



Sisters of the Good Shepherd

Spring 2004

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Upcoming Events

**Discernment
Retreat ~
September
17-19, 2004**

**Good Shepherd
Spirit and
Mission Retreat
~ November
19-21, 2004**

See page 2 for details
and how to register.

Dear Good Shepherd Friends,

I think that you will find the articles in this newsletter interesting and enlightening.

Many people have commented on the beauty of the symbol that Good Shepherd Sisters wear. Sr. Jean Marie gives a lovely description and explanation of the symbol. It is even more beautiful when one knows the meaning behind it.



There is a wonderful reflection by Julie Fees Mahedy, a Good Shepherd representative for our Handcrafting Justice Project, (formerly known as the Global Women's Exchange). Julie had the opportunity to visit some of the sites in Madagascar. We are grateful to Julie and all of our lay collaborators for sharing in our Good Shepherd mission and spirit, and for all that they do to help improve the lives of women and children.

We continue to be deeply concerned about our world situation, the war in Iraq, the violence that plagues the Sudan and other areas of our fragile and broken world. Please join us in a daily "Pause for Peace."

We wish each of you a renewing, relaxing and blessed summer.

In the heart of our Shepherd, God,

Sr. Rose Behrend

The Good Shepherd Symbol and it's meaning

I'd like to share with you the symbol of the Good Shepherd Sisters. All our sisters both apostolic and contemplative wear this Congregational Symbol, which identifies us as Sisters of the Good Shepherd.



THE TWO HEARTS represent the hearts of Jesus and Mary united as one. We

draw our spirit of zeal from this Heart – an evangelical spirit of **Welcome, Kindness, Understanding and Loving Service**, which gives witness to the value of each person. It also represents the reality that we love with two hearts: our own small, limited heart and the great heart of God.

THE CROOK represents the extension of the Shepherd's own self, used to rescue the sheep that is lost or in trouble.

Through the Church, Jesus continues to encompass with love all afflicted with human weakness. He looks for the lost one, brings back the strayed, tends the injured and makes the

weak strong. Jesus reveals the Father's mercy through a love which overcomes all sin and infidelity.

THE CROSS reminds us of the cost of the shepherd's self-giving, even to laying down one's life.

We give our total gift of self, which is rooted in the following of Christ and in his paschal mystery, leading through the cross and death to resurrection.

Sr. Jean Marie Fernandez
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One Congregation ~ Two Lifestyles

Apostolic ~ Contemplative



Pause for Peace

Approaching each person as
Jesus the Good Shepherd would

Dear Friends,

We invite you to join us in a new initiative for peace and hope during this time of extreme violence and suffering in the world. In the spirit of reconciliation, which is our mission as Sisters of the Good Shepherd, we are joining this global "Pause for Peace" to reflect and recommit ourselves each day to peacemaking and hope. This "Pause for Peace" initiative is being launched in the belief that prayer for good can release an energy positive enough to overcome the forces of war and oppression in our world.

This is how the global Pause for Peace works: Each person, wherever on our earth, is invited to pause and reflect for a very brief moment at 12 noon of each day, to renew her or his commitment to peace and hope by saying the following mantra (one or more times), in silence or out loud, alone or with others:

"I renew my commitment to peacemaking in the spirit of hope."

In extending this invitation to you and to our sisters and brothers throughout the world, we hope that you will serve as catalysts in getting this Pause for Peace spread to other peacemakers. Please disseminate this invitation as widely as possible through your own networks, so it reaches wide and far to schools, co-workers and colleagues, families, friends, neighbors, and beyond. Just imagine what energy this daily pledge could unleash if we rededicate ourselves by the thousands around the world, in different countries, cultures and languages, in different time zones, every single day anew.

"How I love to repeat the greeting of Jesus, 'Peace be with you.'" St. Mary Euphrasia

Discernment Retreat ~ September 17-19, 2004

Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Wickatunk, NJ

The Call to Religious Life ~ How do you know?

"A vocation is inextricably linked with a person's 'dream', that vision of the future that includes the kind of person we want to be..." Daniel Levinson.

"The vocation to religious life is a total commitment to Jesus Christ. It is about giving one's whole life to God..." Sr. Sandra Schneiders

On this discernment retreat we will take a deeper look at the call to religious life, the steps of discernment, and the skills needed to live religious life well.

What is a call?

How do you know if God is calling you to religious life? What are the signs to look for?



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Good Shepherd Spirit and Mission Retreat ~ November 19-21, 2004

Sisters of the Good Shepherd
Wickatunk, NJ

Do you have the heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd?

