



raising a prophetic voice since 1970

CATHOLIC COMMITTEE OF APPALACHIA

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CCA'S 2022 ANNUAL GATHERING

By Jessica Wrobleski

For the first time since the COVID pandemic, CCA's 2022 Annual Gathering took place **in person** over the weekend of September 16-18. We met at the historic Blue Ridge Assembly YMCA in Black Mountain, North Carolina. While many who attended were members of the North Carolina Chapter, the Gathering also brought together CCA members and friends from West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, and the Appalachian diaspora (including Cleveland, OH, Bethesda, MD, and Boston, MA).

This year's theme, "Healing: Is Crying Enough?" invited participants to reflect on the need for healing across a number of dimensions of our personal and collective lives. The implied response to the conference title was of course NO—crying is NOT enough to bring about healing in the Church and world. Additionally, prayer and repentance for wrongdoing and harm, reparations, forgiveness, and lasting change to ecclesial and social structures are necessary to healing.

The opening ritual, inspired by a Native American Prayer to the Seven Directions and facilitated by CCA Board member Lianna Costantino, invited us to reflect on our relationships with both Earth and Indigenous people. Are we truly grateful for the wisdom (and challenge) of the voices of Earth and Native American people, or do we try to control and appropriate them for our own enjoyment or benefit? How can we deepen our commitment to respecting

and listening to the land and those who cared for it prior to the arrival of Catholics on the continent? Lianna also offered a keynote address which challenged each of us to seek truth, understanding, and healing with our own ancestors in order to heal ourselves and the world.

A keynote panel featuring Srs. Robbie Pentecost OSF, Rose Marie Tresp RSM, Kathleen Weigand OSB, and myself addressed the topic of healing with/in the Church. Each person shared her own experiences of brokenness and healing in relation to the Catholic Church. Several breakout sessions related to trauma, ecological grief, and racism were available on Saturday afternoon. Many people also enjoyed the opportunity to have a conversation with Bishop John Stowe about the Synod process, which some CCA members have experienced as a sign of hope for healing in the Church.

We enjoyed a lesson on the cultural significance of drumming in West Africa, as well as the opportunity to participate in a drum circle with Adame Dembele, a traditional drummer from the Ivory Coast who has been a leader in the Asheville arts and culture scene. Irma and Bob Howarth were recipients of this year's Bishop Sullivan Peace & Justice Award, and the FOCIS Award for 2022 was given to the St. Eugene Parish Care of Creation Committee. Later in the evening, as usual, CCA members shared their talents (and silly skits).

Throughout the Gathering, many of us felt aware of both the absence and presence of Michael Iafrate and Fr. John Rauch with

(continued on page 6)

DEATH OF AN APPALACHIAN JUSTICE WARRIOR

By John W. Miller

Reprinted from *Moundsville: PBS Film & Magazine*, blogpost with the same title, May 14, 2021 (www.moundsville.org)

Of all the people I've met in Appalachia doing the *Moundsville* project, nobody came at you with a spirit like that of Michael J. Iafrate, a brilliant musician and Catholic social justice activist whose body was killed this week by cancer.

Michael — Mikey to his friends — was a Catholic in the tradition of Dorothy Day, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and Dan Berrigan, articulated by liberation theology. The Gospel of Love means all kinds of things to all kinds of people, but to this community of believers, it means that we all called to fight, passionately, for justice. "If your interpretation of the Gospel isn't having you smash some structure," Michael once told a friend, "it's idolatrous bullshit."

I've never met anybody who loved the church and its message of love, justice, and resurrection, and at the same time hated its flaws — clericalism, corruption, sexism — more than Michael. He seethed with righteous Christian punk anarchist indignation, and he felt called to evangelize in his own way, by playing music, punk and bluegrass (why not?), and fighting for justice in his native West Virginia and the place he was living when I met him, Wheeling, where he helped organized a screening of *Moundsville*. In Wheeling, he helped expose a thieving bishop, but his deeper calling was advocating for marginalized people all over West Virginia and Appalachia, those suffering from over a century of exploitation and deprivation.

As his friend Andy Edwards wrote in a Facebook tribute:

He was the best of us, and I mean that. I struggle to think of a Christian more faithful, more brave in his witness to an unpopular gospel, than Mike. He was a thorn in the side of bishops, diocesan officials, and anyone who neglected "the least of

these," yet he was also the kindest and gentlest person you could ever meet. I only played music with him once, at an "artists' mass," which ended up being one of the most beautiful and inspiring experiences of worship I've ever had. He was equally adept at expressing and proclaiming his faith through punk or old-time bluegrass—an odd combination, to be sure, but it made complete sense in him.

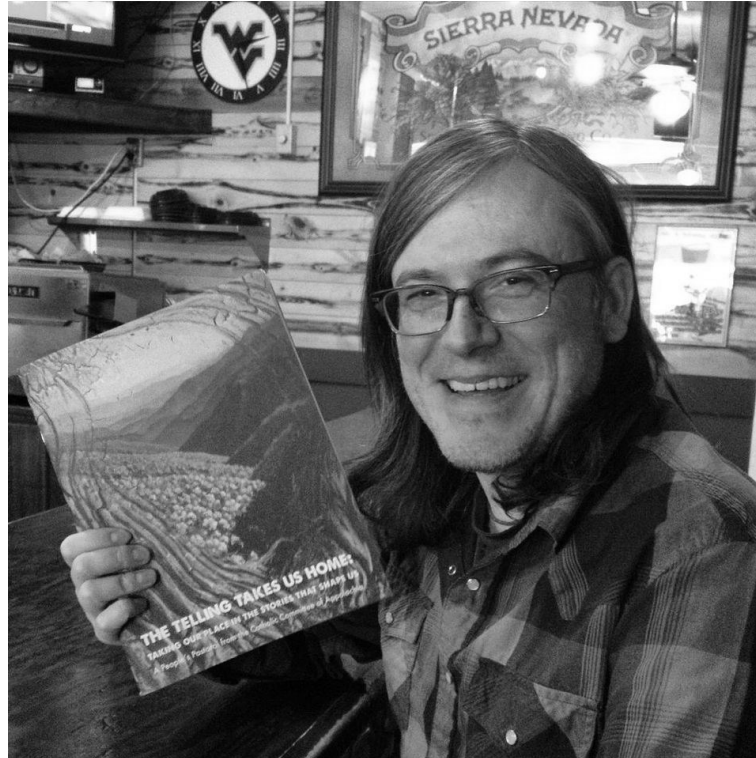
A doctoral student in theology, Michael oversaw the writing of the 2015 People's Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia, a stirring, eloquent 84-page plea for justice for Appalachians, and vision for healing and hope.

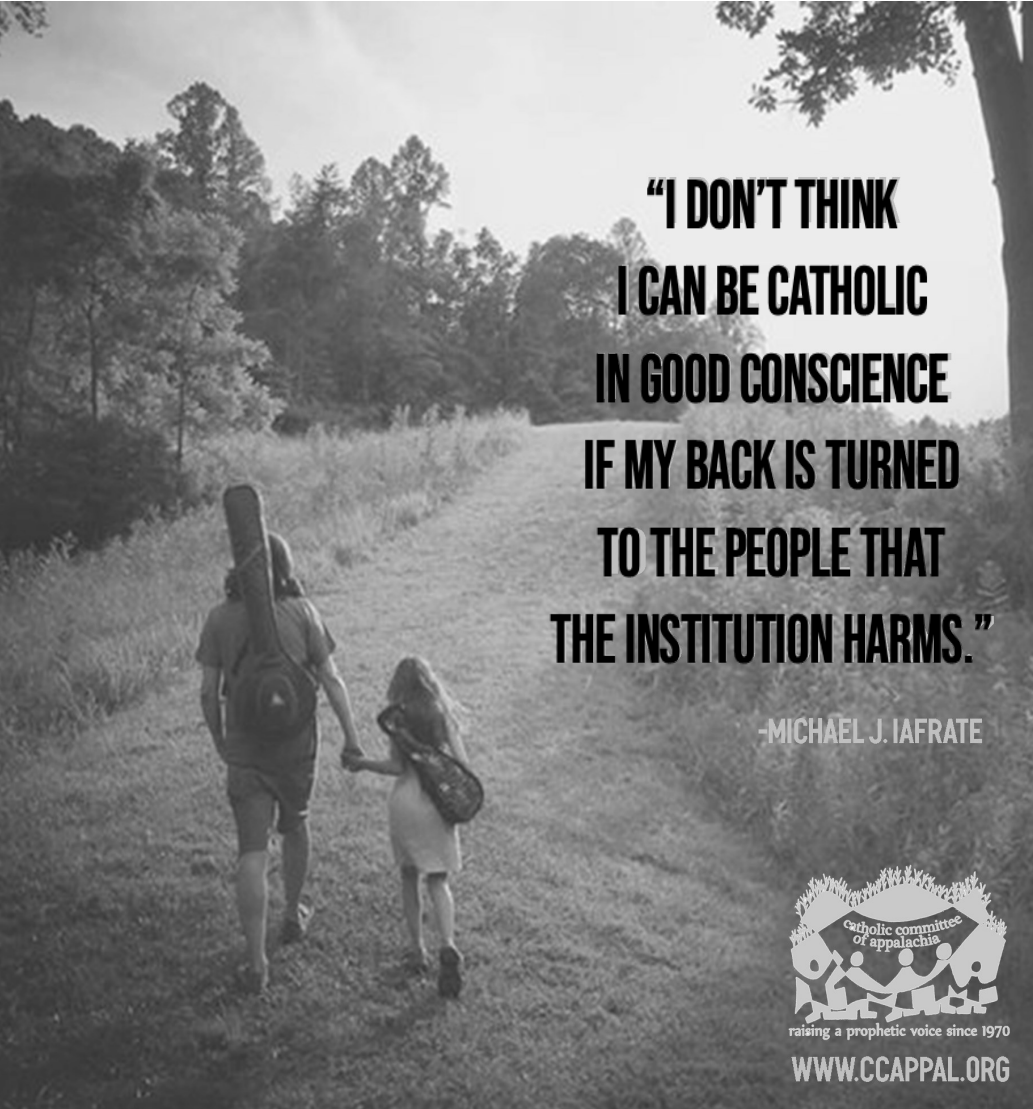
The document, which inspired a documentary film by Sebastian Gomes and Salt + Light Media, seized people's imagination with its articulation of the need for justice, emphasis on the environment and food, clear theology, and lifting up the cause of people marginalized in society and the church, including women, people of color, and the LGBT community.

