

NewsNotes

March 2019

Greetings from your LDDCW President-

This is an unusual year with the amount of snow we are receiving. As I walked out this morning I reflected on the beauty of the day. It is obviously more beautiful when you don't need to be out in it. The snow I see is so beautifully white – all part of Nature's Wondrous Pageantry.

Thank you to everyone that attended the January Winter Symposium. I know it was a challenge for those of you arriving on Saturday with the new snow. A special thanks to all the presenters for their informative, inspirational presentations.

At the January Full Board meeting, a change for the LDCCW Manual Funds for Nuns definition was approved. Following is the revised definition. (Underline indicates new or added verbiage).

The "Funds for Nuns" program was adopted by the LDCCW for the purpose of financially helping young women who require assistance to reduce outstanding debt which prohibit them from entering a religious order in or outside of the Diocese of Lincoln. Additional assistance to reduce debt may be requested by the motherhouse.

Each PCCW is asked to contribute to this fund. The Spirituality Commission Committee will gather information each fall from the Mother Superior of each of the six Motherhouses operating in the Diocese, and funds will be distributed according to need. If there are no candidates requiring assistance, the funds will be kept in an LDCCW account for use in the future. Donations should be sent to the LDCCW Treasurer, marked for this purpose.

When no entrants are needing funds, the committee will ask that the LDCCW vote on an amount to be given to a requesting Motherhouse(s) for further educational and spiritual needs.

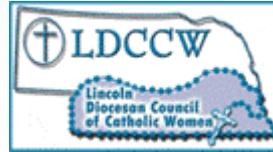
We are quickly approaching the season of Lent. If possible, please plan to attend one of the planned Ash Wednesday/Day of Recollection services planned. See the Spirituality page of these NewsNotes for details.

I was recently privileged to attend the Catholic Social Services 'Celebration of Caring' and the Spirit Catholic Radio Celebration dinner with Father Wade Menezes and Father Larry Richards guest speakers. We in southern Nebraska are so blessed to have these two holy organizations in our midst.

Wishing you a blessed Lent!

Kay Wessel
LDCCW President

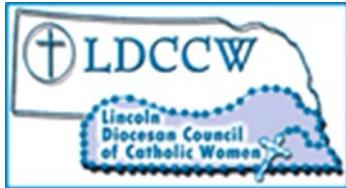
Please pray for favorable weather.
God Bless



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Fr. Thomas Lux—Spiritual Director
Phone 308-995-4950
Email Address—fr.thomas-lux@cdolinc.net

Dear Newsnotes Readers:

Thank you to Kay and all for your patience with my health. I was absent from the last Newsnotes because of back surgery in June. I missed the Winter Board Meetings and Symposium due to Influenza A. In between, I had two ankles and a knee surgery to release peroneal nerves in my tarsal tunnels and at the head of my right tibia. The medial wounds on both ankles have been unusually slow in healing but the other five incisions have healed on time. The back still has some pain and some residual cramping in my legs. I still have some numbness in both feet and my right leg and foot are weak.

I thank my neighbor priests who prayed with me and anointed me before surgeries. Thank you to all who have lifted my health up in prayer. **Thank you God** for the priests who were able to stay with me after surgery in my recovery times. Thank you to the retired nurses and others in my parish who helped me to and from surgery and dressing wounds. Thank you to those who provided a meal train that ensured I did not wither away to nothing! Thank you to the people of God for the health care provided through the health insurance that my parishes pay for and for which I am grateful and blessed. Thank you to the Phelps Memorial Health Center and surgeons and nurses and other staff for their fine care and going over and beyond in providing my back care. Thank you to New West in Kearney & Holdrege and the Heartland Surgery Center in Kearney for my ankles and knee surgery and after care and therapy.

Lent starts late this year as **Easter** is not until April 21. Yet, March 6 will be here before we know it. This year seems to be going fast. One of our ASCS teachers was saying if she plans ahead what she will do for Lent it works much better than if she waits to decide on Ash Wednesday. Sounds like good advice for all of us. Another teacher was speaking about doing something for Lent rather than just giving something up. The Church has a long tradition of pointing us toward three areas for Lenten practices: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving. They all three go together and help each other. I am endeavoring Exodus 90, designed for men, and have benefited from the reflections on the Book of Exodus that go along with it. I might suggest you read Exodus on a daily basis during Lent. Not that you must read the entire book but I think a slow and reflective reading can be very beneficial.

