

North American Lay Fraternities

NEWS FROM LAY FRATERNITIES

Leanne (Anna) Le, from the Lay Fraternity in California, was selected as a delegate to represent the United States at the Jesus Caritas Fraternity (Secular Institute) at the International General Assembly in Paris. This assembly takes place every four years. Anna and the rest of the delegates lived together with the Franciscan Sisters during the meeting. Anna's presentation included her ministry to two parishes in her area in an effort for church members to get to know the new saint, Charles de Foucauld. She also discussed her participation in the Lay Fraternity, and an article she had written for an Orange County newspaper,

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Letter from Fr. Lenny

Dearest Friends,

I'm old enough to remember when people actually ate together at a real table, looking and listening to each other. It was the womb of what we would be looking for the rest of our lives. This was called *ecclesiolae* in Christian terms, a little church within the Church. Many people still leave home and family to belong to a religious community, just to find out that its members are just as flawed as the rest of us. Today the religious quest is a prayer form and community or some other alternative. My first seminary community was 155 young men. We were big numbers in the 60's and 70's and yet the happiest days of my life. When it worked it was a true caring community within the larger group. You chose to live with likeminded people about the same age within the bigger family. It is much the same today. The Greek college fraternities will never disappear; the human need to be valued, loved, and recognized is too great.

Today folks are still searching for prayer and community. Can it exist, does it exist? And where and how? Most Catholic parishes are anything but community. You could die on Monday, and no one will miss you on Sunday. For me this is sadly wrong. We are still going to Church without the ecclesial reality we are Church. Maybe parishes should be subdivided in some way to make us accountable to one

another.

Basic ecclesial communities have always been the key to understanding the Lay Fraternities: small groups, like-minded, similar vision, sharing the Scripture and the Eucharist with people as odd as you. It worked for me for about 30 years.

While reading the many letters of Br. Charles, I observed that it was

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**"We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."
— Dorothy Day**

Community

Editor's Desk

As I wrote in this issue of "Desert Ramblings," my husband and I recently took a combined family vacation/ family reunion through "The Great American West." At the end of our travels (in a rental car), we took a plane back from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. As we walked through the quiet airport (compared to LAX!) to our gate, I saw a tall, young religious sister in full habit, sitting up straight and praying silently the Liturgy of the Hours. Her face appeared shiny and angelic. She was obviously waiting for her flight group to be called, since she had a carry-on bag with her. Every flight passenger sat quite a distance from her (including us) so as not to disturb her. Clearly, this stark image is the exact opposite of community.

Real life religious community is described by our guest writer, Little Sister Mary Roberta in her article, "Religious Life & Community." Our other contributor, Daisy Ramos from the Lay Fraternity of California, describes how participation in the Lay Fraternity supports the vocations of all members – the single, divorced, widowed, and married. In addition, the fraternity also helps to support those members who have taken vows. Susan, our South Dakota member we visited on our vacation, has taken the vow of chastity. Anna, who is featured in the "News from Lay

*Fr. Lenny**Continued from page 1*

first of all the insight of Foucauld, who envisioned small monastic communities - nothing like the rich and powerful monasteries. He wanted something bite-sized; something personal, simple and yet intimate. His writings are filled with the progression of his thought on religious life after scrupulously writing pages and pages of rules for his community that he never saw. In essence he wrote for himself.

"I no longer want a monastery which is too secure, I want a small monastery, like the house of a poor workman who is not sure if tomorrow he will find work and bread, who with all his being shares the suffering of the world."
— Charles de Foucauld

Br. Charles succeeded so well that the crowds came as in the Gospel. Very quickly the chapel, the cells, and the infirmary that

the soldiers had built for him with sun-dried clay bricks were invaded. It was not a hermitage: it was a beehive, dubbed "the fraternity" by the occupants. "I have between sixty and a hundred visits per day," he wrote. Beggars, the sick, slaves.

Wanting a small community of solitude and prayer, he was the seed that fell to the ground as he wanted to be. Today that little seed has grown to 13,000 members in 20 recognized groups in the world. These communities of followers choose to be small and contemplative. They are the hidden workers that no one sees, yet make an unseen difference in our lives.

The theme of community is a difficult one. It hits at the heart who will we love, and who will love us. The experience of the many Charles de Foucauld communities is small groups, maybe big family

size, always the family as the model. It is a real tragedy for me that the few lay fraternities we have had in the USA has come and gone. We had several strong little groups, and then things happened in people's lives. We are graced to have a new Lay Fraternity in California, which started in January 2016.

