

ihmpact

sisters, servants of the immaculate heart of mary

Invitation to unmask ... and learn

By Mary Jane Herb, IHM
Leadership Council President

How many times since March 2020 have we heard it said that so much has changed? The IHM community, founded to educate young women in Monroe, continues our commitment as educators in all that we do. Such is the case as we continue in a global pandemic.

Intellectual curiosity is one of the IHM Belief Statements. It is the overarching theme for the 2022 issues of *ihmpact*. Intellectual curiosity awakens within us new understandings and a transformation of consciousness in light of current realities. As we continue to navigate this time of pandemic, we know that masks continue to be part of our reality. The question is, "What can we unmask as we ponder what we have learned during this pandemic time?" We hope that the 2022 issues of *ihmpact* will invite us to unpack this reality in a new way.

This issue reflects on spirituality, which has aided us during this time of uncertainty. The quest for God is at the heart of our journey and, for so many of us, is a source of comfort. The sharing of one's spiritual journey invites us

to enter into gratitude as we continue to explore our experience of the Divine. One author in this issue shares the story of her father's suffering from COVID-19. She brings a different perspective to her reflection as well as to our experiences of prayer and ritual.

"With intellectual curiosity
the world will always be full
of magic and wonder."

— Marjorie Pay Hinckley

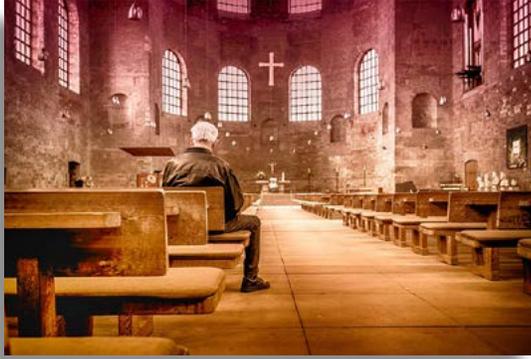
The spring issue challenges us to become a more inclusive community. During this time of pandemic, we have come to realize the disparities that exist in our culture. We will explore through various voices those marginalized within our Church and society. As an IHM community, we are committed to deal with racism, within ourselves, our community and society. It is important to hear other voices. We do not need

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Liturgy in the time of COVID

By Sue Rakoczy, IHM

Vatican II taught us that the liturgy is the source and summit of our spiritual life. Then came COVID-19, roaring into our lives with the force of hurricane winds disrupting everything, including liturgical celebrations. For many months, churches were closed. Our weekend routine disappeared. What to do now?



The original Greek meaning of the word liturgy translates to “public work or work done on behalf of the people.” How have we created liturgy in this time of COVID-19?

Families and community groups have used the time to share and reflect on Scripture and pray together. Thanks to technology, we can join believers around the world for worship — travel via Facebook and/or YouTube — to St. Peter’s in Rome or one’s local parish or a monastery for Eucharist, Vespers or any other celebrations.

No, it is not the same as in-person communal prayer. We cannot physically receive the Eucharist. Since the Word of God is food for the journey, we are still nourished. The Jesuit Institute in South Africa has a Sunday liturgy online and it includes St. Teresa of Avila’s encouraging words about “spiritual communion.”

Everyone is challenged now to do things differently, including the liturgy. The key is intention: to be in the presence of God together. When COVID-19 has receded and we can regularly pray with others in the liturgy, how will we remember the ways we “did liturgy” in this time like no other? And what will continue?

Out of the Depths I Cry to You, O God

By Kathie Budesky, IHM

Psalms 130:1

One especially rich gift from our Judeo-Christian heritage is the Psalter, the Book of Psalms. This diverse collection of 150 hymns was originally composed for use in Jewish temple worship.

An inspection of the book reveals that the Psalter provides us with a variety of prayers for all occasions as well as valuable lessons on how to pray. While the Hebrew title of the book is a reference to praise, it is significant to note that over one-third of the psalms are either communal or personal laments.



