and action of a Provident God in your life

Associates are invited to share in Community retreats, educational opportunities, social events, and ministries, where feasible. Associates receive relevant Community publications and mailings.

There is a mutual benefit between Associates and Sisters in that both give expression to Divine Providence and give witness to the spirit of Providence within their own lives. Associates are invited to share their gifts with one another and the world.

There is no canonical, financial, or legal obligation on the part of an Associate or the Community. Associates are invited to participate in annual assemblies as observers, but do not participate in the governance of the Community. The Associate is responsible for personal expenses related to travel and participation in Associate and Community programs.

All inquirer-candidates participate in a Spiritual Journey orientation leading to a formal commitment. At the time of formal commitment, these women and men are called Associates. However, in Puerto Rico, these participants are known as la familia de la Providencia (the family of Providence)

## ***The Journey to Become an Associate...***

Contact the Director of Associates, who will talk with you about becoming an Associate. Then...

- You will complete an application
- The director and you will mutually choose a companion to accompany you through the journey
- After completing the application, a ten month inquiry journey begins: generally, the orientation sessions consist of information on Providence spirituality and the Community mission, charism, history and ministries.
- In a mutual discernment process, you will be invited to make a formal commitment as an Associate of the Sisters of Divine Providence
- You will be received and blessed in a formal commitment ceremony, at which time all Sisters and Associates renew their commitments and are commissioned to make Providence more visible in the world.
- The initial covenant commitment is for a period of one year, with a renewal period of one to five years.





## ***Associates are invited and encouraged to:***

- Participate in the charism and mission of the Sisters of Divine Providence through reading, reflection, prayer, conversation
- Share in Community retreats, educational opportunities, social events, and ministries, where feasible.
- Participate in Congregational events, circles of collaboration, assembly and chapter, which strengthen a sense of mission and community.
- Unite together with sisters through prayer and service
- Meet together with associates and sisters in local faith sharing groups for prayer, reflection, socially and for peace and justice activities
- Respond to the needs of the times with the Congregation by supporting the chapter mandates and the peace and justice focus
- Accept the responsibility to encourage and promote the Associate relationship. Recommend individuals to the director whom they see as being viable inquirer-candidates for Associates
- Discern their willingness to be a companion to an inquirer/candidate and participate in other related components of the relationship as needed
- Keep informed of Congregation news and information through communications and publications
- Be faithful to annually review one's commitment as an Associate

## **Role of the Companion...**

The primary role of the companion is to encourage the inquirer-candidate to share more fully in the mission and spiritual life of the Sisters of Divine Providence through participation, prayer experiences, dialogue and faith sharing.

The companion is asked:

- To accompany and participate with the Associate Inquirer-candidate to all the orientation sessions
- To stay in communication with the inquirer-candidate by getting together, telephone calls or e-mails at least once a month in addition to attending the orientation sessions
- To assist the inquirer-candidate in her/his ongoing discernment about becoming an Associate of the Sisters of Divine Providence
- To participate with the inquirer-candidate in the reception ceremony. The invitation and call to be an Associate of the Sisters of Divine Providence involves a commitment on the part of both the Community and Associates. Sisters are invited and encouraged to:
  - Accept the responsibility to encourage and promote the Associate relationship. Recommend individuals to the director whom they see as being viable inquirer-candidates for Associates
  - Discern their willingness to be a companion to an inquirer- candidate and participate in other related components of the relationship as needed
  - Convey to the Associates the mission and charism of the Sisters of Divine Providence
  - Unite together with Associates through prayer and service
  - Invite Associates to participate with them in local community celebrations, social gatherings, enrichment programs and retreats
  - Welcome and get acquainted with Associates when they are present for gatherings and celebrations
  - Keep informed of Associate news and information through communications, website and newsletter



## **Associate Leadership**

There are various types of leadership in each local area. Some of these include Local Coordinators, secretary, treasurer, assistant resource person, photographer, program planner. Leadership qualities in Associates are recognized and fostered as Associates continue in the relationship.

### **Director of Associates**

The Provincial Leadership Team appoints a Director of Associates for the entire Province for a term of two years, with a renewable term of two years. The Director reports directly to the Provincial Leadership Team. The Marie de la Roche Province consists of four geographic areas: Kingston, Massachusetts; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Puerto Rico and St. Louis, Missouri. The Director is responsible to promote the mission and vision of the Associate relationship in the Province.

### **Local Coordinators**

There are two Local Coordinators in each geographic area. Local Coordinators, usually a lay Associate and a Sister, work with other volunteers coordinating on-going activities, events, orientation sessions, maintaining communications with local Associates and promotes relationships with Sisters and Associates. Lay Local Coordinators serve a two year term with a renewable term of two years. Sisters are appointed by the Provincial Leadership Team.

### **Advisory Circle**

The Director of Associates, Local Coordinators and the Council Liaison form an Advisory Circle. Members of the Advisory Circle gather for a meeting at least annually. Quarterly meetings are by conference call. Their purpose is to explore ways to enhance and unify the Associate relationship throughout the Province.

## **Providence Award**

Each year at the annual Assembly a Providence Award is presented to an Associate who, in her/his life and ministry, makes Providence visible in our world.

The criteria are:

- manifests trust in Providence/Providence spirituality
- lives with a spirit of joy, hospitality and hopefulness
- demonstrates justice by word and service to those in need

Nominations are gathered from all the geographic areas and the Director of Associates and Sisters who are Local Coordinators, by way of evaluation of each nominee, select the Associate who will receive the award. The award is not granted during the year in which a Provincial Chapter is held.

### **PowerPoint about the Sisters of Divine Providence**

*Copies of the slides are included at the end of this material.*

### **Description of the Inquiry Process**

### **Questions and Answers**

**Closing Blessing:** May God bless all the days of your life and be ever with you to guide and protect you. -- Mother Marie





*History of the  
Sisters of  
Divine  
Providence  
and  
Associates*



*History of the Sisters of Divine Providence and Associates*

# History of the Sisters of Divine Providence

## Opening Prayer (Option One)

**Leader:** We exalt your providence, O God

**All:** And we commit ourselves to making your Providence more visible in our world.

**Leader:** You have searched us and known us, O God. You know when we sit or stand. Whether we walk or lie down, You, Provident God are with us, gracing us to become living signs of your Providence.

*(In a moment in silence, recall God's presence with you in this moment.)*

## **After a moment of silence.....**

**Leader:** Our Provident God has been with us before we were born.

**All:** God, you are with us, and in us, and all around us as we gather for this Associate Session.

**Leader:** In 1851, our God of Providence had a dream which God shared with Bishop William Emmanuel von Ketteler and Mother Marie de la Roche.

**All:** God guided them through the power of the Spirit and the Charism of Providence. Over one hundred–fifty years ago, God brought to birth the Sisters of Divine Providence, a dream come to life in time. God looked at what came to birth and said, "It is very good."

**Leader:** We are invited to be living signs of God's Providence as Associates and Members of the Community of the Sisters of Divine Providence.

**All:** And we give thanks for the gift to be called to be living signs of God's Providence.

**Reader:** A letter taken from the last words of Bishop Ketteler to the sisters. (*Geist und Auftrag unserer Gemeinschaft*) (Page 63) Collated by Sister Anne Winschel.

Dear Sisters,

"Stay close to our Lord. This is my wish and prayer for you, that you be truly interior souls, living through Him, thinking with Him, and working for Him. Everything else will take care of itself. Yes, our God of Providence is infinitely rich and good and can do more than we would ever hope or ask for.

Only be simple, interior and united with God. Seek only to please God and to work for God. God will care for all your concerns. To God do I entrust you. May your life and activities be for God's honor and glory and from eternity to eternity."

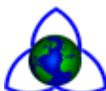
## **Pause for a moment of prayerful silence.....**

**Leader:** Let us pray...

**All:** Glory to you Source of all being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

## **Closing Prayer – Prayer from the Legacy of Mother Marie:**

**All:** You, O God, are my patience and my strength,  
You are my light and my counselor.  
O my God, give me the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and fortitude. The spirit of knowledge and of piety,  
And, the spirit of wholesome fear of God.  
O my God, give me un-wearying zeal,  
Gentleness and kindness of heart, and tireless Patience.  
Make me an instrument of your love. Amen.



## **Opening Prayer (Option Two)**

### **Intercessions:**

**Response:** We thank you, Provident God for linking our lives in so many ways, making a chain of hope and compassion!

On this day, we remember Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie and the hundreds of Sisters of Divine Providence who have gone before us as we proclaim....

We give thanks for the untold blessings that have been ours as an international Congregation as we proclaim....

We remember the many losses and diminishments that we have experienced as a Congregation and individually through sickness, aging, death and a decrease in membership as we proclaim....

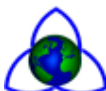
We remember the many times we have been asked to change, to renew, to restructure through all of these transitions, we proclaim....

We give thanks for the growth we have experienced and for the hope in the renewed future as we proclaim....

We give thanks for the call to risk, to share our resources, to stretch our circles of relationship as we proclaim....

### **Closing Prayer:**

We thank you Provident God for linking our lives in so many ways, making a chain of hope and compassion long enough and strong enough to circle the globe.



## Part I: History of the Co-founders and the Sisters of Divine Providence

"I found great consolation in my belief in the truth of those sublime ideas that stirred the world to its depth in my day. I believed then, and I believe today, that not one of them is too high for humankind. I believe it is your duty to realize them, and to love the age in which you live for its mighty wrestling for them, however far you are from attaining them."

*Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler*



### **Bishop Ketteler**

The history of the Sisters of Divine Providence starts with the life and times of its founder, Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz, Germany.

On December 25, 1811, the Bishop of Mainz was born in Munster, Westphalia; one of nine children: six boys and three girls.

Ketteler is known to have been hot-headed and headstrong as a boy, once having thrown himself on the ground in a fit of rage when he missed shooting a rabbit while on a hunting trip with his father. During his days at the University, he lost the tip of his nose in a duel.

He started out studying to be a lawyer, loving the challenge of the law, but under the iron hand of Bismarck, then the Chancellor of Germany, he resigned in protest when the archbishop was imprisoned. It was then that he began to seriously think about the priesthood. He was ordained on June 1, 1844.

As priest and bishop, Ketteler spent his time working on behalf of the poor. At the time of his priestly life, Europe was experiencing the Industrial Revolution, and there were many factory workers in need of just wages. Because the men were working in the factories during this time, many of the elderly were simply abandoned. Ketteler tried to help them.

Ketteler was installed as bishop on July 25, 1850. As bishop, he took the motto For the Church, for the people. This was a most appropriate motto for a church leader of his time, since the liberty of the Church, while not always threatened directly, was often in a tenuous state; and because the poor found themselves in a state of powerlessness in face of the economic and social conditions of the time.

Germany seemed to change overnight from a peaceful agrarian state to a restless industrial center. Steam and electricity, those newly-discovered magical forces, brought about, almost instantly, profound economic changes in the city.

With the changes came some not so good things: factories. Soon, the people became slaves of the machines. A new class of people was formed (the working class), which soon grew into the Proletariat, devoid of rights, power, and protection. Slums began to appear.

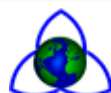
When visiting the parishes and factories in his diocese, Ketteler learned of the many problems facing not only the Catholic industrial workers, but also the poor man: the laborer. Ketteler contacted the common people through the study clubs and lay associations that he established. The bishop recognized the values and ideas of the poor laborer. He saw the children of the poor being abandoned and orphaned and in need of an education.



He founded the Brothers of St. Joseph and in 1859 founded the St. Joseph's Boys Home to educate orphaned boys. This community of Brothers no longer exists, but he would spend every opportunity he could with these abandoned boys.

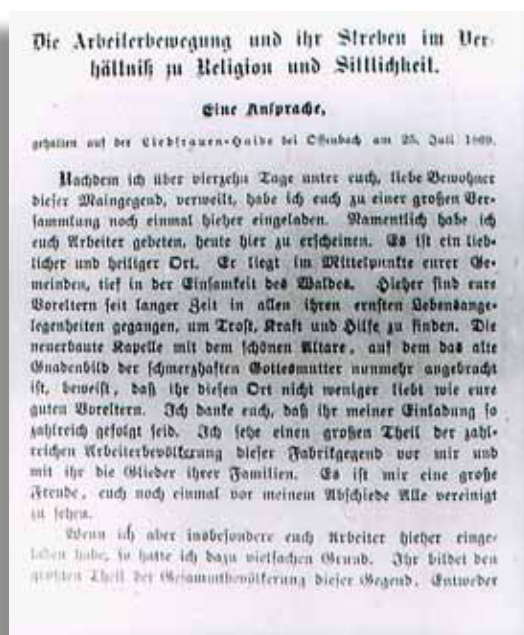
His love for his people found expression in other institutions, such as hospitals and organizations for the benefit of craftsmen. He founded the Mainzer Journeymen's Association to provide a home away from home for young traveling craftsmen.

Ketteler soon realized that, while a



change of heart was essential to any improvement in the socioeconomic plight of the poor, appropriate legislation was necessary. Ketteler began to speak out against the horrors of his times, the changes that had come because of the Industrial Revolution, and how to help protect the working man. He said, "No class stands in need of what unions should give to man in the natural order; namely, help and protection. Look at the evils that have arisen from the isolated condition of the workmen."

Ketteler began to write on behalf of these workmen, and in 1864 he wrote and published his greatest work: *The Labor Question and Christianity*. This work influenced the political platform of the Center Party.



This work, on behalf of the ideals of Christianity and the practical solutions to the problems of the have-nots, was the result of much research into the social questions of the day. Ketteler wrote that every dockhand, every day-laborer, and every peasant should be treated equal to any prince or king and that human dignity should be placed far above class distinction.

Pope Leo XIII was a great follower of Ketteler, and after Ketteler's death, Pope Leo called him his great predecessor. In 1891, he wrote the first social encyclical, called *Rerum Novarum*. It is from this encyclical that all the social teachings of the Church flow. It is our legacy from our founder, Bishop Ketteler.

Much of Ketteler's struggle in his position as bishop involved securing the freedom of the Church from the interference of the Prussian government.

In his early days, he had to establish the role of the Church with the government. There was much concern at this time that the Church would become too powerful politically. There was a lot of fear that the pope would somehow try to dictate the politics of the land.

The government had a great influence in the appointment of theology professors at the universities, which led Ketteler to establish the Mainz Seminary. He met with the other bishops of the Upper Rhine Conference to press the state to grant the Church greater freedom. They wanted to be able to appoint their own educational professors and leaders.

Pope Pius IX called for a General Council. Among the items on the agenda was the question of papal infallibility. Ketteler published a brochure about this, called "The General Council and What It Means for Our Time." In this document, he clearly stated what the doctrine of papal infallibility meant. However, in his own thinking, he believed that an official proclamation was untimely, given the circumstances of the government.

He and the other bishops met at the Church of Fulda in September 1869 and sent a message to the Holy Father expressing their views. Their message stated that this dogma would create confusion and much misunderstanding. Ketteler wrote a pastoral letter to his people before leaving for the First Vatican Council.

The bishops gathered at St. Peter's, where, on December 8, 1869, Pius IX opened the Vatican Council. The bishops discussed the dogma of infallibility; and although Ketteler argued against promulgating it at that time, he was defeated.

Ketteler could not, in good conscience, vote for the dogma, so he departed the council the day prior to the voting. He wrote a letter to the Holy Father, telling him that he didn't want to vote against it, because he believed in it, but not at that particular time. His letter was dated July 17, 1870. Ketteler left the council and began his return trip home to his beloved Germany.

In a brochure published in 1871, Ketteler explained his position to the German people. He told them why he considered the doctrine inopportune; that he was hoping to



have some additions so as to avoid misunderstanding, and that it should be announced to the world in its entirety and not only in part by the Council. The doctrine of papal infallibility caused great concern among the leaders of the Prussian government.

In 1870, Ketteler wrote to Otto von Bismarck, the chancellor, regarding the necessity of incorporating into his constitutions decrees assuring freedom of religion. Von Bismarck, however, feared the intrusion of the Pope in German affairs.

Ketteler met with von Bismarck in November 1871, and of that meeting wrote, "I found the chancellor completely dominated by the thought that danger threatened his work from the side of Rome ... all attempts to convince him of his error proved fruitless."

In May 1872, von Bismarck began to launch his attack upon the Church in Germany, known as the Kulturkampf. In vain, Ketteler raised his voice as a representative of the Reichstag to protest the oppressive force of the Kulturkampf. With great sadness, he saw his seminary close, the Jesuits expelled from his diocese, and other infringements upon the liberty of the Church.

On July 25, 1875, Ketteler celebrated the 25th anniversary of his consecration and installation as Bishop of Mainz. The tremendous support that he felt from his people at the time truly lifted his spirits. Among their gifts to him were the redecoration of the Marian altar in the cathedral, and the cross that was placed on the cathedral's newly erected east tower.

On May 8, 1877, Ketteler departed for Rome, his last journey in life. He went to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Pius IX as bishop. It was at this time that the pope requested an audience with Ketteler and was heard to commend him.

In June 1877, he stopped to visit a priest friend at the Capuchin monastery in Burghausen, but the cold he had caught prior to his visit to Rome had worsened and became so severe that he was immediately confined to bed upon his arrival. On Friday, July 13, he died in the presence



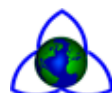
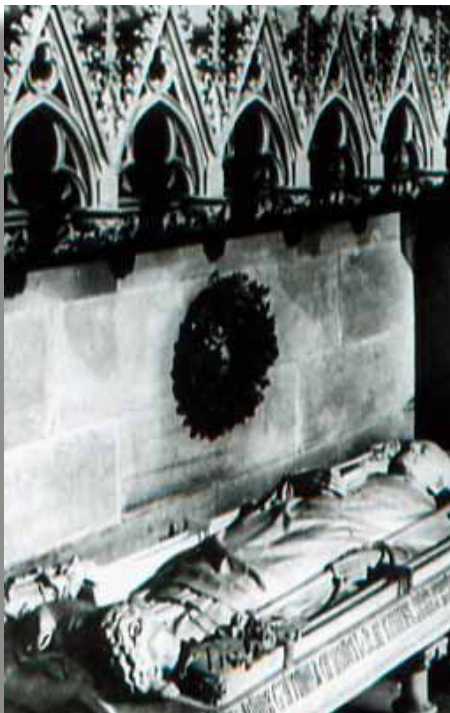
of relatives and friends. His body was then taken to Mainz and waked in the bishop's residence, where thousands paid their last respects. The funeral procession wound its way through the streets, lined with thousands, some even on the rooftops, to pay their last respects.

In his Last Will, Ketteler wrote that his burial should be as simple as possible, keeping his Episcopal dignity. He wanted to be buried in the Blessed Mother Chapel of the cathedral because of his devotion to the Blessed Mother.

In January 1882, the monument to Ketteler, in the Marian chapel of the cathedral, was completed. It reads: The Most Reverend Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, for 27 years, Bishop of the Church of Mainz, a man mighty in word and deed, who, just returning from the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, piously fell asleep in the Lord on July 13, 1877, in the Capuchin monastery, here awaits the resurrection.

The name Wilhelm Emmanuel Baron von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz, now belongs to the history of the Church and will stand for all times in its annals alongside the names of the greatest bishops who ever ruled in the Church of God.

Each year, on July 13, the Working Class Organization in Germany holds a service there and keeps an eternal flame lit at Ketteler's grave.





## Marie de la Roche

Mother Marie, our co-foundress, was born in a castle near Heidelberg on October 28, 1812. She was christened Stephanie Fredericka Amelia de la Roche-Starkenfels.

In 1851, she completed her training, was given the name Mother Marie, and the small community of Divine Providence began.

Because of the troubles facing the Church in Germany at the time, the government deprived the Sisters of Divine Providence of their teaching positions, so Ketteler sent six members to the United States of America.

Meanwhile, in Germany, there was a priest who disliked Mother Marie, mainly because she was not German, and so he made life miserable for her, until he got her ousted from her position. In 1856, Mother Marie was requested to go to the newly opened orphanage in Neustadt.

Mother Marie worked tirelessly during an epidemic of typhoid at the orphanage. She died there on August 1, 1857. It was naturally assumed that she died of typhus, but when they prepared her body for burial, they discovered that she had breast cancer, but had never complained of it.

Mother Marie was buried in Neustadt in the back of a house in a small garden area. Her body was moved from the parish cemetery in 1860 to a convent cemetery. In 1960, the body was exhumed once again, and the remains of Mother Marie were placed in a beautifully carved wooden chest and laid to rest in Neustadt for the last time. There is a monument standing near the grave with medallions of all the provinces in the congregation.

“Be hopeful signs of God’s Providence. Witness joyfully that a living, compassionate God of Providence is with you. Indeed, God is with you as truly as God was with me and the early members of the Community back in 1851.” -- Marie de la Roche



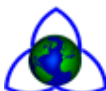
*The Community of Divine Providence began in this house in 1851.*

## The Sisters of Divine Providence in America

To meet the needs of the time, six Sisters from Germany set out for the United States in 1876 to teach the German immigrants who had settled in the Pittsburgh area. Upon their arrival, the Sisters lived in the East Liberty area, first at the St. Joseph Motherhouse on Larimer Avenue, and then at the Mount Immaculate Motherhouse on Lincoln Avenue, adjacent to St. Walburga Church. The St. Joseph Motherhouse has been razed and in its place, on the busy corner of Penn Circle and Larimer Avenue in East Liberty, stands the Pentecostal Temple Church of God in Christ. Mount Immaculate, or "the Mount," as it is fondly remembered by some of the older sisters, was also razed a number of years ago.



In the mid 1920s, the Community outgrew the Mount, and the Sisters began to look for a site on which to build a new Motherhouse. They settled on a piece of farm land in



Allison Park, and construction began. In 1927, the present Motherhouse, Providence Heights, was dedicated. At last, their Motherhouse was large enough to accommodate the more than 500 Sisters who gathered for Community meetings and retreats.

The Jackson farm sprawled out on the north side of Providence Heights where UPMC Passavant Hospital is now located. Cows grazed on the farmland, and from Ketteler Hall down to the creek in back, there were rows of sweet and field corn. Along the Station Walk in back of the property grew black walnut trees, currant bushes, and trees filled with plump, sweet white cherries. There were also yellow and red plum trees. The barn, which is now a garage for the lawn equipment, was filled with chickens and pigs. On the present site of the La Roche College, from Wright Library to the Kerr Fitness and Sports Center and on to the ball field in back, there were apple orchards. Many Sisters remember their days as novices when they picked the fruit, filling their aprons until they overflowed. The Sisters did much of the farm work and canned their food, storing it in the basement canning room.



The landmark building with its tall spire can be seen for miles around. The beautiful grounds at Providence Heights continue to offer an oasis in the midst of the busy North Hills suburbs of Pittsburgh. The property is fronted by a lake and dotted with trees, many of which have been donated in honor or in memory of others. Wedding parties often request permission to use the property for their wedding photographs.

The bell tower at Providence Heights holds three bells. The bells were blessed on May 30, 1926 and lifted to the bell tower to proclaim the Angelus three times each day. The bells were automated in 1999 as part of the building restoration. They ring at 6 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. daily. The bells also ring for Sisters' funerals, jubilees and other Community celebrations.

In order of size, largest to smallest, the bells were christened: Providentia, with the inscription, We exalt Thy Providence, O Lord, and we submit to all its decrees. Laudate, inscribed, Praise the Lord all ye nations, praise Him all ye peoples. Ave Maria, proclaiming, Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

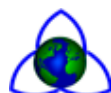
At one time, the cross atop the building was painted in gold leaf. During World War II, the Sisters were asked to paint over the shiny gold leaf to prevent it from serving as a landmark to enemy aircraft. Due to increases in the cost of gold leaf, the paint was not restored. However, as part of the repairs undertaken after a devastating microburst in 1999, and because gold leaf became affordable once more, the cross was restored to its former brilliance.

In the late 1960s, La Roche College purchased a parcel of the original property to expand its campus. Today, the Sisters maintain several buildings and 16 acres of property that is meticulously groomed and nurtured in accordance with the natural beauty and regeneration of the environment. The Sisters welcome visitors and neighbors to visit, walk, rest and enjoy the beauty of their grounds whenever they need a place of respite.

Providence Heights is home to the approximately 70 retired and semi-retired Sisters. It also houses the Providence Heights Alpha School as well as administrative offices. The Provincial Leadership Team has offices in the Marie de la Roche Center at Providence Heights.

The Sisters are present to those in need through a variety of ministries. They began their active ministry as teachers and nurses. From the earliest days, the Sisters operated hospitals and schools with all of their energy. Beginning with St. Joseph's School in East Liberty, the Sisters took on one school after another, educating thousands of children.

Today, the Sisters maintain an active teaching ministry, which includes the Providence Heights Alpha School and La Roche College, which was founded by the Congregation



in 1963 as well as the Sacred Heart Schools in Kingston, MA. In addition, many Sisters teach in elementary schools, high schools, and colleges in Pittsburgh, across the country, and in Puerto Rico.

The Sisters were a major force in the ministry of health care in the area. In 1915, they took over administration of St. John's Hospital on the North Side of Pittsburgh, and opened a nursing school. The Sisters also administered Braddock General Hospital. The Sisters became administrators of Divine Providence Hospital on the North Side in 1955 and continued to be involved in the administration of the hospital until its sale in 1993 to the Mercy Health System.

In recent years, the Community has expanded its ministries to include pastoral care, social work, campus ministry, educational administration, foster parenting, work among those who are poor, and work on behalf of peace and justice. The Community has re-committed itself to the ideals espoused by the founders, Bishop Emmanuel von Ketteler and Mother Marie de la Roche "to advance the cause of the oppressed." Their 1985 Provincial Chapter Documents state that they are committed "as Providence women to share in the task of co-creating a just world for the 21st Century." Today, the diverse ministries in which the Sisters are involved reflect the needs of a diverse population.

From Pittsburgh, the Sisters went forth to St. Louis, MO; Puerto Rico and Kingston, MA, to carry out the mission of Providence.

### ***St. Louis, Missouri***

The Sisters of Divine Providence first came to St. Louis, Missouri in 1879, just three years after the community's arrival in the United States. They moved west in order to

teach, specifically the children of German immigrants in St. Louis. They staffed St. Francis de Sales School from 1879-1903.

For the next several decades, the community staffed and operated primary schools in the Dioceses of Belleville, Illinois; Springfield, Illinois; Shreveport,

Louisiana; Springfield/Cape Girardeau, Missouri; Jefferson City, Missouri and the Archdiocese of St. Louis, and in parts of Kansas as well.

In 1920, the congregation paid \$50,000 to purchase St. Elizabeth Hospital in Granite City, Illinois. The Sisters of Divine Providence owned, operated and staffed the hospital until 2001, when it was sold and renamed Gateway Regional Medical Center.

In 1930, the St. Louis Province of the Sisters of Divine Providence was established, with Mother M. Rosalia Weaver as Provincial. The congregation was formally welcomed into the Archdiocese of St. Louis by Archbishop John J. Glennon, who shared the Sisters' objective of establishing a boarding school for boys. In 1932, the community purchased an estate in Normandy, Missouri that would become Mount Providence, and serve as both the provincial Motherhouse and the board-



ing school for boys in kindergarten through grade 8. Mount Providence School for Boys



opened in January, 1933. It would quickly grow to a complex of three dormitories, nine-8classrooms, three cafeterias, a library, recreation area, craft room, band room, music room, guest rooms and reception rooms. More importantly, it would educate young boys-and beginning in 1988, girls as well-with a maximum enrollment of more than 300 students. At different points in its history Mount Providence would also be the home of an eldercare facility, a day care, and Catholic Charities' Villa Maria, a shelter for pregnant women and their children.

As a religious community, the Sisters of Divine Providence are committed to aiding the homeless. In 1989, the Sisters of Divine Providence opened La Posada Providencia, a shelter in San Benito, Texas for people seeking legal refuge in the United States. In 1993, they began full sponsorship of Room at the Inn, a shelter for homeless women and families in St. Louis County. The congregation continues to sponsor both of these ministries today.

It was determined in the early 1990s that the St. Louis Province could no longer afford to maintain Mount Providence. The property was sold to the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 1995, and Mount Providence School closed the following year. The Sisters moved out of the Motherhouse in 1997. In February 2001, the buildings were imploded to make way for the redirection of a dangerous stretch of Interstate 70.



Also in 2001, the St. Louis Province united with the Provinces in Pittsburgh and New England, the region of Puerto Rico and their mission in the Dominican Republic to become the Marie de la Roche Province.

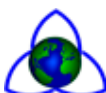
With offices at Providence Center in Bridgeton, MO, the Sisters of Divine Providence continue to be a vital presence in the St. Louis metropolitan area and southeastern Illinois. Today, there are 39 Sisters of Divine Providence in the St. Louis area. Twelve of the Sisters live together in prayer ministry and semi-retirement at St. Clare's Villa in Alton, IL. There are also Sisters from the St. Louis area working in other parts of the country, including Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas and Tennessee. Sisters of Divine Providence work in ministries both traditional (teaching, nursing, pastoral ministry) and non-traditional (as canon lawyers, spiritual directors, pilgrimage guides). They continue to be an important part of our church and our community, always striving to make God's Providence more visible in our world.

Today, the Divine Providence community is the corporate sponsor of two homeless shelters instituted by the former St. Louis Province. Room at the Inn is a shelter for homeless women and families and is located in St. Louis County. La Posada Providencia is a shelter for people in crisis from around the world who are seeking legal refuge in the United States. Located in San Benito, Texas, La Posada helps immigrants and asylum seekers representing more than 65 countries.

### ***Puerto Rico***

The 20th century expanded the vision of the Catholic Church, which called upon North American religious communities to become bearers of the Gospel to the peoples of Latin America. Though America in the early 1930s was in the midst of one of the greatest economic depressions the country has ever known, communities of men and women religious gave heroically of their personnel and finances in answering the appeal for missionaries on the Island of Puerto Rico.

It was the fall of 1931 when Mother Josephine (Schmitt) and her council answered the Gospel summons to begin a mission in Puerto Rico. She asked for volunteers, and



much to everyone's surprise, more than 100 Sisters volunteered. It was a happy day for those chosen for the missionary work.

The five Sisters selected must have felt a bit like the pioneer Sisters from Germany as they set out for Puerto Rico on August 7, 1932. Sisters Callista (Strauss), DeChantal (Huber), Innocent (Miller), Macaria (Gaertner), Bertranda (Leininger), and Theodoret (Bretzel) embarked on a week-long journey by train and ship, docking in beautiful San Juan.



The Sisters settled in the coastal town of Arecibo in August 1932.

From an account written later by Sister Francis Gabriel Beyerl, getting there was immensely interesting to the Sisters, as they had never seen such delightful tropical flowers or swaying palm trees. Their first convent was actually a house that the Sisters shared with a local family. It was tiny, but spotlessly clean. The Sisters unpacked, and immediately -- dictionary in hand -- set upon their mission to open a school.

For the school Sisters, the days were long, filled with class work, their own Spanish lessons, and home visits. The classrooms were small and crowded. They often taught 35 or more students in a classroom that was above a pen where chickens were cackling and cows mooing! Three days a week after school and on Saturdays, the Sisters traveled to the campos (outskirts of town) to teach religion.

The first two years they suffered the deprivations that missionaries often are called upon to bear; inadequate housing space, no good drinking water, different food, and the difficulty of learning a new culture and language. But great was the spirit of community, and their hard work was rewarded with success as school enrollment tripled by 1934. Everything grew – school enrollment, catechism classes, and high school programs – and with the growth, more Sisters came to the missions. The Community also was blessed to welcome Puerto Rican women into vowed membership. By 1935, there were two native vocations with more expected. No doubt that in the beginning there were difficult times, but the people of Puerto Rico were warm and welcoming and Providence took root in Puerto Rico.

In the midst of the day to day, the Sisters also were actively involved in the administration of several school systems: Colegio San Miguel in Utuado, Colegio San Felipe in Arecibo, and San Juan Bautista elementary in Orocovis (closed 1978), and in the later



years, teaching at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico School of Nursing. Their leadership and vision, coupled with their dedication and hard work, contributed to building a strong foundation and the assurance that these institutions would survive to serve the people of Puerto Rico for the future.

The ensuing years were marked with growth as the Sisters continued in the ministry of education, pastoral ministry and nursing. Their mission -- to serve the needs of the times -- has guided ministry throughout the years. The Sisters have moved from traditional education and healthcare ministries to offering support through social services. A number of Sisters minister through the Office of Human Promotion and Development in the Diocese of Arecibo, Puerto.

Motivated by the urgency to respond to the poorest of God's people and the Chapter Documents of 1990 which urged the Community to "take a corporate stand to identify with the poor," the Sisters of Divine Providence began to minister in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in February of 1993.

In Las Cañitas, one of the most deprived barrios in Santo Domingo, the pastor re-



requested that the Sisters be a "presence" to the people. Immediately, they were involved with the youth, the sick and elderly, and the little children in a Center located near a contaminated river.

The program Infantil Emmanuel began about five years ago in response to the crisis created by the barrio of Las Canitas in the Dominican Republic. About 125 children ages 5 to 12 participate in the program. Thirty-five counselors work with these children. Twelve of these counselors were once participants in the program. Also, a group of young women from various parishes are participating in vocational discernment.

The many Sisters of Divine Providence who accepted the call to missionary work in the early days shared common character traits. They were adventurous, welcoming challenge and opportunity. They were willing to step into the unknown and place their trust in our Provident God. They were hard working and selfless. Their hearts were filled with their love of God and their dedication to the mission of the Congregation. Their example and the legacy they have left has inspired those who have followed them into ministry in Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. The pioneering spirit is alive and well in the women to whom they have passed the torch.

### ***Kingston, MA***

The Sisters of Divine Providence were welcomed to the New England shores in 1946. The wooded parcel of the Kingston land, once a dairy farm and only accessible by a dirt road, was purchased by the Congregation. In the beginning, the existing barns and buildings were remodeled for use as a summer camp for girls. During the winter, the Camp became Mishannock Alpha School, later named Sacred Heart Pre-Primary School, for nursery to second grade students (22 children). In 1949, two large homes were purchased on Court Street in Plymouth. After renovations, Sacred Heart Elementary School opened to grades K-7 with 148 students. Grades 8 and 9 were added in 1950-51.



***Sacred Heart High School***

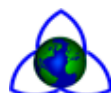
In 1952, construction began for Sacred Heart High School on a clearing once used to raise food for prize cattle, and the road now known as Route 80 (Bishops Highway) was built. In January 1954, grades 1-6 were continued at Court Street in Plymouth while the kindergarten moved to the Camp Mishannock property in Kingston (1957-62). With the increasing enrollment, ground was broken in 1961 for the new Sacred Heart Elementary School.



***Sacred Heart Elementary School***

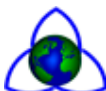
Sacred Heart Pre-Primary School moved from Camp Mishannock to the Court Street property. The kindergarten, along with an Adult Education Center, remained in Plymouth until the 1974 when the property was sold to the town of Plymouth with the specific purpose of housing the elderly. The Pre-Primary was relocated in 1974 to its location

in Kingston. In 2007, a new Early Childhood Center was built is home to Kindergarten, Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten Programs.

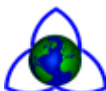


# Timeline of the History of the Sisters of Divine Providence

- 1851 Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler and Marie de la Roche found the Sisters of Divine Providence in Finthen, Germany
- 1857 Mother Marie dies in Neustadt
- 1858 Congregation is approved as a Corporation by the German government
- 1861–71 Motherhouse is erected in Mainz, Germany
- 1869–77 Eighteenth president of the United States: Ulysses S. Grant
- 1876 Six Sisters are sent to the United States to begin a new Foundation The little group of Sisters settles in Pittsburgh, PA
- 1877 Bishop Ketteler dies in Burghausen, Germany, enroute home from Vatican Council I  
First American postulant, Mary Barth, enters
- 1879 Sister Cecilia Schroeck becomes the first Sister to die in the Province.  
staff St. Francis de Sales School in St. Louis
- 1880 The Novitiate moves to Heythuizen, Holland to escape the Kulturkampf
- 1881 Sister Michael is appointed first Novice Mistress
- 1891 Sisters begin ministry at orphanage in Wheeling, WV
- 1892 Sister Josepha Barth becomes first American to make final vows
- 1905 Divine Providence Academy is instituted in East Liberty, PA
- 1909 First United States representatives attend General Chapter in Germany
- 1917 Sisters become involved in Toner Institute
- 1920 Sisters make down payment on purchase of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Granite City, IL
- 1921 Four Sisters of Divine Providence take over management of St. Elizabeth's Hospital
- 1922 First Provincial Chapter held in the United States
- 1924 Ground broken for third motherhouse, Providence Heights, in Allison Park, PA
- 1925 The Sacred Congregation for Religious approves the Rule of the Sisters of Divine Providence for seven years, and the Community becomes a Pontifical Community  
The German Community is divided into three Provinces—St. Martin in Mainz, St. Paul in Aschaffenburg, St. Bonifatius in Oberursel  
Mt. Immaculate Alpha School opens
- 1929 Alpha School relocates to Providence Heights
- 1930 The United States Community is divided into two Provinces: St. Peter in Pittsburgh, PA, and St. Louis in St. Louis, MO. Mother M. Rosalia is the first Provincial Superior for the St. Louis Province. Temporary headquarters are at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Granite City, IL
- 1931 Villa Mater Dei is bought in Rome, Italy
- 1932 St. Louis Province acquires property in Normandy, MO, for Mount Providence Motherhouse, and they plan the 1933 opening of Mount Providence Boarding School for Boys  
St. Peter Province opens a mission in Puerto Rico
- 1933 First students arrive at Mount Providence School for Boys
- 1935 The Rule receives final approval from the Vatican
- 1937 Sisters build and dedicate new building at Mount Providence
- 1941 St. Joseph's Department, living quarters for retired Sisters, opens at Providence Heights
- 1942 Sisters' salaries are raised from \$28 to \$33 a month
- 1945 Beymer property (67 acres) purchased in Allison Park, PA, Providence Villa opens
- 1946 Sisters establish a mission in Kingston, MA, Property is purchased for Camp Mishannock
- 1947 Ketteler Hall classrooms open; Camp Mishannock opens
- 1948 La Roche Hall completed  
Mishannock Alpha (kindergarten) opens in Kingston

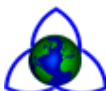


- 1949 Construction begins on Motherhouse for St. Louis Province  
Sacred Heart Elementary School opens in Plymouth
- 1951 Sisters withdraw from St. John's Hospital  
Sisters in Kingston begin providing food service and secretarial support to  
Cardinal O'Connell Seminary
- 1953 Sacred Heart School is erected in Kingston, MA  
Old Presbyterian Hospital purchased to become Divine Providence Hospital
- 1955 Divine Providence Hospital dedicated
- 1956 Property next to Mount Providence is purchased and becomes Villa Maria,  
a home for unwed mothers
- 1957 The Community in Kingston becomes Our Lady Province, Mother Mary Florence  
is named provincial
- 1958 Groundbreaking for Marycrest Preparatory School  
Novitiate in Kingston is dedicated
- 1959 St. Louis Province demolishes original house on Mount Providence property
- 1960 Property is purchased for new Generalate in Rome
- 1961 Six Sisters are sent from Germany to Abancay, Peru  
Property purchased on Guys Run Road for Divine Providence Academy  
Convent Choirs recording made  
The Sisters in St. Louis complete expansion of Mount Providence, with Christ the  
King Chapel wing uniting the 1937 school wing & 1951 new Motherhouse wing
- 1962 John XXIII announces Vatican II  
Sisters erect a new building for Sacred Heart Elementary School
- 1963 La Roche College founded
- 1964 Young Korean women come to Rome to enter the Community and stay in the  
Novitiate in the Generalate  
Christmas Mosaic recorded
- 1965 Mother Pierre Gehenio is elected as first American General Superior  
Mother Rosalia Weaver, foundress of the St. Louis Province, dies
- 1967 Young Korean women are accepted as Postulants in Korea
- 1968 Interim Directives published
- 1969 New General Directives are received
- 1970 First issue of Intracom published
- 1971 Transfiguration House of Prayer opens  
Alpha Boarding School closes  
Toner Institute closes
- 1972 Social Security Program made possible
- 1973 Mortgage for Providence Heights burned
- 1974 Sacred Heart Pre-Primary moves to former Novitiate building in Kingston
- 1975 Sisters of Divine Providence celebrate their Centennial in the United States
- 1976 Marycrest mortgage burned  
House of Prayer moves to 22 acres of land in Butler County, PA
- 1977 Visitation Convent opens in Kingston as a formation house and center for  
spiritual renewal programs
- 1978 Death of Popes Paul VI and John Paul I; election of Pope Paul II
- 1981 Sisters of Divine Providence in the United States receive first Associates  
in Kingston; 10 women and men were welcomed  
St. Joseph Annex in Pittsburgh opened for care of infirm Sisters  
St. Louis Province completes multi-purpose building for Mount Providence School  
and Motherhouse  
Sisters celebrate 50th anniversary at mission in Puerto Rico  
San Rosario sold





- 1984 Associate Program initiated in Pittsburgh, four individuals welcomed  
 Divine Providence Academy closes  
 Providence Child Care Center South begins at St. Anne Convent
- 1985 Providence Fund initiated  
 St. Louis Development Office opens  
 UMSL Eldercare Center opens on the first floor of Mount Providence  
 St. Louis Province launches Associate program; 10 Associates welcomed in 1986
- 1988 Pittsburgh Development Office inaugurated  
 Mount Providence School goes co-ed
- 1989 Providence Summer Ministry Outreach initiated  
 St. Louis Province founds La Posada Providencia in the Rio Grand Valley of Texas  
 Babcock Boulevard property sold to Lincoln Club  
 Conference Center addition to Kearns Spirituality Center
- 1992 Room at the Inn opens in the Motherhouse in St. Louis  
 Foster care ministry begins in Pittsburgh
- 1993 The International Convent is established in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic  
 Divine Providence Hospital sold to Pittsburgh Mercy Health System  
 Divine Providence Foundation established  
 St. Louis Province assumes corporate sponsorship of Room at the Inn
- 1995 The region in Korea becomes a Province  
 Providence Child Care Center North and Providence Family Support Center begin  
 Amelia House established  
 Property on west side of Babcock Boulevard sold to La Roche College  
 St. Louis Province purchases property for La Posada Providencia in Texas
- 1996 Mount Providence School closes  
 Mount Providence Motherhouse and adjoining buildings sold to the University of Missouri, St. Louis
- 1997 St. Louis Sisters move to St. Bartholomew's  
 Kingston Development Office inaugurated
- 1999 Providence Center opens in St. Louis for ministry, office, and gathering space
- 2001 Provinces in Kingston, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, and the region of Puerto Rico and the mission of Santo Domingo unite to form the Marie de la Roche Province  
 Sisters of Divine Providence celebrate 125-year anniversary  
 Mount Providence is imploded, allowing Interstate 70 to be rerouted to eliminate dangerous curves  
 St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Granite City, IL, is sold to Gateway Community Health Systems  
 Sister Robin Nordyke professes final vows as the first permanent member of the Marie de la Roche Province
- 2002 Novitiate established in Kingston
- 2005 Building dedication: Providence Connections, Brighton Rd., Pittsburgh's North Side  
 President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush visit Providence Family Support Center as part of the Administration's Faith-Based Initiative program
- 2006 Provincial Chapter held in Pittsburgh
- 2007 Sacred Heart Early Childhood Center opens a new building on the grounds of Sacred Heart Elementary School  
 Novitiate established in Santo Domingo
- 2008 Providence Child Care Center South closes  
 Novitiate established in Granite City (Diocese of Springfield, IL)  
*Ellen Lavender selected as first lay Director of the Associate relationship*  
 Pope John Paul II dies on April 2, age of 85; Pope Benedict XVI elected on April 19



## Part II: History of the Associate Relationship by Area

### Kingston, MA

In 1980, the Provincial Chapter of what was then the Province of Our Lady of Divine Providence agreed to form a group called the Divine Providence Associates. The Chapter said that "The goal of association is the mutual support of the Associates and the Sisters in their search to find God working in their lives and in their efforts to make him more evident to the world through their life and ministry."



Initially, there were three levels of involvement from which the Associates could choose. Prayer Associates would unite themselves in prayer for ministry and needs of Associates and Sisters. Supportive Associates offered support for Associates and Sisters through presence, involvement, sharing and prayer. The Collaborative Associates committed themselves to collaboration with

the Sisters and Associates through ministry, presence, active involvement, sharing and prayer.

Sister Florita Rodman was appointed the first Associate Coordinator and a group of 10 women and men were welcomed as Associates on December 8, 1981. The Associates were welcomed into the province Assembly days to share their faith journey with the Sisters and to benefit from the educational and spiritual enrichment of those days. They shared in discussions and evaluations through which the group grew and its structures were changed as needs were mutually recognized by the Sisters and Associates.

In June 1991, Sister Mary Francis Fletcher was appointed the new Associate Coordinator and joined 57 Associates in celebrating the 10th anniversary of the relationship. Sixteen of the original 41 Associates participated. At the celebratory Mass, four new Associates were received. They were Ann Moberg, Eileen Scheck, Ann Weaver and Rita Wilson. A buffet supper followed the Mass. The supper was prepared by Sisters Patty Ann Moffett, Mary Pires and Miriam Therese Rubeo.

Sister Mary Francis turned the Associate leadership over to Sister Patrice in June 2000. Sister Emma Jean Middendorf became the Associate Coordinator in 2004. Ann Moberg was a local coordinator in 2007 through 2009 when Cynthia Anne Merry became the local coordinator along with Sister Emma Jean.



*First Associate, Elaine Lafayette, and Sister Maria Fest (right) at the 25th Anniversary Mass and Brunch.*

### Pittsburgh, PA

Sister Mary Glenn planted the seed for alternative membership forms at the Provincial Chapter of 1975. At the 1980 Chapter, the delegates formally recognized the existence of Divine Providence associates and former members and mandated the research and development of a non-vowed membership.

Sisters Carol Stenger and Judy Meinert researched and developed co-membership, as it was called at the time, with Elaine Lafayette and Carol Balchus. On June 16, 1984, Elaine and Carol were received as the first two co-members. Sister Carol Stenger became the first Director and Sharon Balchus was the Assistant Director.

The second group of co-members was received in December 1984. Sister Jean Rene Seiler became the Director in December 1984. The group expanded into Ohio when Nora Hennessy was received in February, 1985. In October six co-members were received from Michigan with Sister Marilyn Bergt as the area co-



ordinator. Also in October, there were seven new co-members received from Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh Associates have welcomed additional Associates each year since.

Sister Jean Rene and Bonnie Coluccio formed an advisory board consisting of representatives from Pittsburgh, Detroit and Ohio.

June 1989 saw the appointment of Sister Janet Schaffran as Co-Director. Sister Janet is the third vowed member to lead the group and the first co-director since two Associates were to share in the leadership as co-directors. Dawn Goulait and Diann Westrick were elected the first Co-Directors in April 1990.

Beginning in September, 1989, a regular pattern of monthly meetings were held at various locations with topics related to Providence spirituality and theology, and social justice issues. Each meeting included a covered dish supper or a picnic cookout. In August 2000, small groups of sisters and associates were formed for monthly meetings. The groups were to gather in various locations and at various times for study and fellowship. By 2009, there were ten groups meeting.

The first Gathering of Associates from all areas was held in St. Louis, October 21-23, 2005. Pittsburgh sent 27 Associates to the Gathering which had the theme of "Fan into Flames the Gifts of the Spirit Within You." The Pittsburgh Associates hosted the second Gathering, October 26-28, 2007. The theme was "Weaving the Fabric of Our Lives."

Throughout the years, the Pittsburgh Associates have enjoyed many retreats and enrichment days that have added to their spiritual journey of Providence. Many Associates look forward to the Spring Fling and St. Nick's Day when they are able to entertain the Sisters at Providence Heights with games, crafts and snacks.

On, October 12, 2008, the Associates started the celebration of their 25th anniversary with an Enrichment Day. The theme, developed by Sister Michele Bisbey, was "The Spirituality of Jubilee." Sr. Michele's presentation was followed by an elaborate high tea prepared by Associates Jeanne Kohser and Paula Gilchrist.

During the anniversary year, each faith sharing group selected a ministry sponsored by the Sisters of Divine Providence to provide additional help and needed items. The groups will continue this as an on-going service project.



An anniversary Mass and brunch was celebrated on March 29, 2009 for all Associates and Sisters. It celebrated Associate leaders, contact Sisters, inquiry session presenters, the achievements and history over the past 25 years as Associates of the Sisters of Divine Providence. Associate Elaine Lafayette,

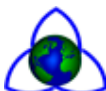
the first Associate and an early director, was recognized for her continued participation. Also, six Associates were received at the Mass.

The anniversary concluded with a river cruise on June 27, 2009 that was suggested by Sister Cathy Frost and organized by Associate Marge Weber. All of the 40 Associates and Sisters on board the Pittsburgh Water Limousine thoroughly enjoyed the day cruising the three rivers of Pittsburgh!

### **St. Louis, MO**

In 1983 Sr. Lucy Schmidt, Provincial, and Sisters Barbara McMullen and Kathleen Hagen, Vocation Directors, attended a workshop in Chicago, Illinois entitled "Alternative Models of Membership." This workshop discussed various ways lay men and women could belong to religious communities. There were at that time a few religious communities that were experimenting with this type of program. Most of them called these men and women "Associates."

The Sisters were very excited to learn of this new way of membership and discussed it the whole ride back to St. Louis! About a month later, Sr. Barbara discussed with Sr. Lucy the possibility of beginning this program in St. Louis. Sr. Lucy asked her to begin



working on this idea and to have a proposal ready for the Provincial Chapter of 1985.