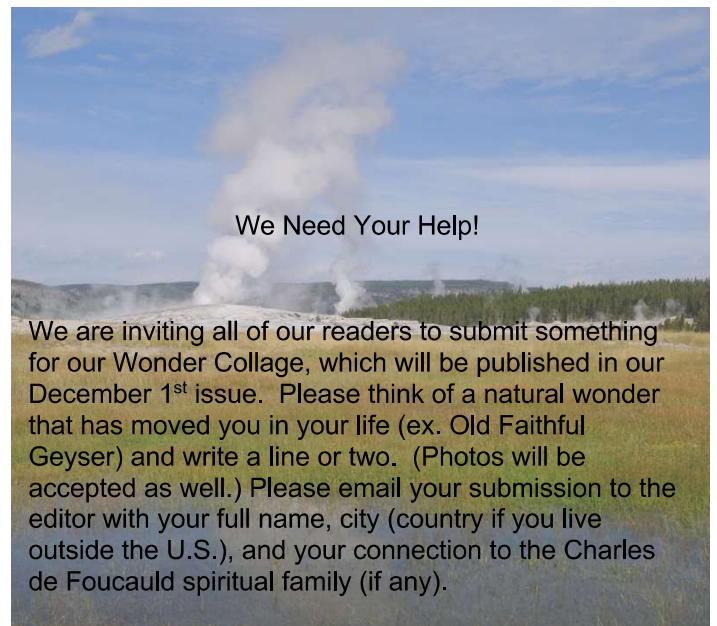
You know my love for you, and how much I have been motivated for over 50 years with what has become my personal mission to share the person of Charles de Foucauld, so that you may better know the Jesus of Nazareth. There are so many different ways of incarnating His Gospel, and many new communities use Br. Charles's model. No two are the same. In recent years I began the Companions, which is a topic for another newsletter ☺.

Your little brother,
Fr Lenny

Editor's Desk Concluded

Fraternities" in this issue, has taken the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as a member of the Secular Institute, Jesus Caritas Fraternity.

The theme for our next issue (Dec. 1st) is "Wonder." The deadline for submission of articles is Nov. 27th. Peace and blessings to you during this autumn season.

**We Need Your Help!**

We are inviting all of our readers to submit something for our Wonder Collage, which will be published in our December 1st issue. Please think of a natural wonder that has moved you in your life (ex. Old Faithful Geyser) and write a line or two. (Photos will be accepted as well.) Please email your submission to the editor with your full name, city (country if you live outside the U.S.), and your connection to the Charles de Foucauld spiritual family (if any).

NEWS FROM LAY FRATERNITIES

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"Eucharist and My Consecrated Life in the Midst of the World."

Arlene Moeller and her husband, Ken, met up with Arlene's brother, cousin, and their wives at Glacier National Park, Montana. Their family reunion also included a visit to Yellow Stone National Park, and Mt. Rushmore. After they said their goodbyes to family, Arlene and Ken drove to the home of Lay Fraternity member, Susan Grimme, who moved to Aberdeen, South Dakota about four years ago. On Saturday, August 26th we took Susan out to

dinner. On Sunday we attended Mass at Susan's parish, Sacred Heart Church, followed by lunch, which included Susan's daughter Christina. At 4:00 pm Arlene and Susan participated in the monthly Lay Fraternity Zoom Meeting, which was cut down to one hour since Arlene and Ken still had to drive to Sioux Falls that day. Arlene commented that it was a strange experience trying out Susan's new recliner during the meeting – the same chair that was viewed (and extolled by Susan) on Zoom during the past few months!



Jesus Caritas Fraternity delegates from different countries in Asia. Anna is on the far right, representing USA.



Arlene, Susan, and Christina (left to right), enjoying fellowship at lunch prior to Lay Fraternity Zoom meeting.

Living our Vocation in the Lay Fraternity

As a member of a small community in Southern California (Lay Fraternity of Charles de Foucauld), I have come across people of different vocations. Whether we are called to a single, divorced, widowed, or married lifestyle, we are all kept busy giving our time and attention to ministry.

In my perspective our community is focused on striving to achieve abandonment to God's will just as St. Charles de Foucauld did. We read about our exemplary dear companion's life and persevere to follow in

his steps. We do this with simplicity as our modern situations allow.

Our fraternity shares with each other once a month our troubles, triumphs, and our process of overcoming barriers. As Saint Rose of Lima said, "Without the struggle of afflictions, it is impossible to reach the height of grace. The gift of grace increases as the struggles increase." All of this leads us to a life of prayer. This includes prayer requests that outsiders have asked us to pray for (knowing we are a prayer-committed community).

Our community also reads and reflects on scripture, particularly Sunday's gospel. As Saint Cyprian of Carthage said: "Be constantly committed to prayer or to reading scripture; by praying, you speak to God, In reading, God speaks to you." We incorporate Jesus's message to our circumstances and intertwine St. Charles and how he dealt with daily life.

Being single, divorced, widowed, or married, we dedicate our lives to Jesus. We trust that Jesus sees the bigger picture. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes, "Who gives you the day will give you also the things necessary for the day."

- Daisy Ramos

Desert Ramblings by Arlene Moeller

The American Psychological Association has posted an excellent article on the internet, "The Risks of Social Isolation," which was written in 2019. One of the research articles cited is especially disturbing. According to a meta-analysis conducted at Brigham Young University, lack of social connection heightens health risks as much as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day or having Alcohol Use Disorder. It was also discovered that loneliness and social isolation significantly increase risk for premature death.

I personally am very fortunate to experience connection through the Lay Fraternity, my marriage, my family, and so forth. Unfortunately, there are many people in our communities who are disconnected for one reason or another. As a volunteer for St. Vincent de Paul, I experience firsthand visitors to the center who are homeless and/or impoverished. For most of these visitors, the human contact that the volunteers provide seem to be just as important as receiving the free toiletries, clothing vouchers, and bagged lunches. For many, eating the free hot breakfast on the patio with other visitors will be the highlight of their week, a time when they can feel a sense of community.

I can truly say that the importance of in-person social connections really hit home during the relatively recent pandemic. I missed the casual conversation at my work office and chatting with the waitress next door. Providing therapy over Zoom was definitely not the same as actually entering the client's home and making an in-person connection. (This was especially true with some of my clients who were young, hyperactive boys!)

One of the places my husband and I visited recently was Sioux Falls, South Dakota. As we were driving in the town, I noticed a church named "Connection Church." Hmm, I thought, the name goes right along with the theme of our upcoming NALF Newsletter! Looking at the church's website, I only had to read the second sentence to find the word community: "We desire to glorify God by multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ. We do this by emphasizing the gospel, community, and mission."

Perhaps our beloved Pope Francis will in the future be remembered as the "Connection Pope." This summer Pope Francis was in Portugal, France, and even Mongolia. He also recently offered to mediate a peace agreement between Russia and the Ukraine. Viva La Papa!!

Do you have news or information to share? Please send an email to the editor.

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Wonder

Please submit your articles for the December 2023 issue by November 27, 2023 to nalf@moeller2001.com.

Religious Life & Community

By LS Mary Roberta Revering

When I joined our community of Little Sisters, I assumed that it would be smooth-sailing. After all, a group of like-minded women all wanting to live the Gospel within a particular charism should be simple - right?! Well, it didn't take long to realize that I needed to accommodate all the different ways each one envisioned this particular life-style. Not only that, but each ones' ups and downs needed to be taken into consideration, and I needed to deal with my own mood swings and temperament.

Before community, working an eight-hour shift meant just that. Leave the work environment and relax wherever home was. In community we woke up in the same house or apartment, prayed together, ate together and while some went off to work, the others took care of the house chores. Then in the evening, there was dinner and time together again. I learned pretty soon that I couldn't avoid challenges with the others nor hide from them. This is a challenge I live with to this very day, sometimes more or less successfully.

Nevertheless, I'm discovering that these challenges and struggles haven't weakened my resolve to want to live community. On the contrary they've actually strengthened my desire in a mysterious way that I don't quite understand, but I am grateful to believe that community life can be a sign of the kingdom.

To reinforce that belief, I'd like to share a couple of experiences which resonated with our neighbors in a positive way. A neighbor noticed that she hadn't seen our eldest sister for a while. So, when she spotted her again one day, she said, "I was so afraid something may have happened to her. What a relief to see the four of you again!"

On another occasion three of us were sitting on the steps outside on a summer evening, which was always a draw for the children. When the fourth sister came down to bring one of us the portable phone, one of the children on seeing her come down the staircase announced gleefully, "And here comes the fourth one!" Such moments help me appreciate our life in community - just maybe it's well worth the energy put into it all.

Editor's Note: LS Mary Roberta Revering has been living community with the Little Sisters of Jesus for over fifty years. She is currently residing in Baltimore.



LS Mary Roberta, wearing the gray "deerest" shirt, is shown living her best life in community.