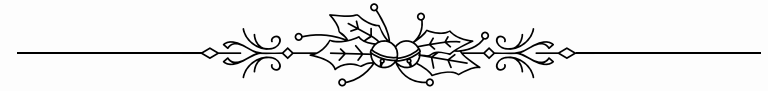


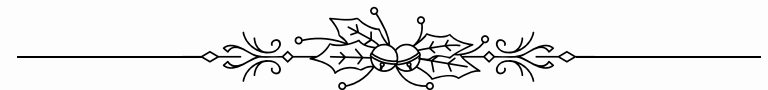


*Advent
Reflections*
2020



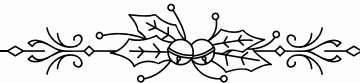
Those familiar with the Darst Center may have heard these words from our mission statement: “we seek to inspire an active and engaged faith, a commitment to serve, and a personal passion for social change.” We accomplish this mission by partnering with over 30 different community organizations through the Chicagoland region – schools, homeless shelters, food pantries, urban farms, re-entry programs, advocacy groups, and neighborhood community centers. Covid-19 has presented a real challenge for us to safely engage with these agencies and maintain our relationships with their members, clients, staff, and stakeholders. And yet, hope is not lost.

Contained within the pages of this book are the thoughts, prayers, and reflections of people from various walks of life all journeying together with the shared hope and resolve for a more just society. These reflections are meant to capture the struggles and realities we face, but also the hope and connections we have together. We invite you to enter into these pages as contemplatives in action, carving out space for internal reflection and for external effort. In the Lasallian tradition, we remember, each time we gather, that the Divine is present within us, around us, and among us. As we prepare for the incarnation this year, may the words contained herein be a source of inspiration for you to #seeitdifferently.



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2020

OPENNESS



"Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands." (Isaiah 64:7)

As we begin Advent as a season of preparation, this image of being clay intrigues me. I understand that I am unfinished. I am invited into more time with the Creator to smooth cracks in my compassion, sculpt the curves of vulnerability and courage, and shave away the excess material of my ego and my complacency. I am unfinished. And yet, as these transformations happen, I wonder: what else will be unearthed? As the clay is molded and moved and mixed up, what will surface from deep within me? What if I don't like what opens up?

Though Advent is clearly connected to Christmas and the birth of Jesus, I also am very aware that I enter into Advent immediately following Thanksgiving. This holiday has unearthed some parts of myself that I didn't particularly like. As I white person, I learned how ignorant I was (and in many ways, still am) about the Indigenous peoples and Native tribes in what we now call the United States. In recent years, I have started to reckon more deeply with the genocide and settler colonialism of our country and of my home state of South Dakota that harmed and still harms Indigenous peoples. I have learned some of names of the many Native tribes in Chicago, the city I now call home, and I truly wonder how different this home may have looked if the Council of the Three Fires: Ojibwe, Potawatomi and Odawa, along with the Miami, Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Meskwaki, Sauk, and many additional tribal nations had not seen such violence and plunder. What could it look like, today, to honor the Native tribes and Indigenous peoples where you live? Where are the places that the Spirit is moving in you, molding and sculpting your own heart, to hold the full truth of the land we are on right now?

May we enter into Advent grounded in the full truth of who we are. May we enter into Advent with a soft soul, ready to be the clay for the Divine Potter to work. May we be open to face whatever is unearthed. May we be open.

Rachel Lyons
Br. David Darst Center

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2020

HUMILITY



Christians celebrate St. Andrew as one of the first to recognize and follow Jesus Christ. The story is simple, yet stunning. Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist, took the Baptist's hint one day and followed Jesus. Whatever happened during that day they spent together, Andrew became convinced that Jesus was the One Israel had been waiting for. He went to his brother Simon Peter, declaring, "We have found the Messiah," and brought Peter to Jesus. (Jn. 1: 40-42) The rest is history. Both brothers are listed among the twelve apostles - Peter always at the head of the list, Andrew usually in the fourth spot.

That fact leaves me wondering about Andrew. Recall a few other gospel scenes. Who was with Jesus when he raised a young girl from the dead? Peter, James, and John. Who was present at the transfiguration? Peter, James, and John. Who was nearest Jesus in Gethsemane? Peter, James, and John.

But it was Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus. It was Andrew who quickly recognized Jesus as the Messiah. It was Andrew who offered Jesus the five loaves and two fish that fed a hungry crowd (Jn. 6: 8-9). It was Andrew who helped some curious Greeks meet Jesus (Jn. 12: 20-22). Yet, time and again, Jesus seemed to favor Peter, James and John.

Think about that for a moment. How are we when others are preferred to us? When we've done something of note, but it's hardly noticed? When God seems distant or uncaring? This is *hard* stuff! But Andrew never wavered. He'd pledged himself to Jesus just as Jesus had pledged himself to the Father. This grounded their relationship, holding it steady, deepening its mutual trust, making them companions in service to God and others.

Advent points us toward Christmas, the amazing choice of God to become a mere human in a turbulent and imperfect world. That's a giving up of status or privilege that Andrew understood and imitated. We would do well this Advent to ask Andrew's aid that we might be firm in faith, rooted in love, and humble in service - whether or not anyone notices or applauds.

