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# WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis

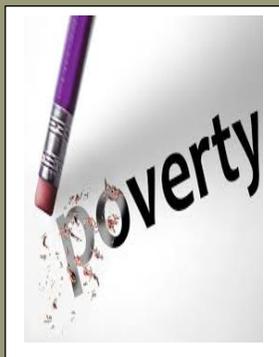


## Special Interest Articles:

- Associate Maxine Smith: Theme of May Issue
- Sr. Josephine Espinos: The Cry of the Poor
- Maria Shriver's Message: Finding Peace in Prayer of St. Francis

## Individual Highlights:

- Follow-up 2
- Water Shut-off 3
- History Project 4
- Books, Movies 5



*Donna Wilhelm, Dorothy Pagosa, Marjorie White, Maxine Smith, Michele Richardson, Rose Grabowski, Rose Marie Bommer, Shannon Fox — Social Justice Committee*

## Poverty Then, Poverty Now *by Associate Maxine Smith*

In this issue of **We Commit Ourselves** the focus will be on poverty, a human condition we work to eradicate, yet the poor will always be with us. As brothers and sisters of all humankind we are called to bring comfort and relief to all who struggle with life's necessities.

I grew up in a small suburb of Detroit and attended high school at

St. Gabriel, a small school of about 300 students in southwest Detroit. We were the textbook "middle class" family during the 1950s and 1960s. My father worked as a Boilermaker in the numerous steel plants and car factories in Detroit and Mother stayed at home and managed the family of five children. We were not rich. We were not poor. We weathered winters

where Dad had no work, relying on food boxes from Boilermakers Local 169 Union and unemployment benefits. Our parents often struggled to pay the \$25.00 tuition stipend at St. Mary Magdalen Elementary School. We received one or two Christmas and Birthday presents each year and thought we were the luckiest kids in the world. All five children spent

*Continued on pg. 2*

## The Cry of the Poor *by Sister Josephine Espinos*

Back in the 70s, when Padre Gustavo Gutierrez, author of **Theology of Liberation**, ministered in a parish in a very poor district of Lima, he remarked, "People say I am poor, because I choose to live and serve in a poor inner city parish. But where you minister does not make you poor. I have an education, which gives me all kinds of possibilities. Poverty happens when a person has little or no opportunity to better them self." According to UNICEF 22,000 children die each day and they "die quietly, far removed from the

scrutiny and the conscience of the world." That is poverty.

Looking at statistics at times I used to think, "Oh, how sad that is." Then I moved on with my life activities. Eventually from my 20 years in Peru, I learned that you come face to face with poverty when it comes knocking at your door and you look into the eyes of a single mom who pleadingly says, "My children have not eaten."

When I sit and listen to her story, I have a tremendous feeling of helplessness. They are

sick and their children are sick due to malnutrition. In the news it was reported that here in Peru, 47% of children younger than three years of age are suffering from anemia.

Not having a way to earn a decent salary to buy nutritious food or to provide education and growth opportunities, parents valiantly and creatively seek out a living however they can. The cost of medicine is expensive, so they borrow from whoever will lend, but they run the risk of being put in prison, because they

*Continued on pg. 4*

*Poverty Then, Poverty Now. . . (continued from page 1)*

Maxine Smith

*“In the spirit of St. Francis we share our stories, pray with persons of multiple faiths and cultures, and open our hearts and homes to those in need.”*

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time at colleges or universities before beginning rewarding careers. To Dad and Mom this was the American Dream.

**W**hile in High School I joined a group of girls who spent Saturday afternoon making home visits with members of the Sisters of the Sick Poor in Detroit's poorest neighborhoods. I quickly learned the reality of life in the inner city of Detroit: limited quantities of food, money, heat, clothing, transportation, and safety. This experience stirred my commitment to help in any way I can to relieve the pain of poverty and work to up-

hold the rights and dignity of each human being.

**M**y journey has taken me from the streets of Detroit, to helping in an inner city nursery school located in the Jeffries Projects, to tutoring in a center in Southwest Detroit where my elementary school-aged girls were subjected to hunger, learning difficulties, and sometimes drive-by shootings at their homes.

I have visited homes of children whose parents are incarcerated, bringing them Christmas presents. I have comforted families who are having serious

difficulty with their teenage son or daughter, and have mourned with families whose children have been murdered.

I thank God for the opportunities He has given me to be of service to His people and my brothers and sisters.

