



nova notes

NOVA Catholic Community

June 2012

Chair Notes...

What resources do we call upon to survive in the discomfort of the “in between?”

“In the in-between?” – “Survive the discomfort?” – “What resources?”

What is it all about in the end?

Let me start with today and go backward. (I am, after all, left-handed .)

On May 5, we attended a funeral Mass in memory of Jean Mendez, and I thought all during Mass, “How did Jean deal with the discomforts of the in-betweens in her life?” Ninety-two years, during which time she nurtured her family (twelve children) up until the very end, as she hung on to her independence and good humor.

At noon, Kopp and I attended the Anatomical Donor Mass at Georgetown University. Here the families of the many who donated their bodies to the hospital for research came together to pray. Bill Callahan and Grace Birch were among the donors and we prayed for them. Both of these beloved NOVA members had passed about two years ago but, as in life, they kept on giving and giving and giving. How many lives will be affected in positive ways because GU medical students were able to learn more about their vocation of healing through Grace and Bill?

Christ gave us His all, and His message to us was simply - to love God and one another. As I reflect, I see Bill and Grace giving us models for living and dying.

As we traveled through Italy these past weeks, I read a book a friend had given me, *When the Game is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box..* It is written by John Ortberg, a Presbyterian minister. It is a lot

about playing the game of life - *wisely*. And so, as we moved from town to town, village to village I thought about what I was reading. “Be rich toward God,” Ortberg wrote, because at the end of life it is God’s assessment of our lives that matters. Be rich toward God and grow your soul healthy and good. Love and enjoy the people around you, especially the ones that seem hard to love. Learn about your gifts, grow them. No one else can play the game for you. The trophy that matters at the end of the game is not on our shelves or on our resumes. It is in the soul that we become.

As we traveled through Italy, we visited many cathedrals and basilicas. The art, with the magnificent displays of gold and opulence, was breathtaking. Then we took a side trip near Cortona to Chiesa Cella di S. Francesco – the little monastery where St. Francis lived and worked, simple and reverent, was inviting and clean, with a little waterfall at its center. This was Francis’ life – here. I love the beauty and peacefulness of Assisi, which we also visited, but Francis was about loving God and caring for the living. It was after he died that the Pope commanded that a basilica be built in Assisi, and his remains moved there. What would Francis have said?

So we return from our trip and come to Joe Kenna’s liturgy celebrating 45 years since his Ordination, and we get this question: “What resources do we call upon to survive in the discomfort of the in between?” Since this day (May 20) is the first part of the calling forth process – the naming of potential co-chairs, I think about the in-between of this process: What resources are we using? What resource can we be? Hopefully we are reflecting, discerning, listening carefully for the “call.” What are the resources within us? Is the Spirit in each of us reaching out to connect with... to draw strength from... to impart strength to... to comfort... to love... to be Community?

Peace and Love to each of you.

~Cece Michelotti, Co-chair

For NOVA photos, click on:
<http://www.novacommunity.weebly.com>

June Birthdays

NOVA Message Line	(703) 852-7907
Chairpersons	Teddi Ahrens Cece Michelotti
Treasurer	Joe Formoso
Coordinator, Community Life	Marlene Shade
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	John Tarrant
Directory & Yahoo Groups Coordinator; Webmaster	Ken Chaison
Announcements Coordinator	Linda Christie
Newsletter Editor	Judy Christofferson

1	Phil Cackley
2	Meg Sullivan
6	Tim White
10	Cecilia Cackley Quinn Connors, O. Carm.
13	Samantha Clarkson Jim Heinzen
19	Kate Doherty
21	Peter Goldschmidt
23	Jeanne Clarkson
24	Sid Boyne Gen Timpane
29	Peg Boyne Joe Formoso

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

Remember in your prayers. . .

Eve Birch, for the success of her work in assisting the needy

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

Jody Furlong, who also appreciates phone calls or notes

Michael Iskander, who going through a lengthy recovery process from extensive injuries following a car accident last year

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

“Live simply that others might simply live.” ~Elizabeth Seaton

**July Newsletter Deadline
Sunday, June 24**

Liturgies: Cycle B

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 School (located on Carlin Springs Rd. off Arlington Blvd.) begin at 10:15 a.m.

June Music Liaison Tom Clarkson

June 3 – Trinity Sunday

Jim Hug, SJ

Planners: Peace and Social Justice Group

June 10 – Corpus Christi

Aidan Shea, OSB

Planner: Carmela Ormando-Kane

June 17 – 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Quinn Conners, O.Carm

Planner: Emma Violand Sanchez

June 24 – John the Baptist

Gerry Stockhausen, S.J.

