

spring 2022

ihmpact

sisters, servants of the immaculate heart of mary

Co-liberation: our obligatory opportunity

By Barbara Beesley, IHM

Have you heard the call to be a good ancestor? Hussein Dekmak, a Michigan poet, expresses it this way:

*“...Your humanity, my friend
Is your eternal legacy, which is more
Precious than your wealth, education,
And a lifetime worth of accomplishments!”*

I have been enriched by relationships with a wide diversity of people who grew up in different cultures, bringing me new perspectives, beauty and awareness. A child of the 40s-50s, my world was populated by people who looked like me. The civil rights movement shook my understanding of an unchanging, hierarchical world order. It pushed me to explore the inequities therein and raised questions about my responsibility regarding those inequities.

Reading John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, the story of a man who darkened his skin so he could enter the world of black people, moved me. I was impressed by his experiences of community among people ostracized by the wider society. Later I found this empathy, comradery and generous hospitality among Mexican farmworkers, Palestinians and members of the LGBTQIA community. I worshiped with Spanish-speaking people because I liked the music. Though my Spanish wasn't good, I knew that the oft-repeated word "corazon" meant "heart/love." That was enough to sing about!



Having recognized how my life was enhanced by diversity, I wondered how to make inclusion work. I found out at the YWCA in Highland Park. I entered a class there in the early

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Cause for celebration?

By Margaret Chapman, IHM, Leadership Council

The moment we chose to focus this issue of *ihmpact* on the theme of inclusion, giving special attention to race and sexual identity, I sensed its potential to be transformative. As you allow yourself to enter the life experiences of our writers, I hope they will touch your heart and open your mind, as they have mine. Engaging past complicity in the sin of racism within the IHM Community has opened our eyes and set us on a different course since our public acknowledgment of Theresa Maxis as co-founder of the Congregation. In “coming to our senses, we seek to make amends, to acknowledge our mistakes, to embrace again the demands of kinship.” Such kinship will continue to demand that we “stay, pray and engage” with all people as “beloved persons created in the image of God.” Can we avail ourselves of opportunities to be with people or hear from people whose life experiences and the way they may look or live are different from our own? Is the progress we’ve made toward becoming the Beloved Community a cause for celebration? Perhaps, but only if it creates a new resolve within and among us to create communities where all people count. We then will be following our call to be co-liberators in the spirit of Jesus, the One who offers the gift of true freedom to all.

Hanging in my Detroit home is a framed copy of my great-great grandmother’s 1851 Virginia Free Papers that signified her as a free woman of color, she could not be captured and enslaved. While these papers that she had to carry with her everyday protected her freedom, they also meant she was forbidden access to certain things including education and the ability to own a dog. Education and dog ownership were denied because they were perceived as dangerous weapons that threatened the ability of those in power to perpetuate and enforce slavery. Ironically, a generation later my feisty great grandmother, whose name I carry, threatened a dog catcher with a

said, “the community was not ready for me at this time.” As hurt as I was, I felt the support of the sisters who had encouraged me and I imagined the disappointment these sisters must have felt that their community responded as it did. Five years later, I applied again and this time was accepted. Although I had experiences in the community that reinforced the message that some were not ready for me, my experience with all of those in leadership and my classmates in the Postulate and Novitiate affirmed the power of truly good people reaching out in friendship, encouragement



Continue the journey

By Frances Pelham Carnaghi

kettle of boiling water as he tried to remove the secret family dog. In the aftermath, my great grandparents fled Virginia in the middle of the night seeking safety for the family (including the dog) and education for their children. Their journey ended in Detroit where access to education, including higher education, opened doors for their children and succeeding generations of my family who became educators, engineers, journalists, lawyers, and public servants. This did not happen in a vacuum, but often because of the encouragement and support of people who enjoyed privilege and were willing to share it.

In 1961, my senior year of high school, I applied for entrance into the IHM community. It came as a shock to me that I was rejected. My handwritten rejection note

and support. Moreover, the journey of the IHM community to acknowledge its own racial history and reconnect with the Oblate Sisters of Providence as well as the community’s willingness to enter into a dialogue about inclusion as it relates not only to race but also to sexual identity and equality, is cause for celebration.

At times when I am discouraged by the continuing struggles minorities face, I look at the Free Papers hanging on my wall and I am reminded that progress is a reality and I pray that we have the will and the audacious courage to continue the journey.

