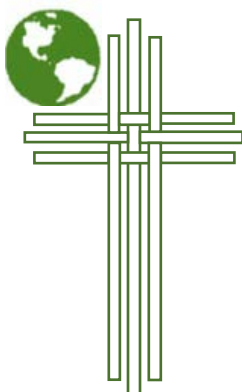


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CUSAN

Christmas, 2025



CUSA

An Apostolate of Persons with
Chronic Illness and/or Disability

What Is CUSA?

CUSA is an apostolate which since its founding in 1947 has united its members in the Cross of Christ so that they "FIND GOD'S WILL OR PURPOSE IN THEIR SUFFERING." Physical or mental illness, or disability or chronic pain has always been the sole requirement for membership.

Although we are not able at this time to accept new members, a similar apostolate is springing up—The Peace in the Storm Project—and we are glad to recommend it to anyone looking for support and companionship as they or their loved ones deal with the above challenges.

By uniting and collectively offering our crosses of suffering to Christ for the benefit of mankind, it is possible to help both ourselves and each other, spiritually and fraternally, as CUSANS have done for so many years.

Acting Administrator: Joan Donnelly

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The CUSAN

Christmas, 2025

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In This Issue

A blessed Christmas season to all of you. And welcome to this final issue of *The CUSAN*. Yes, our final issue. Goodbyes are never easy, but thanks to our writers present and past, we hope these final articles lighten your burdens, spark happy memories, draw you closer to our dear Lord, and strengthen your peace and joy. In other words, fill you with Christmas blessings.

Here Joan Donnelly will give an update on the present state of CUSA, and share a timeless Christmas message from CUSA's foundress, Mrs. Laure Brunner. Inspirational words from Father Jerry Bracken and Father Lawrence are here too, and members Carolyn Humphreys, Anna Marie Sopko, and Shirley Bowling also have reflections or stories to tell. Even yours truly tells a bit of CUSA's history. And you will hear from Father Hopkins, Betty O'Brien, and Jerry Filan too.

Following this short preview of the contents of this issue, I just want to say how grateful I am to have been able to serve as editor of *The CUSAN* for these past ten years. Thank you, readers and writers. Thank you for all you have given me. God bless you all, and may your friendship with Him and with each other that this little magazine has fostered be a constant reminder of how much He loves you. You are precious in His eyes.



Gratefully,
Dolores Steinberg, editor

Message from Joan Donnelly

Acting Administrator of CUSA

You are receiving this issue of *The CUSAN* after the Christmas holiday. However, I wanted to share with our members and friends a Christmas message from Laure Brunner published in the 1962 Christmas issue of *The CUSAN* more than 75 years ago. Why? Because in December, The Robert Brunner Foundation, which solely funded CUSA since CUSA's beginning, was officially terminated as a U.S. charity. Without its funding, CUSA was also terminated. This is the last issue of *The CUSAN* you will receive. And I wanted Laure Brunner to have the last word.

CUSA has been an important part of my life and some of yours for many years. Group letters, Spiritual Advisors, Section Group Leaders Letters, in-person Section Leaders Meetings, involvement with NCPD, and most recently, Electronic Group Letters. It has been a unique ministry for the disabled, providing spirituality and friendship on a very personal level. We are grateful for the leadership Anna Marie Sopko provided during CUSA's most successful years.

Laure Brunner, we have tried to remain loyal to your vision. You will always be in our prayers.



(Mrs. Brunner's message follows; see next page.)

“Just Between Us”—Christmas, 1962

My very dear friends,

We are now approaching the joyful feast of Christmas; how close to one another we shall feel as we pray before the crib of Bethlehem, even in our own rooms! Let us all join together in the prayers of Christmas Day, asking the Little Child for the gifts of Faith, Hope and Charity, that we may love Him more and more. Dear Little Child who became man—leaving heaven to enter this world and suffer and die for our salvation. How thankful we must be in the hope that one day we will be with God!

Last year it was a great joy for me to be with my dear Cusans, even for an hour, at one of the New York Days of Recollection. . . . It was so good to be with all of you, to feel that our prayers were so deeply united, and to see all your smiling faces: happy because they are full of the love of God. May we be more and more filled with that love!

We can never forget the great aim of our CUSA: to bring souls to Our Lord. Although we have many different group intentions, they all bring us to this one great purpose. Let us especially pray for the salvation of souls this Christmas when the world is in such great need of our prayers. With all of you, I offer my prayers and sufferings that He may transform them into spiritual help for the world—and especially for my dear Cusans.

Lovingly yours,

Laure Brunner

A LETTER
TO
CUSANS



Rev. Jerry Bracken, C.P.
CUSA National Chaplain



Dear CUSANS,

When our editor Dolores Steinberg asked if I could write something for the last issue of *The CUSAN*, I said I would do my best. What should I say about the end of something so good? Since this last issue is to come out right before or right after Christmas, I looked for guidance from the Sunday Mass Readings for Advent. Then I looked at the issues themselves; the first ones I had were for 1993/1994. Then I looked at the two issues for the 50th Jubilee of CUSA and those for the 75th Jubilee to see what might be said.

