Blessed are those who mourn

By Beth O’Hara-Fisher
IHM Senior Living
Community Chaplain

“Blessed are those who mourn?” asks the mother of the dead little girl in a bloodied white nightgown. “How do I face barren days without my baby whose body rose from mine like the sun, seven years ago?” she pleads with the pastor who’s mute (in his heart).

He throws rings of words, inflated beach toys to the drowning.

“God’s little angel/she’s at peace now/only the good/mystery/heaven heaven heaven heaven”

On a dark night, I went forth ...

“This can’t be happening, she’s just asleep, little girl get up!” (Talitha cum!) Grandparents lift her from the body, her feet barely touch the floor as she’s carried through the hospital exit, a reversal of hospital birthings, mothers enthroned in wheelchairs with their young in laps.

Without light or guide, save that which burned in my heart …

Fierce as granite, she moves inches daily, weekly, with the scar of death.

To the place where he was awaiting me –
Oh night that guided me
More surely than the light of noonday.

Beth O’Hara-Fisher spent 13 years as chaplain in a pediatric hospital. The poem reflects many of the children’s deaths she witnessed.
We mourn because we loved

My mother had Alzheimer’s Disease. When she was first diagnosed, I became very angry; she didn’t deserve this terrible disease and I didn’t want to lose her. As her health deteriorated, I missed her former self. I longed to call her during Wheel of Fortune so we could solve puzzles together. I wanted to share Snackers at Olga’s with her again.

I directed my anger at God, feeling God unfairly inflicted this disease on my mother. I argued, yelled and turned my back on God. Then one day I met Sister Annette Boyle, IHM, in the waiting room during one of my mom’s doctor’s appointments. We became friends; she taught me how to pray. Sister Annette told me it was okay to be angry; God could take it.

As I prayed, I began to trust God. My anger lifted, making way for mourning. The anguish of mourning took me to the depths of my soul where my memories live. Those memories reminded me of the many blessings I received from my mother and the love we shared. Our love and those blessings will reside in me forever. I believe Jesus knew that we mourn because we loved, and love brings comfort.

Finding hope in mourning

Mourning is the external expression of the grief we experience with loss, both intensely personal and universal. As we honor the many feelings that accompany grief, our hearts can find comfort as we recall the numerous passages in Scripture that assure us that “God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (Ps. 147.3) We are not alone; we can trust in the faithful love of God inviting us to deeper life.

We mourn as communities when we gather at vigils praying for victims of violence, for those whose human rights are denied, for refugees fleeing violence, for the pain endured by our brothers and sisters and our planet itself.

Mourning enables us to move to the level of meaning, to recognize the paschal dynamics of dying and rising and to find the seeds of resurrection and hope. Mourning with others brings comfort and fosters hope and commitment to work together to build communities where all may live in harmony and peace. Our faith assures us that God’s promise of comfort remains and that the seeds of resurrection and new life will appear.

By Claudia Cassidy Bennett
IHM Volunteer

By Patricia McCluskey, IHM, Leadership Council
We celebrate with …

… Sister Jane Aseltyne who professed first vows with the IHM congregation at a liturgy at the IHM Motherhouse in Monroe.

Sister Jane attended Western Michigan University and earned a bachelor’s degree in communication. Prior to her profession, she served as communications manager at A Nun’s Life Ministry. In addition to her love of online ministry, she has a commitment to serving marginalized populations and, in the past, has dedicated her energies to working with at-risk youth and the elderly.

While in first vows, Sister Jane will pursue theological studies at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago. While attending CTU, she will participate in Together, a cohort-based, residential theology program for religious sisters and brothers in temporary vows and for newly final-professed who are pursuing advanced degrees at CTU.

… Sister Diane Sue Brown who professed final vows with the IHM Sisters. Her profession took place in the Sacred Heart Chapel on the campus of Marygrove College, her place of ministry since 2007 and where she currently serves as the Chair of Education.