Unbound Ministry in our diocese is reaching out across the diocese. There will be Friday-Saturday conferences in Nebraska City and McCook this spring. Matt Simmons from our diocese's Office for Evangelization has demonstrated a real heart for Jesus and the power of the Gospel in the few talks I have been blessed to hear over the past few months. I look forward to learning more about deliverance ministry and encourage you to do so as well.

Our diocesan schools have been blessed with a new opportunity known as the **Good Shepherd Scholarship** which provides tuition assistance for families with financial need. It is a learning process for those in our schools- both the administrators and the families. This will be an opportunity for those who want to support education for those in need and those who want to support private education, and in particular Catholic education. More information is available at www.goodshepherdscholarship.com.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the **Spring Board meetings**. Plan to attend and to bring a friend or more than one.

May God bless all of us.

Up Coming Events

Mark your Calendars

March NCCW Lenten Calendar on nccw.org

March 6 – Ash Wednesday Day of Recollection, Good Counsel Retreat House, Waverly

March 6 – 40 Days for Life begins – 40daysforlife.com

March 8 – Day of Recollection at St. Mary's in Sutton

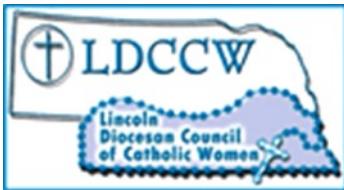
March 14 – 'Pie with Pi Alpha Chi' fundraiser for St. Gianna's

March 27 – Catholics at the Capitol

March 29-31 – Worldwide Marriage Encounter – Hastings – contact Pat/Janelle Benton 308-940-1105

April 13 – LDCCW Full Board Meeting at St. Mary's, Aurora

April 22 – NCCW Our Lady of Good Counsel Application Due



Fr. Thomas McGuire, Assistant Spiritual Advisor
Phone No. 402-759-1392
Email address: frthomasmcguire@yahoo.com

TO PRIESTS: An Editorial about Education Myths

I was shown an article in the February 11, 2019 Lincoln Journal. It was called, “Debunking the education myths,” by John Rosemond, a mental health professional (psychologist, I think) who’s been writing about families with children for quite a few years. He stated several things that people consider valid and called each one a myth. He went on to explain the facts that his experience has shown him.

I knew one was a myth, although many people keep stating it as a fact. That myth is: “More money would improve student achievement.” It doesn’t take long to figure out that’s not true..

In explaining this is a myth, Mr. Rosemond points to Catholic schools: “As a category, Catholic schools have the best record when it comes to student achievement, including students who represent the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum... [they] spend considerably less per student than do public schools... do not suffer administrative bloat...[and] Classroom discipline in most Catholic schools is head-and-shoulders above the ever-deteriorating situation in most public schools.”

These are good points. So, why are some Catholic schools barely surviving financially, at least around here? The schools (or parents who send their children there) get almost no State aid to help pay for the education of their children. Some aid may pay for a service or two that children receive; and there is a program to help pay for certain textbooks, I think. But there is no State aid helping to pay the bulk of expenses of the education of the children; and their parents pay taxes, as far as I am aware. Still, as Mr. Rosemond points out, Catholic schools have the best record when it comes to student achievement. It’s not the money, it’s something else – or rather Someone else Who creates a positive learning climate.

For the rest, I’ll just list what John Rosemond calls myths. In the article he says why.

- Smaller classrooms promote better learning (*has to do with teacher-student ratio*)
- Encouraging parents to oversee and help with homework positively impacts student achievement
- Social science research has been a boon to public education
- Teaching academics before first grade boosts overall achievement
- I thought these were true but Mr. Rosemond has solid reasons for calling them myths.

If you want to read his reasons, go to <https://journalstar.com> and on the homepage click on the term **E-edition** on the blue tool bar at the top. Then put your cursor in the SEARCH space and type debunking education myths AND enter the date February 11, 2019 in both the From and the To date range boxes. The correct article will show up – it was the only one appearing when I did this.

