



nova notes

NOVA Catholic Community

December 2010

Chair Notes...

Although some leaves still cling to their parent-trees outside my window, November is giving way to December, and Advent is here. The good news is that we aren't waiting anxiously like Mary and Joseph did. The Savior arrived, as promised. And so, as we look back 2,000 years to be with Mary and Joseph during these weeks of Advent, we do so knowing that their anticipation of the birth and their nervous journey to Bethlehem turned out fine. Baby Jesus was born healthy and safe, falling asleep in a manger, as prophesied. And then His journey began.

The planners of our Advent liturgies will remind us that there are no boundaries of time and space in the Mystical Body. Thus we can reach back to be in the presence of Mary and Joseph on their journey. We can sit with them and their expectation as we try once again to grasp more deeply the significance of this amazing event.

Of course, we live in the here and now, and every day, we are challenged not to get so distracted (or depressed) by the details of our everyday lives, by the news, our work, deadlines, shopping and cooking, that we lose track of what it's all really about. Is that why the readings speak of darkness and light, of staying awake? Is that why they warn us of judgment and "end times" when the story of our salvation seems to be just getting off to its happy start? Can't the prophets ever give us a break?

Well, I'm not sure, but maybe their message has to do with living AS IF. Living each day AS IF the end times, Christ's second coming, were just around the corner. Quinn Connors suggested that they're

telling us to live, not with fear, but with persistent hopefulness, in spite of how frustrating and depressing it feels when our voice seems unheard, and our efforts seem wasted. And when we wonder if our own reserve of hope is failing, he said, we are called as community to sustain each other's hope.

And of course, we are called to live joyfully, but when grief overwhelms us, it is our community we look to for comfort and the enduring presence of that joy. Whether we are aware of it or not, we witness this hopefulness and joy, or lack of it, it by the way we respond to the ups and downs of our everyday life.

So, since we're not waiting like Mary and Joseph, and we know that Jesus came and saved us, can I say "Happy Advent?" And shall we carry on AS IF—hopefully and joyfully?

One thing, I know for sure, is that joy should never be taken for granted, especially in the form of fun.

Speaking of fun, there's more good news:

Nancy and Ken have organized a new opportunity for Nova socializing. They invite you to sign up now and join the Tables of Six for some regular fun gatherings. *Look for more information on page 5.* And you've already heard about Ted and John and Nova's "Men Who Cook" (and the team of ticket sellers, servers, and cleaner-uppers) who are concentrating on the details of an evening of fantastic food and entertainment, scheduled for March 6, 2011. Tickets are available now, and donations gratefully accepted to benefit the Nicaraguan Women's Micro-Loan Project. Both great ways of spreading hope and joy. ~Teddi

December Birthdays

NOVA Message Line (703) 852-7907

Chairpersons	Tom Clarkson Teddi Ahrens
Treasurer	Joe Formoso
Coordinator, Community Life	Cece Michelotti
Liturgy Coordinator	Gloria Mog
Padre Cadre Coordinator	John Mooney
Music Coordinator	Victoria Robinson
Peace and Justice Coordinators	Dianne Carroll Marie Keefe
Christ House Coordinator	Kopp Michelotti
Facilities	Glen Passin
Newsletter Editor	Judy Christofferson

- 8 Joe Bonsignore
Grace Michie
- 12 Chris Mausert Mooney
- 18 Sonja Donahue
- 21 Warren Reich
Peter Mele
- 26 Lila Powell
- 28 Judy Christofferson
- 29 Jerry Barrett
- 31 Joel Mog

Please send Judy Christofferson your birthday if you would like it to appear here (month/day only).

NOVA is praying for. . .

Eve Birch, who is looking for a home and items to provide temporary housing for the homeless.

Sonja Donahue, who appreciates a card, a call or a visit.

Jody Furlong, who would also appreciate a phone call or note.

Jim Weber, who is recovering from heart surgery.

The NOVA Catholic Community invites you to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy with us every Sunday in Arlington, Virginia.