Planner: Peggy Becker

When possible please arrange any needed exchanges with other planners on dates near your liturgy. Let Gloria Mog, liturgy coordinator, know of any changes to the schedule.

July Music Liaison Victoria Robinson

July 1 – 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

John Haughey, S.J.

Planner: Victoria Robinson

July 8 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gerry Stockhausen, S.J.

Planner: Barbara Formoso

July 15 – 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Priest TBA

Planner: Peggy Meyer

July 22 – 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Priest TBA

Planners: Richard Urban and Marie Schum-Brady

July 29 – 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Priest TBA

Planners: O'Tooles and Christies



NOVA celebrates Fr. Joe Kenna's 45 years in the priesthood



Banner by Fr. Joe Kenna

Gunston Volunteers

NOVA volunteers distribute bags of nonperishable food, cereal provided by the Community, and perishable items such as eggs, milk, and meat that 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. NOVA volunteers have been active in this project for many years. More than one volunteer is needed. There is a seasoned volunteer every Thursday, so this is your chance to try out your skills. Having someone who speaks Spanish is a real plus for each of the teams. **Please help.** If you are interested in volunteering, contact Dianne Carroll by phone or e-mail.

June Gunston Schedule

June 7: **Eric/Gamboa family**

June 21: **Ormando Kanés**

June 28: **Syd/Glen**

June 14: **Tim/Jerry**



David Mog and Chris Massey join Joe during the Climate Ride, biking from Silver Spring, MD to the Capitol in DC.

REMINDER

NOVA'S "CALLING FORTH" MEETING

Date: Saturday night, June 9.

Time: 5:30 p.m. Potluck Dinner
6:30 p.m. Meeting

Location: Rose and Jerry Barrett's social room.

Purpose: To reach consensus on a new co-chair for the next two years

Climate Ride – NOVA Participants

NOVA member Joe Kane (photo below), was one of 200 cyclists who pedaled from New York to DC on behalf of improving the climate.

Congratulations and thanks to Joe!



New Peace and Social Justice Projects Update

Annual Project Selected for 2012-2013

At a spirit-filled meeting on May 5, NOVA chose through consensus to support the Rural Women's Center (Centro Campesina), in the Department of Cabanas, El Salvador for its large Peace and Social Justice project this year. NOVA's plan is to raise the requested \$10,000, which will pay for partial funding of a permanent location for education, training, and income generation activities for rural women and youth, from isolated communities surrounding the commercial town of Ilobasco, conducted by the 18-year-old Asociación La Nueva Esperanza. Archer Heinzen submitted this project.

The community expressed a desire for The Dreamers Project to return to NOVA with ways we might engage with low-income, highly successful immigrant students, especially to support the efforts of Mikaela Ormando-Kane during her senior year. Along with Mikaela, this project was submitted by Emma Violand-Sanchez and Carmela Ormando-Kane.

The Peace and Social Justice team also wants to thank other project proposers: John Veldhuis, for bringing the needs of people in Kononi, Uganda for water and Eric Carroll, for his helping to serve the local needs of homeless Arlington elementary school children for food.

~Peace and Social Justice Team: Joe Annunziata, Eric and Dianne Carroll, Marie Keefe, Kopp and Cece Michelotti, Cathy Showalter, Meg Tucillo, Richard Urban, John Veldhuis, Tim White.



Photo to the left is of Katie Smith, discussing the challenging conditions in the South Sudan region of Africa, where the Camboni Sisters serve the local community. Providing needed equipment for the sisters' work was NOVA's 2011-2012 special Peace and Social Justice Project.

Additional Peace and Social Justice Monthly Projects

At NOVA's March 17 Peace and Social Justice Annual Meeting, five projects were approved and added to the community's monthly PSJ list to receive our financial support. Two of these projects were described in the May issue of the newsletter and three more are described below. The purpose of these project summaries is for community members to see how our weekly contributions help others.

Eve Birch and the *Butterfly Project*

Eve Birch, daughter of an "early NOVA family," has been an advocate for the poor, the homeless and marginalized for many years. At the NOVA Peace and Social Justice meeting, the community decided to send

the community decided to send her landlord 100 dollars towards her rent each month.

Until spring, 2010, Eve managed a shelter and organized assistance for the homeless in Martinsburg, West Virginia, but her landlord refused to fix her furnace or comply with other court orders and evicted her. Although she no longer runs a shelter, she continues to serve those among the neediest, and she is committed to development of her **Butterfly Project**. Eve describes its mission: “to make life a little easier on those homeless that I can help by offering meals and clothing, helping with documentation, and providing creative nutrition, natural healing, hugs, laughter, and respect.” Clients come to Eve via word of mouth; and she helps them find the appropriate resources to become eligible for food stamps, health care, counseling, school, etc. She has limited space and resources, but if a person needs shelter, is drug-free, has exhausted other resources, and isn’t dangerous, she will find or provide shelter until other housing can be found.

