

fall 2020

ihmpact

sisters, servants of the immaculate heart of mary

Blessed are the merciful ...

God's mercy endures forever

By Peg O'Shea, IHM

During the pandemic caused by COVID-19, we've all had some time (actually, lots of time in "lockdown") to reflect upon our beliefs and values. People all over the world have been united in a sudden, dramatic change of plans that have caused a re-thinking of the meaning of our very lives on this planet.

In my case, being 8,000+ miles from Monroe in South Africa with IHM Sisters

Judy Coyle and Sue Rakoczy, we thought that we and the sisters before us had already seen the worst of times in Apartheid and that we were helping to build a new reality of equality and hope. However, with the arrival of the virulent COVID-19, our hopes met a serious stumbling block. For Easter, we were quarantined in the tomb with Jesus, not even able to participate in liturgy.

We had been doing mercy for many years here: teaching poor children and disadvantaged adults, offering lectures and retreats, publishing articles and books, caring for abused youth, supporting HIV/AIDS groups, distributing food to informal settlements, taking the Eucharist to nursing homes, preparing seminarians (of various faith traditions), as well as laity, for ministry ...



Our ministries carried us into the heart of the inequality that exists all over the world for people of color, even in the new society that came into being in South Africa in 1994. The original sin

of racism is deeply rooted in the culture here as in most societies. It may take a different form, but it is rooted in the same lack of equality and respect.

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Mercy, not judgement

By Marianne Gaynor, IHM
IHM Leadership Council

As we move into the fall of this year, we have the opportunity to turn around and look back on how our lives have been saturated with the implications of COVID-19 and systemic racism. How do these two experiences intersect with the Beatitude: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy?

During this season, our reflection on mercy can move us to respond with greater empathy toward the “other” in our lives. Mercy is “love that responds to human need in an unexpected way.”¹

When we experience mercy from another, it often catches us off-guard because we were expecting a reprimand and we are given forgiveness. “Mercy is also the human capacity to access understanding from opposite perspectives, feel both forgiveness and remorse, and move with the urge to relieve pain.”² Consider the possibility of having an attitude of mercy instead of judgement. Those who show mercy will have mercy shown to them.



“Good Samaritan,”
by Helen David Brancato, IHM

pure compassion across health care settings are the fodder of Facebook and the mainstay of the human-interest segment of the nightly news. Patients, families and members of the health care team experience the uncertainty and heartbreak of isolation, coupled with a leap into new ways of building intentional community through plates of glass and Zoom.

Communal diligence and faith are avenues toward safety in the tension between the common good and the dignity of the individual. Communal grief marks our hearts. A response of compassion makes us ripe for the transformative times unfolding in front of us.

1. *Mercy Matters: Opening Yourself to the Life-Changing Gift*. Mathew N. Schmalz, Our Sunday Visitor (April 14, 2016)
2. From “Community Toolbox,” developed by the University of Kansas: <https://bit.ly/2XqogzT>

Faces of mercy in unprecedented times

By Jennifer Discher
Board Member, IHM Senior Living Community

The public health crisis has illuminated the devastating reality of structural racism and poverty. The inordinate burden of the disease on those who already suffer from inadequate access to resources marks our national failure to be merciful toward the most vulnerable among us. Mercy calls us to create spaces of hospitality and kindness where all are welcome. A culture of right relationship is fundamental for wellness.

A merciful and care-filled approach to re-imagining health care just might be possible (or *is possible*) as we live into COVID-19 learnings and leverage our voice through voting this fall. The time for mercy is now.

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

By Julie Vieira, IHM

The “immaculate heart of Mary” is a powerful symbol of Mary’s capacity to “hold all these things in her heart:” the joy and sorrow, the suffering of her son Jesus, the hope she had in her child being “The One” to bring about God’s reign of love and mercy in the world.

As IHMs, we are invited to be like Mary and hold the joys and sorrows, the suffering and the hope of the world in our hearts – and never to let go of God’s deep, abiding love for each of us and all of creation. There are times, when like Mary, our hearts will be pierced by a sword. In these moments, our hearts pour out not just with grief but with love.



And so, we are called to open ourselves to the call of our Black sisters and brothers, to a divided political leadership, to the cries of Earth suffering from climate change and pandemic. Like Mary, we become contemplatives in action, women of deep prayer who enter into the fray to love, to advocate, to educate, to heal and even to overturn the tables when necessary.

