MINISTRY ISSUE

America

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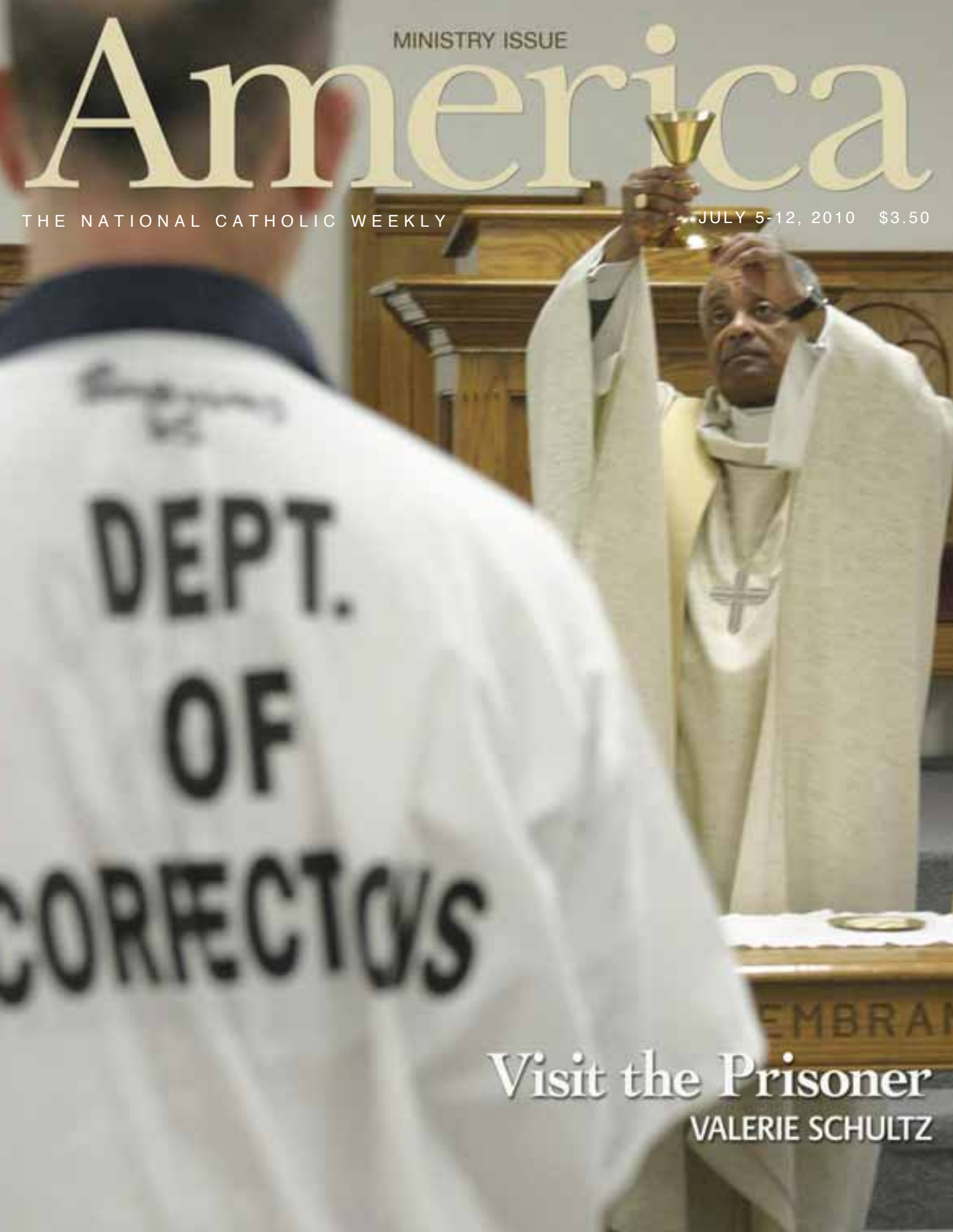

Visit the Prisoner

VALERIE SCHULTZ

OF MANY THINGS

Matthew, my 5-year-old nephew, has an unusual Mariology.

In May I returned from a weeklong pilgrimage to Lourdes, the shrine in southern France where the Virgin Mary appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. It was my fifth trip as a chaplain with the Order of Malta, and the town was filled with knights and dames from around the world. They had come as companions to the *malades*, the sick who were seeking physical and spiritual healing.

It was the coldest pilgrimage anyone could remember, or that I care to experience. Almost every day we pilgrims awoke to driving rain and near-freezing temperatures. At times one wondered whether escorting the *malades* to the Grotto of the Apparitions in a rainstorm would help or hurt their chances of recovery. Nothing is impossible with God, so I came down on the side of "help."

Along with accompanying the *malades*, I had another mission this year: Find a glow-in-the-dark statue of Mary. Matthew, my nephew, had missioned me by voice mail. In his message, when he spoke of the object of his desire, he talked so rapidly that I had a hard time deciphering his words. "Uncle Jim," he said, "when you go to France don't forget to get me a…glowinthedark Mary!" His older brother, Charles, had such a statue, which Matthew had borrowed for his bedroom.

It wasn't hard to find one. Outside the area surrounding the Grotto of the Apparitions, Lourdes is the capital of kitsch, with shops selling Marian ashtrays, oversized soup spoons with St. Bernadette's image and ballpoint pens in whose liquid-filled barrel Our Lady of Lourdes miraculously descends into the grotto and then ascends again.

The weekend after I returned, I gave Matthew his long-awaited statue. "Oooooh," he said. Then I presented him and his brother with a surprise. Matthew and Charles unwrapped the blue-and-white striped paper to reveal tiny, plaster, glitter-covered statues of Our Lady of Lourdes, colored a lurid pink. "Ooooh, it's so sparkly," said Matthew. "What is it?"

"It's a statue that changes colors with the weather. When it's cold, she turns blue; when it's hot, she turns red." Matthew's eyes widened. "Really?" Yes, I said, recalling that when I was in the Arctic—er, Lourdes—she was cerulean. "Put her in the refrigerator!" he said. When that was nixed, Matthew stood her on the sun porch and waited for the Blessed Mother to blush.

In the kitchen a few minutes later, I heard a high-pitched squeal. "Oh NOOO!" shouted Matthew. "Sparkle Mary broke!" In a clumsy handoff, the statue had fallen from his mother's grasp. "That's okay," his mother said. "Daddy can fix her." Then I heard something you don't hear every day: "Where's Mary's head, Matthew?"

I decided to focus on the originally ordered statue, which was still intact: the plastic, glow-in-the-dark Mary. "Let's put her in my bedroom!" said Matthew. We bounded up to his room to replace his brother's statue with his own, new one. Matthew placed her reverently on his nightstand next to the water bottle. "Why do you like her there, Matthew?" "Oh," he said. "Mary protects me."

I liked that. All who had journeyed to Lourdes this year had hoped, in one way or another, for Mary's protection. Most prayed for physical healing, many for spiritual healing. Some simply hoped to feel closer to God. A few didn't know what they might find. But even in the driving rain, in ridiculously cold weather, they hoped that Our Lady, somehow, would protect them.

Matthew, though, had a different Mariology. "What does Mary protect you from?" I asked.

"Oh, Uncle Jim," he said, as if I were a dense student. "Monsters!"

JAMES MARTIN, S.J.

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Cover: An inmate attends Mass with Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Atlanta in the chapel of the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Prison. Photo: CNS/Michael Alexander, Georgia Bulletin

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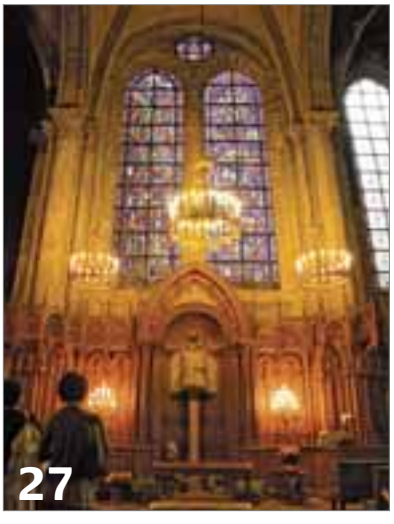
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MINISTRY ISSUE

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

George Anderson, S.J., profiles Catholic attorney **Joseph Cosgrove**, right, and Kerry Weber recalls her year with the **Mercy Volunteer Corps** on our podcast. Plus, a slideshow history of **St. Vincent's Hospital**.
All at americamagazine.org.

Money, Feel Free to Speak

In the middle of the election season, the U.S. Supreme Court landed a body blow to American democracy with a peremptory order ending Arizona's "clean" campaign financing system, known as Azcam. Established by the voters 12 years ago after a series of corruption scandals, Azcam was a mechanism for public funding of elections of candidates who agreed to accept only small private donations in support of their campaigns. The court order is potentially a massive attack on efforts to create a level playing field between deep-pocket candidates and impecunious challengers. Following the precedent set in Buckley v. Valeo (1976), the court identifies money with free speech.

Repeatedly the court has ruled in favor of the plutocrats. In 2008 it found against the so-called Millionaires' Amendment, which allowed publicly financed Congressional candidates to raise more money when they faced wealthy opponents; and in January it ruled against limits on corporate spending in elections. Its jurisprudence seems locked in a fundamental metaphysical confusion that equates the rights of the fictive persons called corporations with the rights of flesh-and-blood human beings.

American jurisprudence, moreover, seems to have whittled down the equal protection of the 14th Amendment into a series of specific nondiscrimination rules (for blacks, women, native Americans, 18-year-olds) and lost any moral vision of what it might be like for citizens to exercise equal voice in their government. Congress is looking to make some small, short-term fixes to this electoral absurdity. Ultimately, a constitutional amendment will be needed to provide a remedy. In the meantime, the United States risks becoming a corporate state like Hong Kong, where businesses are guaranteed seats in the legislature.

An Acting President?

The media's obsession over whether President Obama has "emoted" sufficiently over the catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico is second only to its focus on the actual oil spill. When the president touches a tar ball on the Louisiana shores, what is his expression? Furious, fed up or just frustrated? In modern times, the president has increasingly been looked to as the one who should express the emotions of the American public. When Ronald Reagan, on the 40th anniversary of D-Day, spoke movingly about the brave soldiers who landed at Normandy, many Americans teared up, even though Reagan, an actor, never saw military service. They were pleased that Reagan served as a proxy to express what they felt.

But is it right to expect "No Drama Obama," whose preternatural cool has helped him weather both personal and political crises, to suddenly become Al Pacino? For most of our history, Americans prized a sense of reserve in the chief executive. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had seen war up close, felt no need to prove himself with histrionics. Nor was he much given to worrying. In 1955, on the day when Eisenhower was being honored by Pennsylvania State University, where his brother Milton was president, the weather turned nasty. Milton fretted. Ike said calmly, "Milton, I haven't worried about the weather since June 6, 1944." On the other hand, George Washington wept when he bade farewell to his officers at Fraunces Tavern in New York in 1783 after the Revolutionary War. When it comes to ending and fixing the environmental catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico, however, most Americans would probably opt for action over acting.

