

Heart ♥ to ♥ Heart



Vol. 7, No. 15

October 2022

As we continue to explore an **“Angela response to the reality of our times,”** we hold the image of St. Angela in the piazza, open to all and compassionately engaging with the challenges of her times. Angela was in tune with her culture. She emphasized the dignity of each person as a “child of God” and as an expression of the presence of God. She called us to harmony, unity and peacemaking. This month we reflect on the topic of violence that has sadly become so prevalent in our society. It is the antithesis of the call of our charism.

Violence has many faces. We have an opportunity to expand our definition of violence and become aware of the subtle ways it enters our daily lives. Violence can be emotional, verbal or physical behavior; it can disrupt authentic relationships and can separate us from others. Violence is often motivated by fear, anger or greed. Acts of violence seek one’s self-gratification and do not see the sacredness behind every human face.

Angela, as peacemaker, is a model of non-violence. She encourages us to “Live in harmony...respecting one another and bearing with one another.” This is no easy task. It’s hard to be a peacemaker if we use violent words and expressions. It’s hard to teach peace when we act on anger when someone crosses us. It’s hard to have hearts growing in peace when we are prejudiced against a race or religion. It’s difficult to say that we are nonviolent and peace-loving people if we never raise our voices against injustice, violence or prejudice.

This month’s issue contains the reflections of Ursuline sisters, taking up the challenge to minister among those experiencing various forms of violence. We also hear reflections from an Ursuline student impacted by the violence she encounters daily.



Gun Violence

May 24, 2022 was the last day of school for the children of Robb Elementary in Uvalde, TX. Who would have imagined that on this day the unspeakable would happen as an 18-year-old young man from Uvalde entered the school with a semi-automatic rifle and ended the lives of 19 children and 2 teachers? That day changed the trajectory of many, many lives, including my own.

When the Catholic Extension Society asked for volunteers this past August to go to Uvalde to “give support to the children of Sacred Heart school at the beginning of the school year,” I responded.

Throughout the week I sensed a tension, a guarded behavior, an underlying fear in teachers as well as students. All doors, even classroom doors, were to remain locked. Students were always to be accompanied by an adult, even going to the hall for a drink of water. I

watched as the parents of one of the children who lost his life in the tragedy were trying to convince their younger son, a second grader, to join his classmates. The child clung to his parents as if letting go of them meant the possibility of never seeing them again.

There were moments when the children truly were able to be children: At recess time, going to the play room where counselors were available to listen and engage with the children, and especially in the presence of service dogs. Their faces would light up and, for a brief moment, they were able to



let their guard down and just be children again, living life in the present moment.

Everywhere I went in Uvalde, I saw signs that read “Uvalde Strong.” I came to see how these signs were an expression of resiliency on the part of the people, of trust that though they will never forget what happened, their faith and hope that a life lived without fear is and will be possible.

Little did I realize how much this volunteer experience would become a transformative one in my life, an experience

that has changed me deeply and profoundly. I am called to respond in an active way. As the school week came to an end, I said goodbye to the 2nd grade children. I told them I would be back to see them again, not knowing when that promise would be kept. Once again Catholic Extension Society has sent out an email requesting assistance from religious in the area. Needless to say, I immediately responded to the invitation. A promise made to the children will become a reality come December 2022.

—*Maria Teresa de Llano, OSU
San Antonio, TX*



Responding to Violence

This day and age is filled with constant and chilling acts of violence, especially gun violence. Although this is the case, we are called to follow and live out the examples of the saints. A faithful example to follow is the one of St. Angela Merici. St. Angela is the prime example of what it means to be like Christ in promoting peace and unity. I believe if she were living during this day and age she would actively try to care for those who have experienced this injustice first hand. I believe St. Angela would be the first alongside many others organizing peaceful protests in order to



fight for stricter gun laws. She would also be educating others on why stricter gun laws can actively make our communities safer. Her mission here would require many hands and dedicated minds, so I know women and men like us would gladly be serving in her faithful mission.

—*Ashley Veriguete, grade 12
Academy of Mount St. Ursula
Bronx, NY*

“Christ Breaks the Rifle”
Kelly Latimore
<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/>



Domestic Violence

Domestic violence, often caused by sexism and which is rampant in the world and in the United States, is one of the numerous ways women experience violence. Since 1988, I have worked in a domestic violence shelter, either in a parish setting or, later, at Angela’s Piazza in Billings, MT, with women coming from this experience. Shortly after opening Angela’s Piazza, women requested a support group to assist them in the scary process of leaving their abusers. On average a woman returns to her abuser 7 times before leaving. This is why I believe it is important to walk with women, to encourage and affirm them as Angela did, no matter what choices they make.