So, from the Second Sunday of Advent I found Paul's words to the Romans (15:4). Some words are for the present situation, others for the future. Of the present, Paul writes, "Brothers and sisters: For everything that was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that by perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we may continue to have hope."

It seems CUSANS took these words of Paul to heart, both in their goals and in *The CUSAN* itself, namely: "to be in an apostolate which unites its disabled or chronically ill members to FIND A PURPOSE IN

SUFFERING” and by CUSANs “uniting and collectively offering their crosses of suffering to Christ for the benefit of mankind, they help themselves and each other, spiritually and fraternally.”

So many places in *The CUSAN* did I see CUSANs helping each other, spiritually and fraternally. In a 1994 issue of *The CUSAN* I read Joan Letulle’s praises of the first editor, Kathrin Taylor, who had just died. Joan wrote, “Kathrin helped me in another more secular way. I always wanted to be a writer. . . . But I didn’t have much success. . . . I began to send poems to the Newsletter. . . . Kathrin began to encourage me to send other things. . . . In using these outlets, I began to feel very good knowing that, in some small way, I may have helped or inspired someone.”

In sharing what CUSA meant for him, Anthony Lovelady wrote, “In CUSA I’ve found out what friendship really means and I’ve found through these individuals just what God is like and how God wants each of us to treat one another . . . to be a more gentle and compassionate being.”

As for encouragement, I found the following in the 50th anniversary issue. Anna Marie Sopko, the administrator then, wrote of the day of recollection in NYC given by Father Lawrence Jagdfeld, the editor of *The CUSAN* at the time. The “one thing that almost every one commented on after the Day was Father’s beautiful Liturgy, part of which he offered in Sign Language. It served to remind all of us that prayer can be not only the spoken word, but every action of our body.” Then there was something from the “Diary of

Jerry Filan,” the co-founder with Laure Brunner of “Catholic Union of the Sick in America,” CUSA. With his own sense of humor he described what happened when at Lourdes, waiting for his sister, Mary, as he sat in his wheelchair with the palm of his right hand resting on his leg and facing upward. Someone walked by and dropped money in his hand for “no reason at all!”

As for humor, Frank Reilly tells his memory of when the nuns had the crippled in his building play the team of the mentally challenged in the other building. His team had two responsibilities: instruct the mentally challenged on how to play and be nice! So Frank’s instruction of how to call “balls and strikes” went this way: “Imagine a box over home plate. That piece of wood there with a point on it.” The other responded. “I don’t see a box.” Frank’s reply: “It’s invisible. The box is from the batter’s knees to his chest.” The response, “You’re lying. There’s no box there.” Now seeing the humor of it all, Frank wrote, “I think my side was too serious about baseball.”

In the 75th Anniversary issues I read some things about the meaning of suffering. One is from Carol Ann Velten. “Suffering cannot be an end in itself; it would serve no useful purpose if it did not teach the suffering individual a lesson useful to him in the future.” Another is what she learned from an article by Grace Hensel Davis: “You must learn to accept as well as to give. It is important to be able to do this in order to give pleasure to others, too. Receiving with gratitude is as important as giving, for it is a generous God . . . taking care of our needs.”

Another view comes from the 2025 Spring issue by Carolyn Humphreys: “Acknowledging our sorrow, seeing beyond it, and remembering the good that preceded the sorrow are essential in finding joy in sorrow.”

Perhaps the above is what Betty O’Brien (one of the first members of CUSA) wrote of in her poem:

What do I hope that life shall give?
A day in which I learn to live.

A minute here, a minute there,
That teaches me the perfect prayer.

An hour in which I fight to win;
A second when I’ll conquer sin.

I hope for this in all I do
Because, dear Lord, my goal is You.

So with these thoughts of Betty O’Brien, may I present what Paul is asking us to do now that *The CUSAN* comes to an end. “May the God of perseverance and encouragement grant that you may live in harmony with one another, following in the example of Jesus Christ, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 15: 5–6).”

With the goals you have achieved from CUSA and the sharing you’ve made with each other in your groups and in *The CUSAN* you can certainly fulfill these words of Paul and follow in the footsteps of Christ Himself.

Let us pray for each other,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Jerry, C. O.", written in dark ink.

Coming to Know Jesus

Fr. Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.

CUSA Administrator from 2007 through 2021

Thank you, Father Lawrence, you for what you say here, so central to our life and being, printed with your permission from two of your homilies for the Christmas season. Your writing, ministry, and example have been a priceless gift.

Each of us can reflect on where we are, in terms of knowing Jesus. Each of us can probably relate to a time when we knew “about” Jesus, and may have “practiced” that faith, to one degree or another. But the experience of knowing Jesus—experiencing his love and mercy, personally—is quite powerful. It is freeing, emboldening, and it sets us apart from the world around us and its ways.