Rare for a text by a theologian, it was, also, a work of deep reporting, empathy and curiosity, involving wide travel and interviews. And Michael was not just a social justice activist. He was a real Catholic, which meant that he believed in Jesus, in the the power of the spirit, and in resurrection. By naming problems, and pointing toward love, and embracing the reality of our brokenness, we could make something new, he said.

This was also a man who loved his wife and children, and loved playing music with people he loved. But love is not a zero sum endeavor, and Michael touched the lives of many, even those of us who met him only handful of times. This week, Michael's Facebook page was filled by tributes. "I only met him a few times," wrote somebody, "but I could tell he was the real deal."

Big spirits are like that. ▲





**“I DON’T THINK
I CAN BE CATHOLIC
IN GOOD CONSCIENCE
IF MY BACK IS TURNED
TO THE PEOPLE THAT
THE INSTITUTION HARMS.”**

-MICHAEL J. IAFRATE



“I would say most Catholics have an issue with the church’s leaders in one way or another and figure out their own ways of dealing with that. Some choose to leave, others choose to remain and give witness to another way of being Catholic. Right now I’m the latter, but I respect and cherish those who leave out of sadness or out of a more active rejection. I am part of the church, not part of the institution, but I am responsible for it to some extent. Which is why I push back against it when I need to. I don’t think I can be Catholic in good conscience if my back is turned to the people the institution harms.” - M. Iafrate

ANOTHER NEW VRINDABAN

*By Jacob Strautmann for Michael J. Iafrate
after Goldene Pferde 7 by Eva Strautmann*

One foal becomes another under blankets of dust
A four-wheel drive kicks up rounding the kudzu;
Someone fords the steep grade from crick to ridgway
Hauling ass, a lead foot, gun rack, dripping exhaust.
I find your Volkswagen rusting beside the Temple,
Elephants cursive in the teakwood; there you re-read
A timeline of the commune as the lights fade.
It’s Saturday night, and Maha-matras stipple
The air, perfumy as aging cattle the peacock fan,
As garam masala hyping Govinda’s Take-out.
We visit now as fathers, each in his light jacket,
But fifteen, twenty years ago, no plan,
Pop the stick shift and find us a festival.
That first night: dark-haired girl blue as a grape
Carried sedan-style Krishna hand-on-hip
Would win the costume contest – haribol!
Ecstatic, our first kirtan mid-air we caught
Coin-sized cookies, a sliver of silver inside
Baked, transformed, flipped to the devoted crowd,
We left with legs like jell-o, t-shirts soaked.
Tonight we follow a flock as old as us
At sunset. We’ll sing the deities out on the pond,
Swan boat over the surface of illusion, my friend.
Glad we met here, Michael, even if it was
A short changeable world. The fireworks spring
From the far side of the water. We wait our turn
At a makeshift bridge while someone’s grandchildren
Take up either arm to steady his crossing.

Editor’s Note: New Vrindaban, named after Vrindavan, India, the place of Krishna’s birth, is an intentional Vaishnava Hindu community and Hindu temple outside Moundsville, WV. Michael enjoyed meeting up with friends there to share its beautiful spaces, and regular prayer and festivals, where he found much peace and joy with them.

CCA'S HISTORY OF ANTI-RACIST WORK LEADS TO ANTI-RACIST POLICIES

In the five decades Catholic Committee of Appalachia has existed in these mountains, the two things our members have always said they find most life-giving about our network are: 1) connecting with like-minded people, and 2) CCA's prophetic voice, speaking truth to power.

In 1970, when the Catholic committee spun off from the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA), it would have been considered an entirely white, settler, Catholic, straight, cisgender community. Yet, especially once CORA closed its doors in 2006, those unlike us in demographics were drawn to our mission. Now, we can boast a membership and Board of Directors that include not only other denominations but "nones" (no faith tradition) as well as nuns, female Episcopalian priests as well as male Catholic priests, and people who identify as LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

From the beginning, white CCA members have embraced a moral and spiritual obligation to help end racism believing the work to dismantle white supremacist systems should not have to fall to those who are oppressed by them. Many of our white members continue anti-racist work in their local communities. And, looking back over the last 20+ years, one can see the evolution of awareness and conscious efforts by CCA as a whole.

In 2001, it was deemed prophetic to have an Annual Gathering on "Diversity in Appalachia." The latest Gathering on the topic in 2018 was entitled, "Confronting White Supremacy and Racism in Appalachia." Between 2014 and 2020, CCA published four statements condemning the violence and calling out the Church's complicity. But, we needed to do more than talk and write about it in the broader context because ignoring racism within CCA is a luxury afforded only to our white members.

In 2019, at the encouragement of members during the Annual Gathering, the Board committed CCA to becoming an anti-racist organization. It was the essential next step, but perhaps naïve because striving to become an ally is a colossal ongoing challenge for an organization, requiring complete buy-in and hard work by everyone. And, whether we reach that goal is only for those in the BIPOC community to determine.

The Board discussed, *"Whenever we are together, virtually or in person, can our white members be as keenly aware of racism as BIPOC people are made to be on a daily basis? Can they*

catch even subtle and unintentional expressions of it from themselves and each other? Will they redirect fellow white members? Are they open to others pointing out needed changes? Will they make those changes? Because, this is what it means to 'do the work' of speaking truth to the power of racism within CCA."

The Board concluded that everyone could, at least, try. Through the pandemic, an Anti-Racist Task Force was formed, then, a permanent Committee. Books were recommended and trainings were encouraged. Leadership (board members, staff and committee chairs) began weaving the topic through our programs and publications because it intersects with all other issues CCA addresses. They also started mindfully practicing anti-racist behavior, being conscious of their thoughts (prejudices), more aware of their feelings (unconscious biases) and owning and changing their language and actions (racist behaviors).

Now, when white members miss those marks, Leadership exemplifies how to address it. Since there is always an impact despite best intentions, they try to be prompt either with a brief redirect, or by attempting a conversation, encouraging amends, and mediating for reconciliation. Last year, they encountered a persistent refusal to cooperate from only two members, and flagrant racist and misogynistic behavior from another. Without a willingness to be accountable for the direct harm they had caused, CCA was not a good match for these people. Without having set clear expectations or policies to point to, the Board understood that, although upsetting and regrettable, termination of those memberships was necessary to recreate a safe environment for all of us.

Our collective voice against racism is intensifying. The more we choose to be aware of it, the more we see it. The more we see it, the more we need to confront it. CCA is safer for both BIPOC and white members when we can show our like-mindedness with a unified approach. To that end, and to be fair and inclusive of all prospective and current members, the Anti-Racist Committee is drawing up policies for Board approval that will: define how CCA members cooperate to create safe space for one another; set an effective course of action when our space is compromised; and, decipher when clearly-stated consequences would be needed. The Anti-Racist Committee welcomes all interested members to join in the task, and we will announce when policies are published online this year. ▲

BOARD RESOLUTION ON ANTI-RACISM

The Board of Directors of Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA) is committed to becoming an anti racist organization. The CCA Board of Directors supports the Anti-Racist Committee's development of clear Common Membership Agreements and policies which will be shared later this year.

The CCA Board of Directors is fully aware of the decision by CCA Coordinator Jean E. Kirkhope to terminate the CCA Membership of three members in July 2022 due to continued explicit racist actions after deliberate attempts by CCA leadership for dialogue and reconciliation were consistently ignored. CCA Board Members are disappointed that this action was necessary, and CCA will continue to work to become a place where BIPOC people are safe and welcome within CCA membership.

2021 MARKED CCA'S 51ST ANNUAL GATHERING

By Sister Kathleen Weigand

2021 was a year of many blessings and sorrows. We had already experienced the death of Fr. John Rausch in February of 2020 which was followed by the untimely death of our Co-Coordinator, Michael Lafate, in May, 2021.

It was in the midst of these losses that a committee began planning the 2021 Annual Gathering. Due to the ongoing COVID19 pandemic, the decision was made to move the Annual Gathering into an online format for the second year. The committee consisted of Peggy Gabriel, Sarah George, Vicki Wenz, Sister Robbie Pentecost, Sister Loretta Spotila, Dominic Martina, Richard McCall, Mary Emig, and me acting as Chairperson. Unfortunately, we were met with yet another loss when Mary Emig died unexpectedly in June, 2021.

With these many losses in mind, our opening prayer service featured the "Communion of CCA Saints," including music and prayers accompanied by a slideshow of those who have gone before us.

Our keynote speaker Jeffrey Sachs, a professor, author, and advisor to governments around the world and the United Nations, leads global efforts for sustainable development and climate safety. He is a strong supporter of the Green New Deal and Medicare for all. Speaking to the theme, "Making A Transition to a Just Economy," his address emphasized how CCA can apply the UN Sustainable Development Goals within our state, city, and local communities.

A panel followed, which included local advocates and activists working to accomplish this across Kentucky.

Two CCA members were recipients of the Bishop Sullivan Peace and Justice Award in 2021. First, Rev. Judy Yunker OSB, a member of Mt. Tabor Benedictine community in Martin, KY, who continues to minister to people where they are and has offered continual service for the last 43 years. Second, Jerry Hardt, who has dedicated many years of service to the land and people of Appalachia in the areas of education, social, systemic, and political change.

The FOCIS award was accepted by David Cooke on behalf of Grow Appalachia, which was started over 10 years ago with a grant from the "Peace, Love and Joy Foundation," started by John Paul DeJoria, one of the founders of Paul Mitchell Hair Systems. Grow Appalachia is a Sustainable Agriculture Program that can begin to change the narrative and turn us toward healing—if people are brave enough to confront it, humbly learn, and begin to work towards harmony and balance.

The Chris Hale Environmental Award went to Chris Barton, a professor at University of Kentucky and founder of Green Forests Work. His dedication to the environment, his teaching at UK among other things have promoted the sustainability of our planet, not only throughout Kentucky, but other states and countries as well.

