

Where can I find

JOY?

*It doesn't
come from getting
what I want...
it comes from
being who I am,
as He created
me to be.*

IMPRINT

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Did you know YOU GIVE GOD JOY?



Dear Friends,

“God made us for joy. God is joy, and the joy of living reflects the original joy that God felt in creating us.”
-St. John Paul II

All of creation exists because Our Lord could not contain His joy. The marvels of nature and the simple delights of life – eating ice cream, sunshine on your face, good health, a cup of coffee, the sound of rain, a good sleep – all reflect the triumphant utterance of the Blessed Trinity over creation: “It is good!” This overflowing joy of creation crescendoed when God created the human person in His image, a unique and unrepeatable reflection of His joy and glory: “It is very good!” (cf Gen 1:25,31)

You are very good. And you give God joy. Perhaps it’s something we don’t think enough about. We give Him joy in our very beings. We give Him joy when we allow Him to bless and care for us. And we give Him joy when we give Him our sins in the Sacrament of Confession. “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance”. (Lk 15:7)

We receive joy when we live in Him, the love from Whom we’ve come and for Whom we’re made, the love that has a name. There is nothing that God wants more than to fill us and transform us with His joy, and for us to share this joy with the world. Our founder, John Cardinal O’Connor, said, “You must let people see the joy that radiates out of you, that has to burst out of you...Be what you are, be who you are, do what you do, but be and do with joy.” Why? Because the Lord is good, and He takes joy in you, in your person, in your life.

The joy promised by the angel at the birth of Jesus, that echoed in Mary Magdalene’s Easter cry, “I have seen the Lord!” (Jn 20:18), and that gave the martyrs the courage to lay down their lives, is the same joy that seeks to fill our hearts today as we marvel at the work of God in the hearts of our Sisters, friends, and the women we serve.

Let us enter into the joy of the Lord by opening our hearts to His tremendous love. Let us not be afraid to receive the Lord’s joy! May God bless you.

In Jesus, Our Joy,

Mother Agnes Mary, S.V.
Mother Agnes Mary, S.V.

FINDING THE REAL DEAL

by Sr. Marie Veritas, SV

The Vine & Branches CONNECTION

Joy is a funny, powerful, wonderful thing.

It’s more than a fuzzy warm feeling or a great emotion. It’s even more than happiness. Happiness, strictly speaking, is the realization of my desires or when everything I want works out. Joy, on the other hand, is a gladness that runs deeper than the circumstances. Joy doesn’t come from getting what I want. It comes from being who I am.



1. Two peas in a pod Vulnerability and joy

Joy comes from being vulnerable to love. In *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown calls vulnerability “the constant companion of joy.” Joy actually springs from the fact I am not sufficient in myself – as a human person, I am vulnerable. I need others. I need God.

And it’s that very place of need that leads to relationship and communion, which is what our thirsty hearts long for.

2. Removing the shield / Exposing the heart

Joy requires an open, exposed heart – a willingness to risk being loved and loving. Sure, the risk is real. Jesus exposed His Heart, and it was pierced. But only a heart that is willing to be pierced can be filled with the joy of the Resurrection.

If we walk through life with a shield around our hearts, we may well avoid being disappointed and hurt, but at the same time we also close ourselves off from truly experiencing God’s delight.

3. Knowing who, what, where

The conviction that my life matters

You see, deep joy comes from being rooted in God’s love, knowing that I am infinitely loved and delighted in and never alone. Knowing my identity – who I am, where I come from, and where

I am going – gives me a gladness that nothing, not even suffering, can take away. Take a look at the apostles and martyrs: they had joy in the face of suffering and death because they had opened themselves up to a certainty greater than fear. They relied on God completely.

4. Reconnecting to the Vine Relying on Him for everything

So much unhappiness comes from a disconnect between what I believe about myself and God and what is real about myself and God. We have joy when we reconnect and stay connected. Joy can’t be manufactured or forced or bottled up because, ultimately, joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit – it’s overflow. We have to be connected to Him to experience it. We’re not talking social media “connected”; we’re talking vine and branches connected (Jn 15:5). Jesus wants us to abide in Him, to rely on Him for everything.