Sisters Barbara and Kathleen spent the next two years researched various models of membership, collated the information gathered, made reports to the Provincial and her Council and formed a committee to write up what a program would consist of for the province.

In 1984 Sisters Barbara and Kathleen visited with every local community in the province to present their findings and get input on a possible program for Associates. After all the visitations and discussions, they wrote the first draft of a program (handbook) to present to the Sisters. They again visited the local communities to discuss the draft and make revisions. At the Chapter of 1985 a proposal was put forward to accept an alternative form of membership in the province and it was determined that these lay men and women would be called "Associates."

Following the Chapter in June of 1985 Sr. Lucy Schmidt appointed Sr. Barbara McMullen as the first Associate Director of the St. Louis Associate program. It was then her task, in addition to her full time teaching position, to get candidates for the program, develop and do orientation sessions with them, and help them to prepare the ceremony of their acceptance as CDP Associates. Sister Barbara remained the Director of Associates from 1985-2007 when she was elected to the Provincial Council.

The people who were Associate co-directors, secretaries, and treasurers over the years and assisted Sr. Barbara were: Maggie Jost, Mary Hassler, Beverly Camper, Jan Foster, Rosemary Davison, Diane Bailey, Linda Hoefflin, Cathy Cullen, Pat Alsop, Gil Weyhaupt, Colleen Price, and Cathy Cassy.

The first group of ten Associates was received in November, 1986. The ceremony was a simple prayer service with a theme, chosen readings and songs, a covenant statement signed by the Associate and a remembrance symbol that coordinated with their theme was given to each, along with a candle with their name, year of reception and corporate commitment of the community on it.

Those first ten Associates received in the Mount Providence Chapel in 1986 were: Diane Bailey, Virginia Becker, Sharon Dougherty, John Friedel, Maggie Jost, Frank Koebler, Mary Mayo, Norma Saller, Terry Southerland and Eileen Wischmeier. The theme of their ceremony was: "Called to be a Healing Presence of Hope and Love for the Transformation of the World." Each year since, the St. Louis Associates have received an average of four Associates per year.

From 1986 and each year after, Associates were received in November until the year 2000, when the program was shifted to have the reception and renewal ceremony in late August. It remains on the last Sunday of August.

Over these years there have been several revisions to the handbook, changes to the orientation sessions, and the involvement and participation of the Associates continued to evolve.

In the beginning years, between 1986-1990 Associates usually participated with the Sisters in community functions such as Jubilees, professions, retreat/reflection days and parties. In addition to community events they also began to have their own business meetings and sponsored two parties annually for the Sisters.

From 1990 on, as the Associates grew in number, they also grew in participation and involvement with the community. During these years they often served on community committees, participated in local assemblies, and by 1995 even served as chair of some Chapter committees. While they had no elected voice in the chapter, and were not present for the financial parts of meetings, they were able to participate in the discussions and be part of the consensus gathering of opinions at the open Chapter meetings.

During the years between 1990 and 2001 the Associates were integral in the life of the community in St. Louis and helped the Sisters in many ways. During this same time it became possible for some Sisters and Associates to also live in community together, a practice that still continues today. Sister Barbara McMullen began sharing a residence with Associate Beverly Camper and Sr. Cecilia Jansen began sharing residence with Associate Nancy Bookout. (Sr. Cecilia Jansen is now deceased.)

During these years the Associates began to sponsor two functions for the St. Louis



province: the Pink Pajama Party in February and the BBQ in May. These were parties where the Sisters and Associates often shared fun activities, stories, games and refreshments. Later these annual functions have come to be known as the Fall Turning Leaf party, and the Spring Fling.

Each year the Associates had an annual retreat day which was prepared and given by Sr. Barbara McMullen, CDP, Director. These topics varied and usually included opening prayer, input sessions, reflection/prayer time, sharing in small and large groups, a creative activity, and closing prayer. Sr. Barbara's last retreat with the Associates was in 2008. Mary Lou Bennett, a Catholic lay woman, presented the 2009 retreat day.

Another activity sponsored by the Associates is the Ongoing Education Day. This day usually has a topic of interest selected by the Associates and a speaker is engaged. The topics enjoyed by Associates and Sisters included: The Myers Briggs Personality Indicator, Understanding Your Type, The Enneagram, The Enneagram and Prayer Types, Understanding the Four Gospels, Spirituality and Me, Types of Prayer, Spirituality in Everyday Life, Justice in My Life as an Associate, and Liturgy and Liturgical Forms.



*Associate Pat Rampolla (right) led the 2008 education day on "Justice in My Life as an Associate."*

The Associates also participated in the community's local assemblies, sharing in ideas, input, discussion and ways to help the sponsored ministries. When the St. Louis province began sponsoring a homeless shelter and a refugee house in Texas, the Associates found ways to help. Many of them volunteered at the shelter, did mailings with and for the sponsored ministries and sent money and goods to the refugee house in Texas. In 1998 a small group of Associates and Sr. Barbara visited the refugee house, La Posada Providencia, in Texas, where they listened to the stories of people who had escaped the horrors of war and oppression in their countries.

In 1999 Sr. Barbara, two other Sisters, and nine Associates visited the Sisters in Germany, toured the historical and holy places of the foundation of the community, and met and shared with other "Associates" (Partners in Providence) in Germany. This pilgrimage was a wonderful experience for all those attending.

The three provinces in the United States had begun celebrations together in 1976, 1977 and 1978. In 1986 a Gathering was held in Pittsburgh and some of the St. Louis Associates attended. In 1997 a Convocation was held in Pittsburgh for the Sisters and Associates of the three provinces, specifically to discuss the possibility of coming together. After the Convocation, the Leadership Teams of each province began to meet about the possibility of a merger. It seemed the journey to come together for the sake of mission had begun.

In 2001 the St. Louis province, along with the Kingston and Pittsburgh provinces and the region of Puerto Rico decided to merge and become one US/Caribbean

province, the Marie de la Roche province. This, of course, was to have a great impact on the St. Louis Associates and the way they participated in community meetings and events with the Sisters. Over all the time, since the beginning in 1986, many close relationships were formed with the Sisters and participation with local community was a great value to the Associates.

In October, 2005, the St. Louis area Associates hosted the first gathering of Associates from across the province in order to try and become a more unified group. It was held at the Pallotine Retreat Center in Florissant, MO. It was a wonderful weekend of input, reflection, sharing, prayer, fun and sightseeing. Associates from Kingston, Puerto Rico, Pittsburgh, Michigan, and Ohio traveled to join in this momentous event. It was decided by those in attendance that it was a good way for the Associates from across the province to get to know one another better and so it was decided that in two years it would be hosted by the Pittsburgh Associates.



Another new development in the Associate relationship was the instituting of the Associate Providence Award in 2005. This award would be given annually at assembly to an Associate who in her or his life and ministry, makes Providence visible in our world. The criteria are: Manifests trust in Providence/Providence spirituality; Lives with a spirit of joy, hospitality and hopefulness and; Demonstrates justice by word and service to those in need. The award was not given in 2006 and 2007 due to Chapter and Leadership changes.



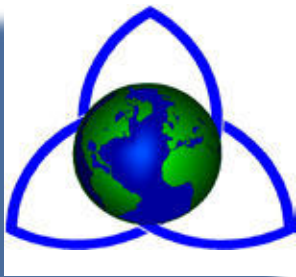
*The St. Louis Associates renewal, 2009.*

At the province's annual assembly in August, 2008, the second Associate Providence award was presented to Gil Weyhaupt from the St. Louis area. At the 2010 assembly, St. Louis Associate Linda Hoefflin received the Providence Award.

In November of 2006, the community held their Chapter of Elections and Sr. Barbara McMullen, Associate director of the St. Louis area, was elected Assistant Provincial of the Marie de la Roche province for a term of five years. This would necessitate a change of leadership within the St. Louis Associates. A new director would need to be appointed. Sr. Stephanie Turck was appointed the new Sister local coordinator to replace Sr. Barbara McMullen.

In October of 2007 there was another Associate Gathering held at Kearns Spirituality Center in Pittsburgh, PA, October 26-28, 2007. Again, Associates from the other geographic areas traveled to Pittsburgh to participate. It was again a wonderful time of sharing. One of the activities of the weekend was to do some futurizing for the Associate relationship. It was exciting to think of what could be in the future for Associates in the community.

The group of local coordinators, led by Linda Hoefflin, from the St. Louis group, talked about a new associate symbol for the united province. Linda worked on several designs, submitted them to the Associates, and by consensus, a choice for symbol was selected. Linda then worked with a jeweler to design and craft the associate symbol. It is a triquetra, a perfect representation of the "three-in-one" concept of the Trinity. Within the feminine version of the triangle is the planet Earth which we entrust to the care of Providence. For Associates then, the trefoil, like the triangle, is a traditional symbol for the Triune God we call Providence. God's Providence is made visible through acts of justice and compassion and through an inclusive, hospitable presence. Associates wear this symbol as a sign of their commitment to be God's Providence in the world.

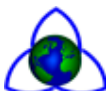


The acceptance of the associate relationship in 1985 at the provincial Chapter and the first reception of Associates in 1986 will bring the St. Louis Associates to their 25th anniversary years in 2010 and 2011. It has been a wonderful relationship over these years between the Sisters and Associates in this area of the province. Hopefully that relationship will continue to grow and deepen in the years to come.

### ***Puerto Rico***

In 1992, the Sisters of Divine Providence in Puerto Rico invited some friends and benefactors to come to the Convent in Arecibo for shared prayer. This group continued to gather monthly for about three years under the direction of Sister Robert Grzelak. It seemed that interest in the group was waning and the Sisters decided to discontinue the monthly sessions in 1995. Some of the group were disappointed and requested the renewal of the gatherings.

After much discussion and discernment, the Sisters made a new commitment in 1996 to invite friends and benefactors to a newly organized Family of Providence. Plans were made in March, 1996, to organize the group under the direction of Hermana Maria



Torres. Invitations were sent out September 29, 1996 for the first meeting for the new group. On September 6, 1998, the first group was initiated with 12 Associates.

The members of the Family of Providence are from different parts of the island. Some come a three hour distance, other less, but all are happy to be able to meet each month to accompany one another on this journey. They are people of different ages, marital status and educational backgrounds. The differences fade into insignificance. Each one has something to contribute and something to learn.



The Associates celebrate an annual Christmas Party in Arecibo, retreat weekends, and participate in an annual Peace Event organized by the Sisters. In 2009, the Christmas Party was held in the Arecibo Convent and hosted some members of the

Provincial Leadership team. The photo at left shows some of the fun!

On Sunday, September 28, 2003, the 22 Associates and the Sisters of Divine Providence gathered to participate in a beautiful Eucharistic Liturgy of Thanksgiving in Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Arecibo celebrated by Father Cesar Ramirez. The Associates and Sisters prepared the activity under the direction of Hermana Maria Torres. Following the Liturgy, all gathered in the convent for the initiation of two new Associates, Mirna Velez and Iris Reyes. A delicious Puerto Rican meal was prepared by the Festive Meal Committee to conclude the festivities. Hermana Carmen Gonzalez, a member of the Provincial Council at the time, congratulated the Associates on their anniversary and praised them for sharing the charism of the sisters of Divine Providence.

The Associates have participated in both Gatherings. Five Associates and three Sisters traveled to St. Louis in 2005 and four Associates and three Sisters participated in the Pittsburgh Gathering in 2007. Hermana Maria and Associate Mirna Velez attended the North American Conference of Associates and Religious (NACAR) convention in 2006.

In 2010, there are 20 active Associates. While the Associates are not actively involved in the ministries of the Sisters in Puerto Rico, they are supportive of the Sisters and participate when they are able. The annual Peace Event organized by the Sisters is an example of their participation.

### ***Associate Unification***

In February, 2000, the three province's Associate Directors met in Puerto Rico to determine how to bring the various former Associate programs together into one unified Associate program. Much work was done at the meeting and afterwards to look at the various handbooks, reception and renewal ceremonies, rituals, orientation sessions, and ways of involvement. That was presented to a Chapter Committee in 2001 but somehow nothing ever happened with that information at the time.

In 2006, at the next Provincial Chapter of the new province, the Associate directors were asked to re-examine the work done in 2000 and write some guidelines for a unified Associate program. Over the next year the area directors and co-directors met, studied the various elements of association, and together wrote what was titled, Guidelines for Associate Relationship. One of the changes made along the way was the realization that it is much more than a "program" or a "process." It is really a "relationship" and so now when we talk about Associates we speak of the "associate relationship."

It was during this year also that the directors and co-directors renamed the local directors "coordinators" and recommended to the Provincial Leadership Team that there be one associate director for the whole province. Upon recommendations by the local coordinators, Ellen Lavender was named the first lay Director of Associates of the Marie de la Roche province in January of 2008. She was hired part-time, 10 hours per week, and receives a stipend.



## Closing Prayer (Option One)

**Leader:** History belongs to the intercessors who believe a new world into being.

**Reader 1:** “To pray is to learn to believe in a transformation of self and world which seems empirically impossible.

**Reader 2:** What is unbelief but the despair, dictated by the dominant powers, that nothing can really change, a despair that renders revolutionary vision and practice impotent.

**Reader 3:** Faith entails political imagination, that ability to envision a world that is not dominated by the powers”  
C. Meyers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 1988

## Closing Prayer (Option Two)

### A prayer from the legacy of Mother Marie,

**All:** You, O God, are my patience and my strength,  
You are my light and my counselor.  
O my God, give me the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and fortitude,  
the Spirit of knowledge and of piety,  
and, the Spirit of a wholesome fear of God.

O my God, give me unwearying zeal,  
Gentleness and kindness of heart, and tireless patience.  
make me an instrument of your love.

Amen





# *Providence Theology*



*Providence is the caring, compassionate,  
luring presence of God in our lives.  
It is present in the chaos, in the best  
and in the worst of times.*

*Mary Joan Coultas, CDP*

# Opening Prayer

**Leader: We come together**

**All:** as companions on our providence journey, called to follow Christ on a way we do not know. We recall the words of our early Sisters and our Constitutions, "The Spirit of the community is the spirit of Jesus Christ, himself."

**Leader: We have gathered in this place**

**All:** for the Lord invites us to come and see...to learn renewed ways of intensifying the spirit of our being providence in our day.

**Leader: We have come as companions on the journey...as Inquirers to become Associates of the Sisters of Divine Providence.**

**All:** Come, Lord Jesus and meet us here. Come, God of Providence! Reveal to us your will for us in attempting to open our hearts to your call to us to be women (and men) of Providence, acutely sensitive to the needs of your people.

**Leader: Let us pause to be mindful of the presence of God as we gather for this meeting.** *(A candle may be lit at this time.)*

**Let us be mindful of the Divine Presence alive within each of us.**

*(As a sign of respect to the holy indwelling presence of our Provident God, bow to the presence of Christ with us...and to one another.)*

**Leader: Come, let us worship God.**

**All:** Let us lift our songs, our prayers, our praises.

**Leader: Come, let us give praise to our Provident God.**

**All:** Let us open our lives to all the ways God's providence is at work in our lives,

**Leader: Come, let us be open to being filled with the the Spirit of the Living God.**

**All:** Breath in us, Breath of God. *Song: Veni Sanctae Spiritus*

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, come fill our hearts. Surround us with your presence.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, move in us and through us. Draw us together as women (and men) of Providence.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Spirit, give us new eyes of faith, a new voice of hope and a new heart for loving and reaching out to others as you call out to us.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, open our arms that we may embrace your call to us to be Associates of the Sisters of Divine Providence.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, open our eyes to the possibilities surrounding us.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, guide us to new ways of creating a more just world.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears to your silent music.**

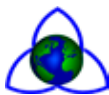
**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, enable us to become a visible presence of your gift of Providence.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.

**Leader: Come Holy Spirit, establish your new creation in us, so that God can be God in all.**

**All:** Sing one line of Veni Sanctae Spiritus.



# The Wonderful Providence of God

By Michele Bisbey, CDP, Ph.D.

*Pittsburgh Catholic*, August 10, 1990

For several weeks, I've been struggling with how to share with the readers of the *Pittsburgh Catholic* the meaning and dynamism of the charism, the special gift, which the Sisters of Divine Providence offers to the Church. Finally, I recalled a story. Stories are ordinarily meant to entertain, to delight, but in many cultures they are also meant to heal and to teach.

It all began in the summer of 1976 at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Divine Providence in Allison Park. Plans were in progress for the centennial celebration of the community's beginnings in the United States.

The original Sisters had come from Mainz, Germany, where they were founded by Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler and Mother Marie de la Roche. There was much excitement as the Sisters anticipated the arrival of community members from two additional provinces and from the missions in Puerto Rico.

Among the youngest members of the community there was a special kind of enthusiasm which surrounded a rumor of a gift that had been especially commissioned for the celebration by the Congregation's Generalate in Rome. It was an immense tapestry that had been many years in the weaving and had finally arrived from Rome. No one had seen it, except for Sister Charlotte and she wasn't talking.

It was hinted that the finished product would graphically capture the history of the community and its many significant women. There were those who said it should also sketch the hopes and dreams for the future of the community in the years following Vatican II. And, there was conjecture about the symbols and words that would express those visions.

One Sister was sure that no illustration would be complete without the saying, "Providence did provide. Providence will provide." Certainly that sense of trust was what the Sisters were all about. Still another was convinced that the community prayer, "We exalt Thy Providence, O Lord, and we submit to all its decrees," would concretely convey our submission and abandonment to God's will.

And, so the anticipation grew with each passing day. Until one evening a group of novices were sent to prepare the auditorium where the assembly was to meet the next morning.

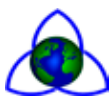
Completing their task, after turning off the lights, someone noticed a light shining out from under the stage curtains. As a novice ran to turn it off, dashing behind the stage curtains, she gasped at what she stumbled upon, before her was the tapestry. And, what a disappointment it was. She could discern none of the images or patterns she had come to expect. The texture was of an uneven quality. The colors were all wrong. The whole thing was nothing more than a mess of tangled knots and snarled strands.

In the hours that followed, she kept wondering what she should do. Maybe she should forewarn the provincial administration. Wouldn't they be embarrassed?

The next morning she was sitting in the crowd as the tapestry was revealed. The weaving before them was beyond anything anyone had imagined or hoped for. It was indeed a tapestry, beautifully executed in the most clever and minutest detail. She was stunned. How could it be? What happened to the hanging she had seen?

Later that day, still puzzled, she ran into Sister Charlotte. She stammered, "Sister Charlotte, how did it happen, when did it happen?" She confessed to her how she had seen the tapestry the night before. Sister Charlotte smiled and walked the novice behind the hanging. It was then that she realized that what she had seen was the verso side.

The gift that was given that day was much more than a lovely woven work of art and a comical story for the community archives. With the gift and the story came



the realization that all too frequently our vision is myopic. Sometimes we look too closely, seeing only strands and knots and snarled threads.

On life's loom, our days are stretched as separate threads. Some stained, some fair -- they are shuttled back and forth as the separate fibers are interlaced, woven in and out, under and through. Out of the individual filaments a fabric is woven. Out of the bits and pieces, a design is interwoven into the fabric to become an intricate part of the whole.

We are connected one to another in this tapestry that is still in the making. And, since it is still in the making, we must take care not to make the mistake that the novice did with the tapestry. The part is not the whole.

It seems that there is a distinct relationship between Providence spirituality and seeing. I wonder if that relationship is not articulated in the story just told. To name God "Providence" seems singularly appropriate in an age where the chaotic and irrational seem to prevail, in a time when we are concretely aware of the brokenness, the woundedness of our lives.

Providence spirituality is not Pollyanna spirituality. Providence spirituality cannot say, "God is in heaven; all's right with the world." Nor can it deny the realities of disorder, chaos, brokenness, alienation, and injustice. Providence spirituality calls us to see these realities, to name them, to wrestle with them, to know that there is meaning in the midst of what appears to be meaningless.

Because we, the Sisters of Divine Providence, have seen the meaning of our own chaos, in our broken heartedness, in our own disordered lives, we can give witness, and we can reveal the vision that we share. We witness to the reality that the God who weaves our lives is the Provident God. We eagerly anticipate that day when the whole tapestry of our lives might be unfolded before us and when we might exclaim with our foundress, "Visibly do I see in all things the wonderful Providence of God."

### Reflection Questions

The charism of the Sisters of Divine Providence is "trust in and openness to the Providence of God." Recall a situation when you or another witnessed this charism.

Sister Michele said that sometimes "our vision is myopic." In retrospect, we may recognize that the part is not the whole. How did you feel when you were able to expand your interpretation of an event?

We are connected one to another in the tapestry of life. Reflect about a time when you felt connected to a significant other, to a Sister of Divine Providence, to another human being, to God.

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## Providence Spirituality and the Earth

By Barbara Doherty, S.P.

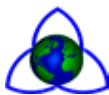
*A Spirituality Named Providence from the  
Proceedings of Women of Providence, March 1991*

Because the classic understanding of Providence has to do with the design and governance of the universe, it seems appropriate that we examine, in light of a Providence spirituality, the growing concern in many persons for our planet.

One of the beatitudes of Jesus which takes on new significance is they that who are meek shall inherit the earth.

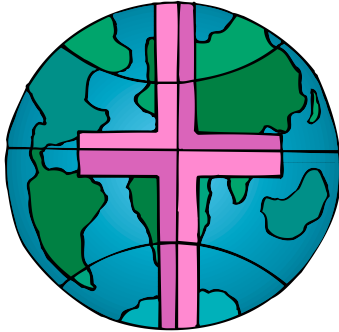
Matthew recalls this teaching of Jesus as a blessing of the homeless, landless, and poor, or the *anawim*, the ones who know their need of the God who saves. Their blessing is to be land. They, in their powerlessness, shall be the inheritors of the earth.

Their God will give them land, whether in actuality or within themselves as



they come upon the expanses of an internal terrain which is home and which is, indeed, a promised land. Is there a way in which we can identify providence persons as the meek and make another identification of a spirituality based on a theology of Providence?

To make an identification between a Providence spirituality and this particular beatitude necessitates the use of an accommodated sense of this scripture. With some reluctance, yet with the classic definition of Providence and with the present concern regarding the destruction of the planet in mind, it seems useful to identify



Providence persons as particularly designated to be the caretakers of the earth.

In their capability as non-aggressors, in terms of verbally asserting Providence in every event of reality, and in their quiet, sometimes pain-filled surrender to reality, it seems they might be characterized as the meek.

This naming would mean that they are the persons who know their need for the God who saves. They feel, perhaps, that turning human choices around in terms of saving our planet is outside of human capability. In their participation in the ordering and governance of earth with the God who saves

lives the only hope for the salvation of the earth, not only in a spiritual, but also in a material sense.

“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” might then come to be a blessing for those who undertake the studies and the activities of ecology and socio-ecology, so as to turnaround the baneful directions we destroyers of the earth have chosen for many centuries.

This effort is of great magnitude and could only be undertaken by those who believe in the power of the God who saves and who recognizes their call to participate in the governance and the ordering of the universe in ways about which the Greek philosophers did not speculate.

The world, in its moments of history, gives shape and determination to the gospel. And, the gospel as articulated in each milieu by the assembly, illuminates the world.

The moment now is the moment of confronting the destruction of the planet. To take the gospel teaching regarding a particular blessing of the meek, the non-aggressors (because of their utter powerlessness in their society) and to suggest that Providence persons, powerless in themselves but participants in divine governance of the earth, can be the new inheritors of the earth, seems a legitimate accommodation of the text.

In this way, the gospel again sheds light in our world and illuminates our paths in order that we might clarify to others the teachings of Jesus and their relevance for the Eucharistic assembly these many centuries later.

## Reflection Questions

This article was first presented to Providence Women in March 1991. The presenter urged a new vision of human participation in the governance of the earth.

Does it seem to you that it took “a long time” for most of us to hear and implement this message?

How has the media’s concept of “going green” been a factor?

One of the Directional Statements of the Provincial Chapter of 2006 was: “We will educate ourselves about ecological economics; i.e., the impact of our living on all creation. We commit ourselves, personally and communally, to seek and implement creative ways to enhance the sustainability of the planet.”

How has the Congregation implemented this goal?

How have you personally done so?



# Obedience

By Michele Bisbey, CDP, PhD

As we approach the dawn of the Third Millennium, it becomes clear that we are faced with compelling and urgent needs. The weight of the world's anguish presses heavily upon us as we attempt to find ways to make God's providence visible. A concept that demands our attention is the relationship between God's providence and the human experience, between God's providence and human responsibility.

The Hebrew Scriptures narrate a story of liberation and power that sounds all too contemporary. Power is what the Exodus is all about: political power, oppressive power, and religious power. Pharaoh is high priest and king of Egypt, the recognized authority. He is characterized as shrewd and deliberate. The Hebrews are an oppressed people under the command of Pharaoh. Ironically, because of the strength of their numbers, they are feared by the Egyptian oppressor who has a plan for their extermination. As the story of the Pharaoh's attempt to annihilate the Hebrews unfolds, it becomes clear that the actual purpose of the narrative is to dramatize the conflict between the providential plan of God and the plan of Pharaoh.

The two plans are in obvious conflict. Plainly, Pharaoh's plans are foiled at every turn. Significantly, God takes no active, visible, or intervening role in defeating Pharaoh. God doesn't have to play the domineering aggressor in order to conquer the oppressor. Notwithstanding the Egyptian ruler's wealth, resources, and power, he is nonetheless undone by his own tyrannical and oppressive antics.

Set within this story is the humorous legend of the midwives (1:15-22). At first reading, this excerpt may seem to be an insignificant fragment, a mere prelude to the grander story of the rescue of the heroic Moses, but theologically, the role of the midwives is of paramount importance. Hidden within the liberation narration is the account of a pair of women who provide some fascinating insights about the relationship of power, responsibility, collaboration, and Providence. Their story is recounted in the first chapter of the Book of Exodus: 15

"Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah. 16 'When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool; if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.' 17 But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the male children live. 18 So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them: 'Why have you done this and let the male children live?' 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous; and before the midwife reaches them, they have given birth.' 20 And God dealt favorably with the midwives and the people multiplied and increased greatly. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he established houses for them."

In its largest context, this periscope is part of a unit found in the prologue to the Exodus. The centerpiece of the prologue is concerned with the issue of Egyptian oppression and economic exploitation. Furthermore, it sets the stage for the birth of Moses, who will be instrumental in the deliverance from that oppression. This section recounts three unsuccessful attempts commanded by the pharaoh to impede the growth of the Hebrew population. Of these three schemes, two are thwarted by the defiance of women. The sly disobedience of the midwives is prelude to the boldness of Moses' mother and his sister, Miriam, who hide the child in the bulrushes. This is followed by the seeming disregard of the pharaoh's own daughter, who finds the child and raises him as her own son. The midwives' fear of God, the ingenuity of Moses' mother, the keen practical judgment of his sister, and the pity of the Egyptian princess all combine to defeat the intentions of the pharaoh.

Midwifery in Egypt was one of the few professions open to women. As practitioners, they seem to have been held in high esteem. As an index of the importance of their actions in this Scriptural setting, they are mentioned no less than seven times within the brief span of six verses.



Notably, the midwives are accorded proper names--Puah and Shiphrah, whereas, by contrast, the name of the reigning monarch, a demi-god, is to this day the subject of dispute and scholarly conjecture. In this way, the Biblical narrator's scale of values is expressed. A concern for life outweighs civil duty. The midwives' sole and untested motive for disobeying Pharaoh's directive remains "fear of God." The women fear God, not Pharaoh. The midwives remain lifegivers, not life-takers. Their defiance takes the form of active noncompliance. The Exodus event begins with an act of disobedience to oppressive authority. Thus, we have perhaps the first act of civil disobedience in recorded history. The midwives' fear of God proved to have a vital role in the history of the chosen people and God later gave expression and tangible confirmation that their option for life was the correct choice.

Surprisingly, the midwives succeeded in disobeying Pharaoh without incurring punishment. They outsmarted one who was regarded as the divine ruler of one of the wisest nations on earth. They outwitted one who had proposed to "deal shrewdly" (1:10). The midwives work together to deceive oppressive power, save the children, and use their energy to help a people survive. The present form of the story evidences high enjoyment of sophisticated Egypt's embarrassment. What began as a story about death, becomes a story about life. And in the end, even the midwives have families. The text states that "because the midwives feared God, God established houses for them" (1:22). A suggested interpretation of this verse is that God elevated them to the headship of their fathers' houses. It would seem that the divine blessing affords the women honor and progeny in the present situation, and remembrance throughout future generations--"as long as the story is told."

An integral issue in the discussion of responsibility in the Hebrew and the Christian Scripture is the concept of power. The Christian Scriptures give ample evidence that Jesus' primary concern with power was to "empower the powerless." The sisters, Martha and Mary, offer a fascinating portrayal of women empowered by Jesus. In them, we have the prototype for a discipleship of equals.

Martha and Mary were sisters who lived with their brother Lazarus in Bethany, a village outside Jerusalem. The Gospels record three separate occasions when Jesus was a guest in their home. In the most familiar scene (Luke 10:38-42), Martha is occupied with the tasks of hospitality, while Mary chooses to sit and listen to Jesus' teaching. This story indicates that Jesus had two women friends. He was a guest in their home. The women, for their part, were interested in what he had to say. Martha may be representative of a typical female figure in Luke-Acts. She is one of a number of relatively well off and independent women who keep their own house and place it at the disposition of the community or of itinerant preachers. Mary, is described as one who charts her own course, choosing to disregard religious propriety, she sits at the feet of the Teacher. Jesus not only allowed Mary to set her own priorities; he applauded her choice, making it abundantly clear that women were called to the intellectual and the spiritual life.

The portrait of the sisters is more fully sketched in John 11:1-44.

1 Now there was a man named Lazarus who was sick; he was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 This Mary whose brother Lazarus was sick was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and dried his feet with her hair. 3 So the sisters sent to inform Jesus, "Lord, the one whom you love is sick." 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This sickness is not to end in death; rather it is for God's glory, that the Son [of God] may be glorified through it." 5 Yet Jesus really loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 And so, even when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was two days longer. 7 Then, at last, Jesus said to the disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." 8 "Rabbi," protested the disciples, "the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and you are going back up there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? If a man goes walking by day, he does not stumble because he can see the light of this world. 10 But



if he goes walking at night, he will stumble because he has no light in him." 11 He made this remark, and then, later, he told them, "Our beloved Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up." 12 At this the disciples objected, "If he has fallen asleep, Lord, his life will be saved." 13 (Jesus had really been talking about Lazarus' death, but they thought he was talking about sleep in the sense of slumber.) 14 So finally Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am happy for your sake that I was not there so that you may come to have faith. In any event, let us go to him." 16 Then Thomas (this name means "Twin") said to his fellow disciples, "Let us go too that we may die with him." 17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had [already] been four days in the tomb. 18 Now Bethany was not far from Jerusalem, just under two miles; 19 and many of the Jews had come out to offer sympathy to Martha and Mary because of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary sat quietly at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died. 22 Even now, I am sure that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." 23 "Your brother will rise again," Jesus assured her. 24 "I know he will rise again," Martha replied, "in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection [and the life]: he who believes in me, even if he dies, will come to life 26 And everyone who is alive and believes in me shall never die at all. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she replied. "I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, he who is to come into the world." 28 Now when she had said this, she went off and called her sister Mary. "The Teacher is here and calls for you," she whispered. 29 As soon as Mary heard this, she got up quickly and started out toward him. (30 Actually Jesus had not yet come into the village but was [still] at the spot where Martha had met him.) 31 The Jews who were in the house with Mary, consoling her, saw her get up quickly and go out; and so they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died." 33 Now when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had accompanied her also weeping, he shuddered, moved with the deepest emotions. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Lord, come and see," they told him. 35 Jesus began to cry, 36 and this caused the Jews to remark, "See how much he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "He opened the eyes of that blind man. Couldn't he also have done something to stop this man from dying?" 38 With this again arousing his emotions, Jesus came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across it. 39 "Take away the stone," Jesus ordered. Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, it is four days; by now there must be a stench." Jesus replied, "Didn't I assure you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you because you heard me. 42 Of course, I knew that you always hear me, but I say it because of the crowd standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 Having said this, he shouted in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, bound hand and foot with linen strips and his face wrapped in a cloth. "Untie him," Jesus told them, and let him go."

One usually thinks of this passage as the raising of Lazarus, but Jesus' raising of Lazarus actually occupies a very small part of the story. Of the forty-four verses that constitute this story only seven of them take place at Lazarus' tomb (38-44). The miracle of the raising of Lazarus is the climax of the story, but it is not its center. The story centers on the conversations Jesus has as he travels to Lazarus' tomb. These conversations help the reader/hearer to see that the raising of Lazarus is not a freak act of nature, but a demonstration of God's power for life. Jesus' main conversation





partners as he travels to Lazarus' tomb are Mary and Martha. The sisters take the initiative in this story.

The conversation between Martha and Jesus is the theological heart of the story. Martha expresses complaint and confidence. In the context of this conversation Jesus declared himself to be the resurrection, the only time such a pronouncement is recorded in the Gospels. According to this evangelist, Jesus revealed the central event of the Gospel to a woman!

It is of no small consequence, that for her part, Martha publicly confesses Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Without a doubt, Martha represents the full apostolic faith of the Johannine community, just as Peter does for the Matthean community. She is responsible for the primary articulation of the community's christological faith. Her belief is prior to the accomplishment of the sign. Her willingness to base her faith on Jesus' words implies that she is indeed one of the blessed.

Jesus' conversations with Mary and Martha transform this story from a miracle story about the raising of Lazarus into a story about the fullness of new life that is possible to all who believe in Jesus. The initiative of these two women in sending for Jesus, their bold and robust faith, and their unfaltering love for Jesus are marks of the life of faith.

Martha and Mary model how people are to live as they struggle to free themselves from the power of death that defines and limits them and move to embrace the new promises and possibilities of life available through Jesus.

In John 12:1-8, it is the same Mary of Bethany who anoints Jesus.

1 Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the village of Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave him a dinner at which Martha served and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. 3 Mary brought in a pound of expensive perfume made from real nard and anointed Jesus' feet. Then she dried his feet with her hair, while the fragrance of the perfume filled the house. 4 Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was going to hand him over), protested, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold? It was worth three hundred silver pieces, and the money might have been given to the poor." (6 It was not because he was concerned for the poor that he said this, but because he was a thief. He held the moneybox and could help himself to what was put in.) 7 To this Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. The purpose was that she might keep it for the day of my embalming. [8 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.]"

This anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary is an act of sheer extravagance, underscored by the comment that the house was filled with the fragrance of perfume. Mary has anointed Jesus so lavishly that all present can participate in it. Judas protests the anointing, but his protest does not diminish Mary's act. Rather, it reaffirms the extravagance of her gesture; she has spent almost a year's wages for Jesus. The centrality of Judas in this scene, and in the foot washing scene that follows, emphasizes an evangelistic intention to portray the true disciple, Mary of Bethany, as counterpart to the unfaithful disciple, Judas Iscariot.

Perhaps no religious concept has been so abused as that of Providence. In the past, God's will has been invoked to sanction colonial conquest, racism, the gross exploitation of the poor, shameless abuse of political and even ecclesiastical power. The poor, the oppressed, have been tendered a fatalistic piety which has taught them to accept their positions and their suffering as the will of God. At the same time, those in power have justified their oppression by the belief that they were the agents of God in their conquest. The story of the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, and the example of Martha and Mary of Bethany, thwart both of these views.

In the midwives' refusal to cooperate with oppression, the liberation from Egyptian bondage had its genesis. The passage is fundamental in that it highlights the key role women played in God's providential plan of deliverance. Throughout the passage's centerpiece there is a positive portrayal of women. Consistently, the women respond with resourcefulness and ingenuity. They are characterized as individuals



who behave according to the dictates of conscience and with compassion. Without exception, and ignoring the pharaoh's command, they make choices for life, not death. It is in the women's refusal to accommodate themselves to those in power, to the whims of the oppressor that the cries of bondage begin to give way to the birth pangs of liberation.

In like fashion, Mary and Martha of Bethany played central roles in Jesus' life and served as models of faith and love, which were chief characteristics of discipleship in the early Christian community. The passages from John's gospel that feature Mary and Martha show them playing key roles and compel us to take them seriously, both as characters and as vehicles for John's theology. Martha's confession and Mary's anointing certify their discipleship. That they hosted dinner for Jesus, at which his inner circle was present, implies that the sisters, or women like them, were also part of, or close to, this inner circle. Mary and Martha serve as illustrations of Jesus' empowerment of women, an empowerment, which stretched the prescribed limits and boundaries of religion and culture. Is it not time for us to claim our birthright and become worthy of our foremothers? How else in our day shall we, and all those who suffer oppression, know the birth pangs of liberation? God's Providence will only be made visible in the Third Millennium if we take the inherent risks and refuse to accommodate ourselves to the whims and caprices of oppressive, political, religious, and ecclesial power.

### **A Caveat**

Over the years, people have asked for copies of my various talks and homiletic "reflections." I've hesitated to put them into print for several reasons. Chief among those reasons is rooted in my background as an English major and the accusation of plagiarism. Unlike papers that I've written for peer and scholarly review, where I've been very careful to note my sources, the talks that I've prepared infrequently reference their sources—which are many. I've found that my process in preparing a talk is akin to the process I use in cooking, where I consult many recipes in books and online and borrowing a hint from one, an ingredient from another, I concoct what feels satisfying to me and those who will join with me at the table.

The process that I typically follow when preparing any kind of oral presentation, especially for worship, involves reading the scripture, reflecting upon it, consulting various commentaries, jotting notes, reading other sermons or homilies in print and online, highlighting relevant passages, reading the blogs of other women theologians and preachers, then letting it all percolate for a time. In between times, I return to old journal entries, story collections and only then do I sit down to compose—drawing upon a combination of many others' words, thoughts, ideas, stories, and illustrations and weaving them together for my intended audience. Since most of what I present is intended for the Divine Providence community, I'm always concerned about viewing my topic through the lens of Providence spirituality. That is what I consider my original contribution to these writings. -- Michele Bisbey, CDP

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# Making God's Providence Visible Through Our Giftedness

By Ellen Rufft, CDP, Ph.D

Marie de la Roche Assembly, August 2003

There is an ancient Yiddish word which describes how one feels when someone she loves achieves success in an important endeavor. The word is "kvell." To kvell is to vibrate with pride and joy. Parents kvell at the graduation ceremonies of their children; loved ones kvell when one of the family members receives an honor. Kvelling is about sheer happiness. As a Jewish friend explained to me, "In kvelling, there is no negative. It is uncomplicated joy!"

Perhaps our first task as Providence people is to kvell. We ought to be professional kvellers, vibrating with wonder and gratitude at the greatest gift we have been given, the grace to know the God of compassion.

We are God's loved ones, God's family. We need to kvell daily at God's success -- at the wonders of creation, at God's indiscriminate graciousness toward every creature in every time on every planet, at God's seeming inability to give up on anyone. The reasons for kvelling in the presence of the God of compassion are endless for those who are in love.

And, we are called to do more than kvell the One we love. We are called to imitate the kind of compassion that characterizes our God. It is a compassion that excludes no one. It stretches to encompass the oppressors and the oppressed.

We are called to give the gift of compassion to those who are poor, oppressed, or vulnerable, but we have also committed ourselves through our mission statement to be compassionate to those who batter women and children, to the tortured and the torturer, the abused and the abuser, to the Sister or Associate who is judged and criticized and to the one who criticizes. To imitate the compassion of God trusts us beyond all human descriptors of one another which divide us toward a love that embraces all created beings.

It is, of course, no easy task to use our individual and combined gifts to make God's Providence more visible in our world. Many challenges face us as we commit to kvelling God's compassion, as well as to imitating it.

We have been invited and encouraged to be attentive to the needs of the time and to respond to them through our ministries from our foundation days, as well as through the many General and Provincial Chapters after them. Sr. De la Salle's opening remarks at the 1985 General Chapter are as appropriate today as they were then.

"We live," she said, "in a world of ambiguities. On the one hand, there is rank materialism, godlessness, intellectual pride, contempt for life, political and moral corruption, on the other is increasingly convincing signs of the action of the Holy Spirit. It is in the context of this world that we must determine the authenticity of our choices in response to the Gospel mandate to bring the Good News to the poor, to manifest God's love to all whom we encounter."

We, too, live in a world of ambiguities. We are bombarded daily with news of violence, wars, and terrorism. We are inundated with enticements to buy, to own, to have more and better. We are programmed toward individualism and competition; perhaps the greatest American sin is to be a loser.

We live in a country in which 41 million people have no health care; where almost 2 million people are in prison, 42% of them African American; a nation where more than a billion dollars is spent on weapons every day. We live in a world of massive poverty, racism, and environmental degradation in which 1.2 billion people have no access to safe drinking water.

On the other hand, technology has connected people to information and to one another in ways barely imagined even a decade ago. Advances in medicine have contributed immeasurably to the health and longevity of millions of people. The new cosmology, ecology, and multi-cultural awareness have increased our understanding of the interconnectedness of all creatures. With Sr. De la Salle, we can truly say, this



is the world to which we must bring the Good News of God's Providential care.

Perhaps the contemporary poet, David Whyte describes our age the best.

He writes:

This is not the age of information.

This is not the age of information.

Forget the news, and the radio  
and the blurred screen.

This is the time of loaves and fishes.

People are hungry, and one good word  
is bread for a thousand.

## Reflection Questions

Kvelling is about sheer happiness.

When in your life did you "kvell" on another's behalf?

What emotion did you experience?

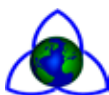
When have you experienced being kvelled?

As Providence people, we ought to be professional kvellers.

At work, what would kvelling look like in relating to others?

If you were God, how would you arrange the world regarding suffering?

As it is? With only bad people suffering? Some other way?



## Closing Prayer

**Side 1:** To be Providence is to turn our lives over to Providence, to rely on the God of Providence whose face is ever turned toward us.

**Side 2:** To be Providence in our world is to take utterly seriously the gift of freedom which we have. It is to choose, consciously and deliberately, to make a difference.

**Side 1:** To be Providence to the world is a call to engage actively in bringing about the transformation of the world.

**Side 2:** To become Providence to our world requires of us an active, creative participation and interdependence with a community of believers.

**Side 1:** To be Providence today is to walk together with a community of believers who support and challenge us in our endeavors to become clear-sighted and single-hearted in the task of bringing about the Kingdom.

**Side 2:** To be Providence in our world is to heed the call to be a people of radical Christian hope.

**Side 1:** To be Providence is to realize that all we are and all that we do belongs to a sacramental world.

**Side 2:** To be Providence is to rely no longer on our own strengths and accomplishments, but on the God of Providence who calls us to make a difference in our world.

**Side 1:** To be Providence is to have the courage to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters against the forces of evil, injustice and oppression.

**Side 2:** To be Providence in our world is to travel with lighthearted abandon, unencumbered, non-possessive, trusting deeply and unfalteringly in the God of Providence who judges, yet never abandons us.

**Side 1:** To be Providence is to prepare for the journey, to be one who sees ahead and makes wise provisions, knowing what is needed for the journey and what must be left behind.

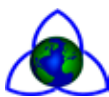
**Side 2:** To be Providence is to be sensitive to the needs of people and times, rooted in tradition and open to change, one who knows the need for roots and wings.

**Side 1:** To be Providence is to seek first the Kingdom of God.

**Side 2:** To be Providence is to accept the challenge to make a difference.

**Amen**

*(Adapted from "Impelled to Make a Difference: Providence, Conversion and Christian Hope" by Marie McCarthy, S.P.)*



*Charism of the  
Sisters of Divine  
Providence*



*Charism of the Sisters of Divine Providence*

# Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Prayer for Guidance

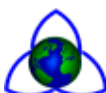
**Reader 1:** Trusted Guide, you are my Mentor, my Inspiration,  
My Home of good choices and decisions.  
You help me search with confidence  
as I find my way to inner peace.

**Reader 2:** Please gather your wisdom around me.  
Guide me carefully as I make choices about  
how to use my energy positively.  
Place your discerning touch on my mind  
so that I will think clearly.  
Place your loving fingers on my heart  
so I will be more fully attentive to what is really of value.

**Reader 3:** Teach me how to hear your voice,  
to be aware of what is in my mind and heart,  
to attend to your wisdom in those around me,  
to acknowledge my intuitions and ponder my dreams,  
to listen to the earth and all of life,  
for in each piece of my existence you are guiding me.

**Readers 4:** Guide of my life,  
thank you for all you have given to me.  
Reveal my spiritual path  
and direct me in the living of it.  
Lead me to inner peace and oneness with you.

(From *Prayers to Sophia* by Joyce Rupp)



# Charism

Excerpts from a presentation by Myra Rodgers, CDP

The dynamism of a religious community is what is known as charism. To come to a deeper understanding of who we are as a congregation and what makes one congregation different from another congregation, we need to do a little theologizing on the word “Charism.”

Sometimes a religious community “rests” in the words: “Our charism is...” but become lax in unpacking that word in this historical time and place, and in the personal lives of the sisters and associates.

This discussion of charism will focus on four parts:

1. The theological meaning of the word charism,
2. Four significant moments in a response to a charism,
3. Challenges for this religious community today, and
4. Some questions to ponder.

## **The theological meaning of the word charism**

There are many meanings to the word charism. But, the Church uses the word in its strict theological and traditional sense as written by St. Paul in I Corinthians 12:4-7. “There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.” (The Jerusalem Bible) Thus Charism, as used here is the theological term for the grace, the “gift of the Spirit,” which is given to an individual or to a group for the sake of others.

Some gifts are given and in the very gifting are intended for others through the person who receives: Gratia gratis data - grace freely given to the person for others. This is what Paul meant in I Corinthians -- gifts given for others. Thomas Aquinas saw this grace as theologically different from grace which is immediately intended to make the person receiving the grace holier: “Gratis gratum faciens.” Or, what we used to call, satisfying grace.

Thus, charism as it is used today by the Church when it speaks about the charism of a religious community, uses the meaning of a grace freely given to a person or a group for others. This definition may lead one to ask, does everyone have a charism? Yes, everyone is gifted at baptism with gifts for the mission of Jesus.

Vatican II also makes it very clear that by our baptism, we have all been gifted by the Holy Spirit and by that gifting we are conscripted, if you will, to join Jesus in His mission to announce the time of God’s favor, the coming of the reign of God.

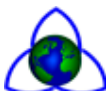
God entrusted his mission to us, the church. And, through these gifts which we received, we must proclaim in word and deed the good news of God’s coming among us in Jesus Christ through the gift of the Spirit. This mission is so central to the words and work of Jesus, that Vatican II affirmed and emphasized that MISSION defines the church and that even Eucharist exists for MISSION. The Church, in every dimension of its life and practice, exists for mission: to proclaim in word and deed the reign of God to people in every culture, time and place. But, this session will look at the charism of a religious congregation, specifically the Sisters of Divine Providence.

So, you may ask, what makes a charism of a religious community or the founders of a religious community so different and so important to the world?

## **Four significant moments in a response to a charism**

There are four basic, but very significant, moments when one receives the “gift” of a charism to religious life -- this grace freely given for others:

1. A call,
2. A resonance,
3. An acceptance, and
4. A willingness to develop that call through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.





**A Call:** In the case of our founders, William Emmanuel von Ketteler and Marie de la Roche, the call was a deep passion that burned in their hearts and drove them to look for answers and to take action to address the needs of their time.

The call, perhaps, was not something they could explain. What would make Bishop Ketteler give up his good life, his status as a lawyer, even his reputation, to take on the cause of the working person? What would make Fanny de la Roche risk losing her relationship with her family, her title, her French background, her religion, to join a group of German peasant women who had come together to answer a need in a poor section of the great city of Mainz?

It was a dynamic spirit which moved them to transcend their own needs and comfort, and to reach out to meet the difficulties of their age. It impelled them to do something new and compelled them to believe in the possibility of change. The urgency which they felt in their souls grew out of a love for the age in which they lived and a faith in the people and in their historical time, coupled with a belief that God was in this place and that things could change.

These Ketteler words are often quoted by us, “I love the age in which I live for its mighty wrestling with sublime ideas no matter how far we are from attaining them.” Thus the call found a resonance in the heart and soul of Emmanuel von Ketteler and Marie de la Roche. Through these two people, the Holy Spirit broke through and opened doors and windows of new possibility in 1851 in Mainz-Finthen, Germany. God found two people who would proclaim in word and deed the good news of God’s coming among us.

We call this charism, foundational charism. It is the dynamic movement in the heart of two people who faced their times and believed that things could be different and who, through their own example, not necessarily their words, drew others to join them. Thus, the foundational charism of Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie, which burned in their souls, was a call to new ways of being the testimony of the Gospel, a living presence. They became a living sign in their historical time.

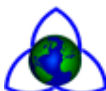
It was not the need for teaching and nursing, two of the works they began, which drew them, but they were grasped by the Spirit, filled with the Word, immersed in God’s will, determined to make God present to the people of Mainz-Finthen, to proclaim to the poorest of the poor that they were, indeed, dear to the heart of their God and that help and hope were on the way. They were led by the Spirit beyond themselves to become what they searched for: God – the humble, just God, the God of compassion, the Provident God, the Presence of the Spirit, the gift of love, light and truth in their historical moment.

We speak about these two faithful souls with a passion, almost making it sound as if they always had it together, but when we read about their lives, we can see in them their humanness, their trepidation and fear. In Ketteler’s own words, “God leads me! God chooses the weak and these uphold me and strengthen me!” But, we are also aware of their ability to listen to their souls and risk all for something they believed.

Like Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie, the call to which the members of this Congregation responded also transcended reason. We were called to a journey of the heart to something beyond explanation. It was an attraction to more than the work, it was a response to the magnet which was the God of Providence to become the face of God’s Providence, to be the Providence of God for others in our historical time and place.