Sister Diane converted to Catholicism in 2011, becoming a member of St. John Neumann Parish in Canton, Mich. She became an IHM Candidate in 2012 and a Novice in 2014. She pursued Scripture and theology courses at University of Detroit Mercy and Marygrove College during those years and professed her first vows in the IHM Chapel in Monroe in 2016.

When asked why she made the decision to respond to this calling, Sister Diane replied, “Fortunately, I have had the opportunity throughout my life to do God’s work. Now I am able to actualize that relationship by professing final vows. This is just right.”

She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in education and a Master of Science degree in reading education, both from Indiana University. She also earned her PhD in education curriculum, reading and technology from Oklahoma State University. Always creative and inventive, Sister Diane continues pursue her passion and artistic talent on the potter’s wheel.

… Janice Mignano, of Temperance, Mich., who celebrated her commitment as an IHM Associate. The ceremony took place in the IHM Motherhouse Chapel. Margaret (Peggy) Schmidt, IHM, served as her vowed companion. Ms. Mignano serves as a Eucharistic minister at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church in Temperance and distributes the Eucharist to residents at Aspen Grove in Lambertville and to patients at ProMedica/Toledo Hospital. She also ministers as a caseworker for her local St. Vincent de Paul Society, making weekly home visits to the Society’s clients, and volunteers at IHM Senior Living Community. During the winter months, she is an Eucharistic minister at Our Lady of Grace, Palm Bay, Fla., and distributes Communion to the homebound and to patients at Palm Bay Hospital.

When maintaining their own lifestyles, IHM Associates choose to covenant with the Monroe IHM Sisters for a specific and renewable period of time, focusing on prayer, community and ministry.
I am blessed to belong to a group of women who have been friends since first grade in 1949. After grade school, we enrolled in three different high schools, but we formed a club that met every Thursday during our high school years and stayed in close touch through college and careers.

After we had settled in our various careers and lives, we started meeting again once a month. It has always been full of laughter and tears and deep tenderness.

A couple years ago, at a high school reunion, a woman we went to school with came over to our table and shared with us that her daughter-in-law was in hospice and her husband was suffering the last stages of a debilitating disease. She asked for prayers, and of course we promised to give them.

Sometime later, she met a member of our group in the grocery store and shared that her daughter-in-law had died and her husband was declining. The other woman told her about our group and where we met for lunch each month and asked if she would like to join us. She has not missed a gathering since.

Recently, I received word that her husband died. It had been a long hard journey and will continue for some time. But at least she knows she has a time and a place where she can go and be listened to and loved. She knows her tears will be honored, and she will also smile and laugh.

What I have come to know is that mourning and grief can only be healed in relationship. We need others to hear our
story and to hold our tears. We need to see our reflection in their eyes. We need to know Eucharist in breaking bread, toasting wine, listening, crying, laughing. It is in relationships that we gather the strength to walk the grief we experience and allow our life to take on new designs.

After the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to his friends as they gathered in community: the disciples gathered in the locked room, the two on the road to Emmaus, the disciples in the boat trying in vain to catch fish.

There is a message here. Jesus is asking us to comfort each other in the breaking of the bread. He is showing us how to embrace mourning by staying connected in community. The true comfort is knowing that you belong to a group who will love you through any loss you experience.

I know that I have more than one of these groups. And I know that I have these groups because of the gift of faith that has given me the confidence to find comfort in relationships that continue to multiply and grow.

I hope, whoever you are, however you find yourself, no matter what you have lost, that you will find comfort in being embraced in the arms of God and a few very good friends. I also hope that when your life is blessed with happiness, you will find room in your heart to compassionately embrace those in need and never give in to the thought that there is nothing you can do. As long as you have faith, hope and love — very human love — all is possible.
My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer

by Christian Wiman, Reviewed by Kathleen Schultz, IHM

Christian Wiman, a poet and former editor of Poetry Magazine, offers 10 essays in My Bright Abyss. The book was conceived during a severe treatment regimen following diagnosis for a rare and incurable cancer. In the same period, Wiman fell in love and married. The author believes that this period of his life awakened a latent faith within him.