By definition, to lament is to express deep sorrow, grief or remorse. To lament is to acknowledge weakness and vulnerability; to concede that we are

not perfect as we are on our own. In fact, we need help and the only one who can assist us in our tragic circumstance is God.

An examination of the content of the Psalter reveals to us that we are invited to come to God asking for healing and wholeness for ourselves and for our communities. More importantly, the sheer number of psalms of lament is a clear indication that God welcomes us as we are, imperfect and broken, thus authentically ourselves.

It is likewise helpful that we notice that psalms of lament invariably end with words of grateful praise. In both hope and confidence, we trust in our compassionate God’s saving love:

*Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes in the morning.*

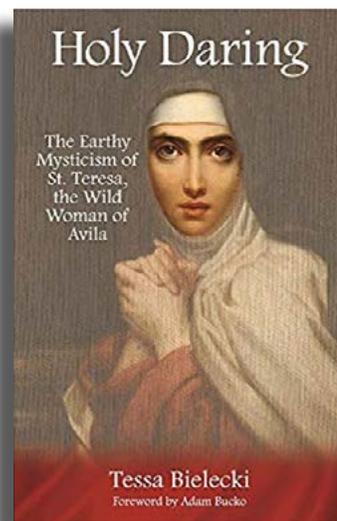
Psalms 30:5

Holy Daring: The Earthy Mysticism of St. Teresa, The Wild Woman of Avila

Teresa of Avila, a contemplative nun from the 16th century, is perhaps one of the most celebrated yet misunderstood saints. She wrote often of her experience of ecstasy and used spousal imagery to describe her relationship with God.

There have been many authors who have written about Teresa in an attempt to translate her works for today's spiritual seekers. One of the best to do so is Tessa Bielecki, a former Carmelite who has poured over Teresa's words for decades. In her work, *Holy Daring*, Tessa does a wonderful job translating Teresa's writings for today's context without diluting her spirit. According to Tessa, Teresa was a woman who felt much and loved deeply. She battled chronic illness and was an astute businesswoman and spiritual leader during the Spanish Inquisition.

Tessa brings the reader into a conversation with Teresa around various topics from how to have a zest for life to preparing ourselves to meet the Beloved. Tessa and Teresa both encourage us in our prayer life. Teresa writes that God 'pays off' if we persevere in prayer. We should not be prayer-conscious but God-conscious. No matter how we pray, God should be at the center. By living our lives to the fullest, we can experience God's unlimited love.



By Tessa Bielecki,
Reviewed by
Audra Turnbull, IHM

(Aug. 1 –
Oct. 31, 2021)

In memoriam



Frances (Mary
Pierre) Chirco, IHM
Jan. 5, 1928 –
Sept. 19, 2021



Rosalind
(Marie Gerard)
Naebbers, IHM
May 22, 1937 –
Sept. 9, 2021



Gloria (Roberta
Marie) Gliniski, IHM
Nov. 7, 1926 –
Aug. 30, 2021



Terry Bellner,
IHM Associate
July 9, 1946 –
Aug. 23, 2021

Read more about the lives and ministries of our remarkable IHM Sisters and Associates, please visit:
<https://ihmsisters.org/who-we-are/members/in-memorial/>



By Brittany Koteles

Finding home in

As any mystic, writer or toddler will tell you, language can only grasp at the ineffable — but its fingers will never close around it. While I am grateful for the utility of words, the one most commonly used to describe my religious affiliation — “*none*” — feels empty when it leaves my mouth.

Derived from checking “none of the above” when asked about religion, the “nones” represent 40% of millennials today. For many, this paints a troubling picture of a religious exodus. To me, I see a quiet movement of prayerful people who are pursuing God beyond the boundaries of an institution. Some of my peers are pushing on the edges of their “checkbox” tradition. Some are remixing the boxes together and others are embracing labels that aren’t on the list, like contemplative, monastic or seeker. In all these instances, I do not see

a rejection of religion as the motive, but rather, an embrace of the space between the boxes.