This grace of charism which sisters and associates respond to is not a call to the same ministries that Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie began for the people of that time, but a call to love our times with an honesty and passion that would issue forth in a determination to meet the difficulties of our age and dare to do something different, to believe and work for change.

**A resonance:** But, what good is a call if there is no resonance to the grace, the charism, in the heart of the one called. The resonance was beyond words which



drew us to this congregation, not the Franciscans, nor any other community. It was an attraction to continue to enter into the mind, heart and will of the Provident God so that others could be drawn to see the Providence of God through each of us. We probably could not articulate this resonance in the words above, for many of us were drawn to the ministry of the community. But many communities do the same ministry, so why this community? Because deep down the resonance was to the charism.

If the resonance is missing, the living of religious life could become a strict adherence to law and an unhappy expression of life, not a testimony to the Gospel. If the resonance is missing, the response of an associate or vowed member could be solely for her or his own “perfection,” forgetting that to affiliate oneself with a charism of a congregation carries with it the responsibility to commit one’s gifts and self to the mission of that congregation, to summon one’s energies to proclaim the reign of God through the particular focus of the congregation. In this case, to strive daily, in every circumstance in which one finds one’s self to be the face of God’s Providence.

**An acceptance:** The call must be accepted and appreciated for what it truly is – not a call to the works, but a call to the mission of Jesus to be the heart of God in the center of the universe and the justice of God in human misery. It is much more than just doing the work or giving the sign, it is a call to be the sign.

**A willingness to develop that call through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ:**

The development of the call through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and in community must be rooted in the Divine, moved by the Spirit not the law, rooted in the Gospel, and impregnated with mystery. The criteria and norms by which we live must transcend personal achievement, personal security and public appreciation. If we understand our life as filled with and flowing from the charism, then our commitment to a religious congregation will be life-giving and filled with endless possibility.

God meets us where we are. But, finding ourselves where we are is always the hardest part. For that we need others. As each person brings the gift of her or his personality, talents, etc., to a charism, the charism continues to deepen, expand, and come alive.

Each member of the Congregation and each associate who is committed to living a Providence life will contribute to the development and expansion of the charism and mission of this Congregation. We may not do the same ministries as were done by the early community, but Bishop Ketteler’s fearless defense of the poor and Mother Marie’s faithful searching will be the heart and soul of this community and the guiding light of each vowed member and associate. Thus, we commit ourselves to developing a personal, adult relationship with Jesus, with the members of the community and will all persons with whom we contact.

**Challenges for this religious community today**

In the exhortation to members of religious congregations, “*Vita Consecrata*,” Pope John Paul II calls consecrated people to extend the horizon of their interpretation of their own charism so that the charism may inhabit this historical period and thus be able to listen to the needs and hopes of today’s world. This is fundamental, the Pope says, in order to bring healing and to minister in a spirit of compassion and hope.

In Article 73c, the Pope goes on to say that the new challenges and situations, the crises we face today, the many problems and urgencies at hand, demand an attentive reading of the charism in order to elaborate new projects and bring new evangelization to meet today’s situations in our world.

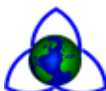
The model of religious life that we have inherited, although good, may not be enough if that model is still adhered to without relating it to this present reality. We are not doubting the model lived through the centuries, but if we have a history to build, John Paul states in Article 110a of *Vita Consecrata*, we need courage to return to what is essential – the fire that burned in Bishop Ketteler and Mother Marie.



We must have the courage to leave behind the encrusted cultural inlays of their time which are obsolete at present, and elaborate, with creative fidelity as Pope John Paul says, responses to the present challenges along with an analysis and understanding of our reality. The model we live may well be one of the old answers to old problems of another cultural system and century. The challenge is to make our charism dynamic and evident in the way we extend its horizon in our cultural context and respond giving evangelical witness.

**Some questions to ponder**

1. What is your understanding of the charism of the Sisters of Divine Providence.
2. How do you envision your own charism as a part of the gifts, growth and journey of the Sisters of Divine Providence? What will you share? What might you need from the Sisters? What new adventures of love, peace and justice might we undertake together?
3. Does our charism speak to the people of our time?
4. How can we as associates live the charism with more fire?
5. Are we personally living and articulating the charism, the fire of Bishop Ketteler and the faithful searching of Mother Marie?
6. What could you do to make your own Providence spirituality dynamic and robust?



## Closing Prayer

**All:** O Provident God, You, the highest and fiery power,  
have kindled every living spark;  
and, you have breathed out nothing that can die.

You flame above the beauty of the fields;  
You shine in the waters, in the sun,  
the moon and stars. You burn.  
And, by means of the airy wind,  
You stir everything into quickness  
with a certain invisible life which sustains all.

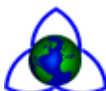
You, the fiery power,  
lie hidden in these things  
and, they blaze from You.

O Provident God, visit us with that same fiery power  
and make us living sparks.

Come, O Provident God, come!

(Prayer adapted from Hildegard of Bingen)

***Note: Additional articles  
on Providence are in  
the section on Other Resources.***





*Partners  
Radiating  
Mission*



*Partners Radiating Mission*

# Opening Prayer

**Reader:** We come together in this circle of community  
knowing that we are called into mission, into spiritlinking leadership.  
Spiritlinking is building the circle of friends.  
Spiritlinking is fostering networks of human compassion.  
Spiritlinking is interweaving teams of relationship  
and then...  
new ideas are born...  
new ways of responding to the mission  
take form and find expression.

Excerpt from Spiritlinking Leadership, by Donna Markham, O.P.

**Side 1** O Holy One,  
You call us into mission  
in a multitude of ways.

**Side 2** Some of us travel around the earth  
Some of us tend Your gardens  
and Your vineyards nearer home.

**Side 1** You call us and lead us into mission  
and strengthen us for our ministry,  
through the nurturing bonds of community  
and the sustaining support of friends.

**Side 2** May we be of one mind in our mission,  
making Your Providence visible  
through all that we are and do.

**Side 1** Be with us all  
as we struggle to do the ministry  
of Your making.

**Side 2** And may we always stay in touch  
with the power You place within us  
and the peace which Your word proclaims.

**Side 1** May we be there for one another  
and take time to celebrate together  
to pray together  
to be providence together.

**Side 2** Glory and praise to You,  
Provident God  
now and forever.

**All** Amen

Adapted from "A Psalm of Shared Mission and Ministry."  
WomanWisdom by Miriam Therese Winter, p. 226



# Mission

A discussion based on a PowerPoint presentation by Barbara McMullen, CDP

To set-up the context for a discussion on mission, we begin with a poem by David Whyte, *This Is Not The Age of Information*.

This is **not**  
the age of information.

This is **NOT**  
the age of information.

Forget the news,  
and the radio  
and the blurred screen.

This is the time  
of loaves  
and fishes.

People are hungry,  
and one good word is bread  
for a thousand.

As he says, "One good word is bread for a thousand." Let us have that word be "Mission."

What do think of when you hear the word mission? One of the most often related words is 'call.' Let us turn to the message of Anthony Gittins, CSSp. He tells us that the "origin of mission is God and that Jesus is God literally brought down to earth to continue God's mission. So mission is who God is -- an extravagant Creator, a liberating Presence, and a reconciling Spirit. And, mission is what God does for a living. He:

reaches out,  
gathers in,  
embraces,  
reconciles,  
unites,  
heals,  
upholds,  
renews and  
transforms.

God has chosen us, in an act of great trust, to bring the mission to others."

Father Gittins says that mission is God's outrageous idea that God cannot operate without us. God chose to need us, God calls, invites and commissions us. So Gittins says that we don't have the mission, the mission has us!

When you've experienced a call to something in your life, what are your responses? To question, to seek answers, to test it out with others, check with your friends or mentors, you think about it, sometimes you hope it goes away, and finally you settle into it. You say yes. But how do we know what that response look like? Gittins says, "Jesus is the mission brought down to earth. He shows us what mission is, the way mission is done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is about evangelization: about "good newsing." He doesn't talk about healing and hope, He *is* healing and hope." Jesus is in your face about mission His whole life!

So then our sort of job description, in light of mission, is discipleship. We're called by Jesus to do what he did, be how he was. Discipleship is a summons, a call, to be communities who find their love for one another and others in the raw materials of daily life. It wasn't apart from the messiness of life that Jesus proclaimed the goodness of God. It was right there with the lepers, the outcasts, the marginalized.



Discipleship requires us to do as Jesus has done. We must model ourselves on Jesus and how he does it. Authentic discipleship follows Jesus. We become the evangelization and the mission. Jesus expands everything to embrace all components, including the dust and mess that are intrinsic to evangelization. Through it all, Jesus is faithful to his Abba, his “Daddy,” his God. So if we are faithful, if we allow God to work in and through us, then the mission has us! We are gathered to be scattered. Not to keep it to ourselves, but to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This is called evangelization.

Gittins says we need to think differently about evangelization. God sent mission down to earth in the form of Jesus. God’s mission became incarnate in Jesus, who came to do the will of his Abba. Jesus spreads God’s goodness in a way we can understand.

So, Jesus’ job description (not ours) is to be the evangelist. Evangelization is “good newsing,” that is, being the good news. Just like Jesus, making a difference one person at a time. Jesus looks for trouble and troubled people. He eats with sinners, he cures the ill, he dialogs with women.

So, if mission is God’s job description, and evangelization is Jesus’ job description, what is our role? Gittins says mission for us is discipleship. Our discipleship criteria is:

To live, you must choose love,  
To love, you must choose to encounter,  
To grow, you must suffer, and  
Never give up hope.

On an individual level, we might ask ourselves: How am I being faithful to these four criteria? Am I challenged to conversion? And, which for the four criteria am I the weakest in?

If none of that grabbed you, here’s another way to think about mission. A river is like the mission of God. Each moment for us in the river is a moment of blessing because God is always blessing us, always calling us to mission, no matter where we are on the river. Our role is to be a part of mission because when we are in mission, we are in God’s dream. The river has its source, it own seasons. A river knows where it is going, even though it meanders.

Though each of us may be in a different place on the river and on a different boat, each of those places is a call. Sometimes the river flows freely and gently, and the carrying out of the mission comes naturally and is life-giving for the giver and the receiver. At other times the river is filled with rapids and those disciples need to hold on tight as they are tossed about.

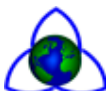
Sometimes the river even runs dry. When that happens, boats need to be picked up and carried to where the river runs free. And, finally, the river reaches its destination, its end, and is absorbed into the sea. Like a river, mission calls us to let go, to be absorbed in something bigger than ourselves. You could think of the river being named “Providence.”

If the mission (God), Providence has us, then it goes to the ground of our being. It’s what makes us tick. it won’t tolerate the inauthentic. Mission will keep us looking at our deepest desires and teach us to trust that those desires for discipleship are in God’s heart, too.

Together we radiate the mission because we have the confidence to do what we never thought we could do, the courage to break free from all that holds us captive, and the attitude of openness to all the possibilities that God sets before us.

To summarize MISSION...

Know God has you...Participate in good newsing,  
Life is messy...Pickup your boat and paddle a new course,  
Get absorbed in something bigger than yourself,  
Make Providence visible by radiating love,  
Contribute your talents for the sake of mission, and  
Be a disciple radiating hope!





# MISSION

*Based on the work of Anthony J. Gittins, CSSP, adapted by Mary Ellen Rufft, CDP*

Although we, the Sisters and Associates of Divine Providence, as well as other religious communities, sometimes talk about our Mission, the truth is that we do not have a Mission. The reason is that Mission is what God is about. It's as if Mission were God's job description. God is the dynamic, interactive movement of goodness spreading out over the universe – that is Mission – that is God.

We can't have a Mission anymore than we can have God. What we can do, though, is immerse ourselves into God, and, therefore, into the Mission, into that dynamic movement of goodness.

Jesus is Mission incarnate, Mission come to earth. He is the Good News of God's Mission. If God's job description is Mission, the job description of Jesus is evangelization or doing the Good News. Our task, and that of the Church, is discipleship, that is, to be faithful to God's Mission. It would be accurate to say, then, that we do not have a Mission, but that God's Mission has us. In the same way, the Church does not have a Mission; God's Mission has the Church. God is the initiator; we, the Church, are the servants of the Mission. We carry out our role of discipleship by imitating the whole life of Jesus, by doing good news-ing as He did.

The primary ways we can do evangelization as Jesus did are by proclamation, witness, dialogue, and liberation. We are called to proclaim and witness the Good News. Proclamation is witnessing with words; witnessing is proclamation without speaking. Witnessing might involve martyrdom, i.e. living or dying for the Good News. It's about laying down our lives for others, not just by dying, but by allowing ourselves to be shaken, changed, converted, and/or recycled.

Dialogue is respectful, mutual discovery of, and conversion to, the Holy Spirit. It is a horizontal exchange, the outcome of which is new revelation. We often fear dialogue because it changes both parties in the process and its outcome cannot be controlled. Dialogue is incompatible with hierarchy. Jesus made Himself horizontal with the disciples when he washed their feet.

Responding to the call to be like Jesus is about foot-washing as well as Eucharist. It is about being willing to wash feet, but also to have one's feet washed. The latter is often more difficult than the former.

Liberation means setting free from any and all forms of unfreedom and injustice. It is what Jesus did throughout His whole public life. He set free whatever was bound, liberating others from the tyranny of injustice. He worked to obliterate the "isms" of His day. We are called to do the same, to recognize the prejudice and lack of justice in ourselves, our society, and our Church and to strive to overcome it. We can do so no matter what our vocation or ministry.

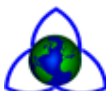
*The preceding ideas are based on the work of Anthony J. Gittins, CSSP, presented to the General Chapter of the Sisters of Divine Providence on July 8, 2007. Adapted by Mary Ellen Rufft, CDP*

Pause for quiet reflection on the meaning of MISSION



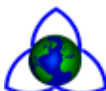
## Questions for Reflection

1. What does this view of Mission mean to you and the Church?
2. How could we eliminate the “isms” of our day?
3. How does it connect with your understanding of Mission and Ministry?
4. What is your personal mission statement going to be?



## Closing Prayer

- Leader:** In the spirit of Mother Marie, and as Providence women and men we are called to trust in divine Providence and so we say:
- Side One:** To strive for “that mind which was Christ Jesus” as we are present to the world through our service and through our mission of witnessing to God’s Providence.
- Side Two:** To imitate the combined gifts of contemplation and action as lived by Mother Marie—who was humble, gentle, and simple in the face of demanding duties; who had deep faith and total openness in accepting the will of God.
- Side One:** To be women and men committed to justice and peace, who stand in solidarity with the poor.
- Side Two:** To be people of prayer, called to conversion, growing in intimacy with our Provident God, and deepening our understanding of apostolic spirituality and mission today.
- Side One:** To be people who live our daily lives of hope and openness to the Providence of God.
- Leader:** As we open ourselves this day to being partners radiating mission let us pray together:
- All:** We exalt your providence, O God, and we commit ourselves to making providence more visible in our world...With fidelity, living as responsible stewards of the earth and our gifts; with courage, confronting the evils and injustices of our times; with compassion, entering into the joys and sufferings of your people; with hope, collaborating in mission to foster your reign on earth.  
Amen.





# Prayer



Prayer

# Opening Prayer

## ***Prayer to the Holy Spirit***

We worship You, holy Spirit of God, and we may only guess, as best we can, who You are for us.

We open our hearts to receive You that we may learn how deeply and invisibly You are present everywhere.

You are the air we breathe, the distance we gaze into, the space that surrounds us. You are the kindly light in which people are attractive to each other.

You are the finger of God and you playfully order the universe. You are the sensitive love with which we were created.

We pray to You, Spirit of God, Creator, complete the work you have begun; prevent the evil we are capable of doing and inspire us toward what is good -- to faithfulness and patience, to compassion and gentleness and awaken in us friendship for every living being, with joy for everything that is good and human.

Everything that lives grows only by your power. Your activity is strange and beyond all human words. You are hidden deep inside us like yeast, a seed of fire. You are our will to live, the love that keeps us here on earth and ties us to Yourself.

You urge us to go on to the end and to endure everything, not to give way, but to go on hoping, as love does. You are the soul of all our prayers, so there is nothing we may not expect from You.

Wisdom to understand each other, readiness to help each other. You are God's gift to us, God who dwells with in. Amen

*(From Out of the Ordinary, Joyce Rupp)*



# Prayer

This unit presents a taste of many different ideas and ways of praying that hopefully will support and encourage prayerful living. It is intended to be used as a resource as you continue on throughout the units.

## ***Sisters of Divine Providence reflect on their experiences of prayer...***

After reading these comments, you are invited to spend some time reflecting on your own life and your experience of prayer.

- How would you describe your prayer relationship with God?
- Has it changed over the years?
- What is central, most important, for you in prayer?
- Have there been times when you have not been able to pray?
- Are there particular ways of praying that are meaningful for you?
- Is there a relationship of prayer to Providence in your life?

For me, as I have prayed over the years, I can now say...

- ...prayer is an articulation of my relationship with God. ~ *Michele Bisbey, CDP*
- ...walking the path of life, hand in hand with God, allowing God's grace to permeate every aspect of my being. ~ *Roberta Grzelak, CDP*
- ...staying in God's presence; thinking time about my life in God; putting myself in God's hands whatever I experience during a day; taking a breath with God; and devoting all to God. ~ *Veronica Kim, CDP*
- ...my deepest connection with God. Whether it's a fleeting awareness of God's presence with me or a long conversation, in all, the connection of love and care and comfort happens. ~ *Josephine Macias, CDP*
- ...being with God in stillness and motion, by myself or with others, and through words or song or dance or silence. ~ *Kathleen Matz, CDP*
- ...relationship with the Lord; talking and listening to the Lord as a friend. ~ *Patricia Ann Moffett, CDP*
- ...in me and beyond me, most of my waking hours...in joy, in sorrow, in most conversations, in reading and media, and above all in people. ~ *Francesca O'Regan, CDP*
- ...a loving response to the Presence of God--practice the presence until we are aware--then respond at each moment -- lovingly and we will KNOW GOD'S PROVIDENCE. ~ *Marian Senish, CDP*
- ...sharing laughter and joy with the Lord and others! God is my Listener. ~ *Carol Tenerovich, CDP*

Prayer is an awareness, a mystery and a Presence where there is no space between God and me (and us). ~ *Sr. Mary Thomas*

For me, prayer is opening my heart to God. It is letting Jesus have access to every part of my heart. This will enable Jesus to act through me in bringing God's love to others. ~ *Mary Weatherly, CDP*

Prayer is allowing my soul to rest: ...in the quietude with God in quiet wordless love.  
...in quietude of soul to allow God to transform us into Himself, surrendering to His will. ~ *Sr. Connie*

The precious moments I spend with my God, letting Him know how much I love Him and trust Him and asking for His help and peace. This is my set-apart time for Him, but I do try to make everything I do a prayer. ~ *Sr. Rosemary*

Prayer is a "time of quiet" when I become more aware of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), who dwells in me at all times. Prayer is a time when I try to listen and hear what God may be asking of me. Prayer is asking God for the Grace and Energy to do whatever He asks of me with a cheerful attitude. ~ *Sister Mary Jerome*

Prayer is awareness of God surrounding me 24 hours a day, from sunset to sunrise, from the ground to the sky. I sing alleluias and magnificats as I go my rounds in ministry. Prayer is "to be" in and with God always. ~ *Cathy Frost, CDP*

Union with God and may I bring Him wherever I go. ~ *Sr. Mary Ann*

Being a friend with God. Putting total trust in God's hands. ~ *Sr. Agnes Marie*



# Understanding Of Prayer And The Experience Of God

Laying semantics aside now, we know the actual experience of prayer is most intimate, most personal to us. Even though we may say or sing words to pray, or use words to describe our prayer, the reality of praying is far beyond the scope of words to express.

Pause for personal reflection on the unique growth of prayerful consciousness for you. If the following suggestions for reflection are helpful, use them. Or use whatever means you wish to express what you know of prayer. Most of these suggestions are word-oriented. However, deep knowing, such as this, frequently eludes words. It may be that some other form says prayer more effectively for you. For instance, other expressions may be more eloquent, such as music. . .gestures. . .postures. . .dance. . .color. . .line. . .shapes. . .textures, etc. The best expression may be a sacred object from nature or ritual moments. This is your experience – your expression.

A way to begin: Develop a cluster of words, images, colors, sounds, movements, etc., that you associate with the essence of prayer. You may also wish to journal.

Consider:

- What persons, events, insights, experiences have most influenced your ways and understanding prayer?
- How have your present ways of prayer evolved over the years?
- What seems to inhibit your ability to pray?
- What seems to enhance your ability to pray?

(Adapted from *Love, Mercy and Justice: A Book of Practices of the Sisters of Providence*, pg. 11.)

This excerpt is from the opening chapter, “The Practice of Prayer.”

“We choose for our purposes to use the word prayer as the name we give to all the varied ways by which we acknowledge, respond to, and enter into relationship with Ultimate Mystery as we come to know it at different times in our lives. While we recognize that it is important and helpful to listen to the prayer experiences of others and to learn from them, we also acknowledge that ultimately each person and each generation must search for meaning and for the sacred in the midst of unique historical and personal circumstances. What we are choosing to pass on to future generations, therefore, is not a particular way of praying. Rather, we hope we can pass on a practice of being faithful to the ongoing search for the sacred and a commitment to the search for an authentic response to the different faces of the God we will encounter as we travel our personal faith journeys, joined together in community with others.” (pg. 1)

In the above passage, the writer describes “Ultimate Mystery” as one of “the different faces of God.”

Pause for personal reflection on the “Ultimate Mystery,” the “faces of God” you have experienced. Once again your experience may elude words.

A way to begin: Develop a cluster of words, images, colors, sounds, movements, etc., expressive of your experience or realizations of God. You may also wish to journal.

Consider:

- How your sense of the ultimate mystery of God challenged, changed, or evolved for you through the years.
- What most effectively brings you to a prayerful sense of God’s presence.
- What seems to form a barrier to your sense of God’s presence.



# Understanding Prayer: *The Breath of Life in Us*

By Michael Morwood

Christians who have believed that prayer is concerned with contacting an elsewhere God now face a radical shift in their understanding of prayer. Prayer is not so much about talking to or addressing God, but rather about deepening our awareness that God – the Breath of Life present throughout the universe – comes to visible expression in us. When we reflect on this truth, we deepen our wonder and joy about who we are, we appreciate the story of Jesus more than ever before, and we understand better what it means to say “Yes” to being the “Body of Christ.”

We gather to pray,  
believing that  
God, Source, Empowerer,  
Breath, Enlivener,  
and Energizer  
prays in us.

We pray,  
aware that  
God at work  
in the vastness of this universe  
for billions of years  
comes to visible  
and audible expression  
in our words  
of appreciation.

We rejoice  
in the Breath  
breathing life and vitality  
into our world,  
into our lives  
and into our gathering here,  
connecting us  
at the deepest level  
with all that exists.

We rejoice  
in the wonder of who we are,  
bearers of the Breath of Life,  
privileged  
in our awareness of this,  
and challenged  
by our privilege  
to allow the Breath of Life  
full expression  
in our living and loving.

We call to mind  
Jesus of Nazareth,  
who opened minds and hearts

*(Continued on next column)*

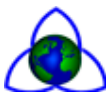
to this awareness  
and to this challenge.  
The Breath of Life  
moved so freely and openly  
in his life  
that people recognized  
the relationship  
at the deepest level of being  
between God and a human person.

In Jesus  
we have come to see  
the truth of who we are  
and we give thanks for his life,  
his teaching,  
and the courage with which  
he faced death  
and the mystery  
of relationship  
with the Breath of Life  
beyond death.

We take this bread,  
as Jesus took bread,  
mindful of the Breath of Life,  
always present,  
always sustaining,  
always nourishing,  
and we give thanks  
for that Breath  
and the wonder of who we are.

We break this bread  
recalling Jesus' readiness  
to love  
with all his heart,  
with all his soul,  
with all his strength,  
with all his mind,  
and to love his neighbor  
as he loved himself.

*(Continued on next page)*





We eat this bread,  
praying that the generosity  
of the Breath of Life  
may find free expression  
in our lives.

We take this wine,  
mindful of the Breath of Life  
bonding us with all that exists  
in its fecundity  
diversity,  
complexity,  
and supporting systems.

*(Continued on next column)*

We drink  
with appreciation,  
with respect,  
and with gratitude  
for that bonding.

Time for silent reflection:  
The Breath of Life prays in me.

May we allow the Breath of Life  
to be evident in our words and actions,  
in our homes,  
in our workplaces,  
in all our relationships,  
and in our world.

Amen.

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### **Prayer for the New Story:** *Expressing Who We Are*, By Michael Morwood

As we embrace the New Story we should become more familiar with a prayer form that deepens our awareness of who we are – a life-form giving the Creator Spirit a unique way of coming to expression. Jesus mirrors this reality for us and to us.

This prayer form does not address God or ask God to intervene and change the way things are. Rather it leads us to reflect on the wonder of God coming to expression in and among us. This is the Wow! of human existence from a Christian perspective. It is also the responsibility we each carry.

We pray,  
conscious that  
raising our hearts and minds  
is a gift of the Spirit of Life  
at work  
in the depths of our being.  
For the presence of that Spirit in us,  
we give thanks.

We pray,  
conscious that  
our prayer  
gives the Spirit  
a way of breaking into word and song  
unique in all the universe.  
For the words and songs  
within each of us, we give thanks.

We pray,  
believing  
we are bearers of a treasure,  
the Spirit of Life  
blessing us with a variety of gifts.  
For the treasures we each bear,  
we give thanks.

*(Continued on next column)*

We pray,  
mindful of men and women  
throughout human history  
who allowed the Spirit of Life  
to work in them  
for the betterment  
of our world and humanity.  
For their lives and their inspiration,  
we give thanks.

We pray,  
remembering Jesus  
who so allowed the Spirit of Life  
to move in his life  
that in him we have seen  
the perfect expression  
of the Spirit in human form.  
For Jesus and all he means to us,  
we give thanks.

We pray,  
challenged by Jesus  
to allow his life  
to be a mirror for us  
so that we might live life in all its fullness.

*(Continued on next page)*



We pray,  
mindful  
of all that has brought us together,  
of the Spirit at work in our lives  
and of what may be possible  
if we allow the Spirit  
to work freely in each of us.

We pray,  
inviting  
the Spirit of Life, Love, and Goodness  
to move freely in our words and actions.

### ***Silent reflection***

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## **Using Images – A Way To Pray**

Look at each of these haiku as a painting drawn with words. Are you able to see the pictures? Using their images is a way to pray.

A tiny gold leaf  
offers a silent sermon  
from a barren branch.

The tiger lily  
stretching toward  
the morning sun  
drinks in the dew drops.

Fear is in my heart  
the buttercups console me  
in my healing field.

Casting aside fear  
like wildflowers on the hillside  
I abide in love.

Two friends journeying  
through the forest at midnight  
to visit the moon.

The red tennis shoes  
left out in the rain last night  
are filled with rain water.

After the hail storm  
Papa looks toward the vineyards  
my heart breaks with love.

Longing for warmth  
I hasten to the kitchen  
on cold winter mornings.

My first memory of snow  
Oh so much sugar, I thought  
falling from heaven.

In the dark of night  
the stars fall into the lake  
until morning comes.

Sleeping outside on a summer night  
I pull a blanket of stars over me  
and listen to the whippoorwill.

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## **Searching For The Holy**

Reading: AN OPEN MIND

A good traveler has not fixed plans and is not intent upon arriving.

A good artist lets (his) intuition lead (him) wherever it wants.

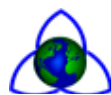
A good scientist has freed self of concepts and keeps (his) mind  
open to what is.

Thus the Master is available to all people, and doesn't reject anyone.

(He) is ready to use all situations and doesn't waste anything.

This is called embodying the light.

*Lao-Tzu*



Reading: LOOKING FOR GOD

Are you looking for me?  
I am in the next seat.  
My shoulder is against yours.  
You will not find me in stupas (towers),  
not in Indian shrine rooms,  
nor in synagogues, nor in cathedrals;  
not in masses, not kirtans,  
not in legs winding around your own neck,  
nor in eating nothing but vegetables.  
When you really look for me,  
you will see me instantly –  
you will find me in the tiniest house of time.  
Kabir says: Student, tell me what is God?  
(He) is the breath inside the breath.

*Kabir, Translation by Robert Bly*

*If I Should Wake Before I Die, Lamont Satterly, page 170*

Quiet Reflection: Sit quietly with soft music, breathing gently.  
Feel the air move in and out.  
Let this breath be THE HOLY.

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## Reflections On The Providence Of God And Prayerful Living

“Have confidence in the Providence that so far has never failed us. The way is not yet clear. Grope along slowly. Do not press matters; be patient, be trustful and rest assured, my dear daughters, if you lean with all your weight upon Providence you will find yourselves well supported.” (Letters and Journals of Mother Theodore Guerin.)

### **An Evolving Understanding Of Providence**

In the contemporary model of Providence, emphasis is placed not on God’s power as control, but rather on God’s encompassing love and concern in the mysterious and manifold shaping of life. With the emergence of historical consciousness in the nineteenth century, a new theology began to develop which is oriented not simply to the past but to the future. In this model God is understood not so much as a sovereign king and master but as a transcendent and empowering presence within all of creation. (*Love, Mercy, and Justice: A Book of Practices of the Sisters of Providence, p. 8*)

Prayer and Providence is:

- dialogic – implying a relationship between ourselves and a transcendent presence or reality;
- multi-faceted – varying incredibly with aspects and circumstances of our lives;
- transformational – drawing us evermore into fulfilling awareness of ourselves and the Transcendent – God.

### **The Practice Of Prayer**

“In the contemporary model of Providence there is more ambiguity as we struggle to discern – in the confusion of the many possibilities presented to us by world events, by nature itself and rising out of our own person – some direction in the process, some order in the chaos, a sense of the direction in which God’s will is luring our own wills, and leading us to discern the responsibilities that are ours. In this struggle a new (or an old) concern regarding prayer has emerged. That concern is how we, today, can discover the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our world.

(*Love, Mercy and Justice: A Book of Practices of the Sisters of Providence*)



“The kind of prayer to which this image of God as loving and empowering presence seems to be calling us at our time in salvation history is the prayer of discernment – a kind of prayer that will enable us to search out and to recognize more clearly God’s presence and lure moving and giving direction from deep within the complex ambiguities of our individual lives, nature and world events.

“How will we learn to recognize the Spirit of God moving in our midst? John, the Beloved, has warned us that it is not every spirit we can trust ... Fidelity to the practice of prayer will help us to stay on course.” (*Ibid*: pg. 9-10)

### **To Name God “Providence”**

To name God “Providence” seems singularly appropriate in an age where the chaotic and irrational seem to prevail, in a time when we are concretely aware of the brokenness, the woundedness of our lives. Providence spirituality is not Pollyanna spirituality. Providence spirituality cannot say “God is in heaven; all’s right with the world.” Nor can it deny the realities of disorder, chaos, brokenness, alienation, and injustice. Providence spirituality calls us to see these realities, to name them, to wrestle with them, but also and at the same time, to know that there is meaning in the midst of what appears to be meaningless.

Because we, the associates and the Sisters of Divine Providence, have seen the meaning of our own chaos, in our own broken heartedness, in our own disordered lives, we can give witness, and we can reveal the vision we share. We witness to the reality that the God who weaves our lives is the Provident God. We eagerly anticipate that day when the whole tapestry of our lives might be unfolded before us and when we might exclaim with our foundress, “Visibly do I see in all things the wonderful Providence of God.” (*Sr. Michele Bisbey, CDP*)

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## **How to Pray a Minute**

By Barbara Bartocci

God is with us in all our moments

“I’d like to pray more but I don’t have time.”

“I’m so busy, I can’t think about God daily.”

“Church on Sunday is all I can manage.”

Sound familiar?

Several years ago, a book called *The One-Minute Manager* hit bookshelves with a small explosion. Time-conscious managers loved it; it provided practical tips to better management—in one-minute segments.

Since then, it’s occurred to me that we need a guide to one-minute spirituality. After all, most of us feel the same time constraints managers feel on the job. But how can we become more God-conscious — in 60-second bits?

Well, here are some ideas:

- **Telephone thanksgiving.** Let the ring remind you of God’s blessings. Every time it rings, recall something good and say a brief prayer of thanks.
- **Thirty-second eye contact.** Too often, we ignore the person we don’t know. Next time you’re at the supermarket or mall, make eye contact with a sales person. Or another shopper. You’ll probably get a warm smile in return.
- **Observe a growing, green thing.** Whether it’s a tree, flower, or indoor potted plant, look at the veins in the leaves, or count the petals in a flower. For a minute, look at God’s living creation, be aware, and be thankful.
- **Stay in the present moment.** Too often, worry sends us into the future — a future where we’re sure something awful is about to happen. Tell yourself that, for one minute, you will live in the present with God. Remind yourself that God gives us our lives moment by moment and is always with us.

**Experience God now.**

- **Perform a one-minute kindness.** Keep postcards handy to write a few words to a friend or older relative. Let someone who’s rushed go ahead of you in

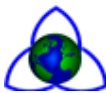


line. Help scrape the ice off an older person's windshield. Carry a plate of cookies to a neighbor.

- **The one-minute fast.** Tempted to eat something you shouldn't? Wait for one minute. Offer the minute to God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you control the desire. Indeed, you may no longer be tempted when the minute is up.
- **Affirm yourself.** We're often overly critical of ourselves. At night, take a minute to look in the mirror. Make eye contact with yourself. "God loves you," you might say, "and I love you."
- **Start a gratitude journal.** Take a minute each day to write in a notebook something for which you're grateful. When life seems tough, thumb through your journal.
- **Make a red-light act of contrition.** At every red light, tell God you're sorry for all the times you stopped living God's will to pursue your own desires.
- **Take a minute to listen to someone.** Maybe you can listen to a child, instead of absently saying, "uh-huh." Or maybe you can listen to a spouse, instead of responding, "That's nice."
- **The shower-power prayer.** Water is a powerful Christian symbol. As you soap and rinse in the shower, pray to be cleansed from feelings of anger, resentment, and bitterness.
- **The alarm-clock prayer.** As your alarm goes off, repeat the psalm: "This is the day the Lord has made. I rejoice and am glad."
- **Lunch-box communion.** Spend a minute experiencing the act of eating. Eat slowly. Notice the taste and texture of each bite. Thank God for our incredible abundance of food. How might you help the hungry?
- **Practice saying:** "I am loved, and through Christ, I love." We can love others only when we love ourselves. We can love ourselves only when we believe that we are loved by God as we are.
- **The count-to-60, stop-a-fight prayer.** Ever burst out in anger and regretted your words later? Next time, count to 60 this way: one-for-God, two-for-God. . . .
- **Remember the God-holder prayer.** Everyone you meet is a God-holder. Especially when someone acts rudely or meanly, it helps temper our response to remember that God is in each person. Like candle holders, each of us holds the Light (even if temporarily we hide it under a bushel).
- **The one-minute change-over for God.** Do you forget to replace the toothpaste cap? Or forget to leave the mail where your spouse can see it? Pick a habit that bothers you or someone else and dedicate one minute a day to correct it. Do it in God's name.
- **The TV minute.** Use the next commercial to focus on the Christian call to live simply. Notice how few products advertised relate to what we need, and how many are designed to make us want what isn't necessary. Talk back to commercials.
- **The gas-pump minute.** As you pump gas into your car, ask God's spirit to flow into you, filling you with holy energy.
- **The peanut-butter prayer.** When making school lunches, whisper a loving prayer into each lunch sack. Every so often, add a special note from Mom or Dad.
- **The elevator blessing.** Next time you share an elevator with someone, ask God silently to meet that person's special needs.

As you practice these exercises, you'll come up with others on your own. And, you'll notice that when we practice one-minute spirituality, a shift in consciousness occurs. We begin to see God in all the minutes of our day.

You don't have to allot to God a large block of time that is never available. God is with us in each little moment. It's up to us to see God in every one.



# Experience Of The Living God: The Core Of Prayer

By Piet Penning de Vries, S.J., (printed in part)

When two lives intersect, life bursts into flame. Because another life crosses ours, a new vitality blazes in us. Authentic life is kindled by the life of another. The peaks of our life are where we have touched the life of another, where another's life and ours have mutually touched, have flowed together as into a pool and thus mutually raised one another's level. THIS is what our Provident God is for us.

God is not someone about whom we pray, about whom we think. No one is only to be "thought about." Our Provident God is to be experienced. Where God's life has touched ours, where we have felt Providence living, there too we felt that we were living. But what do we know of God's life and vitality? Nothing outside of the moments when we experience our Provident God makes us live. It is in our own life that we have to search, if we want to experience God's life, if we want to experience our Provident God living.

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## Prayer

By Rachael Remen, M.D.

In a book called "Kitchen Table Wisdom," Rachel Remen, M.D., writes of an experience of prayer. As she was lying on an operating table waiting to be anesthetized, one of her surgeons took her hand and asked if she would join him and his operating team in a prayer. Startled, she nodded in agreement. Following a moment of silence, he offered a traditional Indian prayer, saying, "May we be helped to do here whatever is most right."

Remen goes on to write that "... prayer may be less about asking for the things we are attached to than it is about relinquishing our attachments . . . It can take us beyond fear, which is an attachment, and beyond hope, which is another form of attachment . . . When we pray, we stop trying to control life and remember that we belong to life . . . prayer is a powerful way of embracing life, finding a home in any outcome, and remembering that there may be reasons beyond reason. Prayer is a movement from mastery to mystery."

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## Prayerful Companionship In Providence

In this section, you are invited to focus on the following considerations related to prayer and Providence:

- First consideration: personal hopes, fears, needs you bring to the Providence Associate relationship
- Second consideration: personal gifts and experiences which will enrich this relationship.

We will look at several of the prayer traditions among the Sisters of Divine Providence.

### Prayer In Word

1. **Liturgical prayer:** "The community, mindful of its role as a segment of the praying Church, participates in the official prayers of the Catholic community – the Eucharist and the other sacraments and Morning Praise and/or Evensong."
  - "The community strives to find its center in the Eucharist, shared frequently in a spirit of praise, thanksgiving and reconciliation."
  - The Liturgy of the Hours: Morning Prayer and Evensong is a familiar form of prayer for the Sisters of Divine Providence.



Resources:

*People's Companion to the Breviary Volumes I and II*  
by Carmelites of Indianapolis  
*Psalms Anew* by Nancy Schreck and Maureen Leach  
*Psalms Journal Book I and II* by Joan Chittister, OSB  
*Rejoice and Be Glad!* by Maureen Fritz  
*Rejoice Beloved Woman!* by Barbara J. Monda  
*Psalms for Praying* by Nan Merrill  
*You Shall Not Want* by John Kirvan

**2. Meditational Practices**

Suggestions for meditational practices:

**Spiritual Reading** of Sacred Scripture and Inspirational Writing

Prepare a passage from Scripture and have it marked and ready.

*Place:* Where you are alone and uninhibited in your response to God's presence.

*Posture:* Relaxed and peaceful. A harmony of body with spirit.

*Presence of God:* Be aware of it and acknowledge and respond to it.

When you are ready, turn to the passage. Read the passage from Scripture slowly and listen attentively. PAUSE.

**Lectio** – reading/listening to sacred text

**Meditatio** – pondering the word of the text

**Oratio** – Responding with heart and will to the Word

**Contemplatio** – Resting in the presence of God

(Adapted from *When In Doubt, Sing*, pg. 60)

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## The Method of Centering Prayer

By Thomas Keating

### **Theological Background**

The grace of Pentecost affirms that the risen Jesus is among us as the glorified Christ. Christ lives in each of us as the Enlightened One, present everywhere and at all times. He is the living Master who continuously sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and to bear witness to his resurrection by empowering us to experience and manifest the fruits of the Spirit and the Beatitudes, in prayer and action.

### **Lectio Divina**

Lectio Divina is the most traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and he were suggesting the topics of conversation. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on his word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust and love. Conversation simplifies and gives way to communing, or as Gregory the Great (6th century), summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition, put it, "resting in God." This was the classical meaning of contemplative prayer for the first sixteen centuries.

### **Contemplative Prayer**

Contemplative Prayer is the normal development of the grace of baptism and the regular practice of Lectio Divina. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. Contemplative Prayer is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. We open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself. Contemplative Prayer is a process of interior purification leading, if we consent, to divine union.



## **The Method of Centering Prayer**

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to cooperate with this gift. It is an attempt to present the teaching of earlier times (e.g.: The Cloud of Unknowing) in an updated form and to put a certain order and regularity into it. It is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer; it simply puts other kinds of prayer into a new and fuller perspective. During the time of prayer we consent to God's presence and action within. At other times our attention moves outward to discover God's presence everywhere.

### **The Guidelines:**

Explanation of the Guidelines

- I. "Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within." (cf. *Open Mind, Open Heart, chap. 5*)
  1. The sacred word expresses our intention to be in God's presence and to yield to the divine action.
  2. The sacred word should be chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire us with one that is especially suitable for us.
    - A. Examples: Lord, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother.
    - B. Other possibilities: Love, Peace, Shalom
  3. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period, for that would be to start thinking again.
  4. A simple inward gaze upon God may be more suitable for some persons than the sacred word. In this case, one consents to God's presence and action by turning inwardly toward God as if gazing upon him. The same guidelines apply to the sacred gaze as to the sacred word.
- II. "Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within."
  1. By "sitting comfortably" is meant relatively comfortably; not so comfortably that we encourage sleep, but sitting comfortably enough to avoid thinking about the discomfort of our bodies during this time of prayer.
  2. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
  3. If we fall asleep, we continue the prayer for a few minutes upon awakening if we can spare the time.
  4. Praying in this way after a main meal encourages drowsiness. Better to wait an hour at least before Centering Prayer. Praying in this way just before retiring may disturb one's sleep pattern.
  5. We close our eyes to let go of what is going on around and within us.
  6. We introduce the sacred word inwardly and as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
- III. "When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word."
  1. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, and commentaries.
  2. Thoughts are a normal part of Centering Prayer.
  3. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word," a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
  4. During the course of our prayer, the sacred word may become vague or even disappear.
- IV. "At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence, eyes closed for 2 or 3 minutes."
  1. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite the Our Father during the additional 2 or 3 minutes, while the others listen.
  2. The additional 2 or 3 minutes give the psyche time to readjust to the external senses and enable us to bring the atmosphere of silence into daily life.





# Prayer of Petition: *Creating Ripples*

By Michael Morwood

Prayer is so much more than telling an elsewhere God what is going on and asking, petitioning this elsewhere God to intervene. Prayer is about “raising the mind and heart” to God – the God present with us in the depths of our being and present everywhere in the expansiveness of this universe.

While we may be unsure how God “hears” our prayer, we believe that the Spirit of God at work in and among us “can do more than we can ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20).

We know that when we raise minds and hearts in prayer to the Presence within and among us extraordinary things happen. How this happens is quite a mystery to us. Love expressed here has an effect on love expressed there. While skeptics may scoff, there is plenty of evidence – for example “distance healing” with hospital patients – to show this does happen. There is also the fact that quantum physics reveals a similar mysterious world in which something here has an effect there. In ways we do not yet understand, all of reality is connected even across enormous distances.

Mind, as Bede Griffith suggests, is present everywhere as a “pattern of self-organization” and becomes conscious in us. This may be our best clue to some understanding of prayer of petition. It is not that we are trying to connect with a Supreme Being external to our world. Rather we are trying to allow mind to work in and among us. We are consciously tapping into mind (or Mind) in which we are all connected, but how the connection works is every bit as mysterious as quantum physics.

Seen in this new light, prayer of petition has hardly begun in the Western world. We have been too conditioned to asking the external God to intervene. We have been obsessed with “correct thinking,” with logic, and with what our senses proclaim as real. The challenge now is to bring the concerns we raise in prayer to a different format (not addressing an elsewhere God) and to a different understanding of what we are trying or wanting to do when we share these concerns prayerfully: create ripples in the unifying mind in which we all have existence, so that reality is effected somewhere else.

We should be more serious about this type of prayer rather than dismiss it or trivialize it by praying for better weather or a win for our football team or success in exams.

Yes, let us pray for someone’s good health or for a cure or for an end to war-mongering or more compassion in political and religious leaders. This prayer can be effective whether the people being prayed for know this or not. Let us also make evident in our prayer that we are not closing our minds to the suffering in our world or to the social evils of our times. And let our prayers challenge us to give expression to God’s presence in our world and in our homes.

When composing prayers of petition it is preferable to avoid the common usage of “that” statements, as in, “Let us pray for world leaders that . . .,” “Let us pray for Mary Smith that . . .,” with “Lord, hear us” and a response such as “Lord, hear our prayer” at the end of each statement. Rather, invite people to pray for a few moments in silence with invitations like the following:

Let us pray for our bishop . . .

Let us raise our minds to the reality of HIV/AIDS in Africa . . .

Let us be present in prayer to sick people in our parish . . .

Let us pray for the men and women fighting the brushfires . . .

Let us pray for world peace . . .

The period of prayer could conclude as follows:

We pray these prayers in the belief

that we are bonded

in God’s Spirit

with everything that exists.

We pray with faith and confidence.

Amen



# Prayer Beyond Words: The Body And Prayer

Perhaps most of us are more familiar with praying with words than with movement. However, prayer is more than words. It might be described as the longing of one's heart or soul for God.

Our bodies are sacred temples, and we pray in and with our bodies. It is not always necessary to use words. You may find some of the following suggestions and practices of movement helpful for prayer and giving expression to what is in your heart.

“Praying with the body is related to knowing with the body. Body knowledge is real knowledge, not lesser knowledge. To know God is to know one's bodily self.”

*(When in Doubt, Sing, Jane Redmont, pg. 29)*

## 1. Movement and Prayer

- A. “Walking meditation is really to enjoy the walking – to be in the present moment and, aware of our breathing and our walking, to enjoy each step.”

*(Peace in Every Step, Thich Nhat Hanh, p. 17)*

Resources:

*The Long Road Turns to Joy* by Thich Nhat Hanh

*Prayer Walking* by Linus Mundy

*Sparks of the Divine, P. 151-159* by Drew Leder

### B. Sacred Journeying

Resources:

*Labyrinth – Living the Labyrinth* by Jill K. H. Geoffrion

*Pilgrimage – Pray All Ways*, p. 51-59, by Edward Hays

*Procession – Dancing with Creation* by Martha Kirk

### C. Prayerful Gestures Indicated in the Psalms

Walking – Psalms 15, 17, 26, 32, 56, 86, 116

Sitting – Psalms 110, 131, 137, 139

Raised/open eyes – Psalms 25, 27, 63, 121, 123, 145

Raised head – Psalms 3, 27

Bowing – Psalms 22, 161, 95

Kneeling – Psalm 95

Prostrate – Psalms 119:25

Rising up – Psalms 16, 145

Touching the heart – Psalm 109

Standing – Psalms 134, 139

Hands lifted up or stretched out – Psalms 28, 63, 77, 134, 141, 143

Lying down – Psalms 3, 63

Sighing – Psalm 5

Lift up – Psalm 25

Wash hands – Psalm 26

Resources:

*Stretch and Pray* by Murray D. Finck

*Embodied Prayer, “The Psalms: A Movement Map”* by Celeste Snowber Schroeder

### D. Sacred Dance

“Moving is the key to understanding how life is. Things, especially things like thoughts, concerns, dreams, problems, need to be moving in and moving out of us. We need to know how or learn how to balance between a holding on and a letting go. There is stillness also in movement and there is movement also in stillness.

“Dance is a living mantra. It is not a mere constant change of gesture and rhythm, calculated to intrigue the attention of the surface eye, but it is the very stuff and symbol of my inner creative life.” (*“Movement as Mediator of Meaning,” in Dance as Religious Studies, Valerie DeMarinis, pp. 113 and 210*)



## 2. *Breath and Prayer – Mindfulness*

“Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.

“Thus mindfulness is at the same time a means and an end, the seed and the fruit. When we practice mindfulness in order to build up concentration, mindfulness is a seed. But mindfulness itself is the life of awareness: the presence of mindfulness means the presence of life, and therefore mindfulness is also the fruit. Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness and dispersion and makes it possible to live fully each minute of life. Mindfulness enables us to live.

“The instant you sit down to meditate, begin watching your breath. At first breathe normally, gradually letting your breathing slow down until it is quiet, even, and the lengths of the breaths are fairly long. From the moment you sit down to the moment your breathing has become deep and silent, be conscious of everything that is happening in yourself.” (*The Miracle of Mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh, pp. 14-15, 20*)

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## On Prayer

From *The Awakened Heart* by Gerald May

My life of prayer has always been stumbling and fitful, but it has convinced me of some basic truths.

~We are in love.

~God is absolutely and always present, intimately active and involved with us, and endlessly good.

~As God’s creation, we bear an essential part of God’s own goodness in our hearts that can never be removed, no matter how selfish, prejudiced, and vindictive we may be, no matter what we have done or what has been done to us.

~And, when we say yes to love, or try to say yes, or even honestly desire to try to say yes, love is as victorious in that moment as it is in all of cosmic time.

The great spiritual leaders have not preached fear and paranoia. They have said that we can trust divine goodness, that we can risk vulnerability if our intent is toward love.

When you have concerns about praying, pray about them. Pray about prayer. Ask the source of love to help you pray, to protect you, to show you *your* way, to make it possible. Prayer just happens as part of being in love. It happens in your heart more often and more steadily than you will ever know.

Whether we are distracted or not, whether we know it or not, whether we even want it or not, a communication between the soul and God keeps going on beneath the surface of our self-awareness. It is given everywhere and at all times. There is no need to attain it; there is nothing we have to do to make it happen. Neither can we escape from it (Psalm 139).

