

Mystery Unfolding: Necessary Witness
LCWR Presidential Address
August 12, 2011

Introduction:

A Presidential Address is a rich opportunity to weave together experiences and reflections. It is also an opportunity to incorporate some words of gratitude. I need to publically thank members of my own Council and congregation. They have been extraordinarily supportive to me during my time in the LCWR presidency. These Sisters possess many gifts and some of them possess gifts that were particularly valuable to me at this moment. There would not have been a power point presentation if it were not for the technical support offered by Sisters Margaret Briody and Barbara Schwarz, important members of our administrative staff. Sister Alice Byrnes, a Council member who is affectionately referred to as the “comma queen” enabled this text to be more literate. Sister Elaine Jahrsdoerfer, our Assistant Prioress, has musical gifts that you will come to appreciate even more as I enter into this address. Her support and suggestions have always been appropriate and helpful. I am grateful to have her by my side.

This address called for personal reflection on my own call to this sacred life and what it means to be a leader and a public witness. I could not help but reflect upon the fractured world in which we are called to exercise this leadership and witness. I reflected upon the privileged position I have held in the Presidency during these past two years. It has been a gift and a grace to work alongside of J. Lora Dambroski, Marlene Weisenbeck, Pat Farrell, Jane Burke, and the members of the LCWR staff. I could never adequately thank them for their inclusion and mentoring, for their example and wisdom. The gift of your trust as an assembly body has enabled me to observe the vitality of consecrated life as it is reflected in our regions. The experiences of the Presidency enabled me to garner an international and ecclesial perspective. Then, there is the title of this assembly, *Mystery Unfolding: Religious Life for the World*. I kept looking for the underlying question that needed to be answered, and I kept praying that I would somehow allow God’s message to speak through me and that I not get in God’s way. What is the “new” that is emerging even as the ground shifts beneath our feet? Let us hope that this personal prayer has been answered.

Stories are powerful teachers. They have a way of engaging our imaginations and our hearts and so I am going to offer you several stories, all of them true. An experience I had some years ago kept surfacing in my memory. This is the story.

A Metaphor:

The year was 1990 and I was an untenured faculty member at Iona College in New Rochelle, New York. My colleagues who held this faculty status preferred to call ourselves pre-tenured faculty. This year marked the 50th anniversary of the college. Among the activities planned was a trip for faculty to visit the Island of Iona, and then to go to Ireland to follow in the footsteps of Edmund Rice, founder of the brothers’ community. Iona is a tiny island located in the Scottish Hebrides. The island is considered sacred. It was the base of the Irish Christian missionary St. Columba. It, at one time, was the home of the Book of Kells. (Coppens, par.5) The itinerary looked wonderful. Since I thought that once I earned tenure, I would be ministering at Iona for the rest of my life, I asked my community if I could go. They agreed and provided the modest funding necessary.

We were a very mixed group of travelers. We probably ranged in age from early forties to early seventies. There were professors from a variety of departments, spouses, and friends. I was traveling singly and was the only person in consecrated life on the trip.

The Island of Iona is not that easy to reach. We flew first to Glasgow, Scotland, and remained there overnight. The next day we took a ferry to the island of Mull. From that port we took a bus to the other side of the island. When we arrived at the other side, we could see the island of Iona, but we had missed the last ferry. They sent fishing boats to pick us up and bring us over.

American travelers are often noted for bringing too much with them when they travel. This was certainly the case for me. However, I was not alone. One detail you might notice from this picture is that there is no concierge service there at the dock. After we rather ungracefully disembarked from the fishing boats, we needed to carry our luggage up hill to the guest house where we would be staying. We had arrived.

A highlight of our brief stay on the island was to be a pilgrimage around the island. That it was a pilgrimage was the only detail we had. The day was beautiful. I arose early and walked the paved road from one end of the isle to the other. Iona is only three miles long and less than a mile wide. I thought this pilgrimage would be a breeze. One of our party volunteered that her definition of a pilgrimage was “a short walk to a statue.” None of us could imagine that this would take very long. We were provided with a sandwich and a small bottle of water for the trip. We would eat along the way.

Most of us did not know each other very well. There were the usual kinds of differences that might exist on a collegiate faculty. The leader was from the Physics Department. Naturally, that is superior to anyone from the Education Department. There were several faculty members from the Criminal Justice Department as well as the Computer Science Department. I will leave our collective state of physical fitness to your imaginations.