Sisters of the Good Shepherd, dream of a world where all God's people are revered and valued as children of God.

We strive to follow in the footsteps of Jesus the Good Shepherd, who sought out the lost, healed the suffering, brought liberty to captives and proclaimed the Good News to the poor. If you feel that God may be calling you to love with the heart of a shepherd, we invite you to come and learn more about us.

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Sister Story continued from page 6

same! Still “Love is not love that alters when alteration it finds.” Instinct told me that was profoundly true. And, I wanted the real thing. Guess what would arise from that clearing within, so still, so empty, when I was in such a dilemma: “No one will ever satisfy you. Only Jesus can.” Do not wonder then why I came up with a 9-husband solution!

Still another day, just before college graduation, as I recall, I was reading *The Way of Perfection* (or was it *The Interior Castle*?) of St. Teresa de Avila. In one of its pages, she shifts in her conversation with the reader and turns to the one whom she called *El Señor Hesuschristo*. She says to him, “I want to be the kind of spouse to you who would suffer when you suffer and be happy with what makes you happy.” Or something to that effect (I cannot find the page now or I’d quote it directly to you). But I remember suddenly being brought to that inner “clearing” once more and I thought, “I’d like that so much too.” I was not aware of it then but from hindsight, Jesus had become very real to me, so much a part of my everyday life, especially of its inner contours. I was part of a dialogue; I had options to consider and with a lot of help from him, (by listening to others’ stories and facing, naming, and befriending my own fears, etc.) I could actually decide for myself.

My questions were not finished, however. In my saner moments, I could not say that I loved God because generally, my behavior was hard evidence that I didn’t! How could I be a nun and for that matter, even say “I love you” to anyone enough to marry him since I knew I couldn’t “suffer when you suffer and be happy with what makes you happy”? I would certainly do an Elizabeth Taylor when the going was rough! It would only be in recent years that this would resolve itself for me. In 1John 4:10, the author writes: “This is love; not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” I finally began to understand that I do not have to go by *my* love which I know for a fact is puny and easily exhausted. What matters is God’s love and allowing God’s love to take flesh in me. Feels better, more believable, doesn’t it?

That is a short cut of how I traveled from there (Why I Want to Be a Nun) to here (being a contemplative sister.) The story is long and it feels like I am on fast speed. But,

I still have to get to Why Good Shepherd? (And I think I have to stay within 500 words and I could be beyond the limit now!) But let me say this: In joining a religious community living a contemplative lifestyle, it did not occur to me that I was giving up a lot. On the contrary. The one reality that burned in my heart and continues to flame high is the *possibility* of being loved, of knowing what it is to be a child of God and sharing that love and knowledge with others. Even if I had this knowledge just for a day, more than 25 years ago I told myself, I would be content. It has centered and energized me to this hour.

Why a contemplative life style? Because by nature I am a homebody? Maybe. But also because I need to be with others who are of a similar mind so that we can support each other within a structure that fosters prayer, self-knowledge, and genuine love for each other. Because I need a *disciplined* discipline that would



Sr. Edith (2nd from right) prays with Sisters Maureen, Mary Therese and Debbie

make me accountable towards *transformation in Christ*, the most effective evangelization, to my mind, for which we are most gifted.

Why a Contemplative Sister of the Good Shepherd? Well, one day I was reading St. John of the Cross. (Wait, let me get my book and I know I marked the page....) Here it is -- the commentary on Stanza 23 of *The Spiritual Canticle*. “True and perfect love knows not how to keep anything hidden from the beloved. (Jesus) communicates to her, mainly, sweet mysteries of His Incarnation and of the ways of the Redemption of (hu)mankind, which is one of the loftiest of His works, and thus more delightful....”

On the margin of my book I wrote, “This is

what Mary Euphrasia is all about.” As I see it now, Jesus was once more in conversation with me, asking me what I wanted to do with my life. I thought about St. Mary Euphrasia’s insight that all are called to the most intimate friendship with God, no matter where we have come from, no matter what others may say. God’s love goes beyond all human categories. For anybody, *the present moment can always be a turning point*. I chose to throw in my lot with her and others who, like her, consider every human person worth laying down our lives for. I went for broke.