Note: Our Liturgy is usually celebrated at Kenmore Middle School, Arlington Blvd. and Carlin Springs Road, Arlington, VA. Beginning Memorial Day weekend up to our Fall Retreat weekend in September, we celebrate at Lacey Woods Park, George Mason Drive near Washington Blvd., unless otherwise noted.

Liturgies at Kenmore begin at 10:15 a.m.
Gather at 10:00 a.m.
Liturgies at Lacey Woods begin at 9:30 a.m.
Gather at 9:15 am

Call the Message Line (above) or check the NOVA website for the latest information.

Remember these and any other NOVA members and their friends and family who need our prayers.

**January Newsletter Deadline:
Monday, December 27**

Liturgies: Cycle C

Inclusive Readings and Music Selections are available in the new NOVA Yahoo Group Files. Please give all music selections to the Music Liaison the Sunday before your liturgy and print 65 copies of the liturgy program. Liturgies at Kenmore begin at 10:15 a.m. and at 9:30 at Lacey Woods Park.

December Music Liaison Linda Rosenberg

December 5 – 2nd Sunday of Advent

Joe Kenna – Jeanne and Tom Clarkson
Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72
Romans 15:4-9
Matthew 3:1-12

December 12- 3rd Sunday of Advent

Quinn Connors, O.Carm. – Cathy and Larry
Goldschmidt
Isaiah 35:1-6, 10
Psalm 146
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

December 19 – 4th Sunday of Advent

Aidan Shea, OSB – Linda Rosenberg and Kathy
Scheimer
Isaiah 7:10-14
Psalm 24
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-24

December 24 – Christmas Vigil*

Barcroft Community Center, 7:30 p.m.

Jim Hug, SJ – Bailey, Cackley, and Kane Families
Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 89
Acts 13:16-17, 22-25
Matthew 1:1-25 or 18-25

December 26 – No Nova Liturgy



*Further details on page 5

January Music Liaison Barbara Formoso

January 2 – Epiphany of the Lord

Joe Nangle, OFM – Helen Michie
Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

January 9 – Baptism of the Lord

Nova's 43rd Anniversary

Gerry Stockhausen, SJ – Mike and Gen Timpane
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 29
Acts 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17

January 16 – 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jim Hug, SJ – Betsy and Mike Marron
Isaiah 49:3, 5-6
Psalm 40
1 Corinthians 1:1-3
John 1:29-34

January 23 – 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jorge Ferrer, SJ – Cackley Family
Isaiah 8:23-9:3
Psalm 27
1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17
Matthew 4:12-23

January 30 – 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dan Madigan, SJ – Peace and Justice Group
Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13
Psalm 146
1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Matthew 5:1-12a

SOCIAL ACTION PROJECTS

Christmas Time at Christ House

On Monday, December 20, NOVA will prepare and serve meatloaf and scalloped potatoes to the hungry clients at Christ House. Please mark your calendars to remember to **bring your meat loaves and spuds to the liturgy on December 19**. Alternatively, you may drop them off at the Michelotti's anytime on Sunday or until 1:00 p.m. on Monday, the 20th.

Since it's the Christmas season, this month we also try to give the Christ House clients a little something special - a useful, warm present. So please also bring gloves, hats, or socks, **wrapped as Christmas presents**, and marked as gifts for a man, a woman, or a child. We will be serving nearly 70 people, mostly men, on the 20th, so we'll need a lot of these presents to go around.

If we have extras, that's okay. Anne Rudd, one of the representatives to the Arlington Interfaith Council, has, for the last few years, arranged to serve dinner to homeless people in Arlington on Christmas day. And Helen Gettys Michie knows of a shelter in Fairfax whose clients also would appreciate a warm present. I will pass along to Anne and/or Helen any excess presents we get for Christ House. So be assured your gifts will not go to waste.

If you'd like to get involved in the kitchen, please contact Kopp Michelotti or Ken Chaison. We generally start food preparation around 4:00 p.m.. Also, members of the NOVA community come to provide Christmas carols as dinner music. Think about joining the singers – no heavy lifting (i.e., carrying a tune) required.