Relationship with the source of love is the most natural thing about us. Active practice of this relationship is nothing other than living, as best we can, in appreciation of, and fidelity to, the continual heart-to-heart connectedness with the holy Other whose presence makes us complete. Brother Lawrence called it conversing everywhere with God.

Little glances and repetitive prayers can be loving, sweet, and deep, but it is in *practicing direct relationship with God* that we encounter the grits and guts of love. The possibilities for practice are endless.

Three common ways are:

1. **Companionship:** All through the Gospels, Jesus keeps inviting people to follow him, take him in, keep him company, and love him. “I no longer call you servants... I have called you friends.” John 15:15
2. **Romantic:** passionately in love with God. Letting yourself be loved.
3. **Cosmic Presence:** love surrounding, embracing, pervading is and all creation. A relatively imageless awareness of God expressed through reverence, awe and wonder.



# Faith Sharing as Communal Prayer

By Catherine Schwemer, PHJC

Formerly the Executive Director of the North American Conference of Associates and Religious

Faith sharing as a prayer form is very familiar to me. Through this communal prayer form, I have been fed by the powerful sharing of my Sisters and members of our Associate community. Through these times of shared prayer, we have come to know and understand each other in ways that have bonded us as individuals and as a community. I believe that there is no greater privilege a person can give another than to share how God is moving through their life, to share at a deeper level what it means to face the struggles and the joys of being a contemporary Christian in our post-modern world.

So I was surprised a few months ago while in the midst of giving a presentation on the process of discernment when the question of faith sharing arose. Oh, I wasn't so surprised that the topic came up, faith sharing is a wonderful way to do communal discernment; what surprised me was how many in this group, which was made up of Associates and Religious, had never viewed or even considered faith sharing as a prayer form at all.

It was this surprise that gave me pause to wonder and to ask myself, how many of us really use faith sharing as a form of communal prayer? Yes, faith sharing is a prayer form and more importantly one of the core elements in the building of the relationship between Associates and Religious.

Over the years, faith sharing has become a practice that many Christians have used as a prayer form and as a way to build community. Its current popularity grew in tandem with the growth of the Small Christian Community movement of the 1970s and 1980s, although hints of its roots can be found in Luke's account of the road to Emmaus (Luke 23:13-22). Three followers of Jesus were leaving Jerusalem following the crucifixion, hearts down cast and despondent. It was on this road that Jesus met and invited them to listen and reflect as he broke open the scriptures and shared with them how God had acted in him and through the events of that past week. They in return shared from their own struggling hearts which had now become inflamed with joy as they recognized Jesus in their midst. They in turn went back to Jerusalem as witnesses of the living Christ. In this story of divine faith sharing, sadness had indeed been turned into joy and new relationships strengthened.



This practice can also find some roots in the practice of *Lectio Divina*, or Divine Reading. *Lectio* is primarily a process of encountering God by listening to God's word and surrendering to it. Faith sharing takes *Lectio* and brings it one step further by calling us to share the fruits of this encounter with others.

Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND, in her book *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*, explains that, "Faith sharing is the practice in which two or more people share experiences about their relationship with God: their awareness of God's Presence in the events of their lives; their struggles to believe in God's Presence; the ways in which they have responded to or resisted God's Presence in their lives; places of suffering, confusion, or joy that have been the entry point for their prayer. It is grounded in humble acceptance of the truth that each of us is a person honored and loved by God and that God is present and active in all of our lives. It assumes the belief that God often chooses to minister to us through the sharing and support of others."

Faith-sharing provides a simple way to gather with others, read scripture, materials on our founders, or other spiritual materials, and to reflect on its meaning by sharing those insights with one another. As with all prayer, intentional faith sharing must be done in an atmosphere of reverent listening and respectful confidentiality. We share our experience simply and must receive the sharing of others without judgment.



Silence, prayerful silence, between sharing is important. This is the time that the group holds each other in the prayers of our hearts.

Where to start? Here are some simple rules before you start:

1. Remember, everyone has wisdom that is uniquely their own. To withhold this wisdom deprives the entire group.
2. Everyone gets a chance to share. Some might need a little encouragement at first but if you provide a respectful and supportive group where people will feel safe to share it will happen.
3. For those where talking is not such a hard thing to do, remember rule #2. Don't dominate the dialog.
4. Be open to new views and perspectives, they will stretch you in surprising ways.
5. If you disagree, do so with care and respect for the wisdom of the other.
6. Welcome Jesus in your midst, sounds simple eh? Not so much if your own agendas get in the way. Be prepared to listen to the voices around you – in other words be humble.
7. Take turns being the group facilitator– this person simply lets the group know what reading is scheduled, makes sure everyone has the time and date you will meet and, if necessary, remind people of rule #2.

The basic steps of Faith Sharing

- Invite God in. Open your minds, hearts and soul to receive the word.
- Read or listen to a text.
- Let the silence after the reading allow your heart to listen to God. What words or phrases touched your heart, challenged or puzzled you?
- Share what you have heard in your heart.
- Commit to some action either individually or as a group – how are we going to respond to what we have heard?

Remember the Emmaus story.

Faith sharing is a prayer style that is close to the heart of Apostolic Congregations. Many of our founders used a form of faith sharing with their early followers. Examine the foundation myths of your own congregation. For example, within my own congregation, our foundress, Catherine, called together each week her “holy helpers”. These young women would break open the scriptures for the week, pondering the question, what was Jesus saying of them? Then they went out to help their neighbors in the village. When the week ended, they came together to share where they saw Jesus that week and start the process of sharing over again. It was this process that bonded them as a community and as followers of the Gospel. It strengthened their trust in each other and in the voice of God speaking in their hearts.

It is this dynamic element of faith sharing which builds relationships, allows misconceptions and misunderstandings to be aired in safety. It opens our eyes and hearts to the God who is in the other; it offers the opportunity to hear the voice of our founders once again through lived experience of religious and associates alike. It is why faith sharing is such an important element in the development of the Associate-Religious relationship as well as an avenue for renewal for us all.



# Prayer Reflection

From 40-Day Journey with Joan Chittister, published by Augsburg Books.

Prayer is neither a passive nor an empty act. On the contrary, prayer ‘works.’ The only problem is that when we pray, we get what we seek. What we want out of prayer determines how we go about it. If we want security and protection, we say suffrage prayers; if we want serenity and enlightenment, we meditate; if we want immersion in the mind of Christ, we immerse ourselves in scripture. Prayer is not one kind of activity, it is many. It nourishes the spiritual life. It also reflects it.

When we are young [religious], we ‘say’ our prayers. When we get older [in religious life], we ‘go to prayer.’ But, when we begin to see prayer as the undergirding of life, the pulse of the universe in the center of the soul, we become a prayer.

As Gandhi says, first we have words and no heart. Finally, we grow into a heart without words. The truth is that the way we pray says something about what we believe about God and about what we believe about life itself.

To the monastic mind, prayer is the marking of time and the pursuit of the known but unseen, the fulfilling but unaccomplished. Those qualities mark the prayer life of a monastic community in form and substance.

## Closing Prayer

### ***A Psalm Prayer Celebrating God’s Providence***

It would have been enough if You had lifted us from nothingness to humanity. But you made us in Your image.

*We praise You, Provident God.*

It would have been enough if You had made a simple covenant limited to our lifetime. But you wove the generations into one long benediction.

*We praise You, Provident God.*

It would have been enough if You had led us out of slavery. But You continue to share our bondage until we are fully free.

*We bless You, Provident God.*

It would have been enough if You had championed the cause of justice for all who are oppressed. But You heal the broken hearted and You bind up all wounds.

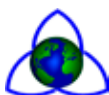
*We need You, Provident God.*

It would have been enough if You had simply shared Your vision through the prophets of the past. But You speak prophetic words to us and through us, even now.

*We hear You, Provident God.*

It would have been enough if You had sojourned briefly among us. but you stayed with us and within us.

*We live by Your Holy Spirit and we rejoice, O Provident God.*



*The Social Justice Agenda:  
A Ketteler Legacy*



*We are the care of God  
for the world.*

Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler

*Social Justice*

# Opening Prayer

## Option 1

**Leader:** We exalt your Providence, O God

**All:** *and we commit ourselves to making Providence more visible in our world.*

**Leader:** Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for the time to ponder, to question, to struggle, for the new insights, for immersion in the issues, for a greater consciousness and courage rising in us.

**All:** *Strengthen us to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.*

**Leader:** Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for our charism, for trust, for openness and receptivity, for a consistent ethic of life, and our searching its deepest meanings, for beliefs, values, Gospel calls, and the commitment rising in us.

**All:** *Focus us to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.*

**Leader:** Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for the vision to see a new reality, to hear a new call, for the struggle of wealth, power, and advancement, for the poor, the helpless, and the prophet rising in us.

**All:** *Enlighten us to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.*

**Leader:** Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for attention to climate change, stewardship, and sustainability, for the new cosmology, for treading lightly on the earth, and for right relationships rising in us.

**All:** *Educate us to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.*

**Leader:** Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for sponsoring safe places for those in danger, compassion for the lost and lonely, for educating children, providing shelter for the homeless, spiritual guidance for the journey, for Sisters, Associates, and co-workers and the hope rising in us.

**All:** *Stretch us to continue to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.*

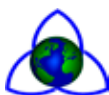
**Leader:** Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for respect, compassion, integration, and wholeness, for peace vigils, advocacy letters, and lived mission experiences, for Chapter mandates, goals, and the witness rising in us.

**All:** *Challenge us to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.*

**Leader:** Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for the grace to see one another in truth and hold one another in reverence, for the gifts of discernment, humor, and harmony, for the forgiveness, healing and oneness, and the Sacred rising in us.

**All:** *Renew our spirit to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.*

By Barbara McMullen, CDP, for the *Book of Hours, Volume 1, A Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Our Founders.*





# Opening Prayer

## Option 2

**Leader:** We exalt your Providence, O God

**All:** and we commit ourselves to making Providence more visible in our world.

**“I love the age in which we live for its mighty wrestling with the problems of our day, however far away we are from solving them.”** *Bishop Ketteler*

**Side 1:** In this moment, draw us to yourself Provident God. Make us aware not so much of what we're given, but of all we have received and so have to share.

**Side 2:** Send us forth in power and gladness and with great courage to live out in the world what we pray and profess as women (and men) of Providence.

**Side 1:** That in sharing, we may do justice...make peace.

**Side 2:** Grow in love. Enjoy ourselves, other people and your world now and You forever, Amen.

*Adapted from Guerrillas of Grace by Ted Loder.*



# The Social Justice Agenda: A Ketteler Legacy

## A. The Ketteler Legacy:

In order to understand the importance of peace and justice in the context and life commitment of a Sister of Divine Providence (CDP's), one must first know something about Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz, Germany (1849-1877) one of the two Co-founders of the CDP's.

Ketteler never perceived justice in a vacuum. He always spoke of justice in the context of charity or compassion. Further, he understood the social teaching of the Church as the primary lens from which to view the political and economic issues of his times.

Finally, he understood the theology of Divine Providence as inclusive, embracing the past, present and future. Thus he was able to say, with great depth of meaning, "I love the age in which we live, with its mighty wrestling with sublime ideas, however far we are from attaining them."

Ketteler knew that there would be another age and another time and that the "wrestling" would be with a new set of ideas for that new era. He knew that this is how the Provident God works.



## Ketteler's legacy involves powerful agendas:

### **1. The concern for the rights of the working class and the poor, and the rise of the labor union to protect and preserve these rights.**

Given the rise of the industrial revolution, and the concurrent rise of Marxism, Ketteler feared that unless there was a counter movement which centered on a Christian response, Marxism would possibly prevail. Ketteler countered with an oft quoted sermon at Liebfrauenheide, which stressed the dignity of work, the rights of workers and the poor, the protection of property rights, the evil of child labor, and the need to keep the Sabbath holy. With this speech, a Christian social labor movement was launched in Germany. The principle tenet was that only through the teachings of Jesus Christ could the labor movement move forward with dignity. The institutions founded by Ketteler were and are living proof of his broad social concerns e.g. orphanages, schools, hospitals, home care, etc.

### **2. The centrality of the Christian family, of Christian education and the enhancement of the position of women in the Church and society.**

In a series of sermons delivered in 1848, Ketteler stated: "The mother is the prime educator also, she is the educator of the father of the family... Woman is the hearer of peace, joy and blessing." Throughout his episcopacy, Ketteler acted to provide equal access to education, and to stress the role of women and the family. He also spoke in behalf of benefits for workers and release-time to provide resources for and presence to families. These actions also flowed from his emphasis on human liberty in relation to God's will and divine governance.

### **3. The position of Ketteler and the German Bishops regarding papal infallibility at Vatican Council I.**

In 1869, Pope Pius IX called Vatican Council I. A primary issue at the Council was the draft of a document on the centrality of Papal infallibility. While Ketteler and the other German bishops were not opposed to papal infallibility, they also defended the collegial role of the bishops of the world when a statement was to be made "ex cathedra". Ketteler also desired more time to educate the German people to this reality. When Ketteler realized that the document was not going to include this collegial understanding, he and other bishops left the council, prior to the vote,



rather than cast a “non placet” vote against the will of Rome after submitting a letter indicating that he would concede to whatever the Council determined.

**4. The call of Ketteler, particularly with regard to the social agenda, to read the signs of the times, and to address this agenda.**

Ketteler’s capability to do this is evident in his response to the *Kulturkampf*, a movement on the part of Bismarck to reign in the influence of the Churches in Germany, especially the Catholic Church. When Bismarck removed the Priests and Sisters from schools, hospitals and social work, a lesser person may have succumbed. Instead, Ketteler used this as an opportunity to reach out to a broader world need by extending apostolic endeavors beyond Germany. Thus, our Sisters set sail for the United States and another group to the Netherlands.

Concurrently, through the early 1870’s Ketteler led the movement to take back the rights of the Church to exercise its ministerial role. There are numerous other examples of Ketteler’s move to address the needs of the times and to act in behalf of the people of God. In many instances he was ahead of the prevailing cultural situation, one of the reasons why he is perceived as a powerful voice in the 21st century.

**B. The God of Providence and the Justice Agenda:**

The emphasis of contemporary Providence theologians has been on the following:

1. The action of caring extended to the whole of creation and found active in the establishment of right relations and ecological and environmental concern for the earth;
2. A dynamic understanding of Divine/human governance beyond a passive acceptance of the will of God and into co-creative concepts, which carry on the saving acts of Jesus;
3. Reconciliation which goes beyond mere forgiveness and into active reconciling;
4. Emphasis in New Testament understandings beyond the care expressed in the “lilies of the field” and in more active Gospel passages, such as the wedding feast of Cana, the loaves and fishes, and the Good Samaritan as Providence stories;
5. Understandings of compassion and caring which related to standing with those who suffer as an act of solidarity;
6. Liberation as a Providence call to “set free the captives”.

**C. Translation into Contemporary Understandings:**

Where does this background put the Sisters of Divine Providence and those who identify with their charism and stance in the 21st century?

In order to answer this question it is important to understand several contemporary realities. While the CDP’s understood that peace and justice were part of their charism, until the redefining of religious life and the renewal which followed, this aspect of our heritage was understood in fairly traditional terms.

The redefinition in the 1960’s also took on added momentum as it was stoked by political and cultural events, particularly in the United States, e.g. the era of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights movement, etc. Also the CDP’s had opportunities for justice education from the formation of organizations such as Network, Common Cause, Pax Christi and local movements for peace and justice.

CDP’s also reflected on how some were better at the service aspects of justice, while others felt called to devote efforts to systemic change. Many felt called to re-examine the role of women, particularly in our Church, and to act to insure the integration of inclusive pro-feminism into the ongoing dialogue in the Church and in society. Over time from these initial streams in the 20th century, as we now move into the era of the new millennium, there are some new directions:

1. The desire to read the “signs of the times” in a contemporary context and to



adopt the slogan “to think globally and act locally”. This also involves the obligation to keep abreast of contemporary issues and to take action where we can both individually and corporately. Recently, CDP’s have moved in the direction of realizing that a corporate stance is necessary for the purpose of solidarity, and thus the first move in this direction was to address the issue of trafficking and to take corporate action against it.

2. Just as Ketteler related to Divine Governance and the will of God, so do the CDP’s. We do this in the light of emerging understandings of Providence, which view our role as co-creators, with a great responsibility for the cosmos, for environmental issues, for planetary sustainability and for right relationships with all of God’s creation.

3. In each of the sponsored ministries of the congregation there is a defined justice thrust flowing from the mission statement. In educational and spirituality ministries, justice education is a prime agenda, part of the curriculum and program development as well as in education of lay leadership and governing or advisory boards. The social ministries are active in making justice with compassion a living reality each day.

4. Local communities pray and reflect frequently on this legacy and find ways to support justice causes locally through education, service and direct involvement to support ongoing awareness and change. There are numerous examples but to name a few, fund-raising for causes, the weekly peace protest at our central headquarters, service at or support for local food banks, homeless shelters, our own ministries and our foster care program.

5. The enlargement of the community base of influence has been aided by our Associate Program and involvement with other peace and justice societies and movements. It is also supported by the sisters and associates who have chosen positions or volunteer work in the social ministries and who work to educate others in this regard.

6. As stated in the prayer service opening the 200th Anniversary of Bishop Ketteler:  
*“Provident God, thank you for the legacy of justice, for the time to ponder, to question, to struggle for the new insights, for immersion in issues, for a greater consciousness rising in us. Strengthen us to speak your truth and trust that You are with us.”* (Barbara McMullen, CDP)

**Sources:** W. E. Ketteler: *Six Sermons Relative to the Social Question*. 1848;  
Sr. Liberata Ricker, *Wilhelm Emmanuel Freiherr von Ketteler, der Mainzer Arbeiter bischof, gestern — heute — morgen*. 2007.

Prepared by: M. Joan Coultas, CDP, January 2011



# Six Topics Relative To The Social Question

Delivered by Bishop Ketteler two years before his consecration as Bishop of Mainz, November 19, 1848 through December 20, 1848

**1. The Christian View of Private Property:** The "haves and the have-nots;" the rich growing richer and the poor growing poorer; God is exclusive proprietor of all creation; regardless of how property comes to be exercised, how it is shared or delegated, or who comes into possession of property, the ultimate dominion of God remains inviolate. He sees the lack of faith which deprives the rich of any spirit of active charity to work among the poor. Where there is private ownership, goods will be properly cared for.



**2. Christian Charity and the Social Problem:** Ketteler reminds the people that the answer to the social ills do not lie with the government, for no matter what "form of government we choose, still there will not be enough bread, enough food, enough shelter, enough clothing for our poor." He said that the poor become involved with political movements out of desperation and the unnaturalness of their poverty.

**3. Human Liberty:** He stressed the importance of interior and exterior freedom to be truly human and to become all that we, as human beings, are destined to become. This demands a reform also of education. Ketteler believed in Christian education which was persecuted in his time. Ketteler reiterates the Christian concept of human liberty, believing that God has given us something of His own freedom and self-determination in creating us. Human liberty means we are capable of developing according to God's plan.

**4. Human Dignity:** Here he stressed the importance to strive to heal the division between the rich and poor; he talked about halting the moral decline that victimized large numbers of people who have lost faith and hope and love for God and fellow-human beings. He presents an either/or--our destination is either outside of this world, in GOD, in which case our life is a preparation for our ultimate goal or else our destiny is to enjoy the here and now and to terminate our existence when we die. The human heart longs for peace and justice and this is part of our human destiny.

**5. Christian Marriage and the Family:** He notes how hard it is to present the ideal to someone who has had no experience of a Christian family. He mentions three essential components of Christian marriage: love, unity and indissolubility. There were elements working against good marriages in his time. His allegiance to the Church is seen in his convincing statements. "Marriage is an exclusive treasure of Christianity." He stressed the importance of the SACRAMENT of marriage with all the grace it brings. And because Christ demands such pure, self-sacrificing love and fidelity in marriage, He will equip souls with grace to measure up. Ketteler speaks of the dignity of women and how much Christianity has enhanced the place of women in the Church. He urged all men and women to develop devotion to Mary. He says that the mother takes the first place as prime educator of her children and adds (How about this?) that a good Christian mother is also the educator of the father in the family.

**6. Teaching Authority of the Church:** He teaches that we all need a certain amount of authority and that we must seek the higher, infallible authority. As a loyal Catholic of his time, he states emphatically that there is just one institution which offers this divine authority -"the Roman Catholic Church, our holy mother!" He said that our choice is not whether we wish to submit to authority, but rather to which authority we will subject ourselves. He makes a strong plea for adherence to the Catholic Church and to embrace its teachings with fidelity and integrity.

**Throughout these six discourses there is a very prevalent and evident feeling that Ketteler sensed the mounting tensions between government factions and the Church; between ecclesiastical and political authority; between Protestants and Catholics--something we can hardly imagine, given our American tradition. Only by reading more can we appreciate his stature in the world and church of his day.** -- Genevieve Brandstetter, CDP



# The Christian View of Private Property

By Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler

Translated by Rupert J. Ederer, Ph.D., Buffalo, N. Y.

First sermon, November 19, 1848

Today, my Christian Brethren. we reflect over the centuries that have passed since the dedication of the ancient churches in this city as houses of the living God, and we look back over the ranks of your ancestors who with one faith, one hope, and one common love walked through these doors. It was they who passed on to you that greatest legacy of all, the Faith in which they lived and died happily. It may also be useful to look into the future and to ask whether you and your children will preserve with equal loyalty these houses of God in the true Faith, so that future generations will be able to commemorate the consecration of churches as we are doing today.

The most reassuring thought in this regard, however, is that while church buildings depend on human caprice which can be fickle, the Church to which we belong owes its strength and durability not to man, but to God and His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to whom is given all power on heaven and on earth.

The survival of the Catholic Church on earth, therefore, is not jeopardized because the powerful of this earth and entire nations may rise against it, nor is it guaranteed because princes and governments may choose to protect it. The Church goes on existing because of the will of Almighty God who once said, "Let it be," and by His word He created the world out of nothing. It is the same God who then said to a mortal man, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16: 18) And, that same God later give the Church His promise, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." (Luke 21: 33)

Therefore, whether the servants of the Church, the Apostles of old and their successors go about, unsupported by earthly power, without staff and shoes, without gold and silver, without a constant abode, with only one cloak. or whether respectful nations build palaces for them and surround them with worldly might and splendor, the Rock on which the Church rests is still no more or no less permanent. Men have no more power over the Church than they have over Christ Himself. They can try to make Him king or they can turn around and persecute Him, mock Him, dress Him in the cloak of a fool and nail Him to a cross; but they are unable to prevent Him from rising from the tomb by His own power, nor can they foreclose upon the survival of His Kingship here on earth.

And so it is with the Church of Christ. Men can bestow upon it earthly treasures and a seat alongside the thrones of kings as our ancestors did; or they can rob it of its earthly possessions, mock and humiliate it as is the case today. Still the power of the Almighty which resides in the crucified Christ cannot be taken from the crucified Church. The Church will survive by this power until the end of time.

By virtue of this faith and conviction, the Church calls itself Catholic, i.e., the Church for all mankind. It possesses a heritage of unchangeable truth more lofty than any imaginable cultural accomplishments of the human spirit. It enjoys a vitality more dynamic than any conceivable ebb and flow of human life. If there were a single truth in all creation greater than that truth possessed by the Catholic Church, if there were a single virtue nobler than those which the Catholic Church strives to inculcate, if there were a single vice or corruption which the Church could not overcome, then belief in that Church would be a deception and trust in it would be folly. The Church would not be the work of God but rather of man.

Until now, the Church has stood the test of time true to her Divine origin. All through history, no higher mission and no greater power has appeared that could supplant that of the Church. She has the mandate to spread its message as the universal truth for all mankind. "Go out all over the world, and preach the gospel to the whole of creation." (Mark 16: 15) Without benefit of temporal resources, without the



benefit of human learning and erudition, relying solely on the overpowering with Divine truth of its teaching, the early Church went about fulfilling that mandate. She has conquered time and distance until our own day and proclaimed the Gospel throughout the world. She has sought out all the nations of the earth. She has presented her truth alike to kings and beggars, to the learned and proud as well as to simple children. In the face of the endless diversity and confusion to which the human spirit is subject, 'the Church has always succeeded in discovering and holding fast to herself those qualities and truths which are common to all mankind. Thus, she has always and everywhere been in tune with the saying of Tertullian, "Oh human spirit, you are, by your nature, Christian!" (Tertullian, Apolog. c. 17)

The Catholic Church has been tested in the face of all human resourcefulness. A thousand times her enemies have erred out triumphantly, as they once taunted the crucified Christ, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." (Matthew 27: 40) "If you are the work of God, climb out of the abyss into which we have cast you." But the judgment of history prevailed and the Church, time and again, arose from the dead by her own mysterious power while her enemies disappeared often without leaving a significant trace in history.

Now, once again, we find ourselves at such a point in history, The enemies of the Church, more numerous and powerful than ever, stand around the cross onto which they have nailed the Church. Lies, injustice, mockery, and contempt are the nails and ropes by which these hostile forces wish to make certain that they will never again be confronted by the Church. Even the rank and file and the poor have all too often joined the Church's enemies, and this includes some of her own sons and daughters who are now shamefully numbered among her bitterest antagonists.

Will the Church once again be able to rise from her apparent death; will she be able to counter the disastrous prevailing unbelief with the ancient Faith of our fathers; will she be able to restore her high moral standards to stem the flood of oral decadence which now threatens to drown us; will she know how to dispense good counsel, help and confidence in this atmosphere of moral chaos and desperation? We respond, without a moment's hesitation with our resounding, "Yes!" What more, we are prepared to bear witness to this belief with every last drop of blood in our veins. Millions of loyal Catholics around the earth join with us in our response to the challenge. How else to explain the calm and confidence of all steadfast Catholics in the face of the raging storms? Even as the towering waves threaten to engulf us, the loyal Catholic stands secure on the Rock, bolstered by a confidence that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!

But this serene faith is not enough in our time! We must bear witness to its truth by works. Precisely now' when the Church stands abandoned by all worldly power she must more than ever reveal her inner God-given strength and show the world that she possesses the same power that brought Christ's mission to fulfillment as He hung helpless on the Cross and made Christianity victorious in the first centuries when the overwhelming might of Pagan Rome was arrayed against it. Now the Church must draw on the deposit of her embattled Faith to present a truth to the world which will work like a sun to dispel the fog which the Father of Lies is spreading. And now she must draw on that reservoir to offer a source of strength, of love, and of virtue which will heal all wounds and lift the crushing burden under which our world is staggering.

How the Church will accomplish this twofold task, which now confronts her, to spread the truth and to restore life to a decadent society, is something none of us can answer. The Holy Spirit who guides her will determine her course. All that I am privileged to do at present is to recall the Church's teaching which is relevant to the most vital social problems of our time, namely the Church's teaching regarding the private property right. I would like to point out how superior this teaching is to contemporary opinions regarding the property right and how the Church, fortified with this doctrine, can heal the evil of our time.



Today the haves and have-nots (*Die Besitzenden und die Nichtbesitzenden*) confront each other with animosity, and the poverty of the masses grows daily. The right to ownership is, for all practical purposes, viewed with suspicion by those who are deprived of property; and from time to time there are manifestations which leap up like flames from the earth, now here, now there, threatening a general conflagration. On the one side we witness a stubborn, narrow interpretation of the property right, and on the other a determination to abolish that right completely. We look desperately for moderation between these extremes.

Amid the turmoil we intend to recall the teaching of the Catholic Church on property as it was developed by St. Thomas Aquinas more than six hundred years ago. We may perhaps discover that the human spirit, guided by the Faith, came up with an answer to our problem more than half a millennium ago which mankind having abandoned that Faith, is now trying in vain to rediscover.

To express the fundamental Church teaching on property rights, St. Thomas falls back on the relationship between God and His creation. We shall re-examine the Saint's treatment of this basic relationship.

St. Thomas teaches that all creatures and all earthly goods, by virtue of their original nature, can belong only to God. This thesis follows logically from the article of Faith which tells us that everything created by God Himself was created from nothing. Therefore, God is the true and exclusive ultimate proprietor of all creatures.

This ultimate dominion of God over His creatures is part and parcel of the essence of creation and is, therefore, inalienable. Regardless of how the property right comes to be exercised, how it is shared, or delegated, or what customs may appear, or who may come into possession of property, the ultimate dominion of God over His creatures remains inviolate. In this sense, God has the absolute right and man does not. However, aside from this ultimate absolute dominion of God, St. Thomas speaks of a right to use (*Nutzungsrecht*), and it is here that man's rights over earthly goods become operative. Thus, when we speak of a natural right to private property, where man is concerned one cannot speak of a full and absolute right--that belongs only to God--but only a right to use.

From this it is clear that man's right to property--even his right to possess and use property--is never absolute in the sense that man may use earthly goods as he pleases. Man must use the goods of creation as the Creator has ordained their use. Man must conform to the order which God has determined in the use of the things of creation, and he has no right to use them in any manner which goes counter to God's plan of creation. This plan of the Creator for His earthly goods is expressed in the nature of creation itself and expressed in the words which God spoke after He created the world: "See, I give you all the seed-bearing plants that are upon the whole earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this shall be your food." (Genesis 1: 29)

The conclusion we draw from St. Thomas' teaching is that God had the ultimate dominion over all things. In His providence, however, He destined certain of those things for sustaining man in his corporal needs, and therefore man has a certain natural right to private property, namely, the right to use the things of creation. From this concept of property we draw two important conclusions.

First, the Catholic Church's concept of property has nothing in common with the prevalent view which regards man as the absolute lord of that which he owns. The Church can in no sense support the notion that man has the right to "wheel and deal" (*zu schalten und walten*) as he pleases with the goods of this world. When she speaks of and defends the property rights, she must always preserve the three essential elements of that right:

- 1) that God and God alone is the ultimate and absolute owner of all things;
- 2) that man has only a restricted right, in effect, to use created things;
- 3) that in using created things man must always have regard for the order which God established for the universe.

Second, it is clear that such a notion of the property right of which we are speak-





ing, is possible only when there is living faith in God, which acknowledges that this right is based on His will and on a divinely established order. Only since men who call themselves the friends of humanity, although they work to destroy humanity, along with their spiritual ancestors, have shattered men's faith in God, has it been possible for such an unholy concept of private property to gain currency. We refer to a concept of ownership whereby man in effect arrogates to himself the rights which only God possesses over property. Once he divorced himself from his God, man pictured himself as the exclusive lord and master of all that he possessed. Accordingly, he viewed his goods merely as a means to satisfy his growing greed.

Divorced from his God, man made pleasure-seeking and the satisfaction of his sensual appetites, the purpose of life; and the goods of this earth were, of course, the means to achieve this goal. Then a gap between rich and poor appeared such as the Christian world had never known. At the same time that most of the wealthy indulge themselves in a lavish and wasteful satisfaction of every sensate whim, they are indifferent to the plight of their less fortunate fellow men who must often do without even the bare necessities of life. Thus, the rich man is in fact depriving his brother of the things which the Creator meant for him to have. The judgement of God rests heavily on this serious distortion of the natural and supernatural order of things—this monumental injustice! It is not the Catholic Church which brought on this sorry situation, but unbelief and godlessness. As godlessness has progressively eroded the will to work among the poor it has simultaneously deprived the rich of any spirit of active charity.

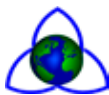
The doctrine which we have discussed so far, based on God's ultimate dominion over created things, constitutes only the essential foundation of the true Christian notion of property rights. We must proceed now to build on this foundation a more complete understanding of the property right.

As we noted, man's right to private property is simply a right delegated by God to man authorizing him to use the goods of the earth according to the prescribed order in creation. This means that the goods of creation are destined to serve the needs of all mankind, God's will in this regard could be accomplished in either of two ways. Men can exercise their God-given right to own—or rather to use—property in common, as Communism proposes. Thus, they would administer the goods of the earth in common and distribute the benefits. The other alternative is to distribute the goods of the earth in such a manner that each person has the right to the exclusive use of certain things in order to enjoy the fruits of those things.

St. Thomas comes to grips with the problem as to which of these two approaches is more appropriate for mankind in general, and thus he solves a problem which troubles the world six hundred years later! Let us follow his guidance in this matter.

Regarding man's right to use property, St. Thomas makes a distinction between the right to care for and administer (*Fursorge und Verwaltung*) on the one hand, and the right to enjoy the benefits coming from property, on the other (*Fruchtgenusses*). The distinction is self-explanatory. As they appear in nature, the goods of creation are not, by and large, capable of satisfying human needs. They must first be prepared, that is to say, worked on and processed.

Regarding the care and preparation of the goods of this earth for man's use, St. Thomas states that the right of the individual person to own must be acknowledged. This is so, first, because only by private ownership will goods be properly cared for. Everyone takes better care of things which belong to him than of those things which men hold in common. Over and above this, every man avoids work where possible, and where things are held in common a man would just as soon leave tasks to his fellow man — as is the case, for example, wherever there is a large number of servants assigned to a task. It is not difficult to recognize the truth of this thesis. If all things were owned in common, or assigned only for a specified period of time, or if the inheritance right were abolished, diligent care of property would disappear. Improvement of such property would be virtually out of the question, and even the incentive to discover and try new things would be uprooted from the human spirit.



Every man would rely on everyone else; man's natural laziness would have lost its counterbalance, and this would soon lead to the domination of one by the other as well as the deterioration of available resources of the earth.

Secondly, St. Thomas wrote, only by the private ownership of property will that order be preserved which is necessary for the efficient exploitation of the goods of this earth. If everyone is in charge of everything, there will be general confusion, if not chaos. This truth is self-evident. There is a generous diversity in the division of human labor (*Abstufung der Beschäftigung*), and all must conform to a general order if all of the needs of men are to be provided for in the way God makes this possible by His plan of creation. Disturb this order, and you jeopardize the welfare of mankind. But the ownership of property by individual families is conducive to this order inasmuch as it determines to a large extent the occupation of the family members, and prevents a sudden switch from one kind of work and life style to another by large numbers of people. How chaotic the division of labor would become if it were subjected to a constantly recurring redistribution of the goods of creation among different people!

Finally, St. Thomas argued that only by acknowledging the right of private property can peace be preserved among men. Experience teaches how easily common ownership leads to quarrels and disputes. It is a truth which is painful enough that even blood relatives cannot agree on how to use what they hold in common without quarrels arising. What would happen if mankind as a whole had to share every possession and divide up every task? All humanity would disintegrate into chaos and conflict! With these three irrefutable arguments for private ownership, St. Thomas stands foursquare in harmony with the law of God which states: "Thou shalt not steal." The two together with the teaching of the Catholic Church stand irreconcilably opposed to the communism proposed in our time. Communism whereby the goods of this earth must be redistributed periodically-contradicts the law of nature, because it makes impossible the orderly administration of these goods. It thereby frustrates the natural purpose, spreads disorder and enmity among men, and consequently eliminates the necessary condition for decent human existence.

With reference to the second thesis, which derives from the right of man to use the things of the earth, namely the right to enjoy the fruits of those things of which man is in charge, St. Thomas elucidates a corresponding obligation. According to him man should never regard the fruits of his own stewardship of property as his exclusive property but rather as the common property of all. He should be prepared, therefore, to share these fruits with others who are in need. Thus, the Apostle wrote, "... Warn those who are rich in this present world...(to be) always ready to give, and to share the common burden." (1 Timothy 6: 17-18) (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theology* II, IIq. 66a 1 et 2)

Just as Christian teaching is opposed to false communism, it is no less opposed to the false teaching of private property rights which it confronts with a kind of true communism. God created nature to nourish all mankind and that goal must be accomplished. Therefore, every man should be prepared to make the fruits of what he owns common property to whatever degree this may be necessary to fulfill the intention of the Creator.

We have now presented, to the best of our ability, the teaching of St. Thomas regarding the private property right, a teaching which is also, in effect, the teaching of the Catholic Church. It is scarcely necessary to emphasize how superior this teaching is to the two irreconcilable opposing views on private ownership which confront each other in our time.

The false doctrine of the absolute right of private property sins against nature inasmuch as it sees nothing wrong with using what God intended to feed and clothe all mankind for satisfying unbounded greed and the most frivolous sensual cravings. It also undermines the noblest sentiments in the human heart and substitutes instead a harshness and insensitivity toward human misery which are not even worthy



of animals. This crude doctrine, in effect, sanctions the right to steal, since, as one father of the Church put it, stealing means not only to take what belongs to others, but also to hold back what rightfully ought to belong to others. The notorious saying, private property is theft, is not purely and simply false. Aside from enormous falsehood, it contains a grain of uncomfortable truth.

One can no longer wave this saying aside with contempt and ridicule. We must see to it that we eliminate the unpleasant kernel of truth it contains, so that it will once again be totally untrue! So long as there is that spark of truth in it, it is capable of setting the world on fire. As one excess leads to another, so one sin against nature begets another. From the exaggerated concept of property rights-Communism was begotten. But Communism too is a sin against nature. While masquerading as a humanitarian solution it can only bring misery to mankind since it destroys incentive and order as well as peace among men. It begets a war of all against all and thus eradicates the secure foundation that human existence is based upon.

Like a beacon, the truth of the Catholic Church shines through the fog of both these distortions. The Catholic Church recognizes the half-truths in each of the opposing viewpoints and integrates them in her teaching while rejecting the untruths in both. She recognizes no unconditional human right to own the goods of this earth, but only a right to make use of them according to the order ordained by God.

The Church defends the property right inasmuch as private ownership is required for the diligent care and management of property as well as in the interests of order and peace. She blesses a kind of communism inasmuch as the fruits of private ownership must again become the common property of all mankind.

I cannot leave this subject without dwelling on the way that this concept of the ownership right fits into the higher plan of Divine Providence and how everything harmonizes with the Divine plan. Man, while here on earth, must fulfill the will of God. By the power of his intellect he must grasp God's truth, and with His will he must put that truth into action. The intellect and will of man must fulfill that prayer which says, "Thy Will be done." But in accordance with the dignity of the human being, God granted to man a free will. Therefore, man acts in a truly human way and his actions only possess moral worth when he carries out the work of God on earth of his own free will. Even God respects the free will of man and does not act to set it aside even when man uses this will to harm himself, i.e., acts contrary to God's will.

Apply these important truths to the Catholic teaching on private property. God created the earth and all of its resources so that man could draw his sustenance from them. God could have accomplished this end by naturally enforced distribution of the earth's abundance. But that was not in His exalted plan. He preferred rather to afford man the opportunity to exercise self-determination and free will. He wanted to give man the chance to share in the fulfillment of His divine plan for order so that he would become God-like. Therefore, He ordained an unequal distribution of the things of this earth so far as their management and possession are concerned, in order that man might have the opportunity to share God's largesse with his fellow man.

Thus, man is supposed to be drawn into the life of love which God makes possible for us. By virtue of this charity, he ought to dispense the goods of creation which God ordained for all mankind, thereby sharing in God's loving plan. If the distribution of the goods of this earth were all predetermined so that man had no control over it, if everything were, in other words, determined by something like physical laws, or if this matter were determined somehow by government regulations, then the finest wellspring of human nobility would be stifled. That is because, my dear Christian brethren, a life characterized by self-sacrificing acts of mercy and charity is the only life worthy of the children of God. Consider the life of sacrifice for example, lived by a frail sister of Charity. I ask you, does not such a life represent a more noble spectacle of spirit, dignity, beauty, and love than perhaps the life of an entire city? If only we would return to this life of charity! If only we would sublimate all of our needs by this love! If only we would resolve to conquer the world by the strength of that love and



lead it back to the Cross from which it has strayed. Let the ancient See of St. Boniface lead the way back to this life of active Christian love. Then and only then will we preserve our Faith, because the Christian Faith can only survive where it is activated by Christian charity. I repeat, my Christian brethren, let us conquer the world by our works of love and thereby bring it back to the Catholic Faith. Amen.

## Christian Charity and Social Problems

By Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler

Translated by Rupert J. Ederer, Ph.D., Buffalo, N. Y.

Second sermon, December 3, 1848

“Meanwhile, make no mistake about the age we live in; already it is high time for us to awake out of our sleep ....” (Romans 13: 11)

Ever since the Apostle Paul spoke these words to the Romans, the Church recalls them to the faithful each year at this time, the beginning of Advent. Down through the ages many have been obedient to this call. They awoke from their sleep, put off the things of darkness, and armed themselves with the weapons of light and of Our Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, many others have closed their ears and their hearts to the call of the Church. They persist in the ways of darkness. of the flesh and of lust. And now, we too are numbered among the generations which are predestined by God to hear this call of the Church, some of us for the last time. Let us cherish this call for the well-being of our immortal souls.

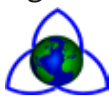
The times are becoming steadily more portentous and critical. The storm clouds that gather over our heads become ever more ominous; and as they do. the call of our Church becomes more and more urgent like the plea of a mother who sees her children threatened by great danger. In fact, on this very day, the Church has delivered a sobering warning through the voice of the bishops of all of Germany. Now I am privileged to add my unworthy voice to recall to you the words of the Apostle: “We recognize from the signs of the times that now is the hour to awaken from our sleep.”

In these words, it seems to me, there are two significant thoughts. First of all, we ought to recognize the problems of the times in which we live; and secondly, this-awareness ought to inspire us to abandon our attempt to live without Christ and to begin a new life in Christ. We will concern ourselves today with these thoughts and consider first where the attempt to live without Christ has brought humanity in our day and then what means Christ has given us to overcome the evil of the times.

My dear friends, it is impossible to speak of and recognize the conditions which confront us without time and again coming back to our social problems. I refer of course, to the division between the haves and the have nots -- the plight of our poor brothers, and the means to remedy these problems.

As much weight as we may be tempted to place on the political question and the structure of our government, still the focus of the problem does not lie there. Whatever the form of government that we may choose to establish, still there will not be enough food, enough work, enough bread, enough clothing, enough shelter for our poor. On the contrary, the more men work out solutions to our political problems, the more apparent it becomes and many don't want to accept that these only scratch the surface of the matter -- that our social problems only become still more critical and their solution becomes ever more urgent.

The main reason why the poorer sector of our population becomes involved in political movements is because of desperation and the unnaturalness of their poverty. While political leaders and demagogues alike are mainly interested in arrogating political power to themselves, the poor are concerned mainly with improving their material welfare. Until now, the latter still accord some trust to the proclamations of their leaders. They expect that relief will come from making changes in the form of government. But once they come to realize that neither the freedom of the press, the right of association, the right to vote, to assemble, nor nice speeches, nor popu-



lar sovereignty are able to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to comfort the afflicted, to heal the sick, then the poor will arise in wrath against those who deceived them. In desperation, they will seek a way out of their need and oppression by reaching out for another kind of solution.

This particular time in world history may, in fact, be destined as a proof to all mankind that it is not for one form of government or another to assure the welfare of nations; but that this calls for a different and for higher power. If our times will only make this abundantly clear, then despite all of the grief which they have brought, they will have been worthwhile! If we wish to understand our times, then we have to understand the social problems of our times. He who grasps these, understands our era; and he who does not, for him both the present and the future remain an enigma.

As an aid for understanding our social conditions, I presented, several weeks ago, the teaching of the Church on private property. I stated that this teaching is confronted at present by two opposite viewpoints; I explained how the denial of the Church's teaching would inevitably lead to the precarious condition in which we now find ourselves. Permit me to recall this teaching briefly and to proceed from it to a deeper understanding of our present problem.

According to the Church's teaching as developed by St. Thomas Aquinas, God, who created all things out of nothing, has absolute dominion over all of His creatures, human beings as well as the goods of the earth. This absolute dominion of God, being an essential derivative of the nature of creation, cannot be infringed by possession, custom, or any human prerogative. Man has only such rights as God means for him to have. In His wisdom, and providence, God has destined certain goods of the earth for man's use; and it is His will that these goods should first and foremost be available to satisfy the material needs of all mankind.

Therefore, the so-called property right is in essence nothing more than a right to use! With it comes the natural obligation imposed by God to use the fruits of our property according to His will. We pointed out also that this right to use implies two further rights: the right to manage (*Recht der Verwaltung*) whereby the goods of this earth are to be prepared for immediate use, and secondly, the right to enjoy the fruits of our property. We reached the conclusion that if God's intention is for all mankind to have access to the goods of the earth to satisfy its material needs, the right to manage property implies the right of the individual to own such property. If this were not the case, then all prudent management would cease, discord and disorder would result, and the conditions whereby man could satisfy his material wants would disappear. However, we also concluded that insofar as the yield from his property is concerned, every man must be prepared to regard his property as common. In other words, he must be prepared to cooperate with the will of the Creator in seeing to it that everyman may satisfy his urgent needs from the goods of creation!

Before I go further, my dear Christian brethren, I would like to remind you that God has favored us with a twofold revelation so that we could arrive at the truth. There is a natural and a supernatural revelation. We arrive at natural truths through the natural faculties of our soul, i.e., intelligence and reason; we reach supernatural truths with the aid of these same faculties applied to what God's messengers have revealed to us and the grace which Christ has earned for us. Since both kinds of revelation are from God and since God is the Truth, they cannot contradict each other, but they rather serve to fulfill and support each other. If we apply this to the doctrine of private property which I have called Christian, then we can, with equal right, refer to it as the natural right of private property. For even if I use certain quotations from supernatural revelation, I have nevertheless relied entirely on natural human reason to develop that doctrine. Whoever accepts that God is the Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth, and whoever agrees further that nature is destined for the support of all mankind, he would have to agree with the teaching which I have put forth here whether he is Christian or just simply a reasonable person. These two teachings are products of natural revelation, i.e., ascertainable by human reason -- since only the fool says in his heart, there is no God!



From this standpoint, the two concepts of private property which we encounter in the world represent sins not only against Christianity, but also against the natural law. It is not only unchristian, but also unnatural to regard man as the absolute owner of his possessions so that he is justified in using the fruits of his property to satisfy his most frivolous wants when he ought to be using them to alleviate his fellowman's misery. Likewise it is not only unchristian, but also unnatural to teach that goods ought to be held in common even for purposes of management -- an arrangement which leads to the elimination of all good management as well as to disorder and discord -- so that the natural function of the goods of the earth is frustrated. It is easy to understand how the unhealthy social conditions and tensions in which we now unhappily find ourselves would originate from such nonsensical doctrines, such distortions of natural truths, Thus, we are painfully aware, my Christian brethren, of the sorry social conditions which we now face. They are the inevitable consequence of this unnatural interpretation of the private property right, and that in turn is the result of the rejection of our relationship to God, and the deterioration of our living faith in God.

But one more question needs to be answered if we are to truly understand our times. How is it possible for such teachings to arise and spread far and wide when they are so contrary to nature? How is it possible that we see wealthy people who, in flagrant disregard of the most elementary natural laws and with undisturbed consciences, squander their superabundance at the same time that they permit poor people to starve and poor children to be overcome by neglect? How is it possible for us to still enjoy our affluence while our fellowman is in desperate need? How can we still find enjoyment in drink and recreation, and how is it that the human heart does not break when we think of the indigent sick who reach out from their sick-beds for consolation and find no one to console them? How can we travel blissfully about the streets of our great cities seeing there, as we do everywhere, poor waifs who are, like us, made in the image of God, but whose lot is physical degradation and moral corruption? In birth, in youth, and in old age, they are victims of the most degrading kinds of misery. How is it possible for natural human beings to become so unnaturally inhuman? And on the other hand, how is it possible for the poor and their godless seducers, to be taken in by the false and nonsensical doctrine of Communism which contravene, all natural rights and common sense, and to expect salvation from something which will obviously corrupt all humanity?

For these questions we have only one answer. It is contained in that teaching of Christianity about which Pascal wrote (Pensees III, 8) that it is at the same time so inaccessible to human reason but also such an inescapable truth, that without it man would remain a total mystery to himself. It is the doctrine of original sin and its transmission to all mankind. Certainly, Pascal continues, nothing is harder for us to swallow than this teaching; and yet, without this mystery -- among the most incomprehensible of Christian doctrines -- we would all be at a loss to explain ourselves and our plight.

Actually, from a purely human standpoint, original sin is folly. No need to harp on the inability of man to come to grips with this doctrine. We concede that. But this folly contains more wisdom than is contained in all human wisdom. Divine folly has more wisdom than all mankind. (I Corinthians 1:25) How else can we explain mankind? Its entire condition testifies to this mystery. And, we too just now are confronted with the same dilemma as we face our own particular problem. What Pascal says applies to the individual human being, I maintain, applies equally to the human condition in each epoch including our own. He who rejects the doctrine of original sin because he cannot understand it, for him human history will remain a puzzle. By wanting to understand everything, he will end up understanding nothing. Under the delusion of wanting to be reasonable in all things, he becomes totally unreasonable. He, however, who accepts the teaching on original sin in faith and in humility, to him all becomes clear. He understands himself and also all of human history. The matter we are dealing with proves this truth once again. Only the doctrine of original sin sheds real light on the miserable condition of our time. According to that doctrine,



man revolted against God and, as a consequence, his natural powers were diminished. His intellect was darkened and his will was inclined to evil. The three-pronged lust and Satan gained certain power over man, and only by the grace which Christ the Redeemer won for him can man regain his original dignity and destiny.

This basic teaching of Christianity alone can explain to us how even the natural truths become obscured and man's noblest inclinations can become warped. As long as Christianity prevailed, it enlightened man's understanding and strengthened his good will. So long as a Christian sense permeated man's entire being, such perversions of the private property doctrine as we witness today and such consequent division between rich and poor were inconceivable. What becomes of man without Christ and without the grace which the Apostle says is destined to renew all that is in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1: 10), world history in general and our own sorry social condition at present provide the best testimony, for reason does not prevail now in regulating man's social relations; rather, passion prevails.