I grew up checking the “Catholic” box, a spiritually curious kid in a mostly secular family. My parents were raised Catholic but became disillusioned with the Church in their adulthood. They still enrolled me and my siblings in CCD classes, wanting to give us exposure and the freedom to choose. The parish was very conservative, though, and I found both their classes and their God to be aloof and unengaging. Back then, God was a stilted dance and I could never get the steps right.

In my teenage years, an evangelical church shattered that awkward dance with stage lights and rock music — quite literally. This chapter gifted me with an image of God that could match my longing: God as abba, me as beloved and a community who celebrated that reality by throwing our hands toward the heavens in song.

But the taste of praise didn’t come without a cost. In my college years, I struggled to understand: If God was so loving and expansive, why was my community so fixated on individual salvation, sin and purity?

While I didn’t have the words for it at the time, my sense of God was expanding beyond what my spiritual home could hold.

The choice to develop these doubts — and not suppress them — was, ironically, one of the great leaps of faith in my life. I recently found a journal entry from that time that read, “*God, if you are real, and you formed my mind, I need to trust that you’ll understand.*”

Over the next fifteen years, a tapestry of teachers and kin has led me to embrace a spirituality oriented around a God who *is* creation — a process in which I am both a participant and an awe-filled subject; both an evolutionary masterpiece and the very font of love that animates it all.

Photo below: Brittany Koteles and Sr. Julie Vieira, IHM

the borderlands

As I go deeper in my journey, my understanding of the sacred continues to form, shatter and expand again. Each time it breaks open, I must pass again through the doorway of grief — another illusion of safety and control, consumed by the great mystery. But this the call of the seeker, the mystic heart: Not to *define* God, but to let go of every image we’ve got until only mystery is left.

Coming of age in the climate crisis, I feel the destructive impacts of capitalism all around me — especially on people of color, the poor, and the Earth itself. At the same time, trying to divest from this extractive economy feels like swimming upstream: It’s too exhausting to do alone, not to mention logistically impossible. When I first got involved with Nuns & Nones, I was deeply inspired by how sisters’ very way of life was a practical pathway to a radical economy: Generations of women were pooling their resources so that they could all live counterculturally. In a world based on individualistic consumption, sisters’ very lives are marked by interdependence and community.

In a 2018 conversation with Julie Vieira, IHM, I began to further see how sisters’ prophetic stance in the world was made possible through their *commitments*. She described the power of taking



publicly witnessed vows to God, held accountable by community. From that deeper place of accountability, sisters have pushed traditional centers of power toward more openness and complexity, including within their own tradition. When talking to Julie, I had this image in my head of a whole community of people standing together, feeling the power of their collective commitment rise and swell among them. The image has never left me.

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The way I saw it, both sisters and my peers shared a *monastic* impulse — what Raimon Panikkar would call the “search for the center” that “renounces all that is not necessary to that pursuit.” In this way, we were all seekers; longing for the sacred in a single-minded, life-defining kind of way. No institution, religious or otherwise, can lay claim to our *religiosity*.



Image courtesy of Nuns & Nones

There are, of course, fundamental differences between the “nuns” and “nones” who gravitate toward monasticism. Perhaps the most significant is that sisters have a built-in structure of commitment, ritual — and accountability that directs their religiosity — a major advantage to practicing within a centuries-old tradition. Without structures to *direct* it, the religious impulse can get stymied in shallow waters or stunted by “smorgasbord” approaches to spirituality — nourishing enough to get by but lacking the real, soul-polishing work that commitment asks of us.

Many see this as the fatal flaw of the “nones,” and they feel skeptical — or even worried — that we will find our way. This real challenge deserves our acute attention but it also deserves our hope. These interspiritual communities *want to happen* and *are already underway*, beyond the institutional borders. My task is to be faithful to the impulse: To try new forms and structures, to fail and learn, and to ask for help from those who have been there before. Thank God we met the nuns.

When imagining the future of monasticism, Panikkar also left us with a simple image: “*Well-trodden paths from house to house.*”

I think Panikkar would be pleased to see what I’m seeing now: Channels of wisdom-sharing at the borderlands of religion, between devoted friends of many paths, serving the needs of our time. Raising my hands yet again in praise of a God that forms, shatters, and expands, I feel at once a sense that I’ll never arrive, and also, that I’m already home.