Dream Daddies

An adult Barbary macaque takes his infant for a ride on his thick brown back, as the tiny monkey clings to his shoulders and clutches his fur. What makes this worthy of a lead story in The New York Times (6/14) is that primatologists have just explained such behavior in a new report. Carrying an infant, they say, gives adult male macaques social status and helps them bond with other males. Infant cuddling is a nonthreatening way for male adults to interact in groups; it enhances social networking. Among animals, though, it is rare for males to engage with infants. Only 10 percent of all mammals—the primates—even so much as acknowledge paternity. So to find a species whose males protect their young not only marks evolutionary progress; it also makes news.

The same front page showed a photo of a Swedish game warden, with a rifle slung over one shoulder and a husky dog at his side, toting his 2-month-old son across a field. This father is on baby leave, bonding with his infant for two months, the minimum time period subsidized by the government. In Sweden paternity leave is a piece of social engineering that started in 1974 and has gradually taken hold. Eighty-five percent of Swedish dads now take advantage of this time off. Baby leave fosters bonding and allows dads to interact with one another in groups, but best of all it helps balance work and family life. It may also strengthen marriage. Since 1995 divorce and separation rates in Sweden have dropped, and joint custody of children has risen among divorcing couples. The Swedish system marks social progress. Too bad it is still so rare that it also makes news.

EDITORIAL

Justice for Juveniles

Advocates for children were understandably heartened by the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on May 17 that sentencing a juvenile to life without parole for a nonhomicide offense violates the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. The case concerns Terrance Graham, a learning-disabled child who was 16 at the time of his original offense in 2003, helping to rob a restaurant in Florida. He received a year in jail and three years of probation. A year later, with two accomplices, he took part in a home-invasion burglary. In 2005 a Florida judge sentenced him to life without parole for violating probation.

The Supreme Court's decision reflects its earlier ruling in Roper v. Simmons that the death penalty for juveniles violates the Eighth Amendment. That finding, as well as the current one, was based partly on the belief that children under 18 are less mature in their thinking and decision-making abilities than adults. They lack what the Roper ruling calls the "well-formed identities of adults" and are hence prone to "immature and irresponsible behavior." Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wrote the opinion for the majority in both cases.

As Ashley Nellis, a research analyst at The Sentencing Project, a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., has put it, "We can apply appropriate punishment as well as protect public safety without locking up these children and simply throwing away the key." As for children who commit murder, approximately 2,000 throughout the country are serving life-without-parole sentences. That may be the next frontier in the move toward a more compassionate and rehabilitative approach to juveniles who commit heinous crimes. Presently, there is no prospect that they will return to the community.

The United States has a poor record on punishment of child offenders and is the only country in the world besides Somalia that continues to refuse to sign the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. The covenant specifically forbids "life imprisonment without possibility of release" for people under 18 years of age. Under the convention, sentencing children to life, even for serious crimes, is considered inhumane and inconsistent with a civilized society. Adding to the severity of life-without-parole sentences is the fact that children serving such adult sentences are often ineligible to take part in educational and vocational programs. Ordinarily these are reserved for prisoners who may one day be released. The possibility of rehabilitation is thus abandoned, along with any hope for a future life outside prison.

Another problem in the field of juvenile justice is the trend toward trying more and more children in adult courts, which began in the 1990s amid fears of an impending adolescent crime wave by "superpredators" that never materialized. The trend is intertwined with mandatory laws that require the transfer of juveniles to adult courts for certain serious crimes. Upon conviction, many are sent to adult prisons, as many as 2,500 annually. There they face increased risk of sexual abuse by adult prisoners and staff and higher rates of suicide. They also become more likely to commit crimes when they are eventually released. The racial implications are strong. Black and Hispanic children are more likely to be sent to adult courts than white children who are found guilty of comparable offenses. (Terrance Graham is black.)

As matters stand now, some 80 children 13 years of age and younger are transferred yearly to adult courts, almost as many for property crimes as for crimes against persons. These are frequently relatively minor offenses. According to the study *From Time Out to Hard Time: Young Children in the Adult Criminal Justice System*, the decisions as to when and whether a young child will be treated as an adult "are marked by extreme arbitrariness...and unpredictability." The study's recommendations include providing parole opportunities for children transferred to adult courts regardless of sentence length. In Florida and Pennsylvania, the report notes, "children as young as seven could receive a mandatory sentence of life without parole."

The case of Terrance Graham should provoke further examination of how the courts can better deal with juveniles in a manner that is both just and compassionate toward children. The Supreme Court's decision does not mean that after a set period of time Graham will be freed, but rather that he may eventually be allowed to appear before a parole board to determine the extent of his rehabilitation. He and others in his situation deserve that right as the Supreme Court continues to reflect on "evolving standards of decency." Justice Kennedy used this phrase in handing down the majority's decision in the Roper case that ended the execution of juveniles in 2005. The Supreme Court ought to make sure those same standards of decency for juveniles continue to evolve.

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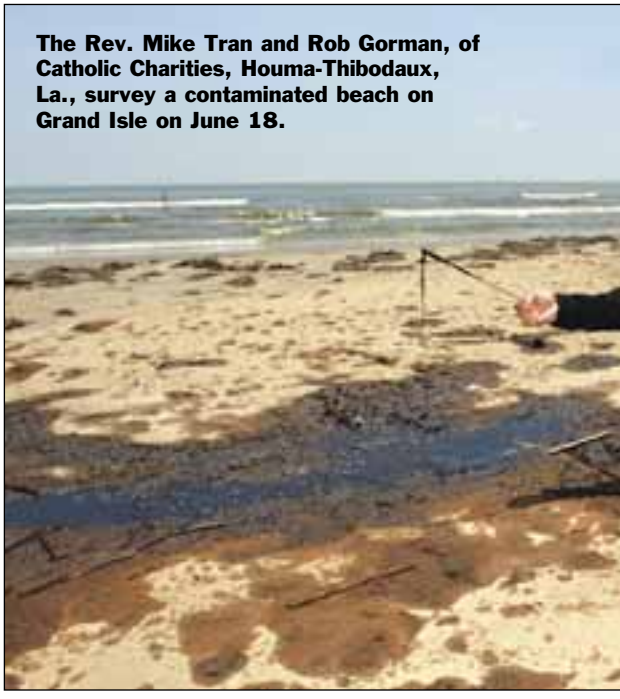
GULF COAST

Residents Struggle With Oil Spill and Uncertainty



The Rev. Mike Tran and Rob Gorman, of Catholic Charities, Houma-Thibodaux, La., survey a contaminated beach on Grand Isle on June 18.

The coast of Louisiana is off limits to its own residents, and their livelihoods and quality of life are suffering, said the pastor of Our Lady of the Isle Parish in Grand Isle. "They can't fish; they can't swim; they can't interact with the water; they can't live off the food from the water," the Rev. Mike Tran said. "This oil spill has had a traumatic impact on the people of the island."

Grand Isle is a barrier island at the mouth of Barataria Bay, where it meets the gulf. The island is connected to the mainland of Louisiana by a causeway. "There are no more tourists; basically everything is shut down. We can't even enjoy the fresh air when we go outdoors because of the smell of the oil that is continually washing up on the beach," the priest said. "And now, with the beginning of hurricane season, the stress levels of the residents have risen even more."

Grand Isle residents and their counterparts across the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux and the rest of the Gulf Coast were waiting anxiously for word that BP has been able to contain the oil flowing into the Gulf of Mexico after the blow-out of its drilling rig, Deepwater Horizon. Since the explosion and fire on April 20 that killed 11 workers on the rig, as many as two million gallons or more of oil have been pouring into the gulf each day, and containment efforts by BP to date have been only partially successful.

As oil continues to spread throughout the gulf, the federal government is still scrambling to find the best possi-

ITALY

Report Critiques G-8 Failures

The Group of Eight countries have issued a glowing report card to themselves, but an independent assessment of development aid being provided by the world's leading industrialized countries since the G-8 summit in L'Aquila, Italy, in 2009, as well as evaluations by aid agencies and activists from poor countries, are not so complimentary.

The G-8's Muskoka Accountability Report—issued June 20 as final preparations were being made for the summit in Huntsville, Ontario, on June 25-26—takes a mostly positive view of how well summit participants have kept their commitments. It notes "considerable success," while acknowledging "it has further to go to fully deliver on its promises." But the G-8 Research Group at the University of Toronto said the leading industrial nations complied with a little more than half of their promises on development, trade, climate change, global security and other issues. Canada did somewhat better than average, meeting about two-thirds of its commitments, good enough for third place, tied with the European Union.

Britain remained in the top spot in the annual analysis of G-8 performance; Japan edged up to second; and the United States was fifth. Canada has led the way on accountability, a major theme of this year's G-8 meeting and the related Group of 20 conference scheduled to follow in Toronto on June 26-27, said Jim Cornelius, executive director of the Canada Foodgrains Bank. But while G-8 officials talk about accountability, the aid community is still waiting for a report in detail about how last year's $22 billion in pledges for food security and agricultural development was allocated, Cornelius said.

Cornelius said he hopes new accountability mechanisms will make it easier to track G-8 and G-20 performances. "What Canada has been doing is working hard on setting up a whole framework for follow-up to all commitments, not just the L'Aquila ones," he said. "If that is successful, then the

ble approach to limiting the environmental damage and administering justice in a catastrophe now heading into its third month. Residents of the Gulf Coast whose livelihoods have been affected by the spill are hoping that a $20 billion pledge made by BP to the White House to help residents is not too little, too late.

Even after some success by BP in mid-June to capture some of the oil billowing from a well a mile below the water surface, millions of gallons continue to escape, and there is no one-size-fits-all way to reclaim all the leaked oil without creating new problems. BP's efforts to drill relief wells are not likely to have significant effects until late summer at best.

There is much uncertainty about the long-term impact of the man-made environmental disaster, which is being called this country's worst, on the people of south Louisiana who live and make their living on the water. The Rev. Thomas Kuriakose, pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Point-aux-Chenes, said many of his parishioners are fishermen, and although they are currently working for BP cleaning up the spill, their future livelihood is threatened.

"I have spoken to a lot of people who are depressed about the uncertainty of what the future holds for them and for the seafood industry in this area," said Father Kuriakose. The Catholic Charities affiliate of the Archdiocese of New Orleans received a $1 million grant from BP in May for spill-related emergency assistance. The money does not go far. The maximum rent assistance the archdiocesan agency can give is $200.

Connie D'Aquin Bosley has seen the despair firsthand. "What we're seeing is that the desperation is growing among the fishermen. Tempers are short, and they really feel neglected," said Bosley, head of Catholic Charities' emergency management office. "The BP claims process is very slow. It's not consistent. There's just gaps right now in what BP offers and what they need right now."

same sort of mechanism can be used to assess the success or the follow-through on maternal and child health."

But ticking off promises kept and holding annual meetings that concentrate on single issues might not be enough when all the issues are linked, according to activists from Kairos, an ecumenical social justice advocacy organization. The activists toured Canada in advance of the summit to discuss issues they contend are being overlooked by G-8 nations. For instance, straight investments in agriculture will not work without taking into account the effects of climate change, said Naty Atz Sunc, general coordinator of the Association for Community Development and Promotion in Guatemala. Since Hurricane Mitch hit Guatemala in 1998, poor farmers have found it difficult to re-establish their livelihoods because weather patterns have been unpredictable.

Farmers in Kenya have tried to plant crops three times since 2009, only to be frustrated by uncharacteristic drought and weather patterns that village elders say they have never seen before, said Isaiah Kipyegon Toroitich, a program officer working for Norwegian Church Aid in the East African nation. "You can easily see communities becoming poorer and poorer," he said.

