



Via de Cristo of Ohio Newsletter
Affiliated with the National Lutheran Secretariat

De Colores!

VOLUME 37, ISSUE 7

August 5, 2016

Via de Cristo Clergy Experience #2

Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

God is awesome! Of course you know that! Clergy #2 is coming up; we have five (5) clergy already registered and of course would like to have more to experience first-hand a weekend (or maybe we should call it a weekday) event. It will be conducted like the weekends we each had so that pastors may know what their laypeople will experience, but more so that they will have the kind of rich experience of God's grace that we had.

The team is called and almost completed. We will have our first meeting on Saturday, August 13th.

Again this year, we will be holding the session at The Saints Peter & Paul Retreat Center, 2734 Seminary Road SE, Newark. The "weekend" will begin on Monday, September 26, and will end with a closing late Thursday afternoon on September 29.

Your Palanca of prayers and other Palanca activities and items are both encouraged and needed. Of course the serenade on Wednesday night, September 28, and your attendance on Thursday at the closing mean so much to anyone who attends a weekend. If you live close to the area and can attend either or both, please mark the dates on your calendar and look for updates later. Details for sending Palanca items as well as openings in the 72 hour Prayer Palanca will also be in the September Newsletter.

With this newsletter is the form for registration for the Clergy #2 Experience. If you know of a pastor who would/could/should attend, please invite him or her! More on Clergy # 2 will come in the September newsletter. Any questions, please give me a call at (740) 694-1755!

GLY & SDI!

Dick Brenneman, Rector, Clergy #2

2016 VdC NLS National Lutheran Secretariat Annual Gathering

The National Lutheran Secretariat Annual Gathering was held in July on the beautiful campus of Lourdes University in Sylvania, Ohio. The convention provided a wonderful expression of how important the Via de Cristo movement is to the transformation and renewal of faith in Jesus Christ.

All the speakers were great communicators, sharing their insights in how effective we can be in changing our environment so that people can be influenced by Christ and the Gospel. Executive Director Pastor Paul Schmidlin reminded us again and again how important it is to each of us, and vital to VDC, that we take seriously our 4th day activity. He said, "We must own the Fourth Day life style – build relationships and discover our oneness in Christ." He reminded us: "Make friends, be friends, and live our friendships in Christ."

Pastor Al Sager represented VDC Ohio very well in preaching about the joy we have as Christians that we receive as a gift of God's grace to us and for us. He presented to us a long list of biblical passages that give expression to the joy we are to have in Christ. (See attachment for the list.)

Perhaps the speaker who made the greatest impression on me was David Shojanezhad. He is a young 32 year old man from Iran. He came to the United States five years ago. He grew up as a Muslim. But whenever he had a question about his religion, he was told he should not be asking questions. His parents were afraid he would get himself in trouble by questioning his faith. The government started watching where he went and whom he associated with. One day he and a friend were riding in a car when the police stopped them. The police found a bottle of liquor in the back seat. He tried to explain that it did not belong to him. Still he was arrested and received a punishment of 50 lashes. Somehow he was able to flee Iran and came to this country. He could speak no English. He found a Lutheran Church that taught English as a second language. He had some questions about the Christian faith. At first he was afraid to ask questions because of the experience in Iran. He soon discovered that questions were welcome and, more important, so was he. He became a Christian, was baptized, and has become a citizen. He told us that whenever he meets someone, he always tells them that he is a Christian and invites them to church. He doesn't understand why we don't do the same. He radiates the joy of his faith!

The theme for the convention was "Reaching the Far Away". The theme song was "Thrive" by "Casting Crowns." The chorus provided the daily theme: Thursday-Joy Unspeakable; Friday-Love Unstoppable; Saturday-Faith Unsinkable; Sunday-Anything Is Possible.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent Ohio VDC.

