



# NEWS

## A Contemplative Perspective

from the Northside

by S. Brenda Lisenby



S. Brenda shares contemplative insights on issues of social justice and advocacy.

*This past year, our community has been engaged in a strategic process. One of the ways in which we have felt led is to increase our awareness of and participation in social justice and advocacy. What does this mean for us as Visitation Sisters in an urban monastic setting? The following is Sister Brenda's reflections on what contemplative action looks like for a community dedicated to prayer and presence in north Minneapolis.*

Our Visitation charism has been described as “prayer and presence” or “prayer and community.” When we are present to one another we receive the gift of community. Community life is a place to grow in love and humility. And just perhaps, the lessons we learn as we live community can help us as a society, so I share with you what it has meant to me to be a part of this Visitation community at this time in our country’s journey.

I’ve heard someone say that we are seeing our “underbelly” or the dark side of American society. I think that is true. But is it necessarily a bad thing? Yes, in the short term. Many people are being hurt, victimized, and further marginalized. Yet important conversations are happening. And so many protest marches! All through the election and first 100 days, this Visitation community has held country, candidates, legislation and those impacted by legislation in prayer. We have also taken action—educating ourselves, reading, calling our representatives, signing online letters to representatives, attending Day on the Hill and other events, walking with our Hispanic sisters and brothers in their fear and uncertainty.

It has not been easy to watch. In fact I don’t. It is too painful and, to be honest, downright puzzling to me. But

others do watch the news. I tend to catch the headlines via Sojourners and other news email updates that I trust. I stay away from news sources that sensationalize. I pray. Daily. Multiple times a day. I often pray in images—my favorite is where I am gently holding our country in my hands, holding it up to God. My prayer is that we can be comforted and transformed by God’s love and mercy. Another favorite is the line in the Lord’s Prayer...“do not forsake us at the test.” Our country is being tested. We as individuals are being tested. And I pray that we who care and are aware, that WE will not abandon God at this time, that we will not allow ourselves to pull away and “feel” forsaken during these days of confusion, fear, and anger. It is my prayer that we would allow ourselves to hope and to do “the next loving thing.” We can’t fix the complex situation unfolding daily before us, but we can be present to those nearest us. We can be community—present and prayerful.





**All thru love and forgiveness:** Six Vis Seniors learn from Mary Johnson and her ministry of healing from violence. See page 3 for quotes from each young woman. These quotes are inspiring to read and give a small window into their experience with us!



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We are an urban monastic community. Please contact us for more information about our way of life.

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This newsletter is available on our website. If you prefer the online format, please contact the Sisters at vmonastery@aol.com.

## Monastery Update | By S. Karen Mohan

In the last two issues of our newsletter, we shared our focus of initiatives for justice and advocacy. As I write this "Update," I am reminded of a line in John Henry Newman's prayer: "I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons." In many ways, our justice and advocacy work is one of making connections. Here are some that have been made since our last Update:

- Three Turning Point men volunteered to assist our friend, Anne Catherine Sert in redoing our Girard basement which had been flooded last fall. Under Anne Catherine's guidance, this space is now transformed! She also completed another home improvement project for us, expanding the back steps at Fremont. A few Visitation Class of '17 seniors assisted Anne, a team leader par excellence!
- Twenty men and women participated in the 2017 "Following the Spirit" discernment series held monthly from January until April at the St. Jane House. Dorice Law, Pastor Karen Wight Hoogheen, Sr. Katherine and Sr. Karen facilitated the evenings for people praying about next "steps" in their faith journey.
- The good will of the St. Thomas Becket parish community bridged into north Minneapolis again this spring as over 150 baskets of household supplies and Easter treats arrived for our neighbors. Julie Fitzgerald and her committee never cease to amaze us with their organization and tireless effort for our northside community.
- We continue to host young adults who wish to be immersed in the neighborhood and listen and learn how systemic issues impact the daily life of our neighbors. The St. Jane House has been the hub for Creighton students who come for an alternative spring break trip and for the Mendota Visitation seniors who choose to spend the last two weeks of their senior year with us. Urban Neighbors joined us again for an evening of conversation

and prayer. Tuesday night gardening has begun again. Volunteers gather from 7 to 8 PM and then are welcome to join the Sisters for Night Prayer.