Now, to read it pay \$0.99 for the first month’s subscription. If want it subsidized, you may have to contact your congressman about that. Good luck with that.

Fr. Thomas McGuire, Assistant Advisor of LDCCW

Ash Wednesday for Lincoln/WAVERLY area at Our Lady of Good Counsel Retreat Center, Wednesday, March 6, 2019. Fr. Nicholas Kipper, Retreat Master 9:00-9:45 a.m. Registration for both men and women; 9:45 Divine Mercy Chaplet; 10:00 First Conference; 11:00 Stations of the Cross; 11:30 Benediction; 11:30-12:15 Confessions; 11:30-12:30 Lunch; 12:30 Close Benediction; 12:45 Rosary; 1:00 Second Conference; 2:00 Mass & Ashes; 3:00 p.m. Close of Day COST \$10.00 & Bring Sack Lunch Contact person: Caroline Helget chelget@gmail.com #402-419-0460 Watch for further details in the Register, parish bulletins; and weather information.

The Day of Recollection for the Hastings Deanery--NOTICE CHANGE OF VENUE--will be FRIDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2019, IN SUTTON, at St. Mary's Catholic Church and Hall, 312 South Saunders. Registration will be from 9:00 to 9:30 A.M. Please park on the east side of the church and enter the hall on the east side. Also, the cost is \$5.00 and a meatless salad to share. Fr. Thomas Schultes will be Retreat Master. All men and women are welcome. Conferences, Confession, Divine Mercy Chaplet, Rosary, Mass & Ashes at 11:15 a.m. Salad luncheon is followed by afternoon Stations of the Cross, time for prayer and other scheduled events. Any questions you may contact Jennifer Johnson #402-469-4871, and leave a message, or jjohnson@spsne.org Watch for further details in the Register, parish bulletins, and weather information.

A couple new announcements for the Spirituality Commission: A revised definition of FUNDS FOR NUNS will now include extra assistance to help with outstanding debt in further education and spiritual support, as well as include our Diocesan young women who desire to join a Motherhouse in another area. One Motherhouse we have “adopted” is the Pink Sisters, to add to our five, now making it six!

Michele Chambers, Diocesan Office of Religious Education, has for years been in charge of the RELIGIOUS AWARDS FOR GIRLS. She manages all girls who sign up, orders books and medals & badges, and coordinates the Awards Ceremony at the Cathedral of the Risen Christ in spring each year. This program is open to Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, 4-H members, Junior CDA, any other groups, and individual girls who wish to earn a reward for Faith Recognition. There are four levels of activities and manuals: “The Family of God” is for 2nd or 3rd Grade; “I Live My Faith” for 9-11 year olds; “Mary, the First Disciple” for teenage years; “The Spirit Alive” is for Grades 9-12, ages 15 and older. (NOTE: Boy Scouts and other boys/teens programs are a separate set of studies, badges, and Awards Ceremony at the Cathedral—though some of the above listed books are for Campfire Boys, also.) THE PROGRAM takes several months, or more to complete, throughout the school year so plan to inquire about Religious Awards for Girls by contacting Michele at the John XXIII Center, Ph. 402-473-0625, michele-chambers@cdolinc.net for next year. Each year’s ceremony is held in spring—watch the Register for it!

HAVE A PROSPEROUS LENT. Ask our Blessed Mother, Mary, to intercede to Her Son for you and your family. Scripture quotes Jesus saying, “No one comes to the Father, but through Me.” And we learn the phrase “To Jesus through Mary”—so what better way of reaching up to God but through Mary, who with the Holy Spirit as spouse, has powers beyond all the angels and saints. Consecrate yourself to her.

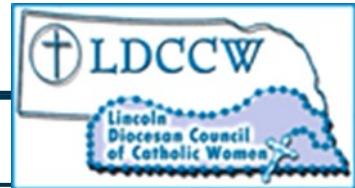
As we begin the various tasks of printing the Hispanic version of “The Parent Educator” book that goes to Baptized families in our Diocese, we ask for your prayers and sincere generous support to get this volume done and on its way. The Parent Educator has been written in Spanish for one year, and has had some cultural additions put in, to make the book special to the families of children from age 0-6 years old, as a catechism in the home. Thank you for your consideration, and be as generous as you can. Ellen

Quote of the month:

‘The words of Jesus “Love one another as I have loved you” must be not only a light for us but a flame that consumes the self in us. Love, in order to survive, must be nourished by sacrifices, especially sacrifice of self.’