Living the excruciating tension of a Catholic lesbian with a call to ministry, but not celibacy, meant that at some level being fired by my archdiocese for my civil marriage to a woman after 36 years as music director was no surprise to me. However, what became *New York Times* newsworthy for others was the grace and forgiveness that marked my response to the callous way it was handled.

I was able to respond in that manner because of the inclusive campus ministry parish community that embraced and formed me over the decades and my roots in mystical spirituality — a cultivated relationship with the all-encompassing Merciful Divine Mystery. My community modeled inclusion in many ways: embracing me through my coming out in college, welcoming the campus LGBT support group that I led, hiring me as music director, keeping me alive in times of despair, supporting my marriage and encouraging me to train in spiritual direction. Pastors, campus ministers, and the music group all served as an inclusive family. They accompanied my wife and me, listened and validated our faithfulness, celebrated our gifts and encouraged our leadership.

By Terry Gonda

One of the pillars in establishing the DNA of the community was Mary VanGilder, IHM. She served at the parish as a stalwart backbone of prayer, preaching, prophetic teaching and comfort. A joyful mysticism and an all-embracing theology poured out of her with ease.

The prayer she wrote for our wedding was grace-filled and moved us to tears.

This experience and the Ignatian Spiritual Direction program from which I graduated taught me a rhythm for living inclusively in community. It requires us to foster daily our mystical connection with God and then with humility and compassion to be faithful to three things: staying, praying

and engaging. This rhythm is now the foundation of my life.

At the beginning of Lent 2020, we learned of the assignment of a new priest who was a conservative professor from the seminary. While assuming he'd fire me, five weeks into Lent I surprisingly found myself filled with a warm love for this man whom I had only met in my prayers. This love could only have come from the Holy Spirit. My wife and I vowed to continue that same rhythm as we prepared to welcome the new priest in July.

He had arrived two weeks after the archdiocese fired me over the objections of the outgoing pastor. Even as this new priest denied us communion, we began a series of challenging, but also holy, respectful and authentic conversations with him. These talks were based on common values — just as I'd envisioned in my Lenten prayer.

But our beautiful community began to die. Each week more people left the parish heartbroken and angry because of my firing. They perceived the new priest as having a rigid, non-inclusive and punitively based theology. Yet, even in our anguish, we could see his prayerful and sincere heart. Ironically, he was happy for us to stay and lead the small remnant of the music group. He said he was humbled by the graciousness we showed throughout this time. We felt called to remain and lovingly bear witness to the Truth. We heard in our hearts how God had brought us together and was now calling us to serve as devout and faithful disciples. We did not try to win him over, but we stayed in holy conversation and prayer with him until he died of cancer a year later. Our relationships left us filled with a powerful grace and a deepened compassion for him and our grief-filled community.

One year later, we thankfully are still walking with our inclusive community, but in a different way. It has moved online and grown (servantsentrance.org), spreading across multiple parishes like something new being born. We are still listening and discerning.

I believe that in this rhythm, my wife and I have found that true inclusion has many paths and is painfully messy. If each of us can learn to courageously lean into conflict with humility and compassion, while staying, praying and engaging, the payoff will be nothing short of the Beloved Community.



Mary VanGilder, IHM
1924 – 2012



Terry Gonda (right) and wife Kirsti Reeve (left). Photo Credit: Jake Jacobson.

By Jeannine Hill Fletcher, Professor of Theology, Fordham University



To commemorate 175 years since their founding, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary did something unusual. They put squarely on the table not only the causes of celebration but also the more painful moments of our nation's history as they are woven through the IHM story. Partnering with the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the planning committee for the anniversary event met over more than six months to study, pray and plan a joint investigation of the IHM-OSP shared



The banners of Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, OSP, Louis Florent Gillet, CSsR and Theresa Maxis Duchemin, IHM, founders of the four congregations, are prominently displayed near the altar.

Commemorating 175 Years:

roots and extended branches through the lens of our most pressing national concern: racial justice.