Remember that you can brighten someone's holiday season. Thank you for all that you do. ~ Kopp

Gunston Volunteers Needed

Nova volunteers distribute bags of non-perishable food, cereal provided by NOVA, and perishable items such as eggs, milk, and meat that are picked up on the night of distribution. Produce items are picked

up at the Arlington Food Assistance Center warehouse on the night of distribution. Produce items are picked up every other week by Eric Carroll at the produce markets downtown (and funded by the NOVA Peace and Justice budget). The distribution takes place at the Gunston Middle School Recreation Center in Arlington. Many volunteers have been active in this project for a lot of years. Every Thursday there is a seasoned volunteer, so this is your chance to try out your skills. Having someone who speaks Spanish is a real plus for each of the teams. Volunteers are still needed for November and December. **Please help.** If you are interested in being a volunteer, contact Dianne Carroll.

December Gunston Schedule:

December 2: Kane Family

December 9: Tim, Jerry, Kathy G.

December 16: Glen, Syd

December 23: Eric, Mike T. _____

December 30: Cece, Cackleys

Micro Loan Project

There are two ways to support NOVA's Micro Loan Project:

(1) By buying \$35 tickets, which will be available at NOVA liturgies, to the Men Who Cook Dinner on March 6, 2011.



and/or

(2) By making a tax-deductible donation to the **Nicaraguan Women's Micro Loan Project**

Please make your check payable to 'NOVA Community' with 'Micro Loan Project' written on the memo line.

These tax-deductible checks made out to NOVA Community can be mailed or given to Linda Christie.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Let's Get Together: Tables of Six

Last summer, NOVA decided to borrow an idea from the PAX Community to enhance community life, get to know one another better, form more support networks and, most of all, have some fun. "Tables of Six" (couples and singles) gather together in one another's homes, usually on a week-end night, to share a pot-luck meal. The groups are formed each year from interested community members and usually meet 3-4 times during the year. An attempt is made to get people together who do not know each other as well. In subsequent years, new groups are formed and the web of connections keeps growing.

Generally, the group gathers, shares their meal and then over dessert, begins a discussion on a particular area of interest – personal memories, hopes and dreams, spiritual dilemmas or whatever is of interest to all. Some groups may occasionally choose to watch a video in advance or read a book or article they want to discuss together. Some may just want to "wine and dine." There are no rules with any of this, whatever each group decides to expand and deepen our connections with one another.

If you are interested in being included in a Table of Six, please contact Ken Chaison or Nancy Veldhuis if you haven't already. Ken and Nancy will be putting the Tables of Six together in December in time for the first gatherings in January-February.

~ Nancy



Christmas Eve Liturgy

December 24, 2010

Gathering: 7:15 p. m.

Liturgy: 7:30 p.m.

Barcroft Community Center

800 S. Buchanan Street

Arlington, VA 22204

(on-street parking)

Agape following liturgy – Please bring finger food for the agape immediately following the liturgy and poinsettias to help decorate the environment.



Advent Pilgrimage

On December 11, a group of NOVA members will visit Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, Virginia. The visit will begin at 10:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. (at the latest). This is a quiet day spent mostly in individual silence – sitting, reading, walking, and praying. The visit ends in a group reflection and discussion with the Abbot, Father Robert. The trip to Berryville is about a 90-minute drive. For further information, contact Mike Timpane.

Print and save the Liturgy Planners and Celebrants schedule for the year in this newsletter on the next two pages. If you need to exchange a planner responsibility, you can use this list to contact planners immediately after or before you to see if they are able to switch. Please inform Gloria Mog and John Mooney of any changes you make in the schedule. If you have not yet signed up to plan a Sunday or have signed up for less than two, please consider taking one or more of the following Sundays: **July 3, July 24, August 7, August 14, October 9.**

Contact Gen and Gloria if you are able to plan on any of these five dates. THANKS!

