Bearing Witness: A World in Crises

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS
POVERTY
IMMIGRATION
REFUGEES
SAFE WATER
OCEAN PROTECTION
MEDICAL CARE

Pope Francis • CLC Apostolic Action
Refugee Task Force
Pax Christi • Guardian ad Litem • Medical Missions
UN Ocean Conference
Table of Contents

3 Editorial Foreword: Using Talents in Bearing Witness: Dorothy M. Zambito
5 President’s Corner: Ady Viera
5 In Memoriam
6 From the Ecclesial Assistant: Peacefully Facing a World in Crisis: Father John Lan Tran, S.J.
8 CLC Volunteers: The Guardian ad Litem Program: Carlos de la Torre
10 Voluntariado en la CVX: El Pograma Guardian ad Litem: Carlos de la Torre
12 Our Lay Vocation: Called to Witness, to Encounter, to Respond: Beti Leone
14 Lessons from the Life of Helen Plocha: Pat Mickiewicz
15 Marciilito Custodio, MD, Funeral Homily: Father Daniel Fitzpatrick, S.J.
16 The Dangerous Crises in Our World and Our Response: Father Benjamin Urmston, S.J.
18 Responding to the Immigration-Industrial Complex: Paul Riek
20 Welcoming Our New Neighbors!: Terri Mierswa
22 Ocean Conference at the United Nations, June 2017: Joan Woods
24 Care of the Oceans: CLC Plastics Project: Joan Woods and Nicholas Kim
26 Book Review: Falling in Love…Finding God, by M. Bridget Brennan and Jerome L. Shen: reviewed by Dennis Roach
27 50 Years of Service
28 Calendar
Next Issue: Preparing for the World Assembly

Harvest / 2
Using Talents in Bearing Witness

A wise priest friend would tell our CLC group that reading the daily newspaper was a good source for prayer and action. Never a day passes that we are not bombarded with stories and pictures of a world in crisis. As I turn the pages today, I am confronted with the following: Korea launches an intercontinental ballistic missile; a man is convicted of terrorism; a town official is convicted of bribery; another sex assault charge is made; disabled riders face daily challenges on public transportation; an attack on a mosque kills hundreds; Myanmar and Bangladesh try to deal with refugees fleeing from violence; self-harm increases among U.S. girls, etc. The list seems endless and the contents so varied and widespread. None of us can escape these or other problems, and they certainly can seem overwhelming!

In recent weeks, the parable of the talents was the subject of our Gospel reading on more than one occasion. Pope Francis reflected on this parable, and I believe some of his reflections are pertinent to our response to crises around us.

“Any environment, even the furthest and most impractical, can become a place where our talents can bear fruit. There are no situations or places precluded from the Christian presence and witness. The witness which Jesus asks of us is not closed, but is open, it is in our hands…. Allow these talents, these gifts, these presents that the Lord has given us, to be, to grow, to bear fruit for others, with our witness….Moreover, the Lord does not give the same things to everyone in the same way. He knows us personally and entrusts us with what is right for us…”

Our Holy Father’s message is a challenge to each of us and at the same time a word of hope and encouragement. God trusts us to be good and faithful servants. Do we trust that God will be at our side guiding and protecting us along the way?

As with all our actions, we are called to be discerning, apostolic women and men for others. We need to spend time reflecting on the crises around us. We need to examine our talents and try to determine where we can be most effective witnesses in the world.

Even though our paths will be different, we are united by our desire to bring about the Kingdom of God in our time. The fruits of my prayer, reflection and discernment will differ from yours because of the circumstances of my life, whether they be health, age, wealth, education or ability. Within my family, choices of service were determined by gifts received and by the desire to share them with others. My husband, Ray, always had a desire to do mission work. He used his education and training to bring dental health to the poor of the Dominican Republic. Together, having been blessed with a good marriage, we responded to the needs of the diocese by being members of the pre-Cana and Cana programs. We also held weekend sessions at our home for high school students focusing on dating and marriage.

Identifying an area of crisis to respond to and be passionate about can be a daunting step. Many of us are already addressing such concerns. (The authors in this issue will share their experiences of getting involved, often beyond their comfort zones.) After a decision is made, we can begin by taking baby steps which can lead to greater confidence that “I can do this.” Setting reachable goals can assist us as we get further involved. Our tendency, at times, is to avoid doing anything because the task seems so large that we feel we can’t affect change. Pope Francis gives this advice, “Reciprocate trust with trust.” God trusts us and we need to set fear and doubt aside and trust him. The following is a case in point.

There is a saying that states, “What goes around comes around.” Forty-two years ago this month, Locust Valley Christian Life Community discerned the action to resettle a Vietnamese family that was in a camp in Arkansas along with many other Vietnamese refugees. The ‘adventure’ began when two CLCers attended a meeting at St. Ignatius Retreat House in Manhasset, New York. When the two of us made a presentation to our CLC concerning the plight of the Vietnamese being held, there was excitement that we (our CLC) could get involved. At the same time, there was fear and doubt that we could make this happen. It was a leap of faith, lots of prompting by our moderator/guide, Father Francis Drolet, S.J., and much prayer on the part of...
our CLC, some twenty members strong. The community grew closer as we figured out the particulars of housing, language concerns, shopping, transportation, expenses, etc. Everyone in the community used their talents to make this endeavor a success. We did such a good job that we were taken aback when the head of the family told us they were going to leave Long Island and move to Texas where they could become fishermen again and be close to other Vietnamese family and friends. We almost forgot that the resettlement was for their benefit and not ours. Through the years ‘our’ family has stayed in touch sharing their joys and sorrows along the way.

Within this issue

In the “President’s Corner,” Ady Viera tells of her feelings about becoming President of CLC-USA. She is especially appreciative of the confidence in her ability expressed by our two past Ecclesial Assistants and the love and support offered by the current ExCo and NCC members.

Father John Lan Tran, S.J., our newly appointed Ecclesial Assistant, shares with us for the first time in “Peacefully Facing a World in Crisis.” He uses the Serenity Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr to reflect on the theme reminding CLC members of our mission to promote gospel justice.

“CLC Volunteers: The Guardian ad Litem Program” written by Carlos de la Torre in both English and Spanish tells of the author’s personal response to children of troubled families in which human trafficking may be present. Read as Carlos describes his fear and apprehension and moving out of his comfort zone.

Betty and Fred Leone were great gifts to Christian Life Community, to the Church and to the world. Beti Leone demonstrates that much of her parents’ goodness rubbed off on her. Her article, “Our Lay Vocation: Called to Witness, to Encounter, to Respond” tells of her encountering the poor in the U.S. and Latin America. Those encounters led Beti to use her talents to witness and respond positively to the poor.

Recently we joined our Past President, Ed Plocha, in mourning the passing of his beloved wife, Helen. Pat Mickiewicz wrote some reflections in “Lessons from the Life of Helen Plocha.” I am sure you will come away with a more complete understanding of Helen.

Hundreds gathered at the Church of St. Francis Xavier in New York on November 11 to remember the life of Mars Custodio, MD. He was a longtime member of San Lorenzo CLC, New York. Mars’ life exemplified the theme of Bearing Witness. Read the homily given by Father Daniel Fitzpatrick, S.J. at the Funeral Mass, based on the Gospel of John 19:25-30.

We are pleased to have the thoughts of Father Benjamin Urmston, S.J. return to the pages of Harvest. His article, “The Dangerous Crises in Our World and Our Response,” demonstrates his ongoing passionate concern for social justice in our world and especially the avenues open for us to respond. Father Ben cites many references and sources to help us become informed and involved.

“Responding to the Immigration-Industrial Complex” was written by Paul Riek. He bears witness among the immigrants, advocating for their human rights. He also expresses concern about Portland which is supposed to be a Sanctuary City but is hampered by the actions of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Terri Mierswa’s “Welcoming Our New Neighbors” tells of the resettling efforts of the Westchester Refugee Task Force. She describes some of the services needed in order for resettlement to be successful. Prayer and discernment need to be present in the lives of the volunteers. Cooperation among many agencies is vital.