The pilgrimage did not turn out to be as easy as we had hoped. Before long, we were climbing in rock quarries, and, if we were not careful, slipping into bogs of mud. Obviously, there were parts of the island not easily seen from our inn. Most often, we were told, there was little sun and lots of rain. It was exceptionally hot. Almost without thinking, we realized we needed to be very conscious of one another. There were several who needed to turn back because they could see the journey would be too rugged. Almost immediately, there was no criticism of another’s ability. There was only encouragement. We not only needed to reach for the hands of one another as we climbed, we needed to be willing to have our own hands grasped in order to more safely reach the next location.

At one point, we reached a meadow that held only grazing sheep. Our guide indicated this would be a good spot to stop and eat lunch. I don’t know if you are fussy about where you eat, but I am. The ground was covered with the by-products of sheep with healthy digestive systems—sheep droppings. It took careful ground scrutiny to find spots that would accommodate our sitting and eating. I had already decided I would not require the need of the napkin included with my cheese sandwich, at least not for its original purpose. It was my new sit-upon.

Six hours after we set out, we returned home. After some much-needed clean-up, we met in the lounge for some hydration. I don’t remember the details of all the places we visited that day,

nor their significance in the life of St. Columba, nor their place in the history of this sacred island. I will never forget the community that formed, the way we laughed that night, and the extraordinary spirit of inclusion that occurred among us. I do not remember having a holy thought while I was out in the fields, but something holy happened. This pilgrimage was not a “short walk to a statue,” but the learnings of this journey, I believe, can serve as a metaphor for the mystery of religious life unfolding for us today and our mission in this world. There are a number of learnings to take from this adventure and I would ask you to try to hold onto them as I speak.

- Sacred places are not always easy to get to
- Pilgrimages often do not turn out to be what one expects.
- Sometimes, we miss the boat.
- The less we carry with us, either on a trip, or on a picnic, or through life, the easier it is to manage the necessary flexibility.
- You may not always know if you can sit down.
- Don’t allow titles, levels of education, status, or impressions to interfere with relationships.
- Don’t be afraid to reach out to others and don’t be afraid to have your own hand grasped.
- Find opportunities to laugh.

As we hold onto these learnings and try to integrate them into discernment about what is being asked of us, for our world, we can only pray:

O Word of God, come into this space.
 O Word of God, come send us your grace.
 Open our minds; show us your truth,
 Transform our lives anew.

The Present:

We are a Pilgrim People. We are on a journey with God, with each other, with the people of God, all moving toward God. The journey to the sacred is not as simple as we might have wished and it is difficult to get there. Obedient to the directives of Vatican II, religious returned to the intents and designs of founders and foundresses. For some, the journey was too fast. For some, the journey was too slow. Some turned back from the journey, unconvinced that it was the right path. Others left our company altogether, having discerned they were not called to this particular journey. We stumbled often and walked through lots of mud, but there was an energy and love for this life that was powerfully unleashed.

Fast forward this experience to more recent events, specifically, the Doctrinal Assessment and the Apostolic Visitation. Religious life is no stranger to criticism. There have been centuries of that. When the criticism emanates from the very Church we love and to which we have given our lives, the impact is particularly hurtful. Relationally, this was for us akin to the betrayal of a child to a parent or of a lover to the beloved. These events and others that have followed have continued to hurt. We continually seek places in the Church where our gifts might be fully utilized. We spoke in support of health care for what it could offer to the poor and trusting in the promises made that this funding would not be used for abortions. Painful accusations ensued. More recently, we witnessed the public critiques of Beth Johnson’s book, *Quest for the Living God*, without the benefit of dialogue. There are still dioceses wherein dialogue with

bishops is nearly impossible. That is not the reality in all places; it is in some. There are still too many places where we do not know if we can safely sit down.

We continually recalibrated our bearings. Almost without thinking, we reached out our hands to one another and we allowed our own hands to be grasped so that we could more safely reach the next location. The community, the laughter, and the spirit of inclusion are gifts that we take with us from these significant challenges. Yet, we still must ask ourselves what it is that we are being called to witness to our world at this time. I realize we witnessed to standing in our integrity, that our actions were rooted in peace, and that we stood by one another. Is there something more our world needs to see? Is there something more that a religious woman, a religious leader, a follower of Christ, needs to hold up to the world?