The Committee was truly grateful for the leadership of Jeannie Kirkhope, the rest of the CCA board for their help, and for all those who participated in what was a real blessing of 2021, the Annual Gathering. ▲

Editor's note: See the '21 and '22 canonizations into the Communion of CCA Saints on page 13. If you would like a link to the slideshow, contact CCA's office: cca@ccappal.org

CCA'S REMATRIATION OF A ST. KATERI TEKAKWITHA RELIC AND THE TERMINATION OF A MEMBERSHIP*By Lianna Costantino*

Lianna is a member of CCA's Board of Directors. She is the Facilitator of CCA's Cherokee Spirituality Retreat, Chair of the Anti-Racist Committee, and also participates in the NC State Chapter. She is a recognized citizen of the Cherokee Nation.

On March 4th of 2021, I was contacted by Jeannie, who connected me with a relatively new CCA member, regarding a relic of the Mohawk Saint, Kateri Tekakwitha (a piece of bone in a Catholic reliquary). This member's brother had been in possession of the relic, and several other things that should be returned to various tribes, which came into the member's possession when his brother passed away. The member wanted to repatriate the relic to the Mohawk Nation. He mailed it to me and, on April 30th, I gratefully brought it with me when I visited the Akwesasne Mohawks and the Abenakis of Odanak in Quebec after a conference with them in Vermont.

But, before heading to Vermont and on to St. Kateri's homeland in Quebec, on April 2nd, I met with Mary Herr and Maxine Studer at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Cherokee, NC, to say a prayer and pay homage to the Saint in Cherokee country. We had a very lovely visit and took a few photos.

When I got to Quebec, I gave the relic to Mr. Darren Bonaparte of the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation. He is a respected Elder, a prior Chief and now serves as their Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and the officer of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. He was very grateful to have this relic returned to St. Kateri's home. They had a Mass in celebration and some other ceremonies as well. Mr. Bonaparte said he would send a thank-you letter to our CCA member.

Sometime later, the member contacted me to say that he never received a note of thanks. He wanted me to call Mr. Bonaparte and "see to it" that he received a written thank-you "from the tribe, suitable for framing." For a white per-

son to highlight his/her own good deeds on behalf of BI-POC people in this way, it exemplifies a racist behavior referred to as "performative allyship," part of the "white savior complex."

Then, on July 22nd, I received a call from this same member asking if there had been any nominations for CCA's Awards this year. If so, he wanted to attend the ceremonies. Then, he spent about 10 minutes telling me why he was not planning to attend the rest of our Annual Gathering. Apparently, it was going to be "ridiculous" and "nothing but a pity party for a bunch of women." He asked me why there was "nothing but women" slated to speak at this "pity party for minority women."

This was the second conversation I had been involved in that day with a bigoted person who had no sense of awareness or tact for the toxic things that were being said.

When I could manage to get in a word with him, I said it was a shame he was not planning to attend because it seemed he needed to be there more than anyone. He went on again, defensively this time, not allowing me to say anything more. The only way to stop him was to end the call.

After I hung up, I wondered what St. Kateri, a female Mohawk Saint, would feel about this member's words to another Indigenous woman about our speakers for the Annual Gathering. Then, I prepared and braced myself for the next Zoom call of the day.

My experience of this member's 'allyship' was entirely performative. He centered his own thoughts and feelings, and his language was overtly racist and misogynistic. I think CCA can do much better, and I said so to the Anti-Racist Committee, comprised of Jeannie and Ed Sloane, when I briefed them about the call at the end of the day.

After consulting with us, Jeannie made the unprecedented administrative decision to terminate the man's membership. The three of us agreed that, although his contribution



St. Kateri Tekakwitha bone relic in reliquary

through the donation of St. Kateri's relic was significant, his language, attitude and unwillingness to listen, were so egregious, and made for such a toxic environment, that they would meet any criteria for termination if CCA had a policy in place. Rather than wait for that process of approval, the Committee agreed immediate dismissal was warranted for the safety of all members. Instead of calling to alert him to his new status, Jeannie drafted a letter of termination and mailed it, not wanting to risk having to endure the misogyny, or the denial of it and other behaviors, in a similar conversation. She followed up by submitting a lengthy incident report to the whole Board which was discussed at our third-quarter Board meeting, and which resulted in the Board's Resolution on Anti-Racism on page 5.

Returning the relic was a meaningful gesture but this member's behavior, however unintentional, tainted the entire process for me. My experience with him is a good example of how our words can have a negative impact. And, it sheds light on the fact that, as we work to become an anti-racist organization, we will uncover, varying degrees of engrained racist, bigoted, misogynistic, centering, white-savior behaviors amongst ourselves in the process.

Therefore, if you are genuinely trying to learn how to become an uncolonized non-performative ally to marginalized people, when you're called out on engrained or unintentional behaviors, try not to take offense. Realize that getting defensive or giving in to self-pity or guilt doesn't help you improve. In fact, when you allow yourself to simply react to feelings of discomfort, you continue to be part of the problem. Instead, try to listen and hear feedback, and ask for any needed clarification, knowing it is critical in order to learn, grow, and do better.

We will only be able to engage in this positive way when we practice honest and constant self-examination of our implicit biases. Reflecting on our own automatic or unintentional judgements, decisions and behaviors prepares us to better hear about them from others, and reduces the chances of anyone being caught off guard altogether.

Allies exercise their power to choose, and move forward. So, keep practicing self-reflection, listening and positive engagement rather than dwelling on mistakes, how they were called out, or by whom. We can do it with patience and compassion for ourselves and each other. And, policies will help provide us with the brave space we need to make mistakes without fear of being demonized or ostracized.

As long as we each keep practicing, we'll get there. ▲

2022 ANNUAL GATHERING *(continued from page 1)*

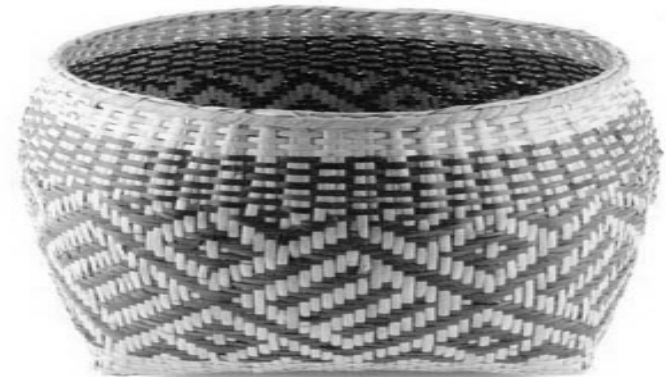
us as we met to talk about the multiple dimensions of healing needed in the Church and Appalachia, and the role CCA can play in that healing. We remain both grateful and grieving as we remember Michael, Fr. John and others who we have lost in the time since we last gathered.

The absence of other CCA faithful and elders at the Gathering at Black Mountain raises questions about the future of CCA, as our gathering was significantly smaller than in the past. Conversations are ongoing regarding a vision for the future, including the 2023 gathering to be held in Charleston, WV on September 15-17, 2023. ▲

CCA's CHEROKEE RETREAT

***An Introduction to the
Culture & History of the Cherokee People:
A Journey to Uncolonization & Allyship***

**March 13-19, 2023
Cherokee, NC**



Partial scholarships available. Call or email:

828-331-8688

liannacostantino@yahoo.com

State News

BIG LAUREL LEARNING CENTER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE TUG RIVER

Big Laurel Learning Center in Mingo County, WV, was founded by CCA members, Sister Gretchen Shaffer and Sr. Kathy O'Hagan, and is currently directed by Grace Williams. Grace shares that, "Big Laurel is proud to be a part of the efforts to create cleaner waterways and we'd love to invite anyone else in the area to join us! The Tug Fork River is 159 miles long, spans 3 states, 8 counties, and contains 1500 square miles of watershed. Friends of the Tug Fork, WV and KY DEP, and residents in Southern WV, Eastern KY, and Western VA are cleaning up trash, removing tires, and monitoring the water quality. Let's keep spreading the word about this beautiful resource we have in our backyards and keep challenging each other to make the Tug as healthy and safe as possible! Check out the progress that's been made in the Tug Fork watershed and the work that is still to come." ▲



Learn more about the Tug: <https://arcg.is/1uenGW0>

UPDATE FROM EMMAUS FARM

Greetings CCA Friends,

I write to share with you the news that it is time for me to step away from my work as Executive Director of Emmaus Farm. Some of you may have known it as the Glenmary Farm from 1971-2014. I was one of the over 20,000 volunteers who spent a life changing week at the Farm, which led me to be a year-long volunteer with Glenmary in 2014—the year they announced they would be closing the Farm. Shortly after, I founded Emmaus Farm to carry on the ministry they established in Lewis County, KY, and it has been an honor to carry on this work.

While the pandemic certainly wasn't good for my small organization, I don't think it was the primary reason we're in the position we're in. Rather, I think the pandemic highlighted and distilled some of the issues I have been facing for years leading up to 2020. I have attempted several different staffing structures that haven't panned out, and the isolation has caused feelings of burnout that have resulted in stress-related illnesses, both physical and mental. Emmaus's success was largely built on my ability to be available, mind, body, and soul, at all times.

In personal news, I got married in October of 2021 to Benjamin Ginn. We live "in town" in Vanceburg's old Library building. I'm in the process of creating a series of YouTube videos chronicling the renovations and DIY projects Ben and I have undertaken to turn the Library into our home together. You can find those by searching YouTube for Library Living | Sarah George Ginn. I've also been working with Ben at the pizza restaurant he owns and helping with plans for opening a second location.

I look forward to staying involved with CCA and would be glad to hear from any of you. If you would like to stay in touch with me, my personal email address is SarahGeorgeGinn@gmail.com.

There will certainly be moments of grief in the wake of this bittersweet decision, but I have peace and confidence I am doing what's best. I fell in love here, with my work, with my husband, with Appalachia, with place, and I have more gratitude than I can express for those who have supported me and the work of Emmaus Farm in countless ways.

I'll close with Emmaus's motto, words I mean with my whole heart: Love is the only way.

