Incarnate Word Convent
Victoria, Texas

Discover God’s Love With Us!

http://www.amormeusspiritualitycenter.org
Send stories of your faith journey to: Sister Donna at sdonnab@yahoo.com
On June 6, during our Community Days at IWC, the Partners in Mission (PIMs) Lamp group invited ten of our Partners to share their stories and reflections on their experiences and ministry with the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament of Victoria.

During the opening session, I presented the journey of the PIM Lamp group during the past two years. Our group had struggled together to define the role of the Partners and discussed the differences between the Partners and the Associates, an organized and structured group who not only study our Charism, but also join the Sisters in prayer and spiritual growth days. I recounted how Partners have been with our Order throughout all of our history since the days of Mother Jeanne de Matel, when in Paris, the monastery was established with the assistance of Mme de La Rochegeon and Michelle do Longueville and the monastery in Avignon with the aid of Mr. de Bely. All through the years, Partners have walked and worked beside the Sisters in our ministries and have played an essential role in the growth and development of our houses, our members, and our ministries. Below are the Partners who came and gave testimonials.

CHRIS ALVAREZ has worked with our Sisters, especially Sister Digna in the Chancery, and with the DISCIPLES ON THE JOURNEY publications. She became aware that the Beatitudes call us to action, living and teaching people how to live and love the Incarnate Word. DJ calls us to change our behavior and make a significant difference in the world.

JOHN VACCA said, “I am your future!” His journey began in a jail cell stemming from many dysfunctional factors in his childhood. His transformation throughout the years has led him to now lead MISSION POSSIBLE 360 for the Por Vida program through Blessed Sacrament Academy, where he works with Sisters Odilia and Stephanie Marie to lead adolescent and young men to overcome huge obstacles in their lives and to guide them in building a sacred space in their homes and wherever they are where they learn about God’s love and their own strengths.
KAY BLUNTZER has been a kindergarten teacher for over 30 years at Our Lady of Victory leading countless young students. She worked with three IWBS principals: Sisters Emilie, Leonita, and Laura. In the past few years, she has led a Disciples on the Journey group in her home encouraging adults to grow in their faith as well. As a teacher, whether with parents or students, Kay leads others through the three doors of prayer, celebrating Jesus through the Sacraments and imitating Jesus in the Gospels.

BARBARA RESPONDEK, a faithful Associate, first encountered IWBS Sisters when she served as a clerical aide at Our Lady of Victory School. After becoming an Associate under the guidance of Sister Emiliana, she has worked on several projects with the Sisters and Associates and attended the IWBS Reunion in Cleveland, Ohio. She draws strength when she is uniting with others all over the world praying the Christian Prayer.

ANDREA BROOKS, an ecumenical witness to the Lord, attended Catholic schools for thirteen years of her life. Presently she is pastor of two churches in Shiner and Flatonia. She quoted her grandmother who said we are all journeying toward heaven, all headed in one direction—we just have to pick “our mode of transportation.” Her involvement with the Sisters has led her to coordinate the New Village at the Por Vida High School at Blessed Sacrament Academy in San Antonio where she serves alongside the Sisters with whom she ministers.

CRIS URESTI cited her prayerful family and the praying of the rosary as forming her foundation in her spiritual life. But after falling away for a while, Cris was invited by Sister Perpetua to join a prayer group. After some time, she became an Associate of the IWBS Sisters. She now spends her weekdays with the Sisters serving as porteress at Incarnate Word Convent in Victoria. Cris learned more about prayer from observing the Sisters during Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; she discovered how to LISTEN to God in silence.

ANNETTE HOWARD was raised Catholic and learned the Rosary at an early age. She said “Yes” to God and found her teaching job at Nazareth Academy to be encouraging and empowering. After time spent in Medjugorje, she found God as a rock empowering her
throughout all the challenges in life with her children and her teaching. Throughout her life, Annette has found close friends and supporters in Sisters Emilie and Elaine, her guardian angel, who support her and her family through their prayers and friendship.

BILL MURPHY, who is a powerful presence and advisor as a Partner in Lamp Group 7, Stewardship and Properties, attended Nazareth Academy for one year and seeing the value of a Catholic education, sent his three children through NA, where he was an active parent and supporter. Through his involvement with the sisters of Nazareth and at Incarnate Word Convent, he found the secret of inner strength and wisdom could be found in the Blessed Sacrament, which is a gift which we need to instill in our children—to find their strength in the Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

VERONICA PEDRAZA, another very active Partner, attended Nazareth Academy during her formative years. Her mother did not teach her the religious superstitions that many of her culture professed but instilled in her extreme reverence for the presence of God in her life which she carries with her today. This she sees in the Sisters whom she has met throughout the years, and learned early in life that “when the Sisters call, you answer!” Thus today, she now efficiently manages the Incarnate Word Gift Shop at IWC in Victoria and works along with a crew of Sisters in this successful and very growing business.