Joan Woods with input from Nicholas Kim and Ann Marie Brennan contributed two articles regarding care of our common home, “Ocean Conference at the United Nations” and “Care of the Oceans: CLC Plastics Project.” Become informed about problems facing the oceans and be prepared to take first steps toward improving the dire situation.

We are pleased to include a book review in this issue. Dennis Roach comments on the book, Falling in Love...Finding God (Marriage and the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola) by M. Bridget Brennan and Jerome L. Shen, Lulu Publishing, 2017. Bridget and Jerry were members of CLC for many years. Dennis says this book “...is especially aimed at married couples who seek intimacy with their spouse as well as intimacy with the God who brought them together...”

We have reprinted our listing of those who served as Presidents of CLC-USA and National Ecclesial Assistants during the past fifty years. We apologize to Ann Marie Brennan for having omitted her name in the last issue.

Each of us comes with talents that are unique. For some it is to speak out vocally. For others the written word is the most effective tool. There are others who are called to protest by marching. Many of us are best suited to provide direct service to those in need, always acting with compassion. Some may be good fundraisers. All of us can pray. These are a few of the gifts given to us by the Lord to be used to bear fruit - fruit that will last.

With gratitude to the Lord, Dorothy M. Zambito
It has been a long journey since I joined CLC-CVX with lots of discerning every step of the way. There were many changes, *Rosa Mystica, Regina Mundi* and the new South Florida Region. Ignatian spirituality was always there. At this time of my life there is a big challenge to be President of National CLC-USA. I never dreamt of being in this position. Two different sources of encouragement continue to lift me up. Father Jim Borbely, S.J., past National Ecclesial Assistant, sent me an email when I was nominated to be President-elect. “You will be a good president. Your spirituality is very practical. Ed Plocha, immediate past President added, “You are very instrumental in building relationships among all the members.”

I always try not to jump ahead of the grace. I guess that at the time it did not cross my mind. I am ready to place myself in the new position. I am sure that all my friends in Christ will be there for me, giving support and lots of prayers. I feel hopeful and enthusiastic.

**I Will Place Myself In His Hands.**

When I got back from the ExCo/NCC meeting in St Louis in October, I kept thinking how blessed and fortunate we are to have each other. We moved slowly during the first days, as we discerned, shared the liturgy and examined in silence the many issues we had before us. It was wonderful to see and feel how all the cultural groups bonded to become a union of minds and hearts, one body in Christ. I remember particularly our last session. The most beautiful song was playing. We were holding hands in one circle of love. Then something very special happened. I was humbled and blessed by the many demonstrations of love from all present. I broke into tears out of pure joy - a moment I will never forget. I am looking forward to the work ahead.

AMDG

**IN MEMORIAM**

- **Laura O'Shea**, mother of Maureen O'Shea, Faber CLC, Metro NY, November 2017.
- **Rita Eldridge**, Paul Community, Omaha, September 2017.
Peacefully Facing a World in Crisis

Father John Lan Tran, S.J.

At the level of action, serenity allows us to act instead of react. Some of us who like to follow political news may get caught in this reactional mode. At times of crisis, we feel closed in and unable to see the bigger perspective. Consequently, we tend to react to the latest and greatest news, or even worse lurch from one crisis to the next. We become crisis operators instead of being contemplatives in action.

Ignatian indifference allows us to reflect, reach the deeper issues and find the long term course of action. Pope Francis’ principle of “time is greater than space” can be helpful. Instead of trying to do what is perceived as most effective action, the better question to ask is, “What process can we start to bring a greater change and a longer lasting impact?” This may take longer, involve more people and be more difficult, but it can also help us to avoid the feeling of going from one crisis to the next.

The Serenity Prayer also reminds us to accept the things we cannot change. This realistic advice counters our arrogant attempt to change the unchangeable. As beings with limitations, we know from experience that we cannot change truth, nor can we alter our past, nor can we change other people.

At times, it is even more depressing when we realize that we may not be able to change our own behavior and attitude. Change is hard. So many people want to change, yet only a few can actually change. As such, change can be mysterious. As we grow older, we recognize that the agent of change is the Holy Spirit. In better moments, we realize that God’s grace allows us to change.

This leads us to the next phrase, having the courage to change what we can change. In other words, what can we actually do facing a crisis? Here human nature kicks in. We often know what we should do, but we are either unable or unwilling to do it. St. Paul describes this in his letter to the Romans that we do the things we should not, but do not do the things we should.

Courage, discipline and perseverance are some of the graces needed in order to “make a difference.” I once had a conversation with a Vietnamese-Australian Jesuit about how to combat the Communist regime of Vietnam. He said that many people fight the Communist regime of Vietnam by contributing money, posting articles on the internet,
going to protests or getting involved in human rights campaigns. These do make some differences. He asserted that the real struggle requires deeper sacrifice and courage. Are we willing to forego our comfortable lifestyle in the U.S. in order to support those who suffer in Vietnam? Are we willing to face evil and pay the consequences, such as going to prison? These questions helped me to realize that I could not do much.

The last part of the above Serenity Prayer deals with wisdom, knowing the difference between the things we can change and the things we cannot. Ignatian discernment does not talk about wisdom but assumes it. God has given us the intellect to be used to its fullest. What can we learn about issues and what can we actually do about them? Unfortunately, we often choose the most simplistic path of least resistance because of mental laziness.

Thus, when facing crisis we sometimes pick and chose the easy choices, the solutions that everyone supports, and neglect the difficult issues. In the contemplation about the three degrees of humility, St. Ignatius talks about choosing the harder, more humiliating options for the greater glory of God. Courage, in conjunction with humility, helps us to fulfill our obligations to the least of our brothers and sisters regardless of the cost.

Finally, I find the personal story of Reinhold Niebuhr helpful when thinking about what to do with a world in crisis. From what I gathered, Reinhold was known for his realistic approach to issues instead of being idealistic or ideological. For example, during World War II, he supported the war and renounced pacifism because he did not think pacifism would work. Yet, in time of peace, he supported non-violent protests. On other issues, he often took a prophetic stand. He fought for labor rights, denounced the KKK and fought racism when all of these were not “fashionable.”

As members of CLC-USA, our mission includes the promotion of gospel justice, which requires us to be involved with the issues and crises of the world. This may mean speaking up, protesting, signing petitions, etc. At a deeper level, we also need to reflect on how to witness by our own suffering. I do not know what we, CLC-USA, should do as a corporate body, except to invite everyone to approach the issues calmly and prayerfully. Perhaps someday we will find a common corporate approach. In the mean time, I leave you with the rest of Reinhold Niebuhr’s original Serenity Prayer:

Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did,  
This sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right,  
If I surrender to Your will,  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.  
Amen.
Inserted among the poor and sharing with them their condition, Jesus invites all of us to give ourselves continuously to God and to bring about unity within our human family. This gift of God to us, and our response, continues to this day through the influence of the Holy Spirit in all our particular circumstances. (Preamble, GP 1)

This issue of Harvest focuses on our responses to a world in crisis for us as CLC members. My personal response is directed to the children of troubled families, and takes the form of volunteering at the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) program in South Florida, with its motto, I am for the child.

After working in parish ministry and Jesuit institutions for many years, the idea of volunteering outside of my comfort zone was something I had been thinking about for a long time. A call to join others in a secular environment to help these families appealed to me. I had done some work in the program years back and was always impressed by how much good a committed GAL can do to help.

Recently I became aware that Miami was the second largest metropolitan area in the USA with human trafficking, and yes, in that human trafficking there are children involved! I could not believe this was happening in my city! I also learned that we are the only place in the USA with a dedicated human trafficking court involving minors. Source of pride, or shame? A bit of both.