Peace, love, joy,
Sarah George Ginn, Founder / Executive Director ▲

WAY OF THE CROSS IN THE GARDEN AT ST. EUGENE, ASHEVILLE

By Vicki Ransom

Many of the members of the Peace, Justice and Care of Creation ministry at the parish of St. Eugene in Asheville are also enthusiastic members of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. With close connections to Catholic Social Teaching as well as environmental activism, they developed several years ago an “Ecological Way of the Cross,” adapted from CCA’s 2015 “Cross in the Mountains”, and similar prayer services by Pax Christi and the Precious Blood Spirituality Center. This Lenten devotion has a long history which can be traced to St. Francis of Assisi. Living in a time when Christian pilgrims could not travel safely to the Holy Land, followers of Francis found a way to reflect on the sufferings of Jesus near to their own homes. Members carried on this tradition in Asheville, adapting the Stations to their own Jardin de la Amistad (Friendship Garden) on the grounds of St. Eugene.

In April 2022, participants were asked to walk mindfully and meditatively from station to station, aware of the sounds of people and traffic in the distance as well as the peaceful sounds of birds and plants around them. As they deepened their awareness of their surroundings, they re-

flected on the Garden itself, considering each Station written specifically for that sanctuary. They opened by reciting the Earth Day Prayer from the Sisters of Mercy, and listened as members read quiet meditations and all joined in responses. They reflected on how Jesus fell on his walk to Calvary, while considering the fallen state of the environment and how it leads to war and the emigration of people from their homelands. As they looked upon the small handprints of school children on the side of the Garden shed, they reflected on how Mary felt when she saw her suffering Son and remembered his own small hand in her own. Toward the end of the devotion, they stopped at the large boulder especially chosen for the site, now covered by flowers, and considered the boulder that had enclosed the tomb of Jesus.

Through peaceful walking, quiet meditation and calm chanting, those who took part in the Way of the Cross in the mountains of North Carolina were able to connect the sufferings of Jesus and Mary with the need to care for all of Creation. If you would like more information on re-creating this devotion in your own area, please see the “Way of the Cross” on the CCA website, or contact Vicki Ransom at rasom74@gmail.com ▲

VIGIL OBSERVING ATOMIC BOMBING OF HIROSHIMA

By Bob Howarth

A vigil observing the 76th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was held in Asheville, NC on Aug. 6, 2021 from 4 to 6 PM at the city’s major downtown intersection of Biltmore Ave. and Patton Ave. Pertinent banners, signs, and handout information were carried and/or distributed by members of the Vigil’s sponsors.

Initiating sponsor for the Vigil was the Western North Carolina chapter of the national Physicians for Social Responsibility (WNCPSR); co-sponsors were Veterans For Peace, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Care of Creation Ministry of St. Eugene’s Catholic Church, and Gender and Radiation Project. Sponsoring participants consisted of about 25 – 30 members of which several were also members of Catholic Committee of Appalachia.

Foot and vehicle traffic was quite heavy during the Vigil period. Exposure to visiting tourists by the Vigil’s reminders stimulated supportive comments from numerous pedestrians and horn beeps with “thumbs up” from passing drivers.

Location of the Vigil site is about 2 blocks, a mere five minute walk, from the Hiroshima Nagasaki Memorial Cherry Tree. The tree was planted by WNCPSR Dec.6, 2019 about 10 feet off Patton Ave. near the front corner of the Buncombe County Court House. One visitor who spoke with us walked to view the Cherry Tree and was so pleased with it and its bronze plaque he returned to express his approval of the Memorial. All in all, we Vigil participants departed soon after 6 PM with feelings of satisfaction for time well spent. ▲

Editor’s Note: Thanks to Bob (NC), Linda Modica and Jim Ullrich (TN), and Art Milholland (MD) for keeping CCA represented and informed on the issue of anti-nuclear proliferation.

Reflections

MY EXPERIENCE OF CCA'S CHEROKEE RETREAT

by Jay Beck

"In the old days the Cherokee people believed that the world existed in a precarious balance and that only right or correct actions kept it from tumbling. Wrong actions were believed to disturb the balance. For hundreds of years, since the Cherokee signed the first peace and friendship treaty with Britain, ... our world has been spun out of control, and we have been searching for that balance. But even though we do not fully understand why, we have returned to searching our own history and teachings for answers to today's problems. Perhaps, like Selu shaking the kernels from her body so that the people can live, we are shaking hundreds of years of acculturation and dehumanization from our minds—also so that our people may live." — Wilma P. Mankiller, Principal Chief, Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma

Nvwoti. Medicine. What is needed for healing. That is how I would simply describe my experience of this retreat.

I am so grateful for the experience I was invited to be a part of with this year's Cherokee spirituality retreat led by Lianna Costantino and Nic Cochran. I have been involved in many different activist circles and cross cultural educational spaces throughout my adult life—as a teacher, facilitator and artist, and this week was one of the most powerful spaces I have ever been in.

It is not easy to gather a group of participants from many different life experiences and simultaneously teach a painful history, challenge racist ideas, confront white supremacy and privilege while also holding everyone involved in a circle of love and hope and making them feel welcome, but Lianna and Nic did just that and more.

The combination of "classroom" style presentations, with lectures and videos and guest speakers, mixed with site visits to the Cherokee language school and local churches and the museum and other important sacred sites made for an extremely dynamic learning environment that engaged all the senses and allowed for things to be more fully experienced instead of just taking in information.

It was also a huge blessing and inspiration to meet and witness the many Cherokee educators and community members who offered their time and expertise to help us learn and understand more deeply about what the Cherokee people have gone through, how their culture and spirituality have helped them to forgive the unforgivable, and how it is fueling their important work today.

I was struck by the immense beauty and hospitality of



the Cherokee people over and over again as they welcomed us into their sacred spaces and cooked for us time and again. I am so grateful to Lianna for being such an amazing facilitator and gracious host. I am equally grateful for Nic and all the ways he regularly modeled how to be a good ally to indigenous people and stand in solidarity with them. I was blessed by his grounding reflection times and his calm and centering accompaniment when the waves of our journey got stormy.

There were many times when things didn't go as planned in the agenda for the weekend, but every time something reared its head to knock us off track both facilitators met it full on and turned it into a deep teaching time that illustrated in real time both how to see the blind spots we have due to our cultural conditioning and how to apply the spirituality we were learning about.

Lianna and Nic were often available for processing and open to answer questions. Lianna also made time to just hang out at every meal break and gifted us with her traditional storytelling skills after hours. All of these gifts together in these facilitators are extremely rare and I highly recommend anyone interested in learning about the Cherokee people to not pass up an opportunity to go on this retreat.

But to be clear, it is not always fun and beautiful. It's actually really hard work that is confronting massive wrongs done by many of our ancestors and our government that have still not even begun to be healed and in some cases are still happening. It is learning spaces like this retreat that can begin to change the narrative and turn us toward that

(continued on page 22)

OPEN LETTER REFLECTS ON CLERICALISM, TRANSPHOBIA & MISOGYNY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In May of 2022, Coordinator, Jeannie Kirkhope, invited a handful of CCA members to take part in trainings to be facilitators or note takers for our Synod listening sessions. This is an email she received from former member, Janna Coe, explaining why she would be declining the invitation and withdrawing her membership.

Jeannie,

Thank you for your gentle nudge. It has pushed me to do something that I've been putting off, which is to break my remaining ties with the catholic church; or as my dear friend Fr. John Rausch used to call it, "R.C. Incorporated." As befits my final break with that church, this is a rather lengthy missive that you are free not to read. Spoiler Alert: you don't have to read to the end to know that I have to decline your generous "nudge" to join the synodal team at CCA; and in fact I must resign from the committee.

I first joined CCA when John Rausch got fired from his job as Justice and Peace Coordinator for the Diocese of Lexington. John was actually too involved doing peace and justice work for Bishop Gainer's taste. I was on John's commission, and it really didn't fare well once he was gone. That's when I followed John to the CCA.

One of my first experiences on the committee was joining in the drafting of a letter to then bishop Ronald Gainer. He had just fired the last woman in a leadership role on his staff because she wrote an article for the diocesan paper that described the history of female deacons in the early church. The letter wasn't published, but just writing it was too much for him. We avoided any *ad hominem* attacks in the letter and kept it focused on inviting him to a dialogue about the role of women in the catholic church. He was furious that I (as one of his deacons) had signed that letter. He accused me of "deliberate disobedience" and promised repercussions. I was hoping that he would fire me, but eventually it blew over. It was a moment with

CCA when I felt like I had done something important.

I was employed by the Foreign Service of the U.S. Department of State at the time, and so I requested a transfer soon afterwards. I was reassigned to Cairo, Egypt, where in addition to my work as Deputy Consul General at the U.S. Embassy, I ministered to the Filipino worker community in Cairo. After the military coup, I retired early and moved to Texas for a few years; but was invited back to Kentucky by John Rausch to help him set up a "Glenmary Corridor" in Campton, Jackson and Hazard, Kentucky. John was in Tex-

as for a Holy Week mission, and his exact words to me were "it's safe to come back now!" By that time, Lexington had a new bishop, in the person of John Stowe. John's project didn't quite work out, and after a year in Hazard I moved to Lexington.

John Stowe put together a group of more progressive individuals to help develop his Diocesan Pastoral Plan. I was part of that team, and it was a lot of fun. It involved facilitating meetings at every parish throughout the diocese, much like the current "synod." John Stowe was certainly a great improvement over his predecessor, and is one of the more progressive bishops in the country; but I found that he is as inflexible on matters of ecclesial law as the canon lawyer who previously held that episcopal seat. It was during that time on the planning team that I came out, "Part 1." It was part one in the sense that I wasn't ready to come out all the way as the trans woman I have always been. Telling people,

including John Stowe and my ex-wife, that I was "gay" was enough to give me the space I needed to continue the process. Once my divorce was final, I moved to South Dakota to start presenting full time in my actual gender. It is also where I was able to get my legal gender and name change (pretty amazing if you've been following the news about the governor's latest attack on trans children.)



Janna hosting her radio show "Transactionality" on WLXU

(continued on page 23)

Reflections

SISTER MARY DENNIS LENTSCH REMEMBERED

By *Ralph Hutchison* reprinted with permission of Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance

On Saturday, August 13, 2022, we gathered at the Great Smoky Mountains Peace Pagoda for an Obon Ceremony, a time to honor ancestors, share memories, and rekindle their spirits among us in the Japanese tradition.