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Spirituality Commission – Ellen Jirovsky
402-643-4802, cell 402-705-2612
ellenjirovsky@outlook.com



Pax Liason - Crystal Vavra

Hello everyone!

I will start off with the happenings at the winter symposium, which I enjoyed the two days of spiritual growth and the realization that Nebraska is not immune to human trafficking. Kay Wessel did a great job of organizing the symposium. Included in the meeting's agenda, were guest speakers representing Pi Alpha Chi. They were past president, Kaitlyn Taylor, new president, Megan Copsey, past liaison Leah Heyen, and new liaison, Kathryn Fortenberry. The ladies gave a presentation about the sorority and stayed to help members make valentine gifts for St. Gianna's. It is such a pleasure to listen and visit with these young ladies. We also held a raffle with proceeds going to the Pi Alpha Chi scholarships. Total amount received was \$289. One of the raffle items was a lantern with candle and greenery and the other was homemade soaps, lotion and miscellaneous goodies. Thank you everyone who contributed to this. It is greatly appreciated!!

The Pi Alpha Chi had their initiation and officer transition on Saturday, January 19. Say a special prayer for the new board members for their continued holiness, leadership and service to others for their upcoming term.

There is a new schedule for the Sisterhood Holy Hour/Mass. It is held on Tuesdays at the Newman Center/St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church with holy hour beginning at 4:30 p.m. followed by mass at 5:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to join them.

Mark your calendar for Thursday, March 14, for the spring philanthropy. It will be "Pie with Pi Chi!" with proceeds going to either St. Gianna's Women's Home or Project Rachel.
Stay warm and Blessings to all,

Crystal Vavra
LDCCW/PAX Liaison

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY - APRIL 28, 2019

Divine Mercy - Jeanette Stengel

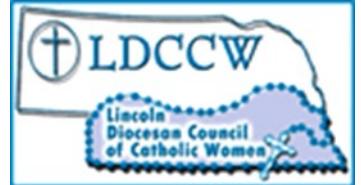
Divine Mercy is the heart of the Gospel. Jesus said, "My Heart overflows with great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners...It is for them that the Blood and Water flowed from My Heart as from a fount overflowing with mercy. For them I dwell in the tabernacle as King of Mercy. (Diary, 367)

One of the most important spiritual works of mercy that we can do is to pray for the sick and dying, as there are many promises associated with recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet for them.

One of the best means of assisting the dying is the one that Jesus revealed to St. Faustina and insisted that she use it often. Jesus said: My daughter, encourage souls to say the chaplet which I have given to you. It pleases Me to grant everything they ask of Me by saying the chaplet....Write that when they say this chaplet in the presence of the dying, I will stand between My Father and the dying person, not as the just Judge , but as the merciful Savior (Diary, 1541).

Please offer to assist your priest with a Divine Mercy Celebration in your parish. Make certain there are ample Divine Mercy pamphlets and M17 booklets. Thank you and God bless.

Service Commission—**Kathy Rentschler**
krentscher21@gmail.com
8200 S. 91st Street Lincoln, NE 68526
402-429-4706



Well, the last time I wrote it was 90 degrees in the summertime. Now the wind has turned cool, out of the north. The rain has stopped for a while. I read that we may see snow soon. The changing of the seasons is one of God's miracles of life. My task is to share with you the aspects of the Service Commission. The Service Commission promotes Works of Mercy for others, allowing us to share in God's plan. The purpose is to respond with Gospel values to the needs of the Church and society in this modern world. Responding with Gospel values is accomplished in several areas.

Community Service: projects such as participating in local Bloodmobiles, Meals on Wheels and volunteering at the local Nursing homes, visiting the sick, feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty are Corporal works of mercy. By volunteering, we can assist in their mission of service.