Although NOVA already supports needy families in Northern Virginia, the **Butterfly Project** serves a population in West Virginia that has limited access to the multitude of services available in this area. Eve and the Butterfly Project operate on a shoestring. Her monthly income from her part-time library and “handyperson” employment is limited, she and her daughter qualify for food stamps and energy assistance, and her truck is struggling for life, but she doesn’t limit her outreach to the needy. Our monthly contribution of \$100 to supplement Eve’s rent makes a **huge difference** in her ability to serve others. ~ **Teddi Ahrens**

Note: Teddi is the community’s liaison for this project.



Women’s Global Education Project (WGEP)

After her return from Peace Corps in Senegal, West Africa, NOVA community member, Elise Annunziata, helped to establish Women’s Global Education Project – following the vision and dedication of her fellow Peace Corps Senegal friend Amy Maglio, Executive Director. The mission of the organization is to provide access to education and to develop training programs that empower women and girls to build better lives and foster equitable communities.

Women’s Global Education Project Kenya’s Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) program provides girls the opportunity to participate in empowerment workshops and--with the support of their families and communities--publicly say “No!” to the culturally-entrenched practice of genital cutting.

Like a traditional rite of passage ceremony, the girls participating in “Circumcision With Words” are “secluded” for a retreat together with mentors and workshop facilitators to discuss topics on health, relationships, personal decision-making, and empowerment. These workshops, which are held in English, Swahili and Kitharaka (the languages commonly spoken in the region) also explore common misconceptions around health and genital cutting, and provide the girls with a support group as they take a stand against the practice.

Since being adopted by WGEP three years ago, “Circumcision with Words” **has helped over 820 rural Kenyan girls and their families to abandon** the deeply rooted tradition of FGM. Over 2,500 girls who have gone through this program since it began in 1995. In 2012, Women’s Global ARP work in Kenya around this year plans to impact over 400 girls and continue to grow the program and its impact.

Please follow Women’s Global work on www.womensglobal.org and sign up for their e-newsletter.

~**Elise Annunziata**

Editor: Elise also wrote in the e-mail to which the above article was attached: “On behalf of Women's Global Education Project, I thank the NOVA Catholic Community very much for its generous donation to Women's Global Education Project and for selecting our Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) Program in Kenya as its Social Action Program.”

Note: Rosemarie Annunziata is the liaison for this project, which receives \$50 per month from NOVA.

Scholarships for Girls at St Gabriel's Middle/High School in Haiti

Nova is funding six scholarships (\$300 apiece) for the academic year beginning in September 2012. These scholarships are for girls attending St Gabriel's Middle High School in Fontaine, Haiti.

In the small town of Fontaine there is a middle high school (St Gabriel's) under construction and due to open this September with 3 classes in place for 7th, 8th, and 9th graders. The school is enthusiastically supported by the community and led by a young man, Pierre-Louis Joizil, who has been planning St. Gabriel's Middle/High School ever since he was a high school student himself, walking two hours each way from Fontaine to the closest middle/high school in the town of Pignon. Pierre-Louis was introduced to members of the NOVA community after attending this year's Ash Wednesday Service. Pierre-Louis explained to us that he has set up a non-profit. He has acquired land to build the school and raised funds to construct the first phase of the school, which is due to be completed this September. (See photo of current students below.)

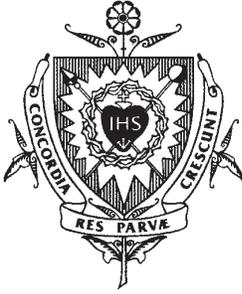
After working with him my impression is that here is a courageous young Haitian with a dream to help other Haitians fulfill their dreams for a good education, productive work and a brighter future. However, he has done more than dream; he has worked with what was available to acquire an education against heavy odds and achieve a solid beginning on his dream for a school. I personally support Pierre-Louis' efforts and I proposed that the NOVA Community support six scholarships, which the community accepted at the annual Peace and Social Justice planning meeting.

~Richard Urban

Note: Richard is the community's liaison for this project.



Thank You Letter



Xaverian Brothers Generalate

4409 Frederick Avenue • Baltimore, Maryland 21229 • 410-644-0034 • FAX: 410-644-2762
www.xaverianbrothers.org

May 4, 2012

Mr. Richard Urban
Nova Catholic Community

Dear Richard and Nova Catholic Community,

Thank you so much for your support of St. Gabriel Middle-High School in Fontaine, Haiti. Your generous gift of \$300 will be put toward six scholarships for girls attending St. Gabriel School.

