



The Canticle

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Voice of
The Community
of St. Francis,
Province of
The Americas

The Poor Are With Us

One of the afflictions of poverty is that it tends to make people invisible. In this issue of *The Canticle* we hope to raise that obscuring curtain which allows most of us to pass by the poor without really seeing them.

The view from my room looks out onto our back garden which provides a sacred sanctuary of beauty and peace in the middle of this city named for our patron St. Francis of Assisi. Our garden is where the veggies grow and the butterflies and hummingbirds flit around the flowers which perfume the air. When I poke my head out the window, I can almost feel the wave of oxygen produced by the friendly vegetation that responds so well to my efforts of feeding, weeding, and watering.

If I move to the front of the house and step out our front door, from time to time, I have to do a bit of clean up of trash from the man who sometimes sleeps on our front porch. If I follow the street, within two blocks I begin to encounter small groups of Latin American casual laborers, undocumented workers who have come up to El Norte because of the poor economies down south, devastated by the 20th century's civil wars and NAFTA.

If I turn left on Mission St. and proceed north, I traverse the Mission District, traditionally the home of immigrants and low cost housing. The area is now in the midst of a fight for its life as a working class mostly-Latino neighborhood due to the process of gentrification sparked by the technology boom in the city. Tucked in between the dollar store and the taqueria there is now a trendy coffee shop. All over the area poor people are being forced out by skyrocketing rents and legal but unethical evictions.

A block off Mission St. at 16th St. I come to the Mission Neighborhood Resource Center, a multi-purpose community center, which hosts "Ladies Night" for the women of the neighborhood on Thursdays. It is one of the places I do massage work. The ladies who come for Thursday nights represent a cross section of the poor women in the city — elderly,

mentally and physically disabled, addicted, immigrants, hungry, lonely, homeless, street prostitutes.....

Mission and 16th is also one block from St. John the Evangelist Church, site of the Saturday Julian Pantry, co-sponsored by St. John's and Holy Innocents Church. Jean, Maggie and Pamela Clare have been involved with that ministry. A few blocks further up 16th St., I come to Martin de Porres House of Hospitality, a Catholic Worker soup kitchen, where several of us have worked over the years.

If I continue north, I come to the skid row of San Francisco, the Tenderloin and SoMa (South of Market), another area for my massage work. Here you will find The Sanctuary, the homeless

shelter which has now grown into Episcopal Community Services, the largest provider of homeless services in the city. For many years the SSF Brothers have worked with ECS in several ministries.

On Maundy Thursday I was part of a massive foot massage event at several of the social service agencies which serve the homeless in the Tenderloin. My station was in the courtyard of the Roman Catholic Franciscan church, St. Boniface, where homeless people are welcomed for a time of "sacred sleep" on the pews during the day. On Good Friday Maggie and I participated in the Stations of the Cross in the Tenderloin.

The pilgrimage took us to many familiar places in the neighborhood. Maggie knows the area from Sundays. She is part of Open Cathedral, which provides an outdoor Eucharist every Sunday (rain or shine) in the middle of the Tenderloin/SoMa area.

Back home in the late afternoon, I again stand in my room. Now I see the famous San Francisco fog rushing over the hills to the west and pouring down into our little valley. This rushing wind is like the breath of the Holy Spirit, providing life-giving moisture to the drought-stressed plants and making our stagnant air clear and fresh. I pray that as we approach the festival of Pentecost, we may open our hearts to the blowing wind of the Spirit that can bring new life, clarity and freshness to all our lives — and especially for the poor, who are with us.

Pamela Clare, CSF



Sr. Maggie at work at the Julian Pantry.

SOMETHING ON POVERTY

Maggie, CSF

I have regretted more than once my casual offer to write “something on poverty” for this issue of *Canticle*. Early on I gave up any attempt to produce a coherent narrative on this painful and enormously complex subject. Instead, I offer you some facts, an assortment of quotations, some questions for reflection, a story, and a prayer. Make of them whatever you will.



Almost half the world lives on less than \$2.50 a day.

At least 80% of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day.

The poorest 40 percent of the world’s population accounts for 5 percent of global income.

The richest 20 percent accounts for three-quarters of world income.

