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CUSAN

SPRING, 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.

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The CUSAN

Spring, 2024

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In This Issue

It's the season of Easter during the 2025 Jubilee of Hope—and the Lord is with us. That's the truth that gives us hope, and the authors who so generously wrote for this issue illustrate it in their inspiring articles.

Father Jerry Bracken and Father Lawrence keep the Easter story alive for us, who like Peter need help to believe and hope, and who, like Martha after her brother died, need encouragement by Jesus that “whoever believes in me will live.” Carol Ann Velten gives us wonderful examples from her own life of how resilience, God's gift, can become part of our lives. In Carolyn Humphreys' article, the reality of life's sorrows is faced head-on, with practical advice about dealing with them so that in the end, “serene joy is recognized at the depths of our souls.” Franciscan Father Bob Seig writes in this issue how he has been inspired by you CUSANS. And Joan Donnelly will share the latest CUSA news with you. Read, too, from Father Hopkins, Betty O'Brien, and Ann Gerhardt. Many thanks to all!

In case the next issue of *The CUSAN* is our final one, we ask and hope each of you will write a few sentences or more about how you have been helped by your association with CUSA. Any special memory? Full length articles are welcome too! My address (email or snail mail) is inside the cover here. God bless you, and a very happy Easter season to you!



Dolores Steinberg, editor

Message from Joan Donnelly

Acting Administrator of CUSA

Dear Members and Friends of CUSA,

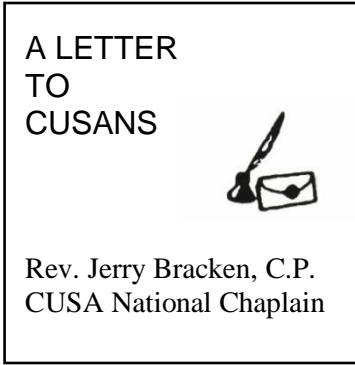
Thank you all for participating in the recent questionnaire sent to each of you regarding your continuing with membership in CUSA, desire to receive *The CUSAN* magazine, and/or volunteering to accept a trial subscription to Maureen Pratt's monthly electronic newsletter from The Peace in the Storm Project. I have been told our response rate was very high—almost 50%.

The Robert Brunner Foundation has financed CUSA since its inception almost 78 years ago. Recently, for business reasons, it moved its headquarters from New York City to Brussels, Belgium. Much thought had been given to the future of CUSA throughout the several months it took until details of the transfer were finalized. Based on factors like dwindling membership, potential leadership from within, as well as demographics, the CUSA Board voted to cease its operations as of March 27 this year.

I have been involved in CUSA for over 48 years. My plan is to pursue contributing our limited assets to one or more charities dedicated to cultivating spirituality in the hearts and minds of those with disabilities. If you know of such an organization, please share that info with me.

Thank you for the friendship and support you have given while a member or friend of CUSA.

Joan



Dear CUSANS,

While you will be reading this letter during the Easter Season, I am now writing it on Good Friday, just before we celebrate Our Lord’s Passion. It is our belief that His Passion is the very cause of His Easter Resurrection and our own salvation. Thus in the Paschal Mystery the reason for sorrow turns into a reason for joy.

That’s what happened at the Lord’s Resurrection, but not for every one or all at once. When Mary of Magdala went early in the morning while it was still dark, she discovered that the tomb was empty. (Only later, when she heard her name “Mary,” did her sorrow change to joy) (Jn 20:16).

So she ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him” (Jn 20:2). Peter and the other disciple ran to the tomb, with the other disciple arriving first but not going in. When Simon Peter arrived, he entered the tomb. He “saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with them, but rolled up in a separate place.” Then the other disciple went in, and the

Gospel relates that “he saw and believed” (Jn 20:8). Unlike Thomas (Jn 20:29), even though he did not see Jesus, the beloved disciple believed He had risen.

But what about Peter? The Gospel does not say. Peter, like the beloved disciple, believed Christ had risen. In fact in the very next chapter, it describes Peter as back in Galilee, by the Sea of Tiberias, saying to his companions, “I am going fishing” (Jn 21:3). With Jesus’ death and His body disappearing, all the expectations that Peter had as a follower of Jesus had been put to death.

Having denied he even knew Jesus, having heard so many shouting out against Jesus, having seen Jesus die hanging between two criminals, and now with not even the body of Christ being in the grave, Peter’s spirit was crushed. All that was left in him, as testified by “I am going fishing,” was Peter’s emotionally empty but sheer will act to care for his family by returning to his fishing business in partnership with Zebedee’s sons.

What caused all this to change, after a full night of fishing and catching nothing, was the man on the shore. After asking them if they had caught anything and they saying “Nothing,” he tells them, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something” (Jn 21:6). Indeed it was something—153 fish!

It was the believer, the beloved disciple, who recognized that the man on shore was Jesus. He said to Peter, “It is the Lord” (Jn 21:7). Peter, with all the enthusiasm of the past, tucks in his garment and swims to shore.

