

petite Sisters of St. Joseph
of Northwestern Pennsylvania
journeys



The Illness of Polarization

Is there a cure?

Healing from the illness of “us & them”

What is ours to do in this time?

We’ve all felt it. We continue feeling it. It wasn’t sudden. It’s been building over time and it’s getting worse. It comes on gradually, first with just a few symptoms, and then it slowly escalates until it dominates how we feel. It’s the illness of polarization that is plaguing our society. The “us and them” mentality has permeated so much of our thinking and our response to one another. Everything seems to be about us and them. It’s difficult, perhaps impossible, to have conversations across these polarizations. It keeps family members from talking, co-workers from collaborating, lawmakers from passing legislation, and communities from uniting.

Is there a cure?

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) has launched an initiative to heal the divisions that keep us apart. *Transforming Grace: The Work of Transformative Justice* is a year-long program that began in November 2023 and continues through November of this year. LCWR is an organization comprised of the leaders of about two-thirds of the nearly 40,000 Catholic Sisters in the United States. *Transforming Grace* evolved from LCWR’s periodic examination of what the organization is being called to do in the immediate



by Stephanie Hall, Communications Director, Rosemary O'Brien, SSJ, Formation Director, Deb Seng, SSJ Agrégée and Justice Promoter

future. It considers the signs of the times and how to respond out of Gospel values and Catholic social teaching. In discerning its call for 2023-2028, LCWR recognized the polarization of these times and that what’s been done to address the issue is not working. Something else is needed.

Transforming Grace is an invitation to participate in a collective discernment, waiting for spiritual guidance and understanding of what we are to do in this time. As Sisters of St. Joseph, our mission is to unite all people with one another and God by responding to the world’s ever-changing needs and serving the neighbor without distinction.

The bond of our common humanity is stronger than the divisiveness of our fears and prejudices. *President Jimmy Carter*

Our mission tells us what to do: respond to today’s needs and bring about unity. Unity is the opposite of polarization. Uniting all people means overcoming divisiveness and finding ways to be in a relationship. Without distinction means, regardless of one’s beliefs or political affiliation. *Transforming Grace* provides a meaningful and practical way to unite people without distinction.

We live in a polarized time in our country, during a year set up to include a contentious political season. Recognizing it is not enough.

The Evolution of Response

A historical look at how Catholic Sisters responded to the needs of the times shows us how the response evolved. When Catholic Sisters began ministering, it was a direct service response. They saw the need to feed the poor, so they fed them. They saw the need to educate children, so they taught them. Over time, they realized that the need for direct service came out of broken systems. This led to Sisters working to affect systemic change and to improve the systems that cause the problems. Over time, it became clear that to affect systemic change, they needed to get involved in political advocacy. They took on that challenge and learned to advocate for legislation that could lead to systemic change. Today, Sisters realize that we need a new way of looking at things—a transformation of consciousness. *Transforming Grace* is LCWR's initiative to help get us there.

We must acknowledge and embrace our part in creating and sustaining the polarization and, more importantly, be open to learning what we can do to affect change. According to LCWR, we must take responsibility for our personal and collective responses during this national election period. LCWR is learning what skills are needed to be in relationships across incredible divides and presenting them through *Transforming Grace*. This is what can lead to a transformation of consciousness.

Transforming Grace: The Work of Transformative Justice addresses long-standing acts and patterns of oppression in our country and how they contribute to the attitudes of today. According to Carol Zinn, CSJ, Executive Director of LCWR, the project was not developed specifically to address the polarization of the U.S. national election campaign. The timing, however, is divinely serendipitous.

“The work of transformative justice is grounded in contemplation and is an engagement in learning the skills and practices that will lead to decision-making and action that leads to being in right relationship with Earth and all human persons.”

Transforming Grace is an opportunity of personal challenge and an invitation to go deeper in prayer, my relationship with God, and the global community. The experience gives me a deeper sense of responsibility and accountability with the issues presented. It's an invitation to be more intentional with my prayer, my reflection, my openness, and my response to global needs. There is a sense of unity knowing that “we” are all praying with Transformative Grace.

SSJ Agrégée Cindy Polesnak

What are we doing?