LITURGY PLANNERS AND CELEBRANTS 2010-2011			
DATE		PLANNERS	CELEBRANT
Nov. 28	1st Sunday of Advent	Teddi Ahrens, Carmela Ormando	Aidan Shea, OSB
Dec. 5	2nd Sunday of Advent	Jeanne & Tom Clarkson	Joe Kenna
Dec. 12	3rd Sunday of Advent	Cathy & Larry Goldschmidt	Quinn Connors, O.Carm
Dec. 19	4th Sunday of Advent	Linda Rosenberg, Kathy Scheimer	Aidan Shea, OSB
Dec. 24	Christmas Eve	Bailey, Cackley, Kane families	
Dec. 26	NO NOVA LITURGY	NO NOVA LITURGY	NO NOVA LITURGY
Jan. 2	Epiphany	Helen Michie	Joe Nangle, OFM
Jan. 9	Baptism of the Lord	Mike & Gen Timpane	Gerry Stockhausen, SJ
Jan. 16	2nd Sunday Ordinary Time	Betsy & Mike Marron	Jim Hug, SJ
Jan. 23	3rd ""	Cackley family	Jorge Ferrer, SJ
Jan. 30	4th ""	Peace & Justice Group	Dan Madigan, SJ
Feb. 6	5th ""	Anne Passin	Gerry Stockhausen, SJ
Feb. 13	6th ""	Cece & Kopp Michelotti	John Haughey, SJ
Feb. 20	7th ""	Cathy & Larry Goldschmidt	Quinn Connors, O.Carm.
Feb. 27	8th ""	Judy & Clyde Christofferson	Jim Hug, SJ
Mar. 6	9th ""	Christies & O'Tooles	Joe Nangle, OFM
Mar. 9	Ash Wednesday	Marlene & John Tarrant	
Mar. 13	1st Sunday of Lent	Barbara & Joe Formoso	Gerry Stockhausen, SJ
Mar. 20	2nd Sunday of Lent	Gloria & David Mog	Dan Madigan, SJ
Mar. 27	3rd Sunday of Lent	Walter Landry	
Apr. 3	4th Sunday of Lent	Barbara & Joe Formoso	Quinn Connors, O.Carm.
Apr. 10	5th Sunday of Lent	Jeanne & Tom Clarkson	Dan Madigan, SJ
Apr. 17	Palm Sunday	Helen Michie	Joe Nangle, OFM
Apr. 21	Holy Thursday	Holy Thursday group	Gerry Stockhausen, SJ
Apr. 22	Good Friday	Meg Tuccillo	
Apr. 24	Easter	Gloria Mog & Tim White	Gerry Stockhausen, SJ
May. 1	2nd Sunday of Easter	Cece & Kopp Michelotti	Jim Hug, SJ
May. 8	3rd ""	Amy & Charlie Bailey	Quinn Connors, O.Carm.

LITURGY PLANNERS AND CELEBRANTS 2010-2011			
DATE		PLANNERS	CELEBRANT
May. 15	4th ""	Cackley family	Joe Nangle, OFM
May. 22	5th ""	Archer & Jim Heinzen	
May. 29	6th ""	Victoria Robinson	
June. 5	7th ""	Peace & Justice Group	
June. 12	Pentecost	Linda Rosenberg & Kathy Sheimer	Dan Madigan, SJ
June. 19	Holy Trinity	Archer & Jim Heinzen	
June. 26	Solemnity of the Eucharist	Rosemarie & Joe Annunziata	Gerry Stockhausen, SJ
July. 3	14th Sunday Ordinary Time		
July. 10	15th ""	Peggy Meyer	
July. 17	16th "	Christies & O'Tooles	
July. 24	17th ""		
July. 31	18th ""	Gloria & David Mog	
Aug. 7	19th ""		
Aug. 14	20th ""		
Aug. 21	21st ""	Linda & Jack Christie	
Aug. 28	22nd "	Meg Tuccillo	
Sept. 4	23rd "	Kate Doherty	
Sept. 11	24th ""	Mike & Gen Timpane	
Sept. 18	25th ""	NOVA RETREAT	
Sept. 25	26th ""	Catherine Loveless	
Oct. 2	27th ""	Catherine Loveless	
Oct. 9	28th ""		Ray Kemp
Oct. 16	29th ""	Peggy Meyer	
Oct. 23	30th ""	Carolyn & Ted Miller	
Oct. 30	31st ""	Peace & Justice Group	
Nov. 6	32nd ""	John & Nancy Veldhuis	
Nov. 13	33rd "	Victoria Robinson	
Nov. 20	Christ the King	Judy & Clyde Christofferson	