Pastor G. Karl Gaston, Spiritual Director, VdC Ohio

Utreya News

<p>Utreyas in the Akron-Kent area of Ohio are often the third Saturday of a month, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Kent, at 4:30 pm at 600 S. Water Street, and potluck will be included. For more information, please call Dave Lann, 330-296-6929, or Pr. Doug Fidler, 330-673-5445.</p>	<p>Cincinnati area Utreyas are usually the first Saturday of each month at 4:30pm at Trinity Lutheran Church in Mt. Healthy. Address is 1553 Kinney Avenue, Cincinnati 45231. For questions, please call Kevin Hoch, 513-931-8797.</p>	<p>Bellville Utreya will be the second Sundays of January, April, July and October at 3:00pm at St. Paul Lutheran Church, 48 Church Street, Bellville 44813. Worship, Holy Communion, Potluck with table service and drinks provided. Call Ken & Josie Riling, 419-886-2437, or Paul and Vicky Sakala, 419-884-1573 for questions.</p>	<p>North Dayton Utreyas are usually the third Saturdays of every month at 7pm at the United Christian Church, 8611 Hoke Rd, Clayton, OH 45315. (Bring snack to share.) For questions, please call Wes Scoates at 937 533-7605.</p>
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PALANCA: THE HEART AND LIFEBLOOD OF THE VIA DE CRISTO WEEKENDS!

You're invited to pray for the Pilgrims and Teams of these UPCOMING WEEKENDS:

Men's Walk # 213 - 18-21 August 2016 (CDT:GMT-5)

Women's Walk # 214 - 15-18 September 2016 (CDT:GMT-5)

Men's Walk # 215 - 13-16 October 2016 (CDT:GMT-5)

Women's Walk # 216 - 10-13 November 2016 (CST:GMT-6)

All four with Big Country Emmanuel
Abilene, Texas

Coed # 95 - Texas Lutheran VDC - August 11, 2016

Wisconsin Sunrise VDC - M61 - Sept. 8, 2016

Wisconsin Sunrise VDC - W61 - Sept. 15, 2016

Minnesota VDC Metro - M638 - Sept. 22, 2016

Minnesota VDC Metro - W639 - Sept. 29, 2016

Light In The Desert VDC - C #25 - Sept. 29, 2016

Blessings,

Sherryl F. Patterson, VdC Ohio Secretariat Palanca Cha

What is a story of faith you could share with others? (You don't have to write it perfectly—I can fix it if you like.) You know how you feel when you read the stories in the Newsletter. Help someone else to feel that way. Send your story by email to vdnewsletterohio@gmail.com or by US Mail to 4025 Andrews Rd., Bellville, 44813.

From Secretariat Music Cha

Everyone who knows me, knows that I don't particularly enjoy "weaving"! All of us music chas have our favorites and this one just didn't make mine. I will, however, always be fond of it because I remember on my weekend being arm in arm with my new sisters, rocking side to side at the closing and never wanting the moment to end.

In researching this song, I am surprised by its origins. "Weave" was written by Rosemary Crow in 1979 as the theme song for delegates at the 1984 Girl Scout/Girl Guide World Conference in New York. Their songbook says the song lyrics reflect the "true spirit of Guiding". Girl Scouting? Not Jesus and Christian Community in Action?

As I'm a music major, the verse below always resonates with me:

"We are different instruments playing our own melodies,
Each one tuning to a different key,
But we are all playing in harmony in one great symphony."

I know exactly what she means! What's your favorite verse?

God loves you and so do I,
Jen Briner

Clergy Experience #2 Set for Monday September 26 – Thursday 29, 2016

At St. Peter and Paul Retreat Center, Newark, OH

Talk to a Pastor you know about it. Provide the registration form attached to this Newsletter.

So How Can You Be So Joyful??

Retiring Bishop Marcus Lohrmann of the ELCA Northwest Synod repeated someone's response he'd heard to this question: "The resurrection of Jesus! If not for that, I'd have chucked it all a long time ago!" Isn't that why we Via de Cristo Cursillistas can be so joyful? It opened his keynote address in which he said joining ourselves to Christ allows us to live and act according to the gift of faith we were given. It allows us to reach the "far away," whether they're across an ocean or across the country or the street or the dinner table. It allows us to affect our environment where God has placed us, whether it's as near as our homes or as wide as the world. It encourages us to seek forgiveness, which perhaps may be pronounced as simply as a daughter saying "OK, Dad. Just don't do it again."