This impulse is not foreign to the Christian tradition. At many funerals and memorial services, a verse from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews is invoked: "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." it begins, envisioning a gathering of those who have gone before and yet remain with us, present in spirit.

Later that same day, August 13, Sister Mary Dennis Lentsch, PBVM, an amazing woman of faith whose life was compelled by that Christian tradition, joined the great cloud of witnesses. Her sister and niece were with her in Dubuque; her death came at the end of slow decline that began with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer a little more than two years ago.

Mary Dennis left her family farm in Iowa as a young woman to join the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In her early years, she taught school. But several decades ago she left Iowa and came to Tennessee to serve in Appalachia. Assigned to assist a rural mountain community, she gathered women together to see what might be done. The women said they needed childcare services, but there was no place and no money. Mary Dennis had no idea where to start, and she told them so. Then she said, "So, we'll do it together!" Of necessity, her endeavor ended up not only providing the needed services, but it instilled in the women who had to figure out what to do and make it happen, with confidence and a new sense of self reliance.

I first met Mary Dennis on a trip to Nashville with the grassroots organizing group Save our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM) – now Statewide Organizing for Community Empowerment. She was with Anne Hablas, a Presentation sister from North Dakota. The two of them were quiet, reserved, and even seemed a bit timid as they anticipated their first trip to the state Capitol. Timid, I was soon to learn, was not a word to associate with Mary Dennis. She might be wary of a situation until she had made an assessment, but once she understood the lay of the land, she asked herself what her faith required, and from that



moment on she was an unstoppable force.

When the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance announced the Stop the Bombs campaign in 1998, Mary Dennis was one of the first to step up. On August 6 of that year, she was arrested and charged with trespassing at the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, protesting the ongoing production of nuclear weapons there. It was not her last arrest. Over the next fifteen years, she would be arrested countless times on a variety of charges. When the government announced, in 2001, that trespassers would face federal charges, including prison, Mary Dennis was undaunted; she climbed over the racks assembled across the road and became a guest of the United States at the federal prison in Lexington, Kentucky.

The magistrate in that case had sentenced Mary Dennis to two months in a halfway house, but before her scheduled report date, the Justice Department under John Ashcroft declared judges no longer could determine where sentences would be served. Several years later, as we stood outside the federal courthouse holding cardboard placards with empty boots stenciled on them, protesting the war in Iraq, the magistrate judge,

returning from lunch, walked past us on the sidewalk. He paused in front of Mary Dennis, spoke briefly, and went on. Later she said, "He just said, 'You know it was never my intent to send you to prison.'" She assured him she knew that.

(continued on page 22)

'21, '22 CANONIZATIONS INTO THE COMMUNION OF CCA SAINTS

Saint Barney Offerman
Asheville, NC, Jan '21



Saint Michael Iafrate
Lowell, OH, May '21



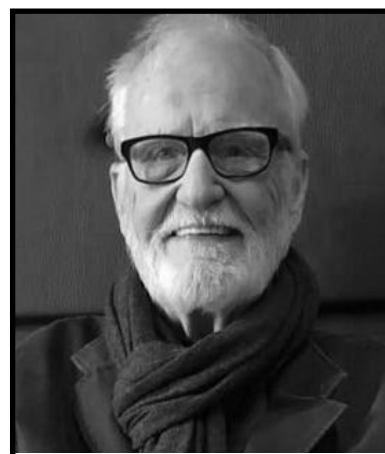
Saint Mary Emig
Owingsville, KY, June '21



Saint Brendan Keough
DePere, WI, June '21



Saint Brendan Conlon
Louisville, KY, July '21



Saint Tom Navin
Ft. Mitchell, KY, Aug '21



Saint Laurence Christiansen
Marietta, GA, Jan '22



Saint Mary Dennis Lentsch
Knoxville, TN, Aug '22



Saint Maura Ubinger
Abingdon, VA, Sept '22



Saint Margie Zuerick
Dayton, OH, Dec '22



Saint Wilbur Thomas
Charlotte, NC, Dec '22

All deceased CCA members are Saints in our eyes. It is never our intention to exclude anyone from canonization, but we do not always get word of people's passing. If you know someone who should be included in the Communion of CCA Saints, please contact us. For full roster, go to: www.ccappal.org/saints

Reflections

THE COORDINATOR'S CORNER

"GIVE WITNESS TO ANOTHER WAY OF BEING CATHOLIC"

By Jeannie Kirkhope

About 10 years ago, I was really struggling in my Catholic Worker ministry and frustrated with the institutional Church. CCA was down to it's last \$8,000, and the prospects for the organization continuing was looking pretty bleak. One evening, I was commiserating over the phone with one of my former Spring Break students who had become a friend through his postdoc years in Theology, and I mentioned thinking about closing up shop and calling it quits on all of it. He sounded almost desperate. "Jeannie! You can't! You showed me a way of being Catholic I'd never seen before! It gave me hope! I know there are still other college kids out there like I was. You have to stick with it!"

That was the thread I hung by until Michael came on as my Co-Coordinator a year and a half later.

Over the next 8 years I worked with Mikey, my ties to Catholicism strengthened to a ship anchor rope, but began dwindling back to a thread after he passed away. As much as I teased him about his phone addiction, I'm grateful I can scroll back through all our online conversations and his prophetic, political, and punk posts on Facebook. That's how I found the quote for the title of this article, in context on page 3, under Jocelyn's photo of him and Hazel heading uphill to CCA's 2019 Hootenanny at our pond.

After losing Michael and John Rausch, and so many other members, so quickly, I knew the small number at our Annual Gathering in September wasn't just due to these COVID-ish times. CCA's membership is at an all-time low

and participation is very limited because most are either unable to travel anymore or unable to fit anything more into their schedules. Those still active are excellent, but there haven't been hands reaching for the torch. Survey results from 2017 showed CCA was important and the work very much needed, but taking part just wasn't a priority. That seemed to still be the case five years later.

My thread began to fray. Is CCA in its own twilight years? Worse yet, should we consider putting it into hospice? We've been here before, but thoughts of closing were never for lack of work, and not for lack of funding this time. We exceeded \$80,000 in the bank last year, more than I've seen in my two decades, and that's without any bishop support for the second straight year! We've reached sustainability, and I'm receiving more just compensation than my predecessors ever saw. But, none of that is enough when we're losing life itself.

Before my thread snapped, I reached out to the 22 members younger than me and dubbed them "The Keepers of the Pastorals." I scheduled a Zoom call in November to see if there's interest in carrying on. Thankfully, there is. We're just not sure how, yet. So, the Keepers will be meeting here at the farm this summer for a Pond Party to brainstorm what they want CCA's future to look like. Meanwhile, they're planning the Annual Gathering, stepping up for the National Synod listening session, creating ways to honor our older members, helping me write to lift CCA's collective voice, keeping in touch, and paying their annual dues.

The Keepers give us hope that as long as two or more are witnessing to another way of being Catholic in Appalachia, CCA will, indeed, carry on...somehow. And, that starts to make my thread feel a little bit more like a banjo string. ▲

CCA'S 53RD

ANNUAL GATHERING

Sept 15-17, Charleston, WV
St. John XXIII Pastoral Center

Highlighting CCA members & how they live their lives for justice in ministry, secular work, or lifestyle

All speakers will be our own

Round Tables, Fish Bowls, Holding Council

Less program, more socializing, networking, and free time

CCA'S 2023 ZOOM MASSES

WITH BISHOP JOHN STOWE

- ◆ Sunday, Feb 12, 4 pm
- ◆ Sunday, June 4, 4pm
- ◆ Sunday, Sept 17, 9am
from the Annual Gathering
- ◆ Sunday, Dec 3, 4pm

Mark your calendars and watch for the link in our email updates.

KENTUCKY'S BISHOP STOWE DESCRIBES 'FEAR AND PANIC' AMID HISTORIC FLOODING

By Katie Collins Scott, August 3, 2022, Reprinted with permission from National Catholic Reporter

As residents of Kentucky endure historic flooding and face a rising death toll — which includes four siblings ages 2 to 8 years old — Bishop John Stowe of Lexington is working to assess the damage, ramp up assistance and listen attentively to those affected.

There is fear and panic; people are trying to figure out where we go from here," Stowe told NCR Aug. 1.

The last week of July, 8 to 10 inches of rain fell in a mere 48 hours in southern West Virginia, western Virginia and eastern Kentucky, where creeks and rivers swelled and overflowed. Mudslides in Kentucky reportedly left some people stranded; bridges were destroyed and houses pulled off their foundations. Roads and electricity were disabled, and thousands of Kentuckians have been displaced.

On Aug. 1, while the region sustained additional rainstorms and bodies were recovered from the drenched landscape, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear updated the total deaths to 37. Hundreds of people remain unaccounted for. "Let us pray for these families and come together to wrap our arms around our fellow Kentuckians," Beshear said on Twitter.

All counties affected by the floodwaters are in the Lexington Diocese, and 15 parishes are in the area. As of Monday, Stowe knew of at least two parishioners who lost their homes.

Though only around 1% of eastern Kentucky is Catholic, the flooding hit those served by church ministries hard, said Stowe.

Eastern Kentucky, which includes a stretch of the Appalachian Mountains, is one of the poorest regions in the United States; throughout Lexington nearly 1 in 5 residents live below the poverty level.

"All our churches have a social dimension to their ministry — food pantries, secondhand stores — and help people who live in dire poverty day in and day out," said Stowe. "To see this devastation is terrible."

Phone service has been spotty the past several days, but

the bishop has been speaking with parish life directors and personnel. "There was more rain last night and today, so rivers they thought were receding might be rising again," he said. "There's also the possibility of flash flooding."

Last year rainstorms ravaged Beattyville, Kentucky, flooding a church and destroying a rectory. "They are still rebuilding, and now the new floodwaters are a foot away," said Stowe.

The bishop praised Beshear for swiftly declaring a state of emergency and said local mayors quickly opened shelters and schools for the displaced. President Joe Biden on July 29 declared a major disaster exists in the state and offered federal aid to supplement state and local efforts.