What does one do? Fear and apprehension set in. I was getting pushed by an interior movement and I knew who was behind it. I spoke with a supervisor in the human trafficking division of the GAL and was told that it is hard work, emotionally taxing to say the least. I decided to take the training, and my wife, Rosita, accompanied me. The training facilitator was very sincere in the way she described what was involved. After the training I said to myself, this is not for me. I’m too old for this. I was scared for days. I told the supervisor that I would continue the regular GAL cases but would not do these trafficking cases.

Days passed. I guess that message did not get down to the staff and I got a call, “Mr. de la Torre, I have a case perfect for you.” After getting the details about the child involved in the case, how could I refuse? The staff member was right. It was perfect for me. The next few seconds seemed like an eternity. I really got scared, could feel my heart pounding and my anxiety doubling every second. “Yes, I’ll take the case,” I said. Then, in a cosmic event that lasted a fraction of a second, peace and consolation set in and fear disappeared. God taught me a lesson, “Don’t be afraid, I’m with you.”

This was one of the many cases that I have worked for the GAL program, helping families from the viewpoint of the well-being of the child, ages newborns to eighteen. These children are in the custody of the Department of Children and Families for reasons such as abuse, drug use by the parents, abandonment, neglect, domestic violence, etc. They live with foster families, are often traumatized by their family circumstances and develop multiple problems. Their cases eventually end up in what is known in South Florida as the Children’s Court.

The GAL is not a guardian as the name might imply, but the eyes and ears of the Court to ensure that the child is the priority. This means reporting on the child’s progress within the system, taking into consideration a huge variety of issues, such as relationships with the foster family, compliance with therapeutic and medical concerns,
monitoring school progress, communication with biological parents, etc.

A GAL needs no legal knowledge to represent the child. The program provides training and assists with case-related needs. The only real requirement is the desire to help a child, and the commitment to be there for the child for the duration. The children and the Court rely on the GAL for continuity. Social workers, foster families and lawyers usually change. Very often only the GAL has the complete picture and is best able to stand up for the child. This continuity also gives the children a sense of security, a constant in their lives.

There is a shortage of GAL volunteers. All sorts are needed and accepted: old and young; professionals and those with little formal education; different racial and ethnic groups; many languages, even rare ones such as Mayan, the one spoken by the child in one of my recent cases.

To summarize, the GAL gives feedback to the Court on what is going on in the child’s life. This means interacting with the child, foster parents, social workers and court professionals, and studying the related documents. The GAL recommends to the judge what should be done for the optimal well-being of the child, and transmits requests from the children themselves. This is very important because it gives them some input on their future. The GAL’s recommendation carries a lot of weight with the Court.

I have been blessed with seeing real changes in the children I serve. For example, I had a child with uncontrolled AIDS transmitted at birth, a case of life or death. The child was extremely ill when, by chance or God’s will, I read about the possibility of a new drug treatment. With only a few days left to access the protocol, the Court, social workers and I worked non-stop to get all the approvals needed to get him into the program. We managed to do so, and the child responded very well to the new drug.

Not all cases have such dramatic, happy endings or bring such immense satisfaction. I find, however, that the GAL program fits right in with my vocation as a member of CLC and with the CLC mission. It is a real option for the poor. In the children, the foster and biological parents, the professionals I work with, I find the face of Christ, and am encouraged by them to love and serve.

Our life is essentially apostolic. The field of CLC mission knows no limits: it extends both to the Church and the world, in order to bring the gospel of salvation to all people and to serve individual persons and society by opening hearts to conversion and struggling to change oppressive structures. (Charism, GP 8).

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Inserto así entre los pobres, y compartiendo con ellos su condición, Jesús nos invita a todos a entregarnos continuamente a Dios y a trabajar por la unión de la familia humana. Esta entrega de Dios a los hombres y de los hombres a Dios se sigue realizando hoy, bajo la moción del Espíritu Santo, en todas nuestras diversas circunstancias particulares (del Preámbulo, PG No. 1).

Este número de Harvest se enfoca en nuestras respuestas a un mundo en crisis como miembros de la CVX. Mi respuesta personal se dirige a los niños de familias con problemas y consiste en un voluntariado en el programa Guardian ad Litem (GAL) con su lema de Yo estoy por el niño.

Después de muchos años trabajando en ministerios parroquiales y en instituciones Jesuitas pensé participar en un voluntariado fuera de mi zona de confort. Me atraía el unirme a otros en un entorno secular para ayudar a familias. Ya había trabajado en el GAL hacia algunos años y me había impresionado cuanto bien puede lograr un voluntario comprometido con el programa.

Me enteré recientemente que Miami ocupa el segundo lugar entre las áreas metropolitanas de EEUU en el tráfico humano, y sí, esto incluye la trata de niños. ¡No podía creer que esto estaba ocurriendo en mi ciudad! También supe que tenemos la única corte en los EEUU donde se maneja el tráfico humano de menores. ¡Motivo de orgullo o de vergüenza? Un poco de ambos.

¿Qué hacer? Me llené de miedos y aprehensiones. Me empujaba un movimiento interior y yo más o menos sabía quién estaba tras él. Hablé con un supervisor de la división de tráfico humano de menores del GAL y éste me dijo que el trabajo era duro y emocionalmente desgastante, por no decir más. Decidí tomar el entrenamiento y mi esposa Rosita me acompañó. La facilitadora fue muy sincera en cómo describió lo que implicaba este proceso. Después del entrenamiento me dije a mí mismo que esto no era para mí: Estoy muy viejo para esto. Estuve asustado por días. Le dije al supervisor que yo continuaría con los casos habituales del GAL pero que no tomaría ningún caso de tráfico de menores.

Los días pasaron; parece que el mensaje no filtró hasta la sección administrativa y recibí una llamada: Sr. de la Torre, tengo un caso perfecto para usted. Después de recibir los detalles del niño, ¿cómo podía rechazarlo? El tenía razón, el caso estaba perfecto para mí. Los próximos segundos me parecieron una eternidad. La realidad es que me asusté, sentía mi corazón latir fuertemente y estaba cada vez más ansioso. Sí, tomaré el caso, le dije. Entonces, en un evento cósmico que duró una fracción de segundo, me llené de paz, desapareció el miedo, llegó la consolación. Dios me dio una lección. No tengas miedo, estoy contigo.

Este fue uno de mis muchos casos en el GAL, ayudando a familias por el bienestar del niño, desde recién nacidos hasta los diez y ocho años. Estos niños están bajo la custodia del Departamento de Niños y Familias por razones como abuso, uso de drogas por los padres, abandono, descuido, violencia domestica, etc.; viven con familias temporales, muchas veces han sido traumatizados...
por las circunstancias familiares y desarrollan múltiples problemas. Sus casos eventualmente acaban en lo que en el sur de la Florida se llama la Corte de los Niños.

El GAL no es un guardián del niño, como el nombre pudiera implicar, pero sí es el ojo y oídos de la Corte para asegurar que el niño sea la prioridad. Esto quiere decir que el GAL reporta el progreso del niño dentro del sistema, tomando en consideración muchas cuestiones como su relación con la familia temporal, el cumplimiento con las terapias y visitas médicas, el adelanto en el colegio, la comunicación con los padres biológicos, etc.

El GAL no necesita conocimientos legales para representar al niño; el programa provee entrenamiento y asiste con las necesidades específicas del caso. El único verdadero requisito es el deseo de ayudar a un niño y comprometerse a estar presente mientras dure el proceso. Los niños y la Corte dependen del GAL para que éste lleve la secuencia del caso; los trabajadores sociales, familias temporales y abogados generalmente cambian durante el proceso. Muchas veces es el GAL el único que puede presentar la versión completa del caso y quien resulta el más calificado para representar al niño; esta continuidad también les ofrece a los niños una seguridad, una constante en sus vidas.