But that was not the end of the story. After their breakfast, Jesus and Peter went for a walk along the sea shore, with Jesus asking three times, “Peter, do you love me?” Unlike what he had said at the last Supper, “I will lay down my life for you” (Jn 13:37), Peter claims nothing about himself, but simply says, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you” (Jn 21:15, 16).

Then, when Jesus asks a third time, “Peter do you love me?” Peter, deeply hurt and so regretting his three denials says, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” No longer does Peter’s love for Christ rest upon himself. It rests upon Jesus.

And in response to Peter’s “Yes Lord, you know that I love you,” are Jesus’ words: “Feed my lambs,” “Tend my sheep,” “Feed my little sheep” (Jn 21: 15, 16, 17). Jesus in effect is handing over to Peter the responsibility but also the authority of caring for Jesus’ own flock, we the members of His Church.

The lessons are these. Our works and enthusiasms of the past can be dampened by present disabilities, with failures happening instead of successes, with energies draining and our having a listless spirit. Besides a will to keep doing as Peter did in going back to his fishing business, we need what Peter got, a beloved disciple to point out where Jesus is in our life. Not that we see Him with our eyes, but by faith we believe that He is with us and take that as our hope. What we need is a walk with Jesus, a dialogue that is our prayer, where we tell Him we love Him, and where He assures us where and when that is true now and can be true in the future.

Sincerely

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



From the Spiritual Apothecary of Friar Lawrence

Father Lawrence Jagdfeld, O.F.M.
CUSA Administrator from 2007

From a Homily for Easter Sunday

Excerpted from <https://www.FatherLawrence.com/homilies/why-are-you-seeking-the-living-among-the-dead>

Today we begin the 50 day celebration of Easter, the greatest and the most important feast in the Church's Liturgical Cycle. The various Gospel accounts of the resurrection usually include an angel or two who speak to the women. "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" The Gospel of St. John relates that an angel said to Mary Magdalene, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

There is an empty tomb in the holy city of Jerusalem—the Shrine of the Holy Sepulcher—and pilgrims from all over the world visit that tomb. A note at its entrance says, "He is not here." It is famous because Jesus Christ, who was once buried there, rose from the dead, as he had told his disciples he would.

When, in an interview, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York was asked who is the most influential person in his life, he answered, "Jesus Christ, of course." A bit perplexed, the interviewing reporter clarified, "I meant someone who is alive." To which the Cardinal

answered, with all the surety of not merely belief, but first-hand experience, “You know? Jesus IS alive!”

The Resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian Faith. It is the greatest of the miracles, for it proves that Jesus is God. “Jesus is Lord, He is risen” (Rom 10:9), was the central theme of the preaching of the Apostles.

Easter is the guarantee of our own resurrection. Jesus assured Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live even though he dies.” (Jn 11:25-26). Easter gives us hope and encouragement in this world of pain, sorrows and tears. It reminds us that life is worth living. It also gives us strength to fight against temptations, and freedom from unnecessary worries and fears. Easter supports our belief in the Real Presence of the Risen Jesus in and around us, in His Church, in the Blessed Sacrament, and in Heaven, hearing our prayers, and so gives meaning to our personal and communal prayers.

Let us live the lives of Resurrection people, constantly experiencing the living presence of the Risen Lord Who loves us in all the events of our lives. This salutary awareness of the Risen Lord within us inspires us to honor our bodies, keeping them holy, pure, and free from evil habits. Our conviction that the Risen Lord dwells in our neighbors and in all those we encounter should encourage us to respect them and to render them loving, humble, selfless service—radiating the Risen Lord.

F. Lawrence

Resilience, God's Gift to You and Me

Carol Ann Velten

For my birthday, my daughter gave me a book written by her minister—*Resilient: The Power of Rising Again*. Mr. Michael Herzog's book made me think of my own resilience which I am sharing with you.

I looked resilient up in the dictionary and the definition was twofold: "able to withstand or recover from difficult situations" or, according to the second definition, "A resilient person is able to recover from an illness or a bad experience quickly." Another source said "resilience can be cultivated and practiced." I would like to think that all of us in CUSA with chronic disabilities and chronic illnesses have learned to be resilient people.

My aunt used to say, "This too shall pass." What happens if the trial, adversity, or illness does not pass in a hurry? Chronic means "long-lasting." Long-lasting, for me, has been dealing with some form of chronic pain for 75 years of my life. I turned 82 in November of 2024. How did I get so lucky? Or, maybe, after reading Mr. Herzog's book *Resilient*, each illness I faced was an opportunity to develop resilience and an opportunity to discover purpose in my suffering. Especially when you get to my age, 82, every year seems to offer new health challenges added to the old.

My journey began when I was seven years old. I came down with polio and ended up in a polio ward at City Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. I did not know what resilience was at the time, but I knew I was stuck

in a hospital ward where I did not want to be, was afraid because I had heard of being put in an iron lung, and felt abandoned by my mother. I cried myself to sleep that first night. A little girl in the glass cubicle next to me comforted me. She went home the next day and gave me all her toys. I laid lifeless in my bed for days and refused to eat and was threatened to be fed intravenously.