Each time Jesus is met by someone, the life of that person is transformed. Like them, we have come to recognize who Jesus truly is and have had our own experience of being changed: converted, molded, purified, and refined. We have been forgiven, challenged, blessed, and consoled. Our participation in the life of discipleship means that our relationship with God and with our neighbor has also been changed. We are called to share the experience of transformation with others, to help them find the experience of forgiveness and healing, of peace and joy that only Jesus can give.

Each time a life is transformed through the experience of meeting Jesus, the incarnation happens

once again. Jesus becomes flesh for each of us when we first meet him. In him, we experience God. As the Christmas prefaces remind us over and over again, the invisible God becomes visible. The mystery of the incarnation is not something that happened once; the incarnation happens each time that God meets one of us.

The same can be said for the Eucharist that we celebrate. When we receive Jesus in the consecrated bread and the consecrated cup, Jesus is physically present in our lives. We are privileged to experience the mystery of the incarnation each and every time.

During these days of the Christmas season our response has often been: “All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.” Each time we share the experience of meeting Jesus another person, we enable them to see God’s saving power in their lives. Just as John the Baptist introduced Andrew and the other disciple to Jesus and facilitated their transformation, it is our mission to continue to introduce Jesus to others.

F. Lawrence



All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God.

Hope: A Golden Thread

Carolyn Humphreys
Passive Member

With the conclusion of the Jubilee Year of Hope on the Feast of Epiphany, January 6, 2026, we are grateful to be able to share these reflections on hope by Carolyn. They are taken from her book, Everyday Holiness (Wipf and Stock: 2018), and appear in the chapter, Hope: Evergreen.

Hope is a thread that should be woven through a life, not simply stitched into occasional patches with a few cheery words or scattered good deeds. Hope sustains optimism, the belief that something better can be attained. In his *Summa*, Thomas Aquinas said that hope is an activity concerned with a future good that is difficult to accomplish, but that is capable of achieving, with the help of God. Hope puts all in the hands of God with confidence. To maintain hope when a situation appears to be hopeless takes strong faith. “But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isa 40:31).

A hope-filled soul lifts thoughts and aspirations to something beyond the physical or mental self. With confidence in God, new ways are found toward the positive and the good. Everything a person does impacts humanity in a positive or negative way. Hope is reflected in one’s thoughts, words and actions. Sweet are the graces that come from having an orientation of hope.

* * *

Hope opens up human hearts. Like curtains slowly parting to admit a winter dawn into a home, hope allows beams of light to make their way into the hearts of humankind. Even when standing in cold darkness, hope reveals a verdant landscape beyond our present desolation. Hope lifts thoughts out of the dark valley toward the inner flame of light. We look forward and move forward to that which gives us a reason to live. Hope brings beauty to a repugnant environment and sustains sanity during intolerable times. Victor Frankl, in his classic book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which was based on his experience in Nazi concentration camps, shows how most people who hold on to the hope of achieving something positive can survive the worst of human conditions. To believe that something good will be fulfilled is a strong incentive for life. Indeed, living in hope is healthier than living in fear. To share darkness with God will help change things for the better.

* * *

As she lived her life as a wife and mother, Mary is our exemplar of the highest hope and complete trust in God. She walked in faith and in mystery, but maintained a deep peace. She came and went quietly, her house was undistinguished among the others in her village. She tended the fire, scoured the earthenware vessels, trimmed the lamps, cooked and sewed. The secret of her hope was that her daily mundane tasks were accomplished with great love and confidence in God's plan for her. In the evenings, we can imagine her



holding Jesus close to her heart, still pondering and perhaps softly singing a lullaby as Joseph quietly whittles a wooden toy for him.

Hope was Mary's stronghold. She held onto it in times of great concern, and there were many. After giving birth to Jesus, she traveled in haste to Egypt. While on another journey, she lost her son.

Like most women of her time, she worked from dawn to dusk. She was a widow at an early age with a teenage son. She watched helplessly as Jesus was cursed and spit upon, and stayed with him during his agony and death. Mary lived with a vision of hope rooted in faith. Hope drew her beyond herself, her fears and her worries. God was the tower of strength to whom she clung no matter what happened. She kept moving forward even though she did not understand what was happening. She lived the will of God perfectly and urges us to do the same. The will of God is our sanctification. . . .

We are here to spread love and hope as Mary did. . . . As Mary is a woman of hope, so we must try to be signs of hope to others. A kind deed, positive word or gentle smile can spark hope in the heart. . . . "We ask you, Mother of Christ, to be our guide to the Heart of your Son. We pray to you, lead us close to him and teach us to live in intimacy with his Heart, which is the fountain of life and holiness" (John Paul II, Angelus address, September 6, 1986).



A Short Story

The children were lined up
in the cafeteria of a Catholic
elementary school for lunch.

At the head of the table was a
large pile of apples. The sister
wrote a note, and posted it on the
apple tray: "Take only one.

God is watching."

