Blessed are the meek ...

By Beverly (Rosalita) Hindson, IHM

The Biblical definition of meekness is strength under control. Mary was a model of meekness, strong when she had no control over circumstances. Consider the Annunciation; nine months pregnant and traveling to Bethlehem over a desert; the flight into Egypt; Jesus in the Temple; the road to Calvary; and the Crucifixion. The same can be said for Joseph and the challenges he faced. Mary’s loving response to circumstances does not mean that she didn’t question — “How can this be? Why have you done this to us?” Yet Luke reminds us that “she pondered these things in her heart.”

Meekness presented itself in my ministry with the children with cancer at Children’s Hospital of Michigan. One of the most difficult things is feeling that one has no control over their life. In children, I call meekness resilience. Children had no control over their treatment, yet by allowing them to give voice to their anger, frustration and confusion; by allowing a trusted adult to share their anguish; and by helping them to believe they had the power within, that they could be in control by allowing choices and hearing them out gave them the measure of control so vital to them. I believe this ministry was God in me, meeting God in them — incredibly powerful.

Dylan was 4 when I met him, flailing in his dad’s arms. I walked up to him, distracting him to allow me to speak to him, telling him my name and that I could be his friend.

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Inheriting the land

By Judy (John Vincent) Coyle, IHM

“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the land.”
Who “inherits the land” is a major question in South Africa at present. The call of redress for generations of people who were dispossessed of their land through colonization, forced removals and group areas may be the issue on which the present government rises or falls.

It is a very complex question. Without ownership, no development can take place, no business or farming furthered, no loans granted, no security assured. But sustaining the current, overwhelmingly white ownership means that the majority of South Africans remain “foreigners” on their own land. To what extent will the present private owners (mostly white farmers) be compensated, if at all? The threat of land grabs and bloodshed that shook Zimbabwe just a few decades ago casts a shadow over South Africa as well.

If any quality of “meek” can be seen here, it might be in those land owners who have taken the initiative to share their land or their business, to develop and train its “rightful owners” in its production and development, so that the “inheritance of the Earth” might be set aright.

Ready and open

By Marianne Gaynor, IHM
IHM Leadership Council

“Blessed are the meek...” In the translation from the Aramaic: “Ripe are those who soften what is rigid inside and out; they shall be open to receive strength and power – their natural inheritance from God.”

Meek does not connote “milquetoast.” The “meek” and “ripe” are those who stand ready and open to the possibilities that await them because of God’s goodness toward them. They inherit the Earth; they inherit Easter joy. It is not something they earned but something that is inherited, passed from one generation to another.

As you move through this edition of ihmpact, be with those who are named as meek and ripe and stand ready and open for the possibilities of life that flood around and through them and at the same time are elusive. How do you stand ready and open in your story?
… Barbara O’Neill, IHM, who professed final vows with the Monroe IHM Sisters on Jan. 13. The ceremony took place in the IHM Motherhouse Chapel.

Sister Barbara is originally from Philadelphia and was an Immaculata (Pa.) IHM Sister for 17 years. She holds a bachelor’s degree from Immaculata College, a master’s degree from LaSalle University and has taken post-graduate classes in liturgical theology at Boston College. She was a classroom teacher for more than 20 years and has served as a director of liturgy at several parishes, in the Philadelphia area and in the Kansas City, Mo., diocese. She was also appointed director of diaconate formation for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. Sister Barbara currently serves the National Association of Pastoral Musicians as a liturgical consultant and is chair of the committee Musicians Serving Religious Communities.

… Barbara Jennings and Bernadette Costello, both of Monroe, who recently made their commitment as IHM Associates. Both associate ceremonies took place in the IHM Motherhouse Chapel. Donna Marie Schroeder, IHM, served as Barbara’s vowed companion on the journey of preparation to become an IHM Associate. Bernadette’s companion was James Marian Sarchet, IHM.