He pointed out that what's happening now in the US, in the world, is increasing distrust of one another and hostility to others. Through Via de Cristo we can learn to say, "There's a place for you in our house, our neighborhood, our business, our community, our nation." What a joy to share that!

Bishop Lohrmann noted that the strongest experience he had on his Weekend was that laity spoke on faith! It isn't just clergy who can have conversations on faith and help others develop the skills to witness to faith. He closed citing a song whose refrain was "As long as I live, make me your servant." Wouldn't that make each of us joyful?

One of the forums of the Gathering featured Tonya Harrison Thompson who said "Kairos = Cookies, but really Kairos = Love." She spoke passionately about her ministry with Kairos, the Via de Cristo-like weekends conducted inside prisons. Ecumenical team members, who initially don't know each other, minister to the residents—not called prisoners, but guests—with the common goal of showing unconditional love. (Maybe we've all learned to call that grace.)

Besides the worship, singing and talks, they supply everyone in the prison with lots and lots of cookies as a tangible part of the loving grace. They also use placemats colored by children who put their first names and ages on the mats with their messages of love. Many of the residents have children waiting for them. Names of pray-ers in the 72-hour prayer vigil, who pray for each guest by name, are shown on a scroll and a paper chain around the room. Someone may wake at 2:30 am and know "somebody is praying just for me".

Tanya said, "It's not about our money or our possessions. It's about God and his purpose for us. It's not our business to know the deed that brought them there. It's about finding the time and the love to make a difference. Go in with Kairos to be a blessing, and expect to be blessed back!"

At a worship service, Pastor Jim Wenger referred to John Ortberg's book *If You Want to Walk on Water, You Have to Get Out of the Boat*. He told of a congregation whose decrepit building was not worth saving, so they decided to be church (a group of believers) by sharing the worship of others in their church buildings in the community and in their style. He also described "Jesus Builds," a cooperation of seven churches in his area who came together to do God's hands-on work. He spoke of Riley, a child born healthy but abused and damaged physically and mentally by her parents who then lost custody of her. Riley responded to only one of her therapists with a smile; that woman and her husband adopted her because, they said, "Riley chose us!" The group "Jesus Builds" renovated the house for Riley's needs as just one of their many projects.

Pr. Wenger celebrated the joy that those "steps out of the boat" brought. He also posed the suggestion that our Via de Cristo, which was originally an innovative movement within the church, might consider whether we should be revamped. Should we stick to all our old ways or continue to evolve? We are called to adventure down paths unknown, so since God's strength begins where ours ends, we must go forward in courage and trust him. What do you think God has in store for us and Via de Cristo when we finally step out of that boat?

NLS 2016 Business Meeting Highlights

Supporting the theme "Reaching the Far Away" was the song THRIVE by Casting Crowns with "Joy Unspeakable" for Thursday, "Faith Unsinkable" on Friday, "Love Unstoppable" on Saturday and "Anything is Possible" on Sunday. Our nationwide Via de Cristo Community is about 110,000 strong—vital, growing and thriving, including two new secretariats, Great Plains of North Dakota and Lake Gaston of North Carolina/Virginia.

The business meeting came in four sessions, each opened with prayer and the "Come Holy Spirit" song as were each of the guest forums. At one, Susan Minch from Thrivent explained their mission and generous donation process, called ABC, as an

expression of faith. Thrivent members **Choose Action** teams to receive \$250 from Thrivent for their projects and Thrivent also supports **Builds** by Habitat for Humanity.

Delegates approved the 2016 Financial Report and at a later session approved the 2016-2017 budget. We also re-elected Brenda Accola from Florida as Treasurer. Newly elected as Spiritual Director is Pr. Mark Marxhausen from Minnesota, and as Vice President of Administration is our own Warren (Butch) Seeley. (Butch will also continue as our VdC Ohio Lay Director until the conclusion of his term next summer.) The NLS Secretariat board is re-establishing Regional Representatives with seven regions in the US. Ours, Region 5, is represented by John Aclin from the Washington DC area, who discussed with delegates ways to develop communications within the region and share best practices.

