



Special Interest Articles:

- Sr. Rose: Our January Issue
- Book Review: "Christ in Crisis" by Jim Wallis



Individual Highlights:

- Some Statistics to Consider 1
- Climate Change 2
- Racism and Violence 3
- "Hunger & Poverty Prevention Partnership" in Portage Co, WI 4

Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon,
Sr. Marjorie White, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox
—Social Justice Committee

Our January Issue

by Sister Rose Grabowski

"While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2: 5-7

In our world today we have many stories of people who are homeless, and even "country-less." In this issue we will take a look at some statistics and some of the problems that are hindering the growth of a real life for people.

Reading about the problems in this issue can be overwhelming. However, I have a favorite quote that brings me hope: "Serenity is, in other words, the very opposite of fear, or dread, or anguish. It is knowing with the

mystic Julian of Norwich that in the end, 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'"

Or, worded a little differently... "All was well, all is well, and all will be well." ■

Some Statistics to Consider

January is Catholic Poverty Awareness Month, so here is a variety of economic facts and figures from both a global and national perspective:

- Globally: In 2019 the world's 500 richest people added \$1.2 trillion to their collective net worth, boosting their holdings by 25%, to \$5.9 trillion. (Bloomberg)
- People living in high income countries can expect to live 10 years longer. (World Bank)
- Income inequality in the U.S. is at its highest level in more than 50 years. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- Median Family Wealth:
Whites \$171,000
Latinos 20,700
Blacks 17,600
(Urban Institute & Brookings Inst'n)
- Since 1978, the cost of a college tuition has increased by 1,120%. Medical care has increased by 601%. Food costs have increased by 244% and the price of shelter has risen by 360%. Meanwhile, the average pay

for a CEO increased by 937% but the pay for a typical worker rose by just 10% and the minimum wage fell by 5.5%. (EPI, Bloomberg & U.S. Labor Dept.) ■

Sister Rose adds:

I strongly recommend that each of us read and reflect on the Message of Pope Francis of January 1, 2020, for the celebration of the 53rd World Day of Peace:

"We cannot claim to maintain stability in the world through the fear of annihilation, in a volatile situation, suspended on the brink of nuclear abyss and behind walls of indifference. As a result, social and economic decisions are being made that lead to tragic situations where human beings and creation itself are discarded rather than protected and preserved..."

"We need to pursue a genuine fraternity based on our common origin from God and exercised in dialogue and mutual trust. The desire for peace lies deep within the human heart, and we should not resign ourselves to seeking anything less than this." ■

Climate Change

Below are various articles and quotes related to the issue of climate change in our world, beginning with a section of an article by Bill Berry, Wisconsin State Columnist on his recent trip to Peru. This is followed by quotes from other noteworthy sources.



The Reality of Climate Change Is Stark In Peru by Bill Berry

PUNO, Peru— “Here on the banks of Lake Titicaca, guide Jose Bastinza was leading a group of travelers to the floating reed islands of the Uros people when he volunteered his observations on climate change.

The lake, considered sacred to the Uros, Incas, and other ancient civilizations, has dropped seven feet in recent years as rainfall has dropped from 25 to 19 inches annually, he said.

Combined with warming temperatures, that has created all sorts of problems for the people and other creatures who live here.

“Climate change isn’t an abstraction, and it’s certainly not a hoax. Birds and fish are dying and the reeds for the Uros aren’t growing.” ■

Also, here in Wisconsin, climate change is already impacting habitats in the Baraboo Hills. Places like the Baraboo Hills provide the most hope for birds and other species as the

climate changes. (Mike Mossman, Ecologist, the Nature Conservancy) ■

As people of faith, we are called to protect the vulnerable and stand with those in need. We are particularly mindful of those threatened by the administration’s decision to return those seeking refuge from violence and fear in their home countries to Mexico to await their chance to plead for their right under international law to asylum in our country. (Ignite the Light, 4th Sunday Reflection) ■

“To embrace the ‘option for the poor’ is to embrace the needs of women... to embrace the needs of women is also to embrace the needs of those most dependent upon women, the young and the elderly.” (Maria Riley, O.P.) ■

Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*, his encyclical on care for the environment, says that “the climate is a common good belonging to all and meant for all” and that “social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental destruction and to engage in a ‘culture of care’ for all of society.” ■

How can we help ourselves regarding climate change?

