

Visions

Christ-Centered Women in a Changing World

Ursulines of
Cincinnati



Spring 2018

WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FOREMOTHERS IN FAITH

—By Jennifer Mertens (SUA '05)

Blessed are you, O God...we thank you for the gift of the saints, known and unknown, who embrace us with their holy wisdom and holy presence..."

The prayer rose from within our circle of pilgrims, one of many prayer services in which I participated as part of FutureChurch's "Following in the Footsteps of our Foremothers" pilgrimage to Greece. With the support of the Ursuline Sisters of Cincinnati and accompanied by fellow pilgrims Sr. Margie Efkeman and Sr. Barbara Niehaus, I had the unforgettable opportunity to retrace the footsteps of ancient women leaders who influenced the development of early Christianity.



A prayer site at Thessaloniki honors St. Lydia, who encountered Paul along the banks of this river and was called as an early Christian woman leader.

In October, the weeklong pilgrimage took us from one end of Greece to the other, traversing through sweeping mountain ranges, never-ending

expanses of olive trees, and picturesque waterfront towns nestled along the Aegean and Ionian Seas. Our group was pioneered by FutureChurch co-founder Sr. Christine Schenk, our Greek tour guide, Aliki, and FutureChurch board of trustees chair and spiritual director Jocelyn Collen. Together, the women invited us into an encounter with early church women that brought the Christian tradition alive in remarkable new ways.

To be sure, it feels impossible to relate this Greece journey in one article! Some of the highlights, however, include our tour of the massive archaeological site at Philippi, where we walked along an ancient Roman road and remembered the early church leaders, Euodia and Syntyche. In

Thessaloniki, we prayed at the bank of the same riverside where Lydia of Thyatira first met Paul and founded an early church in her home. In Corinth, we celebrated the traveling ministry of Prisca, who modeled a collaborative commitment to ministry with her husband, Aquila, and whose leadership influenced early Christian communities in Rome, Corinth and Ephesus. And, of course, at the mountaintop monastery of St. Barbara's in Meteora, we learned about the development of

monasticism and the contributions of women monastics both in Meteora and the broader Greek Orthodox Church.

At these sites and numerous others, I was awed by the richness of women's leadership, creativity, and faith so



The pilgrims pose for a photo.

deeply embedded in the Christian tradition. Like St. Angela Merici, these women also demonstrated such boldness in forming new paths for women of faith – and, indeed, for the whole Christian community. ...I imagine they would have much to talk about together!

In the months since Greece, I continue to process the many layers of experience, learning and wisdom shared on this journey. Currently, I am working on a book project of religion teaching resources for adolescent girls and am excited to integrate learning from this pilgrimage into the texts. In this work, I am aware not only of the contributions of early church women, but of the blessing it is to be part of an Ursuline community that continues to explore, witness, and share women's faith with our church today!

Sr. Margie Efkeman



Dear Friends,

I wish I could recall the words I *thought* I heard the celebrant say during the eucharistic prayer at a recent weekday Mass I attended. They made me smile – almost laugh – inside and out. They spoke of a joyful, celebrative dancing parade to the liturgy's "Holy, Holy" that recalls Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem just before His Passion.

In the moment, my heart was filled with gratitude for God-Made-Human, for God's willingness to take on our human condition, become one of us and suffer torture and violent death, so to show us what LOVE really means. I was and continue to be filled with gratitude for Christ's being Eucharist for us and for commissioning us to "Do this in memory of me."

This joyful experience of gratitude came on the same day the U.S. Senate failed to pass a DACA fix that would provide a legal way for DREAMERS (young people brought to the United States without documentation) to stay in the United States and continue as contributing members of our society. Hope dashed! This evokes thoughts of Jesus' disciples' disillusion when they saw their Master's predicted betrayal and death come to pass.

But Easter happened! Christ conquered death! And we are called to believe that new life can come from our dashed hope. This issue of *Visions* illustrates the Cincinnati Ursulines' firm belief in Christ's promise of LIFE from death. Through prayer, action and funds, we welcome our immigrant and refugee neighbors; we advocate for forgiveness and compassion for those who've committed serious crimes; we value the gifts of women and advocate for their integration in church and society. We hope you find in these pages food for thought and prayer.

We wish you a happy and blessed Eastertide!

Sr. Margie Efkeman
General Minister

Our Mission Statement

We, the Ursulines of Cincinnati, are a community of Christ-centered women transforming lives with compassion and creativity. We pledge to respond to the needs of our times through our diverse ministries and in collaboration with the laity. We will respect the dignity of each individual, nurture their unique gifts, and be present to them as we all seek a deeper and more personal relationship with God.

Ursulines of Cincinnati

Sr. Margie Efkeman, OSU,
General Minister

Editor

Sr. Eileen Connelly, OSU

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for design



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Welcome

Please feel free to write letters to our editor on anything you might like to say about articles that appeared in *Visions* or anything else that is of interest to you.

We welcome your opinion.