Present day concepts of private property emanate not from reason, but from man's basest passions. They ridicule the doctrine of original sin and its cure the generation with true fraternal charity which consequences. They deny the source and the power of these base passions and maintain that they are simply the products of ignorance and indiscretion. What we need, they tell us, is reform of education, better schools. By this they have in mind a separation of schools from the Church, and a spread of some kind of general human culture.

Like a flower that develops out of itself, so human nature must be guided to its full development. Then passions, hardships and crime will disappear from the earth and true brotherhood will be restored. That is the teaching that is currently preached from the rooftops and passed off as supreme wisdom. I, however, question this wisdom. It is hard to conceive of a more flagrant, obvious falsehood than this. If it were true, then there would have to be two kinds of people on earth, those who are cultured and therefore free of passion, hardship and crime, i.e., those who act always in a pre-eminently reasonable manner; secondly there would be those lacking in cultural formation who are therefore slaves to passion and travail. I must ask, does this condition obtain now or can one imagine a greater untruth? How can one maintain such nonsense in the face of all available statistics in France and Germany which clearly show that neither the level of education nor of general prosperity has any bearing on the crime rate of a nation?

Statistics notwithstanding, daily human experience provides even more eloquent testimony against such preposterous claims. What of the miser who piles up wealth or the young traveller who goes about the world learning languages and acquiring knowledge of many lands, spending thousands to satisfy his whims without a thought given to his brother in need? And, what of the young lady who flits about as a social butterfly turning her body into a golden calf adorned with gold and diamonds without the least for her poor sister? Are all of these Christians who are lacking only in cultural upbringing? How does culture and refinement makes misers generous or fill bon vivants and vain young ladies with concern for their fellowman? What kind of education and what kind of textbook can implant the spirit of Christian resignation and self-denial in human hearts? Show me the generation with true fraternal charity which you can produce by worldly wisdom and without Christianity, and I will join you in throwing true Christianity overboard. So long as I remain convinced that all earthly wisdom, all science, all worldly culture together are unable to ignite a single spark of Christian charity on earth so as to make the miser generous, I will persist in my belief that mankind has fallen from grace and can only be healed by Christianity. The world has turned from Christ, has spurned His redemption, and has fallen pray to its own passions. That is the ultimate real cause of our social disorder.

The rich man disregards the command of God that he must share his superabundance with the poor, not because he is lacking in education or cultural formation, but rather because he is enslaved by greed and avarice. And the poor man covets what



belongs to others not because he did not study his lessons in school, but because he is slave to sloth and condemns the law of God, “Thou Shalt Not Steal.” Guided by instinct and passions, men can no longer recognize simple natural truths when these stand opposed to their passions.

The abandonment of Christianity is the source of our troubles, and so long as we fail to recognize this there is no solution to our problem. The individual person can only achieve his full dignity after he realizes within himself that it cannot reach his high destiny by his own unaided strength. In the same manner, the world cannot come to grips with its present serious problems until it comes to realize that something besides mere human resources are required for the task. Failing in this, we will sink into barbarism and decay.

Inasmuch as we are aware of our plight, once we recognize that our social conditions are the necessary consequence of the unnatural and false concept of the private property right, and that this fallacy is a consequence of the abandonment of Christ so that passions and animal instincts have come to dominate our reason – it is time now to awaken from our sleep. We have only to seek out the means which can elevate us from our social misery. In general, I have already indicated what the remedy is by pointing out that the abandonment of Christianity causes us to fall into the pit. Therefore, only a return to Christ can lead us back. I would still like to point out how powerless the world is with all of its learning and experience, and how potent Christianity is in doctrine, in experience and in its means of grace for healing our social ills.

First, let us consider the impotence of the world and the power of Christian teaching for dealing with social conditions. For some time now I have read about all manner of remedies proposed by men of the world for alleviating poverty among the masses of people. I must confess I have found nothing which promises a real solution. So long as their proponents stick with the generalities in which they clothe their proposals, one is easily deceived that they are great benefactors who have learned the secret of how to multiply bread; but when you examine closely their practical measures, one cannot help but pity them. One wants to help matters by a more equitable distribution of tax burdens; another proposes a system of savings banks; another wants, to organize labor; still another proposes emigration; and still another sees a remedy in protective tariffs; while others prefer free trade. Some argue for free enterprise or land reform, and others propose the exact opposite. Some see salvation in a republican form of government.

These proposals generally have some merit, some more, some less; but for solving our social problems, they are woefully inadequate. There are those who realize this and propose the ultimate solution – common ownership of all things. Whether it will come to that, only time will tell, but this much is certain, that by this means we will not assure that the poor will become rich, but rather that all will become poor! Anyone who can still make an impartial judgment can appreciate that all worldly wisdom is woefully incapable of coming to our rescue. The more powerless the wisdom of the world is for providing a remedy, the more vital the Christian teaching becomes. It is precisely for our social problems that the Christian message is now especially relevant. Nothing is more appropriate for demonstrating to us the variety of means which Christianity affords us than the episode from the life of Christ described by Luke, the Evangelist. “One of the multitude said to him. Master, bid my brother give me a share of our Inheritance. And he answered, “Why, man, who has appointed me a judge to make warm between you?” (Luke 12: 13-14)

This occasion gave Christ the opportunity to warn against greed and to point out that good living had nothing to do with seeking an abundance of material goods. He then related the parable of the man, who after a rich harvest, filled his barns and reflected in self-satisfaction, “Come, soul, thou hast goods in plenty laid up for many years to come; take thy rest now, eat, drink, and make merry.” And, God said “Thou fool, this night thou must render up thy soul and who will be master now of all thou has laid by?” Thus it is with the man who lays up treasure for himself. and has no credit with God.” (Luke 12: 19-21).





Take heed, my Christian brethren. That is Christ's answer to those who expect to become prosperous by dividing up possessions or who hope to solve social problems by some superficial remedies. God wants a more just distribution of property, but not by external force, rather through a basic reform of man's attitudes. That is the essential difference between Christian teaching and the remedies the world proposes. The world has only superficial remedies which cannot come to grips with the source of our troubles -- man's basic philosophy.

Surface poverty is not our real problem, rather the poverty of our attitudes. Correct the latter and you eliminate the former. The two great evils which have rent our social fabric are an insatiable greed and a pleasure cult along with great selfishness. These have virtually annihilated Christian charity. It is a sickness which has afflicted rich and poor alike. What good are tax reforms and savings institutions so long as men remain basically self-centered? This moral affliction, the world and all its wisdom is powerless to remedy, whereas the full force of the Christian message is directed precisely toward straightening out man's basic attitude. I would like to try to present various teachings of Jesus to demonstrate how He proceeds step by step and by every avenue to cure the soul of its greed and selfishness.

In the passage cited earlier, Our Lord reminds us of the fleeting value of earthly goods, the foolishness of men who pile up material goods only to be called before God before they have a chance to enjoy them. At another point Christ tells us, "Do not lay up treasure for yourselves on earth, where there is moth and rust to consume it, where there are thieves to break in and steal: lay up treasure for yourselves in heaven, where there is no moth or rust to consume it, no thieves to break in and steal. Where your treasure-house is, there your heart is too." (Matthew 6: 19-22) Here again He offers to eradicate greed and selfishness from the human heart. He demonstrates the folly of seeking refuge in worldly goods, but at the same time He cleared the way for revealing the reward for its proper use of material goods.

Our Lord goes further. He knows that noble ideas can captivate the human soul even more than material satisfaction, so he holds out to the soul, stifled by selfish pursuit, the goal of perfection: Jesus said to him, "If any of you has a mind to be perfect, go home, sell all that belongs to thee; give it to the poor, and to the treasure thou hast shall be in heaven; then come back and follow me." "...And every man that has forsaken home or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive his reward a hundredfold, and obtain everlasting life." (Matthew 19: 21, 29)

That is a teaching designed to heal the sickness which afflicts men's souls. To man, suffocated spiritually by greed, Christ proposes the total poverty which emancipates the soul completely. The Catholic Church has witnessed time and again the consequences of such total dedication in the lives of countless Saints.

Again we find Christ addressing himself to eradicating greed from our hearts when He says: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole mind. This is the greatest of commandments, and the first. And the second, its like, is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22: 37-39) When we ask who our neighbor is, He leads us to the man lying battered and bleeding by the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and teaches us that every beggar, every sick man in need is our neighbor. My Christian brethren, if we would all obey these teachings for one single day, all of our social "problems would disappear as if by magic. Let us, rich and poor alike, love our neighbor as ourselves for one day and the face of the earth will be renewed. Would that the teaching of Christ could capture our hearts! !

Let us add to all of this the stirring message, "And the King will answer them, Believe me, when you did it to one of the least of my brethren here, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40) "He who gives you welcome, gives me welcome too; and he who gives me welcome gives welcome to Him that sent me." "And if a man gives so much as a draught of cold water to one of the least of these here, because he is a disciple of mine, I promise you, he shall not miss his reward." (Matthew 10: 40, 42)



Who can fail to appreciate the power of this message to wipe out our greed? Who can count the tears dried by these words? With these words Our Blessed Savior has, in a manner of speaking, chained thousands of holy virgins to the beds of the poor side, in whom they see the image of Christ. All of the love which men owe to God, He has placed at the service of the poor and the sick.

Still, our Blessed Savior knows the human heart and how deeply greed and selfishness are rooted in it. He knows full well what drastic means are needed to eradicate these evils. Therefore, He reminds those, for whom higher motives do not suffice, of judgment and eternal punishment. He gives them a glimpse of that awful day when He will come in great majesty and power, when the sheep and the goats will be separated and when He will say to those on the left side: "Go far from me, you that are accursed, into that eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you never gave me food, I was thirsty, and you never gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you did not bring me home, I was naked, and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison, and you did not care for me. Whereupon they, in their turn will answer, Lord, when was it that we saw thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee? And He will answer them, Believe me, when you refused it to one of the least of my brethren here, you refused it to Me. And these shall pass on to eternal punishment, and the just to eternal life." (Matthew 25: 41-46)

Finally, for him who remains deaf even to this warning, Our Savior resorts to the ultimate threat. He gives him a glimpse of the place of eternal punishment. He tells about the rich spendthrift, dressed in fine garments and enjoying sumptuous meals at the same time that poor Lazarus begs for a crust of bread in vain, and the dogs lick his sores. We see these two in eternity, Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and the rich wastrel buried in hell. We hear the latter call out, "...Father Abraham, take pity on me; send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; I am tormented in this flame, But Abraham said, My son, remember that thou didst receive thy good fortune in thy lifetime, and Lazarus, no less his ill fortune; now he is in comfort, thou in torment. And besides all this, there is a great gulf fixed between us and you so that there is no crossing from our side of it to you, no crossing over to us from yours." (Luke 16: 24- 27)

That, my Christian brethren, is a brief synopsis of the teachings by which Christ wishes to uproot the sources of all of our social problems, greed and selfishness, from our souls. He leads the greedy and selfish person to the very gates of hell and shows him the plight of the rich wastrel who pleads for a drop of water from his place of torment. He takes him before the seat of judgment and recites the terrible words, "Depart from me, you that are accursed, into the eternal fire." He introduces him to the rich man who has amassed worldly goods and who before he has a chance to enjoy them hears the awful words, "Thou fool, this night thou must render up they soul." He shows him the treasures of earth consumed by rust and moths and stolen by thieves. He holds up before him the way of perfection and teaches him to love his brother as himself, and that every man is his brother. He represents himself as the poor man and demands that the love which men owe to God be extended to the poor. How powerful Christian teaching is and how powerless the teaching of the world is in counteracting social ills. But, Christianity is still more potent and the world all the more impotent in practical everyday life when it comes to curing these ills.

To cure social evils, it is not enough to provide more food and clothing for a few poor or to send a few dollars more to our favorite charity. That is the smallest part of our task. What is urgent is that we heal the enormous division that exists in our society, a deep-seated resentment between rich and poor. We must halt the tragic moral decline that has victimized large numbers of our poor fellowmen who have lost all faith, all hope, and all love for God and their fellow man. We have to elevate from spiritual poverty those who suffer material poverty.

In rich and poor alike, the source of social evil is in their attitudes. Just as greed,



selfishness, and pleasure-seeking alienates the rich from the poor, these same motives coupled with great want engender great hate among the poor toward the rich. Instead of looking for the cause of the trouble where it really lies, and that includes in part their own failings, the poor see in the rich man the sole root of their problem. They are victims of the temptation which afflicts all of us. They see the splinter in the rich man's eye without being aware of the beam in their own. Thus, we see among so many of our poor fellowmen a frightful degree of moral degradation, where hatred toward one's fellow man, greed, covetousness, and sloth operate side by side with great poverty. Sound teachings and counsel are of no more avail here than are occasional hand-outs. They take such hand-outs and use them with the thought that they have this and much more coming to them.

A new force is needed to heal these decadent attitudes -- the force of example and of love. The poor must once again come to realize that there is real love in action before they extend any credulity to the doctrine of charity. For this reason, we must seek out the poorest of the poor in their hovels, study the causes and conditions of their poverty, share their sufferings and their tears. No depravity, no misery must repel us. We must be prepared to counter resentment, rebuff, ingratitude with even greater love until we finally thaw out the icy crust which has frozen the hearts of so many of the poor, and conquer hatred with love. Just as God deals with sinners -- and that includes all of us -- according to the overflowing of his merciful love rather than as a stern judge, so as to overcome our lack of charity and ingratitude, that is how we must overcome the coldness of our fellow man with an outpouring of our love. That, I am convinced, is the only way that we will once again restore a sound disposition among the great numbers of our poor.

I could still speak to you about the graces which Christ has made available to us through His Church to lift man up again after sin has robbed him of his spiritual health. I could speak of the Sacraments which are the living channels 'through which the vitality of Christ flows into our souls. I could speak especially of the Holy Eucharist (*Altarsakrament*) whereby Christ so directly brings His own heart aflame with love in contact with our own hearts so as to unite us all in true charity and harmony in order to heal all divisions among men. But my time and my strength are both exhausted. My Christian brethren, I do not fear the social evils of our time. I know that the world is powerless to abolish them, whereas, the teaching, the life example, the grace of Christ is strong enough to help the world out of its straits and to dry all of its tears. I fear only godlessness, the lack of Faith and the unchristian spirit of our time.

Now that we recognize our times for what they are, let us listen to the call of our Church this day. Let us awaken from our sleep and put on the armor of light and the life of Jesus Christ!

Pray God that today I may have won over even just one soul, one heart to the love of Christ and for the comfort of His poor. A men!

What can the world do to solve this great problem? We already know that the welfare state (*Polizeistaat*) has not succeeded in doing so by its poor laws. And what have the humanitarians (*Volksfreunde*) of our time succeeded in doing in the practical order? I must pass over this in silence, since it stirs me to indignation as do so many of those who regard themselves as humanitarians and friends of the poor at the same time as they are enemies of Christ and His Church and as they demonstrate by their bankrupt life-style! What do these humanists have to offer in the way of a solution of social evils, for poverty, for reconciling people to each other? By their fruits you shall know them. What are the fruits of their love for their fellow man? Do we find them in the hovels of the poor, at the bedsides of the sick and the deprived? Do we see them depriving themselves of anything to aid the poor? Do they live like the poor? Not a chance! They give expression to their humanitarianism by sowing the seeds of hate among people. They live comfortably, even in grand style. They are themselves guilty of the excesses of the wealthy and still they have the nerve to incite the poor against the rich, who are guilty of the same sins as they themselves.



Empty phrases about their love for the people, illusions about an earth bliss which is simply unattainable in this world, stern denunciations of all and everyone -- other than themselves -- these are the fruits of their supposed love for the people! That is their prescription for solving social problems, for reconciling man to his fellowman. for elevating the poor from their sorry state!

Such is the bankruptcy of the world's power to reconcile people one to another, to cure moral and physical misery. Neither the welfare state nor our humanitarians are able to pass beyond speech-making into action.

Contrast this with the life of Christ. He put his words into action. What a friend of the poor was the Son of God! Of poor parents, born in poverty, raised in modest circumstances, poor in His flight into Egypt, poor during His life at Nazareth. And during His public life? The foxes have their dens, birds have their nest, but He was poorer than they. He had not a place to rest His head. Those whom He chose as His apostles were poor men. Daily He moved among the poor, the sick, the suffering. They followed Him into the desert places. He sought them out in their homes. He shared with them the contempt of the Pharisees. He wept with them. He comforted them. At the end He hung poor and naked on His cross. It is from the life of the God-man, Jesus Christ, lived in poverty, that the power of love in action has poured forth abundantly into Christ's Church -- as we have witnessed time and again with wonderment and admiration among the members of the Church. One cannot love Christ without being inflamed by a love of His own poverty and therefore of His poor.

That is a truth which comes home to us down to our own time. What are the miracles of love towards neighbor and the poor which we encounter in the lives of the Saints, if not the result of that fire of love which Christ brought from Heaven down to earth and by which He wished to set the world on fire? He whose heart is not set on fire by this flame will never be able to love poverty or the poor. It was the poverty of Jesus that suddenly possessed Elizabeth, the daughter of a king, as she once caught sight of a picture of Christ crucified while entering a church .and fell to her knees in total disregard of the amazement of those round about her.

It was this fountain of love which so intoxicated St. Francis of Assisi that he elected poverty as his bride. Once while enroute to Rome he was passing by a church and saw a group of his fellowmen lying before the church door steeped in poverty and begging for alms. He was so touched by pity and overwhelmed by the desire to share their poverty that he traded clothes with the poorest beggar among them and spent several days as one of them. This fountain of love is the source from which the mendicant orders of the Catholic Church sprang. The world can no longer understand them; it ridicules them. Yet, they represent the noblest and greatest heights to which the world could reach or has ever aspired! They have served to make the rich men poor in order to make poor men rich! It is from the same source that the Sisters of Charity came forth, these priceless flowers, these hearts in which the love of Christ has taken refuge. These Sisters have left parents, brothers, sisters, all the pleasures of this world in order to spend their lives at the bedsides of the poor, the sick, the dying, administering to their needs. Such a life represents more true Christian charity and love of neighbor in one single hour than the entire lifetimes of a whole host of our modern "friends of the people" combined. In other words, it is from this source that the human race will eventually regain its strength, its capacity for love, its health, once it recognizes that no other cure is available except that which is in Jesus Christ and in the holy Catholic Church which He established.



# On Human Liberty

By Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler

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“John answered them, 'I am baptizing you with water; but there is one standing in your midst of whom you know nothing.'” (John 1: 26)

In considering our present social conditions, we have reached the conclusion that the real reason for our plight -- where men are alienated from one another and a gulf separates rich from poor -- does not actually lie in how wealth is distributed or in the poverty of some as contrasted with the riches of others. It is to be found rather in the inner disposition of people which manifests itself outwardly in these symptoms.

The inequality of wealth, the super-abundance enjoyed by some at the same time that other men are in extreme need, taken by itself, does not necessarily lead to alienation among people. Given a solid Christian disposition, such inequality can, in fact, furnish the most solid and finest bond among men in that it can activate Christian charity and provide the opportunity for true fraternal concern.

He who surveys the present situation without having prejudged it cannot deny this fact. He must admit that our sickness is an inner one, not an external one, that we suffer from a spiritual disease. Specifically, our condition stems from unbounded greed and pleasure-seeking which expresses itself as crass self-seeking among rich and poor. From this naked truth we reached the simple conclusion that all external remedies, no matter how praiseworthy and useful in themselves, cannot offer genuine assistance. Just as the sick man who suffers a serious internal illness is in need of internal medicine, whereas mere superficial treatment could even occasion his death, we too are in need of spiritual aid which will improve our inner disposition; whereas superficial remedies will only prolong our agony. Since the source of our problem is internal; our remedy must come from within.

Speeches about equality will avail naught. What we need is an inner strength which will surmount inequality and rise above selfishness, and which is above and beyond all surface equalization. Speeches about brotherhood are like sounding brass. What we need is a genuine brotherly disposition. More talk about love we don't need. We need a flaming, living charity which alone can thaw out our icy selfish hearts. We don't need those friends of the people who offer no proof of their love of their fellow man other than hatred of the rich. We need men who understand how to share what they have with the poor and deprived as Christ and those who were filled with His spirit have shown us the way.

However, my Christian brethren, as John the Apostle of love cried out: “He, through whom the world was made, was in the world and the world did not recognize him.” (John 1: 10-11) And as John the Baptist before him had proclaimed: “... but there is one standing in your midst of whom you know nothing,” (John 1: 26) we too can now call out in our time. We stand as before that pool which the Angel stirred up from time to time (John 5: 4). We have only to step into it to be cured of our spiritual disease, but we refuse. We have at our bed: and call the fountain of living water, but we refuse to drink of it.

The tree of life, planted by God on earth has burst forth, and we refuse to eat of its fruit. The Redeemer has come into the world to renew the face of the earth, but His own disdain His redeeming work. Because of falling away from Christ and from the Church which He founded, another great evil has arisen. I refer to the wasting away of a true, living faith in God. If we may sum up the work of Redemption in a few words, it was meant to teach men to acknowledge God and to give them the strength to live according to this Faith. The words of Jesus Christ, “... none knows the Son truly except the Father, and none knows the Father truly except the Son, and those to whom it is the Son's good pleasure to reveal Him,” (Matthew 11 :27) seem to have come to fulfillment in our time where men have turned their backs on Christ



and His Church. The most gruesome distortion of the true teaching of God is the distinguishing characteristic of our age and the inevitable consequence of our falling away from Christ and His Church.

In our discussion of the right of property, we saw what a grave distortion the loss of the true Faith has caused in that area. Without a lively, practiced Faith in God, two extreme positions resulted: the wholesale abuse of the properly right on the one hand, and its outright annihilation on the other. Both are equally destructive of true human society. But this is only a small part of the sad story of how man's weakened faith in God has disrupted society. As a building rests on a foundation, so society rests on certain basic truths without which it cannot exist.

Numbered among these truths, aside from the right of private property, are the all important teachings on human liberty, on the destiny of man, and on marriage and the family. When these foundation stones are in order, when they are based on truth, only then can we expect a healthy and vigorous society. If they are otherwise, then society is threatened by collapse like a house whose foundation is destroyed. Having examined our social conditions and recognized to what extent our loss of the true Faith has undermined one foundation stone, the property right, I think it might be worthwhile to direct our attention now to how this disbelief has affected the other bases of our society. Thus we will gain a better perspective of our times, and the imminent collapse of our social structure can be a more compelling goal than any mere words to lead us to return to Christ and His Church.

I shall begin with the teaching on human liberty and its relation to God's law. First, I would like to make it clear that I have no intention of discussing political liberty or of defending or opposing one or the other form of government. Since I became a priest, I have made it a solemn rule never again to belong to a political party. I feel I owe this to every person and to every political party, since I must put my strength and my services at the disposal of all of them as a servant of God and preacher of His word for the good of their souls. I have remained true to this principle until now and I intend to remain so.

The teaching regarding the freedom of the human person is essentially connected with the teaching about God. Belief and unbelief reach completely opposite conclusions. Therefore, I must first speak about God so that I may then correctly teach about human freedom.

If we reflect for a moment on human history, we will recognize with reference to man's belief in God three closely related thoughts: First, we see that the belief in a person's God is so deeply imbedded by nature in man's spiritual life that it is to be found wherever there are people. Man cannot deny the existence of the sun because he lives from its warmth. In the same way, mankind, by and large, cannot deny the existence of God since it derives existence and life from God, and in its own peculiar fashion, it is bound by the will of God.

Secondly, we see the human spirit inclined toward evil and the intellect so weakened and darkened that even this most basic of all truths did not always survive intact but has been subjected to a continual distortion.

Thirdly, we recognize that man's passions and rebellion against God's law are the basic sources of this distortion of the true teachings about God. Only by considering these three truths in their relationship to each other are we able to reach an intelligent understanding of human history. If there were no personal transcendent God, one could not explain the universal recognition of the existence of a God.

If the proposition: "I think, therefore I am," is true then the proposition: "Mankind thinks that of necessity there is a God, therefore there is a God," is no less true. Man may twist and turn all he wants. By doing so he can no more negate his own existence than he can destroy the idea of God which is essentially related to his own existence. It is no less necessary, however, that we recognize and accept as true the weakening and darkening of man's intellect, which is only made intelligible to us by the doctrine of original sin. Without that weakening one could not explain the per-



version of this and so many other basic truths. And, without the doctrine of original sin, one could not really grasp the prevalence of error. Having grasped these truths, on the other hand, one can understand the fate which belief in the true God has suffered among men. Among the pagans – least touched by the influence of supernatural revelation – we see the knowledge of God most severely distorted.

But as unnatural and unreasonable as their notion of God was, still they held fast to it, since they were thereby able to satisfy an innate belief in some supreme being: They preferred even the nonsense of man-made gods to the vastly greater nonsense of no god at all. Insofar as the pagans fashioned their gods according to their own passions, they demonstrated to us that the ultimate source of ‘their errors and of the distortion of the belief in one true God is to be found in their passions and in their rebellion against the law which an un-perverted concept of God imposed upon them.

The history of the Jews drives home to us best of all this important teaching, so necessary for grasping the idea of human liberty. It shows us that all distortions of belief in the one true God do not originate in the speculative intellect, but from practice; not by force of reason, but by the rule of passions, and by the revolt in man’s life style against the law of God. The knowledge of the true God and His laws was revealed to the Jews, but they became so lukewarm in their attempts to live up to the laws, that they rebelled against the true God and fell into idolatry to escape from Him.

Only through Christ, who opened new sources of grace to strengthen man’s will and enlighten his mind, do we see man reconciled in a correct understanding of God. After men once again began to feel strong in their belief and lived according to the faith which dwelt within them, any idea of rebellion against God disappeared. They recognized the truth of the words, “Only the fool says in his heart there is no God.” (Psalms 52: 1)

Among people who live by God’s law, the denial of God is not possible. But since men had once again turned from Christ and His saving graces, the rebellion against God’s law and eventually against the new notion of God has begun anew in their hearts. Only now, the combat occurs on a new kind of battle ground. The light which Christianity spread through the world prevents such crude errors as marked the pre-Christian era. Error became far more sophisticated and malicious to the point where it transgresses all reasonable limits. It was reserved for our age to repeat here on earth the rebellion of those Angels who, fully aware of their position as God’s creatures, nevertheless dared to revolt against God! We have among us not just individual disbelievers, but an entire generation of them. So old as the stones are of which this Church is built and, so long as the sun shines upon the earth and bears witness to the glory of Him Who created it, so long as the raindrops have fallen from heaven to freshen the flowers of the field, so long as the heavenly dew of God’s grace has seeped into men’s souls to enliven them and quicken them with holy charity, that is how long we have not experienced on this earth such an icy, frigid, diabolical teaching emanating from the mouths of men. After we understand all of this, my Christian brethren, the teaching of human freedom as it is interpreted according to a Christian belief in God and the Catholic Church as contrasted with its interpretation by unbelievers is easy to grasp.

The unbeliever has, for practical purposes, nothing left but man himself. He does not recognize any subordination of one man to another according to a higher order of things beyond what is merely human. Therefore, he must logically proclaim the sovereignty of each individual. Every law imposed by God or by his fellowman, in fact any rule which is not fashioned by himself is no law at all but merely compulsion or an unjust intrusion on his sovereignty. Laws are only restrictions which a man imposes on himself of his own free choice. In such a context, to be free means merely to do as one pleases. Every man is free to contradict everything that anyone else has ever proclaimed as true and good and right until he has proved it to his own satisfaction.

Even this notion of freedom has a kernel of truth in it which we need to isolate in order to make clear the massive, grotesque untruth and folly of such a position.



Christianity wishes to guarantee to man his innermost freedom, and it accords moral value only to those actions which stem from the free choice of each person. However, it recognizes an objective truth, goodness, and beauty existing independent of man to which man must conform if he wishes to fulfill himself. The unbelief of our time does not understand self-determination in this way. It does not accept an objective truth, goodness, and beauty; and every individual may contest what all others may regard as good so long as he himself does not recognize it as such.

It is difficult to see how any kind of social living among people is still possible when such a concept of human liberty prevails. This kind of liberty cannot be limited in any way according to age, sex, or levels of intellectual development. As a matter of fact, how can one still declare anyone insane, given such freedom? Every child, every woman, every mentally depraved person has the same right. Anyone can call into question the entire existing social order whether in the family, the community, or the state. This order does not even exist until he himself acknowledges it and indeed, only so long as he is willing to acknowledge it. Even a contract between two persons would be inconceivable, since such an agreement would constitute external force at any time after one of the contracting parties began to feel unhappy about the provisions of the contract. Thus it would constitute a violation of his basic human rights.

The Christian notion of human liberty as taught by the Church stands completely opposed to this ridiculous notion which would in fact make all social relationships impossible. The Christian concept of human liberty assumes the existence of a personal transcendent God in whom dwells all truth, all goodness, and all beauty. From all eternity, He had the nation of our earth in His mind, and He created the earth according to His own image, and therefore He incorporated in human nature something of His own freedom and self-determination. Yet, the nature of human freedom is such that it implies in man the capacity to either use it to pursue God's goodness, truth, and beauty, or to turn aside from these.

In other words, human freedom means that man is capable of developing according to God's plan, or to rebel against it at the peril of his own self-destruction! Because of original sin, the full liberty of man was dealt a crippling blow inasmuch as he was more disposed to rebel against God. It was by the Redemption that full liberty was restored to man. Christianity accords to man his full right of self-determination and recognizes in this right his fullest dignity and nobility. In fact, Christianity, by its doctrine of eternal damnation recognizes the ultimate consequence of this right, because this teaching implies that God will even permit men to eternally contradict Him rather than violate man's sacred right to self-determination. The ultimate cause for eternal damnation is abuse of free will by setting it in final opposition to God's will. Christianity sees in such a disposition of the will, not an exercise of legitimate freedom, but rather punishable violation of liberty, a transgression against God and His liberty which, of course, is higher than our own.

According to the Christian conception, man is a free agent of God, who is entitled to help God complete His work. As a master builder originates a construction project in his mind and authorizes his employees to bring it to fulfillment, so God has conceived in His mind the design for the human race and trusted us to carry it into fulfillment. Inspired by the goodness, truth, and beauty of this ideal, we ought to adopt it freely as sons of God and carry it into execution. In this way God proposes to make His work our own, and to reward us for our free compliance.

We have set forth briefly the two opposed doctrines of human liberty, and we have shown how they are related to the notion of God and His laws. It remains for us to stress the importance and obvious falsehood of that teaching which holds that to be truly free man cannot accept any law outside of himself.

We are told that man is the only and highest law giver who must follow only his own laws; yet man finds himself limited by nature which is independent of his will -- in fact, he must constantly submit to nature's laws. What power does man have over nature and the perpetual laws and order which govern it? We see the stars in the





heavens follow their unchangeable course, just as does the earth on which we live. We watch the trees and flowers sprout, grow, bloom, and fade according to unchangeable laws. Only an intelligent being can promote such order in the universe. But what intelligent being is it that holds nature on its course? If our intelligence is a part of this higher Intelligence, then why are we so powerless to change the laws of nature?

But we are bound even more firmly by a law outside ourselves, despite the protests of those who would dare to violate any law not of their own making. Man's physical nature is a part of the natural world whose prisoner he is and whose laws he must obey unless he wishes to bring about his physical destruction. How pathetic a spectacle man is, my Christian brethren, when he maintains, in his insane arrogance, that he recognizes no law or lawgiver beyond himself -- at the same time that he is forced day and night to minister to the need of his physical nature. What power does man have over the laws governing his physical nature? He has two alternatives. Either he obeys them and enjoys bodily health or he violates them and suffers sickness and eventual destruction. Indeed, the Supreme Lawgiver could not have made more obvious the lying pretensions of man to be his own lawgiver than to saddle him with a body and make him subject to its basest needs. But a man's soul too is subject to a law and bound by a necessity from which it cannot escape, and which forces man to recognize a Lawgiver outside himself. Thought, the freest of all human actions, must follow the laws of thought. What power do we have over the laws of thought? It is either/or. Either we obey these laws and are reasonable people, or we disregard them and destroy reason and are adjudged as fools.

With each thought, man is forced to acknowledge a law and therefore a lawgiver. This is the same as saying there is a higher personal Will which we must acknowledge, and from which we cannot escape.

Finally, we also recognize that man's will, and the conduct of his life which reflects his will is subject to a law -- the moral law. This law is no less demanding and no less independent of man's own will for determining his conduct than the laws of thought are in governing his thinking. He is no more able to alter it than he is able to alter the laws of nature or of thought. He may act according to it and reach his full dignity as a human being, or he may act counter to it and destroy his human worth. It is in the area of morality that the false notion of liberty comes into play, and where man tries to shake off the yoke of an outside lawgiver so as to cater to his passions according to his own laws. But he is eternally destined to fail in this attempt. The consensus of all mankind will always condemn the attempt to deny the objective moral law as it is expressed in the teaching of Christian virtues. No matter how persistently the advocates of this doctrine of freedom may insist that, as they see it, theft, robbery, unchastity, and sloth are licit, the voice of good moral sense will pass judgment on them and teach them that there is a supreme Lawgiver and an objective moral law according to which every man must order his life if he does not wish to dehumanize himself in the eyes of his fellow man.

Thus, God has instilled a goal in man's very nature by virtue of the law which governs him and by a virtue of the sanctions which are inseparable from the breach of those laws. To make man in His own image, God gave him freedom. Thereby man was enabled to reach his full dignity, but it is also within his capacity to sink to a most degraded level. At the outermost limit of this folly, men came up with the strange teaching that there is no lawgiver other than man himself, and that man needs only to follow his own impulses. To curb this madness, God erected a barrier which proclaims, in effect, "This far and no further!" He has permitted man to proclaim nonsense, but He will not permit him to carry it through with impunity.

God forces man, first, to give the lie to his own proclamation in that man must constantly and of necessity subject himself to a law of nature, a law of thought, and a law of conduct over which he has no control, in the face of which is impotent -- as impotent as the lowest worm which creeps along the ground.

In the second instance, God has stigmatized rebellion against His laws in nature,



thought, and conduct with the mark of death. Man may insist that he follows his own inner impulses, but if he dares to act against the law of physical nature, thought, and conduct which God wills, then he will begin to live in a manner which leads to the destruction of his body, the annihilation of reason, moral degeneration, and chaos in society. Ironclad necessity in the law of God will weigh heavily on him and lead to his inevitable destruction.

In the battle against the law of nature, the fool occasions the death of the body. In fighting against the laws of thought, he brings sickness and eventually death to the intellect; in battling against the moral law, he makes life unbearable; and in attacking social order, he makes normal social relations among people an impossibility.

Finally, and thirdly, God has linked to the exercise of this erroneous notion of freedom its exact opposite, a most complete and degrading kind of slavery. The man who will not serve God and live by His eternal law – which safeguards true human freedom – such a man will achieve not freedom, but its opposite, abject slavery. He will be subject to a domination which does not preserve freedom, but annihilates it. Every man is subject to the conflict of which the Apostle Paul spoke: “inwardly, I applaud God’s disposition, but I observe another disposition in my lower self, which raises war against the disposition of my conscience, and so I am handed over as a captive to that disposition towards sin which my lower self contains.” (Romans 7: 22-23)

Those who follow the law of God take pleasure in His law and achieve true freedom since truth makes a man free. And as the Apostle said further: “... and natural wisdom brings only death, whereas the wisdom of the spirit brings life and peace. That is because natural wisdom is at enmity with God, not submitting itself to His law; it is impossible that it should.” (Romans 8: 6-7) Therefore, he who will not be made free by God’s law will become a slave to his own flesh and lust according to the law of the flesh!

The fate of Nebuchadnezzar is a prototype of man’s destiny. Man is too proud to be free under God’s law, but not too proud to be a slave to his own basest passions. Therefore, what befell Nebuchadnezzar according to scripture, will also befall man in the deepest spiritual sense. “...driven from the haunts of men, with beasts dwell thou, grass like the cattle eat thou, till seven seasons have passed thee by, and learned thou has that the most High is overlord of all human kingship, to grant it where he will.” (Daniel 5: 29)

My Christian brethren, let us come to realize without having to undergo such a bitter experience, that the all High God rules also among men, and that our freedom is to be found in freely subjecting ourselves to His laws.

It is impossible to conceal the fact, however, that this guidepost for social living is already badly obscured and that the quest for a freedom which recognizes no external law and order is already widespread. On the basis of such a misconception, the survival of any kind of sane social relationships among men, whether in the family circle, or in the community, or beyond, is becoming impossible. If this viewpoint becomes prevalent, mankind will suffer the fate of Nebuchadnezzar. We shall live like animals, subject to our basest passions; and the seven ages of this degradation, destruction, wilderness and barbarism will last until mankind in its abject misery will come to realize that the all high God is dominant also in the kingdom of men. Amen.

## On Human Destiny

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“...And, indeed, Lord, thou knowest all things, new and old; it is thou that hast fashioned me, thy hand that has been laid upon me.” Psalm 138:5

My Christian Brethren, yesterday we examined the doctrine of human liberty and its relationship to God’s law, and we recognized in it an essential basis for social living. The enormous influence of these doctrines on social conditions is apparent in our times. If we mean by liberty, along with the author of "Social Policy" and his followers,



as well as all of those who deny the existence of a personal, transcendent God, the right of each individual to recognize as binding only such laws as he himself finds to his liking and to disregard all others, then social human relations become impossible. If the stars were to free themselves of the course to which each is bound, they would collide and destroy each other. That is what would happen to humanity under similar conditions. The evidence of this theory of freedom is already widespread.

It remains to be seen whether we may have to live through the horrible drama of a situation where mankind succeeds in emancipating itself completely from all bonds of order. It is certain, however, that if that time actually does come, it will be more frightful than anything men have ever had to experience. It is just as certain that this is exactly what will- come to pass unless we change our ways and acknowledge the dominion of God, If we come to recognize, instead, that freedom is the right of a person to develop and conform himself of his own free will to the Divine plan, then we shall participate in the grand design of God, who is concerned with all of reality, including the life of each and every person, and we will enjoy the order in which each man finds his proper role and shares in the unfolding of God's plan.

Today we will move on to that other principle of social living, the understanding that men have of their destiny here on earth. We shall shortly realize what great influence this vital teaching has on social conditions of our time. It is amazing, in fact, how anyone can go through life without ever seriously asking himself the question why he is on earth! That ought to be the first question that we ask ourselves once we acquire the use of reason, since the direction toward which we expend the resources of our bodies and our souls, as well as our gifts and talents depends entirely upon how we answer this question for ourselves. St. Bernard often asked himself in his cubicle, "Bernard, why are you here?" We ought to do likewise, time and time again. Otherwise it is entirely possible that we could make the entire journey through life and discover suddenly on our death bed that we have completely missed the point of our pilgrimage on this earth.

Here again, there are just two conceivable reasons for living which relate back to whether a man believes in a personal, transcendent God or not. Our destination is either outside of this world, in God, in which case our life on earth is merely a preparation for that ultimate goal-or else our destiny is to enjoy what we are able to enjoy here on earth and to terminate our existence afterwards like the animals do. The believer prefers the former view, the unbeliever holds the latter. Let us consider both these viewpoints along with the great impact they have on human social relationships. We begin with the viewpoint of the unbeliever. Whoever has scuttled his belief in a transcendent, personal God such a person must, to be consistent, also abandon his belief in the immortality of the individual soul along with any hope for eternal personal existence after the death of the body. In fact, he must not entertain any notion that man has a destiny beyond the grave. Indeed, men have abandoned these beliefs in our time with the same brashness as they have denied the existence of God. One cannot, therefore, question whether all such unbelievers have really asked themselves why they are on earth. One of the spokesmen for these atheists has stated clearly that the belief in the immortality of man is just as nonsensical as the belief in God. Man's destiny must be his life on this earth, because he knows nothing about what lies beyond. A much larger group than these consistent atheists, however, follow this line of belief only in a practical sense, i.e., by their actions, while they keep up a pretense in a belief in God and human immortality. An uncounted majority of our contemporaries belong to the latter group. They carry on as though they know of no God or of any life after death and as though this life were their final destiny. They render homage to the flesh, which of necessity leads to the death of the spirit. We have to number them, therefore, among the professing atheists, since their practical atheism has the same effect on our social condition.

The consequences of this concept of man's destiny are truly catastrophic for our society. There are, it seems to me, at least four. First, the viewpoint that man is on



earth merely to enjoy worldly pleasures, of necessity has to lead to a general aversion to work. All work is to some degree difficult and tiresome and interferes with the pleasure cult. Perhaps a person who is enslaved to this cult may wish to work in the sense that a rich man wants to exercise, so that he will enjoy a better appetite. But work in the sense of tedious daily labor in the sweat of one's brow, the kind of work which is rarely recreative and enjoyable, in other words, that work which is the common lot of most of mankind and which is the real source of the wealth of nations, the kind of work with which we could not dispense for one day without general chaos and deprivation, that work which is necessary to provide us with our daily bread and which the transcendent, personal God told us about when He said, "You will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow..." that manner of work will be shunned by people who are given over to the hedonistic viewpoint. There are already ominous portents of such a development. If this sick attitude captivates the masses of people, the horrible consequences of such an aversion to honest labor will be indescribable.

Just as such an attitude must promote disdain for labor as juxtaposed to the life of pleasure, it must also, on the other hand, cause an unbounded increase in the craving for worldly sense pleasures and for the means to satisfy them. If it becomes, in fact, our sole objective to enjoy sense pleasures, then given the uncertainty of a man's life span, a general competition must ensue where each person strives to get for himself the greatest possible share of the goods of this world and the means to acquire them. Thirdly, this hedonism will necessarily cause those who own a quantity of worldly goods to strive, by whatever means, to increase them and to hold on to them for their own exclusive enjoyment. Avarice, hardheartedness and selfishness of the worst sort will spread more and more among the wealthy. No philosophy of life is more calculated to harden the hearts of the wealthy towards the poor. True charity and benevolence do now flow from natural sympathy. Human experience bears constant witness to that fact. These virtues stem from a firm belief in a higher destiny for man after death. He who believes in eternal life will invest his capital so as to earn interest in paradise. The other viewpoint can only generate greed and hardness of heart.

Finally, what must this worldly philosophy do to the poor who lack all means of achieving the goal of worldly pleasures? The immediate consequences will be hatred, envy, and ill will toward the rich who have what they lack, and one can scarcely be surprised at these logical consequences given the lack of belief in God. The ultimate consequences will be that the poor man will resort to any means other than honest labor to achieve his worldly goal. Cheating, robbery, theft and even murder are the logical consequences of this false philosophy -- as we are already beginning to learn to our great sorrow.

That, my Christian Brethren, is the inevitable outcome of the loss of belief in a life after death, so far as human social relations are concerned. Disdain for honest labor along with insatiable greed and pleasure-seeking will be the lot of every person. Among the rich there will be, in addition, stinginess and hard-heartedness toward the poor; among the poor, theft and robbery, hatred and envy toward the rich will come to prevail. Eventually, of course, this corrupt teaching, which makes the enjoyment of earthly pleasure the ultimate destiny of mankind would have to come full circle as every lie must. It would destroy all civilized social relationships as well as any genuine pleasure in life.

We must add that this denial of human immortality is not only godless and destructive of all social order; it is also unreasonable. It flows not from reason, but from unreason. It is rooted not in the spirit; it stems from the flesh which, with all of its sensuous drives, is at war with the spirit. When we look into the recesses of our souls, a thousand voices cry out to us that we are immortal, that we are destined for eternal life.

If the belief in immortality and in a life after death is a delusion how could such a belief have arisen and come to prevail? How come we do not graze contentedly like cattle here on earth, and how come one always finds a craving in the human heart, like the craving for a beloved homeland? How could it happen that precisely the



greatest and deepest thinkers of all ages, as well as the noblest and purest spirits have clung to this belief? What does it signify to us when we observe huge flights of birds overhead each Spring and Fall, drawn to their destinies in the same way we are drawn to another abode? At night, as we lift our eyes heavenward and observe the stars in the vast canopy of the heavens, our hearts also wonder and yearn as if to separate themselves from our bodies in the universal quest for some home across the seas, that is without sorrows. It is the proof found in man's soul that we are in exile here, that we are destined for a better world.

If man's belief in immortality and in a life beyond this one is nonsense, if it is man's nature to die and to remain dead -- as it is the flower's nature to wilt, the tree's destiny to be cut down, the animal's destiny to decay, then how do we explain the deep, universal dread of death in human hearts? This abhorrence can never be overcome except by a belief in immortality. Man clings to nothing so desperately as to the slender thread of life. From the babe at its mother's breast, to the venerable old man who sees his powers fading, there is universal recognition that death is not natural to them, that they are destined for eternal life. If belief in a hereafter is nonsense, why are the children of the world so disturbed in their hearts as they see worldly goods come, go and disappear each day of their lives? Why does the transitory nature of their pleasures frighten them so, and why does the realization that their joys are fleeting make them bitter? Why does the rich man suffer virtual torture, who while he greedily contemplates his houses, goods and money, seems to hear the words, "Thou fool, this night you will be called to account. What good will your possessions be to you then?" Why does the man of the world suffer agony when he begins to sense that the passion with which he seeks his pleasure is growing cold? Why does the vain woman go through torture when she recognizes that all the cosmetics and adornments can no longer preserve that by which she seduced others? Why should the transitory nature of all material things of this earth, since it is of their nature to be transitory, cast their shadow over all of the joys of this world? That is the ultimate proof written deep in man's heart; that he is destined for a life of everlasting joy and that passing pleasure cannot be his final destiny.

If the belief in man's immortality and in eternal life is madness, if the enjoyment of the pleasures of this world is our final destiny, how is it possible then that the vast majority of mankind is unable to achieve this destiny? What is the destiny of the poor on this earth who suffer untold agonies so as scarcely ever to know a joyous moment? Indeed, one hears the reply that poverty is about to be abolished, and everyone will be in a position to enjoy the good things of this world. I will disregard for the moment whether it is indeed possible to abolish poverty. Assuming that it were, is poverty the only obstacle to enjoyment of earthly bliss? What of the countless numbers of those who are sick in body and soul, some of whom suffer for years and some of whom are even confined to their sickbeds an entire lifetime? What is their destiny and what consolation can we offer them? Our self-anointed humanitarians of the public forum never quite make it to the bedsides of the indigent sick. That is our task. With what message of consolation do they equip us?

I have witnessed time and time again with amazement the strength which Christian teaching affords to those who suffer from horrible and lengthy illnesses. There is no more convincing evidence of the truth and Divine power of Christianity than the joy which it is able to bring to the hearts of the suffering. I have often marvelled and admired as I witnessed the calm and patience of those who suffered poverty and misery and unspeakable pain, sometimes over a period of years, without a murmur of complaint. There I witnessed an inner joy such as I have never been able to detect amongst the children of the world surrounded by all of their pleasures. How many of such patient sufferers besieged by great external tribulation, yet displaying an indescribable inner peace, I have already known and loved in my own life time.

Everything that I have heard in the world about courage, strength, and resolution appear to me to be mere shadows of the courage, strength and determination of



Christian souls bearing their sufferings with their glance turned toward eternal life! Is a Faith which can produce such enormous, spiritual strength to be written off as nonsense? Should we approach these robust spirits and inform them that they have no goal other than to enjoy the passing pleasures of this world? And since they are unable to attain these pleasures, are we to leave them with no other companion in their suffering but the disconsolate thought that they have no further destiny on earth, that they are no longer in a position to achieve the normal goal of humankind?

In keeping with such a philosophy, there is nothing left for a considerable part of the human race but suicide! Put an end to mortal life which has as its only purpose the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and which is no longer in a position to do so! Such a teaching is supposed to represent the ultimate truth? No, never! Nature cannot be so unnatural as to give a man his life with a goal that he cannot reach. So long as there is a sick man or a suffering person on earth who feels in his heart that he is destined for happiness, our innermost souls must accept that we are destined for a better life.

Now let us envision ourselves at the deathbed of someone near and dear to us. While it is true that we live in an age which is not marked by great love among persons; even then scarcely any man is so alone that he does not have a son, a brother, a friend to whom he is not bound by some bond of affection. Now place yourself at the bedside of the one who is dearest to you as this one lies dying. Consider the position of such a person at the moment when he draws his last breath, at the moment the light of life leaves the eyes into which you so often saw your own joy mirrored. Now he can no longer respond to your farewell greeting and his hand becomes limp in your grasp. Could you bear the thought of never again enjoying a reunion with this soul? Can you find any consolation in the belief that this person has reached his final destiny, to become a feast for worms, or to be like a tree that has been felled and is thrown into the fire? Does it ease your grief to believe that this soul has died with the body, or that it has become an indistinguishable part of some vague world spirit? How can we explain the strong, determined, insuperable craving to see again, love and possess this particular personality in its full integrity? Whence the consolation which the true Christian finds at the moment of someone's death because of the belief that he will see the deceased again? That is proof enough that there is an immortal soul in the person whom you love, with which your soul is destined to be reunited for all eternity.

If the belief in a hereafter and in personal survival after death is nonsense, then what are the prospects for human yearning that justice be done to all men and that everyone ought to get his just deserts? The instinct for eventual justice cannot be eradicated from the human spirit. Even the inmates of prisons who are paying for their crimes and who are often hardened beyond the reach of all human sentiments demand justice and want to be dealt with justly. It is this universal instinct for justice which gives rise to the concern for justice in human society. The just society is an ideal that people dream of. In such a society each will get his just deserts according to his good and bad deeds, either reward or punishment, honor or dishonor, love or contempt. Can this ideal be fulfilled on earth? Who passes judgment on men's thoughts? Yet it is thoughts that determine what a man will do, and it is man's intentions that determine the real worth of our actions. This whole important area of human action remains exempt from human courts of law. But even the actual deeds and transactions of men cannot all be made to conform to the ideal of full justice here on earth. Here we have an appropriate saying, "One hangs the petty thieves while the big ones remain at large. I am not suggesting that one does this kind of thing on purpose, but the fact remains.