Connect with others, share resources, and stand together. Accept the differences among us. Growth in leadership will develop.

Enormous ‘Megafire’ in Australia Engulfs 1.5 Million Acres



“A pair of massive bushfires in southeastern Australia has merged into a “megafire” engulfing some 2,300 square miles – a single blaze more than three times as large as any known fire in California.

The merged fire, which straddles the country’s most populous states of New South Wales and Victoria, measures nearly 1.5 million acres... It is just one of some 135 bushfires in Australia’s southeast that have

claimed the lives of at least 26 people, killed more than a billion animals and damaged or destroyed nearly 3,000 homes. ■

(NPR News, Scott Neuman, January 10, 2020)

Racism and Violence

This is racism:

“On August 3, 2019, El Paso was the scene of a massacre or matanza that left 22 dead, injured dozens and traumatized a binational community. Hate visited our community and Latino blood was spilled as a sacrifice to the false god of white supremacy.”

This is the beginning of a pastoral letter to the people of God in El Paso by Bishop Mark Joseph Seitz. ■

LCWR members are encouraged to use the contemplative process and social analysis to explore the intersection of racism, migration, and climate crisis as well as our own complicity as congregations, and urge their social justice promoters to coordinate communication, share resources, and act in collaboration with other justice groups in their region.

Congregations are encouraged to use their human and financial resources to help address the root causes of racism and forced migration

– LCWR Assembly Resolution
2019-2020 ■

“I believe that every step we take is like small points of light in a sea of overwhelming darkness. With St. Francis, we seek to identify with the ‘minores,’ the ‘little,’ the poor and unwanted. We live simply and are in solidarity with the poor.”

– Sister Rose Grabowski ■

Something to consider:

According to the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, having just 3.5% of the population actively participating in peaceful public protests can bring about political and social change. Types of public witness activities include:

- Organizing speakers, movies or petition drives.
- Arranging visits to organizations that work with people on the margins.
- Asking preachers to speak on social issues, such as racism.
- Creating/displaying yard signs, banners, and posters,
- Participating in boycotts and divestment campaigns,
- Posting items on social media,
- Wearing clothing or buttons with messages.

– Social Justice Resource Center,
December 2019 Newsletter ■

“As we look around and see the vulnerable, we see that violence is committed because life is considered a property to be defended. We must defend the poor, the young and elderly, and those not yet born and see them as a gift to be shared and revered. “The very first step in nonviolence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness.”

– Mahatma Gandhi ■



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“Much violence is based on the illusion that life is a property to be defended and not a gift to be shared.”

– Henri Nouwen

Book Review – “The Time Is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage”

by Sister Joan Chittister, OSB

This is a call to challenge believers and doubters: *“How do we get out of the swamp that we’re in?”*

Sister Joan reminds us that the prophetic life is

not an easy one. There will be sacrifice and suffering as for the prophets of old.

However, she assures us, *“Faith is the single gift that makes prophecy real.”*

And Sister Joan believes that we are called to be **faithful 21st century prophets!** ■



Homelessness in Central Wisconsin

Portage County's Hunger and Poverty Prevention Partnership



Homelessness

By Joe McHale

Fear

A tattered coat
A look away
Frozen nose.

Fear

An aching gut
A painful smile
Frozen toes.

Fear

An empty hand
A disdained stare
Frozen souls...

Multiple organizations are working to assist those in need of food and shelter, and their numbers show that the need is present over Central Wisconsin.

Most of the people suffer from mental health issues, disabilities, or a drug or alcohol problem. Why are people living in cars and tent cities? It is morally wrong.

Warming shelters throughout the city of Stevens Point operate from November 1st to Spring to protect the unsheltered persons from harsh winter months. These persons range from 18-89 years of age.

Several people are employed and are still homeless.

Portage County's **Hunger and Poverty Prevention Partnership** of many community

organizations works to identify issues of hunger and poverty and to address them with short- and long-term solutions.