We live in a country in which polarization in speech and in action abounds. The violence of September 11th, the explosions in Oslo, tribal wars and political wars, and profound poverty, rip our hearts open. We are red or blue, Republican, Democratic, or Tea Party. We are liberal or conservative, left wing or right wing. We are pre-Vatican or post-Vatican. We are the “good nuns” or the bad nuns. We are pro-life or pro-choice. The lists go on and on. Often there seems to be little room for dialogue, for civility, or for an honest exchange of ideas without assaults on personal integrity. What is the antidote we might offer to our world and to our Church as we exercise our religious leadership?

Last year this Assembly passed a resolution calling us to strengthen our bonds with women religious throughout the world. The resolution invited us to hear the voices of our Sisters, and I would add Brothers, from other continents. While we are very in touch with those areas of our lives that have been touched by suffering, it might it be helpful to step back a bit and incorporate into our consciousness the experiences of others from all parts of the globe. I took a bit of liberty with the resolution. As I make reference to these people and to their stories, I will not be doing them justice. These are merely thumbnail sketches. I invite you to learn more about each as your future allows.

Global Perspectives

Pacific Rim: Blessed Mary MacKillop, Australia’s first native to be declared a saint, co-founded a group of women religious, Sisters of St. Joseph, in order to work with the poorest of the poor in isolated areas of the Australian frontier. At that time, 1860, there were no religious orders in South Australia because of the very harsh living conditions. There were few Catholics. From the onset, the structure of her congregation was irksome to clerical authorities. The constitutions called for the congregation to be governed by a woman—one of their members of course—but a woman. She did not adopt for her community the common practice of having choir Sisters and lay Sisters. All sisters were equal in this community. Sisters lived in the places where they ministered, accepting whatever kind of housing they could find. All participated in the ministry to the poor, in whatever way this was necessary. While Mary began with the founding of a free Catholic school for the children, soon she had her Sisters visiting the hospitals and jails, and doing every kind of social service. There are differing accounts of why she drew so much criticism, but there is certainly evidence that she reported a clergy person who was abusing children. Although the priest in question was dealt with, his friends were angry with her for reporting the situation. Whatever the combination of events, in 1871 her local bishop appeared at the convent, made her kneel down in the presence of her Sisters, while he announced to all that she was being excommunicated “because of her disobedience and

rebelliousness.” (Ball, par. 20) They were all stunned but Mary left the convent immediately and went to live quietly with friends. The action was damaging to her newly established order. Within weeks, many of the Sisters in Adelaide were expelled or dispensed. The convent was turned over to another group.

Rumor campaigns began in earnest. Certainly, Mary’s rebelliousness and disobedience were spoken of often. She was accused of being an alcoholic. Although her friends and her Jesuit brother all told her the excommunication was invalid, she accepted this cross. A pious interpretation of Mary’s reaction was reported by Ann Ball in an issue of *Our Sunday Visitor*. She said, “The human Mother MacKillop wanted to flee, but the saintly Mother MacKillop stayed, silent and prayerful.” Six months later and shortly before his death, Bishop Sheil lifted the excommunication and sent a trustworthy representative to locate her and tell her.

Excommunication is not a tool that has been used only recently. Mary MacKillop was not declared a saint because she was excommunicated. She was recognized as a saint in spite of it. James Martin, SJ, in a commentary on the MacKillop story states, “A powerful woman in almost any organization—religious or otherwise—is frequently seen as a threat to the male leadership. Running through the lives of women saints and blessed are notable stories of conflict with church officials—and laymen as well.”(par. 8)

Eastern Europe

When World War II came to a close, we in the United States rejoiced. War veterans, who had survived the battles they were sent into, returned to families and friends. This country enjoyed the post-war baby boom and there was a huge call for new housing and education benefits for veterans. At the same time and virtually invisible to us, were the situations facing women and men religious who lived under the post-war régime of Stalin. The documentary, *Interrupted Lives*, produced by Judy Zielinski, chronicles the stories of a number of those women. Sister after Sister tells of being roused from her sleep by soldiers who had entered the convent around two in the morning. Some were sent to teach in schools, but most of them had their teaching certifications revoked. They refused to teach Marxism. All religious superiors were summoned and all religious houses were being liquidated. All of their institutions, schools, and hospitals were taken from religious communities. One author indicated the Soviet Union was the first modern nation to try to eliminate all religions and substitute a state atheism. (Tinerella, p. 10). Some Sisters tried to escape and continue to live with the guilt of having been successful when others were shot and left for dead. Many were sent to live in old and deserted monasteries where the living conditions were nearly intolerable. They speak of living with 11 in a room, with 14 in a room, and of living with no heat and no water. The soldiers hoped the Sisters would choose to leave religious life. Still others were imprisoned, beaten, forced into solitary confinement when they refused to give information. Sisters were sent to labor camps and to work with the developmentally disabled and the mentally ill. Sisters were most often forbidden to meet together, forbidden to wear a habit, and needed to find secular jobs. Many went home to live with relatives or with a friend. Prayer books needed to be hidden. Stalin thought the religious would simply disappear, but that did not happen.

