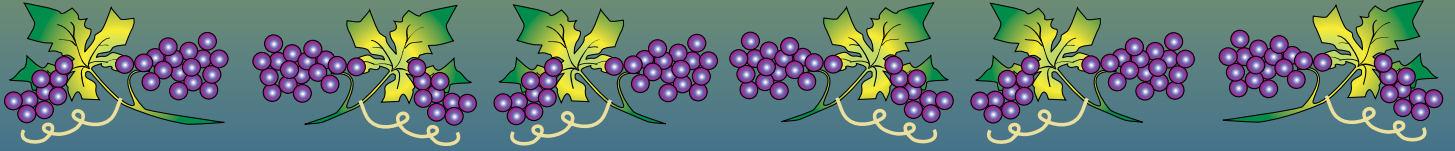


# CONSECRATA

A newsletter for member communities, friends and supporters of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious



FALL 2020

## *Dearest Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

You never thought you would find yourself living through a pandemic.

You never imagined being unable to visit, and comfort, suffering dear ones.

Never could you have guessed that a single Sunday (let alone *months* of Sundays) would ever pass without you in the pew of your parish church.

You could not have imagined your mind plagued with questions, doubts, and uncertainties—you who have built your life on the rock of faith.

I assure you, Jesus is living through this chapter of history with you. When you are unable to visit your loved one, He *is* able. When you were unable to comfort another, He *did* comfort. When you are at home on a Sunday, He is at home with you. When your mind and heart are filled with clouds of questions and doubts—do not be afraid—these are not enough to drive Him away; *nothing* can drive Him away. Nothing can separate you from the saving love of God.

In these challenging times, allow this truth to wash over your soul: *He is with you. He is in You. He will never leave you.*

You are not alone. You belong to God and the Church belongs to God and human history is in His hands.

Now seemed a good time to offer a reminder of Hope.

*Your Sister in Jesus Christ our Lord*



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

**Mother Anna Grace Neenan, OP**

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Dear Friends,

In the treasury of the Church's teaching on religious life, we find a very moving exhortation of Pope Paul VI written to religious in 1971 on the vital *Gospel Witness* we are called to offer the world. Quoting *Lumen Gentium*, he reminds us that "religious give splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes."<sup>1</sup> These words inspire and challenge us still. They are timeless.

Reading the reflections prepared by sisters from several of our member communities for this issue of *Consecrata*, I am struck by the "splendid and striking testimony" they offer to a world so often anxious and fearful in these times of pandemic. How to bring hope in the midst of anxiety and fear? How to recognize ever more deeply God's presence in suffering? How to lift up our hearts, with faith and joy, to the God who loves us? These questions are surely in our

1. cf. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, 50; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 31

minds and hearts as we strive to reach out—by the grace of God—to the needs of those entrusted to our care during these often strange days. The testimonies presented in this issue of *Consecrata* are, I am certain, multiplied in the efforts of countless religious communities. They enable us to be united as we encourage one another to give of ourselves for the sake of Christ and the Church. We are blessed in the witness we receive from one another, and the Church herself is strengthened.



May God's transforming grace be at work in us and through us to bring hope to a world that longs for Him more than it knows.

Let us pray for one another.

*Mother Anna Grace Neenan, OP.*

Mother Anna Grace Neenan, OP  
CMSWR Chairperson

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# JESUS OUR HOPE

By the Marian Sisters of Santa Rosa



It is not uncommon for the Sisters running errands to cause a stir. Recently, two of our Sisters were on an unusual errand—to the jeweler's. The Sisters are preparing for their perpetual profession of vows and needed to be sized for the customary gold ring they will receive as Marian Sisters of Santa Rosa. Not being

a section of town the Sisters regularly frequent, opportunities to encounter those unfamiliar with our life are increased. As the Sisters finished their errand, a little one outside expressed audible interest. "Mommy, who are they?!" Her voice carried clearly despite a mouth full of rapidly softening ice cream. Ice cream cone neglected, her awe-filled eyes traced the Sisters' departure, reminding them tangibly that, "*The very nature of religious vocation involves a public witness to Christ and to the Church*" (Essential Elements, 10).

Little encounters of this nature bring hope and a spontaneous joy, especially as they have been so curtailed over the past few months. A simple trip to the grocery store has always involved opportunities for evangelization. Now, our need to nourish our bodies presents a special chance to awaken the desire for God and the things above this world. Physical nourishment is important, but our need

for intangible nourishment is arguably as essential. Once it became apparent that the pandemic situation and resulting restrictions were going to be impacting our lives for some time, a courageous group of families decided to pitch in and help those most affected and the Agape Food program was created.