Stowe said he still determining all the ways he can support people, but he's currently focused on relief and recovery. "Participating with relief efforts is the best way we can minister to people right now," he said. Parishes that are able will be helping with their social outreach, likely offering food and water. St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Charities of Lexington plan to assist, as does Catholic Charities USA.

The bishop said it's important to listen to people and to partner with them. "Those in Appalachia are used to people coming in from the outside and telling them what they need," said Stowe. "We need to walk with them, listen to them and hear what they need." Stowe is grateful for the prayers sent from across the country and said a few parishes in the Lexington Diocese held a moment of silence before Mass last weekend. "They lit candles and offered prayers for

those who have died and those still missing," he said.

The path forward, added Stowe, was in part illustrated by the Sunday, July 31, Gospel — a parable about a rich man who thought he needed to build a bigger barn to hold his abundant harvest. God reprimands him, saying: "The things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?"

Jesus then explains: "Thus will it be for all who store up treasure for themselves but are not rich in what matters to God" (Luke 12:13-21).

The eastern Kentucky community will store up the treasure that matters most, said Stowe, "by helping one another through this and by providing relief and assistance wherever we are able." ▲

Editor's note: Some in Eastern KY are still struggling. If you would like to give to relief efforts, contact Lexington Diocese's Peace & Justice Office: jvancleef@cdlex.org (606) 666-7871

"We need to walk with them, listen to them, and hear what they need."

- Bishop John Stowe

See, Judge, Act

BOB & IRMA HOWARTH RECEIVE CCA'S 2022 BISHOP SULLIVAN PEACE & JUSTICE AWARD

When newly ordained in the 1920's, Fr. Joseph Cardijn of Belgium came home to find that his school friends were lost, "Most industrial workers hardly lived like human beings let alone sons of God." He began Young Christian Workers (YCW) to help them Christianize their work place by creating leaders among employees. YCW spread to 33 countries. Irma joined YCW when she was 20 years old, Bob was 18.

Weekly meetings were held with men and women in separate rooms. They had three parts, "Observe, Judge, & Act." 1) They were asked to "Observe" situations they felt were not what Christ would want." 2) Read selected Bible passages focusing on the teachings of Christ so as to begin to form the mind of Christ (Judge). 3) Decide on an "Action" to help right a situation. Economic and social justice were central – later they included environmental justice.

Bob and Irma became involved in helping to create two health clinics in poor areas in Tijuana. They joined in the Farm Workers movement led by Cesar Chaves, and offered Dignity, San Diego's gay group, space at Cardijn Center for their weekly worship and gathering. The couple participated in Peace rallies, helped form their diocese's first Preparation for Marriage program, and Irma started Cardijn Center's Legislative Committee to help YCW members be better informed as voters.

All their lives, Irma and Bob have been politically involved, working to promote progressive political candidates by making calls, canvassing & donating.



Irma received a BS in Nursing and later, her Master's in Clinical Social Work. Bob worked as an electrical engineer for the Navy. The two became engaged in Rome in 1957, married 6 months later, and started a family.

Bob and Irma moved to Asheville in 2004 and joined CCA in August of 2010. They helped start Asheville's branch of the national Department of Peace Campaign, and the city's first Care of Creation Ministry. They also became members and are still active in Western North Carolina's Physicians for Social Responsibility whose main project is elimination of nuclear weapons. The Howarths both taught English as a second language to Latino immigrants for three years, and, they are currently active in their small Democrats Committee at their independent retirement facility. ▲

THANK YOU FOR RESPONDING TO OUR ANNUAL APPEALS & FUNDRAISERS!

* Gave more than once

Kit Sloane	Ray Dombrowski	*Francis Busteed	*Janice Iafrate	Sr. Theresa Kehres	*Mt. Tabor Benedictines
Jerry Weigel	Micahel Sigwalt	*Bob Choiniere	Jocelyn Carlson	Frank Hare	Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, KY
R & D Stinebrickner	Sr. Jackie Hanrahan	Chuck DiSalvo	Linda Modica	Carl Long	Sisters of Charity, Dubuque, IA
Marcus & Glenda Keyes	*Michael Vincent	*Dene Peterson	Daniel Ven Belleghem	*Joyce Corbett	Union That Nothing Be Lost
*Theresa Brion	Linda Mashburn	*A & K Simonse	James Ullrich	Greg Kremer	Sisters of Notre Dame De Nemur
Sr. Ann Marie Quinn	Arlene Seeber	*R & I Howarth	B. Thomas Gumbleton	Sue Koesters	Ursulines of Louisville
*Anonymous	Harry Ford	Gerrie Zimmer	Father Les Schmidt	*Dolores Skelly	Sisters of St. Joseph, WV
MaryAnne Jackson	Mary Ellen Koenn	D & D Becher	Jeri Whitely	*A Milholland & L Mostello	Benedictine Convent, MO
*Paul Martino	*John Brenner	Maria Bergh	Lynn Jeffereys	James Spotila Family Trust	Sisters of Precious Blood
Rose Berger	B & D Sweeney	Murel Grim	Peter Iorio	OSF Mission Activities	Cong. of Sisters of St. Francis
*Sr. Joan Wilson	Bruce Cahoon	John Hash	*W & M Laramée	Sisters of Loretto	
Michael Lonsway	Sister Margie Zureick	Theodore Godlaski	George Bain	Augustinians	

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“HIPPIE CATHOLIC” PARTICIPATES WITH CCA IN SYNOD LISTENING SESSION

By Cassidy Beane

I am the founder of the social media platform, the Hip-
pieCatholic. Since I started this platform in 2018, our com-
munity has grown internationally culminating in our own
synodal listening session for Pope Francis’ Synod on Syn-
odality. The Hip-
pieCatholic’s mission is to start a conversa-
tion between the world where the Holy Spirit moves and
the Church where the Most Holy Eucharist resides.

This platform is for the “Roamin’” Roman Catholics,
the exiles and wanderers, the mystics and the misfits. The
Hip-
pieCatholic has gained 26,000 followers on TikTok,
6,000 followers on Facebook, 3,000 subscribers on
YouTube, launched a podcast & blog and has been fea-
tured in America Magazine: [The TikTok star who melds
Catholic tradition and progressive politics.](#) The Hip-
pieCatholic has also launched new merchandise for eclec-
tic, alternative Catholics & spiritual wanderers! Our com-
munity is growing everyday! You can find all these links
in my LinkTree: <https://linktr.ee/thehippiecatholic>. We’re
here to organize and help people take back the Church!

The Catholic Church has a deep history of grass-
roots social justice work that is not often discussed in
the institutional church or secular world. For example,
the Catholic Worker has done amazing work serving the
poor and marginalized, providing a space for Catho-
lics who wish to take their faith to the streets.

When I discovered Catholic Committee of Appalachia,
I was thrilled and inspired. CCA’s mission to serve
the people of Appalachia by networking and raising
her prophetic voice is what the Church needs more
than ever. CCA is committed to working for justice, fol-
lowing a long history of grassroots social justice organiz-
ing in the region of Appalachia. Working for economic
and ecological justice within the Church and in the
world, CCA provides a space for the voice of the people
to be heard. There is often a misconception that inclu-
sive, justice-seeking organizations can only be found in
urban settings, but this couldn’t be farther from the
truth.

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia provides for
the needs of her community and helps build community
in the beautiful rural mountains, full of rich history.



I participated in CCA’s Synodal Listening session in
the spring. We had heartfelt conversations about how
the Church has hurt us, but also how it has brought joy
and healing in our lives. I am grateful to hear these sto-
ries.

Catholic Social Teaching informs both the mission of
the Catholic Committee of Appalachia and the mission of
the Hip-
pieCatholic. We are both inspired by the Spirit of
Vatican II that revitalized the Catholic Church in the
1960s and continues onward today. Peacemaking isn’t al-
ways peaceful, but it’s always worth it. I am honored to
be a part of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia’s work
and I look forward to seeing what CCA continues to do

*We invite you to consider
Catholic Committee of Appalachia
as a beneficiary
when making your will.*

For more information contact us at:
cca@ccappal.org or
81 Puddle Run Rd. Spencer, WV 25276

Reviews

'HEALING HAUNTED HISTORIES' OUTLINES CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS AMERICA'S SETTLER PAST

By David E. DeCosse

First published online April 29, 2022. A version of this story appeared in the June 10-23, 2022 print issue of National Catholic Reporter under the headline: "Book outlines church's burden to address America's settler past."

How can the Catholic Church in the United States resist the temptation of seductively false accounts of the nation's founding that fuel the sin of nationalism? I mean the seduction evident when state laws prohibit the use of the New York Times' 1619 Project in history classes and thereby obscure an honest engagement with slavery's place in the founding of the country or when the continent-wide dispossession of Indigenous land is explained away as a regrettable consequence of the advancement of Christian civilization. Such evasions of truth-telling subordinate objective claims of morality to the imperatives of national myth.

I am aware of the heroic work of history teachers at all levels of Catholic schools committed to an honest engagement with our difficult past. I'm also aware of notable public efforts aimed at truth, reparation and reconciliation like Georgetown University's atonement for its slave owning past; or the truth and healing process undertaken at the Red Cloud Indian School on

the Pine Ridge Reservation; or the "Reckoning with our Mission Histories" project of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker that invites the L.A. Archdiocese to explore the truths of the California mission system.

But it's time for the Catholic Church in the United States to develop a more comprehensive and consistent stance toward addressing our troubled American past and the church's role in it.

Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization by Elaine Enns and Ched Myers could be a big help in that effort. The book is founded on the bedrock of objective morality that Enns and Myers neither avoid

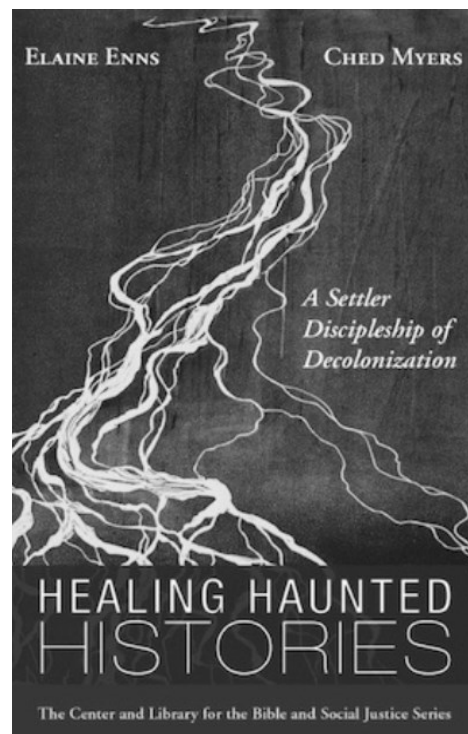
nor mitigate: The continent-wide theft of Indigenous land that made possible the establishment of the United States and Canada.