Through God’s grace, there were still women who sought to join their ranks. Such formation meetings needed to take place in parks, in secret places, and with great care. It often took six to twelve years for a woman to have had enough opportunities for formation that she could take

first vows. Vow ceremonies had to be held in secret. Those who were members of Eastern Rite Churches were particularly subject to harshness.

In 1989 the Berlin Wall fell and the power of communism, as we knew it, diminished. Sisters were finally free to join in community with one another. Their efforts to return to what once was have been both graced and challenged. Many, if not most, convents and monasteries were destroyed or ruined by the interim usage. It is difficult when one has lived alone and in hiding for more than forty years to come to live together with others.

There is so much pain to process. One might expect there to be bitterness and anger. If it is there, it is not what the documentary communicates. Rather, a Sister is quoted as saying, "We are grateful to God that we are not angry. I pray for those who tortured me. After all, Jesus prayed on the cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'" Stalin had hoped the Sisters would just go away. The documentary concludes by saying, "Their lives were cruelly interrupted; but never undone."

Africa

Josephine Bakhita was the first contemporary African woman born in Darfur (Sudan) to be named as a saint. She was born in 1869 in a small, rural village in Darfur. When she was about nine years of age, she was abducted from home and sold into slavery. It is said that the experience was so traumatic for her that she was unable to recall her own name. She was given the name, Bakhita, which means "fortunate one." In total, she was sold into slavery five times. It is said she tried to escape, but was recaptured each time. Her fourth owner was particularly cruel and she endured great suffering with his ownership. Her fifth owner was kind. Because of business interests, he brought her to live with his family in Italy. It was there that she came to know the Canossa Sisters, an Institute of the Daughters of Charity, and where she came to know the God of Christians. It is reportedly said that it was with the Sisters that she recognized the God she had "experienced in her heart without knowing who it was" since she had been a child. She recognized this God as the one who had sustained her through her years of slavery. Although her owners tried to bring her back to Africa when they were returning, she refused. The Sisters helped her with interventions. Since slavery was illegal in Italy, the government declared her free to make her own choices. At the age of 38, Bakhita entered the Canossa Sisters. (par. 17)

She was a simple woman in many ways. She was never a congregational leader or the leader of an institution. There are some who would say she was too often treated as a slave, even within the religious institution. She did come to be known as a holy woman. The Sisters encouraged her to write her autobiography and to tell her story. Her writing and speaking became a source of income for the community. She was, they say, very famous. When she died, the people of the village honored her by calling her "Our Black Mother." It was the voices of the people that brought her cause to the attention of Rome. In 1992, she was beatified.

On the occasion of her beatification, Pope John Paul II offered her praise by saying she left us "a message of reconciliation and evangelic forgiveness in a world so much divided and hurt by hatred and violence." Although she endured so much, she herself declared, "If I was to meet those slave raiders that abducted me and those who tortured me, I'd kneel down to them to kiss their hands, because if it had not been for them, I would not have become a Christian and a religious woman." When Bakhita was canonized on October 1st, 2000, the Pope called her "Our Universal Sister."

