

December 6, 2015

Advent blessings everyone,

I am an avid reader of the Sunday Review section of the NY Times. In today's issue there are two articles beginning on the front page that remind me of Advent themes. The first is titled "Born to be Conned" by Maria Konnikova. Near the end of the article Konnikova says: "Before humans learned how to make tools, how to farm or how to write, they were telling stories with a deeper purpose....In society after society, religious belief, in one form or another, has arisen spontaneously. Anything that cannot immediately be explained must be explained all the same, and the explanation often lies in something bigger than oneself." Later she says: "The often expressed view of modern science is that God resides in the cracks between knowledge....the gaps in what we know are where faith resides." "We set out," she says "to become, in some way, better than we were before. That is the true power of belief. It gives us hope."

I ponder her words as I sit before story after story focused on the horrific events in San Bernardino this past Wednesday, with reporters, government officials and various professionals attempting to make sense of this latest mass killing and wounding of ordinary people living ordinary lives in an ordinary city. And I also ponder the words of Jessica Stern, whose article, "How Terror Hardens Us," sits beside that of Konnikova. Stern tells us that hundreds of experiments world-wide have confirmed: "when people are reminded of their mortality...they will more readily enforce their cultural worldviews. If our cultural worldview is xenophobic, nationalistic or moralistic, we are prone to become more so. If we believe guns will protect us from harm, a terrorist strike will further strengthen our views. If we blame Muslims or white supremacists or the government for whatever is wrong in our world, we will become more fearful and more certain about who is to blame. An attack can reinforce our certainty in our beliefs even—especially—before anything is certain about what happened in the attack itself."

As citizens of this world we humans are physically and psychologically conditioned to believe in the values and customs of our unique heritage, be those of our nation, our tribe, our 'people' or our ethnic and religious identity. We are pre-disposed to cling to beliefs held by our particular culture. We see the world through that lens. It is important we realize the strength of this influence as we grapple with events that terrorize our cities, nation and world. Most often our knee-jerk reaction is to side with fear and quickly identify an enemy in order to make sense of chaos and create some measure of safety. Fear, then, drives many decisions rather than the higher wisdom available when we step back for a moment and question the fear-based story being generated by self-chosen spokespersons of the culture. The stories we tell ourselves and each other matter greatly since they fashion and re-affirm limited cultural beliefs.

Readings for Liturgies can be found on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>.

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in Portland will be Saturday, **December 12**, at **Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way** at **5:00pm**. Please bring entrees, salads, veggie dishes and desserts for the potluck meal. Choir rehearsal begins at 4:00 and all interested singers and musicians are invited to come and participate.

Mass in Eugene will be Sunday, **December 13, at First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd, at 4:00pm.** A potluck follows our celebration. Please bring entrees, salads, veggie dishes and desserts to share. If you are interested in being part of the choir as a musician or singer, please come at 3:00 for rehearsal.

Christmas Eve Mass in Eugene, Thursday, **December 24 at 9:00pm.** This will be our 5th annual Christmas Eve celebration at the home of Dianne and Amanda. The address and directions are posted in the member portal of the Sophia Christi website. You may also request directions from Toni by responding to this email or by calling 503-286-3584. All are invited and welcome!

Mass in Battle Ground will be Sunday **December 5 and 26, at 10:30am.** Please bring non-perishable food items for the poor and hungry of North Clark County, as well as healthy food to share after Mass.

Upcoming Events:

Parish Council Meeting—January 2, 12:00 to 2:00pm, Ike Box Coffee Shop, Salem
The Council will meet again in January to allocate surplus funds to this year's Ministry Partners (Rose Haven in Portland and North Clark County Food Bank in Battle Ground). We will also finalize plans for Sophia Christi's Lenten retreat. If you have questions or input for the Council, please contact one of the Council members before the meeting. These are: Mitch Moore, Kathy Glover, Joy or Jim Learned (Portland); Judith Manning or Carol Zolkoske (Eugene).

Sophia Christi Lenten Retreat—Feb. 19 & 20 Mark Your Calendars

Plans for our Lenten Retreat are in full swing! Time to mark your calendars for February 19th and 20th. We've secured a wonderful location at the 4H camp about 10 miles west of Salem. It's a beautiful setting in the woods, cabins and dining facilities and a chapel on site. We have also found an excellent retreat facilitator. Former Jesuit Bill Zuelke has agreed to help us come together as a community in deepening out Lenten journey. More details will be forthcoming, so stay tuned! --Mitch, Council President

Pastoral Update:

Battle Ground to Become Independent Community

On December 3rd Helen and I met informally to talk about developments at Sophia Christi's House Church in Battle Ground. Following Helen's ordination, the group meeting at her home began to gradually define itself in ways appropriate to the intimate experience of a house-church setting. As their sense of an independent identity began to emerge, there was discussion about whether to continue functioning under the umbrella of Sophia Christi. The result is caringly expressed in the warm and thoughtful letter (below) to all members of Sophia Christi. We bless this new community as it continues on its path, and send assurances of our continued prayers, love and support.

Dear Toni, Mitch and Sophia Christi Members:

After much discussion, and long and careful thought, the Battle Ground House Church has decided to withdraw from the umbrella of the Sophia Christi Catholic Community. Our reasons are based primarily upon the distance between our parishes, the difficulty in participating in council meetings, and differences in our liturgy style.