When I was 10 years old, I wanted to read and read and read. That’s all right; I dare say so. When I was 20 something, I dreamt I’d go all over the world and see those places I studied in our history books. I did some of that. In my 30s, I dreamt I’d practice and practice and practice and so be able to play Rachmaninoff’s 3rd Piano Concerto. Listening to Martha Algerich gives me virtually more than satisfying experiences of that! But even before I was 9 years old, I was given a glimpse of how *good* God is. This hollowed in me a cavernous thirst that has never been quenched. And so I hold fast to the dream that one day, I will be allowed, even while on this earth, to see God’s face on every star, on every human face and every quivering tear. I want to know in my heart that I belong to everyone and everything, and that everything and everyone is part of me. When others suffer I suffer, when one is disgraced it is to my shame. I want to live out in everyday life the fact that all I want to be, I already am.

I have a suspicion that *that* has something to do with what we call *God’s will* for all of creation.

Good Shepherd People work for Justice

“Our Commitment to reconciliation demands that we promote justice and peace....” St. Mary Euphrasia

To mark and celebrate my 40th birthday I decided that following a dream of mine was in order. I am passionate about being a volunteer for the **Handcrafting Justice** project, (formerly known as the *Global Women’s Exchange*) a fair trade handicraft initiative of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and I am an avid world traveler. So to celebrate my birthday I traveled to Madagascar, off the coast of Africa, to visit the sites of **Handcrafting Justice**. My mission upon arrival in Madagascar was clear. I wanted to photograph and interview the women artisans who make such beautiful handicrafts, handmade paper, embroidered tablecloths and wooden angels, to name a few of their products.

After a 14-hour flight from Paris, I was offered lovely hospitality by the Good Shepherd Sisters living in the capital city, Antananarivo. I soon began to see that I was going



to be introduced to some of the other ministries of the sisters. They are doing amazing work with limited resources. The sisters all took me under their collective wings as they introduced me to their great works.

Sister Lucy, originally from Sri Lanka, arrived alone in Madagascar in 1979, with no idea what her role and ministries would be in Antananarivo. Madagascar, a former French colony, was struggling with its identity. French and Malagasy are the primary languages and Sister Lucy spoke neither when she arrived. Almost twenty-five years later it is apparent that she has been divinely inspired with the many projects that she has started. She can only do this work with the wonderful assistance of the other sisters who are now with her.

The Centre Fihavanana, founded by the sisters, educates approximately 200 children who for various reasons cannot attend public school. The students are also provided a

nutritious lunch every day. A program for adolescent girls is in place to teach basic skills and home economics. The Centre also houses a daycare program for mothers in crisis who have sick or malnourished babies. There is a doctor who comes on a weekly basis to offer medical care. The elderly receive supplemental food such as rice, oil and flour twice a month at the Centre.

I accompanied the sisters when they went on their weekly visit to the women's prison. The women are primarily in prison for petty crimes such as stealing at a store and domestic disputes, or they are political prisoners. The sisters brought enough rice and vegetables to feed the 200 plus women who are prisoners there as well as their young children. (Mothers are allowed to bring babies and toddlers with them to prison.) The women who are in the prison cook for themselves and for some this is the only time that they eat rice all week. The sisters also conduct a prayer service on their visit; most of it was beautiful singing.

I got to see the fruit of a micro-credit project that is in full bloom. The sisters purchased



Julie and her husband, Tom receiving the Pax Christi Dorothy Day Award



Julie with her daughters Shannon and Casey

Sisters of the Good Shepherd

land on the outskirts of the capital. There are 14 women that are depositing money on a payment schedule to purchase a plot of the land and a house. They are all single mothers with children who have been involved with the Centre Fihavanana for many years. After paying \$500.00 for the land and then rent for the 1 & 1/2 room house for three years, they own it. So far 12 houses have been completed and 4 more are to be started soon. After the 16 houses are completed, the sisters hope to make loans to additional women who own their own homes that are in need of major repairs.

Of course the main portion of my time was spent documenting exactly what it takes to create all of their lovely handicrafts. In fact the wife of the President of Madagascar has commissioned several pieces from the women at the Centre Fihavanana. I was truly inspired by the beauty of their work and their sincere thanks to all those who support them by buying their handicrafts in the United States. I witnessed firsthand how empowering and vital the project is to the women and their families.

I am available to give a slide presentation on my trip to

Madagascar. **Handcrafting Justice** is also looking for churches, civic organizations, etc... to host a handicraft sale. Please consider it and give a call if you are interested.

