

The San Antonian

Volume XXIII Issue 1

Winter 2017

Reconciliation & Transformation

The San Antonian Committee met late last year to plan the theme for this issue. As we discussed the timing of this issue, that it would come out sometime in the vicinity of February or March, the themes of reconciliation and transformation seemed appropriate. February is Black History Month, a time to recognize the achievements of African Americans and the history of race in our country—a history that cries out for reconciliation and transformation. As March begins, so does Lent, the season in which Catholics focus on reconciliation and transformation. We thank those who have contributed their very personal reflections on these themes. We hope that you will find them inspirational as you begin your Lenten journey.

Racism and Reconciliation

By Mary Anne Bressler

I am sitting at my laptop on Martin Luther King Day, contemplating the themes of this issue of the San Antonian: reconciliation and transformation. For me, thinking about reconciliation inevitably raises thoughts about racism and our need as a nation for reconciliation and transformation.

The critical element of reconciliation as it relates to social sins like racism, as opposed to personal sin, is that it often looks like trying to tear down the Great Wall of China with a hammer. If I step on your toe or your ego, I can go to you and apologize and repair the relationship. But when we are talking about a system of injustice, the task seems overwhelming, and one hardly knows how to begin. What can I as an individual do to turn around nearly 400 years of injustice?

The first thing is probably to let go of a Messiah complex. I *can't* single-handedly change the course of the ship that literally began sailing here with human cargo in 1619 and has metaphorically delivered people of color into Jim Crow, redlining, and mass incarceration. I can't be arrogant enough to think I can save the world, but I also can't be defensive or oblivious enough to deny my participation in racist structures because "I'm not prejudiced." (Or "I have black friends," or "I work with black people.") That attitude is

continued on page 3

"Accidental" Reconciliation

By Jan Wittke

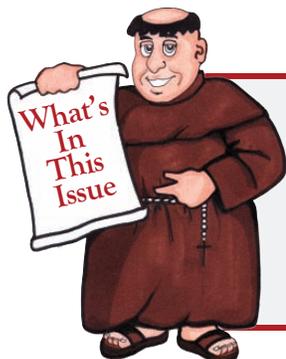
My first experience with the sacrament of reconciliation was an accident—at least I thought so at the time.

For almost two years I had been attending Community of Hope, a non-territorial parish that met in various spaces, but I was not yet a professed Catholic. I had all kinds of doubts. For instance, I was skeptical about how the sacrament of reconciliation worked. If God would forgive you no matter what you did, if you were truly sorry, what was to keep people—including me!—from sinning over and over again and then saying we repented? What if we/I were sorry but kept making the same mistakes over and over? And how would talking to a priest about sins and following through on a penance bring forgiveness—just like that?

But something was tugging at me and I found myself curious enough to go to a reconciliation service one cold winter night. I understood there would be readings and prayers, with the option of individual confessions. Of course my plan was to attend the group service only.

The service was held in an old mansion with rows of folding chairs set up in the living room. There was not a

continued on page 2



<i>Racism and Reconciliation</i>	1	<i>The Father's Love</i>	4
<i>"Accidental" Reconciliation</i>	1	<i>Mentoring Returning Citizens</i>	5
<i>Repentance</i>	2	<i>We Are All Worthy of Good Things</i>	5
<i>God Meets Us in Our Real Lives</i>	3	<i>New Parishioners and Baptisms</i>	5
<i>"That Man" and What He Taught Me</i>	3	<i>The Good Life</i>	6

Repentance

By Kathy Ryan

When I first approached the idea of writing about repentance and Lent, I thought, “piece of cake”. Repentance just means you are sorry and feel remorse and will try not to do that bad thing again. Then I started to really put some serious thought into what it means to repent. When I looked a little deeper into the idea of repentance, it made me uncomfortable. It was like taking a deeper, harder look at myself.