Sr. Joy Clough, RSM
Sisters of Mercy

BEAUTY

“Not by appearance shall (the LORD) judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land’s afflicted.” (Is 11:3-4)

On my first trip on the bread truck with The Port Ministries in 2012, I came face-to-face with the breathtaking collision of chaos and beauty that is ever-present in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in Chicago. We pulled up to a stop to hand out sandwiches and were immediately surrounded by our friends in need, all clamoring for their daily bread. One woman in particular took her sandwich, and then began to weep. A few seconds later I felt a tug on the sleeve of my habit. “Brother, may I talk to you? No one else wants to talk to me.” Her name is Mary. Mary told me that she has been a heroin addict for 20 years. Within the last month, both of her children were shot due to gang involvement. One died immediately, the other lingered on life support for weeks. “But,” Mary continued, “I was too strung out to go to the hospital to say goodbye to my little boy. Do you think God will ever forgive me?” What was I supposed to say? In lieu of some well-crafted theological response that would have been insufficient, we simply hugged one another, wept together, and enjoyed a bologna sandwich. We went back to that same stop many times after this encounter, and I never saw Mary in the crowd. Several months later, I saw a bright-eyed woman running towards the truck. Hugs ensued, and she declared, “Brother, I have good news! Since the last time we talked, I remembered how much God loves me, and how much he loves my children. And I haven’t used heroin in 3 months!” Tears, once again became our collective prayer. She continued, “And I even found a job. Thank you for hearing me, and reminding me of a God who loves me.”

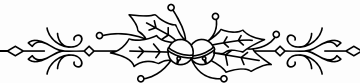
Sometimes all it takes is our presence, our time, and a bologna sandwich, so that we too can be reminded that God freely enters our chaos to show us beauty. God does not judge by appearances, and invites each of us, in little ways, to reveal the never-tiring justice and compassion that the incarnation promises. Let us not get distracted by the chaos, but be prepared to receive the dawn of beauty.

Br. Michael Joseph Groark, OFM Cap.
The Port Ministries



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2020

STEWARDSHIP



“Jesus summoned his disciples and said, “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way.” The disciples said to him, “Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?” Luke 10:21-24

Today’s Gospel is a refreshing reminder to us that the miraculous can start from the little things. The disciples recognize a big problem – it’s getting late in the day, this huge crowd is hungry, and they are in what is described as a “deserted place.” Jesus asks what they have on them. “Seven loaves and a few fish,” they reply. He takes it, he blesses it, he shares it, and somehow, all are satisfied. Not only that – greater abundance remains beyond.

In the tireless work for justice, it can be easy to be discouraged by scarcity. Fill in your own version of the disciples’ question: “Where could we ever get enough _____?” In the antiracism workshops we do with Chicago ROAR, we emphasize that white supremacy has developed over 400 years, and it won’t be quickly or easily dismantled. The odds can seem insurmountable.

Jesus isn’t interested in what is lacking, though – he’s interested in liberation. Notice how he starts with what is already there...though it may seem meager, he takes it, he blesses it, and it multiplies. So, too, is our challenge – how can we recognize the abundance, rather than remain stuck in scarcity? We have everything we need to build the Beloved community – how can we be better stewards of the many gifts that God has already blessed us with? Living out of an abundance mindset will not only help us to recognize the hidden treasure in our midst, but it will help to root us in a space of gratitude that brings deeper joy and sustenance in the midst of the struggle for justice. May this Advent season open our hearts and minds to new ways to live out abundance.

Ryan Lents
Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2020

GRATITUDE



“Open to me the gates of justice; I will enter them and give thanks to the LORD.” (Ps 118:19)

It is Friday morning, and I am sitting down in a visitation room at one of the many state prisons. A client that I am meeting for the first time walks into this small room within this space full of families visiting with their loved ones. I introduce myself and ask, “How are you?” The answer: “Blessed.” We continue to talk for over an hour, and as our meeting is about to come to an end, my client tells me, “After seven years in prison, this is the first time I’ve been to visitation. You are the first visit I’ve had all these years.” My client thanks me and walks away, with eight more months to go in this place.

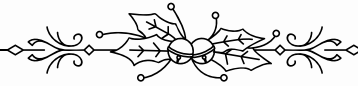
This is one of hundreds of similar stories I have heard over my years as an attorney. These visits to the incarcerated have taught me many lessons in life. One that is ingrained in me is the lesson of gratitude. Since I was a child, my parents planted that seed of gratefulness for everything in life. As an adult, my clients, particularly the ones I encountered in prison, continue to teach me the importance of being grateful, especially for whatever is happening in the present moment. Although they could be focusing on the wrongs of the past or the uncertainties of the future, most of them were thankful for the simple fact that I spent some time with them, accompanying them.

These interactions continue to be a great reminder for me of what my answer should be when someone asks me how I am and the last thing I should tell everyone before I leave them: “Blessed” and “Thank you.” Blessed and thankful to have this particular moment to enjoy the present moment in which I can meet the divine and the divine wants to meet me.

Br. Javier Rodriguez, OFM Cap.
Br. David Darst Center

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2020

LIBERATION



"On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book; And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see. The lowly will ever find joy in the LORD, and the poor rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the tyrant will be no more and the arrogant will have gone." (Is 29:17-24)

In today's reading from Isaiah, we hear a prophesy of liberation – for the deaf, blind, lowly, and poor, to name a few. Isaiah proclaims that God will free them from the weight of the barriers that affect how they engage with the world. For the deaf to hear, blind to see, and all to find joy in a newfound freedom is part of the hope we hold in advent, but it is not the full story of the liberation God seeks for God's people.

Liberation not only requires that the blind now see and the poor rejoice. Isaiah reminds us that the barriers we seek liberation from have a source that must be addressed as well. In his list of liberative acts, he also writes that "the tyrant will be no more and the arrogant will have gone." Liberation requires a shift in power. Isaiah proclaims liberation by dismantling those who abuse power while empowering the marginalized through the power deep within them – sense, sight, and joy. This liberation – that releases us from chains by addressing unjust systems and empowering people – is ultimately the mission of Jesus on earth. This liberation is what we await with hope in the season of advent.