I will be sure to let Pierre-Louis Joizil and Brother Michael McCarthy know of your generosity. I also want you to know that the Xaverian Brothers pray daily for you, your loved ones, and all the benefactors who provide financial support for this worthy project.

Gratefully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Bro Lawrence Harvey'.

Brother Lawrence Harvey, CFX
General Superior

*Thank you for
your assistance to
help the students
at St. Gabriel's.*

In accordance with Federal and State tax regulations, we are required to state that the Xaverian Brothers, USA did not provide any goods or services in consideration, in whole or in part, for this contribution. Your contribution is fully tax deductible under all current tax laws. This copy is your official receipt for income tax purposes. Please retain it with your important records.

A Remembrance: Our Beloved Jean Mendez

By Monica Boland

NOVA community member Jean Mendez passed away on Saturday, April 28, in her cherished home in Falls Church, Virginia, where she had lived for almost 58 years. It was her wish to spend her final days in the place she called home for nearly two-thirds of her life.

Jean would have turned 92 on May 4, which was hard to believe for anyone who knew her well. She was young at heart, with a sharp wit and a sound mind. Family and friends listened rapt as she wove stories like intricate tapestries, made rich with clear memories from years past.

And with a rich life, Jean had many stories to tell. She joined the NOVA community shortly after its launch in 1968 and remained an active member until her final days. As a progressive Catholic woman, she had finally found a home for the fostering of her faith.

Jean served as chairperson alongside Larry Goldschmidt and Gloria Mog for two years, from 1986 to 1988. Larry said she nurtured the NOVA community and opened her home many times to members for meetings and social gatherings.

The NOVA community regarded Jean as a forward-thinking person who looked for ways to make the Catholic Church relevant to her life and the lives of those around her. She was chosen by several young NOVA members to be their confirmation sponsor and was both attentive and supportive, taking each person's questions and concerns seriously.

Dianne Carroll said Jean considered all of the younger NOVA members to be grandchildren and kept up with their activities long after they grew up. Diane also noted Jean's ability to remember the history of the NOVA community in great detail, often providing members with vibrant, accurate and entertaining narratives.

To Diane and other NOVA members, Jean was a model for aging gracefully. She was open to new ideas and always had time for people. Rosemarie Annunziata affectionately described Jean as one of the members that became the glue that helped the NOVA community grow, bond and maintain its spiritual and social justice vision.

Spirituality and leadership were not her only defining attributes. Jean was open-minded and politically savvy, with a great thirst for knowledge. Even if she disagreed with someone, she always heard what they had to say.

Above all else, Jean adored her family. She took great pride in her brood of 12 and in the 23 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren and one great-great grandchild that followed.

Jean was born in Bayonne, New Jersey in 1920 to Harry A. and Lily Clare Jaeger. She was the oldest of five siblings. Her father was City Engineer of Bayonne and his attention to detail and consummate professionalism inspired Jean in all aspects of her life. She graduated from Holy Family Academy in just three years at the age of 17.



June 1987, Co-chair Investiture of Gloria Mog and Jean with their spouses, David and Louis



Katherine Jean Jaeger Mendez • Born May 4, 1920

She soon met Colonel Louis Gonzaga Mendez, Jr., then a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, and the two were immediately smitten. Louis regarded the diminutive redhead with piercing blue eyes and porcelain skin as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. A rare beauty, Jean was often told that she was meant to grace the silver screen.

But as she always used to say, life had other plans for her. Louis proposed to Jean shortly before graduating from the Military Academy at West Point and was then assigned to Fort Ord, California. In December of 1940, the couple was married at the Mission in Carmel.

Their first baby Pamela was baptized at the Mission on December 7, 1941. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the 7th Division was removed from Fort Ord and stationed all over the Western states. By the fall of 1942, Louis was in jump training at Fort Benning, Georgia.

On December 24, 1943, Louis left for the invasion in Normandy as part of the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. In June 1944, he led the charge with his battalion that liberated the town of Pretot from the Germans for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. In 2002, the town square in Pretot was named for him.

Louis also fought in the Battle of the Bulge and served on General Eisenhower's staff. Jean was incredibly proud of her husband and often breathed new life into stories of his accomplishments and their years abroad.

When they moved to Northern Virginia in 1954, Jean was pregnant with her ninth child. By 1960, she and Louis were blessed with a full dozen: six sons and six daughters.