DAVID SMOLIK declared that he was very “humbled” to be on the holy ground of Incarnate Word Convent addressing all the sisters who have graced and formed his life. David recognized his first grade teacher, Sister Annunciata, who still resides at Incarnate Word Convent. After a full career in education, David came to Hallettsville, where he has spent thirty years at Sacred Heart School working along with our Sisters as Principal all these years since Sister John Hayden was his principal. Having grown up three blocks away from the Convent, he was frequently at the school helping the Sisters even at a very young age. His own Mother, who wanted to join the convent, attended Sacred Heart around 1906. David has been a Partner in Mission all his life.
If we pay attention we find that we walk in the midst of mystery each day. A particular one has been intriguing us lately. It is connected to the empty nail on the wall displayed in the picture. It happened during Easter Week. Pope Francis just got up and walked out - frame, picture and all. No amount of investigation yielded information. Until—Tonio walked in one day: Tonio who comes for a donation, Tonio who plays the organ in the chapel, Tonio who did some painting on a set of Stations of the Cross, an uncompleted gift left by an artist. Tonio, by his own definition, an enigma.

This Easter week, Tonio came needing $23.00 for a doctor’s visit. He showed me his spider bite and waded into a conversation of need. I sent him into the chapel to pray for a bit while I thought of how to respond in responsible compassion. My question has become, “What do you really need?” A little whisper advised me that this would not be of any use with Tonio. So? I decided to join him in the chapel, pray with him and go from there. “From there” leads to another kind of question. “Tonio, did you take Pope Francis for a walk? (I pointed to the nail on the wall.) We know he likes to be out there among the poor.” He insisted, “No, I don’t know anything about that.” I continued, “Well, I was hoping you might have seen or heard something when you were here a few days ago.” He gave it some thought and then waded into another conversation about how he should not be stealing because I’m his friend and now I
won’t be his friend any more. He quoted Scripture and verse shoring up his case. I was fascinated and wondered, out loud, “Where did you learn all this Scripture?” Then he told me about his struggle with mental health and how St. Paul says that we do the things we don’t want to do. (Romans 7:15, etc.) And he doesn’t know how to get this out of himself. He made a gesture of pulling something out of his heart. It was clear to me that Scripture helps him to live with himself. I am glad for that.

In the end I gave him some bus money to get to a doctor’s appointment and asked him to be on the lookout for Pope Francis, who would most likely be out among the poor, like Tonio himself! With this promise and a bag of loose change, I bade him farewell.

Now I’m wondering if Pope Francis might not be out there looking for those who are willing to give to San Antonio area non-profits so they can continue their diverse ministries to those in need of support. Psst, Pope Francis, please direct to us those who can give assistance to the children and youth who are nurtured in programs at the Blessed Sacrament Academy campus; i.e. BSA Child Development Center, BSA Parents’ Academy, Por Vida Academy, Jewish Family Service. Thank you for your direction and care. Oh…, the website for donations is www.TheBigGiveSA.org from midnight to midnight on May 6, 2014.

Reminder: Your spot on our chapel wall is being saved.
Contingency Fund

BSA Alumna Carol Whitlock
Mariam, Kansas

Everyone who owns a home, car, or appliance recognizes that word. It's official meaning is an unforeseen happening that is going to cost me money I didn't have in my budget. Things like appliance failure, roof failure, car repairs, even lost eyeglasses or the need for something as small as a new pair of shoes can trigger the word - Oops - how am I going to pay for this?

Well, BSA has some of those same problems. Run with a tightly controlled budget and a finite income, any unexpected problem causes heartburn and possibly sleepless nights.

Things like air conditioning or heating unit failure, broken windows, etc. are not usually in the budget. One strange item I remember from long ago was the failure of the curtains on the stage just a month before the senior play was to be presented. The curtains were so old, that when taken down for cleaning, they fell apart rather than just coming clean. Hundreds of yards of begged fabric and hours of student sewing later the stage again was ready for use.

A few years ago I decided to help out with these situations by asking BSA to create an OOPS fund seeded with my donations. Formally called the Contingency fund it has saved the day a number of times.