Domestic violence is found among all classes, religions, races, and ethnic groups. No group is exempt. 1 in 4 women in the U.S. experiences domestic violence. Every 15 seconds a woman is assaulted and beaten. Every day a woman is murdered by her partner. 25% of all crime is wife assault. Prison terms for killing husbands are twice as long as for killing wives. Domestic violence involves various forms of

assault – physical, economic, sexual, psychological, and spiritual. Most women experience not just one form of assault, but multiple forms. 68% of women experience near fatal strangulation by their partner which has lasting consequences both physically and psychological – PTSD, depression, suicidal ideation, memory problems, anxiety psychosis, and lasting problems swallowing, just to name a few. If they leave the relationship, they often experience stalking in numerous ways. Domestic violence is the number one cause of emergency room visits by women.

When considering violence against women, ponder that a woman is raped every 1.3 minutes. 61% of all rapes are of women under 17 years of age; 29% are of



women under 11. 38% of women have been abused sexually by an adult relative, acquaintance, or stranger before 18, 28% before 14 years old.

I personally believe that ministry with women experiencing or leaving domestic violence is extremely important not only for her but for her children who have also been traumatized. I have tried to help women begin to believe in themselves and their self-worth, and to find their voice which is one way to live out the charism of Angela. Through gradually healing, a woman can begin to find non-violent ways to resolve

conflicts as they too have responded to violence with violence. In healing they can begin to set boundaries, learn better communication skills, and be more attentive to their children. This doesn't come easily and many return to the abuser for a number of reasons. Although I've shared many statistics, like Angela I see each woman as an individual and unique with many gifts. I have often learned many things from the women, and I have come to admire them for their courage, savviness and honesty.

—Mary Dostal, OSU
Billings, MT

Human Trafficking Violence

"I can only describe my life in New York as five years in Hell. From the day I arrived until the day I escaped, I was forced to work seven days a week in the sex trade."

"I was merchandise for him; treated like an animal."

"He forced me to tattoo his name on my stomach and then called me his property."

"Although I have been free for three years, there is a part of me that is still trapped."

These are just a few of the many heart-wrenching stories I listened to during the eight years I lived in a Safe House for women-survivors of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a vile crime against humanity and against God. Pope Francis calls it an "open wound in the body of Christ, in the body of all humanity."

Human trafficking often begins with traffickers luring their victims with false promises of good jobs, an education, economic security and even love. These women are then subjected to a life of dehumanization, where they are viewed as chattel, objects, animals, property bought and sold.

How does one go about addressing such brokenness in our world? How does one reach out and touch those fractured parts of a human being? Prayer, of course, and as I prayed, I found myself calling more and more on Angela. She understood. She knew this work. She had been there. She would help. *Have faith and keep up your courage.*

Our work in the safe house was to help the women begin the slow and often painful process of healing from their trauma;

to create conditions that made it possible for the flourishing of the human person. The community model we provided offered the survivors the things they had been robbed of by their exploiters: self-esteem, an environment in which to regain their sense of self-worth and human dignity, and something most important to these women – safety, the experience of living in a loving, supportive, and secure stable home.

As I shared life with these women on the margins, I often felt the accompaniment of Angela. She too had lived in a period of exceptional violence, a period where women were the disposable ones, especially those who were unmarried, lacked education, and had no options for their lives. She provided refuge and relationship. She sat at table with them and showed the way to heal hearts. *You will accomplish more by kind words and a courteous manner than by anger or sharp rebuke.*

Today Angela continues to encourage and inspire, to offer compassion and hope, needed more than ever in our world. Unfortunately, the need for Safe Houses will continue to exist, but like Angela we will continue to use the gifts, passion and resources entrusted to us by God. We may not be called to rescue girls or prosecute traffickers, but all of us are called to invest something of ourselves in God's and Angela's mission to rebuild the broken places around us, the work to be makers of peace and justice in a broken world.

—Maureen McCarthy, OSU
Tuckahoe, NY



For Reflection

What kind of violence most disturbs you?

How does violence manifest in your daily life?

What steps can you take to live a more non-violent life?