Ordinary citizens should care enough about poverty alleviation to look past G-8 press releases and see the serious issues, Cornelius said. "The challenge is to be able to look below the surface, because a lot of what happens on the surface is hype."

While G-8 leaders assessed their performance in Canada, global poverty remains all too evident in nations like South Africa, the World Cup host.

Abortion Ultrasound Bill Vetoed

Gov. Charlie Crist of Florida vetoed a bill that would have required women to have an ultrasound examination before a first-trimester abortion, but similar legislation is having more success in other states. In Louisiana, a bill requiring ultrasounds before all abortions is awaiting the signature of Gov. Bobby Jindal. In Michigan, where an ultrasound already is required before an abortion, a Senate committee is considering a bill that would mandate that the abortion facilities use the highest quality images available. In Florida, ultrasounds are required before all second- and third-trimester abortions to determine the gestational age and location of the fetus. The Florida legislation would not have required women to look at the ultrasound images or hear a description of them. It also would have exempted victims of rape, incest, domestic violence or human trafficking. Crist said in his veto message that the bill would have placed "an inappropriate burden on a woman seeking to terminate a pregnancy."

Watching Out For Women Refugees

Caritas Internationalis highlighted the plight of three million women experiencing crisis as long-term refugees on World Refugee Day, June 20. Women refugees are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses in cases where they have been forced to leave their homes for long periods. Caritas said the international community can do better in protecting them from violence. There are over 10 million refugees in the world today. About two-thirds are caught in crises of five years or longer. Women make up 49 percent of the refugee population. They are frequently fleeing conflicts in places like Colombia, Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan. "Women can become victims of violence in these camps," said Martina Liebsch, Director of Policy for Caritas Internationalis. "They are more vulnerable to attacks, as they frequently have to leave the camps for basic supplies for their families, such as firewood and water." Caritas says that better security in camps is essential, and that it should be made easier for women to report acts of violence.

Cardinal of Naples Target of Probe

As Italian magistrates continue a wide-ranging investigation into public works contracts and suspected kickbacks, they have informed Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe of Naples that he is a subject of the investigation. The investigators are looking at contracts Cardinal Sepe made with government officials while he was head of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples from 2001 to 2006. Italian newspapers speculated that the cardinal sold property below market value to a government minister, who then allocated public funds for work on the Vatican building housing the congregation. There are also questions about how the cardinal helped a government official—now under investigation—find an apartment. In Naples on June 21 Cardinal Sepe said, "I always did everything with maximum transparency.... I always acted in accordance with my conscience, having the good of the church as my only objective."

From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Hunger in West Africa

On June 23 Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens honored auxilary Bishop **Joseph M. Sullivan** for his "fifty years of vision, leadership and unwavering support" at the annual Bishop's Humanitarian Award Dinner. ✦ According to the G.A.O., six organizations that perform or promote **abortion** received at least $967 million in federal funding in the fiscal years 2002 through 2009 ✦ Cardinal **Daniel N. DiNardo** of Galveston-Houston, head of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, expressed "grave concern" about an F.D.A. decision to label as an emergency contraceptive a drug thought to cause abortions. ✦ The Rev. **Suzan Johnson Cook**, a Baptist pastor, as been nominated by President Obama to be ambassador at large for international religious freedom. ✦ Caritas Internationalis says at least 10 million people in **West Africa's Sahel region** face hunger unless the international community responds to the mounting food crisis. ✦ Bishop J. Kevin Boland of Savannah, Ga., bishop promoter of the **Apostleship of the Sea**, announced on June 16 that the apostleship was setting up a network to help both the environment and people affected by the BP disaster.

KYLE T. KRAMER

The Year for Humility

In this exceedingly complex age, the church places an amazing array of demands on a shrinking number of priests. Certainly they must keep their vows of celibate chastity. They should have the leadership, administrative, management, financial and entrepreneurial skills of a chief executive officer. We expect them to celebrate uplifting (but not too lengthy) liturgies and to deliver wise, theologically sound and thought-provoking homilies. We want priests to be truth-telling prophets (preferably to someone else) and also to deliver compassionate pastoral care at our bedsides. They should be tech-savvy and constantly available but remain calm and centered, not distracted or obsessive. In other words, we want priests who, like Jesus as described in Mark's Gospel, do all things well. We want competence—to the extreme.

In the face of these often contradictory demands, some priests gravitate to what they do well, neglecting other ministries. Others increase their velocity in a desperate attempt to be all things to all people. Still others retreat into identity enclaves of turn-back-the-clock traditionalism or militant Vatican II-ism, fracturing parishes and presbyterates. Some rule their parish as micromanaging demagogues, mistakenly equating control with competence. Struggling with loneliness and overwork, some lose their vitality, vision and creativity. Some just give up on priesthood.

Expectations of competence are not unreasonable, and the seminary at which I work spares no effort in preparing men well for the multitude of tasks they will face in ministry. Beneath this constellation of pastoral skills, however, there is one thing needful for the priest, as Cardinal Francis George writes in *The Difference God Makes*: to reveal God "as absolute self-giving and life-giving love that heals and transforms us and draws all to share in the very life of the Triune God."

This kind of generous, inviting transparency comes less from competence than from humility, as St. Benedict understands it: an unflinching interior gaze that recognizes one's gifts and limitations, goodness and sin—and in all this one's belovedness by God. Truthful humility is the taproot of compassion and the antidote to the pathology of competence-ism. But humility, too, asks much of priests.

An invitation to collaboration may be the saving grace of the Year for Priests.

Making time for the contemplation from which humility grows requires a "spirituality of subtraction," by which priests learn to say no to at least some of the demands placed upon them in a never-ending stream by bishop and parishioners alike, and to strike a dynamic balance among the responsibilities that reasonably remain. Most essentially, humility implies a commitment to growth: not covering up shortcomings but seeking support and accountability from a priest's bishop, his fellow priests and his parishioners.

The priest is shaped by his community even as he leads it, especially when he invites the laity to help spur his growth with honest, constructive feedback—for example, in a group that meets regularly with the priest to discuss his homilies and presiding. And if the priest is overwhelmed by tasks that we laypeople have the authorization, time and talent to do as well or better, might we not step up and offer to collaborate rather than criticize?

An invitation to collaboration may be the saving grace of the recently concluded Year for Priests—a year meant to recognize and honor the priesthood—that became another explosive chapter in the ongoing horror story of sexual abuse by clerics. If the Year for Priests had been a mere advertising campaign intended to put our priests up on a pedestal, then certainly the sex scandals would have made a disaster of those plans.

Perhaps, however, the ironic timing is actually a gift. What if this tumultuous Year for Priests helped them become icons of truthful humility, of brokenness and redemption, rather than reflections of our culture's pathological obsession with overwork and übercompetence? What if the Year for Priests served as an invitation for us not just to point fingers at abusers and their enablers (as they certainly deserve), but to support our priests' growth and collaborate in their ministry?

This would require, of course, that we too take up a similar spiritual practice of humility. We will recognize God's saving love in priests only as we learn also to discover it in ourselves.

KYLE T. KRAMER *is the director of lay degree programs at Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Saint Meinrad, Ind., and an organic farmer.*

Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades, formerly of Harrisburg, Pa., delivers a homily in the chapel of the Camp Hill State Correctional Institution.

PHOTO: CNS/CHRIS HEISEY, CATHOLIC WITNESS

THE SURPRISING REWARDS OF DETENTION MINISTRY

Prison Breakthrough

BY VALERIE SCHULTZ

Twenty-four years ago, my husband and I moved to a small town where he had taken a teaching job. We had been married for five years, had two children (with two still to come) and felt like old hands at life, which, in retrospect, we were not. As we adjusted to life in a village, we soon learned that our new home's main industry was a state prison that squatted, ominous and foreboding, where a two-lane highway reached a dead end. Even though we met many people who worked there, we never went anywhere near the prison. We had come from the diverse metropolis of Los Angeles, so this seemed to us like another planet.

But that was before we became volunteers for our parish detention ministry six years ago. In a comedy of errors, in which my husband and I were each under the impression that the other one had discerned a certain call, we joined a new ministry. The recently hired Catholic chaplain at the prison organized our group of volunteers into teams of two. Each pair spent one Saturday a month conducting Communion services at two different prison yards. While there are priests who faithfully come to the prison as often as possible to hear confessions and say Mass, most of the time the chaplain is a one-man show for all things Catholic for over 5,000 inmates in five prison yards. Our active group of volunteers helps to make Catholic services more widely available.

With some apprehension, my husband and I accompanied the chaplain on our first Saturday, following him as he conducted services we would soon be doing on our own. I wrote everything down: where to park; what to wear; what to bring and not bring; what gates to enter; when to show our I.D.s, for which we had been fingerprinted and run through a law enforcement database; how to act. We worried that we would make a wrong turn, get lost and end up somewhere dangerous. We

VALERIE SCHULTZ, *of Tehachapi, Calif., is an occasional contributor to* ***America****.*

thought we would never get used to the security measures, and we found ourselves wondering if our decision to volunteer there was seriously flawed, even though we respected and enjoyed working with our fearless chaplain leader. Then it was time to come face to face with the inmates.

We waited in the chapel, which looked like any other chapel. And when the inmates arrived, we greeted them. I expected them to be scary, like characters from Central Casting, but they seemed glad to meet us. In fact, they didn't seem much different from people who are not incarcerated. They were young, old, short, tall, thin, stout, bald, well-coiffed, English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, outgoing, shy, articulate, silent, funny, stern. While some are tattooed to an alarming extent, the inmates as a group possess all the quirks and gifts and flaws, the nobility and the sin, that define humanity.

The services were reverent, yet they vibrated with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The choir sang like angels. For my husband and me, it was an extraordinary spiritual experience, and we knew we would be back. God was speaking to us here, incongruously but clearly. Somehow we felt as if we had come home.

Today, our group of volunteers endures. We meet together monthly to determine the schedule. We read and discuss the themes and lessons in the upcoming Scripture readings in terms of how best to present them to incarcerated men. We help coordinate special events, like retreats or celebrations, two of the inmates' favorites being the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday. Sometimes outside groups come to give inmate retreats, and we help by giving talks, being group leaders, donating supplies, offering lodging to the visitors or, with official permission, preparing meals to share with the inmates at the culmination of the retreat.

For Some, a Wake-Up Call

Two years ago, I took a job in a records office at the prison, so I am able to volunteer an additional two weekdays after work. On Tuesdays I help facilitate a Criminals and Gangmembers Anonymous meeting, a 12-step program

HOW TO HELP

If you have reservations about volunteering in a prison or jail, here are some other possibilities.

Things to donate

- reading materials, like books, magazines or Bibles
- rosaries, scapulars or other religious items
- writing utensils (may require special approval)
- materials to assist in the ministry, like postage stamps, envelopes, greeting cards in Spanish and in English
- money or clothing to help with dress-outs (clothes to wear upon release from prison) for inmates with no family to provide them

Things to do directly for prisoners

- Become a pen pal to an inmate.
- Offer to cook or bake for special events as permitted
- Help with family visits to incarcerated parents (examples of California programs are "Get on the Bus" and "The Chowchilla Family Express").
- Search out possible job placements for parolees.
- Begin chapters of programs with which you are already familiar and comfortable (St. Vincent de Paul, Guadalupe Society, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.).