The more clever and crafty people are, the more adept they are at escaping justice on earth. Whereas the shrewd scoundrel can turn a fat profit dishonestly, defrauding widows and orphans, all the while enjoying esteem and a good life, it is entirely possible that a widow defrauded by him may end up in jail for having taken a piece of bread for her hungry children. Who will see to it that justice is done between the evil rich man and the virtuous poor man, between the person who goes through life in perfect



health and the poor man whose entire lot in life is ill health, between the one fellow who by lying, swindling, and intrigue achieves fame and enjoys the esteem of his fellow man and the other person who suffers unjust persecution, contempt and dishonor?

My Christian brethren, if there is no all-knowing Judge who sees the secrets in men's hearts, if there is no general judgment where all thoughts, words, and deeds, all sorrows and joys are judged and balanced off for all mankind to see, if there is no hereafter where every man will get his just deserts, we may as well throw over our poor, imperfect earthly justice too. Then injustice reigns supreme and all thought of equity is madness. But that is not the case. Just as certainly as there is in man a hankering for justice, there is also a Lord of heaven and earth who holds the scales of justice in His hands; and there is a final Court where sentence will be pronounced and an eternity where every man will reap what he personally has sown -- reward for the just, and punishment for the unjust.

Finally, my Christian brethren, if life on earth and its enjoyment were our final and only destiny, why is it that all good things which this earth has to offer cannot satisfy fully the heart of any single person? There must exist something which can satisfy the universal yearning of the human heart for happiness. If temporal goods are our final end, then there must be joys on earth which are available to every man and which so satisfy the craving for bliss that the human heart is completely fulfilled. As food satisfies the body's hunger, that being the natural destiny of food, so the pleasures of this world ought to satisfy the cravings of the soul, if they were indeed the ultimate objects toward which the soul is directed. But here again we come up against the limit which God sets for our folly. We like to insist that life here on earth is our final end, but we are unable to come up with any temporal good which we can say is able to satisfy man's thirst for happiness. God has implanted a craving in man's soul which cannot in all eternity be satisfied except by the possession of God.

There is conclusive evidence of the high dignity and noble destiny of man in the fact that all the knowledge and all the beauty on this earth has not been able to satisfy man's deepest yearnings. In fact, God has even attached to the enjoyment of worldly pleasures a certain satiety, even revulsion. Who can measure the anguish of a man who has set his sights on fulfilling himself with worldly pleasures and who, after wallowing in them, is left with the inevitable emptiness, disgust and revulsion? What St. Augustine discovered in his own life is what every man learns for himself. He was favored with all the bounty that nature can lavish on a person. He plunged into the world, full of zeal to satisfy his soul's yearning for truth and his heart's hankering for pleasure. After he had exhausted all the knowledge and pleasure which the world had to offer, he delivered his great creed, "Lord, you have created us for Yourself. And our hearts cannot rest until they rest in You." From then on he knew peace and found happiness which he had been pursuing in vain. His only regret was that he had found lasting beauty and come to love it so late. Let us follow Augustine and end the quest after what we cannot find, true happiness without God. Like his, our hearts will chase after inner peace without rest and fail to find it until we come to know and love God.

The teaching of Christianity and of our Faith is in full harmony with the inherent recognition of the soul that it is destined for eternal life. According to the teaching of the Church, God created man to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him and thus to merit a bliss which no ear has yet heard and no eye has yet seen and which no human heart has yet realized. In this world, however, man has no other final destiny, now that he has fallen from grace, but to prepare himself by the ordering of his free will for eternal happiness, that is to say, for the possession of God whom Christ manifested to us here on earth. That is why the Church rightfully regards life on earth as a pilgrimage, a kind of exile. It is true that we are strangers here, and only God and His domain represent our homeland. We are exiles so long as we are not united with God and so long as we cannot see, love, and be in possession of His eternal essence. We know, therefore, my Christian Brethren, whence we came. No one can answer this basic, all-important question for us. We are from God who created us out of nothing.



We know Who preserves us from the abyss of nothingness. It is God with His hand upon us. We know why God created us to love and possess Him. We know the reason for our sojourn here on earth is to prepare ourselves for the Kingdom of God. We know, finally, what this hunger and thirst in our hearts is all about: they represent a craving for that enjoyment of eternal bliss.

From this teaching of reason and our Faith about the destiny of man, we derive some most important conclusions regarding life in society. These stand opposed to the consequences of atheism which are referred to earlier, and they are designed to support and strengthen life in society, just as the opposed principles serve to undermine and destroy it.

First of all, only this view of man's destiny is capable of instilling true diligence and cheerful acceptance of the tedium that goes with work. True, there is a kind of ambition for work to which a man will submit for other motives, for example, the diligence of the great merchant who is restless in his ambition to enlarge his enterprise. We refer rather to that tedious, repetitive work of the day laborer who toils for a meager wage and but seldom achieves the enjoyment of the world's pleasures. No man would tolerate such work if he regarded adequate worldly pleasure as his sole destiny. Still, we can scarcely do without this kind of labor since the wealth of a nation arises largely from it. We must either have a race of men who perform such work dutifully or, as was true in ancient times, we will have to experience again a situation where one part of mankind forcefully subjugates the other part, so that it call consign this unpleasant work to slaves. That is one of the mysteries of Christianity, that it is capable of instilling a spirit in a man which enables him to perform unavoidable and unpleasant tasks cheerfully and without complaint. It is on this spirit that Christianity erected a social order which could be destroyed by man, but can never be rebuilt without the benefit of Christian spirit.

While Christianity, by its teaching of man's final destiny can inspire true industry and thereby guarantee genuine well-being, it nevertheless moderates by virtue of that same teaching, uncontrolled striving for the goods and pleasures of the world. For the unbeliever, they are only a means designed to help him in his quest for eternal salvation. The rich man who is aware of his eternal destiny will therefore not regard his possessions as the means for satisfying his earthly cravings, but rather as means whereby, through careful stewardship, he can attain his eternal salvation. In using his riches, he will observe the will of God, share his bounty with his less fortunate fellowman, and fight to keep all inordinate attachment to worldly goods from taking first place in his heart.

At the same time, the poor man who depends for his existence on a daily wage will not look upon material goods with undisguised greed and view his more fortunate fellowman with hatred and envy. How great and exalted is the spirit of a truly Christian worker who looks with disdain not on the wealthy, but upon earthly riches with their superficial appeal. Convinced that human dignity, not the product of riches, but of virtue, he gladly leaves all superficial finery to the rich and engages rather in the pursuit of virtue. He looks with pity upon those who are all absorbed in this empty pursuit of material goods and rises above this in his quest for the eternal treasures, In the peace and joy of his clear conscience, this man finds in the quiet of his own humble homestead more than adequate compensation for all of his toil and labor. With such an attitude, the simple workingman has attained a level of human dignity that is scarcely attainable in any other state of life. The source of such a disposition is the Christian teaching regarding man's final end. It is on fertile soil like this that one can build a social order which is capable of withstanding the tempests of the ages.

We have discussed the Influence of the teaching of man's final end on social living. This guide post for social order has been shattered to its very foundation. The attitude that the destiny of man lies in the enjoyment of material goods has spread through all classes of society. Those who deny God's existence have been joined by many who, for practical purposes, live as though the pursuit of worldly pleasures





were their only goal. Such practical atheism has long been the fate of the rich. Now it reigns as the dominant life style of all classes. In league with godless teachings regarding private property and liberty, the unrestrained pursuit of material goods will have frightful consequences.

It is true that God can send forth His spirit and renew the face of the earth. But then I think of the words of Peter, the Apostle: "God did not spare the angels who fell into sin; he thrust them down to hell, chained them there in the abyss, to await their sentence in torment. Nor did he spare the world he had first made; he brought a flood on that world of wickedness, preserving only Noah, who had borne witness to holiness, and only seven others with him. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, too, he punished with utter ruin, turning them to ashes, as an example to the godless of a later time." (2 Peter 2: 4-6) And so I fear that we, who in our godlessness have surpassed Sodom and Gomorrah, will not escape God's punishment.

But God does not need to send a flood over the earth or let fire and brimstone rain down from heaven, He only needs to permit the passions, which the godless teachings of our time threaten to set loose, run their course. We will then have to drain to the very dregs the beaker of God's wrath!

## Christian Marriage and Family

By Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler

Translated by Rupert J. Ederer, Ph.D., Buffalo, N. Y.

Fifth sermon, December 19, 1848

"You who are husbands must show love to your wives, as Christ showed love to the Church when he gave himself up on it's behalf."

Ephesians 5: 25

We shall now pursue further the task which we have set for ourselves, i.e., to analyze the principles on which the entire social structure rests and the influence which belief and unbelief have in either the destruction or the support of those principles. All told, I proposed four such principles, the idea of human liberty, the final destiny of man, the right of private property, and the family.

We have already examined the first three of these and observed what has happened to them because of the godlessness of our era. They are infected with and undermined by unbelief and they threaten to collapse, bringing society and civilization crashing down with them in ruins.

It remains for us to discuss the last principle of social order, the family. We shall see in what condition this final support of the entire social structure is. The family is of incalculable importance, If we find the basic ingredients for social life still sound and incorrupt in the family, then this single pillar is yet capable of supporting the whole structure. Would that we could find more comfort in the condition of the family, so that we could find there at least a foundation that remains solid. If I had the good fortune to be speaking to an audience all of whose members enjoyed the blessing of having grown up in genuine Christian families and of having themselves experienced the saving grace of Christian family living, then it would be a simple matter for me to inspire you with zeal for Christ and His Church -- which are the fountainheads of such good fortune -- and with horror of the teachings which would rob us of this source of so many blessings. How difficult it is to explain the sun to one who has never experienced the warmth of its rays shining upon his face. And how difficult it is to put the value and beauty of Christian family living across to someone who has not himself experienced this good fortune. More than ever, I now require the assistance of God's grace. Grant me your help, O heavenly Redeemer, through the intercession of your holy Mother Mary!

Christian family life receives its noble character exclusively from marriage as it was instituted and sanctified by Christ. Let us therefore consider marriage and the influence which faith in God on the one hand and disbelief on the other have on it.



In the first man and woman we already witness the intention of God regarding marriage and its purpose here on earth, dearly expressed. When God, the Father, as the Holy Bible relates, introduced Eve to Adam, the father of the entire human race gave expression to God's own design for marriage and its purpose. "That is why a man is destined to leave father and mother, and cling to his wife, so that the two become one flesh." (Genesis 2: 24) In this quotation we find the three essential components of Christian marriage: love, since a man will leave father and mother for the sake of his wife; unity, for the two partners become as one; indissolubility, since they become as one flesh.

This lofty concept of marriage disappeared along with the state of innocence here on earth. Reason darkened by original sin scarcely grasped the true idea of marriage, and the will inclined to evil by that same sin was unable to make such a pure life into a reality. From the time of Adam until the time of Christ, the ideal of marriage disappeared from the earth. What is more, in no area of human life did corruption become more base and more persistent than in this.

The Christian preacher hesitates even to hint at the abominations which paganism brought all in the moral life of the people; we do not find there the faintest recognition of the dignity of Christian marriage and Christian family living. Pagans would have been more ready to believe that one could change the paths of the stars than that one could achieve the ideal of Christian marriage here on earth. The debasement of woman was an inevitable consequence of the degradation of marriage. A woman was no longer a person, but a thing. She had no rights, no independence of her own, and her only destiny was to serve the lusts of men. It is even more noteworthy that revelation among the Jews did not make known God's plan for marriage in its full perfection. Christ told his disciples that Moses allowed a man to leave his wife because of "your hard hearts, but in the beginning it was not so." (Matthew 19:8) Man was rendered so incapable of grasping the authentic idea of marriage after his reason and will were crippled by original sin that God did not even reveal it in its fullness to the Jews.

That is how matters still stand, my Christian brethren. Marriage is an exclusive treasure of Christianity; and so that there may be no misunderstanding, let me say that marriage is the sacred possession of a true, living, full Christianity; I mean Christianity as it is embodied in the Catholic Church. Only Christianity in the form where it can bring the full saving grace of its teachings and sacraments to bear on man's soul is able to effectuate the high ideal of Christian marriage. It is with man as it is with the soil from which he wishes to grow fruit. The better the fruit that one aspires to produce, the more carefully must the soil be prepared. So it is with Christian virtues. The better one would cultivate them, the more they require for their successful cultivation the preparation of the soul by the grace of God, won for us by Christ.

In reverence toward marriage we have the best index of the level of Christian living that a people has achieved. By the same token, to the extent that a people becomes separated from God and His Church, to the same extent Christian marriage will more and more disappear among them. One may observe this among those creeds which have separated themselves from Christianity's true tree of life, the Catholic Church. The twig is first to shrivel up when the branch is cut off from the vine of marriage. Whereas the separated Churches are able for centuries to draw some nourishment from the reservoir of strength that is left to them from the true Church, what happens to marriage provides at once the evidence that the spring from which life flows has been sealed off. Even there, however, where the branch is not yet fully separated from the vine which is the Church and where from outward, appearances there is still a connection, we begin to see marriage deteriorate. Everyday experience supports this claim. We live in a time of pseudo-Christianity (*Scheinchristenthum*). So many people are still externally linked with the Church, who really have separated themselves in their basic beliefs. The consequence is the deterioration of marriage and family life, the destruction of the familial spirit which we so much lament today. We cannot be surprised, therefore, that secularism where it runs its full course even dares to wage war against this Christian institu-



tion which brings so much happiness to mankind. The secularist dares to contest along with Christianity's teaching about God, human liberty, human destiny, and private property, the whole idea of marriage, and to present it as a dispensable institution. With this shameless undertaking the battle against God has returned to its original source, the revolt of the flesh against the law of God.

Let us turn now to a consideration of the essence of Christian marriage so that we may gain an appreciation of its great dignity and its enormous benefits for society.

As I mentioned before, my Christian brethren, the essential elements of matrimony are all contained in the words which the father of the human race spoke and which bespeak God's design; namely, love unity and indissolubility. It was the work of Jesus Christ not to alter the plan which the Creator put into nature, but to purify it from sin and the corruption that flowed from sin, and to restore it to its pristine, original purpose. In Christianity we find, therefore, the same essential elements of marriage that were expressed by our first parents. But we must recognize with the Apostle Paul: "Only the grace which came to us was out of all proportion to the fault." (Romans 5: 15) Christ not only restored love, unity, and indissolubility to marriage, He also elevated it to the level of a sacrament, reflecting His relationship to His church, and He thereby immeasurably strengthened it, sanctified it and clarified it. A sacrament is an outward sign of inner sanctification and every sacrament is specially designed to confer those graces which are appropriate to the nature of the occasion.

Therefore those three properties of marriage also receive, through its elevation to the status of a sacrament, a higher degree of blessing and sanctification. The sacrament first of all sanctifies the love of Christian marriage partners so that the apostle Paul could say to men: "You who are husbands must show love to your wives, as Christ showed love to the Church when he gave himself up on its behalf." And, as he said to women, "Wives must obey their husbands as they would obey the Lord." And, to both he said: "And as you stand in awe of Christ, submit to each other's rights." (Ephesians 5: 21, 22, 25-26)

How far such love in Christian marriage is removed from the lowly condition which goes by the same name, but which has to do more with infatuation, self-seeking, passion and lust! The love that is sanctified by Christ and His sacramental grace does not change with every whim, but like the love of Christ it is stable and self-sacrificing unto death. The sacrament also sanctifies the unity of marriage so that Christ could say of it: "You have heard that it was said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' But I tell you that he who casts his eyes on a woman so as to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5: 27-28) How sublime this statement, how sacred the kind of relationship to which it applies. Christ did not found a religion based on external decency, but one which is interiorly genuine and honest. That is why mere external decency, outward modesty, and respect, are never sufficient for Him. He established a relationship in which he preserves even the intentions and secrets that lie in the innermost caverns of a man's heart from infidelity.

Finally, through the dignity of sacramental status, Christ has once and for all established the indissolubility of marriage without which there could be neither the kind of love nor that fidelity which Christ intended for marriage, and without which the purpose of marriage would be, in any case, unattainable. Regarding this, Christ made it perfectly clear, after he alluded to the words of the Creator, "And so they are no longer two, they are one flesh; what God then has joined, let not man put asunder." (Matthew 19:6)

That is what marriage means according to God's design, as Christ has restored it and brought it to its fullest expression. It is a great sacrament, but only in His Church. (Ephesians 5:32) It is a relationship between a man and a woman joined by a love that is so true, so pure, so spiritual, so self-sacrificing as is the love of Christ for His Church. It is preserved by a fidelity which permeates the whole being of a man and his wife, and it protects them against even the most secret improper desires. It is encompassed by a bond which is as strong as this love and this loyalty and which lasts until death.



Before I proceed further, my Christian brethren, I cannot restrain myself from asking you this question. Do not your own inner souls tell you that only such a bond between a man and a woman as the Church of Christ is proposing bespeaks true human dignity? No man can have sunk, so low in worldliness, sensuousness, and corruption as not to recognize that only that kind of marriage comes up to the ideal which every man cherishes in his heart. Even the crudest ruffian and the bitterest enemy of the Church must desire to be the product of a union which matches the Catholic Church's idea of marriage. But only that divine institution such as the Catholic Church can still attain to such ideals, given the great moral infirmity of our time. Thanks be to God, experience proves that such unions are not merely ideals, but are even now still attained in reality.

However, if Christ demanded pure, binding, self-sacrificing love and fidelity in marriage, He also had to equip souls with sufficient nobility, dignity, and kindness to be able to measure up to this love. In particular, Christianity had to elevate woman from the fallen condition to which paganism reduced her. If man was to fulfill the command of Paul, "You husbands must show love to your wives, as Christ showed love to the Church," then the female sex had to be substantially reconstructed. Love ought to be not deceitful but honest, and it must have truth for its object. Christianity has accomplished this not only in its teaching that every man is made in the image of Christ, but also in the fact that it bestowed on womanhood a spiritual beauty, a dignity, and purity which it never enjoyed in pagan times. The dignity of woman is entirely the by-product of Christianity. The more Christian a woman is, the higher she rises in our esteem; the more un-Christian she becomes, the deeper she sinks. Paganism produced men whose manly qualities we are forced to respect; for there were great statesmen, great scholars, great warriors, but it was never able to produce a woman with the dignity which adorns the Christian woman. Some like to ascribe the treatment of woman in non-Christian cultures to some low point of morality, and they infer that as human civilization progresses, the problem would disappear. Not so, my Christian brethren. The true and natural root of the undignified treatment of women lies in the low state in which womankind finds itself outside of Christianity. That low state among non-Christian societies is the strictly logical consequence of the degeneracy of the woman herself. A man could no longer respect the degenerate woman, and that is how things stood until Christ came.

With the beginning of Christianity we immediately encounter that woman to whom the Church refers in the canticle of praise, "Fair in every part, my true love, no fault in all thy fashioning!" (Song of Songs: 4:7) It is the woman to whom the Angel said, "Hail, thou art full of grace and the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." (Luke 1: 28) The Blessed Virgin Mary possesses all of the beauty and dignity of the female sex, and the luster which radiates from her to all of womankind is so bright that even vice, when it is exposed to just a single ray of her brightness, shrinks back and hides in shame for its baseness.

Down through the Christian centuries, Mary has been the true prototype of all Christian women. Mary, the pure and immaculate virgin, is the fountainhead of that spirit of chastity and purity which adorns the brow of the Christian virgin with greater splendor than gold and precious gems. The Christian woman derives her inspiration for humility from Mary, the humble Virgin. It is that spirit of humility which averts her glance from the blandishments of the outside world toward the inner life of her family. There it affords her the strength to lead a life of wonderful self-sacrifice and self-denial in this great domestic seclusion, where the woman becomes a true hearer of peace, joy and blessing within her family circle.

From the day when women again depart from these two virtues, they are once more on the way toward that low esteem and loss of dignity which was the lot of the pagan woman. The dignity of woman is so closely related to these virtues that I do not think there is a man who can truly hold in high regard any woman who lacks them. Here again, the enemies of the Church and of Christianity must bear witness.



Ask the most immoral man what kind of woman he wants his mother or sister to be, and he will choose a woman with characteristic Christian virtues as his mother and virgin with Christian virtues as his sister. If only all women, all maidens, would recognize this great truth and not be taken in by the false display of esteem and love lavished by the rake! A man can only love and respect the Christian woman of true virtue. In his innermost soul he despises the vain and immoral female.

That, my Christian brethren, is what Christian womanhood and Christian marriage are all about. These are the elements of Christian family living, that sublime school of humanity, that sacred bond which surrounds us through our entire lives and which brings so much blessing, consolation, and joy into men's hearts. How difficult it is to get across the blessedness of the Christian family to him who has not himself experienced it! The Christian family is the prime educator of mankind, and in this sacred trust, the mother once again takes first place. The greatest benefit which God can lavish on a person in the natural order is, without a doubt, the gift of a true Christian mother. I purposely avoided saying simply a tender and loving mother, because if the mother is filled with the spirit of the world, then her love toward the child is not beneficial, but harmful. A Christian mother, on the other hand, is without a doubt the greatest gift which God can give a man.

How my whole inner self revolts when I hear people in the world appraise the good fortune of children on the basis of how much wealth the parents have. That child is immeasurably unhappy, even though bedded down in silk and satin, whose mother is unchristian, without faith, and lacking in virtue. On the other hand, the child who is blessed with a truly Christian mother, even if it is clad in rags from the cradle to the grave, is blessed beyond measure. I concur fully with a great Christian thinker who held that the formation of a person is determined for the most part on the mother's lap during the first six years of its life. What development takes place in later years has already been conditioned to a large degree by what values the mother has implanted in the child's heart during those early years. The influences which the child is subjected to during those earliest, tender impressionable years, when the child's soul is most receptive to every influence, become so much a part of its second nature that they can no longer be erased.

Here we are able to recognize the basic absurdity of that philosophy of education which holds that a man can and must develop fully and exclusively from what is in him. If that were so, we should have to withhold the mother's milk from the child and deprive the child of the warmth and closeness of a mother's heart. We would have to allow the child to grow up alone facing four blank white walls, otherwise such an approach would be ruled out.

Yes, my Christian brethren, men who later became the benefactors or destroying angels for the human race often had the germ for their deeds transplanted from a mother's heart. The word of God -- "And if anyone hurts the conscience of one of these little ones that believe in me, he had better have been drowned in the depths of the sea, with a mill-stone hung about his neck." (Matthew 18 :6) -- applies with special force to the mother. No scandal can equal in its consequences that which the mother gives to her children through bad first impressions. They are like branches of sin and corruption grafted on to the tender trunk, which then determine the direction in which the tree grows.

Whoever has learned about education from experience and not from a textbook will support this view. So long as I have had the duty, while in charge of souls, to supervise children, I have had to work extra hard to counteract the poor example from which children suffered who were brought up by unworthy mothers. Yet I never felt fully confident that such children could wholly overcome such bad influence. Woe to the world because of bad, un-Christian mothers! This is the greatest evil from which we are now suffering. In the most accurate sense of the word, the unworthy mother lays the ax to the root of the tree. She inculcates into the impressionable soul of her children the spirit of the world, of unbelief, of self-seeking, of impurity, because



of which these flowers, implanted by God and nurtured by the blood of Christ will suffocate and wilt. But as deleterious as the influence of the un-Christian mother is on her children, even though she may masquerade under the name "Christian," just so beneficial will that seed be which the good mother plants in the hearts of her children. Even long after a mother is in her grave, and her son is tossed to and fro by life's storms so that he is on the verge of throwing over his Faith and surrendering to an immoral way of life at the risk of his eternal salvation, the pious, noble image of his mother comes before him and gently persuades him back onto the way of faith and virtue.

Whoever has come to know firsthand Christianity and its virtues, its inner truth, its purity, its boundless, selfless love in the life of a Christian mother, or in her counterpart, the Christian nun, whoever has enjoyed the peace which Christ called His own in such a family, the recollection of all of this will safeguard him from every snare of corruption which lies in life's path. Whoever has seen virtue in such clear form cannot subsequently regard vice without revulsion and disdain, even though he may himself be caught up in it.

Just as the Christian mother is the educator of her children, she and her daughter are also educators of the father of the family. When the heart of a man is besieged by the spirit of the world, its unbelief and its vices, because of his constant exposure to the world, then happy that man if he can come home to a pious wife and daughter. Eventually there comes a time when the world will part company with the man who was unable to part company with the world. Perhaps years of suffering will precede this forced separation. But if such a man is fortunate enough to have a wife or a daughter standing by him who has the seal of eternal life on her forehead, who in untiring love and sacrifice provides him with the living example of Divine power, such a man will ultimately return to Christ even though he has parted company with Him for a time.

From what we have discussed thus far, it is clear how essentially this concept of marriage is associated with Christ and His Church. It is also clear what a great influence marriage has on the entire fabric of a nation's society. As a family is the prime educator of the individual person, so it is also the just and most vital cell in the entire social human organism. It is in the family that a man learns to use rather than abuse his personal liberty. It is in the family that he learns to conduct himself as a useful member of society first in the family unit and eventually in the other organs of society. The regulation of the national economic household is basically the same as the economic activity of the largest and smallest businessmen; and just as none of these is able to ignore certain common principles, in the same manner, the moral foundations on which family life rests are the same as those on which the state rests. And just as Christianity understands how to inculcate its lofty virtues into family living, it is also the one institution which is able to provide the foundation for the broader social organs.

It remains for us to examine to what extent Secularism has already weakened, and to some extent, destroyed this last and most stable support of social order, which is in a more essential sense the very primary cell of that order. Yet I do not want to undertake this task from a pulpit in the Christian house of God. The reverence which I owe to this holy place forbids me to spell out in detail what havoc unbelief and lukewarmness in belief have wrought in the area of family life. It forbids me also to show how they have begun to destroy the high ideals of Christendom, how the Christian concept of love and fidelity between marriage partners has already begun to founder, how the female sex has already begun to abandon that jewel of Christianity, purity and humility of heart, how family life has become disorganized and Christian joy banished from it. I must turn my glance away from that horrible picture. It is sufficient for me to recall that unbelievers have already dared to call into question the validity of the very institution, marriage; and proceeding from there they have begun to unleash upon society the whole flood of moral corruption which is implicit in Atheism. After the teaching of secularists about liberty and man's final destiny began to undermine the very foundations of our society, these unbelievers then proceeded to invade the innermost living organism of the social structure. If they succeed, we can confidently expect that, the entire structure of society will be demolished and its wreckage will litter the entire earth.



I have now fulfilled my task, my Christian brethren, to the best of my ability. All of the foundations of social order are under siege and threaten to collapse. No external remedy, no formality, no constitution on earth is able to fortify the structure or firm up its foundations. If God does not build the house, they labor in vain who build it. If Christ, the Lord, does not shore up the foundations, all is in vain. Only in Christ is help to be found. Only if we return to the living Faith in Christ and His Church can we still prevent the collapse of society. It was not my intention to paint a horror picture. So far as I am able to see, I have stuck to the truth. The purpose of our investigations was to discover the ultimate causes of the condition in which our society finds itself. Loss of belief in God appears to me to be the sole and ultimate source of our decay and the belief in Christ and the Catholic Church is the only remedy.

Tomorrow, therefore, my last discourse will deal with Christ and His Church. Like all of the foregoing ones it will have just one purpose -- to bind you more firmly and more deeply to Christ and His Church.

## Teaching Authority of the Catholic Church

By Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler

Translated by Rupert J. Ederer, Ph.D., Buffalo, N. Y.

Sixth sermon, December 20, 1848

“Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” Matthew 5:3

The inner strength which invigorates us is not immediately perceptible, It becomes apparent in the works to which it gives rise. Thus, two oak trees may look alike while one may be filled with vitality that will keep the tree alive for centuries, whereas the other may bear a germ which will cause it to die in a short time. In the same manner we may observe two people from all appearances pretty much alike, yet one is enlivened by an inner strength which enables him to change the world, while the other cannot keep his own house in order.

With this idea as my starting point, my Christian brethren, I have pointed out to you the inner constructive force of Christianity and the Church as opposed to the destructive force of Secularism, with regard to the structure of our social order. We find Christianity everywhere to be filled with a living spirit so that it spreads vitality, order, and formative influence, whereas Secularism is filled with a death-dealing spirit so that wherever it makes its presence felt there is evident death, confusion, and destruction. Therein, in particular, we are able to appreciate the inner truth and Godliness of Christianity as contrasted with the inherent dishonesty of Secularism. The textbooks are full of proofs for the divinity of Jesus Christ, and still the world has refused to believe in Him. Now we are at the point where the proofs are moving from the textbooks into realization before our own eyes. God has now taken matters into His own hands. He is about to demonstrate to man that Christ, who appeared in human form here on earth, was indeed the Son of the living God and that the Church which He founded is a divine institution for the salvation and sanctification of mankind. He is about to write this proof into world history with huge capital letters. It looks as though God is about to permit unbelief to take on its true configuration so that it will at least reveal its destructive power to us. Secularism will be allowed to complete its work of destruction. The noble concept of Christian liberty will be suppressed by its crude caricature of liberty, and those who are liberated from the law of God under the pretext of liberty, having become slaves to the passions, will seethe with hatred and envy of one another. Their unbelief will rob man of the salutary hope for a better life hereafter and fill him instead with a desperate craving for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. It will first destroy private property and bring on the inevitable impoverishment, confusion, and discord. Finally, it will reduce womankind again to the low estate which was its lot in pagan cultures. It will deprive us of the consolation and blessing which a Christian mother and sister can bestow and replace these with immoral and worldly women. After it has thus destroyed the sanctity of



the Christian family, then, finally, those who survive in the wreckage of our society will once again reach out desperately for the life giving grace and strength to Christ and His Church which they are now foolishly rejecting.

There are, my Christian brethren, those who do not require this frightful proof in order to cling to Christ and His Church. They have already discovered for themselves the sanctifying and enlivening Divine force of Christianity as well as the death-dealing force of unbelief. Such persons must be aware of an overpowering desire to save one or the other of their wayward fellow men from eternal damnation and to lead them back to God. That is the final purpose which I have for appearing before you once more today. I have the overpowering desire to share with my fellowmen what I myself have discovered in and learned from Christ and His Church.

Up to now, we have considered the effects of faith and Secularism respectively on social order in human society, and we have concluded that examination. Now we want to turn our attention to the inner principle on which faith and disbelief rest, to determine the truthfulness of this principle. The innermost principle of both of these positions and their essential differences, I find in their teaching about the authority which man ought to follow with both his intellect and his will. The teaching on authority constitutes the deepest, most basic divergence between the believer and the unbeliever. Therefore, my Christian brethren, I beg for your attention, and I beseech our Lord, Jesus Christ, out of the love by which He allowed Himself to be nailed on the cross, to assist us through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Divine Grace.

The belief of the Catholic Church rests on the principle that man, to be completely reasonable can reach nowhere else but for the hand of the authority which God established here on earth. Therefore there is no conflict between faith and, reason. Faith does not demand that we use our belief to stamp out reason. On the contrary, through authority, faith wishes man to attain to the full and true use of this reason. As the dew which penetrates the plant does not suppress the plant but helps it to develop and unfold, so authority does not suppress the proper life of the soul, but helps it to true development and fulfillment. Secularism on the other hand, proceeds from the premise that man should be subject to no authority except the dictates of his own reason. It does not come to grips with the questions of whether such a state of affairs is appropriate to the human condition, whether it is natural and sensible for a man to rely only upon himself and no one else for guidance, whether it is not far more natural and sensible for him in fact even necessary for him, to seek guidance on the way to acquiring knowledge.

The unbeliever thoughtlessly and arbitrarily accepts what suits him, namely that it is undignified for a man to recognize any authority beyond himself. As he rejects every law outside himself which would restrict his will, so he overthrows every authority, every truth outside himself which would restrict his reason. Man must submit only to that law which he himself erects for himself and, likewise, he should hold as true only that which he himself has fully grasped.

These propositions sound nice, even sublime. They offer to man such a high destiny and promise the same thing that the first Tempter promised him: "God knows well that as soon as you eat this fruit your eyes will be opened, and you yourselves will be like gods, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5)

Let us have a closer look to see whether there is genuine truth in these promises and especially whether they are in conformity with man's nature, whether, in other words, it is possible for him to determine all things without outside influences, solely from within himself. I am already skeptical about this viewpoint of the unbeliever, because I maintain that among those who claim to follow nothing but their own power of reason, there is often a remarkable diversity of interpretations of the same phenomenon. What is true and reasonable must, after all, remain the same always; and about the same phenomenon there can certainly only be one true and reasonable explanation. Yet we find among the apostles of unbelief, those men who assert that they follow no authority save their own reason, displaying an amazing variety of viewpoints.





If you pose questions to them which are of an essential nature and to which one would expect them to dispense some sensible answers, as for example, about their own soul, its origin, its relation to the body, its destiny after death, we get from one thousand unbelievers one thousand different answers. Now only one of these positions can be valid. Either there is one truth and one reasonable explanation, or else there is no universally valid truth in which case all thought is unreasonable, the vaunted celebration of reason is foolishness, and this would be the most disconsolate of all doctrines.

But let us examine more closely the proposition that there are people who follow only their reason and nothing else; and let us consider this especially with relation to the history and nature of mankind. First we see the child in its earliest years in the home of its parents. Does one seriously expect that the child at that early age should develop without benefit of external authority solely from within itself and by its own reason? To expect this is to expect the impossible and the proposition is therefore preposterous. Even if man were destined to follow only his own authority, he could only accomplish this after he had reached the full maturity of his reasoning capacity.

In his early years, on the other hand, he is the most dependent creature that we can imagine. At that age he is so totally dominated by an authority outside himself, the authority of his parents and especially his mother, that the individuality and personality of the child remains largely latent. The voluntaristic and cognitive faculties of the child in the earliest years are determined not from within the child, but by the will and intellect of the mother. Long before the child has begun to think and decide for itself, external influence has shaped its thinking and determined it. The influence of this direction and power on the cognitive and voluntaristic faculties of the child, determined externally, i.e., by authority, is so great that one is scarcely able to shed it entirely in later years. In particular, there is a certain kind of love, an inclination of the will, which the child assimilates in its tenderest years at the mother's breast, and this is of the most decisive importance in shaping its thinking in later years. At least at this level of human growth, the principle of the unbeliever that man must reject any and all authority represents a monumental falsehood.

Let us accompany the child in its school years. The decisive influence of parental authority has already given a certain orientation to the individuality and personality of the child by the time it enters school. This influence stemming from the home environment and reinforced by the constant daily relationship with parents already make it impossible for the child to develop entirely from within itself. Now we confront a new authority in the person of the teacher. An authority which also acts from outside the child in shaping the processes of the child's intellect and will. True, there are those who now charge the teacher to help the child develop itself without exercising a determining influence on its will or intellect. This postulate of the unbeliever is as impossible as the principle on which it is based is false, and it will never be fulfilled in real life. True, the independence of the child must develop, but always and everywhere under the decisive influence of the teacher. Complementarity and help from without are so much a part and parcel of the child's nature that no teacher can part company with any child without his own caste of mind and will having had some influence on the child's intellectual and voluntaristic processes. Here too, nature is mightier than all theories. Even if the teacher can avoid all external influences, he cannot banish all love from his heart. He either loves the world or he loves God. Just as the sun cannot shine on a plant without the plant absorbing the wholesome warmth, the teacher cannot withhold the warmth of his love from penetrating the heart of the child and thereby influencing the mind and will of the child.

So the child grows continually under the influence of one external authority and then another until the time it takes its place in the adult world. Now, one might say, the time has finally come when a man has reached a stage of independence and enjoys the full power of his reason. Now he can at last disregard all authority and follow his own reason. We will not repeat what we have said about the impressions which the child has brought from home and school into the world with him.



Let us continue our investigation by supposing that it is true that a man by virtue of his dignity and calling as a man can only accept as true what he himself can grasp. It would then be required that every single person should be in a position to acquire the highest possible level of intellectual development. We all know from experience that there were things that we could not grasp at an earlier stage of our intellectual formation which we subsequently understand after fuller development. Now, therefore, how could we ever be fully confident that we have grasped the full truth of any matter so long as we are not certain that we have attained the highest possible level of our intellectual formation?

For a man to have reached that top level, four requisites must be met: first, the highest natural capacity; second, boundless diligence; third and fourth, sufficient leisure and wealth to command the means necessary to achieve this top level of intellectual development. Where one or the other of these requirements is not fulfilled, that goal is not attainable. Even if it were possible to afford the time and expenditure of wealth required for all to develop themselves fully, still only a small percentage of people will have the natural endowment and driving ambition needed for the task. What will become of the preponderant majority of mankind who can only attain to a lower grade of intellectual development? Shall we tell them too, that they should follow only their limited reasoning powers and disregard everything that they cannot grasp fully, given their limitations? No doubt there are those who would still affirm this, but the advice is so unreasonable, so unnatural, that even those who offer it do not follow it.

The great majority of people sense it in their inner beings that they need authority, leadership, external support. If man is deprived of authentic leadership, therefore, he will fall under the influence of bad leadership. Just as the person who pretends to follow only his own rules ends up being a slave of his own passions, so the one who disdains all authority so that he may obey only his own reason ends up being a slave to the whims of the day.

The truth of this is evident from what we see around us. Men are too proud to permit themselves to be guided at the hand of some higher authority, but rather than gain real self-determination from such blindness, they end up becoming subject to the worst authority of all. They claim to be following only their own reason and what do we find? They have traded a single authority for numberless authorities. Instead of the authority of Holy Scripture, they follow the authority of the most pathetic wisdom of miserable newspapers and filthy novels. Instead of the authority of the teaching Church, they follow the authority of Johnny-come-lately, corrupt human beings. The authority which God established was contrary to what they fancied as their human dignity, but to follow docilely every scandal sheet and every seducer who happens by, this they are somehow able to reconcile with their human dignity.

And, so there seem to remain only a precious few who are in a position to operate without authority; namely, those who possess the natural endowment, the ambition, the leisure and the material means to command the heights of all human achievement and from these heights to pass judgment on them. But even here, the pretended self-sufficiency is a sham. The learned person is no more free from all outside influences and authority than the simple child. No one not even the greatest thinker, can declare truthfully that the construction of his intellect and will is solely and entirely of his own making, free of all outside influence. Even the products of his mind and will are colored by the impressions of his youth, the culture of his nation, the spirit of the times in which he lives, the relationships which he shares with others, the beliefs in which he was brought up, and the love or rejection which marked his general environment and which shaped his outlook. Why do not all great thinkers come up with the same conclusions for all of their efforts, even though they claim to be following their reason? Where does the deceptive shift of opinion in scientific thought come from? How come all of these great minds have not yet been able to come to full agreement in any branch of science? Simply because what they claim is not true; because countless extraneous influences, as well as the darkening of the intellect occasioned by original sin, have in fact dulled their perception of things.



When all is said and done, there is really no greater falsehood than that on which the unbeliever bases his unbelief. His assertion that man by setting aside all authority can be his own creature and develop entirely from within himself contradicts nature and all of human history. It is idle bluster which can never be lived up to.

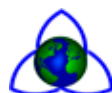
But there is a further question. Where can man find an authority which he can rely upon and follow in shaping his outlook and character? It is immediately obvious that man cannot and ought not to rely upon any mere human authority. Human dignity deserves at least not to have to subject itself to laws and truths which stem from merely human sources. One reasonable person enjoys the same just as another, and it would be undignified and unreasonable to abrogate this parity.

If there were only human authorities on earth, then the teaching of the secularist would be correct, even while expecting the Impossible, Then the lot of mankind is a pathetic one. Man would have to abandon his highest aspiration, the quest for truth. He will never get beyond asking the question, "What is truth?" He finds himself conditioned from his earliest childhood in his intellectual and volitional processes by outside forces. He has absorbed likes and dislikes as well as love and hate, and he cannot know for certain whether one or the other influence is valid, whether his love for something is rooted in good or evil, since these are based on human authority which left its mark on him. Only his own inner promptings remain as the rule and measure; and in them he recognizes fickleness and change as well as tunnel vision, all of which leaves him without certitude and true decisiveness. At this point we are faced with two truths.

Man can by his very nature not operate without authority, and this authority cannot be merely human. It must be a higher infallible authority. He can submit only to such an authority none other; and without it he would have to live in despair of ever finding truth or surrender himself blindly to human opinions. Now when we ask where this higher, infallible authority is to be found, we are confronted with the great and remarkable fact that throughout all of human history, and in all of the world, there is just one institution which offers to satisfy this longing in our souls, which dares to lay claim to the essentially divine prerogative of infallibility. That institution is the Roman Catholic Church, our holy mother! The doctrine of infallibility of the Church constitutes her essential principle -- the characteristic which sets her apart from all other religious systems.

With the doctrine of her infallible teaching authority, the Catholic Church stands or falls. Her whole claim to be the teacher of mankind based on the higher divine origin of her teaching authority. The Church has never succumbed to the madness of her opponents, who posed as the teachers of mankind even while overthrowing a higher authority. Whether the Church addresses herself to the minor child to demand adherence to her teaching or to the accomplished scholar, she always does so on the same supposition that she has received the mandate from the Son of God; that is to say, from a superhuman authority, to teach mankind. As the Church rests on this foundation, so does our own life. Only if we accept this basic teaching of the Church do we ourselves become living members of the Catholic Church.

I would go way beyond my assigned task if I try to treat here of the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church and to adduce all of the proofs whereby the Church can claim that the infallible teaching authority was conferred upon her by God. It is my task here to demonstrate the need man has for authority and thereby to lay bare the inherent falsehood of the entire structure of Secularism (*Unglauben*). There is just one piece of evidence of the higher origin of the Catholic Church's teaching authority to which I would like to call attention. This identifying mark shines brighter than the sun at midday. I refer to the catholicity, the all-embracing quality of its teaching. A purely human institution could scarcely transcend the borders of the country in which it originated. The teachings of the philosophers never became even the common patrimony of all in their native lands. They remained the exclusive property of the learned. And what were the consequences of these proud systems of learning? To them one can with justice say: "Let the dead bury their dead."



The pagan religions were intertwined with given nationalities and were never able to achieve universality. In the same manner, all the sects which broke away from the Catholic Church have either long since gone under, or they find themselves undergoing constant transformation; or else they are in a state of dissolution. Every few years they take a new form, or change the mode of their teaching. What is true today, they scuttle tomorrow. How can the follower of a non-Catholic school of philosophy or of a non-Catholic Christian sect still be enthusiastic about his beliefs when he must be convinced by now from the lessons of history that his viewpoint represents merely an ephemeral opinion which shifts and changes like the weather? How can he seriously hope that his present convictions can escape this general pattern? He might just as well hope to be exempt from the inevitability of the death of the body.

Only the Catholic Church is exempt from this law of limitation and change. She has seen her claim that her teaching represents truth, itself, and that her teaching authority is divine and, immune from human arbitrariness, borne out by an all important fact in the history of mankind. There is no more foolproof, tangible way to distinguish the human from the divine than to observe the universality and constancy of the Church's teaching as contrasted with the impermanence of all other learned opinions. The teaching authority of the Catholic Church is not limited to a period of time, to a decade or to centuries. It is not confined to the peculiarities of a country or a nation. She shows herself in fact, what she claims to be, a daughter of eternity. While her teaching is at the same time that it is divine and truly reasonable, also truly human, it knows no boundaries in time or place beyond mankind itself. So far as humanity reaches in space and time, that is how far the Church reaches with her teaching. It alone remains unchanging. How could it represent error and falsehood given this great unity and catholicity? Her catholicity proves her divinity, and therewith her infallibility. How exalted is the consciousness of a Catholic whose faith is anchored to the infallible teaching authority of the Church?

Every other person may see around him a tiny band of kindred spirits and at the same time feel certain that what he holds to be true today will soon be rejected as false. The Catholic, on the other hand, stands in the company of that large band of martyrs who bore witness to the depth and firmness of their 'I faith by their deaths. He stands in league with that host of holy bishops and confessors who, having abandoned themselves totally to their Faith studied and developed true knowledge in their lands and in their times. He shares the vast company of the holy hermits and monks who, by the austerity and self-denial of their lives, testified as to the strength of their religious beliefs. He is in the company of that, immeasurable band of pious believing men in all ages and in all places, men from all classes and walks of life, who put the one Faith to the test under all conceivable conditions and found it to be true and sound.

And so, my Christian brethren, we have come to the end of our assignment. We have examined the basic assumption, the ultimate principle on which the Catholic Church, on the one hand, and Secularism, on the other, rest. In the effects that we considered earlier, Secularism is the vehicle of death, destruction, and confusion, while our Faith is a life-giving force, a source of order. The principle which we considered today, a Secularism which rejects all authority outside the person himself is an idle boast, a bare-faced lie, a gross exaggeration of human capacity. Our Faith, on the other hand, since it reconciles the independence of man with a higher authority, is a true expression of the nature of man.

I cannot leave this subject, my Christian brethren, without adding a few observations which flow from what has already been said. The attack of Secularism against all law and all truth which comes to a man from outside himself, contains the important truth that is rooted in man's universal nature, in his personality; namely, that he cannot accept any merely human authority. Throughout the course of world history, it has occurred over and over again that one segment of the human race has tried to prescribe laws to regulate the thought and actions of another segment. That is



happening today still, even among the apostles of unbelief. In the same breath they condemn all authority and set themselves up as us the authority. This “service to mankind” was and continues to be a degradation of it. Since the great break from higher authority, the so-called Reformation, it has become practically universal. In city life, in particular, it has reached its crest, and ultimately it had to lead to a general rebellion.

At the same time, however, there is implicit in the revolt of Secularism against all law and truth that is outside of man a great godlessness, an untruth to the effect that man does not want to subject himself to any higher law or truth with or without God, that he does not wish to acknowledge a divine authority, and that he, in fact, wants to be like God.

The part of the truth which it contains gives to Secularism its strength, and that part of it which is a lie will defeat it. That is because Christ has already conquered falsehood. What is true with reference to his fellowman is not true with reference to God. *Secularism is entitled to overthrow all authority with the single exception of the teaching authority of the Catholic Church.* Only the Church claims to be endowed with a God-given infallible authority, and only it can demand to have ultimate authority over men. *Secularism must conquer all systems of belief, but it will shatter in pieces against the rock of the Church.*

The Catholic Church embraces within herself whatever truth there is in the basic principle of Secularism; at the same time that she rejects what is untrue about it. She accepts the profound truth that man need not obey any mere man or believe him and therefore overthrows all merely human authority. She further acknowledges that any authority from whatever source it may come must justify itself in man’s conscience, in his soul, before he needs to obey it. She is satisfied, however, of the natural need of man for a higher authority. She regards herself as endowed with authority by God Himself, and it is only for that reason that the Church feels justified in demanding that men subject themselves to her teaching authority. Just as the Church elevates the service of the lowliest servant girl from the low estate of mere service to another human being to the dignity of service of God, so she also frees the soul of man, who by his very nature cannot develop fully without being influenced by his fellowman, from enslavement to changeable human opinions. She elevates the subjection of the human spirit to an authority to the dignified acknowledgement of a truth revealed by God. Thus, my Christian brethren, the principles of Secularism and of the Church confront us and compel us to make a choice. What Secularism promises, it can no more deliver than the first Serpent could keep its promise to make man like to God.

Secularism promises to free us from all external authority. It cannot because it did not design human nature and therefore cannot redesign it. Our choice is not whether we wish to submit to authority or not, but rather to which authority we wish to subject ourselves. The question is whether in the all important question of our eternal salvation we wish to submit to the shifting and ephemeral human opinions, or to the authority of the Catholic Church which manifests to us by its doctrine, which has not changed from its earliest beginnings, the eternal Kingdom. During the time of the Reformation, our ancestors heard a similar cry. They were told to overthrow the teaching authority of the Catholic Church and to burst the bonds which held reason in check. And what did those who yielded to this siren song gain? Instead of the mild yoke and light burden of Jesus Christ, they were loaded down the iron yoke of human authority. Our own ancestors, on the other hand, stood their ground, and we are grateful to them that we too did not fall prey to the dominion of shifting, ephemeral opinions, as the children of the Reformation did. Do not we, my Christian brethren, wish to remain as steadfast as they and refuse to yield to the approaching Tempter by turning godless and rejecting the world of God as embodied in the authority of the Church? Our decision will determine whether later generations, as well as God Himself, will declare us blessed or cursed when sentence is passed on us. Amen



# Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler

Mary Ellen Rufft, CDP

Reflection at Mass on Ketteler Day, July 13, 2008

I'm happy to be with you today to celebrate together the 131st anniversary of the death of Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, the cofounder of our community.

Although the readings for our liturgy today were not specifically chosen for this anniversary, they are very appropriate. That is especially true of the Gospel. Bishop Ketteler certainly exemplifies in a myriad of ways the harvest that Jesus describes in the Gospel as the result of the seed, the word of God, falling on rich soil.

Ketteler is widely known around the world as the Social Justice Bishop. He was an intrepid defender of human rights in his actions and in the volumes he wrote about human dignity and freedom.

He is honored still today by the Verein, the workers union in Germany, whose basic rights he so strongly supported. Because of his dedication to the rights of the poor, Ketteler founded vocational schools for the children of workers, built an orphanage, founded a day nursery and dedicated a hospital for them.

He was fearless in speaking the truth on their behalf to Church and government leaders. He lived during the period when Germany was undergoing a forced unification and guided German Catholics through all the transitions which that union involved. He was by far the most renowned Roman Catholic leader in Germany in the 19th century.