We saw a Pastoral video, a marketing tool to share with pastors to introduce Via de Cristo, available on the NLS website. It emphasizes that our VdC purpose is to help each other live out our faith with our Piety, Study and Apostolic Action, sharing with others "Far Away" and near in reunion groups. It makes clear that we in VdC want to support our pastors and churches.

Next year's National Gathering will be at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC, July 27 – 30, 2017.

For more detail of the business meeting sessions, request the **full text of Sherry Patterson's article** by replying to this email.

<p>VdC Prayer Chain is prayingforvdc@gmail.com or by phone at 419-884-1573. Vicky Sakala is Prayer Chain Coordinator.</p> <p>If you know someone from the Via de Cristo Community who has changed their street address or email address or telephone number, or does not get the VdCNewsletter but would like to, please send the new information to Newsletter Editor Nancy Martin at vdcnewsletterohio@gmail.com or 419-886-4420 or 4025 Andrews Road, Bellville, OH 44813.</p>	 <p>Find us on Facebook</p> <p>Via de Cristo of Ohio is now on Facebook!</p> <p>We hope you will "like" our new Facebook Page at https://www.facebook.com/viadecristooh</p> <p>Get on the Web – Ohio Via de Cristo www.vdcoho.org National Via de Cristo Website www.viadecristo.org Kairos Website www.kairosohio.org</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Secretariat</p> <p>Lay Director Warren (Butch) Seeley (614) 332-1357 harleyrider751@gmail.com</p> <p>Asst. Lay Director Chuck Fahnestock (937) 238-6170 charles.fahnestock@wright.edu</p> <p>Secretary Kevin Hoch (513) 931-8797 khoch@cinci.rr.com</p> <p>Treasurer Raleigh Sandy (937) 885-1868 sandyjr@donet.com</p> <p>Spiritual Director Pastor G. Karl Gaston (614) 364-3110 jgaston550@yahoo.com</p> <p>coach Butch Seeley (614) 332-1357 harleyrider751@gmail.com</p> <p>Logistics Coordinator Mark Ludrosky (330) 882-4244 mludrosky1@neo.rr.com</p> <p>Fourth Day Shepherd Dave Lann (330) 296-6929 vdclann@yahoo.com</p> <p>Prayer Chain Vicky Sakala 419-884-1573 prayingforvdc@gmail.com</p> <p>Music Adviser Jen Briner (614) 901-0896 jenbriner@yahoo.com</p>	<p>Palanca Cha Sherry Patterson (740) 262-0563 dcsfp20@the-franklins.net</p> <p>Registrar Kevin Hoch (513) 931-8797 khoch@cinci.rr.com</p> <p>Documentation Donna Gough (614) 948-3833 goughdonna@aol.com</p> <p>Rector/Weekend Orientation Dick Brenneman (740) 398-0945 dbbrenneman@embarqmail.com</p> <p>Technology Media Specialist Christy Brill (614) 899-7429 goosebrill@msn.com</p> <p>Newsletter Editor Nancy Martin (419) 886-4420 vdcnewsletterohio@gmail.com</p> <p>Columbus Area Representative open</p> <p>Northern Region Representative Ken Riling (419) 886-2437 kriling07@aol.com</p> <p>Southern Region Representative Open</p> <p>Contact Butch for info @ open positions.</p> <p>Secretariat meetings are held the third Saturday of each month. You are welcome to attend. Contact Lay Director Butch Seeley for the place and time of each meeting.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">God loves you and so do we!</p>
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Via de Cristo of Ohio

Warren W. Seeley, Lay Director

1070 Polaris Parkway

Columbus, OH 43240

(614) 823-8660

vdcoho.org

Reservation Form for Clergy Experience Via de Cristo Retreat

**The Saints Peter & Paul Retreat Center
2016**

2734 Seminary Road SE
Newark, OH 43056

Mon. - Thurs., September 26-29,

Life Long Learning Credit Opportunity

Gathering reception on Monday @ 6:00 pm and concluding on Thursday evening.