Please address letters to:

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CATCHING THE “FIRE” FROM SISTER HELEN PREJEAN



During her nearly 18 years on the staff of “The Catholic Telegraph,” Sr. Eileen Connelly has had the chance to meet many inspiring people and been humbled to share their stories of faith. A highlight of her ministry came on Feb. 3 when she interviewed Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille Helen Prejean, author of the 1993 best-seller, “Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States”

Sr. Helen was in town to serve as the keynote speaker for 74th annual meeting of the Salesian Guild, held at St. Francis Xavier Church in downtown Cincinnati. Named for St. Francis de Sales, the patron saint of writers and a patron of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, the Guild brings together Catholic communicators of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky to pray, socialize and learn together. Sr. Eileen and several Telegraph staffers attended the event.

Sr. Helen’s address to the Salesian Guild attendees, “Staying Alive in the Holy Fire: Field Notes of a Jesus Advocate,” outlined her experiences in advocating for the abolition of the death penalty and her journey through the fire. That fire, she explained, was “an awakening and a call to justice and social activism,” experienced when she witnessed her first execution.

Raised in a life of privilege, Sr. Helen admits that she was originally blind to

social injustice. Through her ministry and those she has encountered, she has learned being a “Jesus advocate” means following the Gospel call to be where Jesus would. Living and working among the poor in Louisiana, “my heart changed,” she said. “I saw what poverty, racism and violence can do.” She experienced Jesus’ presence in the African-American community and said the people were her teachers.

When she serves as the spiritual advi-



Sr. Eileen Connelly poses for a picture with Sr. Helen Prejean

sor for a death row inmate and looks into his eyes, “I see Jesus there,” Sr. Helen said. “I know whatever he did, he’s worth more. It’s really clear where Jesus is in that moment and it sets your heart on fire.”

“When I’m walking with a man to execution and he is shackled, hand and foot, he’s surrounded by six guards. He is going to be strapped down and

killed, and he says to me, ‘Sister, please pray God holds up my legs.’ Where is the dignity in this death? A totally defenseless person is being taken out and killed. Where is the dignity in this? Even those among us who have done a terrible crime have a dignity that must not be taken from them.”

“It’s our gift as a Catholic community to stand for the dignity of all life,” Sr. Helen said.

One of her mistakes early in her ministry was not reaching out to victims’ families, Sr. Helen said. She has since founded Survive, a murder victims’ support group. “What’s interesting,” she said, “is that there’s a growing number of murder victims’ families who are speaking up saying, ‘The death penalty further harms us.’ When New Jersey did away with the death penalty, 62 murder victims’ families appeared at the Legislature, saying, ‘Don’t kill for us. We need to get on with our healing.’”

“I keep learning,” Sr. Helen told Sr. Eileen. “I pray for the world, for God to handle our big problems. I pray that we catch the fire, roll up our sleeves and do the work. The Kingdom of God is within us. It’s a collaborative process. We’re partners with our God, and He is a God of compassion.”

URSULINES HELP LA AMISTAD LOAN POOL REACH ITS GOAL

La Amistad, Inc., supported by La Amistad Loan Pool, LLC, provides high-quality, safe and affordable housing for immigrants in Cincinnati. We Ursulines, committed to welcoming our immigrant neighbors, made an initial loan to the Loan Pool in 2017. After touring the La Amistad properties and meeting some of the residents, the sisters recently made a second contribution to the pool, completing its \$100,000 goal. The funds will allow completion of necessary repairs and improvements.

“This will help us keep the rents as low as possible and keep our residents in safe, stable and minimal-maintenance housing,” said Mark Brunner, La Amistad board chair.

La Amistad and the Ursulines help each other fulfill their shared mission to live the Good News of the Gospel. Visit <http://cincinnatiursuline.org/visions/> to find a related article in *Visions* Spring 2017.



Mark Brunner poses here with Eugenio and Virginia, who rent one of the La Amistad homes. Thanks to the Loan Pool, funds are now available to address needed repairs.

URSULINES COLLABORATE TO ADDRESS REFUGEE CRISES

In celebration of National Migration Week 2018 (Jan. 7-13), the Cincinnati Ursulines collaborated with Catholic Charities of Southwestern Ohio and several other groups to bring to the area the art exhibit, "Columbus Crossing Borders" and its accompanying documentary "Breathe Free." Together, through art and film, they present an emotional response to the current refugee crisis as exemplified in one U.S. city. It's the work of Columbus, Ohio, area artist Laurie VanBalen, 33 other artists, and filmmaker Doug Swift. The exhibit and film appeared in a two-day pop-up event hosted at the CET-TV studios and at Xavier University's Cohen Art Gallery on Jan. 10 and 11.

More information about the project, including a scrolling display of the artwork, can be found at <https://www.columbuscrossingbordersproject.com/>.

columbuscrossingbordersproject.com/. Click "Enter," then "The Exhibit." And click on "The Documentary" for information about the film, which is highly instructional and moving on its own.

We Ursulines expect to offer opportunities for group showings in the coming months. If interested, contact us at <http://cincinnatiursuline.org/>



Notice the heart motif present in these side-by-side paintings – an example of the interconnections in the exhibit and of our human interconnectedness!

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