No hay suficientes voluntarios para el programa GAL. Se necesitan y se aceptan viejos y jóvenes, profesionales y personas con poca educación formal, una variedad de razas y etnias, muchos idiomas, hasta algunos poco conocidos, como el Maya, que resulta ser el idioma de un niño en uno de mis casos.

Yo he sido bendecido con verdaderos cambios en los que niños que he servido. Por ejemplo, tuve un niño con SIDA incontrolable, trasmida por su mamá cuando nació, un caso de vida o muerte. El niño estaba enfermo de gravedad cuando, por casualidad o por volunta de Dios, leí sobre la posibilidad de un nuevo medicamento para tratarlo. Quedaban solamente unos días para integrarse al nuevo protocolo médico, y la Corte, los trabajadores sociales y yo trabajamos sin descanso para obtener las aprobaciones necesarias y hacer posible que lo aceptaran en el programa. Lo logramos, y el niño respondió muy bien a la nueva medicina.

No todos los casos tienen un fin tan dramático y feliz, ni trae una satisfacción tan inmensa. Sin embargo, encuentro que el programa GAL encaja perfectamente con mi vocación CVX y con la misión CVX. Es una verdadera opción por el pobre. En los niños, los padres temporales y biológicos, en los profesionales con quien colaboro, encuentro el rostro de Cristo y ellos me animan a amar más y a servir más.

Nuestra vida es esencialmente apostólica. El campo de la misión de la CVX no tiene límites: se extiende a la Iglesia y al mundo, para hacer presente el Evangelio de salvación a todos y para servir a la persona y a la sociedad, abriendo los corazones a la conversión y luchando por cambiar las estructuras opresoras (del Carisma, PG No. 8).

Entonces, en un evento cósmico que duró una fracción de segundo, me llené de paz, desapareció el miedo, llegó la consolación. Dios me dio una lección. No tengas miedo, estoy contigo.

En resumen, el GAL le reporta a la Corte lo que está sucediendo en la vida del niño. Esto quiere decir que tiene que relacionarse con el niño, con los padres temporales, con los trabajadores sociales y los profesionales de la Corte, y tiene que estudiar los documentos pertinentes al caso. El GAL le recomienda al Juez lo que se debe hacer por el beneficio óptimo del niño, y trasmite peticiones de los mismos niños, algo muy importante porque les permite a ellos aportar algo en las decisiones sobre su futuro. La recomendación del GAL lleva mucho peso en la Corte.
"Our life is essentially apostolic. The field of CLC mission knows no limits: it extends both to the Church and the World, in order to bring the gospel salvation to all people and to serve individual persons and society by opening hearts to conversion and struggling to change oppressive structures." (GP 8)

Growing up: Encounters

I have been a witness to poverty since I was a child, and I have listened to reflections and teachings about poverty by my parents since I could walk. I was taught that in my life’s calling, I was expected to “make a difference,” to make the world a better place for others who had less materially than I did. Importantly, I learned a “culture of encounter” in contact with children and families from barrios and poorer neighborhoods in the U.S. and Latin America. There were always “new” persons living with us who were separated from their families and cultures. These diverse personal encounters were priceless special gifts for my spiritual formation.

Witnessing, responding: Advocacy

Now, in Fresno, California, I have witnessed poverty and homelessness for 20 years, though I have been involved as an advocate only in the last 7-8 years. In 2010, after working part-time for the Census, counting homeless persons on the streets, I heard that our diocese wanted parishes to send a representative to the Bishop’s Homeless Advocacy Committee. I wanted to know more, so I began attending monthly meetings. Though only a few parishes responded, I thought that by joining the committee, I could use my talents to witness, respond and perhaps to educate.

I also became involved with other advocates in faith (Unitarian, Lutheran, Methodist, Islam) and progressive groups (PDA, PICO, labor, free medical and legal), who regularly wrote and taught us about the lack of understanding and mistreatment of homeless persons on our streets. We all worked together, providing direct outreach (services and things that our homeless sisters and brothers needed), and labored to change attitudes and societal structures (city and county) that were oppressive. Every day, more and more joined us and helped to document what we were doing.

Encounter and Change

Since my beginning advocacy in 2010, I am clearly in a very different place. I’ve been changed by the personal encounters I’ve had - too many stories to tell here. Certainly, I can say I’ve found a new calling, amidst myriad activities, accompanied by diverse and ecumenical groups of advocates and homeless as partners. Together, we have:

• Interviewed persons in malls, parking lots and recycling places, under trees, near churches, and all around town
• Tabled at social service “fairs,” inviting folks to sign up for housing, medical, etc.
• Attended the (very cold) outdoor funeral of “Big Sue,” homeless and an advocate, under an overpass, accompanied by hundreds of others, including a former Fresno mayor
• Researched policies and practices most helpful and most harmful to homeless sisters and brothers, and visited “model” programs
• Worked on proposals, located vacant housing, spoke to power brokers, knocked on church office doors, requesting others’ presence
• Stored firewood for others to pick up and deliver to those sleeping/freezing on the streets.
• Delivered bread to motels overflowing with families and friends living on the edge
• Read stories, resolutions, ordinances and reports of other cities’ efforts at reducing homelessness successfully, with compassion
• Listened to stories of hardship, job losses, medical crises, mental problems, addictions, imprisonment, estranged families, LGBT isolation and hurt, and more
• Got to know by name, in very personal ways, our homeless sisters and brothers.

These activities and others were full of abundant graces, inviting me in multiple ways to respond, to see God in all persons, especially in the poorest and most vulnerable.

Responding: Our lay vocation

I was often reminded when growing up that when we respond lovingly to others, we discover our lay vocation. And these encounters and responses connect us because in CLC we have a shared (lay) vocation. Father Luke begins, “I believe that God has a special mission for CLC in the Church at this moment - a mission to refine and develop our understanding of the lay vocation.” He emphasizes “the need for greater apostolic visibility in CLC,” and visibility for “the way we in CLC give an apostolic sense to even the most humble realities of daily life.” Working with our homeless sisters and brothers is indeed apostolic: “What size shoes do you need?” “What ages are your kids?” “Where did you sleep last night?” “Do you need someone to look at that foot?” “Are you hungry?” “How can I help?”

Who is homeless?

Pope Francis reminds us that we are all on a life-long journey. We must have the dust of the road and the smell of the sheep on us. This refers to our apostolic mission, involving sacrifice, collaboration and charity (gifts of time, treasure, talent). But a true CLC way of life goes further and requires struggling for social justice - changing oppressive societal structures as well.

Here in Fresno our journey includes our homeless sisters and brothers, refugees, children on their own or split between parents or other caretakers, those who are homeless but not visible, vets, the chronically homeless, and many more. It also involves hard work converting hearts and minds, engaging those who are most comfortable and churches from more affluent parts of town.

This is who we are, the apostolic body of CLC. And as we leave our comfort and security to journey with homeless sisters and brothers, here is a prayer to guide us.

Prayer for the Homeless

We ask our God’s blessing upon all who are homeless.
For those sleeping outdoors in the heat and the cold.
For those who must wander in the day.
For those who have no relatives or friends to take them in.
For those who have no place to keep their possessions that remind them who they are.
For those who are afraid and hopeless.
We pray that those of us with warm houses and comfortable beds not be lulled into complacency and forgetfulness.
Help us to see your face in the eyes of every homeless person we meet.
Inspire us to enable those who are homeless to secure places of peace, protection and nurture.

For more information

National Coalition for the Homeless. www.nationalhomeless.org
WINGS Fresno. www.wingsfresno.org
Apostolic Advocacy and Action in CLC. See www.clc-usa.org -- for AAA contact information.
Rhodes, Mike. 2016. Dispatches from the War Zone. mikerhodes@comcast.net
Lessons from the Life of Helen Plocha

By Pat Conover Mickiewicz

I’m grateful to be a Portland Pilgrim, a member of the CLC group Ed and Helen joined when they moved to Portland. What follows are my reflections on Helen’s life in CLC. It’s not a biography, and probably has factual inaccuracies and omissions. It says as much about the author as the subject, as is the way with writing. My intention is a grateful tribute to Helen, a focus on the slice I witnessed of a life well-lived. I’m using the format of lessons we can draw from her CLC life.