THANK YOU LETTERS

Letter received by Carolyn Miller from Sister Adriana Torvar in the South Sudan-Nile region of Africa (Sister Adriana is a member of the Camboni Sisters in the South Sudan, a NOVA Social Action project)

Dear Carolyn,

Greetings from south Sudan. I recently visited Mayandit County to celebrate with the Christian community there. The celebration was very well participated. As you can see, the church is under construction and the majority of the people are young.

The catechists are very committed, as are the young mothers. I spent 4 days with the community and had time to visit some families to comfort them in their suffering and sickness. During the rainy season, Mayandit is cut off because the only road is muddy and full of holes so it is difficult for any vehicle to get there. But thanks be to God I was lucky to have a ride as there had not been rain for few days.

It was a joyful time and we prayed and thanked God for all the missionaries and all the people of the world and for God's Word that reaches hidden places. I thank God for giving me this missionary vocation and to be able to speak about God to the Nuer people.



One of the pictures Sister Adriana sent with her letter

Please give my greetings to all the members of Nova community, and please pray for us as we are getting closer to the event of the referendum.

Con carino,

Adriana

Many thanks from Eve Birch for the piles of blankets, warm hats and gloves that Nova donated for her homeless project in November. As she gives these away, more are always welcome.

~ Teddi

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Printed in the Stanford News, March 5, 1830

1830 John Clare

(Edited and submitted by Eric Robinson)

These vague allusions to a country's wrongs
Where one says 'aye' and others answer 'no',
In contradictions from a thousand tongues,
Till like to prison-cells her freedoms grow,
Becobwebbed with these oft repeated songs
Of peace and plenty in the midst of woe:
And is it thus they mock her year by year,
Telling poor truth unto her face she lies,
Declaiming of her wealth with gibe severe
So long as taxes drain their wished supplies;
And will these gaolers rivet every chain
Anew – yet loudest in their mockery be
To damn her into madness with disdain,
Forging new bonds and bidding her be free.



Eric – reading from Malachi at
November 14 liturgy

Britain in 1830: USA in 2010? Oh, for more agricultural laborers like John Clare (1793-1864)!

A KEY TO HAPPINESS

(It works for me.)

By Peggy Meyer

In regard to material possessions,
try to be content with the things you already have.
Don't let yourself become focused on wanting more and more.

By the same token,
accept and appreciate the people in your life,
just the way they are.
Give up asking them to become what you want them to be.
Accept yourself, as well. Enjoy being the way you are.

Don't complain and think about how you wish things were different.
It is good to work on making things better
for yourself and especially for others,
but still accept and appreciate whatever is happening today.
Let yourself experience the pain as well as the joy
and try to be at peace with it all.

Be grateful to God for everything – just as it is,
for life is an amazing and marvelous thing --
a precious gift.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

SALT Fall Advocacy Training Conference on October 23

By Helen Gettys Michie

Colman McCarthy – author, teacher, peace advocate, and a longtime writer for the National Catholic Reporter and the Washington Post—was the keynote speaker at the fall Social Action Linking Together (SALT) Conference on October 23. Approximately 125 SALT advocates attended the conference held at Saint Mark Catholic Church in Vienna and three NOVA Community members were there.

McCarthy, a writer who has interviewed Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela, highlighted the question he routinely addressed to those he has interviewed regarding the subject of peace, which he defined as the fruit of love: *How do we go about increasing peace in society and decreasing violence?* Three responses are common: a commitment to prayer, a commitment to service, and a commitment to nonviolence. He framed the understanding of prayer for those committed to working for peace within the context of “cooperation,” namely cooperation with the gifts we have been given, and related it to the definition of peace, which is the fruit of love. He illustrated his point with a story from the life of Simone Weil, who at one time gave up teaching in a university to work in an automobile factory, emerging from that experience with this answer to the question “What is love?” -- “It’s asking the person next to me, ‘What are you going through?’ and then acting on the answer.” That, according to McCarthy, is what authentic prayer is essentially about: “acting on the answer.”