Things to do in the wider world

- Get involved with, or start, mentoring programs for the children of inmates and parolees.

A volunteer teaches the rosary at Onondaga County Justice Center in Syracuse, N.Y.

- Help with victim assistance programs and with bereavement ministry for victims and their families.
- Protest the death penalty or support a moratorium against it.
- Advocate with legislators for more just sentencing policies.
- Pray for those who are imprisoned, and for those whom they have harmed by criminal activity and for those who minister and work within the prison walls.

What else?

For information, or opportunities to volunteer in detention ministry, check with your diocesan office or parish. You can also contact your local Catholic prison chaplain for specific ministry needs.

PHOTO: CNS PHOTO BY PAUL FINCH, CATHOLIC SUN

that originated in prison. On Wednesdays I lead a Communion service at the sensitive needs yard, which houses inmates who in a general population yard would be at risk of harm at the hands of other inmates.

Detention ministry may seem like a strange landing place for someone whose previous ministries mainly involved children and youth, and it is. When we moved here all those years ago, I would never have pictured myself in the places to which I now willingly go. The fact that I feel more at home in the prison chapel these days than I do in my own parish provides a trinity of proofs: that God has a sense of humor; that Jesus meant us to take literally those words about visiting him in prison (Mt 25:36): and that the Holy Spirit, when asked, will always provide the necessary gifts to make the impossible possible.

Working with inmate files in a records office, however, does not allow me to romanticize or trivialize why these men are here. While a few may be imprisoned unjustly, most of them are incarcerated for good reason. Some inmates continue their life of crime from captivity and have no interest in rehabilitation. Many live the revolving-door philosophy, returning to prison for a new crime or parole violation within months—or weeks—of their release.

Most inmates just want to do their time quietly, without attracting notice. Many of the inmates I have met were just unlucky. But for circumstances, they could be you or I in our early 20s, caught for doing something stupid and unable to afford a decent lawyer or even to comprehend the language of law. And some inmates really do see a prison term as a giant wake-up call from God. They read voraciously, participate in every service and program offered, take (or teach) sacramental preparation classes and open their hearts wide to *metanoia*, to daily conversion. They live an examined life. I believe I see the face of Jesus in them far more than they see the holy in me.

In some dioceses, like the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Office of Detention Ministry has been renamed the Office for Restorative Justice, because this signifies a broader, more effective endeavor. While detention ministry is clearly aimed at those held in the jails and prisons, restorative justice seeks both to facilitate restitution for victims of crime and to emphasize rehabilitation over retribution for the convicted. The goal is to build a more constructive and compassionate society.

Another group that can be touched by God's love and forgiveness through restorative justice is the correctional staff. I am sometimes aware of officers who listen with casual intensity during our services and who come to treat us volunteers with respect, rather than with the initial skepticism that usually greets our bleeding hearts. It is my hope that they are also moved to treat the inmates in their care more humanely. I am often touched, during the Prayer of the Faithful at our

services, when inmates pray for the well-being of the guards and other workers at the prison. They also regularly pray for the victims of their crimes. These are not prayers I would have imagined coming from the lips of criminals.

Unlikely Community of Faith

During services, we sing, repent, praise God, proclaim the word, pray and share the Eucharist together in an unlikely community of faith. Each week I prepare a reflection on the readings. I search for words that are relevant and helpful while praying that the Holy Spirit will smooth my delivery. Yet, when I ask for my fellow worshippers' thoughts at the end of mine, the responses often throw sparks of wisdom and insight. "Why are you here?" I sometimes want to ask the speaker.

But I don't. Every so often an inmate tells me his commitment offense, but it's not information I need. I see further evidence of God's grace in the fact that, when I go into the prison as a Catholic volunteer, I am more powerfully aware of God's love for us than when I am anywhere else. I cannot explain it. But I know that when I shake hands at the sign of peace or place Communion into upturned palms, I am touching hands that have robbed, beaten, cheated, murdered and molested. But that's when I am filled with the true mystery of sharing the Eucharist in community, because I am able to grasp those hands with love and know that where they have been does not matter. Where they are going, what they are going to do next, matters. I believe that hands that have caused hurt always have the God-given potential to be hands of tenderness.

Detention ministry gives me far more than I give others: I feel guilty when I am thanked for doing something that so enriches my faith. But despite my enthusiasm, some people who have tried on detention ministry have found it an uncomfortable fit. As St. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit…" (12:4). We must each discern the particular ministry to which the Spirit calls us at a particular time of our lives.

Every morning on my way to work, just before driving through the front gate of the prison, I see a sign that reads "Caution: Rough Road Ahead." To us employees, it means that the state is still remiss in re-paving the weather-ravaged main road. But I often wonder how the warning strikes others who enter here, both arriving inmates and their visitors. I wonder if their hearts hurt at the aptness of the metaphor. Sometimes I wonder how unwitting the metaphor really is, or if someone in maintenance is a bit of a poet. There is no denying that prison is a rough road. But like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, our choice of traveling companion makes all the difference. A

The Last Days Of St. Vincent's

A venerable New York institution closes its doors.

BY KEVIN CLARKE

Tom Cunningham, afternoon groceries swaying in his hands, stops to review the notices taped to the wall alongside the closed doors of St. Vincent's emergency room entrance. The postings, in English, Spanish and Chinese, advise would-be walk-ins where to find help now that the E.R. has closed for good. Just a few feet away, a Fire Department ambulance roars past the E.R. entrance ramp on Seventh Avenue, sirens wailing. It does not turn in to St. Vincent's but heads downtown, fast.

"I just can't believe it," he says. There has been a lot of that going around Greenwich Village these days. Residents were keenly aware of St. Vincent's precarious health, but many assumed the venerable Village institution would never be allowed to close. "It really hits you now," he says. "They tell us we can go to Beth Israel or Lenox Hill or five miles north or three miles east or four miles south." He shakes his head over the impossibility of such a notion. "You know what traffic's like in Manhattan," he says.

"I hate to say it, but I wonder what's going to happen to someone who gets sick or hurt around here tonight," Cunningham says. "Someone is going to die tomorrow." Cunningham does not say *needlessly*, but that is clearly on his mind and has certainly concerned neighborhood groups that in recent weeks loudly resisted the closing of the 161-year-old hospital—to no avail. A six-month-long death spiral and a final whirlwind of last-minute power plays and increasingly frantic negotiations—no fewer than six competing hospital networks at one point or other were in discussion to partner with the faltering St. Vincent's—ended on April 30. St. Vincent's Hospital Manhattan, the last Catholic general hospital in New York City and an institution that had a hand in the birthing and the burying of generations of New York Catholics, was closing its doors.

Around the corner from the emergency room, the hospital's lobby is bustling with activity, but it's not the human crush of patients, doctors and family members who used to crowd St. Vincent's. These are departing hospital employees in embraces and kissing goodbyes to friends and fellow workers, clutching plastic bags full of personal belongings salvaged from offices and work stations. One 20-year veteran nurse is leaving arm in arm with another, still incredulous that the doors were closing behind her for the last time.

"It's heartbreaking," the R.N. says. St. Vincent's was not just a place where she worked. "This was home," she says. "I came here right out of nursing school. We came here to fulfill the mission of St. Vincent's," the hospital's commitment to "compassionate care" that arguably set it apart from other New York hospitals.

This nurse, who asked to remain anonymous, does not blame the Sisters of Charity for the hospital's downfall, but New York politicians, other hospitals and New York real estate interests are another story. She says the hospital's closing has less to do with its effectiveness as an institution or the needs of the community than with "politics in the city of New York."

Who Killed St. Vincent's?

Conspiracy theories have been circulating madly among staff and neighbors on the Internet since St. Vincent's closing was announced. The suspicions are not without cause. St. Vincent's offers a lot for New York real estate vultures to pick over, its campus alone a last-of-its-kind opportunity for developers to get their claws on a sizeable chunk of property within the lucrative confines of Greenwich Village.

Jane Iannucelli, of the Sisters of Charity, a St. Vincent's board member and director of sponsorship services, is aware of the speculation spinning among St. Vincent's staff and Village residents. "I think even our employees cannot believe that this happened," she says. "I think the easiest way to explain why…St. Vincent's is closing its doors tomorrow," she says, choosing her words with precision, "is that the State Department of Health said there is no need for an acute care hospital in Greenwich Village. And while St. Vincent's had many problems, they were on their way to being fixed. But with the Department of Health saying that there's no need for an acute care hospital here, the board had no choice but accept a vote to close."

Truth be told, the Health Department may have nailed

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the coffin closed, but the hospital has had a busy hand in its own grave-digging in recent years.

Just about everything that could go wrong did go wrong as a series of strategic and administrative missteps initially meant to fortify New York's Catholic hospitals instead accelerated their downfall. In 2000 St. Vincent's merged with a group of Brooklyn and Staten Island Catholic hospitals with the idea that productivity gains and the elimination of administrative redundancy would allow them all to remain competitive and sustainable into the future. But significant gains never materialized for the newly dubbed St. Vincent's Catholic Medical Centers. Bad decisions by its board and questionable fiscal practices and consulting expenses certainly hurt the new network, but its fall was hastened by the domino effect of the debt burden brought into the merger by the individual institutions. Ultimately even relatively healthy institutions, like St. Vincent's, the new system's flagship hospital, were profoundly wounded by the consolidation. An ever-larger debt accumulated for surviving hospitals as the system staggered through a series of hospital closings and divestitures. That debt burden meant St. Vincent's was denied reinvestment and modernization capital. It emerged from a 2005 bankruptcy still shouldering a heavy institutional debt load.

Compassionate Care

But no post-mortem of St. Vincent's would be complete without acknowledging that its mission to the poor itself was a major part of its undoing. Many paying customers opted for Manhattan hospitals with more cachet, but Medicaid patients and the indigent continued to come to St. Vincent's, adding to a debt burden that by the time of its second and final bankruptcy was over $1 billion.

Even after the hospital closed, the poor still come to St. Vincent's door. "I believe we had maybe 48 yesterday and in the 60s the day before," Sister Iannucelli says.

The walking wounded making their way to the dying hospital's doors are part of the reason Sister Iannucelli remains skeptical about the city's stopgap plan for urgent care materializing during St. Vincent's wake. A spokesman for North Shore-Long Island Jewish, the corporate parent of Lenox Hill, said the "urgi-center" would be able to treat about 25,000 patients a year, but at a lower level of care than St. Vincent's emergency department, which provided top-level treatment to 60,000 people a year. Sister Iannucelli notes the increasing number of families moving into the St. Vincent's service area, the large residential projects being developed in adjoining communities and Greenwich Village's large aging population already in place. Replacing a fully equipped hospital with a limited capacity urgent care unit "could be sufficient" over a short term, she says. "But I think the long view says we need an acute care hospital in the Village." She means a full-service general hospital, though smaller, which she says St. Vincent's was on its way to becoming when the Health Department pulled the plug.