They have developed many programs including Giving Gardens, Plant a Row, Mobile Pantry, and Empty Bowls and have been functioning since 2017 in various stages.

The good news is that poverty in Wisconsin is down. The bad news is that hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites still face double jeopardy in today's economy. They live below the poverty line and face high costs in areas such as rent, food, childcare, and predatory lending.

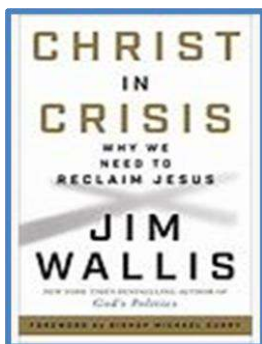
Rent costs eat up huge proportions of income. The poor pay higher food prices because of lack of access to markets. They pay late fees for unpaid rent and face evictions. Poor housing conditions lead to health issues,

which in turn lead to missed days of school or work. They often don't get paid sick days or paid leave, and they sometimes are exploited by predatory lending practices such as pay day lending.

An extension committee is working to set up a new program called **RentReady Wisconsin**. This program provides training and resources and requires specific actionable items to be achieved by persons with checkered pasts.

Upon certification, graduates would be eligible for a rent guarantee program, however it does not provide money for rent or security deposits and there are certain criteria to be accomplished by those who participate. A sponsoring Church then advocates for them and provides assistance and companionship. ■

Book Review by Sister Rose Grabowski



Jim Wallis is a best-selling author, a renowned speaker, and a Christian activist. We're discussing his latest book, **Christ in Crisis**, in our book club here at St. Joseph Motherhouse.

In this book he argues that our cultural and political crisis stems largely from how the American church has become dis-

connected from the teachings of Jesus Christ.

We ask, and measure ourselves, to Matthew 25. Are we thinking as Jesus did in regard to our neighbor, as a peacemaker and a disciple?

The "least of these" are being affected by climate change because we are stripping them of all their

resources. They are hungry, thirsty, and naked.

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* makes it clear that our relationships to God, our neighbor, and to Earth itself are all interconnected and interdependent.

This is a powerful, soul-searching book which I highly recommend. ■



Report: WalletHub shows disparities between blacks, whites

The following story was first reported by WISC-TV in Madison

Posted in Jan. 2019, Updated Jan. 7, 2020 by Christina Lorey

MADISON, Wis. —

Fifty-six years after Dr. Martin Luther King first introduced the world to his dream of a colorblind America, a new report by WalletHub* shows just how far Wisconsin still has to go.

WalletHub ranks Wisconsin the **most segregated state in America.**

Only Washington, D.C. ranks behind Wisconsin in terms of racial integration. The study defines racial integration as the disparity between white and black Americans in terms of achieving wealth,

employment, education, social engagement, and health.

Not only did Wisconsin rank low in each of those categories, but the state also had one of the highest income gaps, as well as the second-highest labor-force participation rate gap.

In short, African Americans in Wisconsin are less likely to be employed and more likely to make significantly less money than whites, even when employed. They are also less likely to have a high school diploma than white Wisconsinites. ■

* According to Wikipedia, WalletHub is a personal finance website that was launched in early August 2013. It is based in Washington, D.C. and owned by Evolution Finance, Inc. — parent company of the credit card company, CardHub.

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

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter



Martin Luther King, Jr. Program

This yearly celebration in Stevens Point honors Dr. King’s legacy through Justice Works and the MLK, Jr. Committee. The goal is to foster forms of justice that strengthen and heal the communities of Portage County.

This year’s speaker was Rep. LaKeishia Myers, Assembly District 12 of Milwaukee. In her speech, **“Drum Majors for Justice: Activating the Leadership”** we were challenged to make the best in our land, that is, to be ordinary people doing extraordinary things

Are we prepared to work for peace?
Are we fit for righteousness? Can we do this on a daily basis? Can life be a life of service and one first in love and in generosity? ■

“This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.”

— Micah 6:8
(Jerusalem Bible)

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

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

Note: The **next issue** of *We Commit Ourselves* will be published in **April 2020.**

Please send any items for inclusion in this next issue to **Jennifer Dillon** by Friday **March 20th**, the first day of spring.

~ Your Social Justice Committee