Latin America

Oscar Romero was born in El Salvador in 1917 and his family, like most of the families in the country, was poor. He was apprenticed to a local carpenter because his family could not afford to continue his education past the age of twelve. He entered a minor seminary at the age of thirteen and excelled in his studies. His initial assignment was to a rural parish. His gifts for administration were immediately evident and he was appointed to an interdiocesan seminary and became secretary to the Diocese of San Miguel. He became distinguished for his use of what might be called the "electronic pulpit." He used the radio to broadcast homilies so he could reach far more people. In 1970 Oscar Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador. His appointment was not warmly welcomed. He was, at that time, a doctrinal and social conservative and he staunchly supported authority. (Biography, par. 6)

Little by little, the needs of the people he served converted his heart. As he began to speak, the death threats began. "Cassocks are not bulletproof" were the words spoken to him by a military commander. It did not stop Romero. They say he traveled on horseback to speak with laboring families to learn how he could best serve them. What he learned horrified him. His efforts at speaking and writing became relentless. He went to the Pope with detailed reports of the murder, torture, and kidnapping prevalent in El Salvador. He pleaded with President Carter to suspend US aid to the military dictatorship then ruling the country. Many of his own bishops did not support him. In 1980, while celebrating a funeral mass, Archbishop Romero was shot to death by a paid assassin.

"Days before his murder Archbishop Romero told a reporter, 'You can tell the people that if they succeed in killing me, that I forgive and bless those who do it. Hopefully, they will realize they are wasting their time. A bishop will die, but the Church of God, which is the people, will never perish.'" (Creighton edu., p. 1)

North America

The Amish, a peaceful people who live simply, have communities that reside in a number of places. One of those locations is a town called Nickel Mines in Pennsylvania. While Amish children had traditionally received their education in public schools, the changes in public education led them to develop some private schools. They were concerned about some of the topics being taught in schools, about the use of technology, and about physical education. The Amish people are known to be close knit and they have a strong belief in family life. Nickel Mines had a small, private Amish school to which they sent their children in confidence, knowing it would support the values they held at home. Twenty-six children attended this one-room schoolhouse.

On October 2, 2006, a man with a gun entered the school. He tied the feet and legs of some of the girls with zip ties and he also tied some of the girls to one another. He promised not to hurt them if they obeyed. He closed the blinds and locked the doors. Because the teacher had been able to run for help, there was help on the way.

Within a short time, the sounds of gun fire were heard. Five of the girls died immediately. Five struggled for their lives, but eventually lost that struggle. There is probably no greater loss for

any parent than the loss of a child. To lose a child in such a senseless way is even more traumatic.

It was what happened later that shocked the world even more than the violence of the shootings. Within a few hours of the shooting, Amish families were reaching out to the wife and children of the shooter. They realized the members of this family were victims as well. They expressed forgiveness to them.

The book, *Amish Grace*, (Kraybill, Nolt, et al) tells the story beautifully. The authors chronicle the complex process of forgiveness, of the practices of Amish life that would even allow that to happen, and of the gradual healing. They tell the beautiful story of the sleepless grandfather who had lost two family members in the shooting. Within two days of the shooting, a reporter stood in front of him.

“Do you have any anger toward the gunman’s family?” she asked.

“No.”

“Have you already forgiven them?”

“In my heart, yes.”

“How is that possible?”

“Through God’s help.” (45)

These voices and these stories tell us a great deal. Male or female, black or white, Catholic or non-Catholic, there is too much suffering in this world. Suffering can come from the Church, suffering can come from the state, and suffering can come from evil. I did not even touch on natural disasters or the mystery of illness, especially when it touches the young. Suffering can happen within a few minutes. Suffering can go on for many, many years. What is it that we can learn from these few examples? Let us take a few moments of silence and pray:

O Word of God, come into this space.

O Word of God, come send us your grace.

Open our minds; show us your truth,

Transform our lives anew.

Drawing From the Stories

I don’t know about you, but the stunning commonality I noticed in the stories drawn from round the globe was the ability of each of them to forgive those who brought about their suffering. There was nothing weak about their forgiveness. Forgiveness is not for the weak; it is for the strong and the courageous. It emanates from a deep sense of freedom.

When Beth Johnson spoke to this assembly in August of 2008, the *National Catholic Reporter* cited her articulation of the universal need to extend and accept forgiveness. Its healing grace, she stated, enriches community. Those of you who were here at that time will also remember that she spoke about about Charles Curran and the outcome of his investigation by the Congregation for Doctrine and Faith. She referenced a liturgy celebrated by Bernard Haring for Charlie and his friends. The reading was that of the Prodigal Son. Haring would not allow the Eucharist to continue until each of the participants had grappled with their anger and allowed

the Spirit to move them to a new place. "She said... 'Forgiveness... means tapping into a wellspring of compassion that encompasses the hurt and sucks the venom out, so we can go forward making a positive contribution, without hatred.'" (par.9)

Donna Markham OP, former LCWR president, spoke about forgiveness at the dedication of the Claretian Center in Chicago. Donna cited four conditions for forgiveness. I highlight these with her permission.

