

Gifts of the Visitation Project by ACCW, 2021
Based on the book, *Gifts of the Visitation* by Denise Bossert

Session #1: Gift of Spontaneity

Opening Quote:

“Being of service and reaching out to others both require going out from themselves: going out to serve and meet others, to embrace another person. ... We imitate Mary when we reach out to others for an authentic encounter, allowing the Lord to work. ... Through Mary’s service towards others, through that encounter, our Lord’s promise is renewed and makes it happen now, just as it did then.” Pope Francis, Homily, May 2019.

Scripture:

“During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”
Lk 1:39-45

Written Reflection:

In those days, just as in our days, the Holy Spirit leads us, as women, to care for those in need. Mary, our Model of Faith, said “YES” and made haste, by obeying the Spirit’s call *immediately*. She doesn’t hem and haw by making excuses, “It really can’t be; Elizabeth is simply too old. Besides, I’m too busy, I’m too tired, it’s too far.” We are to be spontaneous in our response to the Spirit. Reflect with Bossert (20-21): “Am I ready to abandon self-will? ... What things might I be holding too tightly? My plans? My hopes? My words? Am I willing to say “yes,” without question or reservation, with the same spirit of spontaneous cooperation that Mary and Elizabeth had? What is God proposing to me right now?”

“Are these the things Mary pondered? No. Mary voices none of these fears, though she certainly had reason to fear. Instead, Mary responded freely and spontaneously, with a faith and acceptance of divine will unmatched by any other human.”

Gifts of the Visitation, Bossert, p. 15.

Video Witness:

Gift of Spontaneity by Kathy Oberreuter of St. Mary, Manchester and Brenda Strayer of St. Mark, Iowa Falls.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

With Brenda’s greeting, “Hey, Chica!” you immediately sense the joy and spontaneity of this spiritual friendship. Kathy begins by reflecting on their friendship, which has withstood “trials, joys, and sorrows.” Like Mary and Elizabeth, Brenda and Kathy’s friendship was “a holy relationship that awaited us.” Discuss: Have you ever felt that a relationship, a holy friendship, was ordained by God?

Brenda seems astonished at “so many spontaneous ‘yes’s’ that have popped up over those times.” Both Brenda and Kathy have responded “yes” to God through their friendship: Brenda saying yes to speaking at TEC (Teens Encounter Christ); Kathy inviting Brenda to the Christ Our Life Conference; both saying yes to road trips and service opportunities. Discuss: When have you said “yes” to someone, which led to a friendship with him or her?

Kathy says, “It’s remarkable how our yes’s have led us to where we are now.” And then she ponders: “Are we confident, like Mary, that God will give us what we need and lead us in the way we’re asked to serve?” Discuss: Have you ever said “yes” to God, even though you felt ill-equipped? What was your experience? Where did it lead you? Are you open to a spontaneous “YES” to wherever God is calling you to serve? Why?

Brenda spoke to seeing people they serve with “divine” eyes. What do you think she means? Reflect on a time when the Spirit nudged you to serve — make haste to — another. Discuss: What were the circumstances? How did you respond? What did you learn from the experience?

Though Kathy and Brenda can go for quite a while without seeing each other, Kathy reflected: “With our friendship, we can pick up right where we left off and it’s always based on our faith.” Brenda remarked on their friendship as if they are “holding each other in a spiritual and physical embrace.” When “bonded through Christ,” women grow deeper in their faith and friendship, no matter what! Discuss: Do you have friends you rarely see, but when you do, it’s most certainly a visitation? How are your faith-based friendships different from other types of friendship?

Brenda invites Kathy, “Let’s end in prayer.” Discuss: Do you pray with your friends? Spontaneously or rote? If not, why not?

Challenge:

Say YES! Don’t hesitate. Make haste to help a woman in need (a young mom, an elderly woman) in your neighborhood or parish this week through a note of encouragement, a phone call, a meal, a flower, help with a project, a plate of cookies, or an invitation to join a Bible study or women’s group. Get involved!

Closing Prayer:

“Lord, give me a spirit of spontaneity. Imprint the Shema on my heart. Teach me to be docile to your will, to be quick to obey your word, and to offer a spontaneous ‘yes’ to the moment I hear you speaking to me. I bow my will to your will. May this offering pass through the loving hands of your Mother. And may she, in turn, show me how to bear you to the world. For your glory. Amen.” *Gifts of the Visitation*, Bossert, p. 21.

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.