

Ursulines of Cincinnati Visions

Christ-Centered Women in a Changing World



Autumn/Winter 2020

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE OR CONSCIOUSNESS? A Spiritual Practice for Racism

By Sr. Mary Jerome Buchert

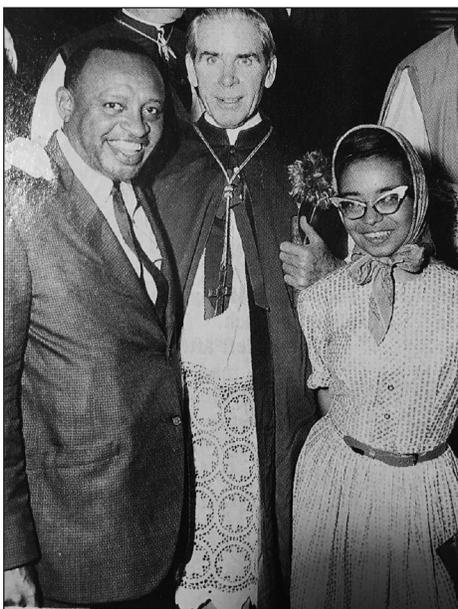
Those of us who grew up Catholic were introduced at an early age to The Examination of Conscience, something to be done prior to receiving the sacrament of reconciliation, better known as confession. For many of us, it was a matter of checking one's life against the standards set by the Ten Commandments. As a child, it may have led to confessing that I disobeyed my parents, hit my sister, or perhaps, as bad as, I cursed!

I really never appreciated the practice until a wise spiritual director introduced me to the notion of an examination of consciousness. The challenge is not to just come up with a list of sins based on the Commandments, but to examine one's life in the light of Gospel values, the dignity of the human person made in the image of God, and, especially, the Beatitudes, which are the heart of Jesus' teaching.

Because there is a communal character to the human vocation, we need to look at how we are building virtuous communities in which to live. It is not enough to not sin. We should cultivate virtue. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that, "A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good – the virtuous person pursues the good and chooses it in concrete action."

Our national community — the United States of America — is struggling

with the persistence of what the last three popes have called the sin of racism. White Christians must be part of the change and part of the solution. Just bringing the topic up makes many good-hearted White



Jazz musician Lionel Hampton poses for a photo with Bishop Fulton Sheen and Pat McMurray (Lionel's god-daughter) at the dedication of the new St. Rita School, which he paid for.

people feel blamed and shamed for injustices they did not personally commit. The tendency, then, is to politicize the issue (racism exists, it no longer exists, there is no such thing as systemic racism). Or, we choose to shove the issue back into the unconscious. If, as a people, we cannot acknowledge the problem, we will never be able to solve it. Here is where the spiritual practice of examination of consciousness

can be helpful. The beauty of a spiritual practice is that we ask the Holy Spirit to be with us and guide us.

I will share a few of the experiences of the reality of racism that my consciousness examen brought to light.

- My earliest memory: As a child of five or six, we went on a family visit with my aunt, who was a nun teaching in an African-American parish school in Indianapolis. A Black family, friends of my aunt, stopped in for a visit. They brought a young man who was a musician. During the visit, my aunt played her harmonica and the young man played the piano, entertaining us with some lively music. On the drive back to Cincinnati, my parents discussed the man. Whenever he came to Indianapolis to play drums with the Benny Goodman orchestra, he could not stay in the hotel with the white musicians. He stayed with a family from St. Rita Parish. I remember thinking as a child how unfair that was. That young man was Lionel Hampton. Years later, when he became a world-famous Jazz musician, Lionel's generosity built a new school to replace St. Rita's old four-room school house.

- In grade school, my Dad would drive me downtown once a week to Wurlitzer's for accordion lessons. When we drove through the West End of Cincinnati, my dad would

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Dear Friends,

For many years, we Ursulines have prayed a Vocation Prayer which petitions God and St. Angela for “a deeper understanding and appreciation of our own call and for the grace and courage to be authentic witnesses to God’s love and justice in our world.” Indeed, all baptized Christians are called to faithfully follow

the Spirit’s guidance in our lives.

Two years ago, at the invitation of Srs. Mary Jerome and Eileen, a group of our lay women friends convened to listen together for direction from the Spirit regarding the role of the charism of St. Angela as expressed in their own lives. In this issue of *Visions*, Peggy McCormick Platz (SUA ’84), Community Service Learning Assistant at Saint Ursula, shares developments of that group, which has come to be known as the Ursuline Companions.

This era of Coronavirus holds its own unique and special invitations—even summonses—from the Spirit.