For example, the 88-year-old water and sewer lines remind us often of their age – though mostly they valiantly soldier on.
Two areas on the campus have puzzled us (Sr. Odilia) no end. After several hydro-blasts, we finally came to an understanding that the “bellies” created in the sewer lines by age and shifting soil were not going away and indeed would continue to plague us. Repairing those two problems reminded me of what one plumber told me, “Other people’s ______ is my gold”. Fill in the blank according to your own experience!!

Compressors going out are another least favorite oops. Recently we replaced one on the 3 door fridge and another on a rooftop air-conditioner in the Child Development Center. Neither item in the budget!

As you can see, the fund has saved the day more than once. Just now, on May 16, 2014, our beloved sewer drained the $975 Oops fund down to $587.50. Not bad, considering. The fund stays open for donations at any time.

Sr. Odilia and Sr. Stephanie Marie have proven very persuasive in finding donors for the large projects such as the new cafeteria. But there just isn't enough time in the day to seek out and solicit small donors to help pay for these smaller projects. As any home owner knows, it is the small problems that will nickel and dime you into the poor house. Plus the vast majority of us alums cannot afford to give large sums. We are doing ok, thank you, but not in the league with the large donors. But we can afford a few bucks here and there to help with the Oops factor. So here is the idea: Give some thought to sending a few bucks to BSA marked for the Contingency fund once or twice a year. You will be helping with the continuation of the fine education you received and making life (and sleep) just a little bit easier for the Sisters and staff at BSA.
It was extremely helpful and very comforting to have the Oops (contingency) Fund in place, thanks to the originator of the fund, Alumna Carol Whitlock.

Carol does stained glass work like the one to the left. We’ve named this angel Angelique honoring the French heritage of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament Sisters.

Our real life Angel of the Oops Fund once went to school here and is now giving back and inviting you to join her in this caring endeavor.

Come walk with us and her in this effort to keep our buildings/equipment in good repair for the ministries they still house and the children they still protect after so many years of service.

Thank you. God bless you.

Sister Odilia Korenek,
Sister Stephanie Marie Martinez
and BSA Sisters
Valedictory Address

Victor Casiano, Validictorian
Cesar E. Chavez Academy,
Corpus Christi, TX Por Vida Inc. Campus

It is not only an honor but a privilege to be here where I am now. It would be untruthful for me to say I got here all by myself without the help of others. There are many of you, my parents, my teachers, my family, and those rare but true friends who helped me excel through the obstacle in life we call high school, and life itself. In the merely 17 years of life I've lived so far, I've faced a myriad of various obstacles, and as much of them as were bad, there was always as much good. Nothing possible is impossible. What I mean by that is; someday you may want to become a successful doctor, or lawyer, that's possible. Now if you want to jump off a building, sprout wings, and fly away, that is impossible, unless you're a bird. But we humans have knowledge, reason, remorse, and intelligence. We can literally do anything we put our minds to do. As easy as it is said than done, no one said it was going to be easy to get what you set out to accomplish done. Life is like one long road with many bumps, a couple of crashes, and a lot of traffic. But still through it all, sure we may have problems, experience tragedies, and have to wait a lot, but we learn from our mistakes, get stronger and learn to have patience. They say forget the past, but I say forget the past, remember its mistakes, live for today, and hope for a better tomorrow. Because in life, you either do or you don't, you don't just maybe or just try. You want to make something of yourself, or you don't. Everybody already knows we only live once, so appreciate that one time you live. However you spend it is your choice. Thank you everyone for your time, have a nice night.
We finally made it and I’m so happy we did. I watched myself grow into a man from a kid.

We faced a lot of obstacles, like people holding us back and making it feel impossible to ever reach our goals. But we tried our hardest and now our wisdom grows as we venture out into this thing called life. Just know you have a friend and it will be all right. Because all our efforts have paid off and
we now have one less worry. But this isn’t the end; it’s just the beginning of our story. Even though we were taught a lot, there’s one thing I will never forget. You have to live life to the fullest and without any regret.

Because even though we’re done with school, there’s still so much to learn. Try not to focus on the little things like how much you earn. We shouldn’t measure life with dollars and cents because you can be a millionaire and have no common sense. We should measure life by the people we’ve touched and the lives we enriched because money comes and goes, but love is hard to forget. So don’t stress over things you don’t have because life is too short and you’re only given one shot. So go out and see the world, get on the scariest rollercoaster and scream like a girl. Make lots of memories with the ones you love because that’s all you have when they’re gone up above. Do crazy things without thinking twice, like falling in love and finding a wife. Start a family, have a beautiful little kid, and leave no feelings hidden. And when that child grows up and comes to you for advice, tell him, “Si Se Puede,” (Yes, you can.) because that’s the motto for our life.
Good Evening Friends and Family, buenas noches y bien venidos.