When I was young, repentance took place in connection with confession. It usually meant three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys and off I would go feeling sin-free. As I grew older (and wiser?), I came to realize that to repent or atone for my sins, there was a great deal more involved. To truly repent takes an honest acknowledgement of my wrongdoings. It takes feeling true sorrow that what I have done has been hurtful to God, to others, and to myself. I need to make amends when possible. And then I need to improve/change/challenge my behavior so that I act in a manner that brings me closer to God, to others, and to myself. As I wrap my head around this whole idea and my humanness, the struggle with that humanness begins anew.

How do I work at being the real loving person that I want to be? How do I avoid “the near occasion of sin” that is a very easy pitfall for me? How do I avoid returning to the problematic behaviors? I honestly feel remorse and sorrow

for what I have done, but it so easy to go back down that slippery slope of behaviors that diminish me as a person, as a child of God.

I realized one thing that would help me is being present. Live in the present. Be present. If each person, situation, and intent is in the present, it would allow me to deal honestly in the now. It is the past and the future that cause most of my anxiety/sadness/anger/frustration/shortcomings/lack of peace. While there is value in reflecting on the past and possible future issues, it causes much of the static and interference in my thinking and perception. If I truly live and think in the present, I may actually listen and try to understand what is going on in each situation. If I am present to the person who is “making me” angry or whom I find myself joining in a negative situation, I may find that I can see past the facade of the situation and actually be able to respond in a thoughtful manner.

So many times it is not about me, and yet I believe it is. There it is: that *egoic self* talked about so much by philosophers. Being present, listening, thinking, praying, and letting go of the ego are all factors that can connect me to real repentance. If I am sincerely trying to be the better person who lives inside me, I must let go of the ego so that I can let God work through me. That letting go will allow me to see each person or situation as part of God's presence on earth. So, when I reflect on repenting, I find it is not a quick “sorry”. It is trying to improve and take action to avoid offending again and it is also making the effort to live in a manner that helps me get past the pitfalls of not being present.

“Accidental” Reconciliation *continued*

seat to be had when the service started, and I was glad to have gotten one of the last ones on the center aisle. Except that when the time came for people to line up for the individual confessions, I had to step into the aisle to make way for those in my row. I meant to step back into my row but was borne along in the crush of people toward the end of the aisle and the smaller rooms where priests sat waiting.

And then there I was in a small dimly lit room with a priest seated across from me. I was relieved to see that he was a friend I had worked with in the inner city, so I could tell him that I was only there by accident and wouldn't waste his time. He seemed amused, and asked me why I thought I was there by mistake. I told him how skeptical I was, and he seemed unsurprised. “Will you pray with me?” he asked, and then led into what seems in my memory to be one of the most conversational prayers I've ever heard.

So when he asked me if there was something I was carrying in my heart that I was truly sorry for, it was easy to say yes. I had been angry with my father for a very long time, carrying a corrosive grudge that I couldn't shake. When he asked if I wanted to give it over to God, of course I did. He asked God to take it from me, we prayed the Our Father, and he blessed me and told me to go in peace. “Just like that?” I remember saying. “Yes,” he said, smiling.

I woke up the next morning feeling inexplicably happy, and then realized the anger was missing. When I called my friend the priest to ask what he had done to make it evaporate overnight, he told me that God had recognized that I was genuinely sorry and taken it from me, yes, just like that. I kept waiting—first all day, then all week, then all year—for it to come back, but it never did. As time passed, I came to realize that I had been trying to explain the inexplicable, and that God's patience with me—with all of us—is endless.

God Meets Us in Our Real Lives

By Caroline Benken, CSJ

Love is never a reward for being good. We experience this in our everyday lives, but we sometimes forget this for ourselves. We become good as we experience the love of God in our lives. We even can become a compassionate lover as God is compassionate with us.

The whole reality of this idea poured into me as I listened to two men and a woman who were dealing with spouses who were physically and mentally disturbed. They carried their patients' dishes or administered their medicines with small loving gestures of hugging or kissing. They carried their frustrations to those who might lead them in better ways. They are there always to alleviate others' suffering. It is a compassionate God who reveals to others their undying love in our good times and in bad times. Do they think of God living in them in their real lives?