The uneven negative impact of COVID-19 on varying populations has laid bare the reality of unequal access to health care in the United States. At the same time, anger in the face of several recent incidents of killing of Black men and women at the hands of police and lay citizens alike has reached the boiling point. In response, we Ursulines, both individually and as a community, have begun to examine our unconscious biases and prejudices. Sr. Mary Jerome reflects in this issue on her experiences, as a young person and as an adult, of her own history with members of the Black community. Sr. Barbara reflects on how the pandemic’s removal of face-to-face interaction with her St. Vincent de Paul clients has increased the challenge of seeing the individual without pre-judging.

My own inner work has been energized by the witness of our dear friend Steve Broermann, husband of our lead archivist Nancy Broermann. Diagnosed in late August with an aggressive cancer, his daughter asked him if he had a bucket list. No, he said. I’ve lived a full life. However, motivating others to work for racial justice must have been on his short list. Steve sent a copy of Ibram Kendi’s *How to Be an Antiracist* to friends whom he knew would value its message and pay it forward! Steve entered eternal life on Oct. 4—the feast of peacemaker St. Francis of Assisi. His legacy lives on. And we thank him for setting the example of fidelity to the Spirit’s call in his life. May we all strive each day to be faithful to our own call!

We pray that you stay well in these very uncertain times!

Sr. Margie Efke
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 Efke, OSU
General Minister

Editor

Sr. Eileen Connelly, OSU

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Stephanie Lang Beckmeyer (SUA ’89)
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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Ursulines of Cincinnati
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Examination of Conscience or Consciousness?

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always say, “Be safe. Lock the doors.” I would look out the window and see Black people on the street corners and little Black kids playing on the sidewalks. Dad never said why, but I just assumed they were dangerous people. Twenty years later, one of those little Black girls playing on Linn Street would become my dearest friend.

- Teaching at St. Francis de Sales in the 1970s, the PTA cleaned and painted the inside of a vacant house in a neighborhood in Cincinnati known for racial bias. The money earned was part of a fundraising effort that year. De Sales was a predominately Black school by that time, so most of the volunteers were Black. While painting a window frame alongside a Black doctor, I looked outside and saw a crowd of people gathering across the street. A delegation of six children was sent over. They stood under the window and called out, “Mister, are you going to be living in there?” The doctor smiled and said, “No, honey, I have a house of my own. We are just cleaning this one up, and will be moving on.” The kids reported back to the adults and the crowd dispersed.

- Teaching history to Black and White students from the approved standard textbooks was a challenge. Black people were enslaved, the Civil War was fought, and slavery ended. Even after the Civil Rights Movement, some of the history books contained cartoonish depictions of Black people used by segregationists. The books were full of

the accomplishments of White heroes, scientists, artists and political leaders. Both the White and Black students were deprived of Black heroes like Dr. Charles Drew, pioneer of processes for blood transfusions, who died because he was refused a blood transfusion in a White hospital; the Tuskegee Airmen; and Katherine Johnson, one of



Students at St. Rita School in Indianapolis pose with a young Lionel Hampton and the Sisters who taught them.

a team of Black female NASA mathematicians. We only learned of her through the 2017 movie “Hidden Figures.” Often, library research is the only way for teachers to supplement what is missing from the American story.

- The Underground Railroad Freedom Center is a wonderful educational resource. Too often, I have heard people say they have never visited there because it is a museum for Black people. On the contrary, it is for all of us. Inspiring educational experiences for both children and adults bring to life past and present struggles for freedom from around the world.
- Recently attending the funeral of a Black Catholic, I learned that, as a

young man, he had a burning desire to become a priest, but couldn’t enter the seminary here in Cincinnati. He would have to travel to a seminary in East St. Louis, where Black men could prepare for priesthood. Not having the money to do that, he gave his life to the U.S. military. Rising to the rank of Captain, he served during the Korean War

and was decorated for his service to the Korean people by the South Korean government. His son, a Colonel in the Air Force, said in the eulogy, “Dad flew in the back of the plane so that guys like me could sit up front.”

My examinations of consciousness over the last several months have led me to commit to education and dialogue about racism with my White brothers and sisters. The ball is in our court. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have

called out racism as a destructive evil, not just for the individual, but for a community, Church and nation.

We can start with some simple conversations. There are so many automatic negative assumptions that we unconsciously associate with people different from ourselves. The challenge is to try to bring those assumptions to consciousness so we can act in ways that reflect Christian values and lead to the transformation of ourselves and our society. We need to talk about race on a personal and conversational level among family, friends and neighbors. Keeping the conversations from blame and shame can help us gain new insights on practical ways to heal and reconcile.