I see this hope embodied in the work of the Darst Center. Every day our partner agencies strive to empower the communities they work with by fostering the strengths they already possess. Many of our partners also speak out against the unjust systems that place barriers on their communities, and demand change of the structures that hold them in chains. At Darst, we seek to bring communities together in the concluding words of Isaiah: "those who err in spirit shall acquire understanding, and those who find fault shall receive instruction." We gather with one another to seek understanding of injustice and our own roles in oppressive systems, and communally discern instruction on how to embody God's liberative command.

Claire DesHotels
JVC Magis, St. Mary of the Lake

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2020

SERVICE



When I began my second year as a Lasallian Volunteer serving as a high school restorative justice practitioner, I learned that my service would be completely remote. I would not be entering the school building to see my students each day, or be able to joke with them in the hallway between periods. I would not have the ability to pull them out of class to check in when they have a tough day. Rather, I would be limited to scheduled video calls and text messages. I began to question what my service meant in this new reality and whether or not I would be able to accomplish what I set out to do as a post-grad volunteer--to create a safe space for young people to thrive in.

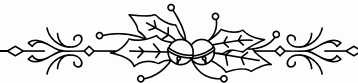
This year has forced many of us to have to rethink the way we serve our communities. It has been difficult mentally, physically, and spiritually. But it has also forced me to realize that service is not just about what you do for people. It is equally, if not more so, about simply being with them and accompanying them on their journey.

I realized that creating a safe space is not just about the physical location or what is in the room, though those things can be important. What is foundational is that the students I serve know they can rely on me to be a listening ear and a witness to what they face in this uncertain world. I don't have all the answers, and these days I don't have even the slightest clue of what tomorrow will look like, but it is my job to ensure those I serve that, no matter what, I will be there for them. Let us all continue to be there for those in our lives, in whatever ways we can.

Samantha Wilson
Lasallian Volunteers, Maria Kaupas Center

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2020

JUSTICE



What does it mean to live in a just society? It's a question that our societies have struggled with for centuries. How do we provide for the least among us and support the aggrieved in our community? Recognizing these failures and shortcomings is where we start when we want to incorporate true justice into our lives. At Latino Union, we joined a lawsuit against the city in the hopes to help end an unjust gang database system that gave police officers widespread surveillance powers that were inordinately targeted against communities of color in Chicago. We continue this work in the hopes that we can create a more just city, one that leads the way in racial equity across our nation.

As we end 2020, we realize that there is still much work that needs to be done to achieve justice in our society. Police officers involved in several high-profile deaths are yet to be held accountable for their actions. A national pandemic, fundamentally and disastrously mismanaged, has disproportionately affected Black and Brown communities. LGBTQ rights continue to be attacked in court, in legislatures, and in executive mansions. Our poorest citizens continue to struggle to meet their basic needs while high-ranking executives set new highs in wealth. Treaties with Indigenous Nations continue to be disregarded. And yet there is reason for hope. The Covid-19 pandemic saw people rally around their communities in a way previously unseen. Our Supreme Court expanded the interpretation of anti-discrimination protections to include more people than ever before. Most importantly, we have seen our community here in Chicago rally together for a more just city across racial, socioeconomic, gender, and any other barriers. At Latino Union, we're proud to have played a part in this, growing immigrant workers into leaders who will fight in the name of justice for their communities.

Mauricio Huertas
Latino Union of Chicago

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2020

PERSEVERANCE



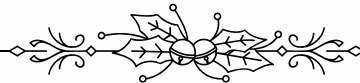
"When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus." (Luke 5:17-26)

Imagine you have a friend: he can't walk, he is forced to beg because he cannot work, and everyone thinks he did something wrong to deserve it. You keep being his friend, because you know he is a good person. Then, one day, some holy guy walks into town and is supposedly healing people. Could it be true? You hope. You and your buddies help your friend and head towards the crowd surrounding this holy person. Nobody is letting you in. What the heck? He's healing people, and your friend needs to be healed! Still no one lets you in. The holy guy goes into a house for a bit. With one small crowded entrance, you aren't getting through. You've pushed, you've tried, you've been carrying your friend with hope that there is a slight chance that this holy dude is the real deal and can heal him... and so, you keep pushing, keep thinking, keep trying.

I hope to the Almighty that one day I will have friends who will do what the group of men in today's Gospel did for the paralyzed man. Friends who would push through anything with a sliver of hope to help me. During this Advent Season, and this time in our world's history, we must keep pushing with any bit of hope we have to help those around us. In Luke's Gospel, it says, "When they could not find a way [to see Jesus] because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered [the paralyzed man] on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus." It is one thing to help friends move; it is another to heave your friend onto a roof, heave tiles, and gently lower your friend down to the ground. Many of us have friends and loved ones who are in need of our support, and we must continue to persevere in providing it.

Daniel Walton
Lasallian Volunteers, San Miguel Middle School

SALVATION



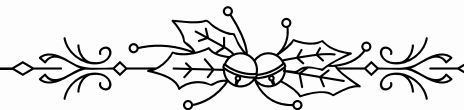
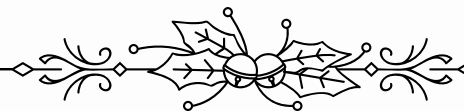
"The Lord has made salvation known: in the sight of the nations the Lord has revealed justice. The Lord has remembered the Lord's own kindness and faithfulness." (Ps 98:2-3)

In the Catholic tradition, December 8th marks the Feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception. This feast commemorates Mary's conception without the stain of original sin, in order to fulfill her vocation as *Theotokos*, or God-bearer. This model of Mary as free from the chains of original sin may feel unrelatable and unattainable for many of the faithful. Look around us: the structural injustices and social sin in our world is not only evident in our institutions, cities, and nation, but also within each of us, in our implicit biases, prejudices, and failures to stand in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable. However, Mary's own being stands as a prophetic example of what it means to be a vessel of justice - to carry love and salvation in our bodies (even in our collective womb).