Love that builds peace has nothing to do with emotions. The question for all of us committed to service is: “Are we using our gifts well and decreasing the world’s suffering?” McCarthy believes that it is easier to raise a peaceful child than to reform a violent adult. If we do not start teaching peace in our schools, what chance do we have to create a more peaceful society? McCarthy invited SALT advocates to consider enrolling in a course on Peace and Social Justice to be held in the summer of 2011. For further information, contact John Horejsi: www.peacejusticestudies.org.

NOVA Yahoo Group Messages

By Ken Chaison

As a reminder to all, on the next page are the guidelines for the NOVA Yahoo Group that we accepted after a meeting last year. A little email self-restraint is good to ensure that NOVA members do not get overwhelmed with messages and leave the Yahoo Group. If that happens, then we lose the ability to share important NOVA information with all NOVA members, which is the main reason for maintaining the NOVA Yahoo Group in the first place.

On the “flip side,” there are other ways that individuals can send messages and share information that do not necessarily follow the guidelines. Individuals can use the NOVA directory as a source for email addresses and develop a private “list” using the “Distribution List” function of whatever email program they use.

Also, many NOVA members have established free Facebook accounts and have connected as Facebook “friends.” Articles, links to websites, photos, and other information are all being shared and discussed on Facebook by NOVA members in that way. Although Facebook is on the web, there are ways to adjust one’s Facebook profile to limit exposure. Ken Chaison can help, if you have questions about Facebook privacy.

NOVA Yahoo Group Message Guidelines (originally published March 16, 2009)

- Stop, breathe and **think before hitting "reply all" or automatically forwarding emails** you receive from various organizations. Ask yourself if the majority of the community needs to receive this information, if it might be more appropriate to respond just to an individual sender or if your personal response to a situation/issue may be "too much information" as the young folks say.
- Try to be **diplomatic and calm** when replying to emails – particularly those that upset you. Criticism always feels harsher when written and misunderstanding can spread quickly. It may be better to communicate one on one with that person.
- If someone has written to you privately, **do not forward** his/her email message unless you have permission from the author. What was written may not have been intended for wider distribution.
- If you have an **idea for a new NOVA project or response send it to the Chairs** or the appropriate Committee Chair so it can be considered in light of what else is going on in the community before being debated on the List.

Theology for a Small Planet

A collection of essays by Clyde Christofferson © 2009-2010

Prior Essays

The Down Side of Hope

These are trying times. For those whose hearts burn for justice and human dignity, the direction of events seems wrong. The elation of recent years at a politics of hope has more recently been deflated. The entire world is in a funk. Painfully, this funk echoes the longer running retrenchment of the institutional Church from the promise of Vatican II.

What is going on?

The standard progressive accommodation to these events might be "two steps forward, one step back." Maintain a stiff upper lip and keep pushing. Those of less optimistic persuasion suspect the trajectory might be "three steps back." The myth of Sisyphus presents a depressing image.

There may be a cosmic method to these trials. As these essays have tried to show, there is an unfolding that we are a part of. The universe blows hot and blows cold, not in some aimless sense but toward whatever it is that is embodied by our hopes. The hopes are real; they are a sign. Creation is of a piece, remarkably. And the ups and downs – blowing hot and blowing cold – are the engine of cosmic evolution. In the last fifty years, since confirmation of the Big Bang, we have become witness to a succession of examples of this wayward engine at work.