Catholic Relief Services have several programs sponsored overseas to address specific needs of poor women and children universally such as Help-a-Child, Water for Life, Madonna Plan and the Refugee Women Emergency Fund. Donations can be sent to NCCW, 200 N Glebe Rd, Suite 725, Arlington, VA 22203. The check memo line needs to show which program you wish your donations to go toward. Donations will assist the mission of service.

Family Ministry shares resources, activities and upcoming events related to the family. Information about these programs can be obtained by contacting the Lincoln Diocesan Family Life Office; phone 402 473-0620. Participating in these programs allows us to share in their mission of service.

Healing Hearts is a program to assist those who are grieving death or divorce in the family. Comforting the sorrowful is important to those who have lost someone close to them. Information regarding Healing Hearts can be obtained from the Lincoln Diocesan Family Life Office, phone 402-473-0620. Again, sharing in people's grief is a way to share the mission of service.

Making and Distributing of Rosaries involves distributing rosaries to the missions and to those who are in need. If you know of a need you can contact Barb Sullivan-phone-402-797-7106 or email: js70837@windstream.net. Praying for the Living and the Dead is a spiritual work of mercy which is another way to achieve the mission of service.

Natural Family Planning is promoted and supported by the Lincoln Diocesan Family Life office. You can contact Michelle Chambers at the Family Life Office, phone 402-473-0630. Learning the programs and being involved by teaching the programs are ways to achieve the mission of service.

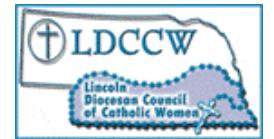
As I write this we are in the middle of collecting diapers for the Diaper drive. These will be delivered to the various agencies near your areas. The Diaper Drive will go thru October 31. You can help by donating and or picking up the diapers and delivering to local representatives. You can reach out to your local PCCW to see what help they need. Thank you for all that you do to serve others. It really is a great way to share in God's love.

Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love..... St.Teresa of Calcutta

Thank You,
Kathy Rentschler

Pope's Intentions for March

Recognition of the Right of Christian Communities. That Christian communities, especially those who are persecuted, feel that they are close to Christ and have their rights respected.



Why join the NCCW?

Your council works hard to raise funds but what if you could do more? You have heard the NCCW has the information needed to make your council grow. Education is key in everything we do and it is no different with the NCCW. I have joined a beekeeping group for women on Facebook. It helps to surround myself with like minded people who can support and help answer my questions. Recently, we received the diagnosis that my brother-in-law is now on a journey of Alzheimer's. I found another group that is for individuals who are on the same journey. The information has benefitted my husband and myself. We know we are not alone on this journey. As I return to the same question, why join the NCCW? As a sister in Christ and trying to work your way through the mounds of information you receive in the meetings, you will find NCCW is an efficient way to sort through the clutter. You can join as an individual for \$50 and work with your council is an easy way to share information. Please go to www.nccw.org and click on membership. I have highlighted "Become an individual or supporting member" follow the steps and you are off to learning and knowing more about the NCCW.



Be the Voice of Catholic Women

[Become an individual or supporting member!](#)

[JOIN NOW >](#)

Access the affiliate membership form here!

[JOIN NOW >](#)

Omaha Province Director Report– Susan Johnson

As your Omaha Province Director, I attended the NCCW Board of Directors meeting January 19-20, 2019 at Washington, DC. The Board meeting included prayer services, Masses, reports from officers, Committees, Associates of NCCW and UN/WUWCO, Commissions and an NCCW Office report. The Commissions spent a day with development of work previously undertaken through emails and monthly conference calls. I serve on the Spirituality, Liturgy and Purse Auction Committees. Prior to the board meeting, I, along with NCCW Board Members who arrived early, took part in Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and the March for Life. I urge you to send representatives from the arch/diocese, deaneries and parishes to the 2019 NCCW Convention which is in Atlanta, GA August 21-24. Much information can be brought back to the A/DCCW, Deaneries/Subdivisions, and CCW groups! Attending convention is also a wonderful spiritual experience where you can network with many ladies not from all over the US. Early Bird Registration (\$300) is March 1-June 1. Register at <https://www.nccw.org>.

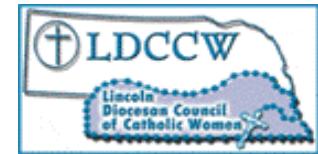
We strive to build the number of NCCW affiliates and individual members to keep NCCW vibrant. Being affiliated with NCCW, we are a part of a national organization that speaks for our Catholic values and supports, empowers and educates all Catholic women in spirituality, leadership and service.

