

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 14, 2006 B

INSPIRING WOMEN

On this Mother's Day, I place before you examples of inspiring women that can speak to all of us whether we are married or single male or female. The following piece is taken from the Christopher News Notes of June 1988. The purpose of the Christopher's is summed up in their name, which means *Christ bearer*. Their aim is to encourage people to show personal responsibility and initiative in raising standards in all phases of human endeavor. Their motto is: "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." For more information call 1-212-759-4050. The June '88 issue wrote the following about women:

Her name was Eliza McArdle and for her time she was well educated. At the age of 17 she married Andrew Johnson, an unschooled 19-year-old tailor.

She taught him writing and arithmetic and he entered politics, becoming mayor of Greenville, Tenn., a state legislator, governor, vice-president and the President of the United States. As president he bought Alaska from Russia for \$7 million.

A woman who lived in obscurity helped shape history.

Throughout history many women have assumed important roles. Two thousand years ago a Jewish girl from Nazareth was the key player in a unique drama of salvation that is still unfolding.

On a totally different level, in our own time, the civil rights movement was launched when Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of an Alabama bus.

Where this once was a man's world, it is now a woman's world as well. An Eliza McArdle could well aspire to and succeed in a political career in her own right.

The world is a better place for it. Women such as Rachel Carson, Mother Teresa, Coretta Scott King, Eleanor Roosevelt, Sandra Day O'Connor and Maggie Kuehn demonstrate that women are the equal of men as agents of constructive social change.

Now is a woman's effectiveness necessarily limited by circumstances. Single women, homemakers, the widowed, the disabled, the divorced, grandmothers, business women—all have a role unique to them. God's work remains to be done, and women are called to do it in equal partnership with men.

And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" This I said, "Here am I! Send me."
Isaiah 6:8

Women are life-givers . . .

Mrs. Shirley Bayer of New Jersey was 12 when she severed her spinal cord in a diving accident and almost died. Confined to a wheelchair, she was told she could never have children.

Nevertheless she eventually fell in love and married a man who knew of her courage. After three years they found a doctor who thought that pregnancy and normal childbirth were possibilities and agreed to help them. Two children were born. Now Mrs. Bayer counsels other women with spinal injuries.

Loving . . .

Shocked by the miserable condition of some children she saw while on a trip to Vietnam as a volunteer chaperone for youngsters coming to the U.S., a Georgia airline stewardess asked herself what she would do about it.

What Jodi Darragh did was found Americans for International Aid. Members escort sick or adopted children to the U.S. or fly medical supplies to Third World countries.

Mrs. Darragh and her husband also adopted six Amerasian children. She continues to run AIA on a volunteer basis from her home.

Generous . . .

Ethel Williams has lived all her life in the inner city of Paterson, NJ. She sees teens evicted by their families, abused wives, single mothers with nowhere to go—except to her. She provides temporary housing, counseling and food in her own home, and helps run a used clothing and furniture shop for the poor.

Prayerful . . .

"Mary" was 82 years old and bedridden, confined to a Denver nursing home and feeling more and more useless each day. From her bed, all she could see was a tall crane on a construction site several blocks away. To occupy herself she prayed for the workers.

A visitor learned of her prayers and went to the construction site to find out the names of the workers so Mary could make her prayers more personal. Touched by Mary's concern, the workers signed their names to a hard hat and sent it to Mary. Shortly before the work was finished, Mary died. But toward the end she no longer felt useless. And not a single worker was injured on the job.

Supportive . . .

"No work is more important or harder or more challenging" than motherhood, says Mrs. Kay Willis, a New Jersey mother of 10. "I believe motherhood is an important profession."

Since 1975, she has been running support groups for new mothers. Called Mothers Matter, the groups enable new mothers to compare notes and increase their mothering skills.

Forgiving . . .

Clara Barton, founder of the American nursing profession, was once reminded by a friend of a cruel thing done to her. Clara seemed not to remember the incident. The friend persisted and asked, "Don't you remember the wrong that was done to you?"

"No," Clara Barton said, "I distinctly remember forgetting that."

Sensitive . . .

As the volunteer manager of the thrift shop operated by the Unity House Ministry in Troy, NY, Fran Spann was meticulous about keeping the shop clean and orderly.

"Because many of our customers cannot afford to purchase their clothing elsewhere," she says, "it is important the store (be) clean and orderly so they won't feel as though they must rummage through. . . Refuse."

Educators . . .

Rainbows of All God's Children is the name of a program to help youngsters cope with parental divorce. The program was written by Suzy Perkins Yehl, who quit her job in Illinois to help develop it.

She had received extensive support after her own divorce, but recognized children needed help too when her sons asked her, "Mom, are we going to have to move and change schools?" Did Dad leave because I didn't clean my room?"

Homemakers . . .

Mrs. Gloria Pitzer, in Catholic Quote, tells of being watched by her daughter Debbie while doing the dishes.

Debbie commented on how many times she had seen her mother do this, and asked, "Mom, don't you ever get tired of doing the dishes?" Her mother replied, "I'm not doing the dishes, I'm building a home."

Peacemakers . . .

Mairead Maguire, now a Catholic housewife in Northern Ireland, and Betty Williams, a Catholic then married to a Protestant, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 after organizing the Peace People movement to combat violence in their native land.

The movement runs a peace center in Belfast, a farm and camps for Protestant and Catholic youngsters. It also aids the families of prisoners on both sides of the Irish conflict. "We have to work at becoming friends and that's a lifetime work," says Mrs. Maguire, who is still active in the movement.

Caring . . .

When Kathy Burke of New Mexico finished her training in family medicine, she decided to limit her practice to the

disabled and their families. She was told that she wouldn't be able to make a living out of such a specialty.