In the face of such a vast injustice, the book essentially responds to the question: What should a Christian settler in the U.S. or Canada today do to make right such a wrong? By "settler," they mean any non-Indigenous persons living now on stolen lands (they except enslaved persons and their descendants from the group of settlers).

This brave, unflinching book falls outside the usual categories of genre. In compelling fashion, it combines personal narrative, Indigenous history and culture, decolonial and post-traumatic theory, biblical exegesis and theological reflection. Enns brings to the work her expertise on restorative justice; Myers is a noted New Testament scholar. They approach the project from their shared Mennonite tradition.

Enns and Myers are keenly aware of the many ways that Christians today dismiss this primal injustice (the authors acknowledge their own tendency to do so). They understand, too, that today's settler inhabitants of North America did not themselves commit the original sin of violent dispossession ("This history is not your fault, but it is absolutely your responsibility," they quote Indigenous filmmaker Nikki Sanchez as saying). At the heart of the book is Enns' immigrant family's story from their fraught departure from Ukraine in the early 20th century amid the chaotic aftermath of the Russian Revolution to their settlement in Saskatchewan in a large Mennonite farming community to Enns' own migration to her residence now near Santa Barbara, California.

Enns' deep and moving dive into her story draws on the concept of "storylines" applied to three key realities of her family's epic and everyman trek. First, there are "landlines." These are the stories of the land itself — its soil, waterways, deeds of ownership, etc. — that propel migration and shape the arrival of migrants to a new country. Then there are "bloodlines," the stories of good and evil that families carry or conjure as they go from one land to the next. Finally, there are "songlines," those sources of hope and healing that accompany migration.



In telling her story, Enns shows the precise ways in which her family — like every other settler family — heroically sought a new life and also benefited from stolen goods. They fled persecution. They crossed vast stretches of land and water to come to what was for them a new and promising world. But when they arrived as farmers in Canada, they were settled by government policy on land that only a few years before had been taken from Cree Indian tribes. The creation of the Canadian nation required the domestication of farmland, not the continued presence of nomadic peoples.

In response to this historic theft, Enns and Myers call for restorative justice over the long haul. We must look for large and small ways to acknowledge the truth of the past and make reparation, including finally the return of the stolen land to its rightful owners. This work of discipleship, they say, is "necessary for Christians who would follow a Jesus who was executed by a colonial state; reckon with the long and lamentable history of a colonizing Christendom; and care for a future of the church as a 'House for all peoples.' "

There are many things to learn from *Healing Haunted Histories*. But the most important comes from its essen-

tially Christian inspiration to seek the redemption of historical wrongdoing.

The Catholic Church in the United States should face our difficult past neither intent on saving national myths nor on vindicating postmodern identity theory. Instead, the essential inspiration should come from the convictions of Christian faith.

St. John Paul II showed the way during the Jubilee Year in 2000 when he apologized on behalf of the church for numerous historical wrongs. A Vatican document called "Memory and Reconciliation" provided theological justification for that Jubilee Year and explained that, in the eyes of faith, the interpretation of the "bond between past and present is not motivated only ... by the common belonging of every human being to history ... but is based also on the unifying action of the Spirit of God."

The Spirit orients us toward truth and the possibilities of reconciliation. And, the Vatican document notes, we should turn in such a direction confident that "taking responsibility for past wrongs is a kind of sharing in the mystery of Christ, crucified and risen, who took upon himself the sins of all."

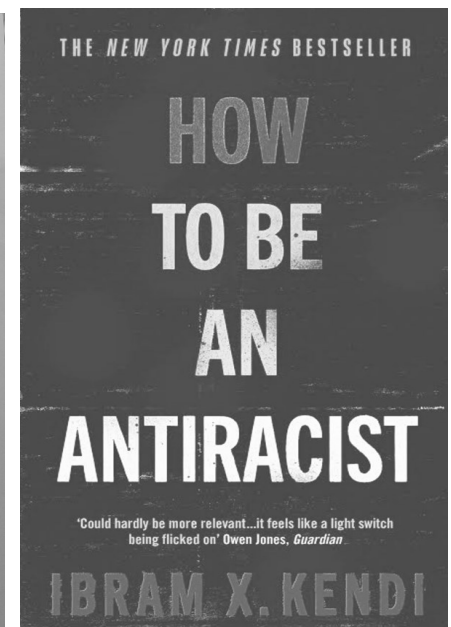
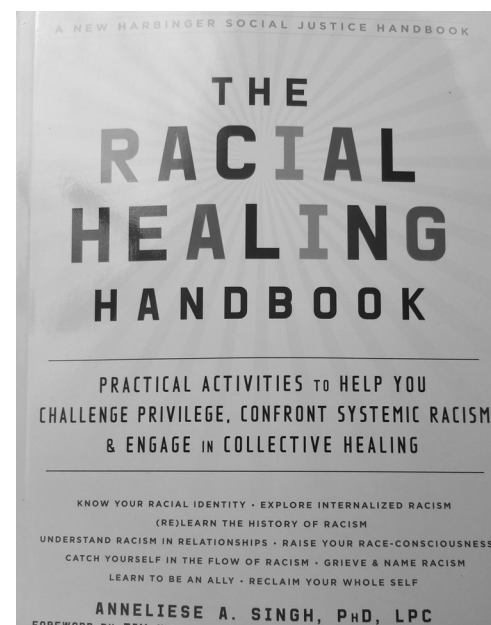
Now that's the spirit the Catholic Church should bring to the battles over history raging across Turtle Island, as the Indigenous called North America. ▲

Editor's note: If you were with us for the 2020 online Annual Gathering, you may remember Ched Meyers as one of our keynote speakers. Below are two more books highly recommended.

DONOR THANK YOU'S (continued from page 16)

FACEBOOK FUNDRAISERS * Gave more than once # Non-member

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Statements

GRAPPLING WITH THE LIFE OF A POPE

Op-ed printed in Charleston, WV's Gazette-Mail, Jan. 7, 2022

by Jean E. Kirkhope

Whenever a globally renowned figure dies, like a musician, athlete or queen, it seems there is a universal pause, however fleeting or prolonged, and often sadness as we reflect upon the depths and ways in which we identified with them. We might be reminded of our own mortality or take stock of life. All this can be as sobering as a cause for thanksgiving. And, all are profoundly the case for Catholics whenever a pope dies.

While Pope Benedict XVI's death has evoked mourning around the world from Catholics and non-Catholics alike, we join those on the fringes of the institutional Church who are still grappling with his life. As a prophetic voice in the region, we echo their sentiments and the statements released by Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests, New Ways Ministry and Women's Ordination Worldwide.

For some people, strong latent emotions have been unearthed by this complicated and controversial spiritual leader who remained in the background since his 2013 resignation. Sadly, others didn't need to see headlines to be triggered again, reliving on a daily basis the traumas they endured while Benedict was in power. News of his passing only exacerbated their pain and grief.

There is no debate that Benedict was a brilliant theologian with deep faith in the Resurrection, but his lack of compassion for the crucified Body of Christ was just as unambiguous. Rightly lauded as the "Green Pope," Benedict focused the Church on the environmental crisis, a critical issue in Appalachia. Almost a decade before the U.N.'s Paris Agreement, he initiated plans for the Vatican to have the largest solar power plant in Europe, converting the Holy See away from coal-generated heat and all fossil-fuel energies.

Yet, he failed to exemplify Care for all Creation in his pastoral approach. In fact, his leadership as Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and the Vicar of Christ proved spiritually abusive to many marginalized and vulnerable populations in the Church and wider society.

It is difficult for millions of LGBTQIA+ people not to recall then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's 1986 letter, "On

the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," that degraded and dismissed their experience as "objectively disordered," without a single encounter for consultation, engagement or inquiry. Women can't forget that he refused to hear their call by God to the priesthood, and excommunicated theologians who campaigned for their equality.

Benedict's legacy also includes claiming female ordination was as grave a crime as abusing a child, while simultaneously covering up sexual abuse and widespread financial corruption by an all-male clergy. Proof exists of him harboring antisemitic views and not addressing racism despite his calls against both. Along with his vision for a "smaller but purer Church," our faith tradition seems to be left with a still-entrenched supremacist's mindset.

Appalachian Catholics have experienced oppressive forms of church governance at the local level, as well as from our worldwide leader. Benedict was a strong defender of the toxic clerical culture that produced the likes of our internationally disgraced former bishop of West Virginia.

Across this mountainous region, we continue to struggle with clericalism perpetuated by Benedict-appointed bishops, superiority complexes of countless priests and parishioners who unwittingly defer to them. Although clericalism is only one reason why people don't attend Mass anymore, while our leaders ignore, belittle, criticize and invalidate our experience, the feeling among Catholic Committee of Appalachia members is, "We haven't left the Church. The Church has left us."

Ultimately, though, Benedict's final act as pope, the surrender of papal power unprecedented in modern times, seems in line with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Was it a courageous, humble self-sacrifice out of love for the People of God? If so, that's a stellar example for his successors and clergy to follow. It would be Christ-like mercy and forgiveness, and deserve thanksgiving. Can we offer those regardless?