Eventually, I snapped out of my mood, made friends with an older boy across the room in another cubicle, and we threw comic books back and forth to read. We were not allowed to get out of bed and play with the other polio patients. The glass cubicle was to protect us from other polio patients, I guess.

My mother was allowed to visit once a week. The nurses would come in at night and take different children out of the ward, and we knew they were going to be put in the dreaded iron lung. I learned how to pray myself out of being put in an iron lung along with my classmates at school. I don't know how long I was in the polio ward, but eventually I was able to go home with my parents. That was my first lesson on learning what resilience was, and I was happy I escaped the iron lung. My suffering from polio did not end when I got home. The disease left me with weak muscles which I had to learn to accept for my entire life.

My next lesson on how to become a resilient person occurred when I was 17 years old. I ended up having three knee operations on my left knee, six months apart. The blessing in disguise was that I did not have to go to take gym. I spent my time in the study hall, and I was able to get all my homework done for that day. I took

so many pain pills, my mind would go blank in class. I was surprised that I passed that year. My mother got tired of my whining and feeling sorry for myself and finally gave me an ultimatum: I could choose to be miserable and make everyone around me miserable too or I could accept the pain I was in and learn how to live a normal life for me at the time. I took my mother's advice, and I began to practice resilience.

I had a very bad limp from the three surgeries. I would project Jesus, in my mind, across the room, and practice for hours walking across the room to Him. Gradually, I learned how to master limping. It was prom time, and I begged my mother to let me go to the prom. Finally, she said it was *my* pain, and if I wanted to go to the prom, I could go.

I went to three proms in one week, forgot the pain, forgot the limping, and had a great time. My aunt said if I could go to three proms in one week, I could go to school. So, my mother made me go to school after staying out until 2:00 a.m. I dragged all day at school, but come 5:00 p.m., I revived and was able to go to the next prom. As the saying goes, mind over matter. Or was it a determination on my part that came after I realized that my twin sister was going to the proms having fun, and I was staying home feeling sorry for myself?

My twin sister was teaching ballroom dancing at 21 years old, and my mother talked me into taking ballroom dancing to overcome my limping. The irony is that my family doctor said I would never dance again. I thought to myself, "You are not talking about me." I

learned not to believe the bad report. I ended up winning two dancing trophies doing the foxtrot and the tango with my dance teacher in a nightclub. I never became an instructor like my sister, but we had a great time going to all the dances at the dance studio and nightclubs with other students. Some were high-class parties, everyone drinking martinis and Manhattans. If my sister and I could not find a coke in a vending machine, we drank water all night.

On weekends, we would give up dates to go to Max Blob's Park, a German place, and polka all night. When we danced with this older man in his 60s, we were guaranteed dancing all night. We learned the German and Polish polkas which were just a little different from each other. Those were some of the best years of my life. I still limp at 82—mainly when I get tired—but I learned to become a resilient person, and my limping did not keep me from having fun. My mantra was “I can do all things in Christ, who gives me strength.” Again, with determination, I was able to bounce back up.

Later in life, in my 70s, I developed a rare type of breast cancer. I was told that only 55 people in the world had this cancer; I was number 56. No one knew how to treat that type of cancer. Again, how did I get so lucky? I had two surgeries and 39 radiation treatments, and I have been cancer-free for ten years now. By this time, learning to practice resilience all my life, I knew once again a resilient attitude: meditating on all the healing Scriptures in the Bible and having faith in God to heal me, if He chose, I knew I would not be on this

journey alone. The final lesson I am sharing is this: God did not give me an attitude of resilience without hope.

Resilience is a gift from God. Often that gift comes to us like a small mustard seed. Resilience only begins to grow in our lives when we cultivate and practice the principles resilience wants to teach us. That gift was for me, and it is for you too. May the difficulties of your trials and suffering become easier for you through the practice of resilience.



A Short Poem by Betty O'Brien

(One of the first members of CUSA)

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.

Joy Out of Sorrow

Carolyn Humphreys

Passive Member

Thanks to Carolyn, one of our talented writers in CUSA, for sharing her wisdom with us in this article, which was published online this past November in Catholic Journal (<https://www.catholicjournal.us/2024/11/21/joy-out-of-sorrow/>). We are grateful for their permission to reprint it here.

Horatio Spafford was a successful attorney and a happily married husband and father. Unfortunately, he lost a great amount of money in the Chicago fire of 1871. He thought a vacation would be beneficial for his wife and four daughters. He sent them on a ship to England and planned to join them after he dealt with unexpected business problems.

When crossing the Atlantic Ocean, their passenger ship collided with an iron hulled ship. After approximately twelve minutes, the passenger ship sunk beneath the waters of the Atlantic and 226 of the 313 passengers lost their lives, including Spafford's four daughters. Miraculously, Anna, his wife, managed to float on a piece of the wreckage until she was rescued by a sailor in a small boat. His wife survived the tragedy. When she reached England, she wired her husband: "Saved, alone, what shall I do?" Upon hearing the news Spafford set sail for England. The captain of his ship notified Spafford when they were passing over the spot where the shipwreck occurred.