- Two very dear friends of the community died this past spring. Marion Loso joined us regularly for Mass, Salesian Monday nights, and volunteering. We deeply miss her loving presence. Jim Brehl offered us legal advice and helped us attain our non-profit status. We treasure their "link" in that chain that connects us to Eternity and we ask your prayers for them and for all who have died.



Easter baskets were blessed and bread broken together. Thank you St. Thomas Becket for your generosity!

We are a link in a chain...and deeply connected...in the bond of love which St. Francis de Sales writes, is the "bond of perfection," a bond that urges us on to be people of faith and justice.

## REJOICE! REBOND! RENEW! Still Goin' Strong at 20 Years

By S. Suzanne Homeyer



### Owning History—Harnessing Hope: Women's Retreat Participants

This Mothers' Day the Sisters had the opportunity to once again gift the women of the northside with an event just for them —our annual retreat. Twenty years ago the Sisters had the idea to have a special gathering of women providing an atmosphere of trust and a deepening of the bonds we knew they shared as mothers, residents of the 'hood and parents. Thus, the concept of a weekend retreat to support these special moms was born.

The theme of this year's retreat, "Owning Our History and Harnessing Hope" was the fruit of Dr. Karen Westbrooks' visit to the African American Museum of History and Culture at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. She blessed us with her wisdom, faith and humor. Sr. M. Frances' sisters, Cindy Eck and Mary Jo Bies, and niece Anne, connected our community with their quilting group. They provided us with beautiful quilts and gifts for the women. The women who come to this Mother's Day retreat sponsored by the Sisters are linked together in a network of support and prayer.

These women and others have been coming back for their Mothers' Day gift for two decades and plans are being made for a BIG event—a 25th anniversary celebration of strong women who nurture their families, each other and share this legacy of trust, strength and renewal! We look forward to this retreat. Dr. Karen Westbrooks has already agreed to be the facilitator and the Sisters are looking for women to participate in the planning.

## Reflections from Visitation Seniors after Urban Immersion Experience

*"Every person that shared their struggles became a part of me, as I will now share their burden. And every person who blessed me with their joy...also became a part of me, as now we have shared in the delights of the Lord together"*

—Anna Strub

*"One of the biggest things I learned was from the words of guest speaker Will Wallace. I learned the importance of recognizing the humanity of every person—even people who are considered to be criminals. They, like Will did, often fall into crime because they are desperate to survive. Hearing Will speak about this issue...reminded me that I cannot judge others until I understand why they do the things they do."*

—Hailey Sabin

*"While working at Northside Development Center, I realized that although these kids come from very different backgrounds and have different lives than we do, it was impossible to tell. They were happy and loving children who are happy where their lives are."*

—Emily Stanley

*"What impacted me most ...was the strong sense of community I found rooted in all that we did. The community went far beyond the walls of the St. Jane House, presenting itself even on the streets. A simple "hello" or "good morning" from a resident warmed my heart, making me feel as though I was wanted and welcomed."*

—Natalie Fafinski

*"Many of the speakers talked about how there are so many great causes to support and by finding one niche to fully support we can truly better the community in great ways...those speakers have ignited a passion within me to find a cause / organization to fully serve and advocate for, throughout college and in years to follow."*

—Molly Farrell

*"Here is one of the many things that impacted me: the police ride along and the very real situations that are considered 'routine.'"*

—Gussie Laird

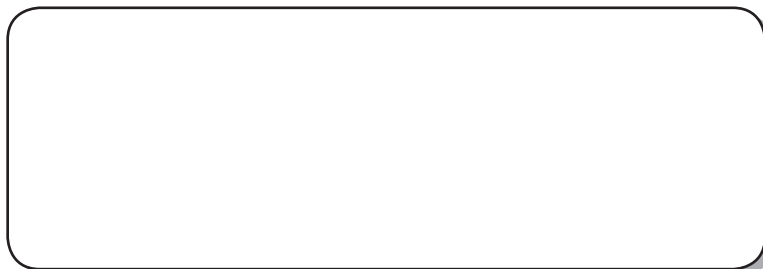
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*"Relate to others with an expansive heart, in freedom  
and good faith."*

—St. Jane de Chantal



### **Catholic Youth Camp (CYC)**



**Thank you to all  
who sponsored over  
100 children for a  
week at Catholic  
Youth Camp!**

A few of the 100+ campers clean up the neighborhood to earn their camperships under the direction of S. Karen, Vis Companion Gerry McKay, and Vis Senior Molly Farrell.