I am so proud of you, we are very proud of you. For some of you it has been a long road. It is such an honor to be in the presence of some of the sharpest young minds in San Antonio.

I feel a special kinship with all of you. As a graduate of a charter school here on the south side myself, playing ball in the same gym some of you played ball in, I know a thing or two about small charter schools. We have the best mix of values of hard work, grit, and determination with a burning curiosity, a progressive disposition to build in you, a genuine thirst for knowledge.

When I was asked to close tonight I got really nervous. Well, to be honest, I got scared. It wasn't a physical fear of any kind. Rather, I was simply scared of screwing this up. I kept thinking. What am I going to talk about?

But then it occurred to me, this is exactly what I HAVE to share with you. My firsthand knowledge of one of the most valuable and life forming things you can experience: fear.
That's right. I'm here to tell you today that "Fear is good." Maybe you feel fear right now -- fear that you won't land a job, fear that you won't find love, or fear that you don't know what is going to happen after this day. These are all very valid fears. Don't be afraid of fear. Because it sharpens you, it challenges you, it makes you stronger; and when you run away from fear, you also run away from the opportunity to be your best possible self.

To understand why fear is good, one has to stop viewing fear as a feeling, and start looking at it simply as information. Fear is good because it is our brain's way of identifying the things we are ignorant about. Knowing this, we should look at our fear not as a reason to avoid the things that frighten us, but as a reason to engage them.

Needless to say, that fear of known physical danger is obvious and it shouldn't be questioned or overthought. But that other kind of fear: fear of the unknown, fear that shuts down action without any real explanation calls us to take a closer look. When you feel that fear, let it be a trigger for curiosity.

Simply asking ourselves what we want is easy. A far more powerful question that can be much harder to explore, but has the potential to bring you breathtaking clarity, is simply: What do I fear? Remember I am not talking about spiders or the dark, I'm talking about what it is that is stopping you from being great.

So don't be afraid of fear. Because it sharpens you, it challenges
you, it makes you stronger; and when you run away from fear, you also run away from the opportunity to be your best possible self.

Indeed, the truth about fear, as with the rest of life, is that you'll only really figure it out by living through it. So, get out there and live. Take your shots and engage your fears. And trust you'll figure it out. Trust your instincts, trust your passions, trust your empathy, and trust your love. And trust that even fear itself will want to stop, drop, and roll when confronted with the unstoppable passion and power of a Por Vida Graduate.

Remember to laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child or a garden patch, to know even one life has breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded.

Thank you and congratulations!

Cafeteria set up for Baccalaureate.
HOPE

Frank Rodriguez, San Antonio Zoo Employee

As leaves from a tree in a thunderstorm
Rays gone from their eyes
Change so far away
Clouds darken the sky
But the sun shines through
With rays of gold
And the stars of peace brighten the sky
Then the thrill of hope
Shines in their eyes
TREES

Joyce Kilmer

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is
prest
against the earth’s sweet
flowing breast.
A tree that looks at God all day,
and lifts her leafy arms to pray.
A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

As I looked sadly at a mesquite tree
which was some 100 years old and
which a 2014 May storm toppled,
this poem by Joyce Kilmer, which I
had memorized in grade school,
came to mind.
Each of us can draw our own lessons from this event. For me one lesson relates to physical aging. Unless we die young, we will experience the toppling of our once young and strong bodies. And the good thing about that is that, if we pay attention, life’s experience brings along with it the virtue of wisdom, which those following us need in order to make good choices in their lives. It is said that God has no grandchildren since we are directly connected to him as beloved children. In our realm of living we do have grandchildren and need to be careful of what we bequeath to them. I’m thinking that I need to plant another tree or several to leave behind the example of the sturdiness of the mesquite tree.

Spiritually I think of how God gives life, nurtures it and changes it in form to something else: firewood, canes made by a veteran, etc. Nothing is wasted. Neither are our lives wasted as we continue to remember our value as children of God. Whatever lesson you find in things which happen to you and around you are worth the thought it takes to drain out the wisdom to enrich your life and those of others.

Praying for our wisdom and sturdiness, even as I plant a new tree!