While passing through his grief, Spafford penned one of the most beloved hymns in Christendom. The words reveal his unshakeable, exemplary faith and robust, profound hope. Those words have proven to many people that joy can indeed come after sorrow.

Parents who have lost children, and all who have suffered losses, never forget their loved ones who have died. The German Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wisely sums up the pain and consolation of these memories. “Nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation. For the gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bond between us. It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap: he doesn’t fill it, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain. The dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation, but gratitude changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy. We must take care not to wallow in our memories, or hand ourselves over to them. Just as we do not gaze all the time at a valuable present, but only at special times, and apart from these keep it simply as a hidden treasure that is ours for certain.”

Like a deeply rooted plant that is uprooted and leaves a large hole, the deeper our love for another, the more painful the uprooting and the deeper the emptiness left behind. An especially large kind of hole is caused by the smallest of children, or parents’ children of any age. Loss of a loved one is assuaged by faith in God,

knowledge of Christian teachings, and prayer. Far below the intense mourning there are seeds of new growth, unrecognized at present but waiting to develop and blossom with nourishment from grace and the passage of time.

Sorrows are a necessary process and an often present part of being human. Many things can cause sorrow: death of a loved one, onset of a chronic disease, moving from a treasured home, loss of a good job, death of a pet, or the closure of a beloved monastery or church. If we do not face our sorrow somewhere, it will wait for us. We must travel through sorrow in order to move forward in life. The passage of time softens a sorrow but does not totally alleviate it. After the death of loved ones, as time passes, their preciousness may become more treasured and we may love them more than when they were alive. As the years pass, we realize more and more what special people they were.

We respond to sorrow in different ways. Some negative responses are histrionics, poor self-care, rash impulsive behavior, prolonged depression, or extended isolation. When the mind numbing emotions of sorrow decrease, positive responses can emerge, such as creating something to honor the memory of a loved one, planning a project for an upcoming event, or volunteering for a good cause. Acknowledging our sorrow, seeing beyond it, and remembering the good things that preceded the sorrow are essential in finding joy in sorrow. Sorrowful feelings can come at any time and in any place. If we have an episode of sorrowful

feelings, doing a task that soothes and calms may alleviate it.

When we focus on faith in a loving God and trust in his help to get us through, we can see our tragedies and storms in a new light. Even in our darkest hours, God is with us. Therese of Lisieux keeps us on the right road. During the last eighteen months of her short life, she was ravaged by tuberculosis and experienced a dark night of faith. She wrote, “With daring confidence, and reckless of self, I will remain there till death, my gaze fixed upon the Divine Sun. Nothing shall affright me, neither wind or rain; and should impenetrable clouds conceal from my eyes the Orb of Love, should it seem to me that beyond this life there is darkness only, this would be the hour of perfect joy, the hour in which to urge my confidence to its uttermost bounds, for knowing that beyond the dark clouds my Sun is still shining, I should never dare to change my place. . . . O Divine Sun, I am happy to feel myself so small and frail in thy presence, and my heart is at peace.”

Our inner sorrows will be quelled if we are receptive to God’s grace as it develops, refines, and stretches us. As God’s timing and wisdom becomes our own, we become gentle with ourselves and our angsts. Gentleness is a many graced virtue as it guards our hearts against bitterness, resentment, or other life draining characteristics that erode our self-respect and dignity as Christians. As we strive to be gentle, we find that sorrow is alleviated and difficulties easier to resolve. Gentleness of heart leads to kindly and sensitive thoughts and actions that heighten our ability

to be at ease with our trials and content with ourselves. To release a tight grasp on things that grieve us clears the way for deeper reflection on current things that matter.

Another way we process and release our grief is through our tears. Shedding tears as a response to grief can be therapeutic. Tears are purifying because after our cry, we can look up and realize our grief can either damage us by self-serving introspection or focus us by seeing the grief situation within Divine truth. Tears can cleanse by providing a clearer vision on authentic realities. They release the stress of grieving moments so we can pay attention to direction signs on the road of faith. Tears are helpful because they can dilute negative feelings, release pent up anxieties, purge pessimism, remove unidentifiable fear, and be a guide to take the next good step. We need not be ashamed of crying, nor be surprised that a smile can break through the tears. Revitalized by hope, we smile and attempt to rise above the circumstances in which we find ourselves. With that smile, a new chapter can begin.

If we do not know the depths of sorrow, how can we know the heights of joy? Spafford found positive elements in his sorrow that brought forth a deeper expression of joy. The sorrows in life's journey break the heart, but with grace, the heart mends. Sorrow darkens the mind, but dawn comes and brings rejoicing. Low energy is recharged with renewed hope. Joy lies unnoticed below the dark clouds of sorrow, but emerges as the clouds dissipate. There are many examples of

how a well channeled sorrow can lead to a good cause or needed service.