Moving further along the lunch
line, at the other end of the table
was a large pile of chocolate chip
cookies.

One child whispered to another:

"Take all you want.

God is watching the apples."



Christmas Memories

Anna Marie Sopko

Administrator of CUSA from 1976 to 2007

Anna Marie wrote this article just a year before she retired as CUSA Administrator. With a few omissions and additions for this final issue, we hope you enjoy reading it once again.

Christmas is coming as I write, and will most likely be gone as you read this. The older we get, the more real our memories of yesteryear become.

During the days of my youth, Christmas was a very special time—not only because of the coming of Christ and the arrival of Santa Claus, but also because of family traditions which kept us closely united. My grandparents came from Eastern Europe, and we still recall stories and traditions which were observed. Dad was born in 1904 and Mom in 1906, a year or so after each Grandmother arrived in Bayonne, traveling steerage in ships headed for America, a journey which usually took about six weeks. In both cases, the men came first to earn enough money to buy passage for his spouse.

Dad's Mom landed at Ellis Island, and Mom's mother arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey, where there was also an Immigration Office. I still remember my one Grandma telling of my uncle, then a two-year old baby with whom she was traveling and who naturally became very cranky on the long, confining trip. To soothe him, a Jewish woman gave him a piece of an

orange, the first time anyone from Poland, Austria-Hungary, or Russia saw fruit of that type!

What an adjustment moving to America must have been. We children naturally experienced the customs which our grandparents brought from the “fatherland.” One of our favorites was Christmas Eve supper at my Grandmother's. The table stretched from the kitchen to a sitting/and sometimes bedroom, to the living room, complete with a white tablecloth and candles. Much of the food—no meat, no knives allowed—was not to our liking, but we all had to taste. There were always a couple of extra place settings in case the Christ Child, dressed as a stranger or acquaintance, would show up during the meal.

The evening began with Grandma signing the forehead of each with a clove of garlic dipped in honey—“garlic to make one strong, and honey to keep us sweet.” Then there were the Christmas wafers—oblong white wafers with imprints of a manger scene that we again dipped in honey before eating. As for other foods—well, some satisfied our palates, and others we kids just avoided, including the dried mushroom soup flavored with sauerkraut juice, though some of us later acquired a taste for it. (My sister and brother have tried to recapture that taste, but so far they haven't succeeded.) There was always enough food to satisfy us, especially after supper when those homemade cookies and boxes of chocolates were finally brought out. Then, after clearing the table, our parents let us forage for the coins given to the Christ Child that were hidden under the tablecloth.

Particular customs and preparation of food varied in different countries, or even in different areas of the same country. Friends of ours put straw under the tablecloth to signify the hay the Christ Child lay on in the manger. We were happy that our family honored the Three Kings by using coins instead of hay! Afterwards came what we all waited for—opening the gifts. The youngest child got appointed to be Santa's helper and hand out the presents. Of course, these were just from all the aunts and uncles as Santa wouldn't actually arrive until we were at home and asleep.

Memories like these are blessings and part of every life. Why bring up memories at this time? Well, memories are a precious part of everyone's life. It was the memories of Our Blessed Mother that allowed the apostles and St. Luke to share with the infant Church the circumstances of the birth of Our Lord in His human body. Imagine how much poorer the Church would have been if we did not know of these memories. How Mary and Joseph must have, as the Gospel says, “pondered” their memories throughout their lives, as they wondered what God had planned for the days and years ahead!

For me, memories also bring to mind the early days of CUSA. Though I was not acquainted with CUSA in 1947, I did have the good fortune to have met Mr. and Mrs. Brunner, our Founders, and also to have known some of our earliest members. I witnessed and was part of CUSA's rapid growth in the early years. What lies ahead is in God's Hands. We just have to work and pray that the message of CUSA, “To find purpose in

suffering” by being a brother or sister to each other, will reach all those who need to hear it.

Christmas Day

Anna Marie Sopko

**Out of the many days of the year
There's one I like the best;
The day on which Our Lord was born,
The day of prayer and rest.**

**For on this day the angels sang
A song of praise to God,
For sending us His loving Son,
The Man Who came from God.**

**So now we praise God from above,
For all His loving care,
For all He gave to us this day,
That we may always share.**



CUSA: Some of its History

When I mentioned to a friend of mine that this was going to be the final issue of *The CUSAN*, she said that it might interest the readers if I could write something about the history of CUSA. I do have the 50th Jubilee issue of *The CUSAN*, the 25th anniversary issue, and two booklets (not yet named *The CUSAN*) for Christmas of 1950 and 1951. I thought: maybe I could get enough history for a short article from these. Or, since I don't yet have enough articles for this final issue, maybe I could find something to reprint.

With both possibilities in mind, I came across an article by Marguerite Marie Teilhard de Chardin in the Christmas 1951 issue. Really? Was she related to the Jesuit philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin? But he died in 1955. What was the relationship? And how could she be writing in 1951? With further research and reading, I learned that she was his younger sister by two years, and only lived to the age of 31, dying in 1936 after having struggled with an illness or disability from a very young age.