Sister Iannucelli worries that the loss of St. Vincent's will

PHOTO: STEPHANIE RATCLIFFE

deal more than just a practical blow to New York. The Sisters of Charity and St. Vincent's grew up with the city. St. Vincent's opened in 1849 in a small brick house with 30 beds on West 13th Street to treat victims of a cholera outbreak. When the immigrant gangs of New York finished their skirmishes on the streets of the infamous Five Points, they brought the survivors to St. Vincent's. Its doors have opened to virtually every catastrophe and community emergency New York City has known. It has treated survivors of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and the sinking of the Titanic, victims of the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 and the more than 800 injured during a day in September 2001 that will not be forgotten. St. Vincent's treated victims of the Spanish flu epidemic and was at the frontlines during the city's H.I.V./AIDS crisis, when its beds were full of the sick and the dying. "Almost every health care crisis that has existed in our city," Sister Iannucelli says, "St. Vincent's has responded to…. I say St. Vincent's not being here is a big loss to our city."

St. Vincent's doctors and nurses have already begun scattering to other hospitals around the city. They will be bringing St. Vincent's with them, Sister Iannucelli says. "The values of the sisters that have been inculcated in St. Vincent's really are in the marrow of everybody's bones in this place…. So when our employees, our doctors, our nurses go someplace else, they're carrying this all with them," she says. "They can't kill the spirit of this place just because the doors close.

"Maybe the name of St. Vincent's will fall into the background in another generation or so," says Sister Iannucelli, "but for the men and women who were in this place, what seeds were sown in them and what they take into the future, you can't take that away."

A New York Legacy

For her personally and for the Sisters of Charity, Sister Iannucelli can't say what comes next. "I think this is a big end of a cycle, of an era for the Sisters of Charity," corresponding with the closing this June of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral School, the city's first parochial school, which the Sisters of Charity opened in 1822. "When you think of what we did in education, starting out in Old St. Patrick's, then you think about the…number of orphanages we founded, the New York Foundling and St. Vincent's. You know that's an unbelievable legacy and an unbelievable part of building the city of New York. So Old St. Patrick's closes. St. Vincent's closes. For us, it really is the end of a cycle of what we have contributed to New York. What comes next? I don't know.

"We're not as many as we used to be," Sister Iannucelli says, and the sisters are not getting any younger. "We're in the process of saying, 'What are we being invited into; where are the unmet needs; what is going to be our focus?

We acknowledge that God has been good to us through our works, but now we have to let go of them and ask: What are we being called into in the future?"

"Heartbreaking" is how Carol Keehan, D.C., president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association, describes the closing of St. Vincent's, "a haven for so many, especially the vulnerable." Despite the downfall of the St. Vincent network, she still believes that institutional consolidation "from a position of strength" is not a bad strategy for Catholic hospitals. Because of the peculiarities of the New York market, she is not sure St. Vincent's offers much of a cautionary tale for institutions elsewhere. "We all know how challenging it is to care for very sick and very poorly insured populations," says Sister Keehan. "It is one of the reasons we needed health reform."

ON THE WEB
A photo history of St. Vincent's Hospital.
americamagazine.org/slideshow

Sister Iannucelli, for her part, is convinced there are lessons in St. Vincent's demise for other Catholic hospital administrators. At the very least, she says, they could learn from some of the missteps of St. Vincent's administration and board of directors. "I can't live in a blame mentality," she says. "I can only say I know I did my best, and I think that I can honestly say that most of the people I worked with did their best." Still, she says there is much that she would have done differently if she could have in the hospital's final years.

To be successful in the contemporary medical environment, "I think you have to be politically savvy," Sister Iannucelli says. "I think you need to be assertive and aggressive for the things that you believe in. I think you have to stay on top of your game; your fiscal structures have to be very, very sharp. You have to be willing to realign yourself and change with the economy and what's happening with respect to, say, health care reform or budgeting in your state.

"Health care today is a very, very complicated ministry. So quality leadership, good strategic planning and a great values system [are important] because it's so easy to get lost in the complexity of the game and the work."

Out on Seventh Avenue, Thomas Cunningham worries that he and his neighbors are the ones who got lost in the St. Vincent's endgame. Mr. Cunningham has taken the ride himself into the emergency room bay at St. Vincent's, and he is grateful for the care he received then. He says the residents of the Village have always known they could count on St. Vincent's when they needed it. "I had friends who were cared for here; I had friends who died here. You never had to worry what kind of treatment they would receive."

"It's a very sad day," he says, taking a final look before walking away down Seventh Avenue. "I just can't believe something couldn't have been done to keep it open." A

Will Work for Free

Faith-based programs create a culture of service amid economic crisis.

BY KERRY WEBER

Before Stephanie Gullotti started working at MercyFirst human services agency in Brooklyn, N.Y., she thought the job would be a temporary stop on her way to a career in health care. But since last August, when she began her work there with children in foster care, she has gained experience organizing workshops about education, employment and health for teens; she has built relationships, planned trips and encouraged high-schoolers to apply for college. "I came into this thinking I'd learn something and maybe take that to whatever else I do in the future, but I enjoy so much of what I'm doing now, I'm torn," she said. Ms. Gullotti loves her job for many reasons, but a big paycheck isn't among them.

As a full-time volunteer for the agency through the Mercy Volunteer Corps, Ms. Gullotti, 23, receives a stipend of $210 a month, $110 of which is for groceries for her volunteer community, which consists of herself and one other volunteer. The two women receive housing and health insurance from M.V.C., which is based in Gwynedd Valley, Pa., and live together while trying to put into practice in their daily lives the tenets of simple living, community, social justice and spirituality.

While this lifestyle might seem radical to some, it makes sense to more and more young adults who are seeking faith-based volunteer programs that match applicants with full-time job placements lasting anywhere from one week to two or more years. The volunteers often choose this path as a way to "give back," to build on a short-term service experience or to explore career options. Most live on a small stipend and in a community with other like-minded volunteers.

Over 13,000 individuals volunteered through faith-based programs between 2008 and 2009, according to a survey by Catholic Network Volunteer Services. Of these volunteers, nearly one quarter served for nine months or more. The increasing popularity of these faith-based volunteer programs among adults under 25 reflects a general increase in the number of young adults in the United States who choose to volunteer for any significant length of time, which rose from 7.8 million to 8.2 million from 2007 to 2008, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service. But despite the abundance of individuals looking for full-time volunteer positions after college, the total number of faith-based programs is declining, and many programs are seeking new sources of funding in the wake of the U.S. economic downturn.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS

Dave Anderson, a volunteer, with students at Detroit Cristo Rey High School.

Expanded Need, Diminished Resources

Since 2004, the number of programs registered as members of C.N.V.S. has fallen from 236 to 182. Of those remaining, 175 offer service opportunities lasting nine months or more in both domestic and international placements. The largest lay, Catholic, long-term volunteer program, and one of the oldest, is the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, headquartered in Baltimore. This year applications for J.V.C. have risen dra-

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matically, up 36 percent since last year. The main office stopped accepting them altogether after receiving 650 applications for 370 placements. The organization expanded both its international and domestic placements by 12 percent in an effort to meet the demand. But this, in turn, has presented a new set of challenges.

"The need is expanding, and the number of people who want to volunteer is expanding," said Kevin O'Brien, the president of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. "What's not expanding is the resources." Even with an alumni base of over 12,000 and several full-time staff members, J.V.C. has not yet met its fund-raising goals for this year. "We are trying to do new things and go back to our alumni for support," he said. "We're writing more grants. It's not dire, but the rate at which we can expand is constrained by the economic realities." Mr. O'Brien says he has directed many qualified applicants to other programs with similar values.

The economic downturn also has affected programs that receive the bulk of their funding from a single religious congregation. Shrinking orders must rethink their budgets as many of their members reach retirement age. Meanwhile the growth of secular nonprofit-based programs creates more options for potential volunteers. Today half of all faith-based post-graduate volunteer programs are run by religious congregations, down about 20 percent from 14 years ago, according to Jim Lindsay, executive director of C.N.V.S.

This July will mark the end of the Providence Volunteer Ministry, a program run for 22 years by the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, in Indiana. As the ministry's first lay director, Julie Szolek-Van Valkenburg worked for several years to build the program; she instituted spiritual direction and retreats for the volunteers. But the community leadership decided to close the program because of its cost, difficulties in housing the volunteers, the declining number of religious sisters and losses from the religious community's investments. "The volunteers had a better attitude than I did," said Ms. Szolek-Van Valkenburg, describing her reaction to the decision. "They said that this ministry as it's known is closing, but there will be something else that will come."

In spite of economic and logistical difficulties, new volunteer programs continue to be launched, and 17 people attended the most recent C.N.V.S. yearly formation workshops for potential new program leaders. Among last year's crowd was Ellen Mommarts, the first executive director for the Norbertine Volunteer Community, sponsored by the Norbertines of St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, Wis. She spent the past year recruiting, securing housing, developing a budget and setting up relationships with agencies in a culturally diverse neighborhood of Green Bay. There the organization's six volunteers commit themselves to 30-hour work weeks with various agencies and 10 hours of community development within their neighborhood.

While agencies in Green Bay are familiar with government programs like AmeriCorps, the Norbertine volunteers are the first in the area sponsored by a religious community. Currently, the Norbertines do not ask participating agencies to pay any part of the cost of a volunteer, which surprises many agencies, who welcomed the help. "When they realized we were serious, they were all over it," Mommarts said. "We know adjustments will need to be made based upon the needs of the neighborhood. That's…the example St. Norbert gave to the order: meet the needs of the people where they're at."

VOLUNTEERS BY THE NUMBERS

65%	are female
83%	are white
66%	are younger than 25
3%	are over 56
72.9%	of long-term domestic volunteers have completed four years of college
73.8%	live in community with volunteers from the same program
94.2%	successfully complete their term of service
19.9%	extend their commitment beyond the original term

Source: CNVS 2008-2009 Membership Survey Results

A Culture of Service

Word of mouth and the Internet remain the top ways by which college students learn about a particular program, but it takes more than good public relations and recruiting tactics to inspire individuals to join.

"We've talked a lot about what we can do to create more of a culture of service, where [long-term volunteering] is not seen as unusual, but something that we would like everyone

to at least consider," said Jim Lindsay of C.N.V.S. "People are very concerned…about finances, student loans; many have to convince their parents that this is something worth doing. But I think we're finally getting to the point where a year of service isn't a year off, a gap year. It's a year of real-world experience, and its an excellent way to start off a career [or]…to live out one's faith in service to the poor."

According to C.N.V.S. statistics, 44 percent of volunteers enter the workforce immediately after completing their service; of those, 53 percent choose fields in education or social work. Another 12.2 percent enter graduate schools, where 61 percent study medicine, social work or education. Yet volunteering is not just for those interested in being a teacher or a caseworker. "For some, volunteering allows a person to really pursue a career; for others, they learn transferrable skills, life skills because of it," said Mike Goggins, executive director of the St. Vincent Pallotti Center in Washington, D.C., which offers prayer resources, networking opportunities and newsletters to prospective, current and former volunteers. "I think a lot of people who choose to do long-term volunteer service have financial means to be able to spend a year not working for pay.... Living simply and in a very rural community or a foreign country or a very urban setting can sometimes be quite a different experience for them."

ON THE WEB

Kerry Weber talks about her year with the Mercy Volunteer Corps.
americamagazine.org/podcast

John Mullman, 49, fully acknowledges that he was pushed outside his comfort zone when he joined J.V.C. in 1982 after graduating from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., with a degree in economics. At the time, he had rarely traveled far from his hometown on Long Island, so his placement as a teacher and after-school program coordinator in Washington, D.C., seemed like a true adventure.