**A**s a Franciscan woman I choose to treat every human being with dignity and respect and do what I can to relieve the pain felt by those in our society who are cast aside simply because they lack financial resources. ■

**WHAT CAN WE DO?** Follow-up... *by Sister Rose Grabowski*

**O**ur Saturday April 18 was a day when, in the morning, we were engaged with **Sister Dorothy Pagosa** and her presentation on Human Trafficking. If we think that trafficking happens "over there" in another country we have it wrong. We realize that it's Africans being kidnapped and forced to work in cocoa fields, or young girls tricked to come to the U.S. and work as domestic servants, or Asian children being brought by tourists for sex. This is also called modern day slavery.

Human trafficking is recruiting, enticing, harboring, transporting, providing or obtaining an individual (or attempting to

do so)... for the purposes of a commercial sex act or labor or services.

Sister Dorothy led the discussion on the systemic causes of human trafficking and what we can do individually and as a nation to stop this epidemic.

**T**he following clues may help identify a possible trafficking victim:

- accompanied by a controlling person or boss; not speaking on own behalf
- lack of control over personal schedule, money, I.D., travel documents
- transported to or from work; lives and works in the same place
- debt owed to

employer/crew leader; inability to leave job

- bruises, depression, fear, overly submissive
- no passport or other forms of identification or documentation

If you think someone is a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center:  
1-888-373-7888.

For more information:  
[www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking)

**I**n the afternoon we were given information about Climate change by **Dan Dieterich**, leader of the Stevens Point Chapter of Citizens' Climate Lobby, Dan discussed this

*Continued on last page*

**April 18, 2015 Event at St. Joseph Motherhouse****What Can We Do?**

- Human Trafficking
- Climate Change

## ... A Reflection by Maria Shriver

One of the first TV jobs I had was in Baltimore, MD. I lived and worked there for two years. I loved the city. Some of the people I met there have ended up becoming lifelong friends.

So watching Baltimore explode recently made me pause, reflect and think. I thought about all of the good people who call that city home. Who feel they are currently being painted with broad strokes on a national scale. I've been thinking about Freddie Gray's family, the pain they are going through and also about the push and pull I'm sure they're experiencing having found themselves thrown into a national news story.

This discord is not just about race, it's about divisions that are ripping our country apart. Pitting people against one another. Cops against those they are supposed to protect. Mothers against sons. Black against white. Young against old. Men against women, and against men. The divide goes on and on.

And I wonder: When and how the healing can occur?

Yes, for sure, there needs to be change in our criminal justice system. But I think the bigger, universal change that's needed starts within each of us. What role can each of us play in healing?

For starters we could put our "understanding hats" on. Instead of rushing to judgement, might we pause and try to understand what it's like to grow up in a different socioeconomic environment? What it's like to put on a uniform every day and go out not knowing if you are coming home? What's it like to be a single mom with teenage boys who you feel you have lost along the way? What's it like for so much of our country that feels strapped, anxious and scared?

All of these stories, these uprisings, are bigger than any one person or any one city. Healing is needed all over our country. In our hearts, in our minds and in our language.

I've often found peace in the prayer of St. Francis, which begins:

*"Lord make me an instrument of Your peace; Where there is hatred, let me sow love"*

This is my version of a prayer for our country, but mostly for each of us:

*"Where there is anger; we must seek understanding; Where there is rage, we must address pain and fear; Where there is abuse, we must seek to educate that there is a different way."*

Healing can start today within ourselves. Take a moment away from the TV, away from social media, away from others and just be with you. What change would you like to bring about in you? In your family? In your community?

Right now each of us can start the healing we all so desperately need.

#PassItForward.

With love,

*Maria*



## Water Shut Offs in Detroit, Michigan

The Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO) is calling for citizens to contact President Barack Obama asking him to intervene in the crisis in Detroit, Michigan concerning the shut-off of water for

25,000 residents who are \$150.00 or 60 days delinquent in their water bills. This shut-off will take place if the resident has not made payment arrangements with City officials within 10 days of Monday, May 11, 2015.

The MWRO states this policy affects the city's poor, elderly, and veterans. The organization stands firmly on its belief that water is a right, a necessity of life, and people should not be denied water because of their low income. ■



## *The Cry of the Poor . . . (continued from page 1)*

*"We are Franciscans seeking to build, empower, bond, and speak."*



*...I sometimes ask, "Lord, where are you? Are you listening?"*

cannot pay back the loan.

On the way to the hospital to get help for their sick children, it is not unusual to be beaten and left penniless. It is a vicious cycle and a constant struggle for survival with no light beyond the tunnel. As soon as one problem is solved, something else happens.