In the 1950 issue I also learned that in April of 1927 she, Marguerite Marie Teilhard de Chardin, was named fourth president of the Union Catholique des Malades (UCM) in France. And that it was during her time as president that the UCM spread from France to Belgium, the home country of Mrs. Laure Brunner, where it became an independent branch in 1931. And Mrs. Laure Brunner, beset by ailments that kept her bedridden much of the time, had become a member.

In 1939 Mr. and Mrs. Brunner moved to New York City. Far from the members of the Belgian UCM, Mrs. Brunner was asked by the president of the Belgian group to try starting a branch in the United States. Embracing the task with zeal, she met many obstacles. Finally, with the help of Father Thomas F. Finn of Stockbridge, MA, who became the first Chaplain, and with the collaboration of Jerry Filan, who had met some members of the UCM during his pilgrimage to Lourdes and was eager for such an apostolate in America, Mrs. Brunner's hopes and efforts were realized.

On December 8, 1947, a new UCM branch in the United States was born. It was named CUSA, the Catholic Union of the Sick Associates, later called the Catholic Union of the Sick in America, and much later, while keeping the CUSA acronym, it received its present description, An Apostolate of Persons with Chronic Illness and/or Disability.

Before I go further, a few words about the very early history of the UCM. It was founded in 1914 by a young man named Louis Peyrot—not in France, his native country, but (if what I read in these early issues is correct) in Switzerland. In his late teens he had begun medical studies, hoping to become a doctor, but tuberculosis intervened and his doctors advised him to go to a sanatorium in Switzerland. He did, and there he discovered an association for sick people that connected them to one another through a round-robin letter. He joined, and appreciated the charity and joy in the members, but found that because it was not a Catholic organization, it was missing an understanding of the

concept of suffering for souls, which, as a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, was so important to him.

If I knew French, I could tell you with more detail what happened next. *L'Apostolat d'Un Malade, Louis Peyrot Et l'Union catholique de Malades*, a book by Jean-Paul Belin, first published in 1930 and recently in 2020, would have that information. But what I learned from the CUSA magazines and from the internet was that after explaining his above thoughts to the group leader, Louis bade farewell on friendly terms, and in March, 1914 he and two friends, Jean Giradot and Charles Reinart, founded The Union Catholique des Malades (UCM).

Louis Peyrot only lived two more years, having contracted further illnesses after serving as director of a 30-bed hospital for military personnel during the First World War. He died in 1916 at the age of 28. But the UCM he founded began to grow, taking root in France, Switzerland, Belgium, and Italy. And eventually across the ocean it came—into Canada, the United States, and in 1950 was even beginning in the Philippines.

What about the history of CUSA since its 1947 founding by Mrs. Laure Brunner in New York? It seems to have grown quickly, spreading mostly by word of mouth, or by mail or phone, by its members—to friends and acquaintances, or through mention of it in magazines and newspapers. In the 25th Anniversary issue of *The CUSAN*, which was published in 1972, a graph shows that there were 1169 members in CUSA at that time, throughout all the United States and beyond! And from Anna Marie Sopko, who was administrator of CUSA from 1976 to 2007, I learned that group letters

(including braille group letters and tape-recording “letters”) were not the only means of contact between members. There were days of recollection, conferences, retreats, meetings of group leaders, even pilgrimages and other occasions where CUSANs were able to meet together and grow.

Among the members, from the very beginning, were many talented writers. Jerry Filan and Betty O’Brien were some of the first, but many followed. To mention just a few: Kathrin Taylor edited and wrote in *The CUSAN* for many years until her death in 1994. Father Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M., both edited and wrote in it from 1994 to 2015, wrote in it throughout his time as CUSA Administrator (2007 through 2021), and in all the years up to now. I must mention, too, Father Jerry Bracken, C.P., CUSA National Chaplain, whose “Letter to CUSANS” has inspired readers for many years. And Anna Marie Sopko, a gifted writer, as well. A good number of you readers, too, have been writers for *The CUSAN* over the years. It never would have lasted this long without each of you. Many thanks!

There is so much history of CUSA that I don’t know, but I hope the above tells at least a little bit of it. Times have changed, and with it, membership in CUSA. But how many people have been blessed by the sacrifices, prayers, and love that have emanated from the members, past and present, united to Christ and to each other through this fruitful apostolate. Only God knows. May His love enfold you, and bring you happily to join all the saints and all the CUSANs praying for you from above, forever.

The Editor, DS

Silence: God's First Language

Father Richard J. Hopkins

Some wise words, for this final issue, from Father Hopkins (1919–2017), a CUSA group spiritual advisor for many years.

Have you noticed how uncomfortable we can become in the midst of company when there is a brief lapse in the conversation? We become fidgety and feel that we have to say something even though it might be quite trivial or irrelevant. It seems that we do have somewhat of a fear of silence.