Spouses are invited!

Attendee's Name _____

Address _____

Phone: CELL _____ RESIDENCE _____ WORK _____

Email address _____

Will your Spouse be attending with you? Yes No

Spouse's Name _____

Emergency Contact Information:

Name _____ **Telephone** _____

Special Dietary Needs: _____

There is a \$ 50.00 registration fee required for attendee only-not spouse. (No other cost)

WOW! The registration fee will be refunded plus an additional \$50.00 for a grand total of \$100.00, provided the registrant attends the entire program.

Please mail this form with registration fee to the address above.

SERMON for National VdC Secretariat Assembly, July 21, Sylvania, OHIO

The boundless grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, and the light and **JOY** of the Holy Spirit be with you all. For the past half year, I've spent time scouring Bible passages that speak of JOY and begin by sharing one of them. Hebrews 12:2 speaks of JOY as having been set before Jesus as the grand motivation for his life and ministry. Eugene Peterson in the MESSAGE speaks of it in this fashion: "Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed – that exhilarating finish in and with God – he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!" So far the quotation.

The adrenaline which remains unnamed in Peterson's recap of Jesus' life and ministry is, I'm persuaded, JOY – expressible joy in a life of astounding faithfulness. Of this I become increasingly persuaded: the divine modeled way of REACHING THE FAR AWAY has to do with a life anchored in relational JOY with our Triune God. Jesus knew where He was headed and that God was counting on Him. Is that language familiar? File that away as we proceed.

A number of you know that one of my spiritual disciplines is dialogic prayer. I shall share a sample I did some time ago when I was first contacted about this preaching assignment. I find dialogic prayer to be both calming and empowering.

Being a **personal** devotional practice, it's usually not intended to be shared publically. But the swiftest way I know to get you up to speed with what's to follow is to throw caution to the wind and let it rip. Here then is the conversation I had with Jesus.

DIALOGIC PRAYER DONE ON JANUARY 14, 2016 J – Jesus; A – AI

A – You know, of course, that I've been asked to preach at the National VdC Secretariat Assembly this July up in northwest Ohio. I agreed to preach on the opening day, and, get this, the theme for that specific occasion is "Inexpressible JOY." Yes, I'm to preach on a topic that is INEXPRESSIBLE. That should shut me up as a former part-time seminary teacher of preaching, don't you think?

J – But you agreed to it, so on with the preparations.

A – That's why it is the topic of this prayer. Of all of the fruit of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, I often feel most bereft of JOY. Love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – oh, I struggle with all of them at times, but JOY as a fruit of the Spirit, the one I left out in my brief listing just completed -- that one gives me the most fits.

J – I noted that this past Christmas you had assorted JOY signs up both in and around your house. Three large stockings hung by the fireplace – each one adorned with one of those three letters: J O Y. Another JOY motif hung by one of your windows. And outside in your front yard there was that really big JOY sign made up of those three five-foot-tall letters – J O Y. That was unmissable, rather than "inexpressible."

A – OK, a little humor from the Almighty! But now I guess I'm to get really serious about JOY.

J – You may be telling off on yourself with that comment about getting serious about JOY. JOY is not something you create as a mood you put on or a feeling you conjure up. My word speaks of it as a fruit of the Spirit, remember?

A – But I work on things like patience, kindness, and self-control. Why would self-control, for example, be called a fruit of the spirit if the self wasn't somehow responsible as at least a partner in its creation and demonstration?

J – Set aside your line of argument for a moment and let me bless you with my JOY. Open your heart and mind to receive all that I have for you. Do not be ashamed that your JOY-tank so often runs at near-empty. Instead, view it as the optimal condition for becoming wholly reliant on being filled with MY Joy. You and your VdC companions have come a long way in your hearty acknowledgement that GRACE is my UNCONDITIONAL gift into your life. It is what my presence within you accomplishes. If you are truly GLAD about that, regard such gladness as a form of JOY, as just another one of MY UNCONDITIONAL GIFTS.