In the opening session of the multi-day gathering participants were invited to orient the time together in the theological commitment that racism is an affront to the God who dwells with us in our history. As Christ-followers, “we who would be his disciples discover our humanity, our personhood in imitation of him — in taking up our cross in order to transform evil into good.”¹ Selecting the Sankofa bird as our guide, we postured ourselves like this dove of the Spirit looking back for what can be retrieved as we move forward in history. If we are to follow the vision of Mother Mary Lange where “our sole wish is to do the will of God,”² participants asked, how do we do the will of God within a history torn by the realities of racism and racialized disparity?

In seeking answers for our present, the investigation over several days aimed to reconstruct the “racial projects” of the past in order to learn more about the dynamics of race and racism as they have been woven into our corporate and personal histories. In this framing, sociologists ask us to see “race” as constructed in various “projects” that were shaped in particular settings and can be reshaped today. We considered the ways in which the categories of ‘the races’ were created at a crucial moment of European-Christian

colonial expansion and functioned to sort humans into different categories, distributing rights and benefits on the basis of the ‘race’ into which persons had been sorted. Seeing American Catholicism’s origins in settler-colonialism, our investigation asked what we might learn about navigating the unjust distribution of resources on the basis of race through the stories of Mother Mary Lange and Theresa Maxis as women of color who navigated racial disparities in the education, health and ecclesial systems of their day. Following the trajectory of the nation’s expansion in the 19th century, the discussion dwelled on the racial project that enabled Theresa Maxis to pass as White when she accepted the invitation to extend the branches of Catholic ministry to the Midwest, ministering within White settler culture on the frontier while her sisters in Baltimore struggled for the congregation’s survival. Moving



The leadership teams of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the IHM Sisters of Immaculata and the IHM Sisters of Scranton join ours during the July 2021 celebration that was hosted at the Motherhouse.

Looking back and moving forward through the lens of racial justice

into the 20th century, we recognized how segregation in housing and education affected ministries in every U.S. community and bequeathed to us a racial wealth gap that impacts us still today. The racial projects of our past — in racism, anti-Blackness and White supremacies — structure the legacies we inherit today and the disparities in the world in which IHMs and OSPs continue the work of God in history.

With these stories and our analysis as backdrop, the final session inquired again how Mary and Theresa might be guides for our future, asking how we leverage our locations and resources for the creation of a more racially just world. Guided by the principles of Undoing Racism from the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (pisab.org), those gathered were encouraged to mobilize what we learn from the past, create structures of accountability and recognize ourselves

as “gatekeepers” in today’s racial projects — persons embedded in institutions with the ability to leverage our locations for anti-racist goals. Partnering in the work of anti-racism, we can create networks of support and accountability to enact change. So that when IHMs look back from the 200th anniversary, they will recognize faith-filled women transforming *our* era’s racial project and they will see the hands of God at work in our world. Tapping into this source of grace, we considered the words of Katie Cannon who envisioned the goal of our historical-theological practice: “God’s freely given gift of grace enables us to resist the forces of death and degradation arrayed against us and to affirm our dignity as beloved persons created in the image of God.”³ While placing heartbreak and failure in the center is an unusual way to celebrate, the ongoing work of the OSPs and IHMs in this chapter of human history rooted in the grace that faces racism and White supremacy *is* cause for celebration.

¹ M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis, 2018), 142.

² Mother Mary Lange, <http://oblatesisters.com/our-history>

³ Katie Geneva Cannon, “Transformative Grace,” *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pau and Serene Jones (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 139.

A hand up

By Pastor Heather Boone

Seven years ago my husband and I made a crazy decision. We moved into the church and homeless shelter that we started. Our goal was to use all of our personal financial resources toward shelter operations and save any donations our church received to buy a new building. We were trying to move the church and expand the shelter. People thought we had lost our minds, but the two years we spent in the shelter were a real eye-opener.

The first thing we learned was that we needed a shower in the building. We started as a warming shelter and people just stayed at night and left in the morning. I thought we were doing a good thing just giving people a place to stay overnight; but, when I moved in, I realized some things were lacking. Having the ability to take a shower and wash your clothes are basic needs.

I also learned there is not just one road to homelessness. Most people think that people in shelters are just unemployed drug addicts, but that is not the case. I found that most people in our shelter are hardworking men and women who have simply fallen on hard times. Homelessness affects all races, ages and educational levels. I have seen people come to volunteer and they are shocked when they see a former classmate or a neighbor who is now living in our shelter. One dad found his estranged son while donating a meal. Too many people think that homelessness couldn't happen to them, but most of us are just a few paychecks or bad breaks away from being on the street.