Blessing God in the midst of sorrow is a praiseworthy manifestation of faith. As sorrows shake the landscape of our lives, through faith in God, serene joy is recognized at the depths of our souls. We remember the words on the headstone of a four year old boy who died unexpectedly—budded on earth to bloom in heaven—and rest, with comfort and hope, in the words of Spafford's hymn.

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!*

*And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

It is well with my soul,

It is well, it is well with my soul.

* * *

More by Carolyn

For those of you with internet access, you can find her articles on the Catholic Journal website at <https://catholicjournal.us/author/carolyn-humphreys/>

Carolyn also has a blog, “Contemplative Christianity—Moments of rest and reflection with the gentle Heart of Jesus,” at <https://contemplativechristianityorg.wordpress.com/>

And her recent book, *Courage Through Chronic Disease*, (Broomall, PA: The National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2023), will provide many helpful insights for all.

Encountering Christ in CUSA

Father Bob Sieg, O.F.M.
CUSA Spiritual Advisor

I am a close friend to our Father Lawrence. We were ordained together 50 years ago (where does the time go!!) I can tell you many stories about him—but I want to remain as his friend! He really is a terrific person.

One story—50 years ago after Ordination—no one ever heard of e-mail. So, on occasion we would exchange letters!! Lawrence was an English teacher. I remember him sending a letter back to me with all kinds of red circles—mistakes in grammar! He is a teacher in heart.

My first encounter with CUSA goes back to Ordination. The director of the seminary was Fr. Harry Speckman. I really developed a deep respect for him and I asked him to “preach at my first Mass.” He agreed with only one stipulation—that I would volunteer to be in CUSA! So, my first encounter with Christ in CUSA came at the calling of Father Harry!

For 50 years I have worked with CUSA as Spiritual Advisor. I have really been touched by so many people who opened their hearts and their souls in our group letters. Someone told me that I am a good “listener”—honestly would rather “listen” than “advise”—and I have encountered Jesus in the faith expressed in the GL!

Honestly, one thing that “bothers” me is this: I have never met most of the people in our groups. I have no idea what you look like and you don't know what I look

like. (Ever seen a “Fat Friar”? That is me!!) One true story: I was about 40 years old and involved in a letter writing group. In those days we had to write the letters by hand. One woman commented, “Father Bob, I have no idea what you look like but reading your written letters I know you must be old and crippled with arthritis!” No; my penmanship is just terrible. I cannot even read what I write!

But I have encountered Christ in meeting with some of you. I don't remember the exact year, but we had a CUSA Day of Recollection in Cleveland (that is where I was living at that time). I think we had about 20–25 CUSANs come for a day of prayer on a Saturday. And as a special treat Anna Marie Sopko flew to Cleveland from New Jersey to be there! I am not sure what all we talked about that day, but I still remember it was an encounter with Jesus meeting so many CUSANs!

Speaking of Anna Marie, we met on a number of occasions. But in the 1980s my job was in Vocation Direction. The Franciscans were trying to develop a policy on welcoming people with disabilities into the community. Most important, ALL ARE WELCOMED, but is Franciscan life really their best option? I figured I would ask the expert Anna Marie for her thoughts. That was before Zoom—so I talked with her and we thought it would be best that we meet in person. I was living in Chicago, my Mom was in Cleveland, and Anna Marie was in Bayonne. I thought: I can make a fun trip too. My Mom was from Philadelphia, so I drove to Cleveland and together Mom and I went to Philadelphia for a few days. Then we headed up to New Jersey to see Anna Marie. My Mom said she would wait in the car while we talked (she was very patient!). We got there

at 11:00 a.m. and Anna Marie would not let my Mom sit in the car; rather, come in to be with her family! Anna Marie gave me some very good points to consider as we formed a policy. Being a Franciscan is not a job but a lifestyle. Anna Marie's thoughts were excellent. We got done a little after noon and I asked my Mom if she was ready to go. Anna Marie said you are NOT leaving until a have lunch with us! She is a real encounter with Jesus.

I enjoy meeting people, so over the years I have tried to visit other CUSANs. Recently it was Rini (Lorraine) Fleury—one of our EGL group leaders. I was in her area (Lake Tahoe) so I stopped by for a few minutes. She is a real example of living her faith!

One more encounter with Christ came in Board Leadership of CUSA. Father Lawrence asked if I would consider being on the Board. I hate meetings but I love to travel. We met yearly in Chicago! CUSA has great leadership. I remember Lawrence asked if I would consider being President of the Board; he was the Administrator. I told him: I hate meetings. I remember Lawrence telling me: think of England. You are like the King—you sit and smile and let the Prime Minister (Administrator) do all the work!! So, I said yes. Again, the leadership in CUSA really cares about YOU—another encounter with Jesus.

Most of my life has been serving as a pastor in parishes, and some time in vocation work and in campus ministry. I fell into a job for three years as our Development Director of the Franciscans. I found that job to be difficult; I would rather spend money than ask for money! But I have encountered Christ in my life's journey.