We study books to know more about racism or human-trafficking, but sometimes we need a book that will transform our spiritual inner lives. Not a book to rapidly go through, but one that will call me to recognize God in my real life. It isn't that it's new stuff, but it relates to our present moment.

One book, *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity* by Ronald Rolheiser, is one of those books. It catches fire in our belly. It rings true of the God who meets us in our real lives. Reading this book is a praying time that looks to God to change us in our everyday meeting with him.

One way to share God's love is in the expression of delight or blessing for another, such as telling a child, a colleague, or a minister what good they are doing by making God a real living presence. To be present in our body language is more than just being there. It tells so many how blessed we are to have love in our lives.

On the other hand, we do not need to be in an abusive relationship. Jesus was not afraid to confront his abusers. He did not take it out on the abusive, but found his love in others. Sometimes he looked to others to lift us up to welcome God that is clearer to us, such as the good thief on the cross, than the oppressors standing nearby.

Most of us have someone who was a part of our lives and has now become one of the dead we honor. Do we meet God through the dearly departed? How does praying for the dead help us? Prayer is for changing us so that we might see God. Prayer is to be a consolation for us. Are there wounds to be healed? Are there relationships to be carried on? Death clears away so many obstacles.

This book has many more possibilities. It just takes time to look at these causes. Do we see differently than before? Does this book, or another like it, make us ask the question of how God lives in me and in others? What does it say in my real life? Did Jesus become human to be just like us? Or was his humanity, in all its ups and downs, to show how we can come to see God in our real human lives?

"That Man" and What He Taught Me

By Jody Coaston

There was once a young man in our neighborhood who would wander past our house several times a day with his dog. Obese and greasy-haired, he shuffled slowly and aimlessly down the sidewalk, always dressed in a dirty tee-shirt and drooping sweatpants or shorts which exposed a wide expanse of pale, hairy stomach. His unleashed dog went wherever it pleased, peeing on every vertical surface and leaving deposits in front yards along the way. The man stood there while the dog was performing its functions, munching on candy bars or snack foods and dropping the wrappers on the sidewalk when he finished them. He never picked up the dog's leavings or his own, and when we tried a few times to suggest that this would be a good idea he simply stared blankly at us and meandered off, returning a few hours later to repeat the process. We didn't know his name, but referred to him with exasperation only as "That Man", as in, "There goes That Man again. Watch out for the pile beside the maple tree!"

continued on page 4

Racism and Reconciliation *continued*

its own kind of arrogance, born of the privilege of living in a world in which I almost never *have* to think about my own skin color when I'm shopping or job hunting or driving in a strange neighborhood. How can I possibly know or understand what it's like to be a person of color?

The next thing I can do is look to the actual Messiah, as found in the Gospels. As Martin Luther King and so many others have pointed out, the blueprint for justice—which is the goal of reconciliation—is contained in the Scriptures. Jesus was a person of color, a person whose life was dominated by outsiders who robbed his people of power, of dignity and often of life. The teachings of the gospel compel those of us with power to relinquish it, for (as Mary sings in Luke's Gospel) God will lift up the lowly and humble the exalted. Jesus tells us that God's judgment falls on those who refuse to recognize the face of God in others (see Matthew 25). For Jesus, reconciliation *is* transformation. Jesus forgives sins, and the blind see, the lame walk, the leper is made clean. By so doing, Jesus makes a point of recognizing the dignity of those who have been excluded, judged unjustly or even hated.

Knowing that I'm not Jesus but that Jesus has given us some clear teachings, what am I to do? How do I pick up my hammer and start chipping away at that wall? There is no short answer, but my seeking has led me to believe that the first critical step is to listen and to honor the stories of people who have lived under the weight of racism and to acknowledge my complicity in the structures that privilege me and disadvantage others, structures that are based on an artificial construct that has nothing whatsoever to do with our fundamental identity as children of God.