Like us on Facebook at NCCW/Omaha Province, Grand Island DCCW, OACCW, Lincoln Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, and National Council of Catholic Women and visit the websites of <https://www.nccw.org>, www.gidccw.org, www.lincolndiocese.org. –Susan Johnson, Omaha Province Director 2018-2020

April 1-May 1, 2019 NCCW voting for President-Elect, Secretary, and Nominating Committee. NCCW will send a link to all individual members and current presidents of affiliates who have provided an email address. Other members will receive a ballot in the mail. Candidates' statements, complete resumes, and photos are posted on the NCCW website. Voting eligibility requires an individual member to be current in her dues, and affiliate presidents (receiving 2 votes) must be listed on the record 60 days prior to the electronic voting.

During 2018, NCCW forwarded CRS donations of \$41,777.62 for Water for Life, Refugee Women Emergency Fund, Madonna Plan, Help-a-Child Fund and General Fund.

Visit nccw.org to find out about NCCW's Human Trafficking Program and the many resources available through NCCW



The 2019 Nebraska Legislature is in session as of January 9. The 2018 Speaker of the Legislature has been reelected for another session. In all, there are 24 new members representing their districts around the State.

Some of the top legislative priorities are relief of property tax and how to fund the expanded Medicaid which was voted in by the voters in the 2018 election. It is expected that this year, the expanded Medicaid will cost the State about \$19 million dollars and will escalate each year.

Bills already introduced in Legislature:

Change terminology relating to shaken baby syndrome

Adopt the Medical Cannabis Act

Require teacher and school staff to receive training on behavioral and mental health.

Change penalties for certain felonies committed by persons under nineteen years of age.

Change provisions relating to vapor products.

Prohibit conversion therapy.

Define offense of child abuse to include subjecting a child to conversion therapy.

Change provisions relating to eligibility for SNAP. (previously called Food Stamp Program)

Prohibit bringing a cell phone into a detention facility.

Change procedures for determining competency to stand trial.

Provide for adoption by two adults.

Provide for posting by public schools of a toll-free number set up to report child abuse or neglect.

Updates when bills are brought to the floor for discussion.

Governor Ricketts State of the State Address included the following:

Hold spending 3.1 %. A record \$1.1 Billion in K-12 education spending and \$19 million to the Medicaid Expansion

Add \$51 million to state's Property Tax credit Fund. Property Taxes have risen over 57% in the past 10 years.

Proposal to create 2100 college scholarships, geared toward students studying in high-demand fields. Adding \$1.25 million to the Developing Youth Talent Initiative.

Reduce overcrowding of prisons.

Modernization efforts to improve access to and efficiency of the courts' online case management system.

FROM WASHINGTON

Sen. Ben Sasse has won a significant win for religious liberty when he offered a very basic resolution to the questions asked by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Brian Buescher, currently nominated by Pres. Trump to take the place of a retiring federal judge has been questioned by the above named committee asking him if he plans to 'retire from the Knights of Columbus' if his nomination is confirmed to "avoid the appearance of bias". Another member of the committee suggested that the KC's were an extremist organization.

Sasse wanted Senators to unanimously reaffirm their oath of office to a Constitution that reaffirms religious liberty and condemns religious tests for federal offices. The Senate unanimously adopted the resolution, rebuking recent anti-Catholic lines of questioning from Judiciary Committee members.

Sasse also re-introduced the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act

This bill amends the federal criminal code to require any health care practitioner who is present when a child is born alive following an abortion or attempted abortion to: (1) exercise the same degree of care as reasonably provided to any other child born alive at the same gestational age, and (2) ensure that such child is immediately admitted to a hospital. The term "born alive" means the complete expulsion or extraction from his or her mother, at any stage of development, who after such expulsion or extraction breathes or has a beating heart, pulsation of the umbilical cord, or definite movement of voluntary muscles, regardless of whether the umbilical cord has been cut.

THE WALL

Throughout history, we have heard about "the wall". In biblical times it was a way to establish boundaries so that people could dwell with their own kind, worship together and in general, have the same beliefs and customs. Their limited educational and social experiences required this.