This may be a reason why TV or radio are often in full operation in our homes. Could it be that we might miss some breaking news or is it because we might find the silence threatening and force us to take a closer look at our innermost thoughts and where they are taking us.

We do not have too much trouble with vocal prayer even though it might be quite mechanical and suffer the consequences of routine. Contemplative prayer, on the other hand, seems to be quite beyond our reach and probably reserved to the more spiritually mature. By neglecting the role of a more contemplative prayer in our spiritual life, however, we may not be providing an opportunity for the Lord to communicate his life-giving spirit and truth. After all, silence is God's first language.

Holy Scripture reminds us that our Blessed Mother reflected upon and pondered what she had seen and heard from her Divine Son. Hers was a prayer of the heart—a listening—allowing Jesus to lead her to a deeper relationship with him and his ministry. Mary

was undoubtedly a busy woman, but silence provided an opportunity for her to enter into the Mystery of the Incarnation and her role in it.

Silent reflective prayer may reveal God's providential plan for us which might be quite different from our own. If we are willing to take the risk, we might find that our lives will bear much more abundant fruit. As Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John, "He who abides in me and I in him bears fruit abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing."

Mary's contemplative prayer life must have given her the faith and courage to be that Mother of Sorrows who could bear to witness the cruel execution of her Divine Son. Our silent prayer of the heart might also prepare us for the crosses in our life more than we might think. If Mary's prayer life was to be that of theological speculation, as Kathleen Norris puts it, she would not have had a baby; she would have written a book. If our prayer life does not have roots in some intervals of silence, we may miss our role in living out the Paschal Mystery ourselves.

The Book of Wisdom (18:14–15) tells us, "When peaceful silence lay on earth and night had run half its course, your all-powerful Word, O Lord, leaped down from Heaven, the royal throne." The Incarnation of the Son of God took place in the midst of silence. Might Jesus also become more vividly present in our lives in moments of silence, where it is easier to hear his gentle knock or his tiny whispering sound? At least our quiet time has given him an opportunity to reach us if he wants to.

Get the Message

Shirley Bowling
EGL 4

Our gratitude to Shirley for the many articles she has contributed throughout the years to The CUSAN. Below is one she had sent to me long before we knew this would be our last issue.

Malcolm Muggeridge said: “Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message.” So I’m going to take a common, ordinary day, which is what most of us enjoy, and see if I can discover the parable, and detect the message.

I get out of bed, mumble the offering of my prayers.

I meet Jesus, the Living Water, as I cleanse my face; encounter the healing Jesus as I exercise my body and mind through yoga; enjoy Jesus, the bread of life, in eating breakfast.

I listen to the voice of Jesus as He speaks to me through my family, neighbors, friends.

I treasure the beauty of God in the beauty of nature: the drifting clouds, the tranquil sky, the melodious birds, the majestic trees, the colorful flowers, the grass carpet, the bright butterflies, the stately corn, the bubbling creek, the innocent laughter of a child, the soft purr of a kitten—and on and on.

The parable of this ordinary day is the story of my individual life, one day at a time. God's message to us in the mundane happenings is:

I love you as you are, where you are,
whatever it is that you are doing.
I meet you where you are,
and we go from there.

There is nothing ordinary about our lives. Each moment has value in the Big Picture. Today is preparing us for tomorrow.

And God's message is the same as it is every day: "I love you unconditionally. Get the message, and pass it on through your actions."

I am passing it on. . . .



**Thank you, Lord, for the beauty of winter.
Even when the days are cold, we know you are with us.
Fill us with the warmth of your love.**

So Much to Give

By Betty O'Brien

Visiting Ireland in 1956 with her parents and priest brother, Betty, one of the first members of CUSA in America, shares her thoughts and memories in these excerpts from Chapter VII of her book.

The gift of friendship is divine;
The love of God had made it mine.
To have a friend, to be one too;
What greater grace can come to you?

Sunday's cold rain and Tuesday's warm sunshine gave the four O'Briens a perfect example of the countryside in Mayo and Galway on two different days. Returning to Limerick through a section of these counties, Connemara again brought beauty before our eyes. This time, the weather kept inviting us to get out of my cousin's car. When we accepted an invitation to rest a while beneath the blue sky that stretched over us, I sat on a rock in a field that separated the narrow dirt road from a wide winding stream. Sitting there, I kept wishing that I has not lost the habit of putting my thoughts into rhymes.

For months before our sailing date from New York, I was wishing that my travels would give me the right to call myself a poetess once more. During an earlier disappearance of my poetic ability I almost believed that I had only developed each inspiration in order to contradict a handicap which never tires of shouting,

“You can’t do it.”. . . [But upon further reflection] I realized that my talent was a gift from God; a way in which I could express my enjoyment of living. . . . And, sitting on a rock in Ireland, I recalled that my poetry had brought me the blessing of friendship.