"There's an element of it that was appropriately uncomfortable, and that's part of the value of the experience," he said. "It's one thing for you to live on $60 a month for a year, when at the end of the year you can choose to not do that," he said. "The people you're working with do not get that choice. And that affects you." Today, Mr. Mullman, who is married to another former Jesuit volunteer, is in the money management business and on the J.V.C. board of directors. "The lessons you learn from that stick with you. The idea of giving back to those less fortunate than you is something we've given to all our children, I hope."

For some, the transition from the life of a volunteer to whatever comes next can be difficult. "The volunteers have been profoundly changed, then [they] go home and try to talk about it, and it's, 'Yeah, great. O.K.; we're going to get pizza for dinner.' Or, 'Oh, the do-gooder is home,'" said Marian Uba, executive director of the Mercy Volunteer Corps. "We try to help the volunteers communicate their experience in a constructive way." She said teaching them to "ritualize their goodbyes" is part of the ministry, too. Many former volunteers feel at home in jobs or communities that uphold the values of their volunteer program.

Cinnamon Sarver's volunteer experience inspired her to "delve more deeply into issues of voluntary poverty." After serving as a therapist and case manager at a mental hospital through Channels, a now-defunct program associated with the Diocese of Seattle, Ms. Sarver, 39, joined a Catholic Worker community. "It was really hard for me to imagine finding full-time work where I wasn't going to compromise some key values by paying taxes to a government that would support war, capital punishment and abortion," she said. She has since spent six years at various Catholic Worker houses, seven years teaching full time, and recently she completed a master's degree in theology from the University of Notre Dame, which is named by many volunteer programs as the top school for volunteer recruitment. Despite her qualms, Sarver found that joining the

SHORT-TERM COMMITMENT, LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Not everyone can spend a year or two as a full-time volunteer. That's why some long-term faith-based volunteer programs have started offering new opportunities for those with only a week or a summer to spare. Though short-term programs are sometimes criticized as superficial fixes, Katherine Hamm, S.C., says programs like the ones she helps run through the Sisters of Charity of New York are less about the type of work and more about building relationships.

Through Charity in the City, young women serve in soup kitchens and in other ways. The Sisters of Charity also offer volunteer opportunities on their nearby organic farm.

Sister Hamm has also assisted with volunteer trips to New Orleans. "No one thinks we're going to change the world in a week. But for the one woman whose house we were working on, we were giving her hope," she said. "You're planting seeds, so people see how change happens, and people see how their gifts are recognized in this environment. There's a connectedness between all people who have the time to reach out to others."

ART: SHUTTERSTOCK/MIGUEL ANGEL SALINAS

labor force has its upside. "I have been able to explore the side of myself that is an educator, and I have a lot of talents in that area that I wasn't able to fully explore in my volunteer experiences," she said.

For Ellen Derby, 26, the value of community stayed with her after two years as a teacher in Micronesia through J.V.C. She stayed for an additional year serving as the school's principal. In the fall, Derby will become a religion teacher and campus minister at a California high school. She still enjoys discussing her volunteer experience, but is sometimes frustrated by those who try to label her experience as time off.

"People say, 'It's so great that you're taking time out to do this,' and I want to say, 'I worked the hardest I ever had in my entire life,'" she said. "I went to bed with the sun and got up with the sun every day. It was by no means a vacation.... [I]n going there I didn't realize how much it would become a part of my life. It's not a sidestep off my path. This volunteer experience was part of the road." A

ARCHITECTURE | JON M. SWEENEY

ARRANGED BY MEASURE

The worldview of the Gothic cathedral

Imagine it is the year 1400, and you are visiting the Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres for the first time. You have never before seen the remarkable structure that dominates the busy, dirty, commercial city and the peaceful French countryside for miles around. Strolling up the Rue du Bourg you enter a cavernous space illuminated by the flickering light of hundreds of candles and the sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows.

The wonder that Chartres Cathedral inspires in me in the 21st century would have been many times greater in someone living more than 600 years ago. After all, before my visit I had read books, seen photographs and talked with friends who had seen Chartres; I may have even watched something on the History Channel. It is difficult to imagine a parallel today, when one might tremble before the power of a previously unseen sacred space. Perhaps the Grand Canyon, the Egyptian pyramids or the Great Wall of China, which books and photos simply cannot capture, would evoke similar wonder. Or imagine a child standing for the first time at the railing before one of the precipitous drops of Niagara Falls. That child would feel awe.

In the Middle Ages it was easy to "feel" God in a religious space. Great spaces were created to communicate many things about God, and ordinary men and women understood their symbolism and iconography. People "read" the way that architects had used elements like light and height to tell of God. "The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material and, in seeing this light, is resurrected," wrote Abbot Suger, the 12th-century champion of the Gothic style.

If you look for the spires of great

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/CRISTINA CIOCHINA

Chartres Cathedral

churches in the cities you visit, you are responding to what the builders long ago programmed into those structures. They are speaking to you, even if in muffled tones.

The verse from the Wisdom of Solomon, "But you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight" (11:20), was made famous throughout the medieval world by St. Augustine; most theologians believed that God arranges things down to the finest detail. The Gothic builders created forms they believed corresponded to the order of the cosmos and to the Godhead. The vision portrayed inside a great cathedral is the vision thought to have come directly from the heavens. Beauty was brought out in order, as the medieval architect labored to praise the God of ultimate design.

In building the Gothic churches, medieval Christians were also taking their cues from Jewish tradition, the Psalms and all Scripture; they were rebuilding the temple and rejoining God in a place that would not falter. Buildings had the ability to communicate divine power, and the sacred rites performed within those sacred spaces were the most essential of human activities. The "house of God" was taken to mean precisely that: God resided inside. They believed that God was uniquely present in church, especially so in great churches.

Awe was the point. But the central focus of Gothic design was always the incarnate God in Christ, rather than the Trinity, the Godhead or God the Father. Gothic architects took their primary inspiration from the opening phrase of the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word." Cathedrals demonstrated this in various ways.

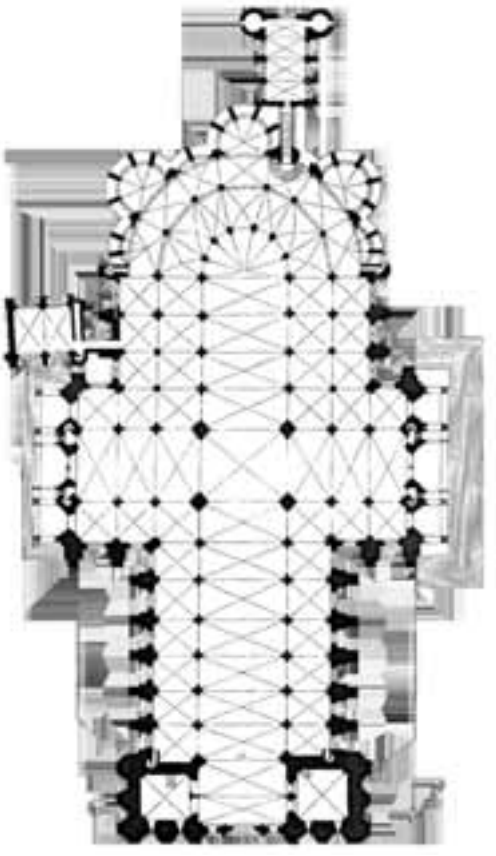
Typically they follow a cruciform (cross-shaped) plan, with the longer axis running from west to east. The cathedral faces east toward the rising sun and Jerusalem, where Christ was raised; the altar is situated at the east end of the church. At the west end of that axis is the front door. The shorter axis, running south to north, forms the "arms" of the cross, called transepts: they are located toward the front of the building, between the nave—the central portion of any church—and the choir and chancel (the steps leading up to the sanctuary and altar). Running along the sides of the nave of most Gothic churches, perpendicular to that longer west-east axis, are one or two aisles, and all along those aisles, columns.

During the Mass, a medieval Christian might feel open to the glories of heaven in that place, as deeply as if a divine hand had reached down from the clouds. But the One acting upon him was a loving Jesus. A Christian's "bread of heaven" was found only on the high altar, there in church.

Medieval spirituality was both more credulous and more embodied than our own. For the medieval person, a symbol was an objective piece of reality: it was the very thing it represented—and not just in the Eucharist. An image of Christ or the Virgin in the form of an icon or a fresco or a sculpture was a portal to Jesus or Mary. Even the stone the builders used was considered important. The architects of the first Gothic cathedrals were taught by the philosopher John Scotus Erigena that a piece of stone can be understood for what it really is only, if we see God in it. The materials were thus transformed in their hands: the slab of marble forming the high altar of a cathedral would be regarded as resembling the very stone upon which Abraham had been willing to

Notre Dame du Pilier chapel in Chartres Cathedral

MARY LESSING / ART RESOURCE



Plan of Chartres Cathedral

ART: WIKI COMMONS/DICTIONARY OF FRENCH ARCHITECTURE FROM 11TH TO 16TH CENTURY

offer Isaac or as the place where sacrifices were made in the temple during Jesus' time or, most important, as Calvary, where Christ offered himself for the world's salvation.

The principal aim of the Gothic architect was to make masses of stone appear simultaneously lighter and vaster and to create a soaring upward movement, as the builders reconstructed older, Romanesque-style churches. They did so by flooding natural light into the space and refracting it through colorful stained-glass windows. Church buildings were intended to tell a story, not simply house a congregation. The story was enhanced by the ways in which the building depicted the Christian community in prayer. That is the idea behind the pointed (Gothic) arch versus the rounded (Romanesque) arch. The Romanesque style emphasizes the massive foundation and cornerstone of the Almighty, while the Gothic pointed arch intends to put the Christian soul back into the building, pointing upward, even bursting out of it. This way of showing a fervent faith was also communicated in ribbed vaulting, pointed windows and towering ceilings. Everything aimed for the heavens.

In Gothic cathedrals, windows grew wider, walls were thinned and ceilings soared. Gravity was overcome beyond what was thought possible. For the first time churches became more than functional. They became intelligent, ideological and contemplative. Windows grew not just large but enormous, especially in the cathedrals of France, where both clear and stained-glass windows radiated natural light into the space of God. There were even moments early on when the new cathedrals were so tall, thin and full of glass that they came close to toppling over (or in), which is why flying buttresses were first used: to hold the great buildings up.

All this was done to foster prayer. We pray to the Light of the World,

from whom all things, physical and spiritual, emanate. "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people," says John's Gospel (1:4). The vision and imagination required for truly contemplative prayer, the Gothic architects concluded, is aided by seeing. What aids our vision more than natural light?

ON THE WEB
Kevin Clarke reviews the documentary "Gasland."
americamagazine.org/culture

While visiting Chartres Cathedral two years ago, I was reminded that during the French Revolution great churches were "repurposed" as haylofts, prisons, blacksmith shops for making battle armor and museums (as if Christianity lay only in the past). Others were renamed, "temples to the Divine Being," for example. It is inconceivable in most countries that such a forced government takeover could happen today.

The Gothic church invites us to contemplate the divine. Our imaginations soar to discover what is rarely experienced in the work-a-day world around us. As the Almighty says in Ps 75:3, "When the earth totters, with all its inhabitants, it is I who keep its pillars steady." That is what we are there to experience. Napoleon said, upon entering Chartres for the first time, "*Un athée serait mal a l'aise ici*" ("This is no place for an atheist"). We cannot help but pray there.