Once the Mendez family had settled into their new home, Jean became very active in the local community. In the late 1960s, she taught confraternity classes at St. Anthony's parish in Falls Church and held a leadership role in the National Council of Catholic Women for several years. She also taught English as a Second Language classes through Fairfax County Schools well into her eighth decade.



With one of her many dear NOVA friends, Father Quinn Connors, Order of Carmelites

Jean's lasting impact on the NOVA community is just one of many gifts that she gave to everyone who knew her. In her final days, members of the community came to visit her at home and some even volunteered to sit by her side during a gap between the nurses' schedules. Her family watched as her dear friends and spiritual companions read and sang to her, shared stories and reminisced with her and most of all, loved her.

Jean's children and grandchildren were touched by these acts. There was no doubt in any of their minds how much each and every member of the NOVA community meant to her. Her granddaughter Monica felt this deep connection so strongly that she and her fiancé Aaron asked Warren Reich

to marry them. As a NOVA member and Jean's oldest and dearest friend of 65 years, the couple knew it was the perfect way to honor her memory.

Warren recently told Monica that death does not separate us from our loved ones. He reminded her that Jean still has many people to watch over and be in contact with spiritually. As we mourn the loss of our dear friend and carry her spirit with us for the rest of our lives, let us remember that she is alive in our hearts and will forever hear us when we speak to her.

Monica Boland is Jean's granddaughter. She grew up eight houses away from her grandmother and plans to publish a collection of stories in her memory. If you have a story about Jean that you would like to share, please email Monica at monica.c.boland@gmail.com, an address she has set up specifically for this purpose.

A Spiritual View of Jean Mendez's Life

by Warren T. Reich

Delivered May 4, 2012 at Jean's Wake

I have been a friend of Jean Mendez for 65 years. This evening I would like to comment on what I have observed regarding two phases in Jean's spiritual development: the first phase, "Jean the church member," and the most recent phase "Jean the mystic." But first I would like to tell you how I met Jean and came to know her, as well as Lou and their children – a personal friendship that has been very meaningful in my life.

After "the war," Lou (Colonel Mendez), was assigned (or re-assigned) to Fort Benning, Georgia. Fort Benning was close to the Chattahoochee River, which forms part of the Georgia/Alabama state line. Not far from the other (west) bank of the Chattahoochee, I was studying in a seminary, St. Joseph Seminary in Holy Trinity, Alabama.

Shortly after their arrival at Fort Benning, Jean and Lou stopped at a Catholic chapel on the base to inquire about the Sunday Mass schedule. In the sacristy of that chapel, Lou (and eventually Jean) met Father Vincent Fitzpatrick who, like Jean, hailed from Bayonne, New Jersey. That encounter led to Sunday visits by the small Mendez family to Holy Trinity, Alabama, where they visited with Father Vincent and some of the seminarians. Two of the young seminary students – the Donovan brothers, who were also from Bayonne – had an older sister who was a good friend of Jean's. One of those students, Jack Donovan, a classmate of mine, invited me along for those visits.

I can still see, very clearly, Jean and Lou getting out of their car with their four young children.

Jean, who was about 26 years old when I first met her, was undoubtedly the most beautiful woman I had ever met. And we all know that she was truly beautiful throughout her entire life. I quickly perceived that she had a very sharp intellect, a talent that she used in every conversation and in everything that she ever did. Jean and I were in touch periodically through the years; she even attended my ordination to the priesthood in Winchester, Virginia in 1958.

By far the closest period in our friendship were the last 43 years, since Jean first became associated with the NOVA Catholic Community. I will never forget her account of her first contact with NOVA. Having been fascinated with what she heard about our community, she decided to try it out – within the first year or two of NOVA's existence – by attending a NOVA Mass that was being celebrated at the church of Our Lady Queen of the Apostles in Alexandria. As she recounted it to me, she paused at the back of the church, looked toward the altar, and said to herself: "My God, that's Warren Reich celebrating the Mass! Now I *know* I'm in the right place!"

Not surprisingly, over the intervening years, my friendship with Jean took a decidedly spiritual turn. Jean called me her "personal theologian." We had innumerable conversations on religious and spiritual topics over the years, usually on her "porch," and sometimes, after Lou had passed away and my wife was in Australia, over dinner in the Peking Gourmet Inn (with my wife's blessing!). That restaurant was one of Lou's favorite places and where Jean, like Lou, was always greeted as an honored guest by the owners.

Whenever we conversed, the conversation always turned to religious and spiritual topics. I want to highlight two phases in Jean's spiritual development, the first of which I call "Jean the church member," and the second, "Jean the mystic."

