

# Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Ministry in Covid-19 Times

*"We are reminded of the many ways of quiet ministry in our lives, and in life that abounds around us. The little healings of the silent breaches, the great redemptive acts when times are out of joint, the lifting of our horizons of hope when to have hope seems to be against all wisdom and against all judgment..." These words of Howard Thurman seem to capture the heart and soul of the ministry reflections shared in this issue of Heartbeats, service deeply rooted in St. Angela's call to "keep faith and hope alive."*

### Angela's Piazza, a Women's Drop-In Center, in Billings, Montana

Sr. Mary Dostal, OSU

Angela's Piazza, like everywhere and everyone, has been impacted by Covid-19. At first, I closed Angela's Piazza and left my cellphone number on the answering service. As a result, my plan of an unexpected vacation did not materialize because of constant calls. Women were laid off and needed rent money; those with jobs no longer had childcare because facilities were closed, and they had no family to help; many worried about their children and were frightened by the virus. After 2 weeks I reopened Angela's Piazza. We have seen a rise in domestic violence cases, so I resumed the

education class. I tried using Zoom for the domestic violence support group, but after 3 weeks this was not working and so we resumed in-person sessions which the women were happy to see returned. We have not resumed our young girls' group, which saddens me and the girls, because we do not have space for the many girls to socially distance for our meal, crafts, and instruction. The Native American population has been hit hard. They are 7% of Montana's population, but 36% of the state's deaths are Native American. Helping some of the women process their grief has become a more frequent occurrence.

### Grief Counseling in Novato, California

Sr. Jeanette Lombardi, OSU

As I reflect on these past eight months, I am encouraged by St. Angela's words: "If according to times and circumstances the need arises...to do something differently, do it..." (Last Legacy). "May the strength and consolation of the Holy Spirit...sustain you...so that you may carry out faithfully the charge laid upon you" (Prologue to the Counsels). And in Angela's Fifth Counsel, she encourages us to "listen deeply, observe, comfort and encourage" those to whom we minister.

My ministry as a grief counselor includes individual and group work. Little did I know that on March 13<sup>th</sup>, midway through facilitating an eight-week support group for those experiencing loss, all our ministries and parish outreach would be terminated. Unfortunately, my support group of

ten experienced another loss by this sudden termination. Connecting by phone and email ensued. As the weeks and months unfolded, I found myself encouraged by the above words of Angela and realized the importance of patience and openness to the circumstances of each day. My outreach, availability and ways of listening would change. The phone became a positive way of connecting; of listening and of offering encouragement. In many ways it became a positive way to affirm those who found themselves alone. Phone calls became a way to help those whose loss was compounded by the isolation of Covid-19. A few months into Covid-19, I began meeting with individuals outside on a very quiet campus. As the summer progressed, we, in northern California, experienced unprecedented heat (110 degrees) and wildfires sparked by

dry lightning. We found ourselves surrounded by fires to the north, west and east. Appointments were cancelled as air quality prevented us from being outdoors. We did not know from day to day what the winds would bring.

Weeks have passed and daily routines are progressing to some normalcy. School has gradually welcomed students and

gone is the quiet campus – gratefully! As it is still unsafe to meet indoors, I now see myself as, “Have chair will travel.” A folding chair and a quiet corner in the Guadalupe piazza provide a venue for me to meet with a few grieving clients. We proceed until the weather gets cold...open to what Covid-19 requires in the days ahead. We hold firm with faith and to the words of Angela, “Be prepared for surprises.”

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## Ministry to our Ill and Aging Sisters

*During these months of Covid-19, we have heard much about the impact of the virus on those in assisted living and skilled-care facilities – residents and their families, and the staff of caregivers as well. The Ursuline Sisters have also felt that impact. Those who minister to our sisters residing in various kinds of healthcare facilities share what these past months have been like for them and their ministry. We thank **Linda Borchardt, Sr. Ginger Cirone, Sr. Pascal Conforti, Sr. Maureen McCarthy, and Sr. Deana Walker** for these glimpses into their ministry.*

For those who minister to our ill and aging sisters residing in healthcare facilities, these months of Covid-19 have been and remain difficult and challenging. Hardest of all for each one has been the months-long restrictions on face-to-face visits and interactions with the sisters in their care:

- “It has been heartbreaking and stretching for me. My ministry of almost daily presence to our sisters and assuring their needs are being met has changed...”
- “It is very difficult not to have the face-to-face visits, especially with our sisters who are cognitively limited and do not understand our absence.”
- “The hardest thing for me is not being able to see and be with the sisters. I cannot get a visual sense of how they are, and of course they don’t want to be a burden, so they say over the phone ‘I’m fine.’”
- “It was very hard to get information from the nursing home.”

These restrictions called for new and intentional ways of being in contact with and present to the sisters:

- “Throughout the lockdown time, I sent cards and delivered surprise packages with treats.”
- “I talk with our sisters on the telephone. Arrangements can also be made for FaceTime or window visits for our sisters who are able.”
- “The sisters ‘at home’ have been wonderful in staying connected with notes, phone calls, etc. Birthdays and jubilees have been lovingly celebrated from afar; and for those who are able, the blessings of technology have been used.”
- “We are enormously blessed to have a lay collaborator/registered nurse who has worked with us at the facility for the past twelve years. Following required protocols, she is able to visit our sisters regularly and to act as our advocate and friend to each of them.”
- “My ministry has also broadened to communicating with family and friends of the sisters.”



*Sr. Miriam Patricia Faricy receives a birthday visit from Srs. Jean Hopman, Madonna O’Hara, and Elisa Ryan.*



*Sr. Martha Gleason has a window visit with Sr. Pat Schifini.*

In some places, a recent easing of restrictions has made brief socially-distanced visits possible. One caregiver has been happy to be able to distribute Eucharist to residents. These opportunities are always welcome, especially with the awareness that new Covid-19 outbreaks can put the previous restrictions back in place at a moment’s notice.

Even as these Ursuline caregivers reach out with concern and compassion, their hearts and lives are impacted by those they serve: “I am impressed and inspired,” shares one caregiver, “by the wonderful and uncomplaining way our sisters on this part of their life’s journey have embraced it and opened themselves to God’s work in them. We are, indeed, blessed.”