The wayward engine of ups and downs is most familiar to us in Darwin's process of natural selection, which is different in kind from the physical processes of the Big Bang and star formation. DNA replication produces variation in organisms, and the vicissitudes of nature weed out organisms that are less well adapted. Over time, this process has produced ever more complex creatures, but sometimes changes in the environment have been so large and swift that even the dominant organisms have been unable to adapt. The dinosaurs did not survive a nuclear winter produced by an asteroid sixty-five million years ago, leaving an ecological vacuum filled by mammals and then primates. A comet some thirteen thousand years ago similarly drove many large animals to extinction, making it easier for *homo sapiens* to then become dominant.

But the wayward engine of ups and downs is nothing if not creative. Or, perhaps more accurately, the more complex structures that have developed over time – now including the structures of human civilization – have found new processes of adaptation that build upon, but are different in kind from, Darwin's natural selection.

These processes have the human character written all over them, which is why they are different in kind from natural selection. They have something to do

with the small kindnesses of everyday life, which resonate in our hearts. The same resonance accompanies the good that we attempt to do as a community, from the meat loaves and scalloped potatoes at Christ house to our support for the orphanage in Bolivia and dozens of other projects, to the new micro-financing project in Nicaragua.

But how can work like this prevail against Darwinian self interest? Remarkably, kindness is not relegated to the volunteer efforts of church groups – it has made its presence felt in the lion’s den, as it were, where competition is fierce. But not without ups and downs. I would describe how this works in terms comparable to Darwinian evolution. In Darwinian evolution changes in the environment operate to "naturally select" better adapted specimens and species. Applied to our civilization, this process seems to foster the success of behavior described by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. Yet over time there has been improvement, an ever so subtle moderation of the severity of self-interest.

The engine of this improvement is the same thirst for justice and kindness that drives our social action projects. It is a longing that resonates within the human heart, and rejects the boundary of “private charity.” It is simply not true that self-interest – the Darwinian premise – trumps all. What happens is that, in its better moments, the community develops structures and practices which not only restrain self-interest but do good for the sake of good. But then circumstances change and the “better moments” pass away. Retrenchment sets in, driving both individuals and the community as a whole to fall back. Justice and kindness seem more distant. The more primitive Darwinian self interest is ascendant, which tends to tear down or obviate structures and practices that had been able to develop and flourish in more accommodating environments.

When more accommodating environments return, *resonance* will generate new or modified structures and practices for justice and kindness, which will be tested by later changes in the environment that again drive both individuals and the community to retrench. The length and depth of the retrenchment will test the resilience of the structures and practices that strive for justice and kindness. And over time this cycle between *resonance* and retrenchment will tend to make justice and kindness structures more resilient, and better able to weather the storms of retrenchment.

For example, the democratic forms of our republic reflect an evolution of this kind over a succession of changes in civilization that cycle between hope and retrenchment. Athenian democracy is an example of a less resilient structure and our current republic embodies more resilient democratic structures. Machiavelli’s *The Prince* is often interpreted as a justification for retrenchment, but that misreads the author. Machiavelli was intent upon establishing within Italy the benefits of a republic, and saw a successful prince as a practical step toward that eventual end. Machiavelli’s *Discourses on Livy* recount the period during the Roman republic when structures more resilient to the purposes of democracy were developed. These structures tried to establish a balance, including elements of all three classical forms of government: democracy, monarchy and aristocracy. The idea of a republic was to use this balance to overcome the tendency of a democracy to degenerate into mob rule, the tendency of a monarchy to degenerate into tyranny, and the tendency of aristocracy to degenerate from rule by the best to rule by the rich.

The American experiment is a balanced republic of this kind. Democratic structures are not in themselves just or kind, although they do respond to the *resonance* of freedom. Freedom does indeed resonate, and for the same reason that justice and kindness resonate: a loving God is sharing existence with independent beings able to comprehend this existence and love one another thereby imaging God. Furthermore, over the long term, democratic structures provide a more resilient and robust foundation for mechanisms, structures and practices that do justice and express kindness.

But structures and practices that do justice and express kindness must themselves be annealed by changes in the political environment that cycle from hope to retrenchment. Private charity persists from age to age, but is not adequate to the need. Structures and practices of the general community for justice and kindness, relying upon the powers of the modern state, have been and are being developed. Social programs (typically, first in Europe and then in America) have elements that reflect the *resonance* of justice and kindness in the human heart. The current financial stress is testing these structures and practices, and retrenchment may well occur. More hopeful times will return, and more resilient social programs will develop.