Shortly after a local newspaper had printed a story about my high school education, which mentioned a little booklet of poetry by me, a girl named Mary Sue Davis wrote for a copy. Her note said, “Like you I have cerebral palsy; with the help of my school teacher, I am becoming a poetess, too.” Mary Sue lived only ten miles from Newark, and my brother took me to meet her. That was the beginning of many visits which gave me a friend of my own; her patience in doing the little things she is able to do still inspires me greatly.

* * *

A friend’s like warmth in winter snow;
The coldest heart will tell you so;
Like summer’s dream of love in bloom,
A greeting carries rare perfume.
It colors life like autumn leaves,
The gentle pressure of a squeeze;
And, like a robin, in the spring,
So, be it spring, or be it fall,
I make my friends of one and all.

Riding through Mayo, I thought about a friend who had been born in this county. We met Mrs. McKenna during a two week vacation at a New Jersey lake. One afternoon, I noticed a middle aged lady sitting on the lawn near the dock, where I was reading. Suddenly, she

slipped from her chair and knelt erect. Without changing her position, she went swiftly towards the house on her knees. Amazed, I asked myself, "How will she ever climb that long stairway to the porch?" While I wondered, the stairs no longer appeared in front of her; she had climbed the steps by going from one to another on her knees.

Soon after we met, Mrs. McKenna told me that arthritis and widowhood came to her within a few years of each other. Her plans to provide for eight children ended with her walking days. Pain, however, gave this mother a new way to protect her family; she offered each ache for the son or daughter who needed the most prayer. She suffered silently for a definite purpose during the war; her five boys were overseas, and they returned without a scratch. Once, though, she believed that one was missing in action.

While Mrs. McKenna waited patiently for a word of her son, the telephone rang at a time that she was alone. To this woman who had not moved by herself in years, the phone never seemed so far away. It kept ringing, and she started to creep across the room. She crept with the prayer, "O God, don't let it stop before I get there." Her efforts were rewarded; she lifted the receiver to hear that her boy was on his way home. Afterwards, that grateful mother went everywhere on her knees.

* * *

My family and I were still enjoying the scenic views of Mayo when I again remembered . . . [a] child's question, "Who broke you?" The sight of Croagh

Patrick reminded me that nobody had ever made me break to pieces except myself. Seated in Father Eamonn's car at the foot of the mountain, where pilgrims have come to do penance since the days of Saint Patrick, I pictured people going towards the summit of this steep hill in their bare feet. Looking at the rugged rocks, which must have stubbed the toes of every person who climbed to the chapel on top, I thought about the pebbles that trip me.

At Croagh Patrick, I might have blamed each stumble on cerebral palsy by telling myself, "I often fall spiritually the minute my handicap shouts, 'You can't do it!'" But I could not deny that the pebbles in my life were pride, and not cerebral palsy. I was sure of this; it only becomes a stumbling block whenever I grow too proud to accept help. Because I seldom recall that my actions are begging for aid, Our Lord must frequently behold my heart as one which has forgotten His promise: "Ask and ye shall receive."

My soul is such a brittle place,
It breaks to bits without Your grace.
So, Triune Spirit, make me host
Of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

We conclude with one more poem that Betty wrote. It is from Chapter VIII of her book, So Much to Give:

The loss of pride is good for me;
I find God through humility.
I try again to be a saint,
The very thing I know I ain't.

A Prayer

Thank you, Lord,
for all the years
The CUSAN flourished.

The poems and stories
of members and friends
blessed us all
with humor and insight,
wisdom and joy,
grace and peace.

Now that writers are few
and resources are low
the time has come
to close up shop.

Thank you for guiding us;
thank you for blessing us.

Help us now to love, trust,
and follow you joyfully
all the days of our life.

Amen.

DIARY OF JERRY FILAN

The First American CUSAN (1918–1950)
continued from the Spring 2025 issue

The journey of Jerry and his sister Mary to Lourdes comes to a happy conclusion. Here, in this final issue of The CUSAN, are excerpts from the last pages of Jerry's diary.

SATURDAY: October 5, 1946

Our last day in Paris. We are so grateful that we are able to go on the Washington. Of course, we knew Our Lady would take care of us, but we were beginning to think she had some reason for keeping us here longer. We were trying to resign ourselves, but we couldn't help wishing that we could go home. . . .

SUNDAY: October 6, 1946

Homeward-bound at last. This morning at 8 o'clock a beautiful, big ambulance pulled up to the American hospital. . . .

The ride to LeHavre took a little more than four hours. We were surprised to find several people on the train who had come over on the Argentina with us. They all remembered me. We were especially happy to find out that Mrs. "Alsace," the woman with the four little children, was there. We had been wondering whether she would be on the Washington. Another "old friend" was the lady from Luxembourg who helped us at the Paris station the first night in France. Of all the people we met on the Argentina these were really the two whom we wanted most to see; partly

because we had left without getting their names and addresses. They both seemed very glad to see us again. Even the conductor on the train remembered me.