Now I work at the Franciscan Connection with another Friar. It is a service agency for the poor here in Saint Louis, Missouri. We help people get connected to providers who can help them with our needs. Like Pope Francis says, you encounter Jesus working with the poor. On weekends I helped Food for the Poor, an international group that helps the poor in Central America. I would be assigned to go to preach at a parish—it could be anywhere in the United States! Again, what a great opportunity to encounter Jesus. But as I write this, next weekend my assignment is Pipestone, Minnesota! That will be my last commitment because of very poor hearing. I have tinnitus and even with hearing aids I have about 50% hearing. Part of preaching in these parishes is so that the pastor is able to get away. This meant I would take “Confessions.” Even though people love to go to a “deaf priest” for Confession, I miss what they say too often!

I have been truly blessed in my past 50 years as a Franciscan priest. I have encountered Christ in people like you!



Easter: The Triumph of Hope

Father Richard J. Hopkins

Among the writings left us by Father Hopkins (1919–2017), CUSA group spiritual advisor for many years, is this one—found in time for our celebration of this 2025 Easter season and during the Jubilee Year of Hope.

Easter is a Feast of joy, of excitement, of new life, celebrating Christ's triumph over evil and His victory over death. But above all, Easter is a Feast of Hope. It is so because Christ's Resurrection is a guarantee of our own. In fact, the Resurrection is the most radical sign of hope that we have. The authorities who killed Jesus were trying to kill hope, but they failed to prevent the Resurrection. Only if we forget the Resurrection can hope be killed.

Hope is not a false optimism or denial of reality but it is a realistic optimism—a deliberate choice to live in hope despite the hard and dangerous realities of the present. Hope is more than hanging on; it is a conscious decision to see the world in a different way than most others see it. To hope is to look through the eyes of faith to a real but unseen future. John looked into an empty tomb; he saw and believed. In times of discouragement we often feel that we are looking into an empty tomb, but then we, too, are asked to see and believe—to see beyond the tomb and believe that Christ has truly risen.

Hope is an anchor that gives us stability in the midst of turbulence. Though frightened and anxious, as Christians we will not forget that Christ has Risen;

though disheartened and depressed, we will not forget His triumph over sin and death; though overwhelmed with sickness and suffering, we will not forget that, like Christ, we will be raised up. May the thought as well as the grace of the Resurrection sustain us through each crisis.

The most exciting news, however, is the fact that the seeds of hope are already germinating within us; that we are experiencing even now this “newness of life”—sharing in the Risen Life of Jesus through the graces of this Feast—participating in some measure in His triumph and victory even before we finish the race.

As people of hope, then, in good times and bad, we can voice our Alleluias each day and experience within us God’s joy and peace.

Since we have been raised up in company with Christ through the graces of this Feast, let us be intent upon the things above rather than the things on earth. Since we have died to sin, our life is now hidden with Christ in God. Truly this is a day that the Lord has made possible; let us rejoice and be glad.

Alleluia!

Christ is Risen!

Let us be glad and rejoice!

O death, where is your sting?

Jesus Christ is Lord forever!

Alleluia!

In Memoriam

Pray for Brother Edward Arambasich, O.F.M., a CUSAN leader for many years (co-administrator under Father Lawrence), who died on March 26. He was always ready to listen to the heartache of others, even when battling cancer himself.

His role a fire chaplain was marked by unwavering dedication. He supported firefighters tirelessly, from comforting survivors of 9/11 to baking dozens of banana bread loaves.

Brother Ed's legacy is one of profound love, service and dedication to his faith and fellow human beings. Rest in peace, Brother Ed.



By the time this issue is in print, Pope Francis will have been laid to rest, and the cardinals will have chosen a new Vicar of Christ. How humble the Lord is, to grace a man picked by His followers as His Vicar, blessing him with all that is needed for such a difficult supernatural mission. Let us keep our new Holy Father in our prayers!

1977 Pilgrimage to Communist Russia

Ann Gerhardt

Ann was a member of CUSA (GLs 57, 58), and she wrote this article for the 1978 Spring–Summer issue of The CUSAN. We share it now with you—a remarkable story of witness at a time in history that no one would have thought a pilgrimage to Russia would be possible.

What we thought was an Impossible Dream came true last summer—Mary Varick’s First Saturday group [Mary was co-founder of the First Saturday Club of New Jersey] actually attended Holy Mass celebrated inside Russia, land of atheistic Communism! For almost 20 years this group had been praying for Peace in the World. I was one of the fifty-nine persons who went on this pilgrimage June 29th to July 13th [1977] for World Peace.

After Mass at Kennedy Airport, we flew to Helsinki, Finland, arriving there during the “White Nights” season when there is only one hour of darkness. It wasn’t dark yet when I went to sleep about 2:30 in the morning. We spent only one night in Helsinki and after morning Mass, concelebrated by our five pilgrim priests, a tour of the city was taken; early afternoon we boarded a luxury liner for Leningrad, Russia.

Arriving at Leningrad the following morning, we found members of the Communist Youth Party waiting on dock to help the handicapped off the ship and onto the bus during the tour planned for us. An unsmiling

young woman was our tour guide; the other solemn young men didn't seem too friendly. A few Russian soldiers stood about, on guard; they took our passports until we returned to the ship.