In reading Isaiah 22, it speaks of tearing down houses to build the wall around Jerusalem. In 1 Kings, Solomon levied forced labor to build a wall. In the settling of the western part of our country, stockades were built around settlements, especially army forts for protection from Indians and other enemies which were then unidentified.

History talks about the Berlin Wall, built in 1961 to keep the Communist nations apart from westerners. In 1989, President Reagan encouraged Gorbachev to "Tear down that wall" which occurred shortly thereafter.

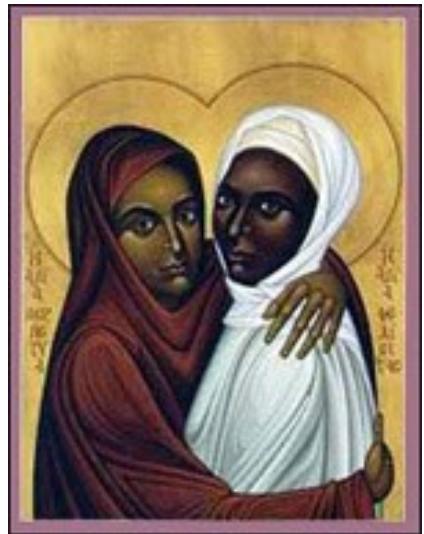
We are once again in a political battle over 'the wall'. Our politicians are asking for billions to establish a firm and sealed entrance to our country from the South.

Men women and children, south of the US border are migrating northward to find a better way of life; to escape oppression of various kinds in their respective homelands. Our own ancestors migrated from England seeking freedom of religion and the stern rule of kings and queens. Some came from Ireland, Germany, and all over Europe to live in freedom and peace in a new nation conceived with the thought of liberty and justice for all.

As we ponder this situation, we feel empathy and compassion for those migrants who have only the clothes on their backs and a few meager possessions that were not too heavy to carry the many miles they would have to walk. But on the other hand, we wonder about the resources of our nation to provide jobs, health care, education and housing for thousands of these people.

Saints of the Month – Saints Perpetua and Felicity

Perpetua's answer was simple and clear. Pointing to a water jug, she asked her father, "See that pot lying there? Can you call it by any other name than what it is?" Her father answered, "Of course not." Perpetua responded, "Neither can I call myself by any other name than what I am -- a Christian." This answer upset her father and he attacked her. Perpetua reports that after that incident she was glad to be separated from him for a few days -- even though that separation was the result of her arrest and imprisonment. Perpetua was arrested with four other catechumens, including two slaves, Felicity and Revocatus, and Saturninus and Secundulus. Their instructor in the faith, Saturus, chose to share their punishment and was also imprisoned. Perpetua was baptized before taken to prison. She was known for her gift of "the Lord's speech" and receiving messages from God. She tells us that at the time of her baptism she was told to pray for nothing but endurance in the face of her trials. The prison was so crowded with people that the heat was suffocating. There was no light anywhere and Perpetua "had never known such darkness." The soldiers who arrested and guarded them pushed and shoved them without any concern. Perpetua had no trouble admitting she was very afraid, but during all this horror, her most excruciating pain came from being separated from her baby.



The young slave, Felicity was even worse off, for Felicity suffered the stifling heat, overcrowding, and rough handling while being eight months pregnant. Two deacons who ministered to the prisoners paid the guards to place the martyrs in a better part of the prison. There, her mother and brother were able to visit Perpetua and bring her baby to her