Jean the church member. As a church member, Jean was active in her parish, St. Anthony's in Falls Church, where she taught Christian doctrine. She was active in other parish activities and at one point was president of the diocesan Council of Catholic Women. One could readily see a conflict within Jean. On the one hand, she was Catholic to the core. On the other hand, she was the critic, the fighter, the risk-taker. She showed signs of being a thoroughgoing skeptic. A skeptic she was not: her criticism of the church was a sign that she really cared about the global community of faith that was supposed to be following Christ. Through it all, she was more of a vigorous *searcher* for a genuine church than she was merely a critic of the church. She told me she found special insights in

this regard in the book by Philip Kaufman, a Benedictine monk, *Why You Can Disagree and Remain a Faithful Catholic*.

Jean championed dissenters who risked their priesthood when they offered criticism of church policy that they regarded as harmful. For example, she was angered by the forcible resignation of Father Thomas Quinlan, pastor of a parish in Virginia Beach, who had previously been a very progressive, post-Vatican II pastor of the Good Shepherd parish in Alexandria. It did not bother her at all that Quinlan did some bizarre things as well; she focused on what she saw as the essentials.

As a church member, Jean was thrilled by the outcome of the Second Vatican Council. She wrote about the “fresh air of change” in the church; the integration of the laity into the deeper life of the church; the prospect of being “enfranchised to help direct (the church’s) journey into a light-filled, joyous, and loving future.” She was especially grateful for Pope John XXIII, who championed the freedom and importance of every member of the church. She also rejoiced to live in an era when she could bask in the joy with which every liturgy was celebrated.

Jean the mystic. In the last two years of her life, Jeanie switched from simply relating to the church as member, as critic, as reformer. I noticed that she was concerned more directly with God and how she could find union with God. I call this phase of Jean’s spiritual journey “Jean the mystic,” because the term “mystic” refers to her deep concern regarding the union of her soul with her personal God, the highly-focused inwardness of her spirituality, and her desire to be absorbed into God. These characteristics of “mysticism” apply directly, at the very least, to the final few years of her life.

In this final period of her life I heard very little criticism of the church. She had moved beyond that to the church of the spirit. Quite simply, she wanted to know more about God and how to be united with God. Jean found help in a book by John B. Philips, a Benedictine monk: *Your God is Too Small: A Guide for Believers and Skeptics Alike*.

In my conversations with Jeanie during this period, she said she was constantly calling on Mary. Recently, she was saying to Mary: “Where are you when I need you? You only had one Son, and he was God!” And so it was that, as she approached the end of this life on earth, she spoke like one of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures: she was argumentative in her prayers, which proves how realistic her relationship was with God!

She said to me: “All these years, I’ve been trying to figure out how to relate to God.” She said she keeps asking herself: “What’s the point?” She turned that question in the direction of the Creator: “What’s the point?” She then added: “He hasn’t answered me yet.”

I said: “I believe God *has* answered you. You just haven’t figured out *what* God has said to you, maybe because you haven’t figured out where God’s voice can be found. But you will!”

Jeanie continued, saying: “Eddie, Ruth Markey’s son and a friend of John-Paul, once said: “When I meet God, I’m going to ask him: ‘What’s that all about?’” Jean laughed, and then said: “That’s even better than my comment, ‘What’s the point?’” Now some people might be tempted to think that Jean’s question to God – “What’s it all about?” – was an example of religious curiosity, but not of mysticism. But I think that reaction would be quite mistaken. As described by Jean, her encounter with God, precisely in the asking of that question, was truly profound. Why? Because her question indicated that she was opening herself up to the divine, eager for enlightenment, and more – eager for union with the divine. And that is a mystical act.

At the end of that conversation Jean said: “Thank God that we can still laugh, even laugh about God!”

So here is my conclusion: Jean Jaeger Mendez was a spiritual giant. She was a giant, because in the end, starting (at least) when she was almost 90, and as the end of her life neared, her spirituality became that of a child; and That’s what made her a spiritual giant. How childlike to say simply, “Dear God, what is it all about? I don’t

know. God, you're a funny one. If I can't reach you now, at least send me your mother."

What's it all about? Finally, now, Jean knows what it's all about.



Photo of Jean and Louis in 1962 with their 12 children, taken before the wedding of their daughter Judy



Rosemarie and Jean



Jean on her 90th Birthday

Food for Thought

THE DANCE OF THE HEART

By Daisy Grace Birch ©1986

I went to the chapel too tired to pray,
And all worn out by the cares of the day.
My head began to bow and nod;
My thoughts just wouldn't turn to God.

There I was before my king
With body and soul too tired to sing
A song of joy, of hope, of love,
But I must. He watches from above.

My heart stepped in and took command:
Before my Lord it took a stand.
It bowed, then danced up to the moon
While angel trumpets piped a tune.