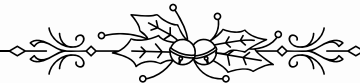
Today, may we stand in the company of Mary and strive to be vessels for the God of justice in our world today. In her honor, may we join her Magnificat prayer to proclaim the greatness of God who "has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly; The hungry [God] has filled with good things, the rich God has sent away empty" (Luke 1:52-53). The psalm for today foretells Mary's vocation to bring Christ into the world; through her, "The Lord has made salvation known" and "in the sight of the nations the Lord has revealed justice." Our task as Christians is to bear witness to this justice and salvation in our own lives, birthing a new vision of God's kindness and faithfulness into a broken world.

Mary - sister of all those who suffer, mother of those executed on the crosses of today, refugee seeking safety for her family, bearer of liberation - Pray for Us!

Dr. Karen Ross
Marquette University



HAPPINESS



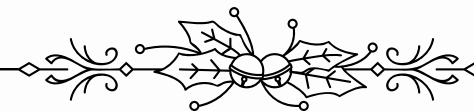
I admit I've always been attracted to today's gospel. Whereas its message is explicit—we will miss how God is speaking to us when we demand God operate only on our terms—the subtext carries for me perhaps even more allure. John the Baptist certainly cut the classic prophetic figure of the wild ascetic. But of all the available means by which Jesus might have revealed himself publicly as messiah, our Lord chose to come *eating and drinking*. Talk about 'good news!'

To celebrate the goodness of God's creation (in this case, the food and beverage part of it) is in a sense an act of praise. In a recent interview, Pope Francis observed that "overzealous moralists," working from a "wrong interpretation of the Christian message," have denied pleasure its rightful place in the Christian life. Instead, the Pope assures us bluntly, "pleasure arrives directly from God." To affirm this truth is to slight neither those who fast nor those who forego in solidarity with the poor. To sacrifice anything is to honor its inherent value—otherwise it wouldn't really be a sacrifice in the first place.

Of course, Jesus' eating and drinking is more than doxological. We find him engaged in a kind of "table ministry" throughout the Gospels, inviting disparate, often socially-marginalized or despised people to break bread together to expose their common humanity. There, the sharing food and drink expresses the economic basis of God's Kingdom, in which no one's belly is empty.

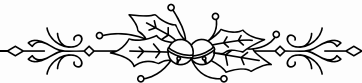
Circumstances will probably deny to us all the company we wish to keep this Christmas season. Yet there remains no more apt time of year to recall that when God incarnate, Immanuel, lived and worked among us, he did so eating and drinking with friends. May God bless you this Advent and keep you safe.

Dr. Grant Gholson
St. Ignatius College Prep



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2020

STRENGTH



"I am the LORD, your God, who grasp your right hand; It is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'" (Is 41:13)

One time while I was on the Port Ministries bread truck handing out sandwiches in Back of the Yards, a woman with fresh bruises on her face approached and received a couple of sandwiches from us, then proceeded to walk away. A moment later she turned around and said that what she really needed was someone to pray for her. She held out her hands for mine and then told me she was in an abusive relationship. I then prayed silently to truly be present at the moment while also praying verbally for this brave woman. Perhaps we both tried reaching for a kind of strength beyond ourselves, knowing that only the hand of God could truly help us transcend the weight of what is carried- with what is known and what remains to be revealed.

Depending on our privilege and any number of other factors, we too may often go through our day not truly present to the fact that God's hand is there to lead us in every step we take. Instead, we may say we "trust" in God taking our hand and leading us, but how often do we truly let our guard down and become vulnerable to others and God like this woman? It takes strength to expose our weakness and to give ourselves up to God's grace to transform it.

Br. Mike Dorn, OFM Cap.
The Port Ministries

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2020

RENEWAL



"If you would only attend to my commandments, your peace would be like a river, your vindication like the waves of the sea" Isaiah 48:18

A small droplet of water hits the window,
then slowly makes its way in stutters and streaks
down the glass in front of me.
Then another, and another, and the rain comes
down,
down,
down the pane in front of me.

The wind builds, the shhhhhhhhh-shhhhhhhhhh begins
as sheets of rain come to cover the clover and crabgrass in the backyard.
The flow of water from sky and cloud and atmosphere to here -
to this window, to this grass, to the very ground beneath me.
The flow of water, the flow of life, the flow of hydrogen oxygen bonds so close
they tumble together and seep down, slinking and sneaking into the soil.
Water in the cracks and crevices of rocks,
Water in the dirt and dust and sand,
Water seeking and searching for the broken places,
because that is where Water will fill in;
that is where Water will fill up;
that is where Water will heal, repair, and renew.

Truth in the cracks and crevices of deception;
Courage in the dirt and dust of oppression and hate;
Mercy seeking and searching for the broken places;
because that is where Truth will fill in;
that is where Courage will fill up;
that is where Mercy will heal, repair, and renew.

And the deepest place for this race of rain to end,
the eventual destination in the dark for these droplets,
awaiting in an aquifer,
is the water table,
the porous rock,
and the zone of saturation.

A table of water: think about it.

A table of water living beneath the surface of the earth,
flowing in slow motion in those broken, cracked, jagged places.

A table shared by all, made by all, where all are welcome.

A zone that is saturated: feel it.

A zone where ground water has filled in, filled up,
made every part of it drenched, covered, soaking in those hydrogen-oxygen
bonds so close;

Close like God with us, within us, in these deep wells.

A zone of saturation, of satisfaction.

Every part of us drenched, covered, soaked, in the Spirit -
poured into our hearts, gushing from rocks, overflowing,
always flowing, always flowing, all ways flowing together
in a cycle that circles around inner rooms and atmospheres and lands far and
near.

So remember the deep well:

the profound goodness,

the hidden wholeness,

the innate beauty,

that is ever-present,

ever-accessible,

if we dare to drink

if we dare to think

if we dare to live

immersed

embraced

saturated

in the heart

of God.

