



Saved by Hope

“As the role of the ordained priest is to consecrate the bread and wine to be the Body and Blood of Christ, so the role of the layperson is to consecrate the entire world!” (*Lumen Gentium*, 4:34)¹. This description of the role of the laity in the teachings of Vatican II is at first startling, then inspiring, and finally challenging. The dictionary defines a challenge as “a test of one’s abilities or resources in a demanding but stimulating undertaking.” *Lumen Gentium* offers some ideas about what these abilities or resources might be, when it goes on to say, “The vocation of each layperson is to seek the Reign of God ... in ordinary circumstance of family and social life ... by their lifestyles, their work, their prayer, their family life, their leisure and entertainment, and their hardships, too, laypeople give witness to the Light of Christ.”*

Anyone who is conscious of the demands of daily life might feel torn between wanting to believe this and wondering just how realistic it is. In his recent encyclical, *On Christian Hope*, Pope Benedict XVI offers support and encouragement for taking up this challenge. Benedict faces up to the fragility of human freedom and human love. Because human freedom is fragile, he says, “the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world.” Concerning human love, he observes,

When someone has the experience of a great love in one’s life, this is a moment of ‘redemption,’ which gives a new meaning to the person’s life. But soon the person will also realize that the love bestowed upon him or her cannot by itself resolve the questions of one’s life. It is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human being needs unconditional love. A human being needs the certainty which makes one say, ‘neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ (Romans 8:38-39)

In modern times, we have been captivated by the pseudo-freedom of individualism. So, when we read words like those from Vatican II or from Pope Benedict, rather than feel encouraged, we feel overwhelmed. We think we have to do it all by ourselves. We think even of our spiritual lives as a kind of personal “achievement.” We can get tired of the effort and give up, passing off such ideas as those *Lumen Gentium* as unrealistic piety.

As we move now from Lent into the 50-day celebration of the Paschal Mystery, let’s take some time to get clear again about what we believe. Jesus came, lived among us, died and rose from the dead to spell out yet again God’s tireless, endless, persistent, unconditionally loving plea to us, pleading for us to respond to his desire to be in relationship with us—a relationship that is vital, dynamic, lively, challenging, and full of love and mercy, a relationship that changes everything—even ourselves. Salvation and holiness do not start with us, they are not the simple result of human effort. Salvation and holiness begin with God’s initiative, his invitation. For the next several weeks, spend a few minutes every day pondering this amazing truth. Repeat a simple mantra, such as, “My God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; your love is finer than life.” Ask to be open to God’s invitation and to his promise proclaimed decisively in Jesus. Believe in that promise. Believe in God’s love. Strengthened by this faith, you can live your vocation to consecrate the world. You will be what our world so desperately needs, a sign of hope.

Gertrude Foley, SC

¹* The translations used here are from Vatican II in Plain English. The Constitutions by Bill Huebsch (Allen, Texas: Thomas More Publishing, 1996)

Community



The Pittsburgh Conference of the Sisters of Charity again invited the Seton Family groups of the Pittsburgh area to their annual celebration of the Feast of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton on Saturday, January 5.

Celebration included Mass and a reception. This has become a favorite event of the year for the sisters and the Seton Family groups in Pittsburgh.

On Laetare Sunday, the fourth Sunday of Lent, the Sisters of Charity held an open house at Caritas Christi. One of the Greensburg Afternoon groups postponed their local group gathering to enable its members to participate in the open house. During evening prayer, Sister Gertrude Foley gave a light-hearted, yet powerful, reflection on Philippians 4:4-9 and the place of Lent in our Christian journey. Seton Family member Rose Marie Harvey had planned to join the sisters in the choir, as she has on many occasions in the past.

The New Haven group continues their tradition of a day-long gathering. Their evening meal in January came together as the shared effort of several members. As on many other occasions, members were filled with spirited discussion, wonderful conversation and a scrumptious meal.

Apostolic Spirit

One of the Greensburg Afternoon groups focused their February learning and prayer on the Lenten season and its call to live in joy and love. As a result of their reflection, the members resolved to reach out to others in times of need, be it in love and caring or other areas of help. Each person chose someone to help by prayer and deeds. In this way, they hope to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Learning

The Brookline group continues its study of the Vatican Council II documents by moving to the Decree on Ecumenism. Since this is the 100th anniversary of the Church Unity Octave, it seems an appropriate way to celebrate it and learn more about the Church and its response at Vatican II.

One of the Greensburg Afternoon groups focused their February gathering on entering the Lenten season with joy and love. Since we are all called to spread the Good News in the world today, the group spent time at home, prior to their gathering, meditating on the Beatitudes. They found that many times in life, one or another of the words of Jesus has been a comfort and an encouragement to them. Reflection included recognition of the joy and fullness marriage has brought to one member and how the Beatitudes inspired another to forgive in spite of a deep hurt. The group plans to continue this discussion at their next meeting.

The New Haven group continues reflection on the book *What Makes Us Catholic*. In chapter Two, "Who Do We Think We Are? Living as Graceful People," the author poses questions of who we are and what we expect of others and ourselves. The group was reminded of Henri Nouwen's challenging reflection: "I am what I own . . . I am what others say of me . . . or I am the Beloved of God." Group members commented on different dimensions of the chapter that interested them, helped them remember graced moments in their lives, or challenged them to move forward.