Barbara is a graduate of St. Mary Academy. She ministered at St. Mary Preschool, St. Joseph Preschool and Elementary School, both in Monroe; the St. Joseph Youth Group; with those who experienced domestic violence; and at a parent aid program. She currently volunteers in Monroe — at Paula’s House, Oaks of Righteousness and with the IHM Sisters. Bernadette attended Oakland University and is retired from the field of research and development. She currently ministers as a volunteer in the IHM Motherhouse Library and sings in the IHM choir.
“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land” (Matthew 5:5) or also translated as “Blessed are the lowly; they shall inherit the Earth.” Ministering in Flint since 1970, I have seen the crest of the boom times of 80,000 General Motors jobs, the highest per capita wages in the United States, a population of 200,000, seemingly unlimited people power and economic power.

I now contemplate that Beatitude with our meekness and lowliness in a city of 8,000 General Motors jobs; a population of under 100,000; a national leader in poverty (especially for women and children); and one of the highest rates of unemployment in the country. Blessed are the meek; they shall inherit the land — a polluted land with polluted air and water. The wealthy, the powerful, and the white keep saying, “know your place. We will call the shots! You deserve no voice. Your protests are wrong; only we, the strong, know best.”

It is as if I found myself in the grim dining hall of Oliver Twist. We had become like Oliver, desperately hungry, approaching the master after he and his mates devoured their meager ration of gruel: “Please, sir, I want some more!” His enraged and well-fed master chases him screaming, “You shall hang for this!”

For the past four years, I have heard a desperate chorus of women, children and some fathers cry out, “Our water is foul. It looks bad and tastes worse; it makes us sick.” Well-satisfied and hydrated public officials and business elites tell them it is perfectly safe.

My memory fades to a seriously ill parishioner who can barely breathe. He had been told for years that the green haze of cutting oil vapor in his plant was “perfectly safe to breathe.” I remembered the women who spoke out against an incinerator being built near public housing. I see the women who chained themselves to fence gates to prevent a former mayor’s compost heap from being built right next to HUD housing. I remember...
the Catholic hospital moving from our poor city to a white and affluent area. So much for Matthew 5. After endless hearings at the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and complaints to the Environmental Protection Agency, meek folk on the north end of Flint labeled the hospital, now called “Genesys,” by a different title: “Exodys.”

Reflecting more deeply on “meekness” in the Scriptures, I was astonished to see Moses described as “the meekest man on the face of the Earth.” (Numbers 12:3) Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest.” (Matthew 11:29) The meek rely on their God for strength in battle. Moses’ God says, “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against the slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore, I have come down to rescue them.” (Exodus 3:7-9) Of course, Moses doesn’t yet grasp that he and Miriam and others will do the delivering. Shepherd boy David defeats a giant by meek use of his skills.

If a Beatitude is not lived, it is meaningless. How are we to live this Beatitude? Any religion that is not transformative is worthless. We have witnessed the implications of Moses’ “Yes, God, I will go.” We celebrate Mary’s courageous “Yes” that altered human history forever.

Inspired by people who were my meek “Olivers” who changed the course of many difficult encounters, they confronted powers of darkness degrading the people of Flint. Thank God for the Sit-Down Strikers of the ’30s who helped birth strong unions and the citizens of Flint who forged our Open Housing Act that overcame the racist geographic structures of red-lining. Sister Joanne Chiaverini, IHM, and Ms. Lillian Robinson were two who led the charge of the environmental conflicts of St. Francis Prayer Center of the late 1980s to the present. Sister Joanne was once told by Rev. Bill Clark, SJ, “You are a tigress. Meek and loving ‘til her kittens are threatened.” From meekness came unrelenting strength.

A farmer’s sheep were being evaluated for a disease by a vet. The sheep were scattered in a field and a friend’s dog scampered towards the fence barking wildly. The closer the dog approached, the closer the sheep drew to each other. As the dog reached the fence, they were in a tight-knit herd and all bleated with one voice.

The dog hurried away from such a fearsome force. My friend marveled at the power of collaboration. Unrelenting strength and collaboration are at work in Dr. Mona Hana-Attisha, the heroine of the Flint Water Crisis. Dr. Mona’s book, What the Eyes Don’t See, should be must-reading for anyone dealing with structural racism, environmental justice or immigration. Meekness calls for collaboration, community and communion.