Julie Fees-Mahedy,

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Mission of Handcrafting Justice

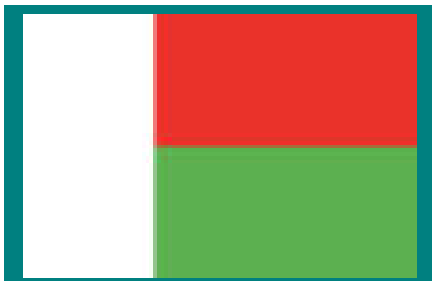
As an international network, we work in partnership, particularly with women and those in social and economic distress.

We promote human dignity and justice by creating opportunities for economic and social transformation.

Handcrafting Justice is A Fair Trade initiative of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

Handcrafting Justice
"Give the Gift of Hope"
718-380-4207

www.handcraftingjustice.org



Sisters of the Good Shepherd

Sister Stories

Sr. Mary Edith Olaguer, Contemplative Sister of the Good Shepherd

I am a Filipina. I was born in a small town, south of Manila. When I was about 9 years old, I won an essay contest with this title: *Why I Want to Be a Nun*. As far as I can remember, I had 2 reasons. Sisters looked nice (the Benedictine nuns in their black and white habit must have seemed so elegant to a little girl whose school uniform was rumpled in perpetuity from playing under the



Philippine sun) and they seemed to know everything. No wonder the nuns gave me first prize! A psychological assessment taken at that time, however, would have had to do double takes before recommending me to any vocation director!

I can still see myself during a religion class, one day, in high school quite perplexed about the *will of God*. I was supposed to accept it no matter what. Period. My thoughts went like this: "If it is true that God loves me, then, he (no awareness of inclusive language at that time!) would ask me about what I think, what I prefer, what I cannot do and we can have a discussion. I am not a pawn on a chessboard ... love isn't like that. Love is courteous." I do not know from whence these thoughts and strong feelings arose but I do know that Sr. Margarita called me for some recitation job and I must have had one of those glazed looks because she sent me to stand in a corner of the classroom. (Oh yes, I would through the years make many a trip to many a corner of many a classroom!)

In my sophomore year in college, I was listening to a lecture on *Gratitude* when suddenly this question bolted through: Have I thanked you God? When class was over, my feet took me to a corner of the chapel, hidden from view by a huge statue of the Blessed Virgin. In her shadow I asked God this question: *How can I really thank you?* Images flit through my mind. Hundreds of them. They left in their wake a clearing so empty, so still, I was jerked clean of all thoughts. Then I do not know how to explain it because I heard no voice, saw

nothing, was not thinking, but simply understood: "Be a nun." My reply was swift: "Not *that*." My heart, already in turmoil because of a 'chronic' inability to align itself to the way some of the truths of the faith were

being interpreted, (for example, the will of God, as I said above) became a disaster area. I did not know if "Be a nun" was God's will or a security need from the ego. Was I being chosen or was I doing the choosing? (cf. Matt. 22:14) I did not know then that the initiative is always God's – we cannot even call on God without the Spirit being around. (cf. 1 Co 12:3) Whew! A couple of months after or maybe a year, I was in conversation with the former Novice Mistress of my sister (who had joined and then left the Benedictines) and I nonchalantly asked her what she'd do if I became a nun. Mother Assumpta exclaimed: "You?" Catching herself, she politely added, "You are only 16." And I said, "But scholars say that the Bl. Mother became the Bl. Mother when she was only 13." With exquisite finality she declared: "My dear, you are NOT the Blessed Virgin." I felt like a rag rung by a wringer.

In one of our family conversations not long after that, my mother almost fell off her chair when I announced, "If I get married, maybe I'd like 9 husbands." Horrified she said, "Then please DON'T marry." But you see, this statement was the logical conclusion from long, long thoughts spun in a heart and mind that were, if you remember, still disaster areas and did not have discernment skills and were not adept with wisdom tools. What had added to the conflict was the continual news about the divorce and remarriage, remarriage and divorce of Elizabeth Taylor. The havoc these wrought! Yet I could really understand why she'd get tired of this or that marriage and want out. More importantly, I felt I could do the

Mission

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd approach each person with the same care of Jesus the Good Shepherd. We are guided by the principle that "*One person is of more value than a world.*"

Through **Contemplation** and **Action** our mission of **reconciliation** impels us to promote justice and peace. Our vow of **zeal**, the heart of the Good Shepherd vocation, leads us to search out the wounded, those left behind by the world. We minister in all areas of human service, with a particular focus on the needs of women and children.

There are two ways that a Sister of the Good Shepherd can express her zeal for God's people – **apostolic** and **contemplative**.

Is God calling you to love with the heart of a shepherd?

WE WELCOME YOUR COMMENTS:

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