However, his memoir is far from being a reflection on death. Filled with stunning and luminous passages on faith, disbelief, contemporary believing and Christ mystically encountered in gritty life realities, Wiman writes in the framework of an artist seeking to give expression to his experience, awareness and deepening consciousness of God.

As I read, I recalled the 2005 Chapter Direction: “We choose to be in solidarity ... with all those who struggle to articulate and live their experience of faith in our complex world.” After her reading of My Bright Abyss, Marie Gabriel Hungerman, IHM, commented, “This little book is as close to a contemporary expression of St. Augustine’s Confessions as we may ever find.”

A reader’s guide with discussion questions is available. Go to www.readinggroupgold.com; enter the title in the search box and scroll down to download the guide. Also, from McMillan, the publisher, try these selected excerpts from My Bright Abyss: https://bit.ly/31zaeM5.

In memoriam

(May 1, 2019 — July 31, 2019)

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

Barbara Quell, IHM Associate
Oct. 7, 1931 – July 31, 2019

Marilynn (Veronica Marie) Mechtenberg, IHM
Dec. 10, 1933 – July 26, 2019

Ann Pauline O’Connor, IHM
Feb. 23, 1927 – July 23, 2019

Catherine Mary Zacharias, IHM
Dec. 8, 1934 – June 13, 2019

Kathleen (Joseph Rita) DeSmedt, IHM
Sept. 2, 1931 – June 12, 2019

Mary (Coronata) Laubacher, IHM
Aug. 15, 1917 – June 7, 2019
Finding comfort ... and a way forward

The last two years have been a time of mourning for Marygrove College’s students, faculty, administration, staff, alumni and neighbors who have experienced the closing first of its undergraduate programs and now of its graduate programs.

How do we navigate this new reality? Where do we find the way forward? A project that began before the closings and is in process today could be the way to continue the educational mission of Marygrove College and the IHM community: The P-20 Cradle-to-Career Campus at Marygrove. The P-20 campus will provide “educational opportunities from prenatal to Pre-K, K-12 to post-secondary graduate, as well as wraparound services and community engagement programs.”

The Marygrove Conservancy Board was created to oversee campus development. In 2018, I was asked to serve as the Marygrove College representative on that board. I am working with Dr. Elizabeth Burns and several other former Marygrove faculty and staff to create a Marygrove legacy — an entity that would house a number of the college’s signature events and community outreach efforts.

I hope that by continuing this legacy of education and service, we may find comfort and see our way forward.

By Rose DeSloover, IHM Associate

Autumn reminds us about vulnerability. It carries the truth that life is fragile; that there is always some dying in living; that change is inevitable.

There is often an “ache” in autumn within us. We all have a tender desire to gather our loved ones and hold them closely now because someday we will have to let them go.

Loving them makes it more difficult, but we choose to love — the investment of our love is worth it. We have embraced the mystery of life, dying in this world in order to rise and enter into our eternal home. This is the resurrection message, which surrounds us with hope! God promises fullness of life to those who have died. They will be “more alive,” more aware of God’s love and beauty.

This incredible promise does not take away the human pain of letting go. But with God’s help we can experience healing in time. We are reminded that life ends not in mourning, but in joy.

The life of a person on Earth lasts beyond their departure. We will feel their life touching ours, their spirit speaking to us in the familiar things they touched, worked with and loved. They live in the lives of all who knew them.

By Mary Downey, IHM

Life ends in joy

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As an IHM community, we are experiencing grief and loss with the recent announcement that our beloved Marygrove College, which existed for more than 90 years, will close at the end of the fall semester. Our faith assures us that as we mourn this loss, we are not alone, God’s promise of comfort remains and that the seeds of resurrection and new life will appear. We will be inviting everyone who has been a part of the Marygrove community to return for a closing event on Dec. 7 to celebrate the gift that Marygrove has been for us over these many years. Details will be forthcoming and posted on the IHM website: www.ihmsisters.org.