Dr. Mona, with her deep faith; intimate community; vast knowledge of medicine, public health and statistics; and her dream team of many others led to the beginning of vindication and final response to our assaulted children of Flint. There is a mysterious power in humility and meekness. It is to be used to protect the poor.
A recollection

By Moni McIntyre, IHM Associate

During the academic year 1974-1975, Theresa (Marie Franz) Koernke, IHM, picked me up at the Immaculata convent and I rode with her to Marian High School, where we both taught religion. As we traveled, we would, in Terry’s word, discuss the “verities.”

One day we happened to discuss Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth.” When I asked her about that, she said, “Just watch Sister Stella Dolan.” I have never forgotten either Terry’s insight or Stella’s pure and daily demonstration of meekness while we were together at Marian.

The notion of the meek inheriting the land is derived from Psalm 37:11. To be meek is to be slow to anger and gentle with others. Although she died in 2007, those of us who knew and remember Stella Dolan, IHM, can attest to her faith and personification of the essence of meekness.

My sister, Michele McIntyre Fratarcangeli, ’67, and her friends from Immaculata High School, still speak well and beautifully of Sister Stella Marie, a gentle and very successful teacher of English. She has inherited a special place in the hearts of the people of this land.

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In memoriam

To read about the lives and ministries of our remarkable IHM Sisters and Associates, please visit https://bit.ly/2VIN6l1.
Perceiving only the sacred

By Joyce (Rose Anthony) Durosko, IHM

I wonder how many of us have met meek people. I have, and they are distinctive.

I ministered for 10 years with the Wyoming Arapaho and Shoshone Native Americans. These indigenous people live the beatitude of “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the Earth” as a gift of the Spirit in their cosmology and belief systems.

First of all, they do not want to “inherit the Earth” as we imagine. They are the Earth. They live humbly and carry out rituals integrated with all creatures here in the middle Earth, above and below. Instead of incorporating a duality of sacred and profane, indigenous traditions perceive only the sacred.

Evidence that indigenous people in their traditions do not seek to possess Earth and its trappings is the practice of the “giveaway.” Generosity, in the Native American tradition, is a religious and a social act in which property and gifts are ceremonially distributed. Tribal members are taught to give eagerly because they mimic the generosity of the other-than-human life providing daily sustenance.

Spiritual richness, not necessarily Earthly happiness, enables these indigenous people to be called “blessed” and “meek” for they truly have inherited the Earth!


By Richard Louv

Reviewed by Sarah Nash, Coordinator of the IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office.

In 2008, Richard Louv published Last Child in the Woods. He highlighted the increasing disconnect between children and the natural world and coined the term “nature-deficit disorder.” Louv linked children’s alienation from nature to an increase in attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, stress, depression, anxiety and childhood obesity. His 2016 book, Vitamin N, serves as a companion handbook and offers 500 practical suggestions for treating “nature-deficit disorder.”

Louv advocates for balancing our technological experiences with those of the natural world. He writes, “The point isn’t that technology is bad for kids or the rest of us, but that … life-long electronic immersion, without a force to balance it, can drain our ability to pay attention, to think clearly, to be productive and creative.” He even suggests ways technology can enhance our experiences in nature.

Most the actions in Vitamin N are geared toward parents but the book can be useful for grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, care-givers and people without children … anyone who might find themselves or the young people they care about “Vitamin N” deficient.
I asked what was happening; he told me he was angry he had to be there and did not want to have the procedure.

I listened without attempting to take his pain from him. I heard his pain but affirmed that he needed the procedure and asked him if I could accompany him. He agreed. A month later, he returned to have the procedure repeated. He was not fussing this time but rather asked his dad if his friend could be with him.

I met him and accompanied them. On a subsequent visit, he told me he loved me; is there anything better?

Perhaps we could learn from Mary and Dylan that it is our loving response that is at the heart of meekness, to let go and let God.