Most of us here know this description of Ketteler and much more about his disciplined, simple life-style as well as his courageous stance for those in need of a champion. Most of us know too that Bishop Ketteler also had a temper. His fits of anger caused him as a youth to shatter a drinking glass by biting it, as a university student, to fight a duel and lose the tip of his nose over an issue as minor as whether or not a fellow student had stepped on his toes accidentally or on purpose, and as a Bishop, to sometimes become angry at slight provocations, at someone's lack of manners or punctuality.

Priests confronted him about his quick temper and even the members of the Cathedral Chapter where he was Bishop wrote a long letter telling him that his that his vehement eruptions of temper exceeded what they and his priests could endure.

How can we honor Bishop Ketteler as an example of God's word falling on rich ground, when, despite all his efforts for social justice, he had a major flaw in his personality, this strong tendency toward anger which caused concern to many people?

Perhaps one answer is to recognize that Ketteler might as easily be called the Humble Bishop as the Social Justice Bishop. Although he came from a wealthy family and became the esteemed Bishop of Mainz, he was the essence of humility. Humility is truth and Ketteler was a man of truth. One description of him at his funeral was that "his whole being was truthfulness."

Ketteler was painfully aware of his inclination to impatience and irritability. He continually strove to overcome it. After any occasion at which Ketteler spoke impatiently or harshly, he apologized as soon as possible, attempting to remedy the matter with generosity and self-denial.

When he was attacked personally, he did not speak in his own defense. When the Cathedral Capitulars wrote to him, asking him to consider that his outbursts of vehemence were sinful and caused damage in the diocese, Ketteler resounded in a completely non-defensive, humble way. He answered them with these words: "I acknowledge that the vehemence with which I repeatedly administer reproofs is a fault and a sin and I have always recognized it as such. This letter will be a serious motive for me to struggle against this fault."

It's difficult to imagine many church or government leaders responding in a similar way if confronted with a rebuke as strong as that which Ketteler received. Such humility is unusual even in a person of lower status much less in a Bishop.



What makes Bishop Ketteler worthy of honor, what made Pope Pius IX describe him as a saint, and what makes us view him as the symbol of the rich ground that brought forth a generous harvest, is that he was a man of truth, a famous Prince of the Church, who, despite his many high positions and honors, remained humble.

He spoke and lived the truth. Just as he didn't hesitate to speak out for those in need, to the government and to the Church, so too was he always forthright in acknowledging the truth about himself.

Throughout his life, he continued to strive for the virtues that were most difficult for his temperament. And, the homilist at his funeral suggests that he finally succeeded. He tells us that "Ketteler had heavy crosses to bear, difficult struggles to face, grievous offenses to his honor to endure, but during the last years of his life, he advanced in patience to such a degree, that at the end, he bore even the most difficult things with gentleness and patience."

Bishop Ketteler's legacy to us could be compared to the learning we might gain from an incident in the life of the famous violinist, Itzhak Perlman. Many of you will remember hearing of the occasion when Perlman, who walked with braces on both legs, was on stage ready to begin a concert when one of his violin strings broke. Perlman did not leave the stage. With three strings, he modulated, changed and recomposed the piece in his head; he retuned the strings to get different sounds. He played with power and intensity on only three strings. When asked later how he had accomplished this feat, the violinist answered: "It is my task to make music with what remains."

That was also Ketteler's task and he did it well. Ketteler played his life's music without a perfect instrument, as did Perlman. The music Perlman made with a three-stringed violin was beautiful and more amazing for its creativity than had his violin been whole. The music of Ketteler's life, played out with inimitable truth, was also beautiful and more inspiring for its humility than had he possessed every virtue from his youth. We are also called to make music with our lives with whatever instrument we have been given, on whatever stage we walk.

Today, we remember with gratitude the life and legacy of Bishop Ketteler, the Social Justice Bishop, the Humble Bishop, the man of truth. We pray that we might imitate his passion for social justice and his love of truth, so that our music, played as was his, on less than perfect instruments, might also be beautiful, be marked by genuine humility, and give praise to the God of justice and truth.

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ Does the idea that our founder, Bishop Ketteler, had a temper that often exhibited itself inappropriately cause a concern for you? Does that make him 'more human'? Do you have a character defect that causes a problem for you?
- ◆ Bishop Ketteler was referred to as 'the Social Justice Bishop, the Humble Bishop,' the "man of truth." What nickname would you give yourself? A nickname for the Associates? A nickname for the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence?
- ◆ Can you identify some of the social justice issues of the 21st century that the Community supports and perhaps some issues that we may need to address in the future?

### PRAYER FOR TODAY

To be like Jesus in everything is the great work of our lives. We must be like Him in our thought and judgments, in our affections and intentions. We must be Him in our outward appearance and in our demeanor. We must be like Him in His virtues, in His humility and meekness. This is the greatest obligation of our lives. *Bishop Ketteler*

### PSALM FRAGMENT

You have done good to your servant, O God, according to your word. Teach me wisdom and knowledge for I trust in your commands. *Psalms 119:65-66*



# Themes Running Through Catholic Social Teaching

## 1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person

- ◆ Human is central/reflection of God
- ◆ Test of every institution: how policies enhance or threaten life/dignity
- ◆ People more important than things

## 2. Rights and Responsibilities of the Human Person

- ◆ Each person has rights:
  - ⊙ to life
  - ⊙ to food, clothing, housing, health care, education, employment
  - ⊙ to freedom of conscience/religious liberty
  - ⊙ to raise a family
  - ⊙ to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself/family
  - ⊙ to immigrate
  - ⊙ to live free from discrimination
- ◆ Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities:
  - ⊙ to one another, to our families, to the larger society
  - ⊙ to respect the rights of others
  - ⊙ to work for the common good

## 3. Call to Family, Community and Participation

- ◆ Humans are social beings
  - ◆ Family is central/must support
  - ◆ Responsibility to contribute to broader community -- participation in government on all levels
- Central test of political, legal and economic institution is:
- ◆ what do they do **to** people
  - ◆ what do they do **for** people
  - ◆ how people **participate** in them

## 4. Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers

- ◆ Work is more than a way to make a living -- expression of dignity
- ◆ All have the right to decent and productive work with decent and fair wage
- ◆ Right to form or join a union

## 5. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

- ◆ Test of any society -- how its most vulnerable members are faring
- ◆ We are called to respond to the needs and creative ways to deal with them

## 6. Solidarity

- ◆ one human family
- ◆ crosses boundaries -- geographic, social, economic
- ◆ concern for world peace, global development, environment





# Levels of Participation in Social Justice Ministry

## Level 1: Knowledge

*Be well informed on the issues and learn what is going on.*

e.g.: Learn about the many issues affecting persons who are in need through reading newspapers, magazine articles, encyclicals/pastorals on Catholic Social Teachings, etc.

## Level 2: Compassion/Conversion

*Meditate/pray/fast over the issues. To attain compassion requires conversion that is based on the Scriptures.*

e.g.: Fast not only from food, but from prejudice; also identify Scripture texts on justice and reflect on their meanings; remember to pray at liturgy for those intentions that focus on persons in need or who are oppressed.

## Level 3: Evangelization

*Be well informed and inform others.*

e.g.: Speak with others -- family, friends, social acquaintances -- about what you have learned; engage others in discussion on the issues; listen to other points of view while not backing down on need to address injustices.

## Level 4: Indirect Participation

*Get involved.*

e.g.: Provide material and/or financial help to organizations working for justice; write letters to Congressional representatives and senators; affirm those in Level five by encouragement and trust.

## Level 5: Direct Participation

*Take part in programs to aid victims treated unjustly or in need of assistance.*

e.g.: Volunteer personally or participate in programs, services, activities, rallies, boycotts.

## Level 6: Adoption/Advocacy

*Make a cause one's own. Let others know that you will go to great lengths to achieve justice.*

e.g.: Visit congressional offices to lobby for a cause; demonstrate; speak out publicly when the occasion arises; sign on to ads in National Catholic Reporter, the New York Times, etc. that call for attention to an injustice.

## Level 7: Solidarity

*Be one with the wounded, the forgotten, persons who are poor.*

e.g.: Live with the oppressed or work along with them; sponsor a refugee family; provide a safe home for a victim of domestic violence; care for foster children.



# A Peace Practice

In his book, “Peace Is The Way: Bringing War and Violence to an End,” Deepak Chopra proclaims that it is the right time to give peace a chance and to each help end war through small daily practices. This excerpt lays out a seven-day plan.

## **Seven Practices for Peace**

The program for peacemakers asks you to follow a specific practice every day, each one centered on the theme of peace.

**Sunday:** Being for Peace

**Monday:** Thinking for Peace

**Tuesday:** Feeling for Peace

**Wednesday:** Speaking for Peace

**Thursday:** Acting for Peace

**Friday:** Creating for Peace

**Saturday:** Sharing for Peace

Hopefully this will create peace on every level of your life. Each practice takes only a few minutes. You can be as private or outspoken as you wish. But those around you will know that you are for peace, not just thorough good intentions, but by the way you conduct your life on a daily basis.

### **Sunday: Being for Peace**

“Today, take five minutes to meditate for peace. Sit quietly with your eyes closed. Put your attention on your heart and inwardly repeat these four words: *PEACE, HARMONY, LAUGHTER, LOVE*. Allow these words to radiate from your heart’s stillness out into your body.

As you end your meditation, say to yourself, Today I will relinquish all resentments and grievances. Bring into your mind anyone against whom you have a grievance and let it go. Send that person your forgiveness.

### **Monday: Thinking for Peace**

Thinking has power when it is backed by intention. Today, introduce the intention of peace in your thoughts. Take a few moments of silence, then repeat this ancient prayer.

“Let me be loved, let me be happy, let me be peaceful.

Let my family and friends be happy, loved, and peaceful.

Let my perceived enemies be happy, loved and peaceful.

Let all beings be happy, loved and peaceful.

Let the whole world experience these things.”

If at any time during the day you are overshadowed by fear or anger, repeat these intentions. Use this prayer to get back to center.

### **Tuesday: Feeling for Peace**

This is the day to experience the emotions of peace. The emotions of peace are *COMPASSION, UNDERSTANDING, and LOVE*.

*Compassion* is the feeling of shared suffering. When you feel someone else’s suffering, there is the birth of understanding.

*Understanding* is the knowledge that suffering is shared by everyone. When you understand that you aren’t alone in your suffering, there is the birth of love.

When there is *love* there is the opportunity for peace.

As you practice, observe a stranger some time during your day. Silently say to yourself, this person is just like me. Like me, this person has experienced joy and sorrow, despair and hope, fear and love. Like me, this person has people in his or her life who deeply care and love him or her. Like me, this person’s life is impermanent and will one day end. This person’s peace is as important as my peace. I want peace, harmony, laughter, and love in his or her life and the life of all beings.



### **Wednesday: Speaking for Peace**

Today, the purpose of speaking is to create happiness in the listener. Have this intention: *Today every word I utter will be chosen consciously. I will refrain from complaints, condemnation, and criticism.*

Your practice is to do at least one of the following:

1. Tell someone how much you appreciate them.
2. Express genuine gratitude to those who have helped and loved you.
3. Offer healing or nurturing words to someone who needs them.
4. Show respect to someone whose respect you value.
5. If you find that you are reacting negatively to anyone, in a way that isn't peaceful, refrain from speaking and keep silent. Wait to speak until you feel centered and calm, and then speak with respect.

### **Thursday: Acting for Peace**

Today is the day to help someone in need: a child, a sick person, and older or frail person. Help can take many forms. Tell yourself, *Today I will bring a smile to a stranger's face.* If someone acts in a hurtful way to me or someone else, I will respond with a gesture of loving kindness. I will send an anonymous note or gift to someone, however small. I will offer help without asking for gratitude or recognition.

### **Friday: Creating for Peace**

Today, come up with at least one creative idea to resolve a conflict, in your personal life, your family circle or among friends. If you can, try and create an idea that applies to your community, the nation, or the whole world. You may change an old habit that isn't working, look at someone a new way, offer words you never offered before, or think of an activity that brings people together in food feeling and laughter.

Secondly, invite a family member or friend to come up with one creative idea of this kind on his or her own. Creativity feels best when you are the one thinking up the new idea or approach. Make it known that you accept and enjoy creativity. Be loose and easy. Let the ideas flow and try out anything that has appeal. The purpose here is to bond, because only when you bond with others can there be mutual trust. When trust, there is no need for hidden hostility and suspicion – the two great enemies of peace.

### **Saturday: Sharing for Peace**

Today, share your practice of peacemaking with two people. Give them a copy of this and invite them to begin the daily practice. As more of us participate in this sharing, our practice will expand into a critical mass.

Today, joyfully celebrate your own peace consciousness with at least one other peace-conscious person. Connect either through e-mail or telephone. Share your experience of growing peace. Share your gratitude that someone else is as serious about peace as you are. Share your ideas for helping the world move closer to critical mass. "Do whatever you can, in small or large ways, to assist anyone who wants to become a peacemaker."



# Closing Prayer

## Option 1

**Leader:** We exalt your Providence, O God

**All:** and we commit ourselves to making Providence more visible in our world.

**Leader:** As Providence people, we are called to trust in Divine Providence.

**All:** ...to strive for “that mind which was in Christ Jesus” as we present to the world through our service and through our mission of witnessing to God’s Providence.  
...to build the kingdom of God in the manner of Bishop Ketteler -- reflecting loyalty to the Church, social concern and involvement, fearless defense of what is true and just.  
...to imitate the combined gifts of contemplation and action as lived by Mother Marie -- who was humble, gentle and simple in the face of demanding duties; who had a deep faith and total openness to accepting the Will of God.

Visibly do I see in all things the wonderful Providence of God.  
May my trust be ever firmer, ever simpler.

### Psalm 21

**Side 1:** O God, your strength gives joy to your people;  
How your saving help makes them glad!  
You have granted them their heart’s desire;  
You have not refused the prayer of their lips.

**Side 2:** You came to meet them with your blessings,  
You have set blessings on their heads.  
They asked for life and this you have given,  
Days that will last from age to age.

**Side 1:** Your saving help has given them glory.  
You have laid upon them your splendor,  
You have granted your blessing to them forever.  
You have made them rejoice with the joy of your presence.

**Side 2:** They have put their trust in you,  
Through the mercy of the Most High they shall stand firm.  
O God, arise in your strength;  
We shall sing and praise your power.

**All:** Glory to You, Source of all being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen



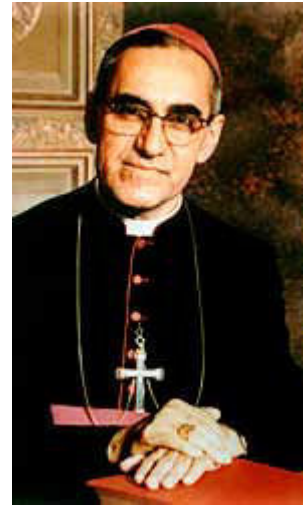
# Closing Prayer

## Option 2

“Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, in El Salvador, was assassinated on March 24, 1980, while celebrating Mass in a small chapel in a cancer hospital where he lived. He had always been close to his people, preached a prophetic gospel, denouncing the injustice in his country and supporting the development of popular and mass organizations. He became the voice of the Salvadoran people when all other channels of expression had been crushed by the repression.

The following prayer was composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw, MI, drafted for a homily by Cardinal John Dearden in November 1979 for a celebration of departed priests. As a reflection on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Bishop Romero, Bishop Untener included in a reflection book a passage titled "The mystery of the Romero Prayer." The mystery is that the words of the prayer are attributed to Oscar Romero, but they were never spoken by him.”

*From the website of the Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC),  
Congregation Of Notre Dame, Visitation Province*



**Bishop Romero**

## Prayer of Archbishop Oscar Romero

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.  
The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.  
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work.  
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.  
No statement says all that should be said.  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.  
No confession brings perfection.  
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.  
No program accomplishes the church’s mission.  
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.  
This is what we are about.  
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.  
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord’s grace to enter and do the rest.  
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.  
We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future that is not our own.  
Amen.



# Sponsored Ministries



Providence Heights Alpha School



Sacred Heart Schools



Providence Connections



Room at the Inn

## *Retreat Ministry*

- ◆ *Kearns Spirituality Center*
- ◆ *Providence Villa*



# Opening Prayer

## Sponsored Ministries: A Call On Our Lives

### A Psalm of Keeping Vigil

**Leader:** People of Providence in Education ministries keep vigil when the values they live have been imparted and they then encourage students to move in continuing the circle of Providence.

**All:** Be vigilant. Keep watch. Otherwise some itinerant whim will steal your Providence heart away.

**Leader:** People of Providence in Health Care ministries keep vigil when they hold life in their gentle, healing embrace until it is time to return again to the gentle embrace of Providence.

**All:** Be vigilant. Keep watch. Otherwise some itinerant whim will steal your Providence heart away.

**Leader:** People of Providence in Retreat ministries keep vigil when they guide others in their spiritual journey.

**All:** Be vigilant. Keep watch. Otherwise some itinerant whim will steal your Providence heart away.

**Leader:** People of Providence in Social Service ministries keep vigil when they strengthen families and improve their way of life.

**All:** Be vigilant. Keep watch. Otherwise some itinerant whim will steal your Providence heart away.

**Leader:** People of Providence in Parish ministries keep vigil when they collaborate with women and men to be Church and journey with them, letting Providence permeate the earth.

**All:** Be vigilant. Keep watch. Otherwise some itinerant whim will steal your Providence heart away.

**Leader:** People of Providence keep vigil when listening, questioning hearts challenge us deeper into the heart of Providence and outward to **BE** Providence.

**All:** Be vigilant. Keep watch. Otherwise some itinerant whim will steal your Providence heart away.

*Based on ideas from Women of Wisdom by M. T. Winter, 1993.*

### All Pray:

Ever welcoming God, help us to open our hearts to the needs of our sisters and brothers. Transform our minds, our attitudes and hearts. Create a sacred space, as host or guest, to share your love and care for all. O teach us to be welcoming like you. Amen



# Education

Teaching and sharing the Catholic faith is an important part of the mission of the Sisters of Divine Providence. The Community sponsors various schools in Pittsburgh and Kingston, MA.

## La Roche College

La Roche College was founded in 1963 by the Sisters of Divine Providence as an independent, private, Catholic college for religious sisters. By 1965 the college admitted its first lay students and conferred degrees on its first six graduates, all members of the Sisters of Divine Providence. By 1969 male students were admitted to the college and beginning in 1993, the Pacem In Terris program brought students from many countries, mostly developing regions and conflicted regions of the world. La Roche offers over 80 majors and minors at the undergraduate level and six graduate degree programs.



From its scenic 80-acre campus, La Roche reaches out to students from the United States and other nations, offering the promise of more fruitful lives for individuals and the hope of a better world for us all. One thing that has remained constant throughout its history is the spirit that animates the institution. It is the same spirit that has animated the Congregation of Divine Providence, since its foundation 160 years ago. It is that spirit which will lead La Roche College for many decades to come.



## Providence Heights Alpha School

Alpha School is a private, Catholic, coeducational school located on the 40-acre campus of the Sisters of Divine Providence. Since 1926, Alpha School has educated children to be independent thinkers, imaginative problem solvers, and caring, compassionate individuals. Voted one of the 25 most innovative Catholic schools in the country, Alpha School provides outstanding instruction in fundamental skills, while encouraging original thinking, intellectual curiosity, moral growth, and creative self-expression. With a student teacher ratio of 15:1, there is ample opportunity for individual attention and practical classroom experience.



Teaching and sharing the Catholic faith is an important part of Alpha's mission. The school fosters an environment in which faith and Christian values become a living and active part of each school day. Alpha School and the Sisters share a special relationship. Sisters are on the faculty, and students plan and participate in weekly liturgies in the Providence Heights Chapel. Students are encouraged to incorporate acts of charity and social justice into their school and family life.

## Sacred Heart School System

Located in Kingston, MA, the Sacred Heart Schools are comprised of a co-educational system from preschool through grade 12. The schools have flourished in large measure due to the faith and hard work of the Sisters of Divine Providence, committed lay faculty and staff members.

*Sacred Heart Elementary School* (Preschool through Grade 6) is a private, Catholic Elementary School that is an educational ministry founded





by the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Providence. Sacred Heart Elementary School is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.



*Sacred Heart High School*, a private Catholic institution founded by the Sisters of Divine Providence for the education of young men and woman of southeastern Massachusetts, has the following threefold purpose: to develop and reinforce Gospel values; to provide an academic program which effectively prepares the student for the

pursuit of knowledge now, in higher education, and throughout life, and; to develop a community of faith whose members are committed to habits of responsible leadership, respect for the dignity of persons, and dedication to service. The school and its staff is active in over 25 professional organizations and hold membership in NEASC, NCEA and AISNE .

## Retreats and Spirituality

Recognizing a constant hunger for spirituality and renewal of the human spirit, the Divine Providence Retreat Ministry operates two diverse retreat centers.

### **Kearns Spirituality and Conference Center**

Kearns, located on the Providence Heights property,

is a non-denominational ministry offering programs in spirituality and holistic health to anyone searching for a deeper meaning in their lives through a season of events, programs, and classes that are designed to enhance, renew and revitalize the human spirit. Kearns also hosts many retreats for groups of all faiths.



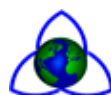
The Conference Center provides meeting space and hospitality for groups up to 250 people for meetings and up to 200 people for dining. The Retreat Center offers 25 double rooms and three suites. A dining room seats 70 with full kitchen or food service available. Visitation Chapel accommodates 170 people. The grounds offer a Woodland Reflection Trail, Labyrinth for prayerful walking, a Gazebo and Meditation Garden for quiet medication and a spirituality library. Special services include Spiritual Direction and a massage therapist.

### **Providence Villa**

Providence Villa, a ministry of hospitality, is located on 16-acres of woodland at 10745 Babcock Boulevard in Gibsonia, PA, about 5 miles from Providence Heights. The Villa invites individuals and small groups of all faiths who seek a reflective environment and an atmosphere of quiet and tranquility to meet and plan, pray and reflect, rest and relax, or just appreciate the beauty of nature and enjoy an oasis in the heart of the North Hills.



Providence Villa welcomes all who seek their unique life journey through private prayer, retreat, and learning. Groups are welcome for meetings, support, seminars, planning sessions, and liturgy. The Villa has several meeting areas, 16 bedrooms, a kitchen, library, formal dining room, a small cottage and food service. Spiritual Direction is available.



# Social Services

In keeping with the Community's justice focus to serve the needs of the most vulnerable, the Sisters operate three social service agencies.

## ***Providence Connections, Inc.***

Providence Connections, Inc., located on Pittsburgh's North Side, was formed in 1994 after the Sisters of Divine Providence sold Divine Providence Hospital to Pittsburgh Mercy Health System. The Community wanted to maintain a connection to this Pittsburgh neighborhood, and to focus on the struggling parents who need support services to enable them to provide for their families. Providence Connections is the umbrella corporation under which the Providence Family Support Center operates.



*Providence Family Support Center* offers family programming and support that is designed to strengthen children and parents and to empower them to reach their highest potential. PFSC is part of the national family support movement committed to promoting healthy families. The focus of PFSC is on prevention, and is specifically intended to fill the gaps that many families experience in their support systems. Family support is not intended to be only for "at risk" families; it assumes that every family deserves help, support and access to resources.



PFSC offers counseling, women's programming, job training, and literacy and parenting workshops. Services include parent education; child care; pre-school and the Clubhouse for Kids, which offers an after-school enrichment program, summer day camp, before-school care and special programming on in-service days; plus programs for teens and entire families.

## ***La Posada Providencia***

La Posada Providencia answers the Gospel call to "welcome the stranger." Founded in 1989 by Sister Carolyn (now Hilary) Hooks, CDP, La Posada provides a safe, nurturing environment to immigrants, asylees and asylum seekers who have come to the United States seeking safety, protection and a better life. All shelter residents are in the process of seeking legal refuge in this country.

Located in the lower Rio Grand Valley of South Texas, La Posada has welcomed over 5,400 people from more than 70 countries. The goals extend beyond shelter to helping the clients adjust quickly to the United States culture. Clients participate in life skills and English language lessons and receive personalized case management and transportation.



## Room at the Inn

Room at the Inn, a shelter for homeless women and families in St. Louis County, MO, has been sponsored by the Sisters of Divine Providence since 1993 and is located at Providence Center.



Room at the Inn operates with a day site and nearly 60 night sites. During the day, clients use the shelter's phone, shower, laundry and computer facilities. They attend classes or see the visiting nurse. They use the kitchen or choose from stockpiles of clothing and personal care items. Most importantly, they work with the client coordinator to plan their return to self-reliance and receive referrals to other agencies.

At night, Room at the Inn's interfaith partners welcome participants to their churches. The night-site hosts provide transportation, meals, shelter and companionship. Room at the Inn enables the compassionate people of St. Louis County to do something concrete and hands-on to help their less-fortunate neighbors.

## Closing Prayer

### Option 1

**All:** Provident God, You call us to be more Than we can ask or even imagine.  
Help us to uncover the rich inner life that is ours.  
Surprise us with hidden treasures we never knew we had.  
Give us the courage to uncover the mystic within ourselves.  
And, show us the way of wisdom as we struggle to leave this world  
a better place.

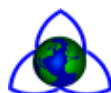
Amen

### Option 2

**All:** We give thank to you, Living God, the source of love;  
Whose light shines forth throughout the universe.

Let our hearts be clear and simple, and our souls filled with Your light.  
With You we can do all things, into Your heart we commend our souls.

Amen



*Covenant:  
Preparing for  
Commitment  
as an Associate*



# Covenant: Preparing for Commitment as Associates

## Opening Ritual

### Introduction

What do you carry in your hearts as you gather here for this Associate Inquiry Meeting? What stirs in your hearts as you think of yourselves as Providence people? You have all been accepted and invited to become an Associate.

Can you go back in time to when you first felt called to consider making a commitment to live as witnesses of Providence? What was it that drew you to the Inquiry Stage of becoming an Associate of Providence?

Has that burning desire or curious energy changed since you first experienced call? How? In what way? Are you more sensitive to the consolation, peace and challenge that being called to be Associate Members entails?

As you think about this, what wells up within you?

### Prayer (Option 1)

For prayer today I would now like to guide you through an imagery experience that will lead you to a pleasant place ...one of your favorite places, where you will meet Jesus and have an opportunity to speak with Jesus about what you are experiencing in your life as you prepare to make your commitment as an Associate, or what it is like for you as a man or woman of Providence who feels called to respond to an invitation to be about building up the Kingdom in the spirit of being providence for others.

Guided Prayer: Breathing, Guided Imagination  
"Be Still" #1 Always with You by Kathy Sherman, CSJ

### Prayer (Option 2)

**Leader:** In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier

**All:** We gather as women/ men of Providence to give you thanks and praise.

**Leader:** Glory to You source of all being Eternal Word and Holy Spirit

**All:** As it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen

**Leader:** It was You who formed my inward parts.

You knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

### Pause for Silence.

**Leader:** Be still and aware of God's presence

**All:** Within and all around

**All:** Let all that breaths praise you, O God!



**Side 1** O God of beginnings, as your Spirit moved over the face of the deep on the first day of creation, move with us now in our time of possible beginnings when the air is rain-washed. The bloom is on the bush, and the world seems fresh and full of new possibilities, and we feel ready and full.

**Side 2** We tremble on the edge of maybe.....a new covenant relationship, a new thing, a tentative start, and the wonder of committing ourselves as Associates. The wonder of it all lays its fingers on our lips.

**Side 1** In prayer now, Lord we share our eagerness and uneasiness about this something we would be or do; and we listen for your leading to help us separate the light from the darkness in the change we wish to shape by formalizing our desires to be an Associates... women of Providence.

**Side 2** We know that our time together during this Inquiry Period has shaped us in many ways and gave us insights to discover your Providence in the events in our lives, and in this call now to discern about entering into a covenant.  
*(Adapted from Guerrillas of Grace; Ted Loder)*

**All:** Let all that breaths praise you, O God!

**Reading 1:** Jeremiah 31:31- 33

### ***Pause For Reflection***

**Leader:** Let us pray:

**All:** God of Providence, turn Your Spirit loose now and each of us with it. Grant that we may enter into the mystery of the uncertainty of making a covenant with trust. Give us the light we need to realize that you and your gifts of Providence are with us always. Fill us with a new hope as we prepare to respond to our calls of covenant promise as Associates of Providence Color our hearts anew with the fire of passion that you are and will be with us every turn of our human journey. Amen

### ***After Prayer:***

Your hearts have been shaped and formed by your everyday experiences during this period of Inquiry. You have been touched by one another, your Associate gatherings, by your Mentor Association, families, different friends, our world reality, as well as by presenters or/and authors who spoke about unique and graced ways of looking at the gift of Providence.

As you prepare to enter into a deeper covenant with our God of Providence as an Associate with the Sisters of Divine Providence, I would like to invite you to reflect on some of the basic theological concepts and the spirituality of covenant.



## Theology Of Covenant

God wishes to lead all people to a life of communion with Himself. This concept is fundamental to the doctrine of God's plan of salvation, and which is given expression in the theme of the covenant.

In the Old Testament, covenant dominates all religious thought, but it intensifies and deepens with the passage of time.

In the New Testament, covenant acquires an unparalleled fullness, for it has as its content the total mystery of Jesus Christ. Covenant is the unbounded love of God outpoured in relationship.

Before being concerned with the relations of people with God, the covenant (*berith*) pertains to the social and juridical experience of people. God uses the cultural reality and circumstances of the day to help clarify God's unbounded love for people.

People were commonly bound among themselves by agreements and contracts implying rights and duties that were usually reciprocal. There were pacts among groups or equal individuals who wanted to help one another.

These are the covenants of peace:

Genesis 21:22, 26,28 -- Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba)

Amos 1:9 -- Covenants of brothers decree

1 Samuel 23:18 -- Agreements of friendship (David and Jonathan made a pact.)

Jeremiah -- Marriage itself

There were also unequal treaties, in which the superior and powerful one promises protection to the weak, while the latter engages self to serve the former. Biblical History offers many examples of this. (1 and 2 Samuel) Suzerain Treaties

The theme of Covenant appeared and was introduced into the thinking of the Old Testament at the beginning of ALL religious thought, and makes it different from all of the surrounding religions.

At Sinai the people entered into a covenant with Yahweh and thus the worship of Yahweh becomes its national religion.

Covenant with Yahweh is clearly not a pact between equals. Yahweh decided with a sovereign liberty...with unbounded love and compassion to grant allegiance to Israel and Yahweh dictates what this covenant would require from them.

Never the less, biblical exegetes tell us not to push the comparison too far. The Covenant at Sinai shows God as the initiating cause, but it also reveals from the beginning an essential aspect of the plan of salvation. Right from the vision of the burning bush, Yahweh revealed to Moses a name and plan for Israel. God wants to deliver Israel from Egypt to set her up in the land of Canaan (Exodus 3:7-10 ff.) Israel is Yahweh's people, and God desires to give her the land promised to her fathers. (Genesis 12:7)

This already supposes that on the part of God, Israel is the object of election and the depository of a promise. But God needs the people to respond to the offer. The Exodus confirms the promise made to Abraham. God is the master and is capable of imposing God's will. (Exodus 14:31)

With this point secured, God can reveal a plan of covenant. "If you hear my voice and observe my covenant, you will be my people privileged among all peoples. For all the earth is mine, but you will be for me a priestly kingdom and a consecrated nation. (Exodus 19:5, 6) God chooses Israel without any merit on the part of Israel. These words emphasize the gratuity of the divine election. God reserved Israel for God's Self: She would serve Yahweh God with her worship and she would become Yahweh's Kingdom. In return Yahweh assures her aid and protection. Yahweh had born her on eagles wings and brought her to the mysterious holy. Now looking to the future, God renews the promises to her (Exodus 23:20-31).



God's Covenant to Israel and making of promises to her, included some conditions which Israel was asked to observe concerning the worship of Yahweh alone. Moses made clear all that God had commanded and the people answered "Everything that Yahweh has spoken we will observe (Exodus 19:7 - ff). This is a solemn commitment. (We will do whatever he asks us to do.)

Once the pact was concluded, diverse objects would perpetuate its memory and witness to future generations the initial agreement of Israel with Yahweh.

The ark containing the Law is the memorial of the covenant and the sign of the presence of God with them. The tent in which it was placed was a figure of the future temple. It was the place of encounter between Yahweh and Yahweh's chosen people.

To keep the relationship alive, the covenant was renewed at certain crucial turning points in history. In Deuteronomy 27:2-26 one finds fragments of a liturgy which supposes a renewal of this type.

Yahweh enters into covenant with David and to his dynasty. This is considered to be an *UNCONDITIONAL COVENANT*, though there was a minority who viewed this covenant also as conditional because it was dependent on the Sinai Covenant. (Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament scholar and theologian)

The prophets enlivened the covenant with emotional overtones. The Deuteronomic Spirituality gathers the fruit of the deepening relation of God with the People. Again and again Deuteronomy recalls the demands, promises, and threats of the covenant, but most of all they emphasize the love of God which waits for the love of Israel. "You are my people and I am your God." Here again Israel's love for Yahweh should naturally show itself in obedience. The people are forced to make a decision.

The prophets turned their eyes to the future and presented in its totality the drama of the People of God, who bound themselves to Yahweh, despite their infidelities. Jeremiah compares it to a marriage.

The plan of the covenant revealed by God remains unchanged. The prophets speak of a new covenant. Hosea speaks of it in terms of betrothal, which would bring the bride love, justice, fidelity, knowledge of God and would re-establish peace between God and the People.

Jeremiah claims that the human heart would be changed, for God would write the law in their hearts. Ezekiel speaks of an eternal covenant of peace that would bring about a change of hearts and the gift of the divine Spirit. Thus the covenant made long ago would be achieved. "You will be my people and I will be your God.

The plan of the covenant which dominates all human history will find its culmination in the end of time. It will finally materialize in perfect form. At once interior and universal, by the mediation of the servant of Yahweh.

And, this turns Yahweh's covenant with the people to the new testament. The word covenant now translated by the Greek word "*diatheke*" figures in the four stories of the last supper ...Take and eat this is my body.... This is my blood, the blood of the covenant which will be shed for many. Matthew adds "for the remission of sins." Luke and Paul say "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus regards himself as the suffering servant. Jesus becomes the mediator of the covenant which the message of consolation hints at in Isaiah. Through the blood of Jesus, human hearts will be changed and the spirit of God will be given.

This act will henceforth be rendered present in a ritual gesture which Jesus commanded us to do "again in memory of Him." It is by the Eucharistic participation, accompanied by faith, that the faithful will be united most intimately to the mystery of the new covenant and that we will benefit from its graces.

New Testament authors, influenced by the idea of a new covenant, saw in the





death of Jesus to be a new covenant with Israel. Thus the covenant theme is the background for the whole New Testament.

Today we believe, as did the people of the Old and New Testament days, that God invites us to a deeper union with Himself through the Eucharist and in our sensed call to be women and men of Providence, witnessing the good news. Just as a testamentary disposition or last will takes effect at the death of the testator, so the death of Jesus has put us in possession of the promised inheritance.

Our Provident God dwells with us today no less than Yahweh did with the people of Israel or those at the Last Supper.

The covenant we are being invited to enter is not about the letter of the law, but that of the Spirit, a spirit of being providence for others through the power of Jesus and the Spirit, thus making God's providence more visible and believable through us.

To be found by Jesus then, we must allow our hearts and minds to be flooded by a light beyond our control and comprehension. We are called to be open to the transforming power of a Provident God.

Acts 2:36-41 Repent and be baptized. It was to you and your children that the promise was made. This promise motivated Moses, David and all the prophets. Like Peter we too must turn to the Scriptures.

To be found by Jesus, we must accept Jesus on His terms.

Looking at your call to commit yourself to God in a type of heart/covenant with our God of Providence, to deepen your personal relationship with Jesus, and to share this gift with others with whom you live and work by being Providence People, we will be asked to enter into a process for writing our personal covenant statements.

## **Closing Ritual** *(Option 1)*

*(Facilitator: Have a selection of inspirational pictures.)*

Inquirer: Select a picture that speaks to you about a challenge or call to deeper covenant or commitment in your life. Pray to the Spirit to help you discover one He has in mind for you, one that enables you to receive and experience the presence of a Provident God veritably humming in and through all the ordinary events of your life.

After selection, return to your place and reflect on what God might be saying to you as you prepare to write your covenant. Where is God in the picture? Where are you? What message comes to you as you reflect?

Song: *(Optional)* "You and I" #3 Always With You by Kathy Sherman, CSJ

Sharing

*Prepared by Sister Anne Winschel*



## Closing Prayer (Option 2)

**Leader:** Jesus says, “I am the Way for you.”

**All:** And, so we come to follow Jesus Christ.

**Leader:** Jesus says, “I am the Truth for you.”

**All:** And, so we come to dwell in the Light.

**Leader:** Jesus says, “I am the Life for you.”

**All:** And, so we come, leaving behind all else to which we cling.

**Leader:** Look at your hands, see the touch of the tenderness,

**All:** God’s own for the world.

**Leader:** Look at your feet, see the path and the direction,

**All:** God’s own for the world.

**Leader:** Look at your heart, see the fire and the love,

**All:** God’s own for the world.

**Leader:** This is God’s world,

**All:** And, we will serve in it.

**Leader:** Jesus said, “I am always.”

May God the Creator bless you.

May God the Son walk with you.

May God the Spirit lead your lives with love.

**All:** Amen



# *Other Resources*

*Providence Articles*  
*Providence Blessing*  
*Litany of Divine Providence*  
*To BE Providence*



# On Keeping Providence

Ruth McGoldrick, S.P., Genesis Spiritual Life Center, Westfield, MA

**Before you read this article**, reflect and jot down a few ideas of your understanding of “Keeping Providence.”

**The process view of a Provident God that Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP, outlines so well can lead us to a more dynamic and intimate familiarity with that Provident God who delights in creation and communion with all creatures. And, the vulnerable Jesus that Louis Roy, OP, presents as experiencing God’s presence in the midst of seeming absence in his Passion, challenges us to seek meaning and direction at those same crossroads in our own lives where inner and outer forces intersect either to build or diminish God’s kingdom-in-the-making.**

What mysteries we probe and what depths we plumb when we relate to a process view of God-provident. This is a God with the same hungers for co-creation and communion that we have, and a God, vulnerable and creatively challenged by creatures who continually plunge themselves into personal and cosmic dark nights, brought on by their own refusal to grow in consciousness.

Though we cannot clearly articulate a process spirituality of Providence, we continue to grow into one just living [now] where we face exciting and frightening decisions regarding meaning and survival.

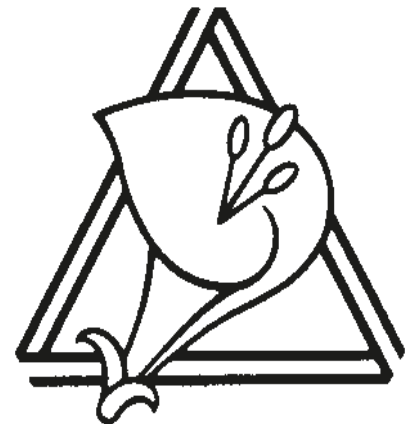
A process view of spirituality can free us from the endless puzzles and ponderous problems of the classical approach to Providence, all the while preserving the best of that tradition’s insights. It can set us free from the struggle to figure out and follow an unfathomable Divine Plan and Will and invite us to participate in a process of transformation, a journey to wholeness and holiness.

We enter the Living Water which flows unceasingly and which is a source of all of the creative and healing energies which we have always attributed to Providence. Once inside that process of wholeness, we need only to cooperate, as did DeCaussade, by loving and accepting the present moment as the best moment, trusting in God’s universal goodness. It is as if, once in the unknown and all-uniting depths, we freely board a ship whose final destiny has been set by a wise Guide, capable of flexible maneuvers, improvisations, and creative twists and turns on a perilous course. It is our capacity for self-surrender, for healthy vulnerability and our delicate and decisive responses to the promptings and lures of this gracious Guide which brings us Home to Wholeness.

We are not long in this growth process before we, like Jesus, encounter evil and suffering. We, too, must struggle to find meaning and direction in the midst of our own Gethsemanes. We come to ponder more in prayer and to live with more confidence the gospels of Providence -- those scripture texts which exhort us as individuals and as nations to let go of our addiction to try to fix and control everything and everyone and especially ourselves.

These same texts warn us that the more desperately we continue our “barn-building,” (or should I say bomb-building), our seeking of security through domination and control, the more we continue to try to provide for ourselves, then the less God can provide for us.

We also come, like Jesus, to learn from nature how to be in our lives in non-anx-



ious and non-controlling ways. It is only when we let go and trust in Providence that we are free of our patterns of addiction.

Healers today tell us that at a certain point in the creative and healing processes, a mysterious element, which we call grace, suddenly becomes operative and releases the creative images and healing energies needed to transform our distressed and diseased lifestyles into more healthy and holy ones.

This co-creative work, this process of transformation, makes full use of our human freedom and gifts. It also requires a keen knowing of when and how to be vulnerable and to let go in a healthy self-surrender that invites God's grace to work in our lives, bringing order out of chaos and beauty from pain.

DeCausade speaks eloquently and fondly of the two hands of God: one hand that knows how to nourish and sustain, and the other that mysteriously knows how to administer just the right amount of darkness. Only when we come to know both hands of God will we, like Jesus, come to realize that there is no other road to holiness and wholeness than the path through Gethsemane on the road to Calvary.

This realization enables us to open ourselves in trusting surrender to God's love and grace, even in the dark nights of contemplative living and prayer. Such vulnerability before God, allows God to grace and gift us with creative and healing energies. Our only task is to go about sharing this divine energy with all the people and in all the places and institutions in need of hope and healing.

As Women of Providence, we have always wrestled with the effects of sin, evil and suffering. At this time in history, we may also be called to better understand so as to more faithfully and fully incarnate that aspect of trust in Providence that Jesus embodied in Gethsemane and on Calvary: the Suffering Servant who with full consciousness and freedom gave up his own life and ego so that his hidden, deeper self, could emerge and grow strong.

The more consciously aware and involved we are in this process of co-creation, this soul-making, this kingdom-building, the quicker we are to perceive and affirm Providence at work in the present moment. Such a growing person freely forwards the Divine Plan and Will, content to know what they have to do with creating and sustaining the harmony, unity and community that a Provident God is, and toward which Providence lures us.

Such persons no longer spend energy trying to figure out why bad things happen to good people. They are in tune with the intuitions of the mystics who know that God does not cause evil, even though God does know how to work in and through evil and suffering.

They also know from their own lived experience that suffering can deepen compassion and strengthen inner muscles, leaving a residue of wisdom that enables a spiritually refined person to penetrate with serenity life's paradoxes and mysteries.

As people grow in consciousness and inner freedom, they are more able to live confidently with the contradictions of a cosmos moving painfully and slowly through evil and suffering on the road to greater interiority, complexity and unity.

However, the interplay between suffering and growth in consciousness can continue to baffle them, as it did the lady Julian of Norwich, who found herself ever astonished by the constant mingling of woe and well-being.

As Women of Providence, we constantly spend our lives in this same mix of well-being and woe. How Provident we would be if we could share with others our own intimacy with a Provident God who is vulnerable, resilient and compassionate; who respects our freedom; encourages our cooperation and desires our company; who is creatively challenged by our sins and failures. This is the same God that the process thinkers are struggling to uncover and reveal.



Julian of Norwich uses a lovely and quaint phrase which I love when she speaks of “keeping Providence. I would like to suggest that we as Providence people, can best “keep Providence” by making beauty from the pain and suffering we experience in our lives and ministries.

It is the beauty that comes out of pain which will connect us with the crucified God of Beauty and the beauty of all creatures involved in the struggle for transformation and wholeness. We best “keep Providence” when we encourage our selves fully in the life-long process of finding and sharing our own inner beauty and the beauty of all other creatures, a beauty wrought from suffering. For in the end, we are saved only by Beauty and its power to transform pain into consciousness.

### **BIBLICAL WISDOM**

Full authority has been given to me, both in heaven and on earth; go therefore and make disciples of all nations... Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And, know that I am with you until the end of time.

*Mark 28:19-20*

### **SILENCE FOR MEDITATION**

#### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

- ◆ In what ways have you expanded your awareness of the phrase “Keeping Providence?”
- ◆ What is your comfort level in sharing with another “of our own intimacy with a Provident God who is vulnerable, resilient, and compassionate; who respects our freedom; encourages our cooperation and desires our company; who is creatively challenged by our sins and failures?”
- ◆ Julian suggests “we keep Providence by making beauty from the pain and suffering we experience in our lives and ministries; by finding and sharing our inner beauty and the beauty of all other creatures; a beauty wrought from suffering.” Are you more inclined to share “good experiences” of “the beauty of suffering” to those you encounter on a regular basis or to those you meet less frequently? Is there a major difference between “Keeping Providence” and “Making God’s Providence more visible in our world?”

### **PSALM FRAGMENT**

God, you are my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? You are the stronghold of my life; of whom should I be afraid? Show me, O God, your way and lead me on a level path. I believe that I shall see Your goodness in the land of the living. Let your heart take courage.

*Psalm 27*

### **PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING**

Mention your own special intentions.

### **PRAYER FOR TODAY**

Help me, Yahweh to honor my limitations and the limitations of others as I grow in my love of You and others.

Because we believe that Providence works good out of every evil, we must surely be meant to look for that good and to learn what life lessons we can from it.

*Mary Ellen Rufft, CDP*



# Praying With The Poor

**Donald Dorr, A Maryknoll Father**

An excerpt from the chapter, Prayer and Providence, from *Spirituality and Justice*.

A crucial question arises, what should I ask for when I pray with people who are oppressed or desperately poor? Should I encourage them to pray to God to take away their troubles? That is the kind of prayer that really annoys many of those who are committed to the struggle for justice. Their main objections to it can be summed up in two closely related points:

They see it as an escapist form of prayer. For it can give people the illusion that they are doing something to change their situation, when in fact, they are making no practical effort to deal with the source of their problems.

The second objection to this kind of prayer is that it encourages a passivity that is rooted in fatalism: if the prayer is not answered, people will think that God approves of the evils they have to endure.

These are very cogent objections. So it seems to me that anybody who prays with the poor ought to do so in a way that does not encourage escapism or fatalism. Indeed, the prayer itself should help people to overcome these temptations. The only proviso is that this should not be done in an arrogant way.

The need to be sensitive to 'where people are at' is particularly important in the case of the very poor or marginalized people who feel that nobody respects them. This means that one may have to begin with a form of prayer in which one begs God to take away the trouble. But, in the course of the prayer one can endeavor to

raise the consciousness of the person or group.

The poor can be helped to see that their suffering is not part of God's plan, nor is it the result of the order of nature; it arises mainly from the injustice of individuals or society. Of course, most people who are crushed by poverty are well aware that they are being mistreated and exploited. But quite commonly this awareness is not allowed to surface in their prayer.

An escapist and fatalistic type of religion creates in the poor a kind of self-deception or false consciousness, one that smothers the sense of injustice that they feel.

Authentic prayer does not therefore have to set out to stir up anger and a sense of injustice in people. The task is simply to facilitate them in getting in touch with their real feelings and expressing them honestly to God. Prayer is not to be reduced to political education; but what is in question here is, rather, a religious education. The poor are to be helped to understand the nature and concerns of the true God.

Perhaps no religious concept has been so abused as that of providence. A false conception of God's will has been invoked to justify colonial conquest, racism, the gross exploitation of the poor by the rich, and shameless abuses of political and ecclesiastical power. The clearest examples can be found in the history of Latin America over the past few hundred years.

There is one important point to note about the distorted notion of providence that was brought to that continent, and indeed to the rest of the Third World as well. It was not simply that a fatalistic piety was given to the poor and oppressed, one that taught them to accept their sufferings as the will of God. There was also the other side of the coin: the colonial soldiers were taught to believe that they were the agents of God in their conquest. A passive version of providence marked the religion



of the poor while a very active version of it legitimated the oppressive actions of the oppressors. The main aim of liberating religion must be to correct these distortions.

In chapter 3 of this book, I gave an account of the God that was glorified by Mary in her song of praise, Luke 1:46-55. This is a God who is actively involved in rescuing the poor from those who oppress them. To proclaim one's faith in such a God is to challenge the distorted notion of providence which I have outlined above.

Any religion or theology which encourages people to work for justice and liberation must have an explicit or implicit teaching on providence. But many Third World theologians seem to be rather reluctant to speak very explicitly about providence. I suspect that this is partly because they have not fully freed themselves from the inadequacies of recent Western theology. But another reason may be that they fear that the concept, 'providence,' cannot be rescued from the distortions of the past. It remains too tied up with fatalistic attitudes.

I believe, however, that the notion of providence, and even the word itself, are too important to be abandoned. It is better to mount a direct challenge to the wrong teaching of the past. The Bible provides an abundance of material for a positive and active concept of providence, one that underpins our efforts to promote human liberation.

In the Old Testament, the Exodus story is the primary instance of active involvement by God in the liberation of his people. It is frequently recalled by the psalmist when he finds himself crushed by enemies and turning in desperation to God:

In the day of distress I cry out to the Lord;  
I groan and am discouraged.  
...Will the Lord reject me for ever?  
...But then, Lord, I remember your great deeds.  
You led your people like a shepherd with  
Moses and Aaron as their leaders. (Psalm 77)

We have every reason to follow the same pattern in our prayer with those who are oppressed today.

The Bible offers many instances of prayers of desperation said by people setting out on an apparently hopeless task of resistance to oppression. These can be a source of inspiration and a model for our own prayer.

Among the more striking examples are the prayers of two brave women, Judith and Esther. Judith 13:5-7; Esther 4:19: 'O God, whose strength prevails over all, listen to the voice of the desperate...' And the final prayer of Samson, Judges 16:28. Other notable prayers of desperation are to be found in the two books of the Maccabees (I Maccabees 3:51-3; II Maccabees 13: 10-12) and in the Book of Daniel (3:40).