Rachel Lyons
Br. David Darst Center

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2020

AWARENESS



It is 1531, ten years after the Aztec empire falls to the invading Spanish. Arguably the biggest crime against the Mexican people was not death that the Europeans inflicted with disease and violence, but the decimation of indigenous religion, traditions, and art by the missionaries. The native population was now enslaved both in body and spirit. Many Aztecs choose suicide and even killing their newborns to escape this New World where they are deemed worthless.

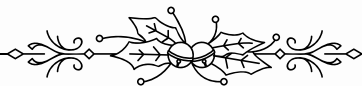
In this environment, Mary chooses the lowliest of the low to carry her demands to the highest religious authority in Mexico, Bishop Zumárraga, to have a temple built for her. At the Annunciation, Mary herself does not feel totally sure that she is worthy to be the mother of God. She chooses an indigenous man by the name of Juan Diego. But because of who he is, neither he, nor the bishop, feel like he is the right person for the job. His description of himself is telling of the indigenous mindset, "I am one of those *campesinos*, a piece of rope, a small ladder, the excrement of the people; I am a leaf, they order me around, led by force." Not until Juan Diego brings flowers that were impossible to grow that time of year and the image of Mary on his *tilma*, does Zumárraga believe him and erect the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

1531 was the year of a new creation, much like when God became flesh in Jesus. God prefers the presence of the marginalized and the outcast. God shows us this, and yet we choose to be like Zumárraga, only acting if a miracle happens. Let us learn to listen and accompany those that our society, and even The Church, has told us are incapable of speaking the truth.

Hector Avitia
Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020

JOY



“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thes 5:16-18)

“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing,” Paul tells the Thessalonians in the epistle passage that gives this day its name: “*Gaudete Sunday*” – the third Sunday of Advent intended to be a brief celebration within the solemn period anticipating the ultimate celebration of the Nativity.

Taken as is, however, it seems odd: why would Paul need to *admonish* anyone to rejoice at the prospect of the salvation brought by Christ? Do we even have control over such an emotion to conjure it at will, short of directly stimulating the endorphins in our brain? As portrait photographers know, telling someone to “smile” is going to elicit a show of teeth, not a genuine smile.

Isaiah is rejoicing as well in the brief passage we hear from his pen today. He hasn’t been invited to do so; he just *is* that way. Why, we ask? Because he’s been *anointed* by God – a ritual typically reserved for royalty in the ancient world. But Isaiah’s joy in this comes not from expectations of deference on the part of others. Rather, he’s now a servant, dispatched to bring that same joy to the dispossessed, to free captives and prisoners, and to herald the jubilee – a reversal of fortune that will have the poor and oppressed vindicated by God and comforted.

Advent is more than halfway through. Christmas, and the joy it brings (when social distancing isn’t required) will soon be upon us. But let’s not slice up “joy” into seasons and dates. Let’s not, à la Marie Kondo, sort our knick-knacks into piles of things that “spark” it and things that don’t. Let’s *create* it on a daily basis, in Advent, Christmastime, and Ordinary Time. End oppression.

Eradicate poverty. Make systemic, de facto racism as obsolete as segregation and Jim Crow. This is the joy of Christ’s justice – a joy we needn’t be instructed to display.

Ed Tverdek, OFM
St. Peter's in the Loop

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2020

LOVE



Today’s responsorial psalm uses the refrain, “Teach me your ways, O Lord.”

These six simple words provide us a glimpse of the true gift of Christmas: God’s loving choice to become human to save us.

As we begin the final ten days of this Advent season, I am in awe of the love implicit in that choice.

“Teach me your ways, O Lord.”

Children learning to pray the Our Father often mistake the words as ““My kingdom come ... my will be done”. A cute, innocent mistake as a child, but a mistake too often stated by my actions as an adult.

While my actions may not be as bold as chief priests and the elders attempting to trap Jesus in today’s Gospel, I know that as I do what I think is best, too often my actions are not grounded in seeking God’s way for me today.

“Teach me your ways, O Lord.”

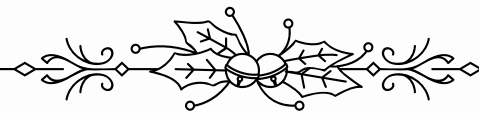
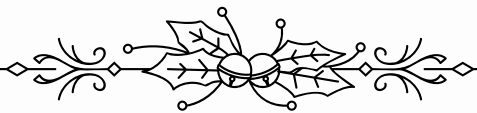
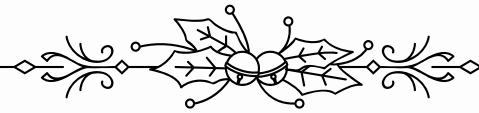
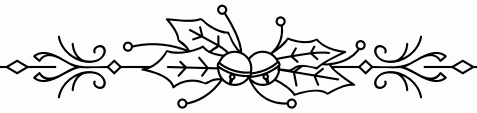
Today let us pray for the grace to seek and see God in the “others” we meet today, whether the poor and marginalized, family, or the half of the country that voted differently.

“Teach me your ways, O Lord.”

May we seek each day to more fully understand the love shown by the savior’s birth.

May we act today - and every day - in that love of God’s way for each of us.

John Ceisel
Br. David Darst Center



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2020

AUTHENTICITY



"At that time you, my people, will no longer need to be ashamed that you rebelled against me. I will remove everyone who is proud and arrogant, and you will never again rebel against me on my sacred hill." (Zephaniah 3:11)

The readings for today compel us to reflect on the place of humility and the authenticity of our word. In the time of the prophet Zechariah and of Jesus, a person's word was their bond. Commitments were made based on the word of a person. How our world has changed! Words get thrown around very glibly on social media and beyond. Truth has become, in our U.S. culture, the province of the one who speaks it.