This admirable program provides necessities to families affected by the pandemic and the fires, striving to do so in a manner that respects their humanity and buoys spirits. To bring Our Lady's presence into this little apostolate has been a delight! Those served have enjoyed the Sisters' presence and instrumental music, but we might argue that we have received more than we have given. As a largely outdoor program, it has provided us with one of our few opportunities for face-to-face interaction with our people! We pray that though occasions to see the souls in our care are more limited, the interactions we are blessed to have are filled with the fruit of our increased ability to present them to Jesus Face-to-face in our additional adoration hours.



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## BRINGING HOPE TO A NATION THAT IS TROUBLED

By Sister Cecilia Joy Kugel, FSCC, Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity

"So ... why did you decide to become a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant)?" asked a resident one evening as I was getting her ready for bed. "Well," I replied, "It was because of COVID."

I had been living the dream for about six months when the pandemic hit. Having made my first vows, my first mission assignment was to be a Communications Specialist for St. Paul Elder Services, sponsored by our community, the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Life was all lights, camera, action until word started spreading of the Coronavirus, and its effects could be witnessed throughout Wisconsin. With video projects on hold, I began leading

activities and entertaining some of our residents with dementia. It was a joy to make them smile just by singing a song.

But the Lord was tugging my heart beyond my normal theatrics. I would watch the CNAs, see how they interacted with the residents, and hear about how much they were needed. I felt like it was a Mother Teresa moment—experiencing a call within a call. Despite my anxiety and weaknesses, all the reasons to say no, God was calling me to say yes to serving as a CNA.

(continued on next page)

His timing couldn't have been more perfect. Our facility experienced a COVID outbreak just as I was finishing training. There was stress, pressure, fear, but also many heroic moments from the people around me. My fellow associates can say all the kind words about having a sister with them, or how Jesus answers her prayers, but the Lord works through them to answer mine. I am inspired each day by their selflessness, strength, and generosity. Picking up extra shifts is not a burden for me. It is affirmation that God

has placed me where I am needed most at this time. One of the greatest blessings of being a CNA is to see residents living comfortably and at peace, and to know you are one of the reasons this is possible.

Would I be a CNA if the virus had not made an appearance? Who knows? What I do know is that "all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

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## DON'T SAY COVID!

*By the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist*

"When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34). Many these days feel like shepherdless sheep, lost and frustrated. The mother of one of our first-graders recently

In March, we made our daily Mass, Lauds, Vespers, and Compline available through livestream. Postcards went out to 44,500 people throughout the country assuring them of our prayers and inviting them to "join" us virtually in our Motherhouse chapel each day.



told our Sister principal: "The other day, I had to remind Johnny, for what felt like the fiftieth time, 'We can't do such-and-such because of COVID ...' and he solemnly replied, 'Mom, I don't ever want to hear you say that word again!'"

To the loneliness, distress, and discord of these days, religious women, following our Spouse, are called to dispense the balm of His pity, "teaching many things," the eternal truths of His tender shepherding. As Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, we are privileged to contribute to these efforts through prayer, teaching in the classroom, and broader efforts of evangelization.

Catholic education has set a high bar in our country during this crisis. As public schools postponed classes or closed indefinitely, Catholic schools pivoted into online learning within days. Our Sisters, in virtual classrooms from pre-K through college and seminary, continued to prepare second-graders for the sacraments and open to high-schoolers the treasures of Shakespeare and Tolkien. A Learning Portal, [golepress.com/elearning](https://golepress.com/elearning), now augments our *Lumen Ecclesiae Digital* online platform, offering two courses of lessons and videos: *Cultivating the Virtues: God Gives the Growth*, for Kindergarten through fourth grade, and *Life of Christ Lectio Divina Companion*, for seventh grade through adults.

On a lighter note, a series of "COVID Chronicles" videos detailed the various recreational endeavors taken up by the Sisters at the Motherhouse in Ann Arbor and Our Lady of Guadalupe Priory in Texas, and "music videos" recorded the Sisters singing originally composed hymns.