This way of life affects the children. It costs money to go to school as even public schools require uniforms, books, utensils and fees, which some cannot afford. The suicide rate among children has gone up as they see no hope. True, this is not the story of all people but it is a growing one, as the price of living continues to rise and jobs, which earn a sufficient salary, are at a great premium. Most families in Peru have someone seeking work and a better way of life in another country.

Sad to say when charitable organizations try to bring solutions of education or betterment, the bureaucracy here stifles them.

A home for children, which has been operating successfully for over 25 years (wherein a group of us do catechesis) originally housed close to 800 children from birth to their middle 20s. The director's goal has always been that each child receives an education, even to university level when possible.

The government stepped in just this past year and unsuccessfully attempted to close it down. Already two children's homes in other states had been shut down. The government's reasoning for closing the homes is that Peru is now considered to be a developed country with increased agricultural exportation and rich mineral resources, so there is no longer a need for children's homes. The reality is, many children are from families who cannot make ends meet.

As the cost of living is going up, so too there are more and more families in dire need. The director fought the establishment and won his case by presenting the legal rights of a child. Thank God, this children's home is still functioning but, sad to say, with far fewer children. The government sent many back to their homes in the jungle and mountain areas.

Many of the ONGs—organization's which are not governmental but with humanitarian ends—are also given so many bureaucratic requirements in order to exist that many times they are not able to function and in many cases close down.

What does one do facing this reality? How do I in conscience answer my own inner call? In the Scriptures, James Chapter 2, it reminds me:

*"What good is it to profess faith without*

*practicing it? ... If someone has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, 'Good luck, keep warm and well fed,' but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that? Faith without practice is nothing. It is thoroughly lifeless."*

Personally I feel limited to help the people who come to us in extreme cases. How much does it help to share a few words of consolation and to pray with them? How do I say, "God is with you in your struggle," when we can only afford to give a few groceries and perhaps a small donation. I realize this can only go so far. Their needs far supersede what we are able to give, as they valiantly and courageously continue to struggle for the life of their families. And with them comes the realization that there are many more suffering similarly throughout the world.

I must say, I do receive so much more from them, than what I am able to give. I don't know how or what I would be able to do in their situation and I admire them so deeply.

When I hear the hymn "The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord," I sometimes ask, "Lord, where are you? Are you listening?"

I would have to say, "YES you are, in the hearts of the poor who also hear the cry of the poor." ■



What Can We Do? ... (continued from page 2)

as a moral one, how we are causing global warming, and what we can do to encourage national and international climate action.

Dan noted that over 97% of climate scientists

are convinced that, based on evidence presented, human-caused global warming is happening.

**What can you do?**

Have you thought about car-pooling, less traveling,

combining errands, all of which can lessen use of fossil-fuels?

Now... what else can you do? ■

Sister Rose Grabowski

**Franciscan Spirituality and Cosmology**

*"We respect the earth and recognize that all life is interconnected in a continuing cosmic evolution."*

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*Recommendations:*

**BOOKS:**

- **Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting By In America** by Barbara Ehrenreich
- **Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis** by Robert D. Putnam

**MOVIES:**

- **All Eyes and Ears:** A moving look at the relations between the United States and China told through the lives of the former U.S. Ambassador to China, John Huntsman, his adopted Chinese-American daughter, and the blind Chinese activist Chen Guangcheng.
- **McFarland USA:** The story of a cross-country coach who wins the respect of the children from impoverished migrant worker families and inspires them to be a championship cross country team.
- **An American Prophet:** The story of the ministry of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

**ACTIONS:**

- The Global Catholic Climate Movement is a newly formed international coalition of religious congregations and Catholic organizations, including LCWR. Become a part of its growing influence. [catholicclimatemovement.global](http://catholicclimatemovement.global)
- **Take the St. Francis Pledge.** All across our country, Catholics are taking the pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor and joining the Catholic Climate Covenant. [catholicclimatecovenant.org/the-st-francis-pledge/](http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/the-st-francis-pledge/)

**Contact us:**

Members of SSJ-TOSF Social Justice Committee:

- Donna Wilhelm
- Dorothy Pagosa
- Marjorie White
- Maxine Smith
- Michele Richardson
- Rose Grabowski
- Rose Marie Bommer
- Shannon Fox

*"Our Franciscan spirituality inspires and guides us in responding to any needs calling out to us."*

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**REMEMBER...**

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, "prototypes," suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources.

**Please send these to Sister Donna Wilhelm** by the end of May for inclusion in the June issue of our newsletter, *We Commit Ourselves*.

~Your Social Justice Committee