One of our priests was marched away and asked if he had any religious articles or reading matter, then searched. Thank God he had nothing, or we all might have been detained or marched off to Siberia!

A cab had to be called for me because my wheelchair could not be gotten on the bus; a personal tour guide was then assigned to accompany me. This was a lovely nineteen-year old girl, Irene. She spoke English, and I was able to ask many questions about the Russian people and their way of life.

Many beautiful churches were seen on the tour, but they were not used. One had a dome of gold. Irene told me that during the war, the dome had to be painted for it could be seen from miles away. Stopping for lunch at a restaurant, we were aware that we were always under the watchful eyes of the Communist youths. Irene and I became friends, but in the presence of her comrades she was cold and aloof; later in the cab she was friendly again. When we returned to the ship, I was happy that she said she would see me the following day.

Our July First Saturday Mass was celebrated on the ship by our five priests. Later, a group of us went on deck to recite the Rosary in full view and within hearing distance of the guards. I couldn't help thinking that we were getting the Blessed Mother's undivided attention!

The following morning we attended the only scheduled Mass in all of Leningrad, a Sunday Mass.

The Russian parish priest was waiting for us outside Our Lady of Lourdes Church, only half-believing that we would appear as he had been told. He was beside himself with joy and excitement to meet our five priests, who concelebrated the Mass with him. There were no pews in the church, just chairs. The congregation was mostly old women. Father Val, one of our priests, spoke about our Pilgrimage for Peace, how our being in Russia was a dream fulfilled, and that we would continue to pray for the Russian people who have no religious freedom (although the Communist youths were there at Mass with us). After Mass, many of the parishioners came over and kissed us; some cried.

We said our goodbyes to the Russian priest and the parishioners, and as I got into the cab, I said to Irene, “What did you think of the Mass?” She answered, “If there were Masses like that here, it would take all the priests in Leningrad.”

I said my only regret was that the congregation didn’t understand what Father Val said. “True, Ann, they don’t understand English,” Irene responded, “but the vibrations were there. The message got through.” I somehow felt she meant herself as well.

Later, after lunch, when we were in the cab waiting for the bus to be boarded, Irene spoke up. “Ann, this morning after Mass, a man was giving out medals.” (Siberia, here we come, I thought!) “Do you think that you could get one for me?”

The medal she referred to was from Jerusalem, with a tiny stone that came from the Grotto of the Annunciation in Nazareth. I had one and gave it to

Irene. I could see her joy as she held the medal in her hand looking at it until the driver came along; then she put it in her coat pocket. Bernie, one of our group volunteers, was in the cab with us and asked if she would like to have his Rosary. We were pleased that Irene took that, too.

It had started to rain as we came to the next buildings we were to tour, and Irene asked if I was going to get out in the rain. When I decided to stay in the cab, she said, “Good, we can talk.”

Bernie and the cab driver left and when we were alone Irene asked, “Ann, how can you be the way you are, so friendly and cheerful, concerned for others, and be unable to walk? Aren’t you bitter in being confined to a wheelchair?”

She added that the night before she and other Communist youths had been talking about our handicapped group. “Everything that was said was very favorable,” she said.

I told Irene that we learn about God when we are young, and we learn to know Him and love Him. “We believe we are here on earth to serve Him, and if He feels I can serve Him better in a wheelchair, who am I to complain?” I told her that without God’s help, I should probably be grumpy, full of self-pity, and not too nice to be around—as they all said they thought they would be in our place!

“Many people do not believe in life after death,” I said, “but someday everyone will learn this is true and that we should do what is right to earn our way into

Heaven. Our Lord is really making it easy for us. So, how could I be bitter?”

Irene asked about the Rosary, which gave me a chance to tell her about the Mysteries and how they are events in the lives of Our Lord and His Mother. She listened to every word, asking then about the Holy Father, the American churches, our customs and way of life. Then she asked again about God.

“How do you know you are serving Him, Ann?”
“Well, Irene, if we were an ordinary group of tourists, if I was walking like everyone else, would you be sitting here asking me questions about Him?” “No,” she said with some wonderment. “Then there’s your answer. It’s because I am confined to a wheelchair and the qualities you see in me are gifts of God, that you are learning about Him.”

At that moment our driver returned and she thanked me for talking with her. When we returned to the ship, Irene kissed me and said, “I am sorry to see you go. I wish you could stay longer, but I wish you the very best always.”

I had asked Irene for her address to write to her. Knowing that she will not be the first to see the letter, I shall be very careful what I write; but I feel God will maintain the bond between us.

My experience in Russia made me see that it isn’t that people do not believe in God, but that they are not permitted to learn about Him and they are hungry for knowledge. I ask our readers to pray for Irene and all Communists so that someday Russia will know and love God again—and then there will be peace.

DIARY OF JERRY FILAN

The First American CUSAN (1918–1950)
continued from the Christmas 2024 issue.

Jerry and his sister Mary are about to get good news: there is room for them on the Washington, and soon they will be sailing for home.