5. No more white-knuckling Open to be filled with Him

The more I try to be in absolute control of my life, the less vulnerable I am, and the less joy I have. It’s only when I release my white-knuckled grasp of my own plans that my hands can be filled with His. After all, *Psalms* 34 says, “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord,” not, “think and see” or “analyze and see” or “work really hard to see” the goodness of the Lord.

Joy comes from savoring the goodness of God, the ordinary delights of the day, and the people placed in our life.



6. Living in reality

Blooming, true to our nature

Joy also comes from living in right relationship with myself, God, and others. Why? Because joy blooms when we live in accord with our nature – that is, when we live according to how God created us to flourish. It bubbles up from a deep experience of “rightness” – not in the sense of perfection, but in the sense of the rightness of a thirsty man drinking water or of a mother nursing her child or of a planted seed that sprouts. It’s the rightness of living from the deep truth of who we are.

7. Enough about me

Embracing the other

Joy comes with self-giving love. “Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.” (St. John Paul II) “If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

JOY-BUILDERS VS JOY-BUSTERS

TIPS:

Forgive others

Are there people in your life you need to forgive? Ask Jesus to help you. Forgiveness releases an inexpressible joy.

Thank God

Literally. Gratitude allows us to see and receive the gift of each person and each circumstance. Make it a habit to thank God for the blessings of your day. Try writing your gratitude down or saying it aloud.

Seek healing in confession

What are the ways I’ve disconnected myself from God? Bring those to Him and let Him set you free and fill you with joy again.

Choose to love

Love is a choice. Choosing to love another person, in big or small ways, releases in joy.

Live in the present

Live in the NOW. Let yourself receive the reality present before you. God is loving you now.

Unforgiving

Along with anxiety, it’s one of the biggest joy-blockers around. It leaves us trapped in bitterness and pain.

Complaining

Focusing on the negative is a perfect recipe for isolation and desolation.

Living in the dark

Turning from God’s mercy can dampen our ability to receive joy. Apathy and emptiness replace it.

Holding back

Choosing to hold back kindness, generosity, and love is a joy-smasher.

Stuck in the past or straining into the future

We rob ourselves of the grace in the present!

FORGIVENESS PRAYER

by Sr. Faustina Maria Pia, SV

When we have been treated less than our dignity demands, it can feel like something’s been taken from us – like there is a debt now owed to us. Over the years, I found that, even though I would forgive someone and bring my heartache to the Lord, something was still left lingering, unresolved. One day, I stumbled across this forgiveness prayer: *I release [this person] from his/her debt, and I give that debt to You, Jesus. I ask You to give [this person] a blessing instead.*

This prayer powerfully acknowledges that there is a debt and that the person who owes it cannot pay it. I began to pray this prayer whenever I would feel hardness of heart, pain, or bitterness toward someone. It began to shift my heart, letting Jesus free me and fill my emptiness. This prayer becomes especially powerful when the person who needs forgiveness is me: *I release my debt into Your hands, Jesus. I ask You to give me a blessing instead.*

Handing over our debts to Jesus, especially in the Sacrament of Confession, releases a newness of soul and fills us with joy!

God reached within me, removed what felt like a huge ball of darkness, and filled that gaping hole with His light and love

istock gradyreese

The Retreat

As I traveled to a Day of Prayer and Healing with the Sisters of Life, I was fearful and anxious. I knew God was calling me there, but I was overwhelmed by the emotions that I had been holding onto since my abortion forty years ago. I was afraid I would begin to cry and not be able to stop. But as I approached the convent, tears of relief began to fall instead.

Love surrounded me that day as I met other women who shared the same pain. Our “secret” was no longer a “secret,” and we no longer carried it alone. After years of shame, remorse, anger, grief, silence, and fear, we began to heal, in the presence of God and through His presence in the Sisters. We were safe, accepted, loved, and we experienced a new joy being born within us. Our journey of healing had begun.

After that day, I felt like a great weight had been lifted from me, a weight I could now name as the pain, emptiness, suffering, and grief from abortion. Spurred on by joy, I attended another retreat. I realized that God’s greatest desire was to love me and bring me wholeness. I began to experience a new life that I never knew existed.