First on the list of United Nations Millennium Development Goals is “halve extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.” (“Extreme” poverty is defined as living on less than \$1.25 a day.)

This goal is said by the UN to have been achieved in 2010, but what does that mean to the 1.2 billion who are still below that level?

In the United States, the top 1% control 43% of wealth; the next 4% control an additional 29%. That leaves 28% of the money for 95% of the people.



The poverty, starvation, and desperation of more than six-tenths of the world’s population has become a root evil that feeds violence, hatred, terrorism, and nationalism. . . . People are poor most often because of larger issues that impact their work, their families, their lands and crops. Jesus came preaching an ethic and a spirituality that was based on sharing, on justice for all . . . so that there was a foundation of hope built into the economic and political system. But he went much farther. The poor were his own, his friends and neighbors. They were held up for high praise, and the disciples were told to observe how they lived, as when he watched with care the widow who put her small pittance in the temple treasure, giving out of her very sustenance to survive. (from *The New Stations of the Cross*, by Megan McKenna)



The author of the earliest biography of St. Francis explains Francis’ love of poverty this way: “holy poverty stands high above all the virtues that prepare in us a dwelling place for God,” and “the Son of God loved this virtue especially; he went in search for it and found it, when he effected our salvation upon earth. And when he began to preach, he entrusted holy poverty as a light into the hands of those who enter the door of faith, and he set it as the cornerstone of his house. The other virtues only promise the Kingdom of Heaven, but poverty makes the Kingdom present here and now. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,’ Jesus said, ‘for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.’”

Francis and the other early brothers took Jesus’ words literally, and made them their own by living them. They believed that in so doing they were imitating the way Jesus himself lived, and they could imagine no higher way of life.

When the bishop of Assisi once spoke to Saint Francis about his life so rich in deprivation and his lack of possessions, he was told, “My lord, if we wanted to have possessions we would also need to have arms for our defense. But that is where the quarrels and fights come from that so often impede love for God and neighbor. That is why we do not want to possess temporal things in this world.



The poor are collectively unseizable. They are not only the majority on the planet, they are everywhere and the smallest event speaks of them. This is why the essential activity of the rich today is the building of walls—walls of concrete, of electronic surveillance, of missile barrages, minefields, frontier controls, and opaque media screens. (John Berger, from *Hold Everything Dear*)



As Franciscans we make a vow of poverty. “From now on, call nothing your own.” And yet we live, not in luxury, but certainly in comfort. Many of us struggle with this discrepancy. Recently the Ministers General of the First Order sent out a pastoral letter to all the brothers and sisters in SSF, asking us to take a look at our vow of poverty and how we live it out, not as a mandate for immediate change but rather as a challenge to practice what we preach.

“Martins,” the Catholic Worker soup kitchen, has been a part of our lives as CSF in San Francisco basically from the beginning. Since the mid-1970s various Sisters have worked there. Our mutual concern and respect for the poor and hungry make us natural allies. Twice a week Maggie and Jean volunteer with food preparation and service and once a week Pamela Clare does massage there.



Sr. Jean teaching Diocesan Intern Sitraka how to make pie crust at Martins for Thanksgiving.

The Family Link has been Sr. Ruth’s ministry for 29 years. She founded it to provide affordable accommodations and support for the families of people with AIDS, cancer and other life-threatening conditions. Most of the people who stay at the Family Link are poor and cannot afford a hotel room in San Francisco, and some can’t even afford the Family Link’s suggested donation, so they pay little or nothing. Sr. Maggie is also on the staff of the Family Link.





Open Cathedral at United Nations Plaza. After the interdenominational Eucharist, volunteers give out food. Maggie has found this congregation to be constantly invigorating. sfnightministry.org



Chronicle / Brant Ward

The late “Little Bit” (aka Susan Beach), a street prostitute who was one of the participants in Ladies Night at Mission Neighborhood Resource Center. Her life and death are chronicled in photos by Brant Ward and story at blog.sfgate.com/cityinsider/2011/10/19/homeless-island-leader-little-bit-dies/



Pamela Clare giving chair massage for the Care Through Touch Institute at San Francisco’s quarterly Project Homeless Connect which provides one-stop access to a variety of resources.