1. **Don’t die before you die.** When she faced that devastating diagnosis, she somehow found the Magis, though I doubt she called it that, in living so very fully in the valley of the shadow of death. She adapted diet, already very disciplined and healthy, to optimize her health in light of her new circumstance. She stayed physically active, with a regular practice of walking. She added therapies of acupuncture and massage not grabbing indiscriminately at every straw, but focusing her energy into a pathway of life. She went on trips to Poland, to Brazil to a holy healing place, and frequently to visit family and the beach. She sought support in groups and individuals, and was clear and clear-eyed about what was of value and what was not. She went to view the Eclipse, traveling for Totality, just days before the unexpected vascular event that led so quickly to her death. She responded gracefully even to that, being so present to family in that last day, receiving their love beautifully and yielding to a peaceful, holy death.

2. **Love fiercely.** Our Portland Pilgrims check-ins were sometimes longer than our faith sharing, and it was always clear how much Helen cared about family, how much joy she found in family visits and contact. This crystalized in the untimely death of her son Rick. Her grief was all-consuming. She railed against the unfairness of his passing in a way that never seemed to occur to her to protest her own health betrayal. She was steadfast in honoring Rick’s life and holding family together as much as possible in their new normal. Her love was so evident, and her grief so strong. She did not flinch from it or hurry through it, but lived it fully and fiercely.

3. **Practice hospitality.** It’s difficult to say that the hospitality was Helen’s, as Ed and Helen were a well-matched pair when it came to being welcoming. But I absolutely draw from her life the lesson of hospitality. During a long phase of our Portland Pilgrims journey, the Plochas were our consistent hosts, always offering very tasty post-meeting treats. Sometimes it was food that they themselves would not be eating, due to their careful vegan diet, and always a delight that showed such care in selection and preparation. They extended themselves to regional and national travelers as well, and made or deepened strong connections that I’m sure have helped develop the fabric of our regional and national organizations.

4. **Speak your mind.** Helen told it as she saw it. She had a clarity about her feelings and a willingness to express herself directly. This may have increased following her cancer diagnosis, but it was always a part of how I experienced her. She did not always demand that the other person change, but she had as close as I’ve seen to 100% integrity in speaking her truth.
5. **Do CLC your own way.** Helen had read the *General Principles*, had known many CLC group formats and went to plenty of retreats and conferences. She would always check in in a CLC meeting, but might not always share during faith sharing. She rarely joined the regional committees, but was often of service to them. I remember one regional retreat for which she handled all the registrations, payment plans and communication with the venue, despite not being on the retreat committee. She did clerical work for CLC-USA (which turned into an ever-larger task, as these things do), but found more holiness in a day at the beach than at an organized conference or retreat. She was as active as she was in CLC as part of her fierce love for Ed and her understanding that his enjoyment of his CLC participation and leadership was made more complete by her presence. That said, she found a deep joy in the friendships with the many people she got to know in her regional and national participation. She was deeply moved by our wonderful Portland Pilgrims rituals of sending, and it was a profound experience for her to be prayed over in the various gatherings, local, regional, and national, where participants shared their love with her in this way.

Thank you, Helen, for the lessons. Helen Plocha, Pray for us.

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**Marcilito Custodio, MD**

**Funeral Homily**

*By Father Daniel Fitzpatrick, S. J.*

**GOSPEL OF JOHN 19: 25 - 30**

As is so often the case in our life of faith, we come this morning before Jesus on the cross. As He is about to die, Jesus cries out, “It is finished.” Yes, finished but not ended. In fulfilling His mission Jesus, in dedication and fidelity to His Father, goes through death to new life. This is the great mystery of our faith.

St. Paul tells us that, because He was faithful to the end, out of love for us all, Jesus poured out His blood on the cross. In doing this Jesus broke through the mystery of death and came to the new life of Resurrection. In faith this is what we pray for Mars this morning that Jesus will bring Mars, so faithful and loving in so many ways, into the new life of Resurrection.

Like Jesus, Mars Custodio lived his life in loving dedication and fidelity to the end. A great part of Mars’ life was being faithful to the Hippocratic Oath he took as a young doctor. Mars was not only a good doctor, he was a compassionate one as well. It is never easy to have to walk with your patients as they come to the end of their lives. Like Jesus on the cross, who had compassion on the good thief, so Mars, as an oncologist, reached out and supported his patients to the end. It was always a challenging and draining task.

When Mars was in medical school, Cora came into his life. They belonged together. How faithful Mars has been to you, Cora, over these many years. You were his close companion, his friend, the one he loved so much. We offer you our prayer of deep sympathy.

Mars’ fidelity also showed itself so deeply in his love for his children, Christian, Victoria and Paulo, and their spouses and especially you, his grandchildren. We grieve with you all today.

Before the mystery of death, we stand in awe. We cannot explain it away, but stand before this mystery in faith. Yet, faith does not take away our feelings of sorrow and loss. There were tears, grief and sorrow on Calvary as Jesus breathed His last. Today we stand next to Mary, Mother of Sorrows, who consoles us in our sorrow.

In faith we find our consolation at our Mass today as we join with Christ in remembrance of His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Jesus becomes present on our altar and in our hearts as we offer our Eucharist for Mars and remember the many wonderful things he brought to each of us here in the church this morning, to his family and friends, the members of San Lorenzo CLC and to many others in many other places. Some are in remote places in the Philippines where Mars brought healing while on many Medical Missions.

We call our Mass, Eucharist, which means thanksgiving. We thank God for all the blessings God has given to Mars over the years. We pray with great confidence that the Lord will give Mars one more gift, the greatest of blessings, life forever in and with Christ. As we heard in our second reading: “To the thirsty I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water. The victor will inherit these gifts, and I shall be his God and he will be my son.” (Rev 21:6b-7) It is finished. It is not ended. May Mars rest in peace.
Pope Francis has encouraged us to embrace the joy in the Gospel, and I have made a selected list of Scripture that I find helpful both from the Hebrew Covenant and the Christian Covenant. Faith and hope in eternal life is there, but selected passages, Vatican II and the Church in general urge us to be co-creators with God in making this a better and more joyful world. As Peter Maurin, the companion of Dorothy Day, used to say, “We want a world in which it is easier to be good, not a perfect world, but a better one, a more hopeful one.”

When I look at all the good in our world, families raising children, teachers preparing and teaching class, the work of nurses, doctors, public officials, religious leaders, prayers, liturgies, retreats, environmentalists, and peace seekers. I find the list is endless.

The Office of Apostolic Action and Advocacy, Christian Life Community, USA, is a gold mine for reflection on our graced stories, present and past, where collaboration with CLC from other nations and World CLC is most encouraging. Also peruse www.seasonofcreation.org. “Integral Ecology” is clearly Pope Francis’ theme. CLC’s discerned frontier mission areas are reflected in this link with that theme in mind.

Jesuit sources for your reflection courtesy of John Sealey, Coordinator of Peace, Justice, Environment in our Midwest Jesuit Province include:

Ecology: Ignatian Ecological Examen; Ecojesuit; Healing Earth; Earth Healing (Fr. Al Fritsch, S.J.)

Refugees/Migrants: Campaign for Hospitality; JRS USA; Kino Border Initiative

War and Violence: Marquette Center for Peacemaking

Advocacy: Jesuit Advocates; Ignatian Solidarity Network

When we reflect on the culture of violence, war, refugees, hunger, the assault on the earth. The list may not be endless, but important and dangerous.