God reached within me, removed what felt like a huge ball of darkness, and filled that gaping hole with His light and love. There has been a shift within my heart, a softening and an internal peace. Now I find joy through seeing and embracing God’s presence around me. Whether it is in nature, a friend’s text or phone call, a hug, or sharing faith with a stranger, I can see the touch of God. It reminds me how close He is.

I want to hold the hand of any woman who suffers from a past abortion, look her in the eye, and tell her how much God loves her and desires her healing. He is not a condemning God, but rather a loving “Papa.” Say yes to God’s invitation for healing. You will be blessed beyond measure.

To learn more about healing after abortion: (866) 575-0075 toll free hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org



My Sister

BELLA

by Elizabeth Santorum Marcolini

In a world that measures worth according to usefulness, Bella's story is a reminder that our real value lies in our capacity to love.

CHOOSING AGAPE

And the surprising fruit it bears

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul told us “now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13). Love is the greatest of the theological virtues and is at the heart of Christ's teachings. Yet, the dictionary defines love as “an intense feeling of deep affection.”

If love is merely a feeling, then it cannot be a choice. If the highest similar state is affection, then it requires nothing deeper than tenderness or passion for another. Love is a concept misunderstood by most of modern society and a look at its origins can clarify what “love as a choice” truly conveys. The ancient Greeks used four words to describe love: *storge*, *philia*, *eros*, and *agape*. *Storge* was familial love and defined the bond man feels toward family, persons, and animals. It often referred to love that is constant, love that one takes for granted. *Philia* described the love of friends or relationships formed based on compatibility and mutual interests. *Eros* was passionate love – not only in a sexual sense – but also in the wonder, appreciation, and desire that man has for sublime beauty.

Finally, the ancient Greeks used *agape* to describe “when one person has much to give to another [who is] more needy.” This sort of love exists when there is a generous emptying of oneself in the service of another, without expectation of a reward. It is the love our heavenly Father has for His children.

Isabella Maria was born with a rare genetic condition called Trisomy 18. Only 10% of children with this condition are born alive, and 90% of those children do not make it to their first birthday. On May 13th, 2018 Bella celebrated her ninth birthday.

When my sister Bella was born, I was a seventeen-year-old girl without a proper understanding of *agape* love or its practice. No doubt I received plenty of that deepest form of love from my parents growing up, but I had taken its existence for granted. I loved my parents and my siblings in the sense of *storge* and *philia*, but did not distinguish it from my other pleasant, reciprocal relationships. My ambiguous conceptions of love encompassed everything without noting any distinctions. My shallow understanding of love was challenged and deepened when Bella was born and diagnosed with Trisomy 18. I assumed that my little sister would never be able to love me in a way that was familiar to me. We would never share clothes, talk about her crushes, or paint each other's nails. I only saw dependency, not reciprocity.

I wanted to love her, but I did not know how. Honestly, I wanted her to be able to love me too. I was blind, selfish, and afraid. Yet, when I held Bella for the first time, I saw her fragility and, with it, her perfection. I saw her vulnerability, not her helplessness. She was not passive but responded to me in ways that showed an open receptivity to my love in the form of simple, newborn appreciation. As I watched her, another Bible verse came to my mind, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). God would do mighty things through this little one. Her vulnerability was the perfect vessel to manifest His strength.

As I held her, I saw that her perfect vulnerability would require a more perfect, *agape* love. Bella's very life demanded it. I initially feared this dependency, partially out of selfishness and partially out of unfamiliarity.

(continued on next page)



Elizabeth and Matt’s wedding with the Santorum family
Photos by Laura Gordon Photography

As I stood next to her at her baptism several days later, I promised to be her godmother, to instruct her and guide her on her journey with Christ. Yet, it struck me that I would learn more about God from my meek, dependent, and “disabled” little sister than I could ever hope to teach her.