HAVING A HEART FOR MISSION



In October, Sr. Eileen Connelly marked one year of ministry as Associate Director of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Mission Office. She joined the staff after many years of collaboration as a writer and editor at *The Catholic Telegraph*. Sr. Eileen has participat-

ed in a number of mission experiences over the years, including trips to Honduras and India.

“Experiencing the diversity of our Catholic faith and the mutual impact made through building relationships with our sisters and brothers in other cultures is spiritually enriching

and life changing,” Sr. Eileen said. “I’m blessed to be able to work closely with our missionaries and twinning partners to share their efforts, stand in solidarity with them, and help develop awareness that we are all one family in Christ.”



The annual World Mission Sunday Mass, held locally this year at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Peter in Chains, was an opportunity to celebrate the beauty and diversity of Catholicism and honor and support the ministries of those serving in mission dioceses throughout the world.



One of the missionaries Sr. Eileen has enjoyed working with over the past year is Jillian Foster (SUA '14). Jill is a Maryknoll Lay Missioner who has been serving in Haiti since January. She currently ministers at a tree nursery at the Jean Marie Vincent Center. Reforestation is a priority in Haiti, one of the most deforested countries in the world. In the midst of the pandemic, Jill and her fellow missionaries have also been making masks for the local community.

Laudato Si' Award



Saint Ursula Academy is a proud recipient of the Laudato Si' Award from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Care of Creation Task Force. SUA was selected as a winner as a result of the Earth Club and Green Team efforts to reduce and recycle waste, especially in the lunchroom. The award was made possible, in part, by the Ursuline Sisters, who provided the initial grant to start the composting program in SUA's cafeteria.

SISTERS PREPARE FOR FUTURE WITH URSULINE COMPANIONS

By Peggy McCormick Platz (SUA '84)

“You will be shown a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.” —Luke 22:12

The modern image of an upstairs room, warmly furnished, awaiting the guests to share a meal, emanates from St. Luke’s passage when the Apostles were instructed to prepare for Passover. The upstairs room image is revisited when the Holy Spirit descends on the Apostles. All who have experienced the Gospel narratives of the upstairs room know the story’s ending as the beginning of Christian faith. What happened in the upstairs room did not remain there. Likewise, in 1535, gatherings of women moved beyond cloistered rooms, walls and borders to spread the Ursuline charism in the Catholic Church as instructed by St. Angela Merici’s writings and her many good works. The Ursuline Sisters of Cincinnati have been part of the historic existence of the Ursuline Order, following Angela’s Rule through education and diverse ministries to cultivate the vine of faith.

In 2018, the Ursulines of Cincinnati acknowledged that vowed religious life is gradually coming to completion for most U.S. congregations. The Sisters committed to explore

an alternative vision for the future, a way to pass on the legacy, ministry, and the charism of Angela in Church, families and society. They envisioned a model that could be self-perpetuating and include lay women, and possibly men, both married, widowed, and single. A dedicated group of laywomen was invited to come together to discern how best to respond to Angela’s admonition to “meet the needs of the times,” and keep the Ursuline mission and ministry alive for future generations.

For two years, the self-named “charism committee” met in the

Leadership from the Heart: Guidance from Angela Merici, was central in helping the committee develop a lay adaptation of the Ursulines of Cincinnati.

Inspired by prayer and study and moved by the Holy Spirit, Ursuline Companions was formed. The organization established three pillars: Identity, incorporating the nine Ursuline Characteristics; Legacies, adopting St. Angela’s directives as tenets; and Governance, which consists of three councils of work: Spirituality, Ministry and Funding, cooperating in synchrony to support and enact

Identity and Legacies.

Documents of formation were approved by the Ursuline Companions on Aug. 4, 2020. With confidence, members of Ursuline Companions will move beyond the upstairs room and



Ursuline Companions, meeting virtually during COVID-19 restrictions, discern how to carry the spirit of St. Angela Merici and the Cincinnati Ursulines into the future.

enthusiastically claim a spiritual inheritance to continue the mission of the Ursulines of Cincinnati. Through prayer, mutual support and charitable works, they will remain united in heart and will, to persevere faithfully and joyfully in the works begun by Angela. To learn more about the Ursuline Companions, contact Sr. Mary Jerome at buchert@zoomtown.com.

upstairs Community Room of the former Ursuline Convent in Walnut Hills. Members prayed, studied, discerned, (and yes, ate!) while composing ideas of what a new formation might look like. Research sources included The New Testament, documents from Vatican II, History of the Ursuline Order, archival documents, the Constitution of the Ursulines of Cincinnati, and many writings by Mary Cabrini Durkin, a recognized author/expert on the life and teachings of Angela Merici. Her most recent publication in 2019,

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WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES



By Sr. Barbara Niehaus

The pandemic has changed the way volunteers with the St. Vincent de Paul Society (SVDP) interact with neighbors.

