By Mary Jane Herb, IHM
IHM Leadership Council

Beatitudes: challenge of blessings

Can we imagine what the Sermon on the Mount might look like today? Before he spoke, Jesus would ask everyone to turn off their electronic devices! People would probably take pictures and post them to social media and tweet the event. That being said, the Beatitudes are as relevant and challenging today as they were 2,000 years ago. Macrina Wiederkehr, in her book, Seasons of Your Heart, tells us that the Beatitudes are a way of life designed for those who want their life to be a blessing. Embracing these difficult blessings urges us to be Christ in the world.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Mt 5:8) In this issue, the focus is on the call to be attentive to our heart’s desires. We need to cultivate the practice of contemplation, remaining open to God’s word in our life. We are the “Immaculate Heart of Mary” community seeking to find the meaning of that in how we live our lives.

In the spring, we will reflect on the first Beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:3) This issue will blend our solidarity with the poor and our place in the universe. The experience of other cultures has much to teach us and calls us to realize that we are all connected.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Mt 5:6) Reflecting on this Beatitude leads us to ponder our connection to Earth, our common home. The commitment to ecological consciousness unites us with all people.

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“Open our hearts” to others is an offhand phrase many of us use in talking about the necessity of cultivating compassion and empathy for those who are suffering in our world (or perhaps more challengingly — those with whom we disagree). But did you ever stop to think about how to actually go about doing it?

Buddhist monk Pema Chodron offers a spiritual practice to her students called Tonglen meditation that can be incorporated anytime, anywhere, to “dissolve the tightness of our hearts.” Tonglen, Tibetan for “send and receiving,” is a simple practice that can help us awaken the compassion within us and give us the ability to be fully present to our own suffering and the suffering of others.

We visualize taking in the pain of others with our in-breath and sending out whatever will benefit them with our out-breath. In doing so, we begin to let go of our own self-centeredness. We begin to feel love for both ourselves and others. It is then that we truly “open our hearts” and can begin the work of taking care of ourselves and others.

For more information about Tonglen meditation and a step-by-step guide, go to: www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-tonglen/.

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM)

People sometimes ask me what our title means in today’s world. It is a very good question. My response is usually something like this: the congregational title was given in the mid-1800s at a time when the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was being declared. It was a time when the role of women in Church and society was defined as service and it reflects our Redemptorist heritage from Louis Florent Gillet, CSsR.

Today, IHMs live their call as a community of sisterhood in the heart of Mary, who witnessed to the Christ-presence by supporting women, pondering in her heart and attending to the needs of the people.

In these troubled times, we reflect on the Scripture that says, “a sword shall pierce your heart,” and see that perhaps looking at the world with an open heart is an update of “immaculate.”

Which is how we go forward, with our partners in ministry, joined in spirit with the fire of Theresa Maxis, a woman of color, and Louis Florent Gillet, an immigrant missionary, attending to all that is wounded and abandoned and taking our place in the ever-evolving universe.
On Saturday, Sept. 28, Karen Kuchar, of Downers Grove, Ill., became an IHM Associate. The ceremony took place at Hartman Hall, on the campus of Marygrove College. Nancy Sylvester, IHM, and Associates KC McBride and Kathy Tkach served as her companions on the journey of preparation to become an IHM Associate. Ms. Kuchar currently ministers as a board member of Anawim Arts and facilitates Wisdom Writing Circles. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree from St. Louis University and her Master of Science degree from George Williams College.

On Sunday, Sept. 22, Sarah Nash, of Monroe, Mich., celebrated her commitment as an IHM Associate. The ceremony took place in the IHM Motherhouse Chapel. Mary Ann Flanagan, IHM, served as her vowed companion on the journey of preparation to become an IHM Associate. Ms. Nash is the coordinator of the IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office; she has worked for the IHM Sisters for 16 years. She earned her bachelor's degree in psychology and women's studies from the University of Michigan and her master's degree in social justice education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She is a member of St. John the Baptist Parish in Monroe and is currently enrolled in the University of Toledo College of Law.