The recent 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus urges Jesuits to reflect and act in three areas: reconciliation with God, reconciliation within the one human family, reconciliation with the earth. As partners with the Society of Jesus, Christian Life Community may consider this framework as its own. Reconciliation with God would include prayer, meditation, liturgy, the sacrament of reconciliation and Ignatian spirituality. Reconciliation within the one human family may be the most difficult and challenging. It certainly would include civil discourse, listening respectfully and with compassion to those suffering and those making the decisions in our world. Skills in conflict resolution, peace, justice and sustainability need to be part of our education from pre-school to graduate school to old age. Peaceful resolution of differences is a game all of us can win. War, violence, injustice, screaming at one another or name calling is a game all of us will lose. Reconciliation with the earth should begin with environmental studies and continue with personal, national and world implementation. I like Catholic Climate Covenant, the Center of Concern and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, but you, no doubt, have your own sources of information and encouragement.

CLC members are studying, promoting and acting in daily life on Laudato Si’, engaging with advocacy work that recognizes the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one,” as well as practical endeavors like organic, urban farming, such as Ballfield Farm in Pittsburgh where five CLC members are extensively involved in this communal “tikkun” project.
I add Christian Life Community in general and our own Ann Marie Brennan’s leadership in Global Catholic Climate Movement. CLC is one of the partnering organizations of this international effort to address climate change.

Also for your consideration is the recent AAA E-newsletter that includes Season of Creation, Integral Ecology, and some reflection on the Charlottesville racism concerns. http://clc-usa.org/documents/2017/10/AAA-2017-08.pdf

But the list of worthy groups to support in the environment, peace and justice is endless and encouraging. I can name only a few that have helped: the Network of Spiritual Progressives, Rabbi Michael Lerner, Josh Ruebner of the Coalition to End the Occupation and, of course, Carol Gonzalez of Christian Life Community who coordinates the national calls of Advocacy and Action. www.clc-usa.org.


Some of the many authors who have formed me are Jesuits like Frs. Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, John English, Dave Hassel, Albert Fritsch, Joe Mulligan and Peter Henriot. My favorite economist and political author is Dr. Gar Alperovitz, Principles of a Pluralist Commonwealth. Another author that I like is a Jewish Israeli woman Deb Reich, No More Enemies, It’s not the people..it’s the paradigm. If it has worked with her in her relations with Palestinians, it can work with all of us. Of course, I’m elated by Pope Francis and all the popes from Pius XII, John XXIII on to Pope Francis. All have supported a democratic world democracy and an end to the war system. (Laudato Si’ 175)

At the top of the list of the many crises in our world I join many others who see the dangers of the war system and climate change as primary. I think there is an excess of evil in our world which isn’t working very well or as God wants. “We must enter into a deeper understanding of the mystery of evil in the world and the transforming power of the merciful gaze of God who labors to create of humanity one reconciled, peaceful family.” (36th General Congregation, Decree 1, n. 31)

“We want a world in which it is easier to be good, not a perfect world, but a better one, a more hopeful one.”
Through the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, I felt invited to empty myself and risk all for the “Kin-dom” of God. After making the Exercises, I converted to Roman Catholicism. I served as a lay missionary in Oaxaca, Mexico, for fourteen years, first in human rights work and then in prison ministry. During that time, I married Aurelia and became part of her family. My salvation became tangled up with the salvation of my family, the people of Oaxaca and Mexico.

In 2009 we moved to Oregon, where I found a job with Voz Workers’ Rights Education Project, an organization that works with day laborers, most of whom are immigrants from Mexico. Before long, my salvation became tangled up with the salvation of immigrants. I became connected to the immigrants’ rights movement in the United States. It has become my apostolate.

On October 11, 2017, four others and I chained ourselves together and blocked the driveway of the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) building in Portland, Oregon. For over three hours, we blocked the departure of a bus carrying immigrants to the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington. When asked why I was doing this, I replied, “I am a member of St. Andrew Catholic Church in Portland. St. Andrew is a Sanctuary Church. I am also a resident of Portland.” They say that Portland is a Sanctuary City. How can Portland be a Sanctuary City when ICE is tearing our neighbors, coworkers and friends from their families and their community, bringing them to a building right near downtown Portland, and then sending them to Tacoma to be imprisoned and deported, many to countries where their lives are in danger? Our community doesn’t feel safe here in Portland. I am willing to take concrete action to make Portland a true Sanctuary City.

I did not make the decision lightly to take this action. For years I have participated in various ways in the immigrants’ rights movement, but risking arrest was another matter. Yet when a well-organized group of people whom I trust invited me to participate in this action, I felt that as a Christian I couldn’t say no. I felt that the time had come to say ¡Basta! Enough! and do something concrete to stop the deportation machine, even for a few hours. I felt that the time had come to use my privilege as a
mature, white, male U.S. citizen to take a public stance in solidarity with those without that privilege who are suffering at the hands of my government.

Before the action, I prayed a lot. Was this from the good spirit or the bad spirit? I brought my decision to my CLC group, the Portland Pilgrims, for confirmation. I also brought my decision to my parish pastor. I was heartened by the positive feedback and encouragement.

Every day the United States government, through ICE, imprisons immigrants while they fight deportation, most of them in private prisons. By law, the government is required to fill 34,000 prison beds every day in order to guarantee profits for the private prison companies. And all of this is done with my tax dollars.

Some say our action was a waste of time and effort. After the three plus hours, the bus left for Tacoma anyway. Yet I feel that our action was very successful! We threw a monkey wrench into the deportation machine for over three hours. We drew a lot of attention to the main issue: the existence of an ICE building in a supposed Sanctuary City, and the daily detention and deportation of our neighbors.

Some called me a hero. Not true. The heroes are the immigrant activists who have been taking actions like this for years and have received far worse treatment than we did for the same action. Others said I was courageous. My courage is nothing compared to the courage that immigrant families have to muster daily just to survive in this hostile environment. For a few brief hours I was in solidarity with them, as a member of the community, and as a Catholic Christian. This was simply a prophetic witness, born of love.
Welcoming Our New Neighbors!

By Terri Miersaw

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed...” Luke 4:18

“To welcome the stranger is to welcome Christ.” Pope Francis, March 24, 2016

We are especially aware of the pressing need to work for justice through the preferential options for the poor and a simple lifestyle which expresses our freedom and solidarity with them… CLC General Principle #4

After reflecting on these words, I was led to join the Westchester Refugee Task Force, an unprecedented coalition of faith and community groups seeking to help resettle refugees in Westchester County, New York. At that time I was working for Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. The Maryknoll family of Religious Sisters and the Fathers and Brothers had been participating in the Refugee Task Force and showing a living example of how we could welcome the stranger. They had provided both presence and monetary support for one of the first refugee families settling in Connecticut. (Connecticut lawmakers very openly welcome refugees to the state.)

I brought the idea of CLC participation with the Refugee Task Force to members in the Westchester CLC. The Canadian CVX effort to sponsor a Syrian CLC refugee family (Harvest, Vol 49#3) provided a motivating role model for us to imitate. The Westchester CLC agreed to co-sponsor with several other groups, a day-long introductory session on ways in which organizations and faith communities could contribute to the resettlement process. At that session we learned that groups with a small number of persons could partner with others to provide some of the many services that were needed. For example: finding affordable housing, working with schools to find ways to help refugee children assimilate into the classroom, teaching ESL to family members, helping families to negotiate the grocery store, orienting families to the American healthcare system, transporting family members to doctor appointments, job preparation and job search assistance, and many more discreet means of support. It made the idea of being part of a sponsoring team less intimidating.

Catholic Charities and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)* took the lead in training groups about how to provide the best support for all the refugee needs. Both organizations were awed at the response of Westchester community and faith groups to the refugee crisis. Everyone was very enthusiastic and eager for a refugee family to be approved for resettlement. Then the political boom dropped with the announcement that refugee visas were curtailed. Always adaptable, the Task Force leadership kept us all together with a new agenda. The focus became educating legislators about refugee resettlement and continuing to build a body of knowledge of how, where and what to do when refugees were eventually allowed to come to the US.