Like Johnny, we may never want to hear the word "COVID" again; thankfully, we have a Word to speak to one another and to those thirsting for direction and reassurance. He is a Word of joy, of truth, and of mercy—and, COVID or no COVID, He is the "same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

# JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU

By *The Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará*

*Jesus, I trust in You.* St. Faustina's simple, yet profound Divine Mercy prayer echoes in our hearts as we reflect on the graces received during the pandemic of 2020. As the global situation turned upside-down overnight with the COVID-19 quarantine, we missionary sisters tried to remain rooted in the unfading hope of Jesus Christ. While change surrounded us, we were blessed with the stability of religious life. "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8).

In *Vita Consecrata*, St. John Paul II urged: "Live to the full your dedication to God, **so that this world may never be without a ray of divine beauty** to lighten the path of human existence" (109). Truly, we are blessed to witness heaven when souls are given even a glimmer of hope, of Divine Mercy—Mercy they may not have sought if not for the pandemic.

For our apostolic missionary sisters, our daily life includes catechism, youth groups, children's oratory, and visits to the sick. During the quarantine, the apostolic service shifted to increased spiritual accompaniment through prayer, community time to foster our consecrated life, and creative ways to digitally accompany the Faithful. In various parts of the country, our witness of hope came through connecting digitally for prayer, catechism, online retreats, Bible camps, youth groups, and school visits. The digital connection allowed amazing possibilities for our missions: our catechists could unite in an annual online conference—from Guyana to Canada and throughout the United States from Baltimore to Brooklyn!



Certainly, the soul of the apostolate is prayer. From Eucharistic Adoration to witnessing the joy and hope of the Gospel by praying the rosary in our neighborhoods, we live our spiritual maternity and help the needy by operating food pantries, feeding those who come to our door, calling the elderly, and planting flower and vegetable gardens.

Our contemplative sisters remain within the stability of the monastery walls uniting in ceaseless prayer in Brooklyn, New York, keeping Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration, offering the St. Ignatius Spiritual Exercises online, accompanying souls around the world in the St. Louis Marie de Montfort preparation for Marian Consecration during Mary's month of May, and sewing face coverings for the local hospitals.

May we confidently trust in Jesus and Mary even during trying times.

# HOPE ABOUND

By Sister Maura Thérèse, School Sisters of Christ the King

Through simply living as a communion of persons, the Lord enlivens hope. **Enjoy a few vignettes of those who have brought us hope, even now.**

Parents and teachers heroically teamed up to educate our Catholic school students last spring with unprecedented learning curves of teaching remotely. Unified again this fall in working toward in-person education, many gave us hope as they put their varied preferences aside to follow the county mandates and school plans.

Our students are just glad to be back together in school and are showing greater self-discipline—may this be the new normal! Masks have not been a problem, yet a kindergarten girl did need teacher intervention; admiring her friend's stylish flowered mask, she asked, "Wanna trade?" The resilience of our youth bolsters hope.

Two boys lifted a Sister principal's heart; she took them to the playground after they worked hard to catch up on some studies. As they tested the upper limits of the swings, they both started laughing freely as if they had not a care in the world. Though their lives are surrounded by difficulties, joy and hope can rise above the earthbound realities—in the boys and in us.

While taking a walk, two Sisters saw some neighbors they had not met before sitting on the porch after a hard day of construction work. One of them yelled out to the Sisters and met them in the middle of the street, saying, "I'm not sure why I just called to you ... this world is so messed up I wanted to talk to someone who follows God. I can see by your clothes you do. I'm not always a good person, but I want to do what's right." After chatting awhile, they asked if he wanted to pray. With unexpected reverence, he immediately dropped the cigarette he was taking out of his pocket. After praying, they handed him his cigarette and exchanged goodbyes. This man's open heart inflamed their hope.

A woman parked her grocery cart near mine and, while comparing onion prices, told me she was hoping her husband would receive clearance to return home from overseas. Despite our social distance, our hearts united as we prayed for him and for all in similar situations, begging God to grant their desires. She thanked me for taking time to talk with her, and her trust that God would work it out made my hope soar.

May we be continually aware of the presence of our Lord of Hope in each of our encounters.

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## IN THE PANDEMIC: FAITH AND HOPE

By Sister Mary Dominic Pitts, OP, Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia

How does a worldwide viral pandemic bring out the theological virtues of faith and hope? So often great faith and hope come out of what is happening, precisely *because* we cannot see where God is taking us. Yet even in this unusual time we have seen the Lord working. So if worldwide illness abounds, faith abounds all the more.