I felt so gay; too full of glee
For such majestic company.
I feared that soon my Lord would frown
Upon the pranks of such a clown.

And yet He seemed to understand
And when I stopped He took my hand.

My heart then bowed before its Lord
And to its place returned, restored.



Note: Jeanne Clarkson read Judyth Hill's poem during NOVA's remembrance of those killed in current wars during the liturgy on May 20. Several members wanted to put this poem in this newsletter, but the poem is copyrighted. However, you can view the poem by clicking on the following link: www.judythhill.com. On the left side of this website is a list that includes "wage peace." Click on this and you can read the poem, which was written on September 11, 2001.

Theology for a Small Planet

A collection of essays by Clyde Christofferson © 2009-2012

[Prior Essays](#)

What does the cosmos say about "the law written on their hearts"? Part 3

The first two essays in this series make essentially the same point: there is a need to cultivate reliance upon what is written on the hearts of the faithful, through trust (Part 1) and a style of dialogue (Part 2). This third essay deals with the practical challenges of moving the ancient and venerable institutions of our Church in this direction.

As Richard McBrien says in *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism*, Vatican II asserted that the People of God is all of us, lay and cleric alike. The

structures and institutions of the Church are in service to the whole People of God, who are the Church. The preconiliar tendency was to identify "The Church" with the hierarchy, who controlled and delegated ministerial functions to a lay apostolate. Vatican II turned that focus around, from the few to the many, to the whole People of God who directly participate in the mystery that is the Church.¹

The Papacy has famously understood itself as the "servant of the servants of God." A servant institution

must have the humility to understand that its role is cultivation of something not its own. It stands as a fiduciary, not a principal. The long history of this fiduciary institution shows much good will and a dogged persistence toward Gospel values, along with the quintessential earmarks of humanity. It is an article of hope if not faith that the Holy Spirit will protect the People of God from error. Perhaps protection from error, but not from politics.

This essay is about how “the law written on their hearts” can overcome the ravages of politics. At the moment, however, the People of God have little in the way of institutional supports against the ravages of politics. Despite the recognition at Vatican II that bishops and priests are only a part of the People of God – indeed, not even the most prominent part – institutional supports for the faithful have languished.

But this ought to be a sign of life, not a reason to be discouraged. God’s book of nature – the cosmos – is telling us that evolution is at work, even if more slowly than some of us would like. In the two thousand years since Jesus first walked among his friends it has been only in the last hundred or so that the Church has discovered what remains its best kept secret. That secret – now called “Catholic Social Teaching” – is that social structures are made by humans and can be changed by humans to better serve the ends of justice. It had once been assumed that institutions such as rule by kings were natural and therefore of “divine right.” No longer.

The practical working out of such insight takes time. I recall a talk by Ken Himes – in a series on Catholic Social Teaching in 1999 – in which he used a metaphor of a train leaving a station to describe how this works. He was referring to Vatican II, but the metaphor is helpful for understanding change in general. Ken’s description included everyone, from those at the front pouring coal into the boilers to make the train move faster to those in the caboose trying to apply the brakes. There are those sitting in the cars, looking out the window and enjoying the ride. And there are some still on the platform (opposed to the changes of Vatican II) shaking their fists as the train begins to move away from the station.

Where is this Vatican II train going? In a typically preconiliar view, the answer is to be found by looking at what the Pope and the hierarchy are doing and saying. There is a certain irony in this view, for two reasons. First, as a historical matter, it has only been in recent centuries – since the Reformation – that the majority of Catholic faithful have come to understand the papacy as a focal point for Catholicism.² Second, perhaps in consequence of this millennial sea change that now associates the Church with the Pope, even reformers who are heartened by the shift in emphasis to the People of God tend to measure the progress of the Vatican II train by how well or how quickly the

vision of the Council is being implemented from Rome.

It is true that the Vatican II documents themselves deferred to the Vatican for implementation of the vision. In practical political terms, such deference may mean that the Vatican’s procedural controls are able to steer the vision (using Pope Benedict’s terminology, toward “a hermeneutics of continuity” rather than “a hermeneutics of rupture”). But if the Vatican II vision understands the Church as mystery, as a People of God whose ministries are served by, rather than controlled by, its institutions, then there is another way of seeing where the Vatican II train is going: the answer is to be found by looking within the whole People of God, to what is burning in the hearts and lives of the faithful across the planet.

In his homily on Pentecost Joe Nangle recounted signs of hope in his travels over the years with Franciscan missionaries and sisters in Africa, Asia and South America. The Spirit is alive and well, working among the People of God. Joe recalled one visit in the Philippines with Franciscan sisters from China. These sisters were intent upon returning to the mainland to do missionary work in their homeland. But when the state of the Church in the West was discussed these sisters said that it would be good to bring their “new Pentecost” ministry to revive an older sibling.