The Father's Love

By Sandra Willingham

I grew up in a large bustling family in the West College Hill neighborhood of Cincinnati, the fourth child of Oscar and Ruby Willingham, the “baby,” a “daddy’s girl.” I was able to tie my shoes and was already reading by the time we moved from the West End in 1947; “cry-baby” to my mom and siblings, but no, simply “tenderhearted” in my daddy’s eyes.

When I was five, as we kids returned from Sunday School, two Precious Blood Sisters assigned to the new Colored Mission of St. Richard of Chichester called us four siblings across North Bend Road to tour the new church. This led to our reception of the sacraments the next year as an entire family. I was not made to wait until I reached second grade as was customary because I could read and I was able to memorize and understand the *Baltimore Catechism* lessons. I also learned to trust the Lord Jesus so much so that the nuns dubbed me “Jesus’ Pet.” I loved the process and I still do, which explains my attachment to this very day to the RCIA ministry.

Less than a year later, at age 32, our beloved Daddy was gone. He was suddenly buried under tons of concrete when a roof he and a fellow contractor were building collapsed, suffocating our father and breaking his neck. Also buried under that concrete was my anchor, my emotional mirror who reflected back to me all the qualities in me that pleased him, most especially that tender heart. Precious few were the years we had with our father modeling a father’s love. But they were enough. God spared our mother, who taught us to value education and effort as the means to succeed in this world. Finally, besides our extended family, God gave us the Church and the sacraments to comfort us in our loss.

Years later, I asked our Mom how we survived, even thrived, after that, keeping us in Catholic school, finding a new husband and bearing four more children during the succeeding ten years. She described to me how when she got to Daddy at the morgue all she could see at first were his feet, which she immediately recognized. She said she began reciting the Lord’s Prayer. When she came to the words “Thy will be done,” she fell on her knees and surrendered. She said when she finished that prayer and stood up she had the strength to go on.

On January 16, 2017, we lost Tamara Price Clarke, my sister’s 52 year-old daughter, who died suddenly of a ruptured aorta. Her funeral was a loving, joyous/sad, Black Baptist, home-going celebration lasting over two hours. Besides our side of the family, people attending included her father’s side and his church family, as well as neighbors from Arizona, where Tam and George had lived the longest, and from Virginia where the family had moved recently. All of us brought, along with unending food and supplies, our deepest sympathy and, as well, our own vulnerabilities and trials.

There seems to be, among us, a tacit agreement that allows each other to be who we are. Life has taught us that when acceptance takes over affection soon follows, then generosity, which leads to sacrifice of time, effort, finances—not counting the cost. There is no room for snarkiness, no pulling scabs off old wounds. On the contrary, the vibe all week has been total peace. Because truth be told, nobody’s perfect. We are all so fragile. Our vulnerabilities are so palpable, we all realize that what happened to Tam could easily happen to any one of us at any time. In fact, what happened to the Clarke family had happened to the Willinghams 68 years ago. That’s why we all came a-running to George and the kids when we got the news about Tammy’s passing.

God speed, Tamara! May the angels lead you into Paradise; may the martyrs come to welcome you and take you to the holy city, the new and eternal Jerusalem.

“That Man” and What He Taught Me *continued*

This went on for several years, until one day I had an encounter with “That Man” that was completely different. It was Palm Sunday, which had come late that spring, and it was a beautiful, warm day. We had just finished rehearsing the Passion, and I stood with a group of friends on the front porch of St. Anthony’s chatting and enjoying the sunshine, when suddenly someone on the sidewalk said, “Hey!” It was “That Man”. His speech was indistinct, and it took a moment to understand that he was asking, “When’s church?” I went down the steps and approached him. I smiled and said, “I know you; you live near me. My name’s Jody. What’s yours?” He said that he was Tommy, and he wanted to come to Mass. I told him when Mass started, and explained that today was Palm Sunday so we would start outside by the school and then go into the church. I handed him my palm to carry, and urged him to stay and join us. He muttered something I didn’t catch and walked off. I didn’t know if he would really come back, but at Communion time there he was, still in dirty clothes, still with grubby exposed skin, walking up the aisle. But now he was no longer “That Man”; he was Tommy, my neighbor, my friend, another valued member of my church family. I reached out and patted his arm and smiled at him as he passed; he looked surprised, then smiled back.

