



Western Region Salvatorian Newsletter

December 2019

Salvatorian Western Region

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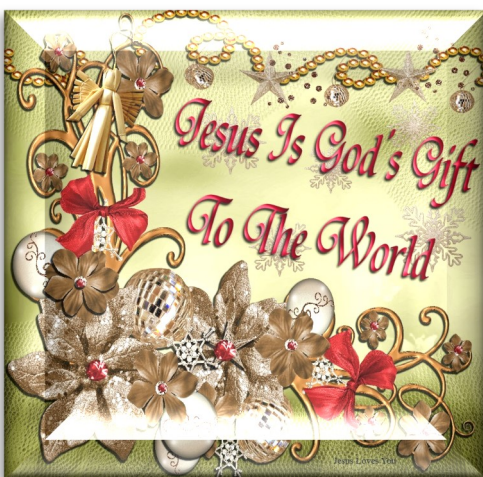
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From our Regional Moderator, Sr. Sheila Novak



'The Most Wonderful Time of the Year' - ???

In early October I walked into Lowe's to a cluster of lit Christmas trees. Before Halloween, the tent was going up on Greenback for the selling of real Christmas trees.

I agree with this cartoon on the left. One holiday at a time. Each holiday needs space to be relished and enjoyed. We all know the basis for the Christmas takeover -- not for celebrating Jesus' birth, but for a prolonged 'moneymaking time of the year'.

I do not want to sound like Ebenezer Scrooge. I love Andy Williams' song -- about Christmas being 'the most wonderful time of the year'. Family, signs of love, and gatherings make the season special -- along with cherished Christmas recipes and cards from people who have been a part of our lives -- and joining in wonderful liturgical celebrations.

But it also seems like a lot of 'should of's' -- get out the cards, set up the tree, put up the decorations, make the Christmas cookies, get a gift for each family member, wrap those gifts and plan the meals, get tickets if I am traveling to be with family. It all leaves me a bit breathless.

I ask myself, what would Jesus think of all these ways of celebrating his birth? I can hear him saying -- "It sounds a bit exhausting to me and I wonder if you are really enjoying it!?" There is little in what we do that recognizes what this time of year is all about. We have left the stable and gone to Macy's. We have nostalgia for Christmases past and hopefully good memories of family times of celebration. But just to get us thinking, the following article is a rethinking of what Christmas (Incarnation) is really about. The article will give us a different perspective.

However you plan to celebrate this wonderful time of the year, may it bring you calm and joy. I wish you the gift Jesus came to give us – the gift of peace. You may want to try a new family tradition by eliminating some of the commercialism of Christmas. Our Christmas carols remind us of how much the world needs peace! So do pray for peace on earth. May peace be with us!



Incarnation

SDS Preface: (Our first foundational feast was Pentecost. It speaks of the Spirit, of fire and courageous proclaiming of the gospel. Then our name was changed in 1893 from the Apostolic Teaching Society to the (Sisters) (Society) of the Divine Savior. With that name change came the change of our foundational feast; it shifted from Pentecost to Christmas. As wonderful as Christmas is, it did not hold the energy of Pentecost for me and it always seemed like a bit of a loss. Here is a new look at Incarnation (Christmas) that gave me a new perspective. The thoughts are gleanings from the book, Incarnation by Diarmuid O’ Murchu. The book was written for spiritual seekers.)

Christmas is the greatest Christian feast, in fact the greatest of them all. Salvation and redemption belong first and foremost to a birthing forth, not to a mighty act of dying! Resurrection may have more in common with Bethlehem than with Calvary. Both are indeed about a renewed birth. Birthing is God’s primary activity – radiant in every aspect of creation – including birth – death – rebirth. The long-held focus on the cross of Jesus as a symbol for salvation has undermined and distorted the saving and empowering significance of the life of Jesus. It seems we are waiting for God’s intervention, but God is waiting for our collaboration. God calls us forth as co-disciples, as friends and awaits our collaboration. God had befriended us with the grace of “mutual empowerment”*. The cross is not so much an emblem of God’s sacrifice for us sinners, but a prophetic horizon shared by all who sacrifice their lives for the sake of empowering justice, the price we may have to pay to make the Incarnation real on earth. We need to reclaim and expand our understanding of the Incarnation.