Skeptics don’t see how a broadly based “People of God” vision can work. They are in the caboose, applying brakes to the Vatican II train. And they believe they have good reason for applying the brakes: what burns in some hearts is different from what burns in other hearts, and the result can be not simply diversity but chaos. How is this vision to be grounded? Love of God and neighbor would seem to be firm grounding, but those in the caboose are looking for a more practical and decisive clarity. A hierarchy centered in Rome provides that clarity. Why change? So ask those in the caboose.

I have a three part response in support of Vatican II’s shift toward the People of God. The first is based on a book, the second uses a cosmic perspective, and the third is practical.

The Book

A recent book provides a rationale for a more participatory model for the Church. The book has nothing to do with religion. It is about the evolution of societies over the last ten thousand years and is particularly focused upon economics. The principal author, Douglass North, won the 1993 Nobel Prize in Economics “for having renewed research in economic history by applying economic theory and quantitative methods in order to explain economic and institutional change.”

That is a mouthful, but I want to focus on the phrase “institutional change.” Although the Roman Catholic Church does not have an economic focus it is clearly an institution with a long history. The central

theme of North's 2009 book, *Violence and Social Orders*³ is that recorded human history can be explained in terms of transition from a "limited access social order" to an "open access social order." The problem with the former is that participation depends upon the favor of the ruler and the elites that work with the ruler. As it might be applied to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, the limited circle of "the ruler and the elites that work with the ruler" would seem to fit the Pope and the Curia. Even if the bishops are added, it is still a small group.

North's historical evidence is that the transition to a more open political structure is correlated with a transition to a more open – and more successful – economic structure. The data is fairly dramatic: open societies are twice as productive economically as limited access societies. This is not a surprising result, because "open access" engages the people, values their initiative, and provides freedom of action. The book mentions the Roman Catholic Church several times as an example of an institution having trouble making this transition to "open access." I was surprised the Vatican was discussed at all, since the Church is about salvation, not economics. However, North's point is the connection between political structures and economic structures: political structures control how other structures – in particular, those that affect the workings of the economy – operate.

The simplicity of North's model is breathtaking. He contends that two political structures are all that is needed to cover all of recorded human history: the politics of limited access (which still applies to most of the world) and the politics of open access. Of course, his focus is on economics, so it is not self evident that such a simple model would be sufficient to explain the development of non-economic structures, such as modes of religious organization.

The economic metaphor is intriguing, nonetheless. If the energy and creativity of the people are more effectively engaged under an "open access" political order, perhaps that lesson is not limited to economic structures. Perhaps that lesson can be applied to the institutions of the Church. Surely bishops and pastors would have a positive interest if the effect of a more democratic political structure for Church institutions is that the people are more engaged in the work of bringing the reign of God on Earth.

It is said that "the Church is not a democracy." But that question is a red herring. As North's discussion makes clear, the point of "open access" is to free up the energies of the people by enabling anyone – regardless of connections within the political elite – to have access to the support structures needed for their initiatives to bear fruit. In limited access politics, individuals must keep at least one eye on those whose favor must be obtained – a sort of "license" that may or may not be renewed – in order for work to continue.

In open access politics, no such personal "license" is required. The same ground rules apply to all.

The difficulties of transition from "limited access" to "open access" may help explain the Church's longer history that goes back to the unsuccessful efforts of the Council of Constance in the 15th Century to constrain the power of the Pope. More recently, Pope Paul VI spoke eloquently about dialogue in *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), but he was not able to part with the structural clarity of hierarchical authority. Vatican II proposed parish and diocesan councils, but the documents of Vatican II retained the structural clarity of hierarchical authority. Little has been done to pursue these better angels of Vatican II. Pope John Paul II initiated a dialogue about the Petrine Ministry in *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), but few bishops have pursued the matter.

What has been missing is a theory which makes these more democratic directions an engine for enlivening the People of God. "Open access" politics provides such a theory.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT TIME with
The Cosmos and Practical Steps

¹ Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (Harper Collins: New York, 2008), p. 166.

² John W. O'Malley, S.J., "The Millennium and the Papalization of Catholicism," *America Magazine* (April 8, 2000): "At the beginning of the last millennium—indeed, as late as Luther's posting of the Ninety-Five Theses—relatively few Christians knew that the papacy existed, and surely only a minuscule percentage believed it had anything to do with the way they lived their lives."

³ Douglass C. North, with John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).



Joe Nangle – at liturgy in the park on May 27