A – That helps my head with better understanding. But how do I get JOY into my heart – into my inner being – in such a way that it SHOWS – demonstrably so? Because then it would no longer be INEXPRESSIBLE.

J – I like that. At least on occasion, you can be both honest and clever at the same time. But, as I'm sure you are aware, cleverness failed to make the list as belonging to the fruit of the Spirit. So lay your cleverness aside as we continue this conversation you asked for.

A – And I'm still asking and looking for more.

J – I figured you'd say that. I'll continue by going deeper, which usually means inviting you to confession. I note that it seems to be easy for you to touch up your outward appearance, to look as if you have it all together. Your attempts to look good can fool most people. Put up enough JOY signs at Christmas and the fooling gets joyous punctuation. But I see straight

through your exteriors into the depths of your being. There is no place for pretense in your relationship with Me. Rejoice in the relief of being fully understood, Al. Talk with Me about your struggles and feelings of inadequacy, even about such a matter as feeling more than a bit hypocritical as you prepare to go public preaching about INEXPRESSIBLE JOY. It's more than a LITTLE TOUGH giving expression to what you have too little of, though I do credit you with bringing the whole matter to me in this your prayer. Little by little, I will transform your weaknesses into strengths. Is it OK for me to remind you, a long-time Spiritual Director in Via de Cristo, that your relationship with Me is grounded and saturated in grace? Therefore, *nothing that you do or don't do can separate you from My Presence, nor from my JOY.....* I think I'm going to stop there for a moment and let that last sentence soak in a bit more – *nothing that you do or don't do can separate you from my presence WHICH INCLUDES MY JOY.*

A – Thank you, Lord, for knowing when I need another soaking bath in your GRACE. And that your JOY is just another manifestation of your GRACE.

J – Ah, that last sentence of yours assures me that you get what I've been saying. You see, Al, you can preach GRACE decently. I've heard you do it repeatedly and with laudable effectiveness. The mistake you sometimes make is to see the declaration and appropriation of GRACE as a temporary re-fueling stop before you pull out again into the fast lane, acting as though, with a fuel tank now replenished with grace, you can handle the driving quite nicely by yourself, thank you very much! Al, I am your *always* present and *always* essential provider. Grace is more than the fuel your spiritual engine requires **on occasion**. Its various manifestations encompass your entire life, your very living from moment to moment. So hear the good news once again: *NOTHING THAT YOU DO OR DON'T DO CAN SEPARATE YOU FROM MY PRESENCE which enshrines as well, MY JOY.*

A – I need to let go and recognize that you are my God at ALL times and ALL circumstances. And that reminds me of a hilarious piece of Palanca that my at- that-time eight-year old grand-daughter provided me some years ago. She was quite a young artist; plus she and I loved to play with puns. Her mother, a Spanish teacher, taught her any number of words she'd learned to use playfully. So the little poster that served as my Palanca from her had on it the picture of a large mouse with a handsome-sized piece of cheese which in Spanish is called Queso. She printed alongside her artwork these words to encourage her Spiritual Director Grandad in the midst of a VdC weekend. She wrote: "In queso emergency, just call on Cheesus." Well, even an eight-year old child of faith knows that ALL OF LIFE IS AN EMERGENCY, SO Cheesus BELONGS IN ALL OF IT, along with the JOY which He imports and empowers through His presence.

J – You'd have more JOY in your life if you allowed such humor and its many relatives to keep you a bit more "loose in the saddle."

A – Are we still praying?

J – All of life is a prayer, so prayer can never be inexpressible, and neither is JOY, for that matter.

A – Whoops, so now you've helped me with the "Inexpressible" component in JOY. Joy just IS; it's in the life of every person who is grounded in grace. It's not inexpressible because, as a gift of the Spirit, it's never absent from a life that's lived in surrender WITH and FOR CHRIST.

J – I'm going to be the one who says AMEN to that. You see, sometimes it's the prerogative of the divine to say when a prayer has appropriately ended, even if the punctuation mark is but a semi-colon.