I spent many years in social services, so when I retired, I thought volunteering with the SVDP Conference at my parish would be a good fit. What I realized early on was the big difference there is in visiting our neighbors in their homes versus visiting at an agency or behind a desk. Connections and conversations come naturally as you are seated in a neighbor's home.

My other big awakening was an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the easy life I have enjoyed. Visiting a home where people are sleeping

on the floor and whose cupboards are bare is an epiphany.

One of my early calls was to a mother who needed school clothes for her son. The boy had only one pair of tan pants (required attire), and he had spilled chocolate on them. As a result, he had to miss school. On giving the mother a voucher to visit the thrift store, I realized that I would have bought my son five pairs of tan pants. And a friend reminded me: "Barb, you had a washer and dryer!"

The pandemic has made home visits unwise, so we now call our neighbors on the phone and chat that way. It is not the same. It's much more like sitting behind the desk. It has changed things for me deeply. I realize how much easier it

is to lack compassion when we don't see the person face to face. And judgment also becomes easier.

Someone once said to me, "Don't you think those people may be lying to you?" I thought back to the days when my children were young. I replied, "Maybe, but I'm very sure that, if it were my children who were hungry and in danger of being homeless, I would have lied as well."

Making home visits helps me come a little closer to walking in someone else's shoes. While it may only be for a short time, usually not even an hour, my ability to feel compassion and avoid judgment is very worth it. I look forward to the time when we can again make our visits in person and on their turf.

**Do something
Get moving
Be confident
Risk new things
Stick with it
Get on your knees
Then be ready for
BIG SURPRISES!
—St. Angela**

PRAYER TO OVERCOME RACISM

Mary, friend and mother to all, through your Son, God has found a way to unite himself to every human being, called to be one people, sisters and brothers to each other.

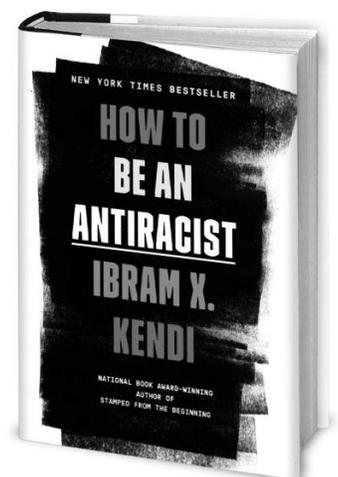
We ask for your help in calling on your Son, seeking forgiveness for the times when we have failed to love and respect one another.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son the grace we need

to overcome the evil of racism and to build a just society.

We ask your help in following your Son, so that prejudice and animosity will no longer infect our minds or hearts but will be replaced with a love that respects the dignity of each person. Mother of the Church, the Spirit of your Son Jesus warms our hearts: pray for us. Amen.

www.usccb.org/racism



Ursulines of Cincinnati Celebrate 110 Years of Presence and Service

We are quietly celebrating 110 years of presence in Cincinnati. Founded in 1910 under the leadership of Mother Fidelis Coleman and Mother Batista Freaner, Ursuline Sisters of Brown County, we continue to “cultivate the vine that has been entrusted to us.”

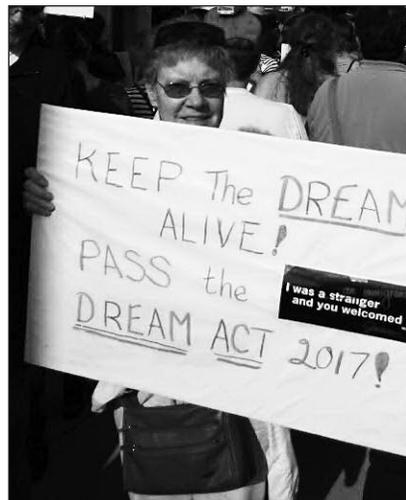
Following St. Angela’s admonition to “strive to be faithful to that to which God calls us,” we listen attentively to the Spirit alive in our world today.

•We support the mission and vision of the schools we founded – Saint Ursula Academy and Saint Ursula Villa.

•We accompany women and men on their spiritual journey.
 •We provide assistance to those in need through local St. Vincent de Paul chapters and through our Starfish Project.