Some questions for thought (with thanks to the SSF European province):

- Is it a coincidence that people who appear most economically poor often show best the generosity of God?
- Are there times in our lives when we are inclined to grasp at our own comfort and freedom at the expense of other people?
- Do we as Franciscans allow our lives and lifestyles to be challenged by Francis’ radical approach to poverty?
- Can we experience joy and liberation when something happens to make our lives less comfortable?
- How does the poverty of the very poor impact our lives?



The easiest walk from our house to the BART station takes me past the Salvation Army donation center. A couple of years ago I began to notice an interesting phenomenon. Nearly every morning that I went by, the curb was lined with an assortment of small box trucks, pickup trucks, and vans. Beside each truck, someone was digging through a huge plastic bin filled with miscellaneous “stuff”—everything from children’s toys to VHS tapes to old TV sets and computer parts—and tossing most of it into their vehicle.

At first I was annoyed more than anything, because they were making a mess and blocking the sidewalk. Then I thought, well, they are obviously going to sell most of this stuff as recyclable scrap, so they will have some money and it won’t go into the landfill. So that is a good thing.

Then one morning I was walking along that block, looking not at the stuff but at the people, mostly dark-skinned, who were sorting through it, and the word “ragpickers” popped into my head.

These people are the heirs of the ragpickers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, who collected salvageable items from the streets and trash piles and sold them in order to have something to live on. From Wikipedia: “Rag-picking is still widespread in Third World countries today, such as in Mumbai, India, where it offers the poorest in society around the rubbish and recycling areas a chance to earn a hand-to-mouth supply of money.”

And you will find these contemporary ragpickers on the streets of San Francisco, one of the richest and most expensive cities in the world, not only scavenging at the donation centers but roaming the streets with bags and carts looking for glass jars and cans, and any kind of metal, to take to the recycling centers.

There are several possible routes I could take to the BART station. I don’t have to pass the Salvation Army, weaving my way down the cluttered sidewalk and trying not to trip and fall over the stuff lying around. But I always go that way. I want to remember these people and what they are doing to survive in the world we have all helped to make.



No matter how you get your news these days . . . you are likely to be confronted with challenging, disturbing information about the state of the world. Each day comes with fresh reports of war, disease, crushing poverty, and ecological menace. . . it is easy to become overexcited, or frightened, or numb. How can we stay vulnerable and open to the world and not be overwhelmed? How can we be intimate with the way the world is and not let it overrun us; exhaust us; create in us a sense of hopelessness, despair, and finally withdrawal? (from *Most Intimate* by Roshi Pat Enkyo O’Hara.)



God of the poor, we long to meet you yet almost miss you;
we strive to help you yet only discover our need.

Interrupt our comfort with your nakedness,
touch our possessiveness with your poverty,
and surprise our guilt with the grace of your welcome in Jesus Christ.

(Janet Morley)

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WHAT'S GOING ON

- Srs. Maggie and Pamela Clare again facilitated the Advent Quiet Days at the Bishop's Ranch, the Diocese of California's camp and conference center.
- January 1, Pamela Clare completed her year as chair of the Diocese of California Commission on Ministry. She continues on the COM for another year and also with her work as Chair of the Diocesan Board of Examining Chaplains.
- In February Maggie spent two weeks in England attending the Sisters' Meeting, visiting several of the convents and touring a bit of London.

T Consider Your Call...
Spend a week sharing our life of prayer,
study and ministry in San Francisco
July 30—August 4, 2014

This is a "live-in" week for women who desire to learn more about life in a religious community. Participants are invited to share in the life of the Sisters as part of discerning a vocation to Religious Life.

Change is Coming to *The Canticle*....

The Community of St. Francis' newsletter, *The Canticle*, will be entering the digital age with its next issue. After 32 years as a print publication, with this issue we are phasing out our print newsletter in favor of a digital one. In November 2014, those friends for whom we have e-mail addresses will receive *The Canticle* as an e-mail attachment. If you think we don't have your e-mail address (and we do have them for Third Order and other Religious Orders), please send us an e-mail with your e-mail for the mailing list.

We will print a limited number of newsletters for mailing to people who have not sent us their e-mail. But we would appreciate e-mail addresses if possible! Thank you!

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