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia offers the reminder that Catholicism is more than attending weekly Mass, the institution, or any one leader's sins. We offer community, a network, and hope for the Church. And, we offer prayers for those still suffering the effects of Benedict's pontificate, as much as we pray for the repose of his soul. ▲

CCA'S COMMON AGREEMENTS

The Anti-Racist Committee has developed this list for CCA members to keep in mind and practice during any encounter with fellow members or outside guests, whenever we are in CCA space together virtually or in-person. When we engage in these ways, we ensure that all, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), are respected and can feel safe. The Board of Directors hopes for *common agreement* among CCA members for the following:

- **The “Platinum Rule” over the “Golden Rule.”** Instead of treating others the way *we* wish to be treated, listen, learn and follow how *others* want to be treated.
- **Speak from your own experience.** Use “I” statements rather than generalizations. No gaslighting, i.e. Don’t try to convince people of color their experience of racism didn’t happen or isn’t valid.
- **Encourage a brave space more than a safe space.** Be curious, open, and respectful - call in, not out; throw sunshine not shade. No one knows everything - together we know a lot – popular education. We can’t be articulate all the time, so, give the benefit of the doubt and ask questions. Risk being honorable, vulnerable and courageous and show unconditional positive regard for others. Safety means different things to different people as does respect.
- **What is said here, stays here. What is learned, here leaves here.** Confidentiality. Do not share something communicated in a private or safe space. Do not speak for others without explicit permission. *Take Space/Make Space* - if you are usually quiet, challenge yourself to take more space with your words, and if you usually talk a lot, please be mindful to leave room for quieter voices. Be mindful of the space you take up in the conversation to allow for collaborative dialogue. Center the voices and lived experiences of those targeted by racism (BIPOC people)
- **One mic - One voice at a time.** Try not to interrupt. Do not disrespect each other by talking over each other. A culture of radical consent involves asking permission before interjecting, giving feedback, touching anyone.
- **Be present, but also...**
- **Take care of yourself.** Stretch, eat, drink, use restroom, rest, ask for what you need. Step out of the room, take a break, answer a call or text with mindfulness that your presence matters and your absence has impact on the group process.
- **Lean into discomfort.** If you find yourself feeling uncomfortable, sit quietly with that for a bit, and ask yourself: “Why am I uncomfortable, where is that coming from and who can I share this with?”
- **Be aware of your white privilege and white fragility.** It can taken for granted that white people’s thoughts, feelings and experiences are the same/similar to those of people of color, when they often are not. Fragility can manifest itself as anger or shame around these differences.
- **No shame, no blame, no guilt.** CCA space is for listening to thoughts, feelings and feedback. We come together to make mistakes, learn and grow. We invite joy, humor, laughter and radical hope.
- **Accept criticism gracefully.** It is to help you, not to harm you.
- **Listen to understand, not to respond.** Practice “appreciative inquiry” and use reflective, deep listening skills. Civility doesn’t weaken a message; it helps others hear it.
- **No tokenizing.** Do not expect or ask anyone to be the spokesperson for their community or race.
- **Try not to make assumptions and challenge others when they do.**
- **Be aware of time.** “Enough, Let’s Move On” (ELMO) means: if what you wanted to say has already been said, don’t say it again.
- **Be conscious of intent vs. impact.** No matter your intention, you are responsible for the impact your words and deeds have on others.
- **Avoid using “isms”** without explaining what you mean by them. Avoid jargon, acronyms, and industry language. Use inclusive language that is accessible for people with varying types of knowledge.
- **There is no quick fix, no easy solution, no urgency for completeness.** Be prepared for messiness and non-closure practice.
- **Do not use ad hominem attacks.** Insulting the person vs. challenging/disagreeing with their principles or ideas.
- **Practice patience, compassion and forgiveness whenever you can.** ▲

Back Matter

CHEROKEE RETREAT *(continued from page 10)*

healing if people are brave enough to confront it and humbly learn and begin to work towards that harmony and balance that are the core aspects of Cherokee spirituality.

I am a recent transplant to North Carolina, as I moved here a couple of years ago to reconnect to my wife's family farm and launch a project of our own that is trying to educate ourselves and others on environmental justice and right relationships with the land and water and others.

I feel that the work I feel called to do demands a deepening of solidarity with indigenous people, especially the Cherokee as this is their ancestral land, and this retreat is a beautiful way to begin learning and making relationships,

SISTER MARY DENNIS LENTSCH *(continued from page 12)*

The faith that sent her across boundaries in Oak Ridge also carried her across lines in Columbus, Georgia, at Ft. Benning, the military base notorious for training soldiers from Latin America who routinely return to commit war crimes and to prop up or lead corrupt governments. Mary Dennis spent six months in Lexington after her arrest at the School of the Americas.

Mary Dennis was a tireless worker against nuclear weapons; she volunteered at OREPA, lived in our Peace House in Oak Ridge for several years, maintained our database, served on the Action and Events committee, folded tens of thousands of peace cranes and attached red yarn to them—each year on August 6, hundreds of those cranes would be hung on the fence in front of the bomb plant in Oak Ridge, each one a plea for peace.

Mary Dennis left East Tennessee after hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans; she spent several years in ministry there with a small group of nuns, serving food and providing other services. When she came back, she picked up where she left off with OREPA, and she took up residence and Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center, living a sparse life there in a tiny one room cabin that she shared with a four foot long snake, taking on numerous tasks for Narrow Ridge, and, every two months, assembling several hundred copies of OREPA's bi-monthly Reflections for Nonviolent Community.

In her last years in East Tennessee, she became a resident at the Riverside Catholic Worker house in Knoxville,

which I believe is the first step toward a deeper solidarity. There is so much to learn!!

As well as so much unlearning to do, as we have been taught many false narratives in the dominant culture of the United States if we were even taught about native Americans at all. This retreat was a great space to break all of that open and to begin to see a different way.

It is truly astonishing that native people are still willing to welcome us into their space and relive their trauma, teach us and feed us after all they have been through. It is nothing short of miraculous in my opinion and I will be forever changed and grateful for what I learned during this experience. ▲

assisting in the raising of foster children, later adopted, making and serving hundreds of sandwiches weekly in a neighborhood ministry, and serving on the Board of Directors and working for OREPA as a volunteer.

In early 2020, Mary Dennis went to visit her sisters as part of a month-long trip that was to include a retreat at the Presentation Motherhouse in Dubuque. She ended up sequestered with her sister as covid-19 descended on the country. After several months, she was able to travel to the Motherhouse in Dubuque, quarantine there, and rejoin her community there. She continued to collect readings for the Reflection Booklet and sent them to us.

In the end, it seemed providential that Mary Dennis was home, with the Presentation Sisters, as her health declined. We missed her terribly in Tennessee, but we were pleased that she was being cared for so carefully by her community.

We could tell Mary Dennis stories for days on end without repeating ourselves, stories filled with joy and power and hope, stories that would make us laugh, make us angry, make us cry, and make us determined to carry on with the work, as she would have wanted. Those stories, and her memory, will inspire and animate us as we work for justice and peace for years to come.

Mary Dennis Lentsch — ¡Presente! ▲

Editor's note: CCA is grateful for the years of service Mary Dennis put towards our Board as member and Secretary. She never missed an Annual Gathering until the pandemic, and was part of many planning committees. Her light is deeply, sorely missed.

OPEN LETTER REFLECTS *(continued from page 11)*

During all of this, the pope published his letter regarding the recent Amazon synod. I was stunned. I expected that he would take some minor steps forward, based on the recommendations of the bishops at the synod. They called for ordaining married men in the Amazon to the priesthood and establishing a formal role for women in the hierarchy of the church. This would have still been misogynistic and would have reinforced clericalism, but it was the least that I would have expected, particularly because he had previously told the bishops in Brazil that if they wanted to ordain married men to the priesthood they needed to present the question to him. This was for me the end of any hope I had for the catholic church. Whenever I heard of “progressive” statements that this pope had made, I read the entire context and found that he really wasn’t saying anything at all, and definitely did not plan on making any substantive changes to “R.C. Incorporated.”

During this period I was working for Maryknoll. Initially, I was selected to be the director of their “Deacon Mission Partners” team, and I served in that role for a time. When I came out, part 1, I asked them to take me out of the lead role on that team so that I could deal with all of the changes in my life. When I came out “part 2,” I asked them to move me to another team to avoid the confusion over why a woman was a member of that team. I continued writing for them, and Maryknoll took proactive measures to adapt to their first trans employee. They brought in a gay female lawyer from New York to educate their entire staff, including the fathers and brothers, on New York law regarding gender diversity in the work place.

From the beginning, Maryknoll told me that I could continue to work with them as long as I did not marry a man or take a public position contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. When I came out as trans, I asked them how they would deal with the hypothetical situation where I might marry a woman (hence a same sex marriage). They were flummoxed and hoped they wouldn’t have to deal with that. I am going to have to write to them as well, as I have crossed their other red line, about contradicting church teachings. I am now on the Kentucky Democratic Party’s newly established LGBTQI+ Council, in which role I publicly and enthusiastically advocate for marriage equality and women’s reproductive rights, including the right to safe and legal abortions (always to be determined by the

woman whose body is involved, not by state regulation or ecclesial fiat).

Most significantly, my studies for the diaconate gave me a completely new understanding of the history of the church and the development of its theology and dogma. I do not believe in the most basic dogma and doctrines of christianity, such that even if there were to be a “miraculous” change in all the things wrong with the church, I would not return.

Maryknoll was aware of the fact that I am an atheist, but they appreciated that my writing was more universal and not particularly catholic. Maryknoll embraces a wider audience.

What compels me to now break my last diaphanous ties with the church is that I sincerely believe that the church does great harm. I honestly believe that the church is “intrinsically disordered” and incapable of changing itself. I see the pope lecturing the nations of the world on what they should be doing differently to achieve social justice or to save the environment, but then I observe that he does nothing to change the things that he has total power over, as the executive, judicial and legislative branches all rolled into one person. This is particularly egregious in the matter of clergy sexual abuse, but is manifested in the entire structure of the organization.

I love the people I have known and worked with at Catholic Committee of Appalachia, but I must now ask you to remove me from the membership roles. To continue to be associated with any organization that has the word “catholic” in its name or affiliation is, for me, to be complicit with evil. I do not mean this to detract in any way from the good people who serve the Committee. Rather, it is my personal wish not to be a part of the larger organization, headquartered in Rome. Although I very much do appreciate your invitation and your nudge, I must decline. I wish you luck with your ongoing efforts.

Love, Janna Coe ▲

Editor’s Note: Jeannie and several other CCA members remain in friendly communication with Janna, who now hosts a radio show called “Transactionality” focusing on the needs and aspirations of gay and trans people. It airs Monday evenings on WLXU 93.9 FM (radiolex.us)

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