Additionally, member groups in the Refugee Task Force continue to find additional ways to assist families who remain in refugee camps awaiting US clearance. A donation drive provided items that refugees in holding camps need such as diapers and infant formula, medical equipment, medical supplies, warm coats and toys for children. A barrel was sent off in early November to refugee camps in Lebanon. Another group is focusing on gathering needed supplies for the Rohingya in Bangladesh. All are turning their disappointment at not being able to actively welcome our new neighbors into actions that
show that the refugees have not been forgotten. These are small but important efforts to support the vulnerable of the world.

To date four families have been resettled in Westchester County! This month word came that another couple from Afghanistan had progressed through the screening process and could soon be heading for the area. Everyone is mobilized to find housing before the couple receives final approval. Task force members are prepared and waiting to make the transition as smooth as possible for our new neighbors.

Our gift of Ignatian awareness often leads us to opportunities that could be missed without prayer and discernment. As I prayed and reflected on the needs of our new neighbors, I realized that the car, which I was considering trading in for a new vehicle could be useful to a refugee family. It continues to be serviceable even though it no longer meets my needs. I contacted the Westchester Task Force who found a recipient refugee family through Catholic Charities. The family breadwinner, who has a two hour ride each way to work, will now be able to have a more efficient means of travel that will free up time for other activities.

Meanwhile word from Canada is that there is some progress in the efforts of CVX to sponsor the Syrian CLC family who is currently living in Lebanon. Giles Michaud, CLC member of the General Council in English Canada reports that the family met with the Canadian consulate this past summer for a first interview. He states that there will be two more interviews before a decision is made that would allow the family to come to Canada.

In the meantime, CVX Canada has raised $12,000 in donations from a number of CLC members in USA and Canada. This money will be added to the family’s own life savings when they come to Canada. The CVX coordinating group has determined that this amount will help the family to transition to a new life in Montreal, Canada. If you still would like to contribute, donation information is noted below. We continue to pray that the process continues smoothly and swiftly.

As Mother St. Teresa has told us, we are called to do small things with great love. May we all continue to welcome the stranger, our new neighbors, in the many small ways we are called through our life as members of CLC.

*HIAS and USCCB are among the nine nonprofits authorized by the US government to resettle refugees. Catholic Charities has been designated by USCCB to facilitate resettlement.

CLC CANADA SYRIAN REFUGEE PROJECT
Mail to:
Gilles Michaud
4533 Millvale RD
RR2 Breadalbame PEI
Canada C0A1E0.
A high level United Nations conference called the Ocean Conference took place at the UN in New York on June 5 – 9, 2017. Two CLC representatives were able to attend, Joan Woods and Nicholas Kim, both of Metro NY CLC. The governments of Fiji and Sweden co-hosted responsibilities for the conference with numerous side events.

The aims of the Ocean Conference were to:

- Identify ways to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal #14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
- Build on successful partnerships and create new ones by sharing experiences.
- Involve all relevant stakeholders including governments, businesses, NGOs, civil society, academic institutions, scientific community, and the private sector.
- Be the inspiration that will reverse the decline in the health of our oceans for people, planet and prosperity.

Important aspects of this conference can be divided into three main categories:

1) Education about Our Oceans

Princess Victoria of Sweden asked participants at a side event to imagine a forest fire, its frightening consequences, and the heroic work of fire fighters to control it. Then she asked that we picture the ocean, recalling its calmness and beauty. She went on to say that the surface of the ocean is not reflecting the truth like the forest fire event. The ocean is dying silently, and it will not bounce back. There is a need to understand the connection between ocean health and migration. Numerous people are affected, and innovative solutions are needed which require government interventions on a world level. One of the visible ocean health indicators is the coral bleaching that occurs in many coastal areas. Above average sea water temperature caused by global warming has been identified as a leading cause for coral bleaching. Coral reefs are important because they shelter 25% of marine species, protect shorelines and support fishing industries. Coral reefs can be found in all parts of the world including the Pacific Ocean (Great Barrier Reef, Australia) and in the Atlantic Ocean (South Florida, US and Caribbean Islands).

2) Immediate Impact on Pacific Islands and Need for Assistance by the World Community

There were a number of side events about the Pacific Ocean and its inhabitants. Many Prime Ministers and other government officials were either on the panels for the side events or in attendance. There is a unique relationship between the ocean and the island people whose lives are dependent on it. Millions of people are affected by increasing cyclones, floods, larger waves, erosion and loss of fish which disrupt occupations and food security.

Rubbish and marine debris wash ashore, and there is great plastic accumulation in the Pacific.

Officials from these Pacific islands recognize the challenges and the need to work together to find solutions. However, some challenges are beyond their ability to solve, and they need international assistance. They would like the United States government to assume responsibility for oil spills and past nuclear testing sites which are contaminated with radioactive material.
3) Ocean Pollution and Decline

a) Climate change. There is an important connection between oceans and climate. Climate change is negatively impacting our oceans’ health and coastal areas. As the atmospheric temperature rises, the ocean water expands and, in return, causes the sea level to rise and affect low lying coastal areas. Since 40% of the world population lives near coastal areas, the oceans are part of a planet-wide ecosystem that supports life. We must respect and care for our oceans.

b) Industry. Side events on this topic featured speakers from Nordic and Baltic Sea countries on the role of business and industry in identifying causes and solutions to ocean pollution. Items of interest were a future carbon-free liquid fuel and fuel efficiency, a future carbon-free steel industry, shipbuilding for fishing and tourism, marine debris and human waste. Companies showcased items that contributed to sustainability in building (steel), transportation (ships and trucks), and manufacturing (clothing).

c) Fish and Fishing Industry. This was a topic of discussion in many side events. Island nations depend on fish not only for food but for the livelihood of their inhabitants. Panelists demanded accountability and urged large nations to respect their fishing regulations. Global fish populations are in serious decline. The UN FAO’s 2014 report found that 90% of the world’s fish stock were fully exploited or over exploited. Global warming has caused a collapse in fish stock due to fish migrating to the North and South Poles. The impact of illegal and unregulated fishing has been severe on many nations. Other causes of depleted stocks are waste and habitat destruction (i.e. coral reefs). Modern slavery on fishing vessels should not be tolerated and international cooperation is necessary for its’ elimination from the shipping industries supply chains. Other violations include child labor, smuggling, illegal transactions and forgery.

d) Plastics: Non–biodegradable and Biodegradable. A non-biodegradable substance is one that cannot be changed to a harmless natural state by the action of bacteria. A new report from the UN says that plastics labeled biodegradable rarely disintegrate in the ocean because they require industrial composters and prolonged exposure to high temperatures to break down.

Plastics dumped in the worlds’ oceans are estimated at eight million tons annually which is equivalent to the weight of about six million passenger cars.

Solutions

One important aim of the Ocean conference was to reverse the decline of the oceans by raising awareness of their decline resulting in a global call for action with new dialogues and partnerships for implementing solutions. The Conference did its job. Time will only tell whether or not it achieved the following objectives.

UN Member States adopted a “Call for Action” a document which addresses what Governments can do to address this issue. Global problems need global solutions and for that partnerships must be strengthened and new ones initiated.

Initiatives for Governments

Coastal Floods. A mangrove tree is found in many places around the world. Mangrove forests are known to act as barriers to flood waters. At present there are many campaigns for planting mangroves with industrialized nations offering money for trees and assisting in planting them. There is a need to increase these partnerships.

Dirty Water Entering Oceans. An approach called “Looking Upstream” asks governments to correct bad land practices which pollute rivers and streams before they enter the oceans. Governments must work with industries, municipal sanitation departments, and farmers to correct these situations.

Lack of clean water. Governments must enter into partnership with their citizens to insure that clean water is available to all under the UN declaration of Human Rights.