That evening, I marveled at how differently I’d felt and behaved because I was standing at the entrance to church when I saw him. Wow! What a nice, pious thought... But then a question came to me that took my breath away: When have I ever stood anywhere else? If we believe that we *are* the church, and I do believe this, then wherever we stand *is* the entrance to church. We stand there always, and must act accordingly. It is our duty to approach, to include, to welcome, to accept, and to love, because we stand on sacred ground. Everywhere. Always.

Thank you, Tommy.

Mentoring Returning Citizens

By Bob Ehram

“Bob, I need to talk to you” is the text message that I have received many times from my HELP Program mentee, “J” (his first initial). The HELP Program was created in 2007 by Marianist Brother Mike Murphy to serve Returning Citizens by inspiring hope in those who have been convicted of a felony, served time, and now have been released to society as a “returning citizen”. The Program provides a caring community of support as well as the tools, education, and resources that returning citizens need to find and maintain employment and become fully self-sufficient and contributing members of their community. The HELP Program has grown over the years, both in terms of the number of returning citizens who are in the Program as well as in the types of services provided for them. The mentoring component was added in June, 2015, when J and I were matched at the first mentor-mentee training and matching session. There are now over twenty mentor-mentee pairs that include both men and women.

As I and my fellow mentors have learned, each mentor-mentee relationship has its own unique characteristics that are based mainly on the needs of the mentee. These needs usually change over time. Flexibility and adaptability are essential as setbacks are likely; however, real progress can be realized with persistence. Over the past two years J and I have grown together in terms of mutual respect, understanding, and love for each other.

This year J had a major setback when he was charged with some misdemeanor offenses that resulted in his incarceration for over 45 days in the Hamilton County jail. His cases were finally adjudicated and he now has been released to probation. As a very resourceful person he also quickly regained employment. While re-incarceration was a bad experience for J, it could have been devastating if not for his admirable strong faith in God which gave him hope and helped him get through his time in jail without totally breaking his spirit. Perhaps my continuing support, including letters and a few jail visits as well as my prayers, helped a bit too.

Finally, I would like to add that being with J through this most recent experience has been eye-opening for me in regards to the unfairness and even injustices that seem to be inherent in the Hamilton County judicial system. For someone such as J who comes from a challenging socioeconomic background the system can seem to be quite intimidating, if not downright unfair. This is even more so the case for a person of color. Individual advocacy efforts and mentoring programs are great and they do help, but I now also realize that advocacy for change to the system itself is greatly needed. Perhaps the social justice faith community should make this sort of advocacy a greater priority. Returning citizens in the HELP program are doing their part to reconcile themselves with God and society; maybe it is time for us to advocate more effectively for society’s reconciliation with returning citizens!

We Are All Worthy of Good Things

By Sally Von Lehman

“No matter where we are, we are better coming together than living separately. We come on circuitous paths from prisons, from the streets, from churches because we are tired and want to live in hope. We come in every color. We come lonely and afraid and do not want to die. We come because our bodies and spirits are sick and our teeth are falling out and we know we need help.” (“Find Your Way Home: Words from the Street, Wisdom from the Heart”). These words echo those I’ve heard over the years from Cincinnati women of “Off The Streets”.

The “Off The Streets” (OTS) program, which is under the umbrella of Cincinnati Union Bethel, has provided a home for women who are victims of sex trafficking and drug addiction since 2006. When entering OTS, many women have lived on the streets for years; often they’ve been in and out of jail, have tried various rehabilitation agencies, and have lost their families and their health. OTS is a safe haven where the women live in community receiving love, support, physical and emotional healing, and skills for re-entry into the work force and life.