And on Sunday, Oct. 13, Linda Delene of Mt. Holly, N.C., joined us as an IHM Associate. With a theme of “Long Journey,” the ceremony took place during the morning liturgy in the Chapel of the IHM Motherhouse. Following the unexpected death of Carol Quigley, IHM, Suzanne Sattler, IHM, served as her vowed companion. Ms. Delene holds a doctorate from the University of Toledo and spent her career in education. Her ministries included teaching at Marygrove College, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Kalamazoo College, Oberlin College and Western Michigan University.
2020: another new year! And it is a presidential election year!

What is facing us in the coming months has the potential to deepen the divide among us — not just as a nation but as friends and family and colleagues. Perhaps you experienced that during family gatherings where certain topics were avoided, or if discussed, turned into shouting matches and more entrenched positions.

Although we could choose to simply be silent and ignore the issues that divide us, I wonder if that serves our country well or our commitment to live the Gospel. It seems as if the moral fabric of our nation is being pulled apart and needs to be mended. We need Christians and those of us who understand that there is another dimension to our lives that challenges the accumulation of wealth, the fear of the other, the trivialization of law and morality and the refusal to acknowledge that we are all connected here on Earth, to name a few; to be and act in new ways.

As Einstein said, we cannot solve the problems of today out of the same level of consciousness that created them. So, do we need a new strategic plan? Perhaps, but I believe that something more profound is being asked of us who believe in God.

Contemplation:

Simply, it is to fall deeply into the spaciousness of God’s presence within us and from that place of one’s truest self — put on the mind of Christ and actively “see” in new ways. That is what contemplation invites us into.

Contemplation is a form of prayer, one without words or images, that beckons us to release our worries, our thoughts, our biases, our assumptions and see anew. Contemplation invites us to wake up. Too many of us sleepwalk through life quite unaware of why we believe what we do and why we think this is right and that is wrong. Contemplation loosens the hold we have on our own staked-out positions based on earlier worldviews whose blinders keep us from seeing the complexity all around us.

When we live life more asleep than awake, we assume that our reaction to a person or an issue is right and any other position is
wrong. We rant and rave. We read articles that confirm our position or listen to news that reinforces our views. Often, it feels so good to be so sure and even a bit self-righteous.

We don't stop and ask “Why?” Why such a strong reaction? Why can't the position shift? Why isn't there any room to change?

To ask such questions is part of the interior spiritual journey we are on as Christians. As one practices contemplation, insights to such queries begin to emerge. We begin to see how the needs of security, survival, affection, esteem, power and control are operative in our lives. How our unacknowledged needs continue to shape our beliefs and values. How unconsciously they create the reactions we have to the world around us. How such reactions can deepen the divides within us and among us.

If these divisions are to be healed, more of us need to awaken and “see” in new ways ourselves and those around us. We need to put on the mind of Christ and see from the heart. To understand the heart as an organ of perception and not only the center of emotions.

Nancy Sylvester, IHM, is founder of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue. Prior to 2002 she served as vice president of the IHMs, as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and as executive director of NETWORK, a Catholic social justice lobby. For more reflections on contemplation, contemplative practice and the time in which we are living, go to the Institute’s website: www.iccdinstitute.org.

seeing in new ways

Seeing from the heart implies an honesty with one's self. It demands our truest self – the diamond self, as Thomas Merton calls it. The self at one with God.

The Beatitude, Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God, captures this well, for when we act from our most authentic self, we cannot but see the Divine spark in everyone.

That capacity to see each other as connected and part of the Body of Christ is core to our Christian faith. It is a belief that is needed at this time when our pluralistic democracy is threatened by too many unable to see in such a way.

As we grow in our capacity to see the other with a purity of heart, we will be able to wonder and ask the why questions of ourselves and of those who differ from us. We will discover ways to soften the barriers between us and imagine a new way forward together bridging the divide.
The Education of an Idealist: A Memoir

By Samantha Power

If our hearts are purified by compassion for people suffering violence, accompanying war refugees, enduring heart-wrenching conversations with survivors of genocide and writing a best-selling book warning the world about genocide (*A Problem from Hell*), then Samantha Power’s purified heart has surely enabled her to see God.