Detaching from our plans to embrace God's will takes faith, nowhere more than in the classroom. Last spring when many schools were closed due to COVID, Sisters and lay faculty had to move quickly in faith to adapt their teaching to an online format. After an entire fourth quarter held entirely online, mostly through Zoom and similar technologies, the Dominican Sisters decided to return to in-person learning for the fall 2020 academic year in whatever schools and dioceses they could. Administrators grappled with protocols for keeping everyone physically safe. In most schools, the faculty have worked twice as hard to plan and implement lessons to accommodate



both in-person and online students who are enrolled for the year. There is a palpable joy and gratitude everyone feels in being able to be together in this new year, even with social



distancing and other protocols in place. It offers a sign of hope for the future.

Just as with many other religious communities, the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia moved many of their retreats for young women to online formats. Even with the entire retreat going virtual, from the retreat master

to breakout groups, the Divine Office, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, seventy women from 23 states and seven countries outside the United States participated, showing retreatants' faith in God and hope for the future.

The women shared how staying at home allowed for prayer and discernment time, and that a retreat online enabled them to attend from Australia, Finland, Ireland and other foreign countries. The retreatants' faith held firm precisely because they realized that we are not in control—that it is God who is directing “all things for good for those who love the Lord.”

Thanks to God's Providence, the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia welcomed ten postulants this past August, a true sign of God's hope and an expression of the willingness of these young women to follow His plan no matter what.

God's grace is surely much bigger than the challenges even of a global pandemic. We have faith, knowing that God is in control, and we have firm hope in whatever future the Lord is planning for us. He has called us to be a consolation for each other and for those we touch in our apostolates.

## JESUS IN OUR BOAT

### *How Adoration Shapes Our Apostolates in Uncharted Waters*

*By Sister M. Anna Joseph Nelling, OSF, Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration*

Jesus got into the boat with them. As Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, we have responded to the call to get into the boat with Jesus. Hour by hour, Sisters draw near to the Lord in adoration, offering up the needs of the Church and the world. These needs are current events, spoken requests, and prayers submitted through our website ([ssfpa.org/prayer](http://ssfpa.org/prayer)). “Official adorers” pray in a special way for our apostolates along with our co-workers and their families.

In recent months, our Eucharistic Spouse has entrusted us with unprecedented types of service. Our healthcare apostolate has taken on the overwhelming task of serving populations afflicted by COVID-19. Sisters who teach have transitioned overnight to online learning environments. Hospitality has taken on a whole new meaning as we strive to keep each other safe and healthy within our convents. And all of us continue to approach our Lord in supplication.

Nevertheless, He desires still more. Jesus wants to get into our boat. He does not distance Himself from us. If at times He seems to be asleep, He will awaken at His beloved's voice. As Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, our time with the Lord is not only a time of supplication. It is, above all, adoration, in which we rejoice that our Lord is who He says He is. We cannot depart from Him as we depart from

the adoration chapel. These times remind us that the Lord is in our boat, and our adoration does not stop when a holy hour ends. How easily we can transform our cry, “Save us, we are perishing!” into an act of adoration: “Be who You say You are: Be our Savior, stay with us.”





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## PAPAL AWARD GIVEN TO THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH THE WORKER

Mother Mary Christina Murray and Sister Celeste Marie Downes of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker received the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* award on September 27th at a ceremony at the Cathedral of the Diocese of Covington. Most Rev. Roger J. Foys nominated two priests, a deacon, nine women religious and 19 lay faithful for the honor. His holiness, Pope Francis, agreed with the nominations and allowed the honor to be given to those who have helped the Church with their prayers, works, and support.

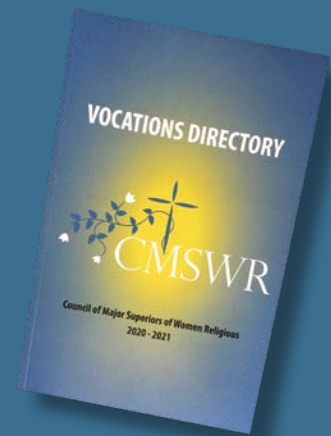


The *Pro-Ecclesia et Pontifice* Cross is a papal award given in recognition of distinguished service to the local and universal Church. It is the highest medal that can be awarded to the laity by the pope.

Mother Mary Christina stated that the founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker, Mother Ellen, had a deep love for the Church. Sister Celeste Marie said, “We are just riding on Mother Ellen’s coattails.”

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