Image courtesy of Alan Webb/Nuns & Nones



NUNS & NONES

Nuns & Nones (N & N) began as a series of encounters between women religious and spiritually diverse Millennials in 2016. Today, the project supports many forms of spiritual formation and accompaniment across traditions. Brittany Koteles is a founding team member of N&N and the Director of its new Land Justice Project, an initiative to support religious land transitions that contribute to long-term social, spiritual and ecological healing. Learn more at <https://www.nunsandnones.org/>

COVID survivor

By Jennifer Discher

Some events either reinforce a meaningful life or become a catalyst toward greater meaning.

On Dec. 10, 2020, my parents, Arnie and Carol Discher, experienced one such event. Their pragmatic nature, coupled with a strong moral compass magnetized by love, forgiveness,



and a get-it-done attitude gave them the fortitude as a couple to endure months of illness. Like many families around the world personally experiencing COVID-19, ours was challenged to weave the threads of anger, grief, loneliness, survival, science and sacrifice into the fabric of our common existence. They, and we, will never be quite the same.

Carol and Arnie were unknowingly exposed to the Coronavirus when they responded to a plea for help from lifelong friends. It was their instinctive generosity that cracked open this door. The disease progression was textbook and as the days passed, Arnie and Carol had conversations acknowledging the possible danger. Each was confident that, should they need hospitalization, they were strong enough to handle the isolation. When Arnie's oxygen saturation levels dropped, Carol knew it was time to get him to the hospital. I tearfully asked them to tell each other they loved one another, to

kiss, and to trust that I would do my best to monitor their care. They responded in unison, "we already have, we have forgiven one another, and we know we might not see each other again."

Arnie was immediately taken back to the Emergency Department and COVID pneumonia was confirmed. After four days, he was moved to the COVID ICU floor. Our family met via ZOOM with one of the pulmonologists who compassionately explained the seriousness of the prognosis. He bluntly told us that if Arnie had to go on the vent, he would have a 50/50 chance of survival. Carol decided, "Arnie would be in the good 50%."

The team worked hard to keep Arnie off the ventilator, but this meant he had to endure the BiPAP machine, which supplies pressurized air into your airways. Arnie recalls, "I had conversations with God. I asked God to enable me to tolerate the BiPAP mask so that I would have a better chance to live. I don't really know who or what this God is, but as I prayed, Breathe in slowly I am free from disease; Breathe out slowly, I am at ease, God listened." Having experienced this lonely breathing prayer, Arnie feels there is something left that God has in mind for him to do. He adds, "I am curious as to what it might be."

After forty-two days in the hospital, Arnie was discharged. Reflecting on his experience, Arnie says, "My team of doctors and nurses were my angels. Worldwide, our friends and family included me in their prayers. This reminded me I was not alone and that I could pray for others to have the strength to endure this disease. All of this helped in my recovery."

Back home with Carol, Arnie continues to experience long term effects that he describes as "bearable." He continues to be grateful and to live life with intentionality, generosity, and a heightened curiosity about all that is to come.





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to look far to find the example of one who reached out to the poor and vulnerable as we reflect on the life of Jesus.

During the year, in addition to living with the pandemic, we have come to understand natural disasters in several ways. One is from the perspective of ecology, which will be the focus of our summer issue. We are aware of our ancestors, particularly indigenous people, to whom the land belonged prior to our taking it for our own purposes. Our Earth has much to teach us as we operate out of an abundance mentality and not one of scarcity. Our sense of the common good will help us see the pandemic as a learning experience.

Economic challenges have been evident during the pandemic. Our current economy is not working for many of our brothers and sisters. The fall issue will investigate our economy and ways in which we can create a more equitable system.

As you read the issues of *ihmpact*, we invite you to “unmask” what you have learned so each of us may experience a transformation of consciousness, striving to live life differently.

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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