Mary has been depicted as God’s great collaborator, but in Christian art she tends to be depicted as a young Caucasian, looking very devotional, obedient and subservient. Reducing Mary in this way falls short of her incarnational empowerment. The historical Mary would have been a robust, industrious, multi-skilled woman. She would have

held home and family together – serving as homemaker, weaver, educator, medical person, and horticulturalist. Yes, Mary certainly collaborated with the divine, but not in the over-spiritualized caricature of popular religion. Reducing Mary in this way falls short of her incarnational empowerment.

The same may be said for reducing Christmas to a fascination of a vulnerable baby lying in a manger. For responsible Christian faith, we must always start with the adult Jesus and the gospel project of the new reign of God. This is called the companionship of empowerment.**

Advent is a preparation to welcome Jesus, first by commemorating his first arrival in our midst two thousand years ago, and also to anticipate God’s second coming when God will sort out the mess our world is in. We have been ineffective in bringing about the transformation signaled by the historical Jesus and the New Reign of God (the new companionship). We have been unable to muster the courage and the wisdom to get on with the gospel empowerment that Jesus modelled for us. We need to grow up! We have been endowed with all the incarnational blessings any species could hope for! We are blessed with multiple resources; if we would only wake up to what truly we are meant to be. Advent and Christmas serve as perpetual reminders to us that we have been birthed from the womb of the energetic Spirit. Our task is to continue the creative process of birthing anew the world that birthed us. This is the call to serve God and work out our own salvation and the wellbeing of all that has been entrusted to our care. That more than anything else is what Advent and Christmas is all about.

*Empowerment here = the divine presence in our midst.
**Companionship of empowerment = the kingdom of God; devoted service to the gospel.

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- What did you take away from this article?
 - How does the idea of Christmas being a birthing process speak to you?
 - Name some of the incarnational blessings that we have been given.
 - How has the cross impacted the view of our faith?
 - Think of a recent example from your life or that of another’s that illustrates this collaboration to transform our world.

December Giving

Right after Rita's call for newsletter articles, I sent an email asking for suggestions as we look at doing some giving from our Region to a project you select. Preferences are for causes for which Salvatorians are directly involved, but this is not essential. The only suggestion we received in time for the newsletter was from Sr. Jean. (*see pages 4-5*)

The ministerial outreach is to serve vulnerable people locally, nationally, or internationally for which the members can make a financial contribution. So, if you have a suggestion, please bring it to the December gathering. You will be given time for an explanation of why your suggestions is important to contribute to. If there are several causes, a vote will be taken and donations will be collected from the members present at the gathering.

Dec. 7th Gathering at Holy Names U

Sal is our December host. Here are his directions:

- Arrive by 10:00 AM. *We would like to start the Mass no later than 10:30 AM.*
- Brunch will be in the Public Market, as in the past years. *Each pays their own. I think it is \$10.25 all you can eat including drinks. They take cash and credit cards. And no one needs to bring anything in terms of utensils or food.*
- Then we will have our meeting in the room right across from where we are eating. *It is reserved until till 2 PM. That way you all can get back well before dark.*

Address: Holy Names University / 3500 Mountain Blvd. / Oakland, CA 94619

SDS Formation

(Submission by Jan Bencken)

The Western Region has started the Formation process for our new Candidates, and has been piloting the revised Formation Sessions.

We have had two sessions: *Beginning the Walk---* *Being Called*, and *Called to a Shared Journey* covering Baptism and the role of the Laity in the Church. The sessions have been engaging and energizing, and so enriching even to an established SDS-L!

The next session will be focusing on ministry and what that means, looks like, and how it's experienced. A part of the session will look at some of the ministry stories of other Lay Salvatorians such as Heather Holton, Ann Griffin, Sue Haertel, Mary Jo & Mark Verke, Henry Gonsalves, and Mary Frontiera. All of us are involved in one or more ministries, and I invite you, **encourage you**, to write your story for us. This is an invitation being extended to all Salvatorians, and my hope is that eventually we will have a full collection of these stories to share and inspire us.