Sister Odilia Korenek, IWBS
Red is for the hard things, the suffering which leads to the transformation of our hearts. Blue is for the easy and enjoyable things, the love which leads to the transformations of our spirits. White is for the Holy Spirit who weaves them all together. This was the finishing lesson of our time together during our monthly spiritual direction meeting at Blessed Sacrament Academy. You may not be able to distinguish the hands so I’ll tell you. These are the caring hands of Sisters Stephanie Marie Martinez, Magdalen Carpenter, Odilia Korenek, Ann Francis Shimek, Tina Guerra (whose one hand was occupied with taking the picture).
Tina Guerra, our spiritual director, has brought us a plethora of learnings, a depth of psychological exploration and deepening prayer. Each of us learns, prays and transforms according to our own rhythm. We’ve loosely used an amazing book, *A Hidden Wholeness, The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, by Parker Palmer to guide our exploration. I say loosely, because Tina is great at interspersing other readings and activities to deepen our experience of God. Most recently she gifted each of us with the book, *The Language of Emotions, What your feelings are trying to tell you*, by Karla McLaren. Though we’ve been at this journey for years, we walk into and stumble upon startling discoveries about ourselves according as each is able to tolerate them. This new resource promises to provide material for some excellent side-trips into our inner selves. Or, it could be a detour which then becomes the journey itself.

Richard Rohr, in his book *The Naked Now*, explores the theme of transformation and comes to the conclusion that we have the tools of transformation built into our daily experience. Those tools are suffering and love. To take the time to explore this insight on a consistent basis is gift indeed. To long to be transformed from bitterness to betterness, from smallness of mind and heart to a commitment to largess of spirit is gift indeed.
Evangelizing Through Retreat Ministry

Sister Marian Sturm, I.W.B.S.

Each year we Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament Sisters participate in a 6 day retreat in which we have the opportunity to renew and to deepen our relationship with God, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Having just come from a retreat of 6 days of silence, my prayer challenged me to allow God to love me. Inner silence is something we often are not “at home with.” Yet when we open our inner self to God’s great love in this silence, we find healing for our deepest wounds and are energized to love others.

I have heard people wonder why God no longer speaks with us as he did in the past. To this wondering I share what St. Catherine of Siena said: “God is no longer personal as he once was because instead of treating him as the Master and seeing ourselves as the disciple, we treat him as the disciple and act like we are the Master.” Our prayer is often telling God what we want God to do rather than silently and attentively listening to God.

Experiencing a need for prayer that brings me into a deeper relationship with God, I realize is a gift to myself and that many of the laity do not have this opportunity. Therefore, I desired to facilitate retreats which might help them also be renewed and grow in their love relationship with God. With the blessing of my religious superior, Sister Stephana Marbach, IWBS, and with permission from Bishop David Fellhauer, our local bishop, I began this ministry on August 1, 2013. Writing a letter to every pastor in the diocese of Victoria, I asked permission to offer a retreat in his parish through the various parish organizations. With the pastor’s consent and contribution of chairpersons’ addresses, I wrote each of these organizations.
Retreats were offered on the topic the parish or organization chose from a list of possible topics such as: prayer, becoming familiar with different forms of prayer and having time to practice these, becoming familiar with Spiritual Direction and availing oneself of it, living a spirituality for everyday life, meditating on various Scripture passages based on a certain theme, living a life as Jesus and the lives of the Saints, based on Scripture, etc. A powerpoint presentation was composed for each one.

As a result, retreats for catechists, elementary and high school faculties, a parish, parish organizations, and a high school Confirmation retreat were facilitated. At our retreat center, Amor Meus Spirituality Center, I also presented the topic of prayer as a relationship with God, using the Advent Scripture passages to help discover one’s true self, the “self” God calls us to be.

Evangelization, the movement of the heart by God to God, has truly been taking place. The following positive responses demonstrate this. “This exceeded my expectations. Very peaceful—loved the private time of reflection.”

“It was good to have a retreat on prayer. It reminded me how important my time with God is and it reminded me to listen for God.”

“It was great to have some quiet time for reflection as well as time to share with the faculty.”

“It was helpful to take my own experience and tie it into scripture.”

“It was awesome. It opened my eyes to see God work.”
These 10 Partners shine a bright light on the possible...

Chris Alvarez, Veronica Pedraza
(front row) Cris Uresti, Andrea Brooks, Kay Bluntzer,
Annette Howard, David Smolik, John Vacca,
days: (back row l-r) Bill Murphy, Barbara Respondek,
Our IWBS partners who spoke at our June community
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