Today, now more than ever, those who are committed to justice, such as those associated with the Brother David Darst Center, need to witness the value of humility and integrity in our daily lives and in our ministerial presence. We need to be authentic. As Mother Teresa stated so wisely, "Do not act or say that you know, when you do not." Is there anyone more obnoxious than a know-it-all? This is especially true when one who claims enlightened knowledge does so in the area of religious belief.

Christ challenged the Pharisees and their hypocritical response to his probing scenario of two sons responding to their father's request. The Pharisees had all the answers. They felt that they were in control. They HAD to keep control. Jesus was seen as one who threatened this control. He paid for his challenge with his life. Could we even imagine offering our lives, whether literally or figuratively, for the truth?

Are we willing and able to be true to our word? Are we willing to have the humility to listen and respond respectfully to those with whom we disagree and those whose experiences differ greatly from ours? Our world desperately needs people of integrity today so that conversations that lead to justice can take place. Only humility and transparency can lead to the change that we hope to see. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to garner the courage to receive these gifts.

Br. Mike Kadow, FSC
John XXIII Education Center

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2020

SOLIDARITY



And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them." (Luke 7:22)

Advent is my favorite season because it's so honest. No matter the year, Advent always seems to come right on time, inviting us to dwell in the dark, waiting and yearning for the goodness that is yet to come. Advent invites us to acknowledge the pain around us and cry "O Lord How Long?" Advent invites us to turn our gaze toward the promise of Good News.

When we proclaim the Good News, we must always ask, "Good News for who?" What is the Good News of Jesus and who will receive this Good News? What will actually be Good News for those who are suffering under the weight of injustice?

Throughout the Gospel stories, Jesus demonstrates over and over again that we cannot proclaim the Good News without showing solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Solidarity requires more than our charity. It requires our presence and our commitment to social and political accompaniment.

At The Night Ministry, we provide lifesaving services to those experiencing homelessness and we know that our care cannot stop there. If we are truly to be carriers of Good News, we must create deep relationships with our clients and come alongside them to address the systemic injustices that contribute to their struggle.

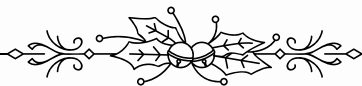
As we dwell in the disorienting dark this Advent, as we yearn for transformation and for Good News, let us remember that Jesus came to bring Good News to the poor and make the oppressed go free. Let us remember that Good News requires a complete reorientation of ourselves and our society.

This Advent, may we cry out, "O Lord How Long," and may we come alongside those on the borderlands of society, proclaiming the Good News that God has a deep, abiding love for the poor, and we shall too.

Rev. Brittany Caine-Conley
The Night Ministry

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020

LEGACY



"Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah." (Mt 1:17)

Fourteen generations. Scripture today tells us it was 14 generations from the time of Abraham, the father of our shared Judeo-Christian-Islamic faith, to King David. It was then another 14 generations from the time of King David to the Babylonian exile. And finally, another 14 generations from the Babylonian exile to Christ Jesus. 42 combined generations - nearly 1500 years in total.

Reflecting on this passage from Matthew, I cannot help but also call to mind the cleaning products in my home - 7th generation. As noted online, "the Seventh Generation Principle is based on an ancient Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) philosophy that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future."

Seven generations... fourteen generations... 1500 years... these all feel so far away. In a time of division and bifurcation, in a time of distress and nihilism, in a time where hope seems so far away, both our Judeo-Christian-Islamic faith and the faith of so many indigenous peoples remind us we have to look forward - way forward - to a time well beyond that which we can see. We have to plant seeds that one day will grow and water seeds already planted.

An ancient proverb reminds us, "a society grows great when people plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit.

What seeds will you plant today? What plants will you water? Your actions today will surely have an impact 7, 14, even 42 generations from now. For what do you want to be remembered? "Tell me, what will you do with your one wild and precious life?"

Keith Donovan
Br. David Darst Center

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020

ACCOMPANIMENT



"When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him." (Matthew 1:24)

In English, "Taller de José" means Joseph's Workshop; this name was inspired by the patron of our founders at the Congregation of St. Joseph, and we are a resource center where community members can gain access to the tools they need to achieve their goals. I am struck by today's readings in which Joseph listens to the angel who visits him, even though he still must have so many questions about the child Mary is carrying and Joseph's own role in the story.

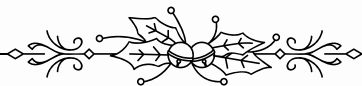
In many ways, this is our role as *Compañerxs*, or 'Companions', at Taller de José. Sometimes a situation may feel so challenging that it can be difficult to see what our role is; many of our clients face the impacts of system injustices that seem far beyond the scope of what we are able to address. But, like our patron Joseph, we are called to walk alongside our neighbors, many of whom have been marginalized by society. And when we respond to that call, it is such an honor and privilege to be a part of our clients' journeys for a time, even if we won't fully understand the "big picture" or full story.

Ultimately, through all the challenges or difficult situations we encounter, Joseph serves as an example of how we can find the path forward through listening; though we might not hear angels speaking to us in dreams, we can be attuned to the spirit's call in our lives and, as importantly, to the voices of the community members we serve.

Anna Mayer
Taller de José

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020

SHELTER



“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.” (Isaiah 11:1)

At Su Casa this year we have been working to reclaim the garden, digging up the well-established roots of weeds and shrubs, pruning back trees that have gone a little wild. Our garden grows in the foundation of St Augustine's Catholic Church, bringing vegetables and habitat out of rock. Similarly, the former Franciscan Friary we call home shelters women in search of peace and love we were denied, but believe our children deserve. We see both growth (a fruit tree cut to the ground bore fruit again) and loss (about a dozen community members left us, giving us cause to reflect, reconsider, and rebuild).