She went ahead anyway. Now her practice is thriving and her office has become the training ground for people planning to work with the disabled.

Selfless . . .

Mrs. Chessie Harris of Huntsville, Ala., told her family "we've got to move over and make room" after coming across a boy scavenging meat scraps and a girl looking for returnable bottles because they were hungry.

Her family did make room. Two years later Mrs. Harris obtained a boarding-house license. More than 800 children have since found love and shelter with "Mama Harris."

Determined . . .

Because women were not permitted to run in the Boston Marathon in 1967, Kathrine Switzer entered under the name K.V. Switzer. At the four-mile mark, one race official physically tried to pull her out of the race but was stopped by one of her friends.

Kathrine Switzer finished the race. Then she campaigned for four years to have it opened to women, having decided "to devote some part of my life to changing this situation with women's sports." One of her goals: "to show the Olympic Committee that women could and wanted to run." A marathon and a 10,000 meter race for women have since been added to the Olympics.

Courageous . . .

In 1982, in the New York City Marathon, some 13,609 or 15,000 starters finished within seven hours. But still out on the course, also determined to finish, was Linda Downs, a victim of cerebral palsy. Six times her crutches went out from under her and she fell. Nevertheless, numb with pain and black and blue from the jarring of the crutches, she finished after 11 grueling hours.

People from all over wrote to tell her they had been inspired by her feat. To encourage other disabled people, she entered the race again in 1983 and finished in nine hours.

Agents of Change . . .

On trips to Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, Mrs. Jessica Linder couldn't help but notice "how very hard the women work and for how little." She decided to do something about it.

That something was People's Exchange International—a way of marketing the handicrafts of Latin American women. Proceeds from the sale of the crafts are given in part to the women in salary; the rest goes into educational programs.

There is no limit to the ability of women to contribute to the solution of problems large and small. With Mary as a model—she who was God-fearing, accepting,

courageous, prayerful, concerned for others—they need but believe in their own abilities, appreciating their special gifts and making use of them.

This is what Yahweh asks of you; only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.
Micah 6:8

A Prayer for Today's Woman

Lord God,

Show me the inherent goodness and beauty of my womanhood and teach me to rejoice in all its aspects. Let me see the dignity of my sex so that I shall never permit anyone to abuse, debase or ridicule it.

Show me the wonder of my role as a life-bearer which is not limited to my biological function as a mother but extends to other aspects and situations of my presence in the world; let me recognize my power to nurture, comfort, inspire and guide others as part of the creative process of my life.

Fill me with the desire to build up rather than tear down, to heal rather than to wound, to reconcile rather than polarize, to risk rather than to seek compromise and security.

Help me to see what is of everlasting value in cultural and religious traditions; help me to forge ahead and to be true to my own nature without being hindered by false assumptions of the past or by passing fads of the present day.

Let me understand that my femininity is a gift of God to be acknowledged with gratitude and delight; let me know that womanhood is not a situation in conflict with manhood but that both are created equal for the purpose of mutual love and support.

Help me to grow according to my own nature so that I may be able to fulfill my destiny according to Your will.

I pray for all my sisters in the world—may they live as Your children in freedom and peace. Amen

Catherine de Vinck

I thank God today for the many inspiring women of Ascension Parish who week after week give of themselves to our parish and wider community.

Unfortunately, I do not know the author of the following reflection.

A Mother's Day Reflection

This Mother's Day, let's remember all the moms who didn't win Mother of the Year in 2006, all the runners-up and all the wannabes. And all the mothers too tired or too busy to even enter.

This is for all the mothers who froze on metal bleachers at soccer games Friday night instead of watching from cars, so that when their kids asked, "Did you see my goal?" they could say, "Of course, I wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

And this is for all the mothers who went to every soccer game, except that one time, but only because their mothers-in-law were coming and they had baked 35 cupcakes for the class party, but that was still the one time their kids came home and said, "I kicked the winning goal!"

This is for all the mothers who mess up. Who yell at their kids in the grocery store and get angry looks from total strangers and go home worrying that someone in Publix has called the police.

This is for all the mothers who send their sons to school with stomach aches, assuring them they'd be just FINE once they got there, only to get calls from the school nurse an hour later asking them to please pick him up. Right away.

This is for all the mothers who really meant to teach their daughters to tie their shoelaces before they started school, but then ran out of time and opted for Velcro instead.

This is for all the mothers who ran carpools and made cookies and sewed Halloween costumes. And this is for all the mothers who didn't because they honest to goodness couldn't, but they still felt guilty about it six months later anyway.

What makes a good mother anyway? Is it Patience? Compassion? The ability to feed a baby, cook dinner, and sew a button on a shirt, all at the same time?

Or is it the ache you feel when you watch your child disappear down the street, walking to someplace alone for the very first time? The jolt that takes you from sleep to dread, from bed to crib at 2 AM. The need to flee from wherever you are and hug your child when you hear news of a school shooting, a fire, a car accident, a baby dying?

This is for all the mothers who taught their sons to cook and their daughters to sink a jump shot.

This is for all the mothers whose heads turn automatically when a little voice calls "Mom!"

This is for mothers who put pinwheels and teddy bears on their children's graves.

This is for mothers whose children have gone astray and who can't find the words to reach them.

This is for the mothers who gave birth to babies they'll never see and for the mothers who made them homes.

This is for young mothers stumbling through sleep deprivation. For mature mothers learning to let go. For working mothers and stay-at-home mothers. For single mothers and divorced mothers. For mothers who still have mothers of their own, and for mothers who know the pain of living without them.

This is for all of you. Hang in there. And have a happy Mother's Day.

Have a blessed Mother's Day,

Le Sarah