FRIDAY: October 4, 1946

Again, what a day. The suspense has been awful. This morning Mary went to 7:30 Mass for the First Friday. She offered up her Communion for me because she couldn't take me with her. When she got back, I was very restless so she finally started getting me ready to get up. Then, just before lunch she decided to call the U.S. Lines. That number is always busy so it took a long time before she got her call through. Again, as on yesterday afternoon, we were on tenterhooks because that one call should solve everything but, again—it solved nothing. Still no answer. Mr. Wall said he would call Mary back this afternoon if he got word. Mary was very upset because she is beginning to be afraid this is all a “stall.” So far she has trusted Mr. Wall and has had complete confidence in his promise to do everything possible. This afternoon, though, she began to worry because, as she said, if he is really keeping two bookings open for us, he would probably radio the ship again to make certain. After all, there is only tomorrow left to do all the necessary business.

We did have one nice surprise this morning, though. Just after Mary got me up, we had a visitor.

Genevieve. We were so glad to see her. It sounded wonderful to hear her “good, good, good” again and “must, must, must.” She didn’t look very well, though, and she told us she has to have the operation but she will have to come back again for it. The woman who has been minding René [the man for whom she is caregiver] has to leave so Genevieve has to go back to Lourdes. She wants to be there for the Rosary pilgrimage.

Genevieve stayed for a long time. She and Mary had lunch together in the room. While we were eating, Genevieve told us all about the arrangements she has made. She succeeded in giving her [Paris] apartment to someone in return for having all her things sent to Lourdes for her. This means she will get all her furniture without having to pay. She says René will be so happy to hear she has made this final break with Paris.

When Genevieve heard about our troubles, she became very excited. Usually she is happy about everything that delays our return home. Today, however, she really seemed to understand how important it is that we get that boat. Finally, she suggested that we pray together. She has been saying a special novena at the three Hail Marys [of the rosary] for her problems so she suggested that we say those prayers. She and Mary knelt down and Genevieve began reading the prayers in French. At the end of each one, Mary said the “Je vous salue.” Genevieve prays with fervor and eloquence. Listening to her brought back vivid memories of all the days when the

four of us awaited the Blessing of the Sick. At Lourdes her voice usually rose above and drowned out the voices of all surrounding her.

After Genevieve left, Mary started fidgeting again. She felt she ought to go down to the U.S. Lines and try again to make them see why we had to go. However, Mr. Wall had said he would call and she was afraid to leave. Finally at about a quarter to five she put on her hat and coat and said she thought she would try calling just once more and then, if there was no answer, she would go ahead down. The line was busy again and she was just about to leave when, who came, but Pierre Malmezat. He is the tall, young brancardier who used to push Mme. Lavalee, the “lady on the stretcher.” He had asked Mary to let him know if we returned to Paris. He brought a box of candy for our trip home. That is quite a gift in France today. He didn’t stay very long but it was good to see him. I was sorry, though, that I couldn’t understand him. He speaks only French and some German, so the conversation was mostly in the latter tongue with a few French words mixed in.

It was while he was here that Mr. Wall finally called. Mary nearly broke her neck running down the hall to the phone. Mr. Wall read the telegram which he had received:

WILL ACCEPT FILAN ON THE WASHINGTON

To which we add a fervent Deo Gratias . . . and our sincere thanks also to Our Lady and to Saints Theresa and Jude.

By the way, while Genevieve was here today she started telling us about the doctor she had been to and how annoyed he was when she said she was going to Lourdes. In fact, she told him that the Mother could cure as well and better than he could if she wanted to. While she was on the subject, Mary asked her why she thought Our Lady had not cured me. She was just wondering what Genevieve would say and thought it would probably be her usual answer about how much better it is to be “on the Cross.” She says this very dramatically. Today, however, she just answered very simply, “Because she knows you can bear your trouble. The miracles are the exception.”

Another thing about today. This morning we got a letter from Dad in which he said that the news that we were sailing on the Washington was the best yet. He surely must have taken the most optimistic interpretation of Mary’s letter. He probably just ignored the “if” which she took pains to explain. What made us particularly desperate today was thinking of how awful it would be to have to tell him we were not sailing on the Washington and that, because of the new strike, we really didn’t know when we would sail. That struck Genevieve, too. In fact, she said she would pray for us especially for Dad’s sake.



To be continued



From the CUSAN Morning Offering

Lord Jesus, through this cross of my disability, it is Your desire to bring me nearer to Your Divine Heart, and especially do You want me to offer my cross, united with Your own—in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world—for the salvation of souls.

O my Jesus, help me today not to waste a single one of the trials—both large and small—which, if borne with patience, can obtain so many graces. I desire the Will of the Father, and walking in Your footsteps, I accept these trials and offer them to the Father with all my heart in reparation for my sins, for my Group and its Intention, for our deceased CUSANS, our benefactors, and all those who ask for our prayers, and for the other apostolic intentions which have been entrusted to me.

Bless my brothers and sisters in CUSA, and may we all glorify You and give proof of our love for You by bearing courageously and even joyously the cross which is ours. Amen.

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