When we think of shelter, we picture a roof over our heads and walls to keep out the wind. In the dark and cold of a Chicago winter, I suspect you will have found some minimal shelter - a blanket, a coat, a bus stop - before reading this reflection. Isaiah's words, however, remind us that there is another shelter, the shelter of solid earth, the shelter of deep roots, the shelter of new potential. These bring us through adversity as surely as a building keeps out a storm.

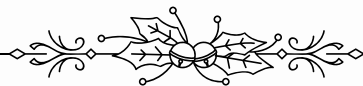
The principles of the Catholic Worker (living out the Works of Mercy, caring for our neighbors, giving freely, and working to correct injustice so that there may be peace) spring eternal and bear fruit wherever they are planted. The faith of the Franciscans are deeper roots yet, grounded in the bedrock of simplicity, service, and sustainability. This faith and this place will remain in service to the community in new and different ways long after we are gone.

Do you find yourself wandering among stumps this advent season? What roots anchor these fallen trees? Seek the courage of buds and shoots that grow to bear good fruit again.

Maria Bergh
Su Casa Catholic Worker

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020

COURAGE



“But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.’” (Luke 1:30)

I imagine this scene, - Mary is young, pregnant, not married. What does she think and feel? What will people say? What will her family and friends think? And Joseph, will he still love her?

But Mary has courage. She has courage to listen instead to that still small voice that says, you have found favor with God!

We have all found favor with God, we are created in God's image and likeness; therefore, God is in us, with us, through us.

It takes courage to live in that truth and to continue to hear that still small voice. As I imagine Mary had competing voices telling her the opposite of that truth, we have those voices today. “You are not enough”; “you are not good enough”; “they are bad”; “they are wrong”; “things will never get better”; “our country is awful”; “things are hopeless”.

It takes courage to still those voices and to listen to that voice that reminds us to have hope, to not give up, to believe that a light does shine in the darkness and the darkness cannot expel the light. It takes courage to believe that God is with us!

In this season of Advent, we prepare for Emmanuel – God with Us. We search for and sweep away those things that block us from knowing this truth. Then at Christmas we truly experience the birth of the Christ in us!!!

It takes courage to have hope, it takes courage to remove what blocks me from the truth and it takes courage to allow the Christ to live in and through me.

In this Advent Season may we have the courage to truly know that we have all found favor with God. May we lean into that truth in our thoughts, words and actions, not only with ourselves, but with all whom we encounter each day.

Lee Hubbell
Loyola University Chicago, JVC Magis

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2020

HUMBLENESS



"Let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and you are lovely." (Song 2:14)

God also manifests himself in that which many times seems simple and ordinary—that which many times seems to be significant. Certainly, sometimes we would like to see, hear, and experience the presence of God in the same way that we see, hear, and experience the presence of one of the many people who are part of our lives.

It is true that there have been many people who have had extraordinary manifestations of God, especially those mystical saints whose experiences continue to illuminate our path of faith. But God's love for us is so great that it is not limited only to supernatural experiences. When one has a simple heart that lives and yearns for God, even in the simplest and most ordinary things, God will reveal His presence.

This is the reason why there have been so many people who have found holiness in such simple things as being the porter of a convent such as was the case of St. Conrad of Parzham or Blessed Solanus Casey. Their secret was not in the importance of their ministry, but in the importance they gave to their ministry.

In my time here in Chicago, in which I have had the opportunity to work with many people in St. Clare of Montefalco Parish, I have met many people who dedicate their time and service to the Church with the same love and fidelity as that attributed to the saints. Certainly all of them are very holy people who have taught me that God is also found in simple and ordinary things and that it is necessary to calm down our hearts so that we gaze and rejoice in God manifested in the simplicity and ordinary things of our lives, and thus be able to say: "Oh God, how sweet is your voice and how loving your gaze."

Br. Jose Maria Vera, OFM Cap.
St. Clare of Montefalco Parish Hispanic Ministry

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2020

PERCEPTION



"He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty." (Luke 1:51-53)

At the heart of the Gospel reading from Luke 1, Mary sings about the changes that will follow the birth of her son. She celebrates a time, soon to be upon us, when the rulers will be thrown down and the lowly lifted up, when the hungry will be well-fed and the well-fed will be hungry. Jesus later confirms his Mother's convictions when he returns to Nazareth, and before his family and friends, claims to be the "anointed one," sent by God to announce glad tidings to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed." Alleluia! The reign of God is upon us! The great reversal is underway! Our world is reborn with Jesus, and we will never be the same!

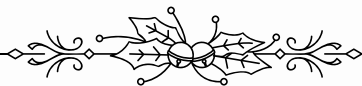
But I wonder. Are we a new people, working for the great reversal? Are our poor, those suffering and dying of Covid, those locked in our prisons, those isolated in our care facilities, those families stuck on the Southern side of the border, perhaps without their children, and those left jobless and homeless and helpless, are they celebrating the reign of God? Are they experiencing the great reversal proclaimed by Mary and owned by Jesus?

None of us aligned with the Darst Center can be naïve about the role that our Catholic community has played in the "great reversal." Collectively, we have not been agents of social change. We have not been God's instruments to bring about economic, racial, environmental, and gender justice. We have not been courageous stewards of Cardinal Bernardin's hope for a Catholic community, united under a "consistent ethic of life."

Which is why we celebrate Advent, the coming of the Savior into our hearts, and why we support the Darst Center and work for the Darst Center, which introduces young people to Mary and Jesus's vision and offers an experience of the reign of God, alive and at-work in Chicago. May we be ever more faithful to the vision proclaimed by Mary, and may it become the star we follow as we actualize the Reign of God among us.