JON M. SWEENEY *is the author of* Beauty Awakening Belief *and* Light in the Dark Ages: The Friendship of Francis and Clare of Assisi. *He lives in Vermont.*

BOOKINGS | ANN BEGLEY

EDINBURGH'S GRANDE DAME

In a tiny, walled cemetery in Tuscany lies the body of one of the most original writers of the 20th century. Inscribed on the simple stone slab are the words: Muriel Spark, Poeta, 1918-2006. Although she began her career as a prize-winning poet, she is best known for her fiction. The move from poetry to the novel, which she regarded as an inferior art form, "a lazy way of writing poetry," coincided with her conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1954, after which she wove threads of theology into virtually everything she wrote. She always maintained that her artistic inspiration came from the Holy Spirit—for her, the most important person of the Trinity.

Spark published an autobiography covering the first 39 years of her life, called *Curriculum Vitae* (1992), which consists of a series of intriguing vignettes. While it is engaging, it is at the same time evasive, revealing very little about its subject. After reading Martin Stannard's account of the life of Evelyn Waugh, she invited the author to write her biography, offering exclusive interviews and unrestricted access to her voluminous archives. She was, however, not pleased with his manuscript and withdrew her cooperation. Yet Stannard's recently published rendition of her life, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (W. W. Norton), is a sympathetic one. His scholarship is admirable, and his reading of her work is insightful. The use of the definite article in the subtitle of this well-written volume seems to imply that in the author's opinion, his is the definitive biography of this *grande dame* of letters. And he is probably right.

Movable Roots

Muriel Spark was born Muriel Camberg, in Edinburgh, of a Jewish father and a Presbyterian mother—or so she believed. Stannard's research suggests that both parents may in fact have been Jewish. Her religious impulses seemed to be symbolized by her native city's Castle Rock. "To have a great, primitive black crag rising up in the middle of populated streets of commerce, stately squares, and winding closes," she mused, "is like the statement of an unmitigated fact preceded by 'nevertheless.'" In the middle of worldly enterprises, she once remarked, "there is, nevertheless, the inescapable fact of God."

At age 19 she sailed to the British colony of Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe—to marry Sydney Spark, an expatriate mathematics teacher 13 years her senior, who proved to be mentally ill and prone to violence. The marriage, a disaster, was dissolved after the birth of their son, Robin. World War II was underway, but Spark managed to gain passage on one of the last boats to England, leaving six-year-old Robin behind in the care of nuns. The child arrived in Scotland a year and some months later and was deposited with Spark's parents, who raised him, while his mother took a room at a London club for "ladies of good family"—later to appear as a boarding house in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963)—and found work for a while in the Political Intelligence Department of the British Foreign Office, where her creative talents were put to use inventing bogus news items for propaganda broadcasts. This secret activity was later used in *The Hothouse of the East River* (1973). After the war she worked at various jobs while trying to establish herself as a writer.

Spark had an unfortunate love affair with the poet and literary journalist Derek Stanford, who worked with her on monographs of Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë and John Masefield, among others, and, significantly, on the editing of the letters of

Cardinal John Henry Newman. (She was struck by Newman's statement that a Christian view of the universe is a poetic one. Her intense interest in his writings is explicitly demonstrated in *Loitering With Intent* (1981). When she became seriously ill, Stanford ran her business affairs and gave her assistance in other ways. His is the first critical and biographical study of Muriel Spark. She gave him up as a lover when she entered the church, but they remained friends for many years until he "betrayed" her by selling her letters to a collector. In retaliation, she drew a caricature of him in *A Far Cry From Kensington* (1988).

ART: RICK PARKER

Depressed and Delusional

Spark's career turned a corner when she won first prize in a short story competition, an event that firmly established her as a writer of fiction. Grindingly poor with scarcely enough to eat, she experienced a mental breakdown brought on largely by drug poisoning: Dexedrine was sold over the counter to assist in dieting. She lost weight, economized on food, and her mind was sharpened for long sleepless nights of writing. But she began to hallucinate. She was adamant that T. S. Eliot was sending her threatening messages in code. Words on a page rearranged themselves into frightening anagrams. As she withdrew from Dexedrine, depression set in, but her treatment and the support of friends near and distant effected a steady recovery. Graham Greene, for one, sent her a small monthly allowance accompanied by a few bottles of red wine to alleviate the sting of charity.

Like many novelists, Spark used her personal experiences, even the most intimate, as grist for the mill; she plundered the lives of others as well as her own for material with which she constructed her fictional worlds. To varying degrees, her narratives mirror her thoughts and her history, including her delusions. Caroline, in the first of Spark's 22 novels, *The Comforters* (1957), which is a novel about writing a novel, hears typing sounds in her head along with voices that either repeat or predict her thoughts, while the protagonist of *Loitering With Intent* discovers that what she is writing is becoming reality.

When she signed the contract for *Robinson* (1958), her second and more obscurely autobiographical novel, she laid down the ground rules: her punctuation, intentionally unorthodox, was not to be altered; no passages were to be deleted on the grounds of "mild indecency"; and she insisted on veto power over all publicity materials. Stannard relates that when a grammatical error was pointed out to her, she replied, "If I write it, it's grammatical." Writing furiously in longhand, she began producing novels at the rate of almost one a year, along with dozens of short stories, plays and essays.

Flying Sparks

It was, however, the publication of her most famous work, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), in which she drew upon the school she had attended as a young girl and the eccentric, charismatic teacher she had encountered there, that made its author a celebrity and financially secure for life. This legendary tale of an Edinburgh spinster school teacher—who devotes her middle years to her "gerrils," her favored pupils whom she calls "the crème de la crème," appeared in its entirety in The New Yorker and was subsequently adapted for stage, screen and television. Vivacious, affectionate and beautiful, Spark thoroughly enjoyed her success—dressed glamorously, kept apartments in New York and Rome, bought a racehorse from the queen and hobnobbed with the famous and illustrious.

Predictably she and Robin, her son, grew estranged, especially after he embraced Orthodox Judaism, insisting that both his grandparents were Jewish, and hence his mother as well. The dispute became a public feud. She accused him of seeking publicity to further his career as an artist. The estrangement continued into her later years, when she cut him definitively out of her will, leaving her entire fortune to her artist friend and compan-

ion of more than 30 years, Penelope Jardine, who had settled down with her in Tuscany, serving as her secretary. (Spark laughingly denied rumors that the relationship was a lesbian one.) While presenting the carefully researched facts, Stannard makes every effort to soften his portrait of a talented, charming but neglectful mother, ready and willing—like a lot of other great writers—to sacrifice everything for the sake of her art.

One of the most notable characteristics of her fiction is the metaphysical component. In *Memento Mori* (1959), for example, her characters, one after another, receive an anonymous phone call with the strange message, "Remember you must die," a dramatic reminder of human mortality, the underlying theme being that life should be lived with death in mind. Her work makes the statement, she claimed, that there is a life beyond this one. Spark was intrigued by the Book of Job, "the pivotal book of the Bible." In *The Only Problem* (1984) she explores, as in *The Comforters*, the mystery of ubiquitous suffering in the light of a benevolent, loving God. Her fiction, in general, depicts a world fallen from grace, peopled by characters with a damaged nature.

'An Intellectual's Novelist'

It has been remarked that Spark's novels belong to some larger, transcendental plot that her characters are hardly aware of and that the novelist herself can only gesture toward. Often this gesturing is overtly religious. *The Bachelors* (1960), for instance, is a contemplation of the forces of good and evil, original sin and what it means to be a Roman Catholic. *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960), an examination, in part, of free will, is at the same time an assertion that Satan, the master of deceit and disguise, roams the world seeking the ruin of mankind. And the central character of *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) motivates another to commitment and

action by quoting the well-known passage from the Apocalypse: "Being what thou art, lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, thou wilt make me vomit thee out of my mouth." In interviews, she was wont to draw a parallel between the divine creation and the outpourings of the novelist.

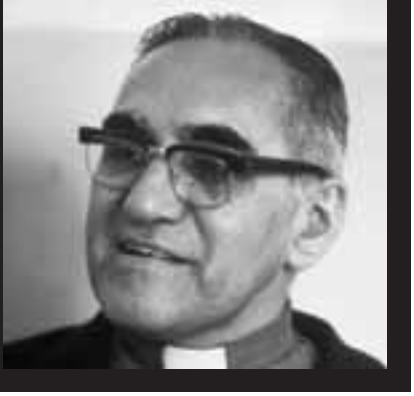
Spark employs satire to great effect, her humor being both malicious and delightful. Known for her wit, her darkly comic—sometimes macabre—prose, her sedulous avoidance of sentiment, her economy of style and her penchant for creating bizarre characters that come and go as in a soap opera, her novels, for the most part, are slender and brilliantly plotted.

Scholars have difficulty categorizing Muriel Spark; she has no identifiable precursors. Some have labeled her a postmodernist. Many critics have called her "an intellectual's novelist," since her work provokes profound thought as well as an emotional response, often an unsettling one. Her conviction that literature should not only give pleasure but also be concerned with values places her firmly in the great moral tradition of British literature. David Lodge observes, with justification, that her writings illustrate the literary concept of the Russian fundamentalists that the function of art is to defamiliarize or "make strange" the world, so that the effect is sometimes surrealistic.

The recipient of a plethora of prizes and honors, Spark was named a Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1993.

Martin Stannard's biography (with 16 pages of black-and-white photos) of this grande dame from Edinburgh was 17 years in the making. As he summarizes: "She was first, last, and always, a poet."

ANN BEGLEY, *an essayist and reviewer, has taught at universities on both east and west coasts. Her studies of Simone Weil and Marguerite Yourcena appear in* European Writers: The Twentieth Century.



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LETTERS

Placing the Blame

Your editorial "Adrift in the Gulf" (6/21) is by far the best commentary I've read on the oil spill. I lived on the Texas coast for 20 years, working as a volunteer and professional with several coastal conservation organizations. I have lost count of how many acres of salt marsh I helped restore. Working that closely in the marsh allows you to see just how many tiny life forms depend on these vital nurseries for survival. The value of our coastal wetlands is incalculable, and we will never fully know the total loss from this disaster in terms of economic loss or ecological damage.

We know more about outer space than we know about the oceans. We can point the finger at BP and their partners, Transocean and Halliburton, but our insatiable desire for petroleum products places the blame squarely on us. The pathetic images of suffering birds should be on everyone's mind the next time we fill up at a gas pump.

SAMRA BUFKINS
Denton, Tex.

Thinking Collectively

The recent comments by John Kavanaugh, S.J. ("Uninformed Conscience," 6/21) are timely and thought-provoking. I offer three points. First, good moral judgments require more than just data, information and evidence. They also need discernment. Any conclusion about what I ought to do must, first and foremost, be an answer to the question, What do I discern as God's will?

Second, many contemporary issues of conscience are not about personal and private matters. At the level of society, which is the domain Father Kavanaugh is addressing, the collective ethical question is not simply, What should I do? but rather, What should we do as a society? Other questions arise: Is this proposal really viable? Will the hoped-for benefits really materialize?

My third point concerns a problem with theory. Data that do not fit well into a schema are discounted, while data that fit well get the limelight. Surprise, surprise! The data I see confirm my theory, so my theory needs no more examination. Thus we all quickly arrive at the point where we are defending our theory instead of continuing to critique and develop it. As we do this, the collective discussion takes place on the basis of essentially different data sets. So any convergence toward a consensus is virtually ruled out.