This decision is not made without much agonizing over how it will affect the remaining Eugene and Portland parishes. The Battle Ground House Church probably would never have come into existence without our attendance at, and the influence of, the Portland congregation's liturgies. Toni's cheerful encouragement, and thoughtful spiritual guidance have led us into a wondrous spiritual growth. We have been able to experience the blessings we so love about being Catholic, such as attending Mass and baptisms of grandchildren, while realizing in real time that women can be priests. For this we are indeed grateful.

However, it has become clear to us that this change is the best path for our church community. Few of our community attend Mass in Portland and no one attends in Eugene and therefore do not benefit from membership in the greater Sophia Christi community. We feel that it is important for us to serve those in our existing house church to sustain their spiritual goals and hopefully add to our community. Additionally, navigating the distance to and from Mass in Portland, as well as council meetings in Salem, is difficult, especially in the winter months. Most of our members reside in and around Battle Ground, some even to the north of Battle Ground.

Therefore, as of December 31, 2015, we will no longer participate as Council members, nor will the Battle Ground House Church send donation funds or goods to Sophia Christi.

Our hearts are heavy in sending this news, and we hope that you will understand our needs. We plan to attend the Portland services as we always have, and hope that when the time comes for the planning of retreat type events, that you will allow us to collaborate with you, in an effort to share ideas and costs. We wish Sophia Christi Catholic Community the very best in the years to come.

--Yours very truly, Helen Umphrey and Mary Goody, Council Members

Report from December 5th Parish Council Meeting

The Parish Council met in Salem for our Annual Meeting on December 5. We adopted a budget for 2016 after revising projections following news from the Battle Ground community as stated in the above letter. Realizing we won't have a complete picture of budget surplus until the end of 2015, we voted to meet again January 2nd to determine our contribution to each of this year's Ministry Partners: the North Clark County Food Bank in Battle Ground, and Rose Haven in Portland.

The Council voted to retain the same officers for 2016: Mitch Moore, president; Judith Manning, secretary; and Carol Zolkoske, treasurer.

We settled on a date and place for the Sophia Christi Lenten retreat—Feb. 19-20 at the 4-H Camp outside of Salem. Council members charged with forming the retreat planning team are: Mitch Moore, Carol Zolkoske and Kathy Glover. If you are interested in helping to plan the retreat, please contact one of these members or let Toni know by responding to this email.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's report for 2015 will be posted in the member's section of the website by year's end. If you are interested in a hard copy of the report please let Toni know and copies can be made available at Masses in January.

Portland Ministry Partner—Rose Haven—Continuing Needs

We will continue collecting the following items for Rose Haven's women and children at Masses in Portland. Eugene members of Sophia Christi are invited to participate in this effort until a Ministry Partner in Eugene is chosen. Please note what is currently most needed, as needs change seasonally:

- *Large/Plus Sized Clothing*
- *Warm blankets (fleece or wool preferred)*

Hygiene Needs:

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| - <i>Feminine hygiene – tampons & pads</i> | - <i>Hand sanitizer</i> |
| - <i>Shampoo & conditioner (travel size is ideal)</i> | - <i>Deodorant</i> |
| - <i>Soap & body wash</i> | - <i>Body lotion</i> |
| - <i>Toothbrushes & toothpaste</i> | - <i>Combs/brushes</i> |
| - <i>Pocket Tissues</i> | - <i>Razors</i> |
| - <i>First aid supplies</i> | - <i>Incontinence pads</i> |

Website

Remember that the newsletter, current homily, and Council minutes are posted on the website each month, as are all upcoming Sophia Christi events along with directions to those events. Our web address is www.sophiachristi.org.

A pastoral reminder--if you or someone you know has a pastoral need that isn't being met, please don't hesitate to give me a call. You have my email address in this mailing, and my office phone number is 503-286-3584. Feel free to use either one. You can contact me anytime for conversation, home visitation, reconciliation or anointing, home Masses, weddings, funerals, memorial services or other pastoral care needs.

As citizens of 'heaven,' as Christians who strive to live as disciples of the nonviolent, love-your-enemy-Jesus, we have tacitly accepted the discipline (disciple) of the Gospel. Not only do we believe God lives between the cracks of our limited understanding, we also believe in a crucified God, a God who is present within scenes of indescribable horror, who, while obscure, still exists in creators of mayhem, who is there in the murdered, wounded and traumatized as well as, inexplicably, in the murderers themselves. The story we must tell ourselves is bigger and broader than the cultural narrative because we are more than citizens of one limited and limiting culture. Let us become "better than we were before" by allowing the power of our belief in a loving, inclusive God, to lead us through the darkness of these frightening and desperate times. There is a larger story, a story of hope that transcends generations of human conflict. It is a story of light emerging from darkness, tender shoots erupting from the hard-pack of winter, life arising out of an empty tomb. It is a story worthy of our faith. Let's make meaning where there is meaninglessness, meaning inspired by the Gospel, by Mary's 'yes' to the angel of hope and chaos inviting her, and us, to bring new life into a dark and wounded world. Let's tell ourselves and each other an Advent story inspired by this faith, grounded in this 'yes,' and open to the mystery of life, death and transformation that is God's unfathomable design.

Advent hope and blessings,
Toni