The resources LCWR has made available to support this initiative are thoughtful, prayerful, educational, powerful, and inspiring. The Sisters gather weekly in our Community Living Center to pray using the LCWR prayer/reflection guides. Our administrative staff also prays weekly using the guides, including the music and videos. We have informed our SSJ community of Sisters, Associates, and Agrégées about *Transforming Grace* and have encouraged them to use the resources in prayer groups and other gatherings. We include information and a link to the reflections in our weekly e-newsletter, monthly newsletter, website, and social media.

For more information about Transforming Grace, visit lcwr.org/transforming-grace



Sisters at our Community Living Center gather regularly to pray and share using the *Transforming Grace* reflection guides.

God Uses Us for Good

Thank you for your many gifts to us and those we serve. Together, we are blessed with a strong faith to carry out the SSJ mission, reaching our dear neighbors and meeting their needs with generosity, action, and prayers.

This powerful common faith is a sign of our call to do God's will, remembering that Jesus tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourself. (Mt. 22:37-39)

Rev. Jerry Simmons, our chaplain, shares liturgy with us and our visitors each week and he reminds us what God expects of us. In short, "God uses us for good."

Your belief in God drives your generosity. Together, we care for our neighbors in body, mind, and spirit. Our mission and ministries are vessels to carry out the good God expects.

Please consider making a gift to the Sisters of St. Joseph Mission & Ministries Foundation.

We are grateful to be the recipients of your goodness.

On behalf of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, I wish you a happy, healthy, and peace-filled spring. You are in our prayers and hearts, today and always.

Sr. Mary

Mary Drexler, SSJ
President
Sisters of St. Joseph
of Northwestern
Pennsylvania



To make a gift, visit us online at ssjmmf.org, scan the QR code above, or use the enclosed envelope.



SSJ Leadership: (L-R): Carol Morehouse, SSJ;
Mary Drexler, SSJ; Phyllis McCracken, SSJ

Transforming grace is the power of love. It is a gift which draws us closer to God.

If we acknowledge our need for transformation, we will experience the limitlessness of God's grace. That grace is transformational for each of us, if we are open to it.

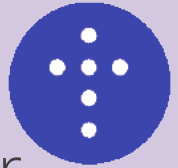
In his book, *Living Confidently in God's Unfailing Love*, Jerry Bridges writes, "The basis of our relationship with God is often on what we do rather than the acceptance of God's grace which transforms us in and by love."

Let us pray to be open to the grace of transformative love—that we might reflect that love to our neighbors.

Mary Drexler, SSJ
President

Phyllis McCracken, SSJ
Treasurer

Carol Morehouse, SSJ
Secretary



we remember

Deceased Sisters

Jean Baptiste DiLuzio, SSJ
March 30, 2024

Elizabeth "Betty" Ruza, SSJ
December 15, 2023

Deceased Associates

Gail Smith
March 6, 2024

Do you want to find
or re-connect with
one of our Sisters?



Do you have a prayer
request or special
intention?



Visit ssjerie.org where you can search for a Sister by her first name, last name, or former religious name. You can also submit your prayer requests on our website, via email at prayercall@ssjerie.org or by calling **814-836-4232**. Our Sisters pray the rosary each day for the intentions we receive.



Connecting with God ✚ Connecting with You

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Ministry News and Happenings

SSJ Neighborhood Network's youth programs continue to be a bright spot in its ministry. After-school tutoring is up and running and enrichment programs and field trips have included making tie blankets and meeting the dogs and cats at the ANNA Shelter. Applications for our Youth Work Experience are open for teenagers 14-17 years old. Thank you to our tutors and field trip chaperones who make these opportunities possible.



St. James Haven (Meadville) ended 2023 serving 130 men, offering the highest number of bed nights (2865) since opening in 1997. Our Third Thursday dinners continue to be a success. In February, we



served jambalaya and corn bread, sponsored by Allegheny College and Remax.

St. Patrick's Haven (Erie) officially launched its 40th anniversary with a PSA campaign and volunteer appreciation brunch. We're choosing to 'commemorate' rather than celebrate the anniversary because there's nothing to celebrate about homelessness until it no longer exists. The volunteers who make St. Patrick's Haven possible were celebrated, however, at the appreciation brunch. We are blessed that Sr. Mary Fromknecht, SSJ, who founded St. Patrick's Haven 40 years ago, is still actively engaged with the Haven and attended the brunch.