We extend an invitation to reflect on your own connection to “Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” What stirs within you? We’d love to hear your reflections. We remain with you, held in Mary’s immaculate heart.

Congratulations
to Jane Herb, IHM!



Mary Jane Herb, IHM, IHM President, was voted in as president-elect of the Leader Conference of Women Religious at the annual LCWR meeting in August. Sister Jane will serve as president-elect this year, president the following year and complete the three-year term as past president.

LCWR has about 1,350 members, who represent nearly 80 percent of the approximately 44,000 women religious in the United States. Founded in 1956, the conference assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today’s world.

Margaret Brennan, IHM; Sharon Holland, IHM; Carol Quigley, IHM; and Nancy Sylvester, IHM, have also served in the leadership role for LCWR.

By Barbara O'Neill, IHM

It takes a special kind of sensitivity to be aware of the suffering that surrounds us daily; to see the humanity in each person that might otherwise remain invisible; to fearlessly reach out with mercy and compassion; to capture images on canvas that pull back the curtain, touching the hearts of all who accept the invitation to enter the sacred journey, risking total transformation.

Sister Helen David Brancato, IHM, (Immaculata, Pa.) is someone who has a heart filled with mercy and compassion, who genuinely sees people in their lived reality and has the ability to capture these moments through the medium of art. She invites us, perhaps even dares us, the viewers, to ponder and reflect on the holiness that surrounds us.

her work in the gallery exhibit titled, “Rediscovering Mercy and Compassion.” She risks personal vulnerability as she shares with us the profound experiences that have influenced her art, spirituality, compassion and creativity, namely the lives of the poor in her native Philadelphia, and in countries around the world such as Haiti, Peru, Chile, Italy and Germany.

Deeply concerned about the socio-economic-political conditions we face today, Sister Helen labors to showcase mercy and compassion as central to approaching the human condition. Many years ago, she served as the director of the Art Center at the Southwest Community Center in Philadelphia. This center was established to meet the needs of the people in southwest Philadelphia, who urgently wanted to form a community and support the needs of children. This particular ministry had a profound impact on her and shaped her world view going forward.

Working at the Southwest Center, she encountered a warm hospitality and compassion from the Black community. Through normal everyday exchanges, she felt the love and

Blessed are they who show mercy shall be

Sister Helen is a versatile artist who works in oil, watercolor, printmaking and graphic illustration. Her work has been widely acclaimed and has appeared in professional magazines such as *Maryknoll* and *Pax Christi*. She is an associate professor of art at Villanova University, teaching drawing and printmaking, and collaborated with Henri Nouwen in the illustration of his book, *Walk with Jesus*, and with poet Evelyn Mattern on *Why Not Become Fire?* and *Ordinary Places, Sacred Places*. Her work is on permanent display by her IHM Sisters of Immaculata as well as the Gatehouse in Bryn Mawr.

We welcomed Sister Helen to the IHM Motherhouse in Monroe in the summer of 2019. We were blessed to exhibit 30 pieces of



goodness of the people, whose limitations were not seen as deficient or lacking but rather celebrated as strength through the gift of community. Here, everyone was welcome and gifts were happily acknowledged. An activity important to the people was called “The Quilting Party.” Assembled were women and children of all ages, a true sense of intergenerational community. For the adults, it was important to pass along the communal and family heritage to the younger generation. These gatherings were filled with sharing wisdom, stories, laughter and song.

Sister Helen’s exhibit in Monroe featured a selection of paintings she felt best expressed the idea of calling us to rediscover the mercy and compassion articulated by Jesus in the Beatitudes. A painting that particularly captivated visitors is titled “Homeless on the Parkway.” (For those familiar with Philadelphia, the Parkway is the area surrounding the famous art museum where a statue of Rocky adorns the steps.) She painted this after watching a daily encounter that took place at lunchtime. The piece clearly articulates that there is no boundary between the sacred and the seemingly ordinary. Here we view the homeless on park benches

mercy: theirs

and a woman who gives her lunch to them every day; the seemingly mundane becomes sacred for all who have the eyes to see!