The direction of all this is evident. We are in the palm of God's hands. And yet we are limited creatures, among many such civilizations in the cosmos, and our continued survival is not etched in stone. Our capacity to develop ever more resilient structures and practices for justice and kindness, at the level of the general community as well as individually, will be tested. And our time is limited. Will we reach the parousia of a unity of God's kingdom in heaven and on earth? We can hope, and we can act on that hope. The downside of hope need not discourage us.

What is the role of the institutional Church in this struggle for justice and kindness? In the preceding essay in this series I suggested that Huckleberry Finn's struggle with himself over the slave status of Jim, his companion on a raft down the Mississippi, serves as a metaphor for current times with the Church. The Church is divided as Huck is divided. Justice issues – for silenced theologians, for women, for a lay role in governance – are adrift on a raft.

In recent weeks I have come upon yet another reason for seeing Church governance as off the rails. One of my favorite pastimes is listening to Teaching Company courses, and a short series of twelve lectures on *Understanding Complexity* has provided food for thought concerning the promise of Vatican II. Yes, we are in a period of retrenchment. And yes, this retrenchment will test the resilience of the structures

and practices initiated by the Church fathers at Vatican II. We seem to be going nowhere with *Lumen Gentium's* shift toward an emphasis upon the Church as the People of God. Parish and diocesan councils languish in obscurity. Regional synods began with promise but the Vatican pulled them back. *Ut Unum Sint* suggested a reflection on the Petrine ministry, but that inquiry has languished as well.

What those who study complex systems say is that robust and resilient systems emerge from the bottom up, without a script or a plan. And these systems survive by balancing in a middle ground: the individuals within the system are interdependent (but not too much), connected to one another (but not too much), diverse (but not to excess), and learn and adapt (without knowing it all).

There is a history, of course, to the highly centralized structure of the Roman Catholic Church. But the People of God appear to be responding like a complex system, on their own – thank you very much – seeking a *via media* from the bottom up.

The institutional Church could be a more helpful part of this development. Our American heritage of a constitutional form of government – one that understands the excesses of democracy, monarchy and aristocracy – provides a pertinent perspective. The institutional Church need not bury its talents.

But hope has its down side.

TO BE CONTINUED

RECENT NOVA COMMUNITY PHOTOS



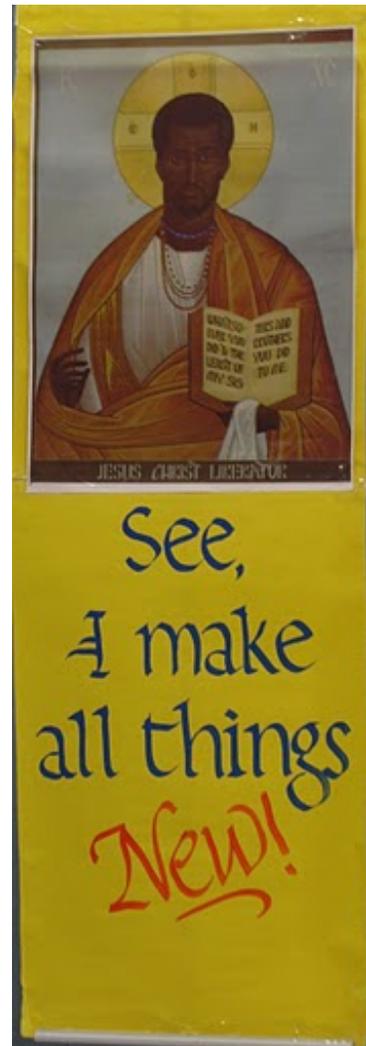
Brother David Genders and Quinn Connors celebrate the Eucharist



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Banner created by Father Joe Kenna for November 21 liturgy



John discusses Ugandan project supported by NOVA



Blessing of Communion ministers