Father Kavanaugh has raised some timely and significant points. We need, collectively, to give them serious reflection.

PAUL BANGASSER
Grilly, France

Sacrifice

Re "Adrift in the Gulf" (Editorial, 6/21): It is refreshing to hear the word *sacrifice* being used in this context. The editors have it right; we cannot have it both ways. We can't continue to consume massive amounts of fossil fuels in support of our economy and also protect the planet. Sacrifice, in the form of higher prices at the pump and for utilities as well as adjustments in the way we live—warmer homes in the summer and cooler in the winter, more public transportation, walking and biking, etc.—must be part of the mix.

But sacrifice also leads to grace and grace to hope. We can be more hopeful about the future we give to our grandchildren, make more space to enjoy one another's company instead of the

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relentless pursuit of more stuff and be more in touch with the great gift of creation by slowing down and enjoying the place where we're planted. Catholics can take a step by taking the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and the Poor (at catholicclimatecovenant.org).

DAN MISLEH
Director, Catholic Coalition on Climate Change
Washington, D.C.

Complicit War Criminals

Thank you, Nancy Sherman, Jim Conroy and **America** ("To Hell and Back," 6/7). We blind ourselves to the many horrors of our wars, including the horrors done to our own soldiers, and the strangling of our own consciences. We are sending our own children off to be slaughtered. What can we do to gain the political skill that is absolutely necessary to oppose our wars and our star-spangled militarism?

BRUCE BYROLLY
Cambridge, Md.

Explanation/Apology Needed

Many of us are very sorry to see Catholic hospitals disappear ("The Last Days of St. Vincent's," by Kevin Clarke, Online, 6/7). Much has been said about St. Vincent's, but there are many questions concerning all eight Catholic hospitals that have closed in New York City. An explanation and an apology are in order to all the religious women who founded and ran these institutions and the nurses who gave much of their energies to them.

ROSE MARY LARKIN O'CONNELL
Windsor, Conn.

Whom Can We Trust?

Re "Uninformed Conscience," by John Kavanaugh, S.J. (6/21): I feel like a reed shifting in the wind. I used to know whom to trust to help me form my conscience. I used to believe that we could trust people in high places in government. Certainly they would have the best access to data and would provide information honestly to the people. As we all know now, money controls most everything done in Washington. Lobbyists lavish large amounts of cash to get political favors.

I used to believe the clergy could be trusted. There are many wonderful members of the clergy who have lived faithful to their mission and to their vows, but the revelations of abuse all over the world have tainted everyone else. Churches have been sold to pay for lawsuits. Much damage has been done. It all comes down to money and scandal in the church as well. The church is not open to sharing all of the "specifics of evidence, information and data" that Father Kavanaugh mentions. Members of the hierarchy and their lawyers have been busy trying to prevent that information and data from being revealed ever since the scandals first broke and continue to do so.

Truth is withheld by corrupt politicians, and truth is withheld by the church. Therefore I do not believe that anyone can be faulted for forming their own conscience and making a wide variety of judgments, some of which are strongly opposed by others.

We all become reeds shifting in the wind and with no firm foundation because of lack of trust in the people and the institutions in which we used to believe. Trust must be restored before one can possibly say that another's conscience is not correct.

KEN CHAISON
Bethesda, Md.

The Sports Lesson

The Current Comment "A Win-Win Situation" (6/21), about the girls' ball teams, is inspiring. I would like everyone in the whole world to read this. In a world where violence and competition have taken over, even in our sports, we need the example of these great young women, their coach and school and their parents to show us a better and more Christian way. Thank you!

MARY ELLEN LOCH
Wichita, Kan.

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The Kindness of Strangers

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JULY 11, 2010

Readings: Dt 30:10-14; Ps 69:14, 17, 30–37; Col 1:15-20; Lk 10:25-37

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25)

There are all kinds of good reasons for not stopping to help a stranger: I have other pressing obligations. It's dangerous—what if the robbers are still lurking and attack me? I don't have any professional skills or resources to help this person. If I move him and make his injuries worse he might sue me. And on and on.

I can easily talk myself out of any good deed, just like the scholar of the law in today's Gospel. He knew what to do. He knew what his religious convictions prompted him to do. He could recite the law perfectly. He also knew what his heart was urging him to do. He just needed somebody to reassure him that his rationalizations were well founded and that no one would expect him to do anything for some stranger in need.

It would have been easy for Jesus to give him the answer he wanted: "Yes, of course you're right. He is not your responsibility. Someone better equipped will tend to him." But he does not. Jesus knows it will not be easy for the scholar to hear his answer. Better than rational arguments, a story will help the scholar move out of his head and listen to his heart. There is, however, a twist to the story that Jesus tells. It is not a straightforward tale about someone like the scholar who is "moved with compassion" that he might easily emulate.

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The complication is that the scholar of the law would never identify with a hated Samaritan. More likely he would see himself in the person in need at the side of the road. From that perspective, he would watch in horror as the priest and Levite, the ones he would expect to act with pastoral attention, pass him by while justifying themselves. To receive lavish aid after that from a despised Samaritan breaks open the strictures of his heart, as he experiences a flood of grace from this unexpected source.

The parable asks the scholar, stripped of his defenses, to accept the ways in which divine compassion and grace have been showered upon him in undeserved ways. From this place, he could then be prompted to extend these to others.

The question is not really, "Who is my neighbor?" Deep down the scholar knows that each human being and every creature are neighbor and kin, all relying on one another in the fragile web of life. The scholar does not want to admit this to himself because of what it will ask of him. In the depths of his heart, however, he knows what he must do to aid a fellow traveler in need. It is not really too hard or too mysterious to figure out, as Moses tells the Israelites in the first reading. You do not need someone to "go up in the sky" or "cross the sea." How to live out God's way as elaborated in the Scriptures is actually "something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out," as Moses asserts.

Sometimes we need to be helped out of our rationalizations for not doing what our listening heart prompts us to do. At other times we are asked to be the one who can speak truth lovingly to a friend who struggles to do what compassion asks of them.

Heeding the voice of God to know what is the right action and the right time requires deep listening, in contemplative silent prayer, in honest conversation with trusted friends and in openness to hearing the cacophonous cries of needy neighbors at hand and throughout the globe. We do not know whether the scholar of the law let go of trying to justify himself and was able to "go and do likewise." The parable remains open-ended, inviting us to hear it addressed to ourselves. How will it end?

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- What do you do to help you listen to the cries of those in need and to heed the voice of God?
- When have you experienced compassion and grace from an unexpected source?
- What does that experience of grace prompt you to do?

ART: TAD DUNNE

A Woman's Place

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JULY 18, 2010

Readings: Gn 18:1-10; Ps 15:2–5; Col 1:24-28; Lk 10:38-42

"Martha welcomed him into her home" (Lk 10:38)

Martha always gets a bad rap. In traditional interpretations of her story, she is said to be too preoccupied or anxious about the details of hospitality to attend well to her guest. Her sister, by contrast, sits in rapt attention at Jesus' feet, drinking in his every word. When Jesus declares that it is Mary who has "chosen the better part," the message we are supposed to take away, according to many commentators, is that contemplation, rather than active service is the harder but better choice, and that no one can minister without first sitting and learning at Jesus' feet. While finding the right balance between contemplation and action is a perennial challenge for most Christians, that may not actually be the question that today's Gospel addresses. There are many tensions in the story left unanswered by the traditional interpretation.

Recently New Testament scholars have proposed that this Gospel incident may be more a reflection of the situation of the Lucan communities and the questions they were trying to resolve, rather than a report of an episode in the life of Jesus. They have noticed that what concerns Martha is much *diakonia*, and her distress is over her sister leaving her to carry it out alone. Both the noun *diakonia* and the verb *diakonein* occur in verse 40.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, these terms refer primarily to ministerial service, as in Jesus' declaration of his mission "to serve," not to "be served" (Mk 10:45; Lk 22:27). In New Testament times, *diakonia* covered a wide range of ministries. In the case of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and the other Galilean women who "provided for" Jesus and the itinerant preachers "out of their resources," *diakonein* refers to financial ministry (the Greek word *hyparchonton* connotes monetary resources, Lk 8:3). This is the same nuance *diakonia* has in Acts 11:29 and 12:25 regarding Paul's collection for Jerusalem. In Acts 6:2 *diakonein* refers to table ministry, while in Acts 6:4 *diakonia* connotes ministry of the word. In Acts 1:25 *diakonia* is apostolic ministry. One individual in the New Testament is named a *diakonos*, Phoebe, "deacon of the church at Cenchreae" (Rom 16:1).

Scholars are now thinking that the incident in today's Gospel is not about preparing a meal; instead, Martha voices how burdened her heart is over the conflicts surrounding women's exercise of their ministries in the early church. Some people were greatly in favor of women evangelizers and teachers like Prisca (Acts 18:26), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:3), women prophets like Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9), and women heads of house churches, like Nympha (Col 4:15), Mary (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:40), and Prisca (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19). Others, however, argued that a woman's place was in the home and that speaking and ministering in the public sphere belonged to the men (e.g., 1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tm 2:11-12). Luke takes the latter position, giving it validity by placing approval of the silent Mary on Jesus' lips.

There was never any question in the early church about women becoming disciples. Both Martha and Mary welcomed Jesus and the word he spoke (vss. 38-39). The controversy swirled around what women would do with what they learned while sitting at Jesus' feet. The answer Luke gave was quite understandable for his time. Today's Gospel invites us to reflect on what answer Jesus might give today to the question of woman's place in the ministries of the church as they have now evolved.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How do you foster a spirit of hospitality, ready to receive God's word with openness from whoever comes into your home?
- How has the word come alive for you through women's ministries?
- What does "choosing the better part" mean today?

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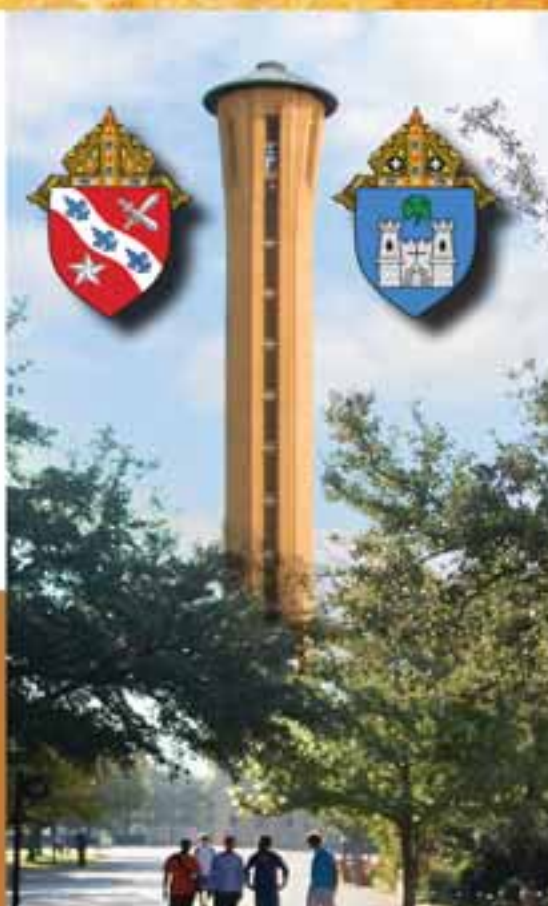

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