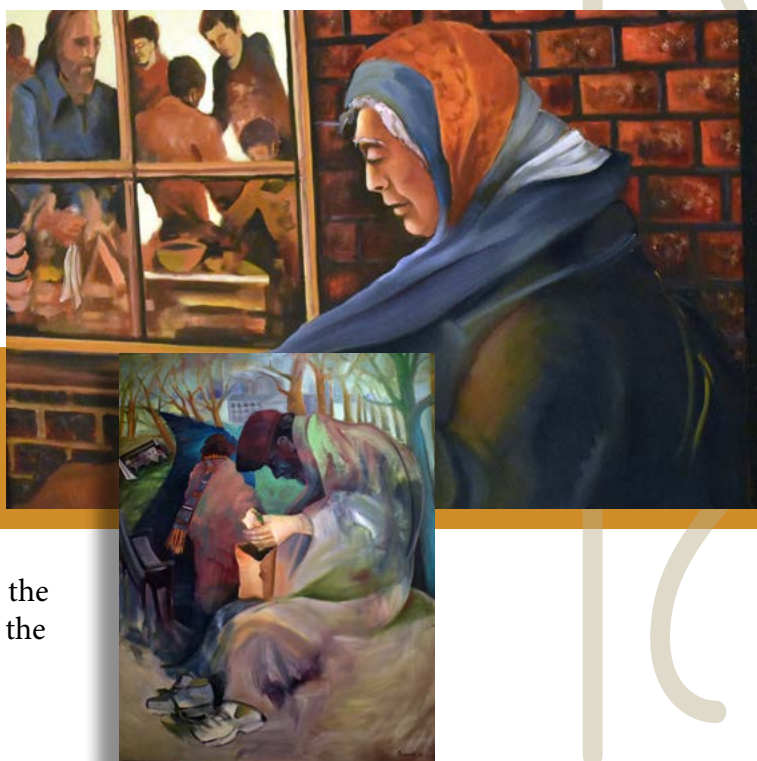
Other works include:

- ▶ “In Hiding,” a riveting portrait of homeless people waiting in line to be served a meal at St. Francis Inn, Philadelphia. Frankly, it is hard to look at as it depicts a woman who is trying to hide her face from the artist behind another homeless person. The person who allows themselves to be drawn into the scene will find it disturbing, haunting and unsettling.
- ▶ “The Wounded Healer,” a painting where the artist has exaggerated the hands of the healer. Once we recognize our own woundedness, we can in turn reach out to enable healing for others.
- ▶ “Hildegard of Bingen” is a visual rendering of scenes of the life of a mystic, using various shades of green to convey

the importance of staying young, green and moist, accessing the childish innocence within us. Never lose your sense of wonder!

▶ Several portraits convey the strength of women. These are paintings of women from all over the world, who continue to inspire us with their righteous anger and courage: “You Have Struck the Women, You Have Struck the Rock!”

A painting titled “Dreamers” is proudly displayed in the IHM Motherhouse main corridor. The work calls to the viewer to understand the Body of Christ through the immigrant population — all who must flee their homes seeking a better life for their children.



Beatitude people are ... people who won't rest until the world is just and holy and single-hearted. They call us forth from the comfortable ruts of daily living and urge us on to bless the world with beatitude living.

—Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB

For more information or to make arrangements to visit the Gatehouse Gallery, please call Sister Helen at 484-383-3599.

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

By Karen Armstrong

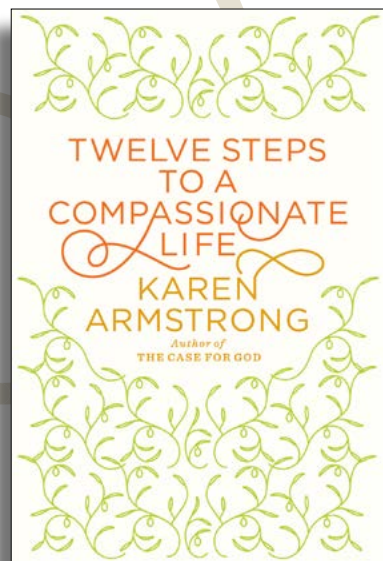
Karen Armstrong, prolific author and religion historian, won a TED grant in 2008 to create a process for reinfusing our global society with compassion. Scholars from six major world religions created a "Charter of Compassion" and have been working ever since with nations and groups to sign on.

In this brief but inspiring book, Armstrong shows how compassion is fundamental to all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions and using the scaffolding of 12 steps, lays out a process for individuals and groups to build their compassion competencies.