- We advocate for justice:
- Racial equality
 - Immigration reform and hospitality
 - Care for creation
 - We help to spread the Gospel at home and abroad through the Archdiocesan Mission Office.

Celebrating our past, we address the needs of today and journey into the future with hope!



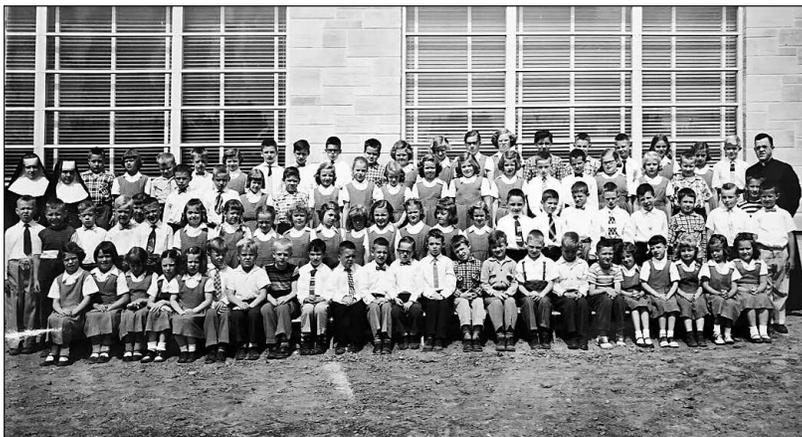
Sr. Margie Efke helps the Cincinnati Ursulines advocate for the various aspects of immigration policy reform.



Dedication of the bells and bell tower at Our Lady of the Visitation on Sept. 29, 1991. “For over 40 years Ursulines of Cincinnati called members of this parish to Faith.” The bells are named for Saint Ursula and for Sr. Gabriel Grimes, who taught at Our Lady of the Visitation for those 40 years.



In response to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the Cincinnati Ursuline Sisters worked tirelessly to bring about the integration of St. Francis de Sales School and provide quality education in an urban setting.



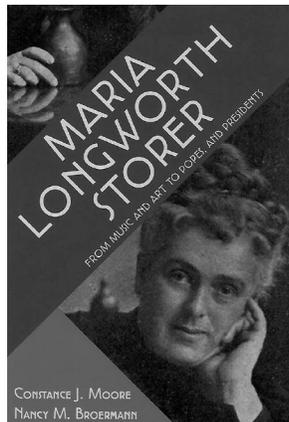
All Saints School in Kenwood opened in 1954 with the leadership of Sr. Mary Paul Gieske, principal, and Sr. Mary Xavier (later Sr. Rosemary) Winkeljohann and the pastor, Fr. Thomas Devitt. The Ursulines served at the school until 1978.



Through board membership and funding, the Cincinnati Ursulines help to provide affordable housing for immigrant families.

FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE: BOOKS WITH AN URSULINE CONNECTION

Historian Constance J. Moore and Ursulines of Cincinnati Archivist Nancy Broermann (SUA '68) have co-authored *Maria Longworth Storer: From Music To Arts To Popes and Presidents*, a comprehensive biogra-

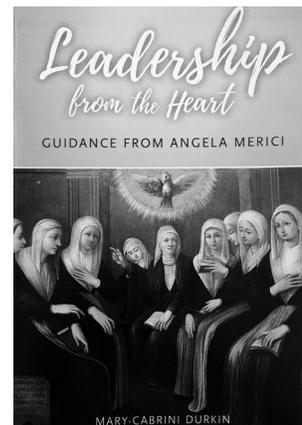


phy, published by University of Cincinnati Press. Known as the founder of

the first female-run manufacturing company in the United States, Rookwood Pottery, Maria was passionate about women's rights, her city, and issues of poverty and the arts. Constance and Nancy spent years researching Maria and found a treasure trove of letters that provided insight on her rich contributions locally and beyond. Many of the documents were found at Saint Ursula, where Maria and her husband, Bellamy Storer, resided for a time. The book is available online, or wherever books are sold.

Mary-Cabrini Durkin (SUA '60) has penned *Leadership from the Heart: Guidance from Angela Merici*, an unfolding of St. Angela's Counsels and Testament, her leadership manuals for the women who would follow her in leading the Company of St. Ursula.

The book leads the reader through St. Angela's teachings with an invitational



style that fosters personal engagement with the Ursuline foundress. Mary-Cabrini belongs to the Company of St. Ursula and leads the Company in the United States. To place an order, email Ursulines@fuse.net.

Credit card contributions may be made by using the enclosed envelope or by calling Allison McGraw at 513-961-3410 ext. 146

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