This vision then led her into service in government and the United Nations. Educated through experience, mentoring, challenging study and discernment, Power’s idealism has matured eventually into commitment to teaching and writing in a style full of fascinating, engaging stories.

In her memoir, Power draws on her Irish storytelling roots to keep readers laughing and crying as she recalls moving from Dublin to Atlanta to Washington, D.C., to Eastern Europe, back to United States for law school then politics with Senator, then President, Obama, then the United Nations as U.S. ambassador. In between she falls in love, gets married and has a son and a daughter. Currently she is professor of the Practice of Global Leadership and Public Policy at the Kennedy School and team-teaching with her husband at Harvard Law School.

Reviewed by Joann Wolski Conn, IHM Associate

**IHM Chapel Concert Series**

- The first concert of 2020 takes place on Sunday, March 22, at 3 p.m. and features concert pianist **Jim Hendricks**. Hendricks has worked with such legends as Dave Brubeck (piano duets), Della Reese, Rita Moreno, Maynard Ferguson and many others. He has performed more than 1,400 Christian piano concerts in churches throughout the country, including several appearances at the former Crystal Cathedral. He has made 14 piano recordings, performed on ABC, CBS, TBN and PAX and wrote the book *Contemporary Arrangements for Today's Church Pianist*.

- **Detroit Song Collective (DSC)** will continue the series on Sunday, April 26, at 3 p.m. Rooted in the belief that everyone deserves access to beautiful music, the goal of the DSC is to reach out to audiences and young talent in the greater Detroit community, sharing important pieces of music. By bringing quality musical performances to the community and designing outreach programs to assist the development of talented and motivated young artists, DSC will enhance and enrich the lives of its audiences and students. **Free-will offerings are requested for each concert.**

**Retreat opportunity**

**Joyfully Serving a Bountiful God**

Wednesday–Sunday, Feb. 26–March 1, 2020

With Rev. Gil Enderle, CSsR

**IHM Motherhouse, Monroe**

Beginning at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday and concluding at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday

As we begin this Lenten season, we enter together into a wonderful time of prayer and reflection. In this retreat we look to Scripture and the spirituality shared by the IHM and the Redemptorist communities as we create more expansiveness in our own lives and deepen our relationship with God.

Suggested offering is $250 and includes lunches ($50 due at registration).

Registration deadline is Feb. 11.

To register for the retreat, email riverhouse@ihmsisters.org or call 734-240-5494.

Note: Reasonably-priced overnight accommodations are available across the street at River House and other nearby locations. Please ask for assistance when registering.

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**175th anniversary book available soon**

2020 marks 175 years since the IHM Sisters were founded. Award-winning journalist Patricia Montemurri has researched and written *Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters of Michigan*, highlighting the history and accomplishments of the IHM Sisters since 1845. Full of both archival and modern photos, the book will be published in spring 2020 by Arcadia Press.
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In the summer issue, we will reflect on this Beatitude and have an opportunity to share the good news of activities from our sponsored educational institutions.

The fall issue focuses on “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” (Mt 5:7) At this time of election for our country, we will center the issue on compassion and mercy. During our anniversary year, we will celebrate 175 ways to live the IHM mission.

In 2016, Pope Francis, while in Switzerland, proposed six new Beatitudes in a homily. One was, “Blessed are those who see God in every person and strive to make others [know God].” As we enter 2020, let us accept the challenge of these blessings, setting our hearts on the Reign of God.

ihmpact

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Urged by the love of God, we choose to work with others to build a culture of peace and right relationship among ourselves, with the Church and with the whole Earth community.

—IHM Mission Statement

MOVING?
Contact us with your ID# (found above your name on the mailing label) at:
734-240-9860 or develop@ihmsisters.org.