The officers of the prison began to recognize the power of the Christians and the strength and leadership of Perpetua. In some cases, this helped the Christians: the warden let them have visitors -- and later became a believer. But in other cases, it caused superstitious terror, as when one officer refused to let them get cleaned up on the day they were going to die for fear they'd try some sort of spell. Perpetua immediately spoke up, "We're supposed to die in honor of Ceasar's birthday. Wouldn't it look better for you if we looked better?" The officer blushed with shame at her reproach and started to treat them better. There was a feast the day before the games, so that the crowd could see the martyrs and make fun of them. But the martyrs turned this all around by laughing at the crowd for not being Christians and exhorting them to follow their example. The four new Christians and their teacher went to the arena (the fifth, Secundulus, had died in prison) with joy and calm. Perpetua in usual high spirits met the eyes of everyone along the way. We are told she walked with "shining steps as the true wife of Christ, the darling of God." When those at the arena tried to force Perpetua and the rest to dress in robes dedicated to their gods, Perpetua challenged her executioners. "We came to die out of our own free will so we wouldn't lose our freedom to worship our God. We gave you our lives so that we wouldn't have to worship your gods." She and the others were allowed to keep their clothes. The men were attacked by bears, leopards, and wild boars. The women were stripped to face a rabid heifer. The two were thrown out and attacked, but the crowd cried out they had had enough. The women were removed and clothed again. Perpetua and Felicity were thrown back into the arena to face the gladiators. Perpetua called out to her brother and other Christians, "Stand fast in the faith, and love one another. Do not let our sufferings be a stumbling block to you." Perpetua and Felicity stood side by side and were killed by sword at Carthage in the Roman province of Africa.

Sts. Perpetua and Felicity are the patron saints of mothers, expectant mothers, ranchers and butchers. Their feast day is celebrated on March 7.

On Ash Wednesday, millions of Catholics around the world engage in the ancient ritual known as "the imposition of ashes." This service marks the beginning of Lent, the forty-day period, not counting Sundays, between Ash Wednesday and Easter. The practice of using ashes as a sign of penitence goes back to the Hebrew people (Jon. 3:6; Mt. 11:21). Christian use of the ashes goes back to the 2nd century, and it was widely practiced by the 5th century. Ash Wednesday sets the believer on a sobering time of self-examination and repentance, to wait upon and prepare for the renewal given by God's Spirit in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Saying No

During Lent we Catholics are called to say 'no' to any habit that comes between God and ourselves. It might be an unhealthy physical habit: unhealthy eating patterns, drinking, drug abuse. It might be an unhealthy spiritual diet: the habit of vicious gossip, of jealousy of others' accomplishments, or of consistently seeing the worst in people and situations. It might be indifference to the condition of the homeless and the lonely in our community. It might be the habit of judging and categorizing others to maintain our sense of superiority. It might be the tendency to see our spiritual lives as limited to one hour of worship on Sundays. It might be the habit of expecting unbroken peace and inward joy without putting in the time to cultivate our prayer relationship with God. It might be the habit of facing life's challenges without factoring the presence of God into the equation.

Saying Yes

When we answer Christ's call to say 'no' to destructive practices, energy is left to say 'yes' to positive disciplines. We can fill the space and time left by our fasting with some positive disciplines to help us respond to God's love more intentionally. John Wesley called them the means of grace: prayer, searching the scriptures, fasting, acts of kindness aimed at justice, and regular attendance at Mass, where we participate in the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion and meet God as the scriptures are read and proclaimed.

Just as there are lots of things we may need to say 'no' to during Lent, so there are many opportunities to say 'yes'. I will see the good points of a troublesome family member. I will show more affection to my spouse. I will keep in better touch with my extended family. I will improve my understanding of issues of justice for the poor. In adopting these positive disciplines, even though they may be taxing for us, we find new life. As the prophet Isaiah says "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly" (Is. 58:8).

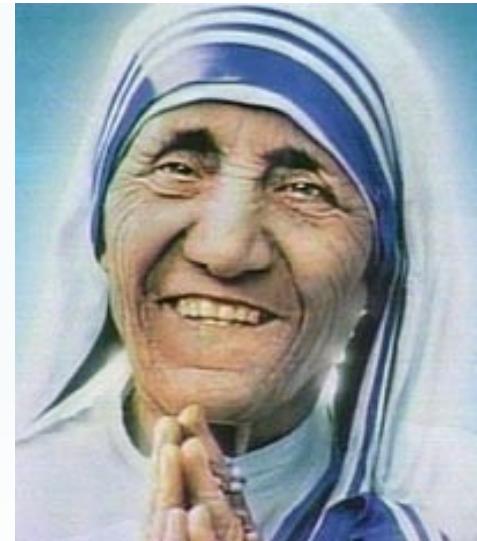


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Kay Wessel
3600 W. Wittstruck Road
Martell NE 68404