Equally important is your participation in these formation sessions as a member of our Salvatorian Family. The combined conversations, discussions, and your presence shape and develop each and all of us.

Please mark your calendars and plan to come to the next session which will be held on December 6 from 9-12N in Room Y-3 at Divine Savior.

Even though this makes for a busy weekend with our Gathering the very next day, it is so important to support each other.



2019-2020 Schedule of Monthly Western Region SDS Gatherings



**Dec. 6 (Fri) - 9-12N - Formation Series Room Y3
Divine Savior**

Dec. 7 (Sat) – Arrive 10:00 AM — Fr. Sal
Holy Names University

Jan. 10 (Fri) – 5:00 PM - Rita Schillin Roseville

**Jan. 11 (Sat.) - 9-12N - Formation Series Room Y3
Divine Savior**

**Feb. 7 (Fri) - 9-12N - Formation Series Room Y3
Divine Savior**

Feb. 8 (Sat) – 12:00 PM at the Barbera's

**Mar. 13 (Fri) - 9-12N - Formation Series Room Y3
Divine Savior**

Mar. 14 (Sat) – 12:00 PM – Jan Bencken

**Apr. 17 (Fri) - 9-12N - Formation Series Room Y3
Divine Savior**

Apr. 18 (Sat) -12:00 PM – Leah Edwards at Sunrise

May 9 (Sat) - 3:00 PM at the Drakes



Jan Bencken Dec. 31

Inspirational Quotes from Inspirational People

Bob Hope: "My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?"

Helen Keller: "The only real blind person at Christmas-time is he who has not Christmas in his heart."

Charles Dickens: "It was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim Observed, God Bless Us, Every One!"

Mother Teresa: "It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you...yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand."

From Sr. Jean– Sisters SL Project:

Project: Care for children with traumatic experiences
(<https://www.share-global.org/wom2.html>)

Location: Iluppaikulam – Sri Lanka

Project Title: Agriculture and Home Gardening

Background and reason for the project: The Salvatorian Children's Home is situated at Iluppaikulam in the Mannar District within the Cheddikulam Division. The purpose of this home is to give shelter, protection, education, psychological help, and social and spiritual assistance to girls whose parents were the victims of the thirty-year civil war in northern Sri Lanka. The home was opened in 2010 after the civil war finally came to an end.

Project Goals: Because these children have endured traumatic experiences, (seeing the deaths of their loved ones and others who had fled to protect their own lives, etc.), they are in need of trauma counseling and therapies that would eventually help them to become free from all fears and tensions. We do make many efforts to meet the children's needs. Our efforts include home gardening, a project that we are currently doing on a minor scale. We also have a parapet wall and enough water. Later our hope is to create a paddy field and a poultry farm because we have 1.5 acres of well-protected land.

Activities: Preparing the garden plot and the paddy field with good, fertile soil; Purchasing equipment: water pump, hoses and other gardening tools; Purchasing seeds and plants; Developing programs in agriculture and home gardening for 25 girls.

Beneficiaries: The program will help to relieve the tension of the girls, especially their fears caused by trauma. The girls will learn cultivation. They will produce their own vegetables and fruits, thus helping them to be self-sufficient. The program will use bio production. The fruits and vegetables will be free from all chemicals. The project is, by its very nature, friendly to the environment.

Costs: Earth preparation, landscaping, equipment, fruit plants, vegetable and fruit seeds and the gardener's salary: US\$4,800.00

Photos of the first stages of this project are on the next page.

Photos from the Sisters SL Project:



The ground behind the house is broken and must be filled with earth



Beetroots and small cultivation areas have to be prepared



Seeds and seedlings are planted and watered into the garden is gradually cultivated



The girls are helping, getting some instructions - as here in planting a coconut tree



The girls learn a lot about the cultivation and planting of fruits and vegetables.



They take over responsibility and can look forward to results - the first harvest!

A Fun Time was had by all having breakfast with Fr. Sal in Orangevale:

