COVID-19 is wreaking havoc in our lives. We are scrambling to understand how an invisible force, an enemy we cannot detect with the naked eye, is bringing the world to a screeching halt. It is literally taking our breath away.

As a community of faith, ARCWP is grasping to understand where God is in all of this, especially as we find ourselves exiled from our parish communities. While we are connecting with God in varied and creative ways, adjusting to a new normal, we are mindful that the least among us endure the worst in any crisis situation.

For over 20 years, I was involved in a mission that supported the Dalit Caste (Untouchables) in India. This community, living in unimaginable poverty, has been weighing on my mind and heart since the crisis began. In good times, the Dalit Caste suffers from lack of dignified work, safe and sufficient supplies of water, sanitation, nutrient-rich food, and adequate health care. In the midst of a pandemic, their already difficult situation transforms into a nightmare. Social distancing, proper handwashing, and access to needed medical supplies, such as ventilators, are not realities for this part of the globe. These are exacerbated by over-crowded slums. Unrecorded deaths and unrecognized burials are typical. Yet, in the midst of this suffering, there is profound grace to be accessed in the spirituality of the poorest of the poor, because it challenges us not only to look beyond our own needs, but also to be concerned for and to care for those less fortunate. Moreover, we must take an honest look at the blessings we often take for granted.

Yes, we are all in this together, but the level of suffering endured is not equally distributed. Some suffer more than others.

A few days before Easter, I found myself sick with symptoms after I was exposed to the corona virus while officiating at a burial for a COVID-19 victim. Learning of my situation, a friend from Chennai, India, an ordained priest in the Dalit community, sent me suggestions on how to stay healthy during this crisis using ancient holistic Indian remedies, one of which is meditation (e.g. chanting traditional Indian bhajans). His suggestions for using herbs, music, and breathing techniques are not only a part of ancient Indian tradition but are also found in the writings of a master Catholic holistic healer, St. Hildegard of Bingen.

St. Hildegard coined the theological concept of “viriditas” to describe the divine greening life force, which keeps us rooted in mind, body, and spirit. One way we support a green lifestyle is by taking time to sit and focus on the most important task we do each day—breathing.

(continued on page 4)
Book Review

Book reviews by Maureen McGill

From the Editor

This may be one of the strangest book reviews ever written. For that matter, it may actually be a non-book review. I am trying to cover several works surrounding Buddhism. Because of COVID-19, those of us who are 65+ years or have prior physical conditions which impair our ability to fight infections have been told to stay at home. I am complying with this directive. That has led me to explore new vistas.

My daughter Erin and her family spent 18 months in Hong Kong shortly before the pandemic. During that time, they traveled extensively in the Far East. Their adventures took them to Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Borneo, and Japan where she had considerable amounts of time to explore Far East cultures and religions. Early in her college career, she studied Buddhism under a Jesuit priest at Loyola University in New Orleans, so she was somewhat familiar with the subject. With all this in mind, she recommended that I read some of Thich Nhat Hanh’s work. I did and I found great spiritual riches.

The first book I read was Vietnam, Lotus in a Sea of Fire. This title appealed to me since my husband is a decorated Vietnam war combat veteran. After a few pages, I realized that Thich Nhat Hanh’s point of view is quite different from what the United States government wanted people to believe about the war. He points out that the average Vietnamese farmer viewed the United States military as invaders rather than the partners that Washington portrayed. Moreover, the Buddhists felt left out of the turmoil. They were neither Communists nor backers of the French-installed government which the United States supported. Even though the French were defeated at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Vietnamese government they installed remained in power. The Buddhists never felt included in the government which was mostly Roman Catholic. This was quite an eye opener for me. Members of our armed forces, especially our military academy graduates including my husband, were convinced that the United States was saving the Vietnamese people from communism. (Keep in mind that this occurred in the 1950s and 1960s.) When we try to look at mid-twentieth-century actions with twenty-first century eyes, vision can get somewhat distorted.

Originally, I had planned to review Thich Nhat Hahn’s book, No Mud, No Lotus. I found that the book can be summarized on the fly leaf where Thich Nhat Hanh is quoted, “Most people are afraid of suffering. But suffering is a kind of mud to help the lotus flower of happiness grow. There can be no lotus flower without the mud.” This is the heart and soul of the book, which contains suggestions for transforming suffering and practices for happiness. Simple? Maybe, maybe not.

During the period of time in which I stayed home to prevent the spread of COVID-19, I also read Carrin Dunne’s book, Buddha and Jesus: Conversations. This is the book I most want to recommend. In Ms. Dunne’s work, I found conversations which could have happened between Buddha and Jesus and several juxtapositions of their teachings. The dialogues are beyond fascinating and contain mental food for thought to last a lifetime.

We have so much to learn from our Buddhist brothers and sisters!

Maureen McGill

There can be no lotus flower without the mud.

Maureen McGill was ordained a priest in January 2014. She was a founding member of St. Francis Ecumenical Catholic Church in St. Petersburg, Florida. A retired attorney, she served as General Magistrate in the First Judicial Circuit of Florida and as Guardian ad Litem Circuit Director. Maureen is married to Gerald McGill, an admiralty and maritime attorney. They have 2 adult daughters and 5 grandchildren.

From the Editor

By: Nori Kieran-Meredith

This issue’s theme was not difficult to determine; with the outbreak of COVID-19, there was only one reasonable choice.

ARCWP’s response was immediate and truly significant: celebration of the Eucharist on line with multiple consecrations. Truly a giant leap forward for the Church! For the exciting details, check out Bridget Mary Meehan’s column.

Deb Trees enchants us with the life of Blessed Julian of Norwich, whose voice rings down the ages, promising that all will be well.

Looking at current coping mechanisms, Shanon Sterringer, a distinguished addition to the newsletter; Maureen McGill, our steadfast and inspirational book reviewer, and I write of coping with the misery of the pandemic via Eastern prayer and healing traditions. ♦

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The Roman Catholic Church has a tradition of praying to saints during times of trouble. There are particular saints dedicated to specific conditions, circumstances, ailments, and worries. As we go through this pandemic, looking for a saint for our time to hold our hand, we find that there are so many. How do we choose?

There are St. Sebastian, St. Rocco, and the 14 Holy Helpers, a group of saints actively prayed to during the 1400s and 1500s, when the Black Plague was rampant, killing one third of the population. See the story here in the CNS:

Some people have their favorites – St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Bernadette, and St. Francis of Assisi.

The Roman Catholic Church has saints to cover so many human conditions. The need to “pray to” and know that others have gone through something similar can leave us feeling not so alone. This seems to be significant as we deal with a pandemic affecting the world.

Enter: Blessed Julian of Norwich. Recently, Julian kept surfacing in my life. In a three-day period, her name and presence came forward from diverse resources, all looking to her for a special focus of prayer and wisdom. Especially in these days of pandemic, we need to hear God’s words through her writing: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

Blessed Julian of Norwich is indeed a saint for our times!

Although Julian is not listed as one of the Roman Catholic official patron saints of plagues, she just as well might be. She lived in the 1300s to 1400s during the bubonic plague. As an English mystic, Julian was an anchoress who lived in one room attached to her church in Norwich. She had no physical contact with others in her community. There she prayed and was a spiritual director for women and men of her day. Becoming sick herself and near death, she had a series of visions or “shewings.” From these experiences she wrote a book, Revelations of Divine Love, the first recorded woman writing in English; a major accomplishment of Middle Ages’ scholarship. Julian’s writings reveal a special relationship with Jesus through his passion. “He said not ‘Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be dis-eased’; but he said, “Thou shalt not be overcome.”

Let us embrace this woman who has undergone what we are experiencing. Let us support her good work and theology, and her candidacy as a doctor of the Church. Let us share God’s vision that all is and shall be well, with ourselves, our families, and our communities, especially in this difficult era.

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A Prayer Style for the Pandemic
by: Nori Kieran-Meredith

Over the last few months, I have been exploring and adapting the Buddhist tradition of tonglen. While it is not particularly suited to Western prayer, with a little re-shaping, I found it ideal for this time.

I start with imagining Jesus joining me. Typically, He puts an arm around my shoulder, promising me that He will facilitate this process. I state an intention, usually personal to me, and synch it with my breath. For example, “Breathe in anxiety.” Then we visualize a crowd in front of us. Individuals suffering from anxiety stand in supplication. We listen for Jesus’ response. As a rule, it runs, “Replace with loving kindness.” He and I alternate at length, “Breathe in anxiety.” “Replace with loving kindness.” “Breathe in anxiety.” As He brings healing to the supplicants. It is a thrill to pray with Him and not just to Him, and I am secure with Him beside me.

The possibilities for similar prayers are limitless. Here are just a few: “Breathe in overload;” elicited the response: “Breathe out: I am at the helm” (of our make-believe sailboat). Or “Skim off chaos” with its response, “Replace with My resourcefulness.” As He brings healing to the supplicants. It is a thrill to pray with Him and not just to Him, and I am secure with Him beside me.

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is enduring so much in this pandemic: “Breathe in Your heartache,” and “Breathe out my love.”

What I treasure so much about this prayer style is it works all three ways. It strengthens those prayed for and allows me to shoulder some of Jesus’ suffering. It profits me, as well, for the several minutes of anxiety, overload, or chaos dissipate with time, to my advantage.

It’s a wonderful prayer form, easy to remember, and ideal for this time!
The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests consists of women and men committed to a renewed model of ordained ministry in an inclusive community of equals in the Roman Catholic Church. We seek equality for women in the Church that includes decision making and ordination.

“In Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

“Pure air produces viridity.” – St. Hildegard of Bingen

Find a quiet spot and bring to mind a peaceful image. While focusing on the image, concentrate on breathing in light and love and exhaling fear and anxiety.

Our breath is the most powerful tool we possess for healing. It is the divine life force that animates and sustains us, without which we cannot survive. The entire earth is struggling to breathe right now, and some areas are struggling harder than others. This is the ultimate lesson of COVID-19: we are one capillary intimately connected within the universal lung.

Whether we are living here in the USA or across the globe in India, every aspect of our lives has been altered by COVID-19. As we continue to work together to overcome this pandemic and adjust to a “new normal,” may we stay committed to discovering new and creative ways to stay healthy in mind, body, and spirit as one human family.

I created a “Breathing with Bhajans” meditation video to share. It can be accessed through the following link: https://youtu.be/aN8blClgI3o

Shanon Sterringer, Ph.D., D.Min., and ARCWP priest, is founding pastor of The Community of St. Hildegard at the Hildegard Haus Church and Shrine in Fairport Harbor, Ohio. She is the owner of The Green Shepherdess fair-trade gift shop and is a published author. Shanon is a sought-after speaker on the topic of St. Hildegard in the US and abroad and is married with three beautiful daughters.

In 2002, on the Danube River, seven women were validly ordained Roman Catholic priests. The principal consecrating Roman Catholic male bishop who ordained our first women bishops is one with apostolic succession in communion with the Pope within the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, all qualified candidates who are presented to our bishops for ordination are ordained in apostolic succession by the laying on of hands. According to man-made canon law, the Church may consider us illicit, but our ordinations are valid.

In our cyberspace gatherings, we are staying connected and becoming part of the world’s healing. As we open ourselves to the needs and sufferings of our sisters and brothers in this pandemic, in God’s heart, we are one big family. Here we can release our fears, pray together, and experience grace uniting us in compassionate solidarity to work together for healing and justice in our world.

For such a time as this, ARCWP was born!