Next, I want us all to take a soaking scriptural bath in a number of brief Bible passages that give expression to JOY.

Ps. 16:11 "In YOUR presence there is fullness of JOY."

Ps. 20:5 "May we SHOUT for joy over your VICTORY."

Ps. 47:1 "Shout to God with LOUD SONGS of JOY" Exuberant singing at VdC events is Scriptural, you know!

Ps. 51:12 "Restore to me the JOY of your salvation."

Ps. 67:4 "Let the nations be glad and sing for JOY."

Ps. 96:12 "Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for JOY."

Ps. 98:8 "Let the hills sing together for JOY." God's been into ecology from the ancient of days!

Prov. 21:15 When justice is done, it is a JOY to the righteous."

Isa. 66:5 "So that we may see your JOY." Even the Bible expects JOY to be convincingly expressible, SEEABLE.

Joel 1:16 "JOY and gladness from the house of our God."

Mt. 2:10 "They were overwhelmed with JOY."

Mt. 25:21 "Enter into the JOY of your master."

Lu. 1:14 "You will have JOY and gladness."

Jo. 15:11 "I have said these things to you so that my JOY may be in you."

Jo. 16:20 "You will have pain, but your pain will turn into JOY."

Ac. 8:8 "So there was great JOY in that city." Perhaps even in the Toledo environs!

2 Co 1:24 “We are workers with you for your JOY.” Think of that as the grand motivation for all who have worked to pull this Assembly together.

1 Th 2:20 “Yes, you are our glory and JOY.”

2 Ti 1:4 “I long to see you so that I may be filled with JOY.” Did you come to this gathering expecting that the very presence of fellow cursillistas would stir JOY within you? (True of me!)

Phm 1:7 “I have indeed received much JOY and encouragement.” Probably helps to explain why any number of us keep coming back to these events, EH?

But now, let’s back up a bit and get reverently reflective in a truthful sort of way. How many of you agree with me that we’re typically in an environment not particularly characterized as joyous? Do you need to be persuaded that we live in a corroded age, jaded from corrupt systems and strange election cycles, and broken people at the helms of broken institutions? Every edifice of modern life – familial, agrarian, institutional, political, economic, ecclesial, academic (you name it) – carries a complicated history shot through at some points, with repugnant or downright evil elements. The consequence of all this mess and pollution is anything but joyous. In fact, I’ve heard joy put down by this question: “In our times, is not talk about joy a betrayal of everyone and everything that remains wounded?” Sometimes the church seems more escapist and irrelevant in its lofty talk about what is obviously missing than helpful and constructive. How can you dare to speak of such things as hope, redemption, and joy when their very opposites appear so obviously to prevail?

The cardinal virtues of faith, hope, and love are sorely needed, as are rich manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit, including that focus on JOY which the planners of this event apparently sensed to be in especially short supply and wish to see expanded so that the FAR AWAY may be reached.

I move next into a brief sharing of two realizations that God has used of late to refurbish my sense of JOY in the Lord right in the face of all the debris I’ve just been reminded us of.

Consider with me first a few select verses from Isaiah 43. Bill Gafkjen, the esteemed Bishop of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, to which I have long been assigned, repeatedly shares from this great chapter, Isaiah 43. He obviously believes it is a word fitly spoken for our times. Listen carefully and see if you agree. Beginning with verse 18: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” JOY isn’t mentioned, but the appropriation of JOY is keyed. JOY has to do with living in the NOW. Do not remember or stay locked with all of the past corruptions and dysfunctional realities so bannered in our media. Rather, take note of the NEW things God is majoring in all around us as part of God’s redemptive current activity. Perceive them. Take note of them. Don’t you get it that God is both sovereign and continues to be best defined as a God of grace, mercy, AND JOY -- not only loving the world in this fashion, but actively engaged in its rehabbing?

I witness that if we get a new and fresh perception of that goodness, JOY will be restored in our hearts and lives.