The boat was to sail at six; shortly after six the gangway was taken down. It had to be put up again, however, because just as the boat was about to be untied a jeep came tearing crazily along the pier. Someone on board had to get off to receive a message. Once again the gangway was taken down. This time the tugs moved in; the ropes were untied and the ship began moving slowly out from the pier. Just as the last coils of rope were slipping off the piles a car came speeding up. As it reached the ship's berth, a man jumped out and began running toward where the gangway had been, saying, "Wait for me! Don't go without me!" It was one of the crew. It was too late. The boat had already slipped away. . . .

As the boat started moving, the order was given to hoist ship's colors. What a thrill to see our own flag riding up. It was a very happy moment for us. . . .

Tonight Mary and I started another Rosary Novena. This time it is partly in thanksgiving to Our Lady for helping us come to visit Lourdes and for taking such good care of us, and partly to ask her to help us benefit to the greatest extent possible from our pilgrimage. We don't want to ever forget it. We hope we shall become better and better as a result of having come.

* * *

SATURDAY: October 12, 1946

The ship was in the Gulf Stream all day today and the weather was lovely. It put us in mind of the first day out of New York. Many of the passengers spent the day sunning themselves up on the top deck.

While I was waiting for Mary to put me out on deck today, the Papal Nuncio came by. He gave Mary a St. Theresa medal for me. After lunch Mary put me out on the side deck while she went back to straighten up the room. Then she came out and we sat there until nearly sunset. . . .

This ship is very different from the Argentina. It seems like a whole city. There are two elevators, two hospitals, movies every night, a telephone system and even a daily newspaper. Each day a three page RCA news report is distributed. It even has a jail. And what's more, somebody has been in it for several days.

* * *

MONDAY: October 14, 1946

WE ARE HOME. This is it and we can hardly believe it . . . but it surely is wonderful. We arrived at Pier 62 at just about nine o'clock. . . . We came home as we went—in one of the trucks. . . . The ride home was rough, but we loved it. Mary and Dad were trying to drink coffee and eat sandwiches as we bounced along, but they finally gave it up as a bad job.

What a welcome when we got home. Grandma and Jean were here and the house looks beautiful. There has just never been anyone like Dad for planning

surprises. Not only has he done a lot of painting and fixing, but the decorations are really super. On the piano, banked with autumn leaves, stands a big, illuminated lantern slide picturing the churches at Lourdes. In each of the two upper corners of the slide is a small picture, one of me and one of Mary. They are smiling pictures and they make us look almost as happy as we felt. Over near the fireplace is a huge white basket of gorgeous giant-size dahlias. They are beautiful by color and look like the ones we admired so much in Paris. In the dining room is the party table covered with a pretty flowered cloth. Dad used all the orange bulbs this time and the whole thing has a lovely, warm harvest glow. Set in the middle of the table, surrounded by autumn leaves, is a big white ship, the S.S. GLADYERHOME and in front of it is the welcome sign: BACK IN DRY DOCK. It has two little American flags unfurling in the breeze and two other flags, one fore and one aft. The other two are our flags made of snapshots of us.

Tonight all the family came and we had a wonderful party. Elsie and Fred Plate were here, too, and Fred played the piano nearly all night. Mary and I are really too happy to do anything but watch and enjoy every minute of it.

Dad had another surprise for us too. After supper he gave us a huge box that looked as if it would contain another giant bouquet. In it was a beautiful rosary. A surprise rosary—one that Lourdes would be proud to have. It is fifteen feet long. There was a little lull in the party when we received our gift. In the midst

of all the fun and excitement, everyone paused a minute to think and to remember. Daddy's pilgrims are home again. The long journey dreamed of so many years ago and planned for over so many months had ended. Dad grasped the spirit of it so beautifully. It has been a rosary pilgrimage. We started the rosary novena before we even attempted to take the first practical steps toward putting our plans into action and it was during the various rosary novenas that each of the great obstacles faded away one after the other.

* * *

We all said the rosary again tonight. Everyone knelt around in a circle and the rosary was stretched out so that each one could help hold it; and as we said the prayers, we slid the beads along from one to another. When we finished it, the lovely cross came back to me again and those who had been holding the beads came over to me to lay them in my lap.

It was a rosary of thanksgiving. For Dad it meant the return of the loved ones whom he had missed and worried over. For us it meant home again and Dad again. We are so very grateful for our wonderful trip and our safe homecoming. Our rosary was more than one of gratitude, however. Dear Lady, let this not be the end of our pilgrimage, but only the beginning. We would travel with you always.





CUSA Evening Prayer

O Heavenly Father, another day given me to love You, and to help others to love You, draws to a close. Has it been a day which I can offer lovingly to You? Have my thoughts turned to You frequently this day, and have I tried to be Christ-like in all my contacts with others?

I love You, my God, and I beg forgiveness for any way in which I offended You today.

I cannot undo my petty faults of the day—the unkind retort, my foolish pride, forgetting You for so many hours.

All that remains is a loving regret and a determination to serve You better tomorrow.

Amen.

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