Reviewed by Barbara Stanbridge, IHM

Each step is examined and illustrated by way of practices: learning about compassion; looking at our world; compassion for yourself; empathy; mindfulness; action; how little we know; how we should speak to one another; concern for everybody; knowledge; recognition; and love your enemies. This is not another self-help, new age book, but rather a deeply spiritual book for the spiritual seeker with the capacity for reflection. It is in the best tradition of Confucius, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, the Dalai Lama, Etty Hillesum, Dorothy Day, Florence Nightingale and Nelson Mandela.

Perhaps there is nothing more important for us to get a grasp of in these days of polarization than compassion. Karen Armstrong lays out a path.



(May 1 — July 31, 2020)

In memoriam

To read about the lives and ministries of our remarkable IHM Sisters and Associates, please visit <http://bit.ly/2HWEOs9>



Dorothy (Harold Marie) McDaniel, IHM
June 14, 1934 -
July 26, 2020



Margaret (Louis Gillet) Lorenger, IHM
July 6, 1923 -
May 20, 2020



Barbara (Therese Lisieux) Torzewski, IHM
June 30, 1933 -
May 10, 2020



Marie Andre Walsh, IHM
May 26, 1918 -
May 8, 2020

Who speaks for Jesus Christ?

By B. J. Schlachter, IHM Associate

Various religious leaders exhort their followers to vote a certain way because that is what would be “God’s will.” They might throw in Bible verses to back up their views and then urge all “good Christians” to go out and vote to achieve their “Christian nation” agenda.

Political ideologies hijack the Bible to further their own agendas. Speakers may quote extensively from the Old Testament to back up their claims of righteousness. However, the Old Testament often portrays a warring, revengeful God who hands out punishments to the disobedient. They ignore that Jesus came to tell us that “Abba” was a loving, merciful, all-forgiving God who embraced everyone and all creation.

The Biblical teachings of Jesus were often parables, not literal, historical happenings. He urged his disciples to follow him with two commands: “Love ... God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37, 39)

Let Jesus speak for himself as you listen to love calling within your heart. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are being called to reflect God’s love for everyone and be witnesses to Jesus’ teachings. Listen to Love!



Perfect mercy

By Audra Turnbull, IHM

During the pandemic, I spent the entire day with a group of drug addicts helping to move out one of my clients from his trailer. I don’t have the space to explain the details, but what I observed that day changed my perspective on drug addiction, poverty and God’s mercy.



From a safe distance and with a mask on, I interacted with individuals suffering from the disease known as drug addiction. After spending the day

with them, they were no longer drug addicts to me. What I observed were people whose goodness shined through their addiction. They were people who have built up defence mechanisms just trying to survive stressful situations. I can relate to this as I have my own arsenal of defence mechanisms, though not as severe. Throughout the day, their gentleness, kindness and compassion shone through to me. I saw them as God sees them. As God sees me. Society throws these people away but my call, our call, is to stop the violent cycle.

Fortunately for us, God’s mercy is perfect. Through prayer and moments like these, we grow closer to God. We listen and learn from experiences at the margins at how God can still walk with us each day.



**Sisters, Servants of the
Immaculate Heart of Mary**

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***Urged by the love of God, we choose
to work with others to build a culture
of peace and right relationship among
ourselves, with the Church and with the
whole Earth community.***

—IHM Mission Statement

MOVING?

Contact us with your ID# (found above
your name on the mailing label) at:
734-240-9860 or develop@ihmsisters.org.

... continued from front cover

It is immensely supportive to belong to a congregation that acknowledges our common need for repentance and healing. We are all part of the problem. We hope for mercy.

The growing awareness of our own and others' vulnerability to illness and death is giving life to possibilities of radical change. In the midst of this new situation, we search for the meaning of God's enduring mercy. Despite the anguish of our times, God renews the mysterious gift of Jesus' resurrection: divine acceptance of unbelievable suffering and death on a cross to assure us that God loves us and that *God's mercy endures forever*.

Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ – not even pandemics that take many lives and cause enormous disruption to our human systems. God is the only guarantor of eternal life offered in Jesus' resurrection!

In the midst of injustices, hurricanes, earthquakes, our hope is alive. Our people continue responding to achieve needed unity. May we serve and live the spirit of the Beatitudes with joy.