Check out the Sisters of Charity Website

Go to www.scsch.org to see the new look! The website includes Seton Family. It has immense potential for providing useful information to Seton Family members and for helping others to know who we are. What the website needs most is photos, photos, photos. Notice also that we have no photos to include in this newsletter. Can each Seton Family group find a way to generate photos of its members and activities? These would greatly enhance the Seton Family page on the website as well as create a more attractive newsletter. Send photos as electronic attachments to Sister Edie Strong at earthisone@yahoo.com or as prints to 1617 Elm Street, Greensburg, Pennsylvania 15601.

Greensburg Afternoon group grows into two groups

The Greensburg Afternoon group has grown in size and popularity to the point where the group needed to split into two in order to be effective. Sister Cecilia McClain, former facilitator of the Jacksonville group, and Sister Anna Marie Miller each now facilitates one group that meets at Caritas Christi.

Seton House East group joins Brookline group

Another step taken that changes the face of Seton Family is the merger of the group that has met at Seton House and the Brookline Seton Family group. Our deceased Sister Kathryn Palas led the Seton House group until her death in 2005, at which time Sister Mary Jean Petrarca became facilitator. Sister Mary Jean is also involved in the Brookline group. Since the two groups were in close proximity to each other, it made sense to combine them.

Bethel Park group has new facilitator

We welcome Bob Sontag as the new facilitator for the Bethel Park Seton Family group. Bob Sontag has been a Seton Family member since 2006. He is a Eucharistic minister, lector and choir member at Saint Germaine Parish in Bethel Park. He is also a member of the Germaine Harbor Board. Bob follows Sister Vincent Marie Sidick in accepting the facilitator role. This change enables the Bethel Park group to accomplish its desire to meet monthly.

Three groups now function with lay leadership; the Bethel Park group joins the Jacksonville and Raleigh groups in having lay facilitators. We thank Bob, Renee Higgenbotham and Sharon Beech for the leadership they provide for Seton Family and ask God to work through them as they inspire, encourage and guide their groups.

Seton Family welcomes new members

**Susie Bingold, Cathy Montoya and
Anthony, Elisa, Kyle and Ryan Walsh**
of the Chandler group

Thelma Alves
of the Tucson group

Welcome to new participants

Several people are participating in local Seton Family groups, exploring possible interest in becoming Seton Family members. We welcome you and are happy to have you with us. We hope that Seton Family makes a valuable contribution to your faith journey. Together we seek to understand better what it means to be church in the spirit of Saints Elizabeth Ann Seton, Vincent de Paul and Louise De Marillac, pillars of the church and kindred spirits in the call to holiness.

Retreat in the Western Region

A bright sunny day welcomed the Seton Family members from Chandler, Carefree, Tucson and Scottsdale. Approximately 80 members gathered for the 5th annual retreat on January 12, 2008. Sister Gertrude Foley gave a wonderful presentation on the importance of lay people in the Church. A new understanding of lay people in the Church was an eye opener for many of us; we were very open to her input.



Sister Gertrude spoke about mental models—our past experiences of church, what has become unconscious, the filters that we have each placed on our experiences and how we generate our expectations and behaviors. Sister took us back to the “old” way of thinking that priests and sisters had the “higher call” and then there was the laity—“oh well not quite so good and holy.” She reminded us that we are all called by our baptism and had us all draw a picture of our concept of church. Saint Paul’s letter to the Romans reminds us that we are about building the body of Christ. In our reflections we recognized our mission to be proclaimers of the gospel, especially in our families. We are to be a welcoming community with different lifestyles, work, prayer, leisure, entertainment and hardships. Each of us is an apostle in that each is “one who is sent.” I have a call to consecrate the world. I must be ready to give a reason for hope.

Sister Gertrude told a delightful story about the Magpie’s Nest. I guess we shouldn’t be too concerned if what we do isn’t perfect. We need to live with a little (or maybe a lot) of messiness.

New members and present members made the Seton Family promise. There were some changes to the ceremony and that too was well received. The day concluded with Mass with Saint Mary’s Parish in Chandler.

Participants valued the time to be with members from other groups. Our group in the van going home was VERY lively and rambunctious to say the least. Good time together!

(Thanks to the contributors of this fine story.)

Prayer

Each group includes prayer in their local gatherings. In addition, the following requests have come to us:

Please pray for healing for:

Rebecca Wilkerson Henderson, goddaughter of Suzanne Dougherty; Sister Maria Goetschalckx; Virgil Winkler; Ohky Beauchamp; Marion Grote, sister of Mary Wicker; Samuel Marshall, son of Kate Marshall; Samuel Michel, grandson of Toni Michel; father of Jerry Marfe; Mark Thompson, husband of Amy Thompson; Barbara Giesendorfer; Stella Poerio; Tony Mango; Vernon Wechtenhiser, brother-in-law of Sister Mary Norbert Long; Julie Semple, sister of Sister Mary Noël Kernan; Richard Moakler, brother-in-law of Sister Claudia Rushlow; Mary Grace Stafford, related to Lorraine Wagner; Sister Jo Rhoads, SFCC; Judy Roseberry and for all the friends and loved ones of our Seton Family members who are in need of healing in body, mind or spirit.

Please pray for the intention of:

Joseph Michel, grandson of Tony Michel; Isabelle Galvan; Nadeen Montez; Marlene Sobota; Dolores Quihuis; Alvin Struiff, brother of Joan Damico and for the special intentions of all members of Seton Family and the Sisters of Charity.

Please pray for the repose of the soul of:

Ernestine Hepp, aunt of Sister Barbara Ann Boss; Amanda Faux, niece of Joan Damico and for any other loved one who has died recently.



Lord Jesus,
in this holy season,
raise us up and renew our lives
by the Spirit that is within us.

Adapted from the liturgy for Easter Sunday