When most people walk into a shelter they are scared, broken and many feel hopeless. No one says I want to be homeless when I grow up. Just as Jesus' putting on humanity and dwelling among the people gave him a greater understanding of mankind; my time living in the shelter gave me a greater understanding and compassion for homeless individuals. It is



amazing how much I changed by walking in someone else's shoes.

Jesus said, the poor you will always have with you, so I know poverty and homelessness is a big problem that we may never solve. But I am glad to be doing my part. Opening a homeless shelter has been one of my greatest accomplishments. There is nothing more rewarding than giving a person a hand up who is at their lowest point.



Oaks of Righteousness

Oaks is a ministry of hope and reconciliation whose vision is to bring hope and restoration to individuals, families, the Monroe community and beyond. They provide transitional housing and an emergency warming shelter for over 500 individuals a year. Their services have expanded to include feeding programs, youth programs, health and human services. To learn more or donate visit oaksvillage.net.

(Nov. 1, 2021 –
Jan. 31, 2022)

In memoriam

To learn more about the lives and ministries of our remarkable IHM Sisters, visit the links below.



Joan (Marie Trinite) Glisky,
May 22, 1930 –
Jan. 13, 2022
<https://bit.ly/3fUTSqm>



Jean (Eymarda) Laubacher
Feb. 26, 1923 –
Jan. 7, 2022
<https://bit.ly/3fUTSqm>



Shirley (Angela Mary) Houff,
July 18, 1935 –
Dec. 28, 2021
<https://bit.ly/3qTxzrh>



Therese (Catherine Marie) Lenihan
Sept. 27, 1928 –
Dec. 28, 2021
<https://bit.ly/3H0YeYE>



Lorraine (Paul Joseph) Humphrey
Sept. 20, 1929 –
Dec. 16, 2021
<https://bit.ly/3fQMOuz>



Ann Gabriel Kilsdonk
June 21, 1924 –
Nov. 27, 2021
<https://bit.ly/3FQI0A4>



Kathleen (Ann Dorothy) Israel
March 5, 1923 –
Nov. 20, 2021
<https://bit.ly/3rEL8K8>

Litany of reparation

Mary Fran Uicker, IHM

O Birther, Father-Mother of the Cosmos, faithful heart of all reality

Praise and thanksgiving to you, O God.

Jesus, Word of God, given flesh through Mary, body and blood poured out, the Christ

Praise and thanksgiving to you, O God.

Spirit Sophia, who moves, breathes, restores and unifies, praying through us and for us

Praise and thanksgiving to you, O God.

Have mercy on us for we have sinned, turning on one another and tearing apart the fabric of your design, our wholeness in Sacred Unity

Forgive us, God, we pray.

We have failed to recognize and reverence the image of your face in each person of our human family, each creature of your unfolding universe

Forgive us, God, we pray.

We have allowed our hearts to grow shallow and our attention to narrow, trading the true wealth of your goodness for what glitters but fails to satisfy

Forgive us, God, we pray.

Coming to our senses, we seek to make amends, to acknowledge our mistakes, to embrace again the demands of kinship

Come, steady our steps in your way.

For the sake of Earth, tattered and torn ...

For the sake of Native peoples ...

For the sake of those of African descent ...

For the sake of Asian, Latinx, Jewish and Middle Eastern persons ...

For the sake of women ...

For the sake of all perceived as other or different ...

For the sake of systems necessary for our common life to function ...

For the sake of human and beyond human ...

To see the complete litany, visit <https://bit.ly/3AH8NxL>



**Sisters, Servants of the
Immaculate Heart of Mary**

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80s knowing I'd probably be the only white person there. I was welcomed and treated like everyone else. It felt like a comfortable group, one into which I "fit."

Detroitier Tawana Petty, author of *Towards Humanity: Shifting the Culture of Anti-Racism Organizing*, invites us to be co-liberators, a term resonating with Jesus' mission of setting people free. In her words:

"The future of humanity depends on us shedding the sort of individualism that has us turning a blind eye to a world of suffering. It also depends on us figuring out how to live meaningful lives without demeaning the lives of others."



In God's dream, we all count. Let's engage together in this beautiful opportunity.

ihmpact

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

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