The presupposition of all of these prayers is that God is actively involved in directing the course of human history, that His saving power is exerted on behalf of the poor and the weak.

It is important to note, however, that God's answer to the prayer of the desperate is hardly ever a direct miraculous intervention. Rather, the prayer is answered by a strengthening of the person's own courage and determination.

One of the best correctives for a fatalistic or escapist conception of providence is familiarity with these biblical stories and prayers. If we model our prayers of thanksgiving on Mary's song of praise (Luke 1:46-55), then we will be inculcating a correct understanding of divine providence. It will inspire people to take responsibility for their lives and to work to overcome evil in society.

Once the poor become active in the struggle for justice, it could be very useful to borrow some of the charismatic techniques of prayer. For instance, when a few people are about to lead a protest march, the group could impose hands on them, and pray for courage and protection.

There are times, too, when it would be opportune to pray for healing of various kinds. For example, when 'the security forces' use violence against protestors,





people are likely to suffer not merely from bodily injuries, but also from deep resentment. Such resentment gnaws at the human spirit and deprives people of inner freedom; so it is good to pray that they be healed of it.

In praying with those who are poor and desperate, one might well use a version of the Lord's Prayer, expanded to apply to their situation:

"Our Father....May you Kingdom come, and may we be active in promoting it, a Kingdom of peace and love, founded on true justice...

Give us this day our daily bread and strengthen us in our efforts to build a world where we all have the opportunity to earn our bread through meaningful work, where nobody has to go hungry, and no group lives in luxury while other starve.

Forgives us our trespasses -- our failure to believe in your Kingdom and your call to us to bring it about, our sinful apathy in the face of injustice, our failure to work together, our dissipation of energy in fruitless resentment rather than courageous challenge.

Lead us not into temptation: do not test us beyond our strength by leaving us in our desperate situation. But, deliver us from evil: lead us out of bondage as you led your people in the past out of slavery and into the Promised Land; raise up leaders for us as you called Moses and Deborah, Judith and David; inspire and strengthen them to lead us into freedom."

### **BIBLICAL WISDOM**

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives and release the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor; to comfort all who mourn.

*Isaiah 61:1-2*

### **SILENCE FOR MEDITATION**

#### **PSALM FRAGMENT**

To the upright, I will show the saving power of God. *Psalms 50:23*

### **PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING**

Pray that we may always treat the oppressed with the dignity that they deserve. Pray that we may always be God's instrument in promoting the true spirituality of Providence to all those we encounter.

### **PRAYER FOR TODAY**

Pray together The Lord's Prayer. It may be helpful to read the two versions from Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11: 2-4

### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

- ◆ After reading this article, try following the suggestion and 'expand' on the traditional version and make the "Our Father apply to the present situation." Can you share this 'new' prayer with the group?
- ◆ Have you ever been 'prayed over'? Have you ever 'prayed over' another? As part of many CDP and/or parish rituals, the congregation extends their hands and prays over an individual or a group. How did it feel to be the receiver or the giver in the specific situation?
- ◆ Read the suggested biblical selections about Judith, Esther, Samson, Daniel and Maccabees. Notice that their prayers are answered by the individual's courage and determination -- not by direct miraculous intervention. If we model our prayers of petition and thanksgiving on these, then we will inculcate a correct understanding of Providence. Relate a situation when actions as well as prayer were needed.



# The Role of Providence in Crisis and Healing

Mary Hogan, SP

God does not directly will our suffering. God's will for us is for good. God created us out of love, created us human and free. Given the human condition in which we exist, we carry in our very nature the roots of disease and death.

Being imperfect and finite creatures, we are subject to all the ills that could possibly happen from failure, loss, weakness, sickness and suffering right up to death. However, God does not directly will or take pleasure in our sufferings or illness.

Sickness and death are the effects of our human condition, and are as much a suffering to God as they are to us. But, given that God is not responsible for illness, the cancer, the accident, the unfortunate circumstances, we may still ask why does God not step in and change the patterns?

Karl Rahner reminds us that one of the mysteries of God's presence is that God created us and redeemed us out of infinite love, but created us human and free, and being human we are subject to every human weakness and every human failing.

We do not often consider what it means to be human, any more than we stop to think about our heart beating continuously or the steady and essential exchange of oxygen as we inhale and carbon dioxide as we exhale. When these processes are momentarily interrupted or overburdened, we do consider their function.

When something happens in our life that is beyond or outside our control, we begin to realize what it means to be limited, weak and human.

One basic underlying dynamic of being human is that we are not always in control, and we struggle to be in control. We live within that tension.

## BIBLICAL WISDOM

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

*2 Corinthians 12:9*

## PSALM FRAGMENT

Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample on me; All day long foes oppress me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me. O Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

*Psalm 56:2-3*

## SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ What questions or complaints do you have for God as a result of experiencing suffering and disappointments? (Be honest!)
- ◆ Do you still hang onto anger about how "the Church," or someone in the Church treated you in the past? How could your belief in the Providence of God help you to release that anger?
- ◆ How has God's Providence been revealed to you in times of exile and alienation?

## PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Pray for the most vulnerable among us that the heart of humanity will overflow with compassion and wisdom.

Pray for your family and friends that they will be receptive to how interdependent and vulnerable our bodies, minds and spirits are.

Pray for the grace to be able to turn to God in anger and sorrow, to bring all that we are into God's loving presence.

Pray that "vulnerability" will be experienced as a strength beyond understanding the strength of the Spirit in us.

## PRAYER FOR TODAY

Allow me to be gentle with myself. Allow me to savor my humanness and my limitations. Allow me, Holy One, to fall into your arms.



# Darkness/Light

**Reflection: Christmas**

**Michele Bisbey, CDP, Ph.D.**

In the 2,000-plus years that have unfolded since that night in Bethlehem, can anyone claim that the darkness has diminished? Is there any less pain, any less meanness in the human spirit, any less heartache?

“The light shines in the darkness,” writes John. And, maybe that’s the thing. Maybe that’s the gospel writer’s point. It is not that the light obliterates the darkness; it is simply that the light is there.

This, I think is the message of the incarnation -- the story behind the story that we will tell each other this day. God enters into the darkness to sit alongside of us as a Providential presence -- God with us -- Emmanuel.

God refuses to dwell in the heavens above and, from a safe distance, watch the drama of human life play out. Instead, our Provident God climbs right into the darkest places to be with us; and in that holy and luminous action, we find reason enough to hope.

When Robert Louis Stevenson was a little boy, he lived in a house on a hillside in Scotland. Every evening he would watch the lamplighter walk through the streets in the valley below lighting each of the village street lights. “Look Mother,” he would say, “here comes the man who punches holes in the darkness.”

As women and men of Providence, we are called to be light in the darkness, to be a Providential presence. We are called to punch holes in the darkness. We punch holes in the darkness when we find ways to bring the light of ourselves to the dark places of our world.

Punching holes in the darkness is what the candles that burn in our windows symbolize. They are

- candles of hope to overcome despair,
- candles of peace to dispel discord and violence,
- candles of joy to dissipate sadness,
- candles of courage to ease all fear,
- candles of love to uproot hatred.

A number of years ago, I was invited by a friend to make a retreat in a small, out of the way, “holler” in rural West Virginia. At night, we would sit on the porch watching the sky darkening and the shadows coming on. It was fascinating. The house was high in the hill above a small town. First there would be one light. Then the minutes would pass and another light, then another. A trail of light wound its way below us, around, in and out. I watched wondering what was it and how it was created. My friend smiled and said, “Ah, you’ve noticed. We are still poor and a little bit backward here.” That is the lamplighter, walking through town, lighting the gas lamps.”

As I recall those lamps being lit, I am grateful for so many Providence people like your selves who day after day -- not just at Christmas -- punch holes in the darkness. We know them -- you -- by the trail of light left behind. Truly, you are the light shining in the darkness.

*(With extensive borrowing of words and ideas from Megan McKenna, John Shea, and a sermon entitled “Luminaria” by Dr. Scott Black Johnson.)*



# Darkness/Light continued

## **BIBLICAL WISDOM**

The light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overcome it.

*In part from John 1:1-18*

## **PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING**

Pray for those who are missed in being touched by the light. The news prompts naming individuals and groups who need touched by the light. What stories in the news come to mind?

## **SILENCE FOR MEDITATION**

### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

◆ In what ways do the painful conditions that confront our planet -- ecological degradation, war, poverty, homelessness -- challenge us to rethink our understanding of Providence? People punching holes in darkness? Give examples.

◆ How would encountering God, in the darkness of our world, help one to become holy? Recall another in your life who is holy. Recall the life of Jesus, Gandhi, Joan Chittister, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa or one of the saints.

◆ As light surfaces in the holes punched in the darkness, "trails of light are left behind." At work, with family members, in our community, name "trails of light left behind" that you have noticed and been grateful.

### **PSALM FRAGMENT**

Though the darkness covers much of the land and violence seems to flourish, love gives birth to dazzling light...it shines through all that is hidden.

*Psalm 92:7-8, Nan Merrill*

### **PRAYER FOR TODAY**

#### **Where there is darkness, light**

Amidst the darkness in our hearts, the sin of violence, our self-hatred, our fear, our hostility toward one another, our oppression of the poor, our rejection of You; let Your light shine -- the light of peace, joy, trust; the light of truth; the light of resurrection; the light of hope. Let us be like Christ, the light of the world, pointing to Your presence, showing each other how to live justly, humanly, nonviolently, so that our light, Your light, will shine for all, and one day we see You face to face.

*John Dear, S.J*



# Making God's Providence Visible Through Our Giftedness-Part 1

Ellen Rufft, CDP, Ph.D

Marie de la Roche Assembly, Part 1, August 2003

This morning, I'd like to share with you my reflections on the theme for the Assembly, our giftedness, our mission, and on the challenges we face as we attempt to make God's Providence more visible in our world. What I think is important is that my remarks and the questions that we'll discuss will stimulate your thinking and energize all of us to more concerted action for those most in need of experiencing the Provident love of God.

To speak of the gifts of our Province, is to speak of plentitude. We have many, many Sisters and Associates who give generously of themselves in a great diversity of ministries. We have among us more degrees than those on any thermostat. We have individuals with excellent health and an abundance of energy.

We have Sisters willing and capable of being in leadership -- on Provincial Council, on committees, on the Consultative Body, in internal ministry, in our Circles of Collaboration. We have aging Sisters and those with dwindling health who provide a powerhouse of prayer for us. As a Province, we are truly blessed.

Like many religious communities in the United States, we have moved from the dependence that characterized our lifestyle in pre-Vatican II days through the period of sometimes excessive independence to on-going efforts toward interdependence. Two years ago, with the creation of Marie de la Roche Province, we took a huge step in our community history. We decided to combine our gifts, to pool our resources, to become one interdependent entity. And, the impetus of our decision was the mission. We came together because we believed that God's Providence could be made more visible by our becoming one.

Today begins a new moment in our history. Today, this moment, is what theologians call a "kairos" moment, a unique moment characterized by an urgency and a challenge to respond unlike any other time. It is the fullness of time. Now is the moment when, as a new Province, we are called to determine how we will carry out the "why" of our coming together. What does it mean that we have joined for the sake of the mission?

In his book, "A Presence That Disturbs," Fr. Anthony Gittins, a social and theological anthropologist, tells us that "the origin of mission is God and that Jesus is God literally brought down to earth to continue God's mission. Mission is what God does for a living: reach out, gather in, embrace, reconcile, unite, heal, uphold, renew. Mission is not just about our ministry, it is about our whole life.

The new Archbishop of Boston, Sean O'Malley, told a story at his installation about a secretary at a different chancery office who answered the door one day and found a scruffy looking man who claimed to be Jesus Christ. The secretary wasn't sure what to do, so she went to the Bishop and asked him. He replied, "Look busy."

After the audience laughed at that response, Archbishop Sean explained that in truth, what we are all called to be doing at every moment, being busy about the mission of God, believing that Jesus can show up as easily in the schizophrenic man at our door at home as he can in the pastoral visit that is part of our designated ministry. The Archbishop was saying in different words, that God's mission has us. We are to live in service to it.



The urgent challenge which faces us now as a new Province, in this kairos moment, is to decide how we will use our combined gifts to strengthen our desire and our ability to carry out the mission of Jesus.

If we have truly joined together for mission, how do we want to be together in a way that's different from two years ago? What do we want to be doing together to make God's Providence more visible in our world that we could not do or were doing as three provinces and a region?

### **BIBLICAL WISDOM**

Come to me, you who desire me.  
*Ecclesiastes. 10:18*

### **SILENCE FOR MEDITATION**

#### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

◆ Name and claim “kairos” moments in your life. What was the outcome? What were the insights and perhaps changes?

◆ Mission is what God does for a living. Gittins suggests, “that we do not have a mission, but instead, that mission has us.” To say this, implies that like God, it is our life, to reach out, gather in, embrace, reconcile, unite, heal, uphold and renew. Mission is about our whole life. How is this true for you? How has this concept grown in you from your early years until now?

◆ As a community of believers, Associates and Sisters, how can we use our combined gifts to carry out the mission of Jesus? What do we want to do together to make God's Providence more visible?

### **PSALM FRAGMENT**

No one is like You, God. All of creation belongs to You. For You are great; we are awed by the wonders of Your world.  
*Psalms 86*

### **PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING**

Pray for your faith community so that we may live believing that the origin of mission is God and that Jesus is God brought down to earth to continue God's mission. Pray, too, for each of us here present that we might live in a generous way, realizing that the mission has us. Pray for our Sisters and Associates who have died, those who embody our God, source of all mission. Pray for family members and friends who have asked for prayers. Add your intentions aloud....

### **PRAYER FOR TODAY**

#### ***Eye of Love***

When we look at the world with God's “eye of love,” we see that: we humans are children of a loving God who invests utmost confidence in us; we are brothers and sisters, not strangers or enemies: all else on the face of the earth is God's gift given to all of us for our common good and our responsible stewardship: the greatest among us is the one who serves the rest: we “find” our lives by “losing” them in love of God and love of neighbor; hostility and hatred are healed through forgiveness, not retaliation and revenge; the world's destiny is decided -- it is not in doubt -- it is the Kingdom of God in which all tears are wiped away and we rejoice together, as a family, around the Banquet Table of the Lord.

*James L. Connor, S.J.*



# Making God's Providence Visible Through Our Giftedness-Part 2

Ellen Rufft, CDP, Ph.D

Marie de la Roche Assembly, Part 2, August 2003

There is an ancient Yiddish word which describes how one feels when someone she loves achieves success in an important endeavor. The word is "kvell." To kvell is to vibrate with pride and joy. Parents kvell at the graduation ceremonies of their children; loved ones kvell when one of the family members receives an honor. Kvelling is about sheer happiness. As a Jewish friend explained to me, "In kvelling, there is no negative. It is uncomplicated joy!"

Perhaps our first task as Providence people is to kvell. We ought to be professional kvellers, vibrating with wonder and gratitude at the greatest gift we have been given, the grace to know the God of compassion.

We are God's loved ones, God's family. We need to kvell daily at God's success -- at the wonders of creation, at God's indiscriminate graciousness toward every creature in every time on every planet, at God's seeming inability to give up on anyone. The reasons for kvelling in the presence of the God of compassion are endless for those who are in love.

And, we are called to do more than kvell the One we love. We are called to imitate the kind of compassion that characterizes our God. It is a compassion that excludes no one. It stretches to encompass the oppressors and the oppressed.

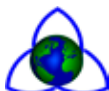
We are called to give the gift of compassion to those who are poor, oppressed, or vulnerable, but we have also committed ourselves through our mission statement to be compassionate to those who batter women and children, to the tortured and the torturer, the abused and the abuser, to the Sister or Associate who is judged and criticized and to the one who criticizes. To imitate the compassion of God trusts us beyond all human descriptors of one another which divide us toward a love that embraces all created beings.

It is, of course, no easy task to use our individual and combined gifts to make God's Providence more visible in our world. Many challenges face us as we commit to kvelling God's compassion, as well as to imitating it.

We have been invited and encouraged to be attentive to the needs of the time and to respond to them through our ministries from our foundation days, as well as through the many General and Provincial Chapters after them. Sr. De la Salle's opening remarks at the 1985 General Chapter are as appropriate today as they were then. "We live," she said, "in a world of ambiguities. On the one hand, there is rank materialism, godlessness, intellectual pride, contempt for life, political and moral corruption, on the other is increasingly convincing signs of the action of the Holy Spirit. It is in the context of this world that we must determine the authenticity of our choices in response to the Gospel mandate to bring the Good News to the poor, to manifest God's love to all whom we encounter."

We, too, live in a world of ambiguities. We are bombarded daily with news of violence, wars, and terrorism. We are inundated with enticements to buy, to own, to have more and better. We are programmed toward individualism and competition; perhaps the greatest American sin is to be a loser.

We live in a country in which 41 million people have no health care; where almost 2 million people are in prison, 42 % of them African American; a nation where more than a billion dollars is spent on weapons every day. We live in a world of massive



poverty, racism, and environmental degradation in which 1.2 billion people have no access to safe drinking water.

On the other hand, technology has connected people to information and to one another in ways barely imagined even a decade ago. Advances in medicine have contributed immeasurably to the health and longevity of millions of people. The new cosmology, ecology, and multi-cultural awareness have increased our understanding of the interconnectedness of all creatures. With Sr. De la Salle, we can truly say, this is the world to which we must bring the Good News of God's Providential care.

Perhaps the contemporary poet, David Whyte, describes our age the best. He writes:

This is not the age of information.  
This is *not* the age of information.  
Forget the news, and the radio and the blurred screen.  
This is the time of loaves and fishes.  
People are hungry, and one good word is bread for a thousand.

### **BIBLICAL WISDOM**

God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

*2 Corinthians 9:8*

### **PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING**

We gather to pray, believing that God, Source, Empowerer, Breath and Enlivener, prays in us. We pray rejoicing in who we are and in who we are together as we kvell a friend who brings joy to the world. We rejoice in the wonder of who God made us to be, wonders of God's creative power, each allowing full expression of God in our loving. We pray for those who have no one to pray for them. Offer prayers aloud....

### **SILENCE FOR MEDITATION**

#### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

- ◆ Kvelling is about sheer happiness. When in your life did you "kvell" on another's behalf? What emotion did you experience? When have you experienced being kvelled?
- ◆ As Providence people, we ought to be professional kvellers. At work, what would kvelling look like in relating to others?
- ◆ If you were God, how would you arrange the world regarding suffering? As it is? With only bad people suffering? Some other way?

#### **PRAYER FOR TODAY**

Perhaps kvelling brings Peace. This prayer of Peace was written by Yannis Ritsos following World War II during the Greek Civil War, translated from Greek by Kimon Friar

#### **PSALM FRAGMENT**

Let your Word be known to the nations, your Glory to our children's children.

Let the grace and gentleness of the Holy Spirit be upon us, guiding our feet upon paths of Love; increase the Light within us -- O Beloved, hear our prayer!

Amen

*Psalms 90*





# Mary's Visit to Elizabeth

Michele Bisbey, CDP, Ph.D.

Mary at Cana offers an example of a contemporary image of the Mother of Providence -- one who gives voice to the need and directs us to listen to the Word -- to determine a way to respond to the need. The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth, known as the Visitation and found only in Luke's Gospel, offers us an example of those who compose and proclaim a Providence canticle providing the first strains of a melody that will find its full orchestration in the life and ministry of Jesus, who is God's Providence made visible.

The story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth begins in haste, an expression of her joy, her faith and her gratitude. The Greek term *spoude*, which can be translated as "haste," carries with it the idea of eagerness, diligence and enthusiasm. On this journey, the first of three she undertakes to Jerusalem, Mary is alone and pregnant as she travels the 90 miles from Nazareth (tradition says) to Ain Karim, five miles south of Jerusalem -- a journey of three or four days.

Mary sets off because the angel tells her that an older cousin, Elizabeth, is six months pregnant. This is the only passage in the New Testament that establishes a family relationship between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:36). But, as is always the case in Luke's writings, it is not blood ties that are important, but faith ties. Luke will demonstrate what close relatives Mary and Elizabeth are in the community of their belief.

Mary goes to meet Elizabeth, who is the first woman encountered in Luke's Gospel. She is identified primarily in terms of the relationships in her life: with her husband, Zechariah; her cousin, Mary; and her son, John. Little is said of Elizabeth, yet what is mentioned reveals a woman of deep faith who cooperated with God's plan.

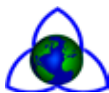
The initial description is that she is righteous. She is the only woman in the New Testament called righteous. She comes from a priestly family, a daughter of Aaron who was the brother of Moses and Miriam.

Elizabeth means 'God is my treasure.' But, Elizabeth is an old and childless woman, far beyond the childbearing age. This would have counted her among the poor, in that her worth and her hope would have been measured by children, and she has none. Barrenness was thought to be the woman's fault, a punishment for sin or at least of God's forgetting the woman. More than just a biological fact, however, this is also a theological comment about the lack of possibility and the lack of a future.

The fact that Mary was not yet married suggests that she, too, can be viewed in terms of social and cultural weakness, in a position akin to that of Elizabeth. It has been noted, that the meeting of a pregnant crone and an unmarried, pregnant bride suspected of adultery is powerful and potentially empowering.

These two have been identified with a remnant in Israel referred to as the *Anawim*. The word comes from the Hebrew, which refers to the poor, the humble and the afflicted. But it is these that God protects, defends, saves and rescues. God's preference is for the *Anawim* -- whether as an individual or as a group.

The greeting of Mary and Elizabeth is one of the most poignant encounters in Luke's Gospel. Fittingly, in the Eastern Church, the feast of the Visitation is called the Embrace or the Kiss. The icons depict Mary and Elizabeth warmly, fondly embracing each other. The Spirit in the early Church was called "the kiss of the mouth of God," and these two believers kiss ecstatically and embrace one another. The Visitation



scene is entirely focused on the two women. What is especially to be noted is that, according to Luke, the first person besides Mary to whom Jesus' messiah-ship is revealed is a woman, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's greeting to Mary is especially significant. She makes the first and only Christological statement by a woman in the Gospel. Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth greets her as the "mother of my Lord." Thus Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, makes a prophetic statement. The women immediately express the overflowing sentiments of their hearts. Elizabeth speaks a dual beatitude, in a loud voice, she pronounces Mary blessed. Her blessing has its roots in those of the Hebrew women, Deborah, Jael and Judith. Elizabeth's exuberant praise joins Mary in solidarity with a long heritage of women whose creative actions, undertaken in the power of the Spirit, brings liberation in God's name. This blessing weds her historic pregnancy to her faith, depicting her as someone who hears the word of God and acts upon it, even in her own body.

Mary is blessed not so much because she has a physical relationship to Jesus, but that she has a more intimate, spiritual one. She is the "mother" in that she first heard God's word and believed it. As the Lucan disciple, Mary hears God's word, ponders it, keeps it in her heart and brings forth its fruit.

Luke then tells us that the infant John leaped for joy at the sound of Mary's voice. This detail also has Old Testament roots -- the twins Jacob and Esau leaped and played in Rebecca's womb (Genesis 25-22). The Greek word for leap is *skirteo*. It is found only in Luke, twice in reference to John's leaping (1:41-44) and once in reference to Luke's beatitude about persecution: "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven" (6:23).

In response to Elizabeth's greeting, Mary responds with the canticle we know as the Magnificat. This is the longest passage put on the lips of any female speaker in the New Testament. The Magnificat is the great New Testament song of liberation.

The liberation is personal, social, moral and economic. It is a revolutionary proclamation of intense conflict and victory. It praises God's liberating actions on behalf of the speaker, which was paradigmatic of all of God's actions on behalf of marginal and exploited people.

Mary's song is the "program of the reign of God" which will be echoed in Jesus' program proclaimed in the synagogue in Nazareth. Mary stands in the long Jewish tradition of female singers from Miriam (Exodus 15:2-21), to Deborah (Judges 5:1-31), Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and Judith (Judith 16:1-17) who also sang dangerous songs of salvation.

Composed according to the overall structure of a thanksgiving psalm, which first praises God and then lists the reasons for gratitude, the song is generally divided into two strophes: vv. 46-49 center on what God has done for Mary, and vv. 50-55 center on what God will do in society.

When we consider the two parts of the Magnificat together, we see that a parallel is suggested between God's powerful mercy for one lowly girl and the way that God acts through time and society. Mary's story is presented as the emblem of a much larger experience and expectation.

Some scholars posit that the Magnificat should be rightly seen as Elizabeth's song, to parallel the Benedictus that is attributed to Zechariah. Whoever it is attributed to, it is clear that it very closely resembles the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). In both, there is emphasis on praising God for lifting up the lowly and feeding the hungry. The Greek behind the English word for lowly is not simply talking about humility, but about poverty.

We have here a vision of concrete freedom from systemic injustice from oppression by political rulers and of the arrogant and rich. In the transformed social order that is celebrated, food is provided for the hungry. The spiritual realm is understood as embedded in the socioeconomic and political reality. Focus is on the might,



holiness and mercy of a Provident God who has promised solidarity with those who suffer and who is true to those promises.

The Magnificat is not the song of a victim, but of one who proclaims liberation with certain authority. The entire narrative is subversive of the typical structures in the world and a call to the Church to participate in this subversion. This is a call to live out the implications of accepting a God whose self-definition is in terms of the weak and oppressed, who has chosen to work in the world among lowly handmaids and barren women. The Magnificat's message is so subversive that, for a period during the 1980s, the government of Guatemala banned its public recitation.

This is a call to acknowledge by the way we live that the values and powers of this world are not the values and powers that matter most. It is a call to view the world in terms of God's perception of worth and value, by particularly valuing those who have been marginalized by society, by culture, even by the Church. In short, it is a call to make a preferential option for the poor, because that is what the God of Providence does, and this is the way that we make God's Providence visible. And, the poor are entitled to make claims upon us, upon our time, upon our resources.

This truth was brought home to me just recently. Sister Elena Almendarez and I, who have fostered 25 children over a 12-year period, have spent these last few days transitioning a baby we've cared for the past 10 months to his new home with a single mom who is financially lacking much. So, as we packed his clothes and his toys, we also prepared to send a car seat, a stroller, a high chair, about 30 cans of formula and nine boxes of cereal, along with assorted jars of baby food.

I was feeling good about the way we were sending him off and feeling that we had been very generous. When I told the new mom what we were sending, her response was, "Do you have any Pampers?" I was stunned, unsettled. Didn't she realize all that we were giving her? How many other foster parents would just send the kids off as they came, with nothing?

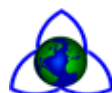
But upon further reflection, I discovered that she was right. She was entitled to all that I had to give, because I had it, and she didn't. She needed it, and I didn't. We could easily afford to supply her with all that she needed. It wasn't a matter of being generous, it was a matter of being just.

Our Provident God chooses to be indiscriminately loving and indiscriminately compassionate to all of us, but especially to those on the fringes, to those on the outside, to those who have not merited, to those who do not seem worthy, to those who have not paid their dues, to those who have not worked hard, to those who are disruptive, to those who don't even try, the list goes on and on, to include warmongers, the batterers and the abusers, because they need it the most.

In their time, Mary and Elizabeth were numbered among that fringe population, the poor, the lowly, the *Anawim*; and the God of Providence dwelt among and within them. They sang a canticle of praise and thanksgiving that the God of Providence did great things for them, that the God of Providence was with them, poor and lowly.

With the proclamation of the Magnificat, we hear the strains of the kind of reversal that will characterize Jesus' ministry that he announces in the synagogue at the beginning of His ministry. He here proclaims that the Spirit has anointed him to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free (Luke 4:18)

Significantly, as Sandra Schneider has noted, "The more scholars of the social world of Jesus study his historical teaching and praxis, the clearer it becomes that one of the most original features of Jesus' life and ministry was his universal compassion expressed in a nondiscriminatory ministry and an inclusive table fellowship that broke through the purity boundaries of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, economic class, physical condition and even sinfulness." This is the concrete way that Jesus was God's Providence made visible; we are called to be the same.



These brief reflections of Mary in two familiar Gospel settings have perhaps portrayed her in a slightly different light. If we return to the initial question, “What, specifically would it mean to explore the figure of Mary in relationship to the God of Providence?” I think we can conclude that Mary at Cana is an advocate, a voice for the community who speaks from within the community. At the scene of the Visitation with Elizabeth, she is counted among those who are disenfranchised, marginalized. In both cases, Mary makes God’s Providence visible by her actions on behalf of others who are needy and by her presence in solidarity with those who are poor, as she is poor.

Elizabeth Johnson sees Mary as a friend of God and a prophet. As a friend of God, Mary enters into a mutual relationship with the God of Providence, caring passionately about what God cares about, allowing God’s presence to be the foundation of her life. As a prophet, she makes God’s Providence visible as she raises her voice against injustice, speaking out and acting in the service of God’s reign, comforting others with her presence.

Mary, Mother of Providence, walks among us today in the persons of many women and men of Providence. She is among us wherever there is a place of welcome and tender regard. She is among us when we see the needs of our brothers and sisters and give voice to those needs and become advocates. She is among us as we live in solidarity with those who are disenfranchised and marginalized. She is among us whenever and wherever we take the initiative to make God’s Providence visible.

There is a story of a tribe in Africa in which the art of true intimacy is fostered even before birth. In this tribe, the birth date of a child is not counted from the day of its physical birth or the day of conception. For this tribe, the birth date comes from the first time the child is a thought in the mother’s mind. Aware of her intention to conceive a child, the mother goes off and sits alone under a tree. There she sits and listens until she can hear the song of the child that she hopes to conceive.

Once she has heard it, she returns to her village and teaches it to the father so that they can sing it together as they make love, inviting the child to join them. After the child is conceived, she sings it to the baby in her womb. Then she teaches it to the old women and the midwives in the village so that throughout the labor and at the miraculous moment of birth itself, the child is greeted with the song.

After the birth, all the villagers learn the song and sing it to the child when it falls or gets hurt. The song becomes a part of the marriage ceremony when the child is grown. And at the end of life, loved ones gather around the deathbed and sing this song for the next passage of life.

The song that Mary heard, pondered, hummed and sang throughout her life was the same theme her child just couldn’t get out of his head. That familiar refrain was sounded again and again in his life. It was the tune Mary hummed climbing the hills, covering 90 miles of sacred land to visit Elizabeth. It was in the air that set the little baptist leaping and womb dancing. It was the melody that accompanied Mary once again across the land from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It was the lullaby that she crooned as she rocked the child in the cave in Bethlehem. It was the harmonious angel’s canticle that resounded over the Judean hills and stirred the shepherds from dreamy sleep. Years later, the feisty verses an adult son proclaimed in the synagogue promising liberty to captives, release to prisoners, sight to the blind, were an echo of the descant his mother sang on a hill three decades earlier, heard then only by an old woman and two unborn children. His lament in Gethsemane’s garden was a recapitulation of the conception fiat she uttered as she was overshadowed by the Spirit. The dirge that companioned her as she walked home that night he was murdered and buried was her heart’s anthem throughout that desolate Saturday when it suddenly crescendoed into Easter’s alleluia.

Throughout those 30-plus years, the land heard the song. Its rhythm and cadence



reverberated across the Judean hills and Jordan's valleys. The land heard, and the land remembered, figuratively and literally, For, as the physicists tell us, no sound is ever lost. The sound continues as long as there is a medium to receive and translate the vibrations.

Our gathering of Women of Providence in Collaboration calls us to listen to the sounds, to the songs, to the cries of this land that we call home. Our ears and our hearts must be attuned to hear the sounds and to hear the song that was sung by the people before we were born. As we learn the song, may the Spirit overshadow us that we, too, might feel stirring within us, that we, too, might add our voices to the acclamation that shatters the forces of oppression.

### **BIBLICAL WISDOM**

Luke 1:39-55

### **SILENCE FOR MEDITATION**

### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

- ◆ Spend some time reflecting on the Magnificat. As noted, verses 46-49 center on what God has done for Mary, and verses 50-55 center on what God will do for society. Take some time and compose your own Magnificat. Be ready to share some of your phrases with the other group members.
- ◆ Sister Michele commented that for a period of time, in the 1980s, the government of Guatemala banned the public recitation of the Magnificat because its message was so subversive. This prayer is a call to view the world in terms of God's perception of worth and value. It is a call to make a preferential option for the poor, because this is what the God of Providence does and that is the way that we make God's Providence visible. Mary made God's Providence visible by her actions on behalf of those who were needy and by her presence in solidarity with them. Mary is among us today in the persons of women and men of Providence, whenever and wherever someone takes the initiative to act on the message of the Magnificat. Do you agree that the poor are entitled to make claims upon us, upon our time, upon our resources?

### **PRAYER FOR TODAY**

Women's voices, women's witness  
being faithful through the years.  
Living lives of dedication,  
finding hope amid the tears.  
God, you made us in your image,  
from your womb you gave us life.  
With this life we give you service.  
Serve your people, show your grace.

Women's witness of the ages  
has persisted through the pain.  
Tell the stories of our mothers,  
let us sing their songs again.  
Women's voices of the future  
speak of visions yet unseen.  
Tell the stories of our daughters  
filled with wonder, hope, and dreams.

Tell of visits to two women,  
one a virgin, one grown old.  
Yet to each there came a promise  
of a gift by God foretold.  
Tell us one who shared her water,  
left replenished from the well.  
Tell of women that first Easter  
to whom Christ said: "Go and tell."

Celebrate the faith of Anna  
and the loyalty of Ruth.  
Stand with Naomi and her sisters  
seeking justice, speaking truth.  
Join with us in Sarah's laughter,  
raise your voice in Miriam's song.  
Women's voices, women's witness,  
showing women they belong.

*Women's Voices, Women's Witness*  
Manley Olson  
*Women's Rites by Diane L. Neu*

### **PSALM FRAGMENT**

Read the Magnificat  
Luke 1: 46-55



# Providence and Presence

Lucy Zientek, CDP

Providence Event 2003 has given us the opportunity to reflect on the relationship between Mary and Providence. In particular, we have been invited to reflect on her as the Mother of Divine Providence in the context of the wedding feast at Cana. Have you ever wondered what the wedding feast at Cana might have been like if Mary had not been invited? Would the failing wine still have occasioned Jesus' first miracle? Would Jesus have even been among the guests?

We can only speculate about how things may have turned out for all concerned had Mary not been at that wedding. But, as women who understand that "it is the quality of our presence that effectively allows Christ's love to be felt by others," it is important that we reflect more deeply on the significance of her presence -- a presence that always evokes, through the love of Christ, a new manifestation of God's Providence for all in attendance.

The Church gives us the foundations for honoring Mary at Cana under the title of the Mother of Divine Providence through texts of the Divine Liturgy. Noting that a Mass in honor of the Mother of Divine Providence is found in the collection of Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Michele Bisbey, CDP, remarks: "Of particular significance is the fact that the Gospel in this Mass is that of Cana (John 2:1-11), and the preface, usually the most theological of all the Mass texts, makes explicit reference to Mary's intercessory role with her son at Cana for the bridegroom and bride. *It extends this role to Mary's state in heaven, where she provides for the needs of the Church.*" [italics added]



Thus does the Church not only ask us to consider Mary as the Mother of Divine Providence in the context of her presence and actions at Cana, but through the language of the preface, we are given as well a direction in which we can pursue our reflection: What needs of the Church today might she seek to provide for through her continued intercession? In other words, can we learn something about the practical significance for the Church today that Mary is the Mother of Divine Providence? And more particularly, since she is invited by the Church itself through its liturgical texts to the Eucharistic celebration, we find ourselves encouraged to ask: What difference might the Mother of Divine Providence make for us by her presence at our feasting table?

As noted previously, the Church would have us reflect on Mary under this title using John's Gospel passage describing the wedding feast at Cana. To do so, we will follow the simple methodology of Karl Rahner, SJ, whose opening remarks in a theological meditation on Mary as "Mother of the Lord" raises two key questions:

Mary is the virgin mother of Jesus Christ. The meaning of this statement, and the fact that it says everything about her, becomes clear, if one considers whose mother she is and what way she is his mother?

Although Rahner considers Mary under a different title, it is of note that he begins by situating her son, "the Lord," in the broader context of the Christian understanding of the relationship between God and the world. Rahner notes that God creates the world not only for its own goodness, but also in order that God may communicate God's very self to it. This communication finds its true end in those personal, spiritual beings made in the image of God who are capable of receiving God's reality.



In Jesus, the Word of God is made flesh, and God can now share life with that world in a personal way. All things have been created with that end in mind, says Rahner. Such was God's plan from the beginning. Aquinas and others would name that plan God's Providence.

Of course the plan isn't quite that simple. Human beings can freely receive or reject this offer of relationship with the divine. And, we have the capacity to shape and nuance our responses, as well as to offer or withhold them at any given moment. In other words, implicit to God's plan is dialogue. In its root dynamic, Providence is dialogical, and so we can expect that our response or lack thereof makes a significant difference with respect to how, when and where that Providence is made manifest.

As Marie McCarthy, SP, observes: "Providence is not the mystery of a God who plans everything, handing it down to us creatures. Providence is, rather...the mystery of dialogue and relationship in which divine activity and human response are joined. Providence is the mystery of the ongoing, enduring relationship between the God who makes all things possible and us creatures, handiwork of the creative activity of God – creatures made in God's image and likeness, creatures who are themselves creative."

Given that the human-divine dialogue is a constitutive element of the plan, is it any wonder that we find the Mother of Divine Providence at the fulcrum of the conversation that makes the difference for all concerned at Cana? At first calling Jesus' attention to the fact that the wine had run out, she remains undaunted by his seemingly less than encouraging response. By enlisting the assistance of the waiters, in effect she re-opens the dialogue with her son and even changes the situation somewhat by procuring whatever help she can for him. By not letting the matter drop, the Mother of Divine Providence expresses not just her faith in Jesus, but also a faith that there are always possibilities in a situation that have yet to be considered.

Mary Christine Morkovsky, CDP, points out: "Providence is basically a dynamic relationship. Providence is God's way of relating to creatures that encourages their creativity and sustains their hope...God lovingly proposes plans or possibilities which creatures are free, to a greater or lesser degree, to accept or reject. This is Providence as persuasion. To accept and implement lures is really to add to the sum of actuality and thereby contribute to the divine joy; this is to co-create."

Finally, Mary instructs those who serve the table to "do whatever he tells you." Here the Mother of Divine Providence invites them to join her in a stance of openness. Offering her son no suggestion as to how to handle the situation, still she fully expects something to happen.

And, why not? The very presence of an infinite, indivisible and loving God-with-us means that there are always limitless unimaginable possibilities open to creation for its goodness and its growth. She thus has every reason to be optimistic!

Whose mother is she? She is the mother of the one who is made manifest when we love, live and work with what we have available to us in a stance of openness to the God of infinite possibilities. The Mother of Divine Providence knows this is the "plan" because she lived it. Knowledge of Divine Providence, like all knowledge of mystery, must come through the personal, lived experience of that mystery.

What is the practical significance for the Church today that Mary is the Mother of Divine Providence? Do we find that she still intercedes for the needs of the Church today from her state in heaven?

Surprisingly for this writer, our reflection on Mary of Cana, in the context of her title as Mother of Divine Providence, leaves us wondering: Has she led us to a place of dialogue? Has she suggested to the Church, which itself has invited her to be present at our feast, that there are always possibilities in a situation that are still to be considered? Does she ask us to stand with her in a place of openness?



Will Mary of Cana, the Mother of Divine Providence, again prevail upon her son (whose first reply to her was that his “hour had not come”) and engage those who serve the table and instruct them to follow the one who ultimately charges them to bring the jars filled with water (image of our baptism) and take them to the chief steward? Will the chief steward be surprised to find wine of exceptional quality?

Will the wine flow once again, freely and with great joy, at our wedding feast? She is expecting something to happen.

And, why not? For the very existence of an infinite, indivisible and loving God -- the presence of Providence -- means that there are always limitless, unimaginable possibilities open to creation for its goodness and its growth!

### **BIBLICAL WISDOM**

John 2:1-11 -- The Wedding at Cana

### **SILENCE FOR MEDITATION**

### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

- ◆ For many years, thoughts about God’s Providence seemed to focus on “accepting” all that God had planned and arranged for us. Recently, the theology has changed to the concept of dialogue and relationship between God and God’s creatures becoming more pro active. When have you personally or communally been more pro active in making God’s Providence more visible?
- ◆ How does having a stance of openness further the concept of praying and trusting that all my works depend on God, while taking action as though all my labors depend on myself?
- ◆ Also, the presenter in her conclusion offered some additional questions for consideration that may be used.

### **PSALM FRAGMENT**

Guide me, O Beloved, that I may become spiritually mature; Love me into new life!

*Psalm 140, Nan Merrill*

### **PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING**

Pray for women, mothers, friends and girls so that each might live their lives in fullness of being made and loved in God’s image. Remembering parents who suffer the loss of children through death, may healing be theirs. We bring to prayer.....

### **PRAYER FOR TODAY**

Provident God  
How boundlessly you bless,  
how generously you give,  
how completely you love,  
how faithfully you provide,  
how tenderly you understand,  
how fully you forgive,  
how endlessly you invite,  
how willingly you welcome,  
how lovingly you cherish,  
how compassionately you shelter.

The riches of your presence  
exceed my largest dreams.  
The fullness of your kindness  
expands beyond my experiences.

Unreservedly you display your riches.  
You freely offer all of them to me,  
a banquet of daily nourishment,  
plentiful food to fill my hungry soul.  
I have only to come to the table  
to receive from your abundant feast.

*Prayers of Sophia, Joyce Rupp*





# Prayer Reflection

From 40-Day Journey with Joan Chittister, published by Augsburg Books.

Prayer is neither a passive nor an empty act. On the contrary, prayer ‘works.’ The only problem is that when we pray, we get what we seek. What we want out of prayer determines how we go about it.

If we want security and protection, we say suffrage prayers; if we want serenity and enlightenment, we meditate; if we want immersion in the mind of Christ, we immerse ourselves in scripture. Prayer is not one kind of activity, it is many. It nourishes the spiritual life. It also reflects it.

When we are young [religious], we ‘say’ our prayers. When we get older [in religious life], we ‘go to prayer.’ But, when we begin to see prayer as the undergirding of life, the pulse of the universe in the center of the soul, we become a prayer.

As Gandhi says, first we have words and no heart. Finally, we grow into a heart without words. The truth is that the way we pray says something about what we believe about God and about what we believe about life itself.

To the monastic mind, prayer is the marking of time and the pursuit of the known but unseen, the fulfilling but unaccomplished. Those qualities mark the prayer life of a monastic community in form and substance.

## BIBLICAL WISDOM

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

*Mark 11:24*

## SILENCE FOR MEDITATION

### QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ◆ In what ways have you experienced that ‘prayer works’?
- ◆ Is praying a ‘religious’ activity or does it transcend religion?

## PRAYER FOR TODAY

May my heart expand without words into the silence of your love.  
Anoint me, Divine One, with the wisdom of the unseen.

## PRAYER OF HOPE AND HEALING

Send prayers out to all creation, that our belonging to God will become more than an activity in us; that it will be the pulse of the universe itself.

Pray for the ability to pray without ceasing, to have your life ‘become a prayer.’

Pray with your whole heart and whole soul for your loved ones, for life itself.



# Providence Blessings

May Providence be with you in **strength**, holding you in strong-fingered hands, and may you be the sacrament of God's strength to those whose hands you hold.  
May the blessing of **strength** be with you.

May Providence be with you in **gentleness**, caressing you with sunlight and rain and wind. May God's tenderness shine through you to warm all who are hurt and lonely.  
May the blessing of **gentleness** be with you.

May Providence be with you in **mercy**, forgiving you, beckoning you and encouraging you. May your readiness to forgive calm the fears and deepen the trust of those who have hurt you.  
May the blessing of **mercy** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **wonder**, giving you wide-open eyes for seeing the splendor in the humble and the majestic. And, may you open the eyes and hands and hearts of the blind and the deaf and the insensitive.  
May the blessing of **wonder** be with you.

May Providence be with you in **compassion**, holding you close when you are weary and hurt and alone. And, may you be the warm hands and the warm eyes of compassion to those who reach out to you in need.  
May the blessing of **compassion** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **simplicity**, opening you to a clear vision of what is real and true, leading you deeply into the mystery of childhood. And, may your dealings with others be marked by the honesty which is simplicity.  
May the blessing of **simplicity** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **patience**, waiting for you with outstretched arms, letting you find out for yourself. May God's patience with all the young and all the old be your patience.  
May the blessing of **patience** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **peace**, stilling the heart that hammers with fear and doubt and confusion. And, may the warm mantle of your peace cover those who are troubled or anxious.  
May the blessing of **peace** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **love**, drawing you close as you tremble at the edge of self-gift. May God's love in you light fires of faith and hope and inflame the earth.  
May the blessing of **love** be on you.

May Providence be with you in **joy**, filling your heart to fullness. And, may you spread joy wherever you go.  
May the blessing of **joy** be on you.



# Litany of Divine Providence

Loving God who manifests your love through the heart of Jesus...**We Praise You!**

Loving God who delights in our salvation...**We Praise You!**

Loving God, you have chosen Mary to be the mother of Jesus and the Church...  
**We Praise You!**

All Provident God, hope of all those who have lost hope...**We Trust You!**

All Provident God, our confidence and hope in times of doubt and confusion...  
**We Trust You!**

Because you entrust to us the message of the Gospel through a sharing  
in the spirit...**Your Providence be praised!**

Because your constant fidelity bring us out of the darkness of sin into your  
redeeming light...**Your Providence be praised!**

Because all wonderful people and precious things come from your hand...  
**Your Providence be praised!**

For calling us to a life of service in your Spirit...**We thank you Lord!**

For giving us our families, relatives and friends...**We thank you Lord!**

For the gift of yourself and the joy of being loved by you...**We thank you Lord!**

For the witness and prayers of all the saints...**We thank you Lord!**

For our sins and the sins of all...**Forgive us Lord!**

For our failure to do good...**Forgive us Lord!**

Father, care for those who have the responsibility of leadership...**In Jesus' Name, amen.**

Father, give to all of us the fidelity to seek you forever...**In Jesus' name, amen.**

For your continuing presence with us...**We thank you, all Provident God.**

We exalt your Providence, O Lord...

**and we commit ourselves to making your providence more visible in our world.**

**Let us pray: Gracious God, we stand in awe before Your greatness and marvel at your providential love, which you so generously give each of us through your son, Jesus. Inspire us through your spirit to share with all, a love like unto yours and assist us in all of our undertakings in your service, so that all may know, as we know, that You are Love. This we ask through Jesus, your beloved, and his spirit who dwells within us. Amen.**



# To BE Providence

To be Providence  
in our world is to prepare  
to take with and to leave behind,  
to seek the Reign of God actively,  
and to find the treasure in the  
Community of persons that surrounds us.

To be Providence is  
to allow our hearts to be changed,  
to be poor in spirit,  
to know we need loving, caring mutuality,  
to allow our needs to move us, and  
to grow in Love.

To be Providence is  
to know forgiveness,  
to be merciful, and  
to allow ourselves to let go of hurt, pain,  
vengeance, getting even, over and over  
again and again.

To be Providence is  
to be pure of heart,  
to be genuinely surprised by the gift of  
each person and of each day.

To be Providence is  
to be a peacemaker,  
to find peace deep within who we are,  
and all we believe.

To be Providence is  
to be Holy,  
to allow our desire for the Reign of God,  
to overcome our fear of moving on, and  
to yearn for a gentle heart, and  
for God and Providence in abundance.

To be Providence is  
to be humble,  
to acknowledge equality,  
to live in freedom from anger and envy.

People of Promise,  
People of Providence,

May our lives be a blessing on all who  
have had the opportunity to know us  
well.

May we look to the future with the same  
faithfulness, with expectation of prom-  
ise, with awe of Providence.

May our willingness to change in our  
work and ministry, in living, in everything,  
be an example to those in need of help.

May our faithful love be a source of  
strength to those in need of that extra  
measure of love.

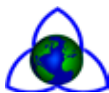
May our willingness to be Beatitude  
People be a source of joy to those  
around us.

May we always, and in every way,  
celebrate the gift that is Providence.

May we continue to be true to God's  
work in our lives, so that others may hear  
of the God of Love, the God of Mercy,  
and the God of Justice.

May we continue to grow, struggle, and  
be found to have lived our faith out loud  
so that we may gift our world with a  
sense of love that is an echo of  
PROVIDENCE!

*Author unknown*





# Associate Application



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Home-- \_\_\_\_\_ Cell-- \_\_\_\_\_

Work-- \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

(County)

(City)

(State)

U.S. Citizen: Yes

No

Sex: Female

Male

## EDUCATION

High School: Number of years completed \_\_\_\_\_

Diploma Received: \_\_\_\_\_

College: Number of years completed \_\_\_\_\_

Specify Degrees: Undergraduate \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate \_\_\_\_\_ Post Graduate \_\_\_\_\_

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Currently employed by \_\_\_\_\_

Retired from \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Name of your Church \_\_\_\_\_

Denomination \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years a member \_\_\_\_\_

Have you been

a church volunteer? Yes No a lay minister? Yes No

an elected church officer? Yes No

If Yes to any of these, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

What does your faith mean to you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## ***Associate Application continued***

When and how did you learn of the Associate relationship of the Sisters of Divine Providence?

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Who influenced your decision? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you want to become an Associate of the sisters of Divine Providence?

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What are you looking for from this Community as an Associate?

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach or include a recent photo of your self with this application. Also, ask a friend, family member, co-worker, spiritual director, pastor, etc., to write a brief letter of recommendation. Submit this application, recommendation letter and photo to you local coordinator.