On Friday mornings I have the privilege of coming into the OTS circle to sit with, pray with, and listen with these beautiful women. While their particular stories may vary, all the women have made a commitment to sobriety, to healing, and to strengthening their spiritual lives. Watching the transformation of these women gives me hope and confirms my belief in the healing powers of our God. “We are made in the image of God. We look at each person’s journey beginning not with original sin but original grace. Our journeys all start and end with God, and everything we do is a step toward our return to wholeness. Because grace is our beginning, we are worthy of all good things.” (“Find Your Way Home...”)

**Find Your Way Home: Words from the Street, Wisdom from the Heart* was written by women from Magdelene House, a similar agency in Nashville, TN.*

New Parishioners

Ian and Cheryl Foley and children: Isabella, Addison and Evelyn
Ken and Diane McPhillips

Baptisms

Connor Joseph Dill, son of Brian and Katie
Corinne Frances Studebaker, daughter of Erin and Jason
Ava Ashley VonLehman, daughter of Chad and Laura

The Good Life

By Deanna Spatz

Oftentimes when I'm at prayer, I think about what it will be like at the end of my life. What will be my biggest regrets? What can I do now to avoid the burden of those regrets at life's end? Widening the scope, I wonder what we as a society will come to regret most deeply in years to come. Daily news feeds flood us with stories that compete for our attention and response. Many things are very important, but all concerns fade away if we don't have a planet to live on. Scientists tell us that we are nearing the place of no return. The world is recognizing the urgency, as 195 countries pledged in December at the Paris Conference to cut greenhouse gas emissions in order to hold global warming to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels.

Margaret Swedish, in her book, *Living Beyond the "End of the World: A Spirituality of Hope*, writes: "We did not intend to create such a world. It has happened, I suspect, much to our surprise, and so quickly – in the span of a lifetime, really – that we can forgive ourselves a bit for reeling, for having a hard time grasping it all. But while we were working hard in a challenging world, this is the reality that unfolded. And it did not unfold evenly or equitably."

A familiar statistic: industrialized countries, with only one-fifth of the world's population, consume two-thirds of the world's resources and generate 75 percent of all the pollution and waste products. At what cost does "the good life" come? Msgr. Charles Murphy writes: "The disparities between human beings who live in squalor and those who have everything money can buy...denies social justice, leads to ecological tragedy, and most of all, creates a misperception of what the good life really is, which ultimately makes excessive consumption a religious question."

Future generations – our grandchildren and great grandchildren – might ask: What did you do once you knew? E.F. Schumacher, author of *Small is Beautiful*, writes of the virtue of temperance – knowing when enough is enough. Pope Paul VI spoke of genuine development as the right not to "have" more but to "be" more. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* lauds the capacity to be happy with little. "It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things."

The world's governments can set standards for industry, but what about our roles as families and individuals? As citizens, consumers. In fact, we know what we need to do – and that it will not be easy. Buying less, driving less, consuming less, using less, and praying more. We pray that this beautiful earth, given by God as a gift and a promise, may not be allowed to perish...selfishness.

The good news is that, faced with the reality of the direness of our situation, more and more people are seeing the challenge as a new mission. People are beginning to live differently. They consume less, not because they have to, but because they want to. They have lost interest in having things, but they have found more meaning in living. Pope Francis tells us that such sobriety is liberating. "It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full."

The world is a web of relationships. In the end, as our awareness deepens of our connectedness to and interdependence on all of creation, reconciliation with all can take place, and transformation can happen. God trusts in our trust in God. God will not give us a role in this historical time without giving us everything we need to fulfill it.

Return Service Requested

www.stanthonychurch.net
Phone (513) 271-0920
Cincinnati, Ohio 45227
Madisonville
6104 Desmond Avenue
St. Anthony Parish

A quarterly newsletter by and about
The San Antonian
St. Anthony Parish

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
CINCINNATI, OH
PERMIT #4448