- There must be a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, or indifferent behavior toward the one who hurt us.
- One needs to make efforts to reduce our motivation to seek revenge and try to move toward reconciliation.
- One needs to let go of hoping for a better past.
- One needs to let go of a sustained and negative attachment to the hurt.

There are those who believe that the gospel command of Jesus to "turn the other cheek" is somehow a sign of submission, as though the insult was all right to begin with. Barbara Reid and Jose Pagola, among others, interpret the text very differently. Pagola speaks very clearly on this passage. Jesus "wants them to respond with dignity, creating a new situation which dramatizes the injustice and forces the violent ones to reflect, even perhaps to change their attitude." (255) He wanted to forestall the possible escalation of violence. As Barbara Reid states, "Turning the other cheek is a provocative response that robs the aggressor of the power to shame, and instead, the shame falls on the perpetrator." (38)

Forgiveness never pretends that all was well. Make no mistake! It is wrong to have so many fractured relationships in the Church and in our world. It is wrong to exclude women from using their gifts in service to the people of God. It is wrong to make judgments without dialogue. It is wrong that trust has been broken. It is wrong to be self-righteous. Joan Chittister, in her little book called *God's Tender Mercy*, says: "What other people do to us may have little or nothing to do with forgiveness. The fact is that there is nothing to forgive in life if and when we manage to create an interior life that has more to do with what we are than with what other people do to us." (43-44)

Neither does forgiving mean that one does not speak. Our own sister, Catherine of Siena, was often daring in her speech and writing. In a letter addressed to Cardinal Orsini in 1376, she writes: "You ought to be a fragrant flower, not a stinking weed." (69) The reference was about his moral character, not his personal hygiene.

At the July meeting of the Religious Brothers' Conference Donna Markham urged the Brothers to be agents of reconciliation. This month a group of untenured Catholic theologians will meet at Boston College. They are part of the Catholic Conversation Project. They are predominantly laymen and laywomen who want to develop a new approach. They will be discussing the relationship between theologians and bishops, hoping they can find ways to make this conversation more fruitful even as they address contemporary challenges. (Winters, 12-13)

Here we are, gifted women, who are leaders in our congregations and within our Church. What is it that we most need to witness to our very troubled world and Church? What would be our greatest gift? Right now, we each stand in our own integrity. The LCWR stands in its own integrity. The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious stands in its own integrity. The

Bishops stand in their own integrity. The Vatican stands in its own integrity. Members of all the special interest groups that are part of the Church also tell us they stand in their own integrity. Yet, the truth is vast. Each of us holds a piece of the truth but not its entirety. The truth is a person who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the Life." If any of us believes we hold the entirety of truth, we are, most likely, a short walk from idolatry. In our collective search for truth and for the One who is truth, we must learn to respect and honor the differences we hold.

Each of us seeks closer contact with God and with all that is sacred. Each of us has been loved into being by God and we all love God. We have so many different understanding. It might be important to remember that Jesus began his ministerial work with a rather motley crew. In more than 2000 years, little has changed in terms of our diversity. As we stand in our integrity, we meaning all of these entities, might remember:

- Sacred places are not always easy to get to and the journey often does not turn out the way we might have hoped or imagined.
- Sometimes, we miss the boat—any one of us can miss the boat.
- The less we carry, the greater our ability to be flexible as we climb over rocks and sink into mud.
- We may not be comfortable with whether or not we can sit down, but if we scour the ground carefully, we can usually find a spot. At the same time, there are others who do not know if they can sit down with us. Can we dust off the seats and create that space?
- Don't allow titles, levels of education, or status to stand in the way of relationships. In the human community, and in the Church, we need one another.

This life is not a "short walk to a statue." Perhaps, as each of us stands in our respective places, we might stand a bit closer to one another. Then when the movements of grace and opportunity happen, we will be close enough to reach out for the hand of another or to have our own hand grasped. In that way we can help each other through the rough spots and keep one another from falling. Can we allow the room for something holy to happen. We need to celebrate those moments with laughter, and we always need to pray:

O Word of God, come into this space.
 O Word of God, come send us your grace.
 Open our minds; show us your truth,
 Transform our lives anew.

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