Lack of knowledge of important marine areas. Governments need to know the location of those special places that are crucial to healthy marine systems. They need to form partnerships with other governments and with their citizens to protect these areas.

Initiatives for Industry

There is a need for corporate leadership and responsibility in the areas of fishing, shipbuilding, and manufacturing. Firms should invest in new technologies to restore the oceans.

Initiatives for NGOs, Civil Society and the Private Sector

Individuals were called to do their part. Each individual contribution is and will be important. This call highlighted the wisdom of indigenous people and women with local knowledge.
Example:

*The #OneLess Campaign.* During the Conference attendees were given water bottles made from stainless steel. The logo on the bottle reads, “I have gone #OneLess – Using a refillable water bottle protects the ocean from plastic pollution.” The campaign revolves around collective individual action, encouraging people and businesses to stop using single-use plastic water bottles. “When you throw something away, there really is no away. It’s going somewhere, whether it’s your local beach or an island far away. So it’s about individual responsibility and the bigger picture at the same time. Every piece of that litter on the beach was in somebody’s hand at one time.”

The UN Oceans Conference launched a “Call to Action” to mobilize people to implement SDG 14. In solidarity with governments, business and organizations worldwide, World Christian Life Community joined this initiative by registering a two-year project, or “voluntary commitment”, in reducing use of plastic. Our CLC project is named: #OceanAction21726 Read more about this project in the next article.

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**Care of the Oceans: CLC Plastics Project**

By Joan Woods and Nicholas Kim

#OceanAction21726  
Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #14: “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.”

CLC joins the UN Ocean Conference “Call for Action” to support SDG 14! Having attended this Ocean Conference in June 2017, our CLC Representatives Joan Woods and Nicholas Kim shared their concerns about the dire problems facing the ocean. They felt it was significant for us to join with others at the conference in taking action. Together with the UN working group, we proposed a project for reducing our use of plastic and this has been supported by the World CLC ExCo. We have registered our project as a “voluntary commitment” on the UN Oceans Conference website. As of this writing, there are over 1,400 voluntary commitments by organizations, businesses and governments around the world.

We felt affirmed in this decision by Pope Francis’ words in a letter to the Ocean Conference held in Malta in September 2017. *The oceans are the common heritage of the human family. Only with a deep sense of humility, wonder and gratitude can we rightly speak of the ocean as “ours.” To care for this common inheritance necessarily involves rejecting cynical or indifferent ways of acting. We cannot pretend to ignore the problems of ocean pollution resulting, for example, from plastic and micro-plastics that enter the food chain and cause grave consequences for the health of marine and human life.*” (Laudato Si’, 41).

Our CLC project is listed as #OceanAction21726. The Objectives of the Project:

- Make the connection about how our faith calls us to care for our common home, as described in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*.
- Raise awareness about the pollution of the ocean and its detrimental impact to health.
- Encourage lifestyle changes by minimizing use of plastics and other products that pollute the ocean.

We plan to reach out to CLC members worldwide to both share information about best practices regarding packaging and minimizing plastics, as well as collecting the stories from those at the local level. We hope to do this through our magazine *Progressio*, on our website, on a Facebook Group and at our World Assembly.

We are fortunate to have CLC representatives at the UN who can help inform us about pertinent events at the UN as well as information about the oceans. Our main representative, Joan Woods, regularly attends conferences and committee meetings such as Climate Induced Migration, and our other representative, Nicholas Kim is an Ocean Scientist. The UN working group works closely with our World Executive Council and will coordinate the communication flow among our national communities. There are many sub-categories and targets within SDG 14. We decided to focus on target 14.1 which states, “By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.”
CLC Action will involve:
- Reducing our use of plastics through lifestyle changes as well as advocating for bans and restrictions on plastics in local areas
- Educating our members about caring for our common home, protecting our oceans and reducing plastic usage (we will be promoting our CLC ecology materials, the Pope’s Encyclical Laudato Si’ and other relevant documents.)
- Helping to implement action through networking and communications using Progressio Magazine, CVX-CLC website, Facebook group, Twitter, etc. We want to encourage the sharing of stories from local communities, best practices in reducing plastics, and other relevant information that inspires us to act on behalf of our oceans.

This project concludes in June 2019 when our CLC UN Working Group will produce a document of stories, best practices, analyses and recommendations for next steps, etc.

In the meantime, we encourage all to get involved in reducing use of plastics. Many of you are already doing this. We invite you to share your photos, stories, and information. Join our new Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/cvxclceology and Tweet #OceanAction21726

Some Additional Sources Are:

https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/?id=21726

September 2017 at Ocean Conference in Malta Vatican statement: Letter of his Holiness Pope Francis, signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State, to the participants in the fourth high level conference on “Our Ocean, an Ocean for Life”

For those of us who are familiar with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, “finding God in all things” is a necessary means of finding meaning in our lives. This little book, Falling in Love…Finding God is especially aimed at married couples, who seek an intimacy with their spouse as well as an intimacy with the God who brought them together in a lifelong, committed relationship. In other words, the intimacy we desire in our marriage mirrors the intimacy we desire in our closeness with God. Each desire reinforces and strengthens the other. The authors state quite clearly the importance of this intimacy in our marital and spiritual journeys.

Another intriguing feature of this book explains how the four weeks of the Exercises relate to the four stages of a relationship. For instance, the initial stage of a relationship causes us to face those personal tendencies which may weaken or put in jeopardy a strong bond with the other person. Similarly, the first Week of the Exercises invites the retreatant to face those sinful habits which may hinder or weaken a strong relationship with the Lord.

What particularly increases the appeal of this book is the openness of the authors who share with the reader some of the difficult moments in their relationship. Recounting their personal struggles invites the reader to reflect on his or her fears or moments of doubt in establishing and maintaining a marital relationship. In keeping with their Ignatian approach to marriage, the authors wisely rely on the use of the Examen as well as the use of discernment in their decision making. These are valuable Ignatian tools which help the individual or the couple to see more clearly whether their actions lead them toward or away from that union with the Lord. The authors also mention how crucial trust and honesty are in this discernment process. I quote from their book: “If we are open, generous and courageous, God will grace us with a discerning heart.”

Their openness and vulnerability, evident in their own relationship, help create a bond between the reader and the authors, who then invite the reader to reflect on his or her own experience within the marital relationship. So, to encourage that sharing between spouses, they present at the end of each chapter a series of reflection questions concerning a selected topic. For instance, Chapter 4, which focuses on the commitment to God and to the vision of marriage, invites the couple to think about their core values or to examine the positive or negative aspects of reaching an important decision. Their aim is to promote a shared discussion and a better understanding of each one’s feelings in reaching a decision.

The final chapter examines a number of topics, relevant to every married couple: SEX: What message do we send to each other in our conjugal lovemaking? MONEY: Are you a saver or a spender? CONFLICT: How do we handle our disagreements? COMMUNICATION: Can I listen without judging? The reflection questions from this chapter are quite pertinent and flow from Jerry and Bridget’s lived experience as a married couple. Their hope is that each couple will live an integrated life. In their own words, “Live a life of growing in union and intimacy with God and with each other.” With that strong foundation, it will be easier to witness to others a joyful and love-filled life.

Reviewed by Dennis Roach, The People of St. Paul

Copies of this book may be purchased at www.canainstitute.org

“If we are open, generous and courageous, God will grace us with a discerning heart.”
### CLC Presidents

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Paul Roy, S.J.</td>
<td>Fall River, MA</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Robert Johnston, S.J.*</td>
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### National Ecclesial Assistants

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### Episcopal Moderators

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<td>1975</td>
<td>Bishop Maurice Dingman</td>
<td>Des Moines, IA</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>Bishop Louis Gelinau</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Bishop Thomas Gumbleton</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>Bishop Victor Balke</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>Bishop Kenneth Untener</td>
<td>Saginaw, MI</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Bishop Robert Kaffer</td>
<td>Joliet, IL</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Bishop Gerald T. Walsh</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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