Robin O'Keeffe - Mercy Associate, Mother McAuley High School
& Michael O'Keeffe - St. Xavier University

SUPPORT

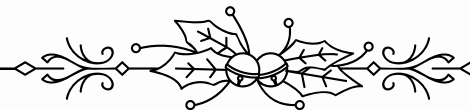


This year, fraught with challenges, we've all needed a little more- patience, empathy, grace, and certainly a little more support. Over the past several months, Sarah's Circle has had to make many adjustments to continue safely serving our clients. These adjustments would not have been possible without the network of supporters that we've cultivated over the past 40 years. Whether we needed hot meals, toiletries, monetary donations, marketing assistance (or anything else on our extremely long to-do list!) Sarah's Circle supporters have worked as a community to help our unhoused neighbors. Though the assistance is always appreciated- given the circumstances, this year we've been filled with more gratitude than ever.

Sarah's Circle has a unique way of offering support to clients entering our programs. Not only do we provide housing for women that are experiencing homelessness, but we also host a wide array of wrap-around services that constitute a full continuum of care. This enables us to truly meet clients where they are and offer them supportive services that fit their individual needs. Housing, laundry services, showers, meals, case management, art therapy, are all things that clients can take advantage of. These are optional, not compulsory, so clients can choose how and when they want to be involved.

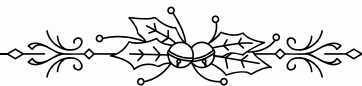
By offering a safe and welcoming space where these programs and activities happen, we help support clients through their entire journey out of homelessness. With the express aim of ending homelessness for women, Sarah's Circle staff, volunteers, donors, and clients themselves, have successfully created a climate of support that, for many, serves as a refuge from the harsher realities of their everyday lives.

Dakota Chisholm
Sarah's Circle



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2020

TRANSFORMATION



"In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Lk 1:78-79)

Billy does not talk much and for months he had stopped using the bathroom; his parents had to potty-train him all over again at age seven. Every morning they needed the security guard's assistance to force him into his classroom. Billy was autistic. His parents wanted to transfer him to Pui Tak Christian School.

Mrs. Ho, the Principal told the parents, "We don't have a special education program, and he will lose most of the services from Chicago Public School if enrolled in our school."

Billy's mother spoke softly. "He doesn't need special programs; he needs love, and he'll get that here. I know he will."

Billy started attending our school all week, willingly, no more battling in the morning, but the real miracle came on Saturday when Billy jumped out of bed and dressed. "I'm ready for school," he proclaimed.

"But Billy," mom told him, "We don't go to school on weekends, remember?"

"I am going to school!" Billy demanded to be taken to school.

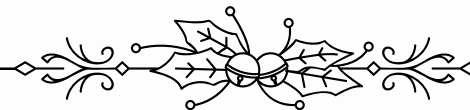
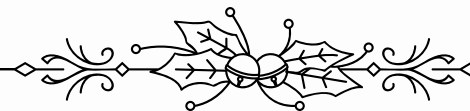
"See? It's empty. We'll have to wait until Monday," his mother said. The next morning, he demanded again to go to school and they repeated the episode anew.

In Billy's class, the Bible lessons came alive, his classmates learned firsthand what it meant to be accepting. They learned about patience, understanding, and helping others. They didn't just learn about Christ by listening to stories; they learned by experience.

"Who can tell me what the word 'joy' means?" the teacher asked during chapel. Billy raised his hand. The teacher handed Billy the microphone, and he spoke: "Pui Tak - School - joy - .com."

Pui Tak may not have a special education program, but it is a special place where life transformation takes place. It is God who guides our feet into the path of joy and peace!

Bonnie Ho
Pui Tak Christian School



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



November 29	Rachel Lyons - Br. David Darst Center	Openness	December 12	Hector Avitia - Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation	Awareness
November 30	Sr. Joy Clough, RSM - Sisters of Mercy	Humility	December 13	Ed Tverdek, OFM - St. Peter's in the Loop	Joy
December 1	Br. Michael Joseph Groark, OFM Cap. - The Port Ministries	Beauty	December 14	John Ceisel - Br. David Darst Center	Love
December 2	Ryan Lents - Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism	Stewardship	December 15	Br. Mike Kadow, FSC - John XXIII Education Center	Authenticity
December 3	Br. Javier Rodriguez, OFM Cap. - Br. David Darst Center	Gratitude	December 16	Rev. Brittany Caine-Conley - The Night Ministry	Solidarity
December 4	Claire DesHotels - JVC Magis, St. Mary of the Lake	Liberation	December 17	Keith Donovan - Br. David Darst Center	Legacy
December 5	Samantha Wilson - Lasallian Volunteers, Maria Kaupas Center	Service	December 18	Anna Mayer - Taller de José	Accompaniment
December 6	Mauricio Huertas - Latino Union of Chicago	Justice	December 19	Maria Bergh - Su Casa Catholic Worker	Shelter
December 7	Daniel Walton, Lasallian Volunteers, San Miguel Middle School	Perseverance	December 20	Lee Hubbell - Loyola University Chicago, JVC Magis	Courage
December 8	Dr. Karen Ross - Marquette University	Salvation	December 21	Br. Jose Maria Vera, OFM Cap. - St. Clare of Montefalco Parish	Humbleness
December 9	Dr. Grant Gholson - St. Ignatius College Prep	Happiness	December 22	Robin O'Keeffe - Mercy Associate, Mother McAuley H.S. & Michael O'Keeffe - St. Xavier University	Perception
December 10	Br. Mike Dorn, OFM Cap. - The Port Ministries	Strength	December 23	Dakota Chisholm - Sarah's Circle	Support
December 11	Rachel Lyons - Br. David Darst Center	Renewal	December 24	Bonnie Ho - Pui Tak Christain School	Transformation

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." (Matthew 1: 22-23)



See it Differently

BR. DAVID DARST CENTER
FOR JUSTICE & PEACE • SPIRITUALITY & EDUCATION