A second realization, already identified in part in my earlier dialogic prayer is this: I have come to realize that there’s something better than praying for JOY as a recurring petition. A better spiritual practice for me is to surrender to and invite a richer infilling by the Spirit. Why pray or settle for anything less than the GIVER of the fruit? If you specifically ask in prayer for JOY, you may be settling for about one-eighth of what a full residency of the Spirit might accomplish in you and me as equipment for a heightened effectiveness of life and ministry in this hurting, broken world. Think about it. Why settle for a single fruit of the Spirit when you can receive the GIVER of all that is good and needed? Why settle for a gift when you can receive the supreme GIVER? There simply is no better accompaniment than that for REACHING THE FAR AWAY.

And this little addendum yet. I’ve discovered that I am able at times to do little things that might add momentary delight to my life, but a soul-deep JOY remains absolutely more gift than achievement.

Now, I’m proposing that we move into the audience-participation-part of this sermon. Choose one person, only ONE, close to you to serve as your conversation partner. It’s probably best that it be the person closest to you that you’re not closest with. This will be a little two-part exercise. Each part will be signaled as having come to a close with this sound (illustrate). You’ll have a few seconds to finish your sentence before a double gong sounds (illustrate again) signaling transition to your partner’s sharing time.

FIRST EXERCISE: Identify a person in your life who has demonstrated for you the essence of joy as you presently understand it – a person whose behavior has stirred in you unforgettable joy and delight. I’ll begin with show-casing my live-in maternal grandmother. Following World War II, (yes, I go back that far), I was about twelve years of age and was asked by my grandmother to assist in preparing care packages for her relatives in Germany who were seeking to recover from their war-

torn circumstances. Grandmother was clearly not wealthy, but repeatedly, for many months, packed good-sized food packages to send to her recovering family back in Germany. She wanted my help especially in listing the contents on the required government labeling. She asked that I be accurate with everything, except that I dare not list the packages of cigarettes that she would hide in canisters of flour or cornmeal. She knew that American cigarettes could be traded very profitably in the German black market. She did all this with a kind of joyous abandon and conviction that compassionate help at times needs to take playful risks and supersede any letter of the law. As I was helping my grandmother who was daring to love in obedience to her Christ, I could see the spark of love and joy in her manner, and smile at her ingenious though quirky way of multiplying the good she was about.

OK, two minutes tops to share your recall of memorable JOY you've seen expressed in the life of someone who has for you made JOY memorably expressible. Then two minutes for your partner to share. Again, a gong will signal time for the shift.

SECOND EXERCISE: Much briefer now: What is the central take-home you've derived from these moments together thus far? That is, what awareness or blessing will you carry forward from this time of worship?

The last editing change I made on this sermon, was to set aside my final prayer for Sarah Young's sharing for June 13th as presented in her book, JESUS CALLING. Remember, she writes as if Jesus is speaking. Here is Jesus' good word for that day: "I am creating something new in you: a bubbling spring of JOY that spills over into others' lives. Do not mistake this Joy for your own or try to take credit for it in any way. Instead, watch in delight as My Spirit flows through you to bless others. Let yourself become a reservoir of the Spirit's fruit.

"Your part is to live close to Me, open to all that I am doing in you. Don't try to control the streaming of My Spirit through you. Just keep focusing on Me as we walk through this day together. Enjoy My Presence, which permeates you with Love, Peace, and Joy."

And here's the final benediction I invite you to share with your previous partner. Put your hand upon their head as you share: **"MAY THE LIGHT OF YOUR JOY/ SHINE IN ALL SORTS OF DARKNESS,/ KNOWING THAT DARKNESS/ CAN NEVER OVERCOME THE LIGHT OF YOUR JOY."**

Final benediction declared over all of you collectively: "MAY THE COLLECTIVE LIGHT OF YOUR JOY SHINE IN ALL SORTS OF DARKNESS, KNOWING THAT DARKNESS NEVER OVERCOMES THE LIGHT OF YOUR JOY WHICH GOD USES TO REACH THE FAR AWAY."

AMEN.

Pastor Al

The Reverend Dr. Allan H. Sager (905 Valleyview Dr., Westerville, OH. 43081—
614-882-1998 -- ahsager@columbus.rr.com.)