She called me to practice *agape* love. I would be called to imitate the love of our Lord for me, to truly walk with Him day by day in my journey with Bella. I could ask nothing in return from her, except for the love that she gives me every day. I am continuously humbled by the example of my parents as they selflessly and joyfully care for her, in both good days and bad. To them the radiance of their beloved baby girl is a reward in itself.

Bella has taught me there are different kinds of love and that the highest form of love is self-giving and chooses the beloved even when it proves difficult. The way our family lives has changed dramatically in the past several years, and we wouldn’t have it any other way. Bella is at the heart of our home, a quiet and smiling reminder that every day is a gift. Her tenacity, strength, and unqualified love encourage us daily. We have learned that life is not centered on our individual needs; it is about living for Christ and serving others with a Christ-like *agape* love. Love is not about what we can gain; it is about what we can give.

In the following pages, my parents share the story of Bella’s life from their distinct perspectives. They grieved in different ways, but they grieved together. When the realities of caring for a special-needs child could have

driven them apart, they held each other even closer. When Bella reached milestones and celebrated huge victories, they thanked God for them and shared in the joy of her life.

As I write this, Bella sits here with her hands on top of mine. Occasionally, she’ll look up at me, find my face with her hand, and then return to following my hands on the keyboard. She reminds me of how we all must look to God the Father, we who are so in need of His love and reassurance. May Bella’s story witness to the transforming love that these special children bring into a world that so desperately needs to experience the self-giving love the Father has for His children.

Introduction to New York Times Bestseller,
Bella’s Gift: How one Little Girl Transformed our Family and Inspired a Nation
by Rick and Karen Santorum with Elizabeth Santorum.
Used with Permission, Thomas Nelson Books, 2015.



Photo by Laura Gordon Photography

The moment I knew I loved Matt occurred in my parents’ kitchen. Matt and I were watching Bella and making dinner for my family. We were playing music and enjoying the time together. I left briefly to get an ingredient from the downstairs freezer. When I came back, I heard him talking to her. He didn’t know I was there. He said, “Bella, can I have this dance?” Then I heard her laughing, her delightful, twirling laugh. I peeked into the kitchen and saw him holding her hands and spinning her around in her chair. She was over the moon with joy. As I watched, with tears in my eyes, I knew then that he loved her so very much. His love for her, my beautiful, precious, and vulnerable little sister, made me know that I could walk with this man through all sorts of things in life. That is the sort of man I wanted to marry! -Elizabeth

◀ Elizabeth and her husband Matt with Bella at her First Communion



Perpetual Profession of Vows

Filled with an
inexpressible joy
united to Him.

“Dear young people,
The world you are inheriting is a world
which desperately needs...to be touched
and healed by the beauty and richness of
God’s love. It needs witnesses to that love.”
- St. John Paul II

Perpetual Profession of Vows, August 6th:

(top row) Sr. Faustina Maria Pia, SV, Sr. Mariana Benedicta, SV, Sr. Monica Marie, SV, Sr. Cecilia Rose, SV

(bottom row) Sr. Gianna Maria, SV, Sr. Talitha Guadalupe, SV, Sr. Maria Regina Immaculata, SV, Sr. Marie Veritas, SV



Archbishop Charles Brown, the Apostolic Nuncio to Albania,
celebrated the Mass of Perpetual Profession




First Profession of Vows, August 4th:

(top row) Sr. Mary Grace, SV, Sr. Fidelity Grace, SV, Mother Agnes Mary,
Sr. Gaudia Maria Magdelena, SV, Sr. Catherine Joy Marie, SV

(bottom row) Sr. Ann Immaculée, SV, Sr. Mary Casey O’Connor, SV, Sr. Zelié Maria Louis, SV
with Bishop Frank Caggiano of the Diocese of Bridgeport, CT





My family was not religious, and we did not go to church. Yet, when I was around seven years old...

...I was lying in bed, and I knew God existed. He was there with me, and I knew Him. For years following this experience, I would pray to the Lord in thanksgiving. All I knew was that He existed and that my response was a thank you which encompassed everything.

When I was 10 years old, I was in a serious sledding accident. I fractured my skull and was unconscious in the hospital for about two weeks. Only after I had become a novice and received the name Sr. Talitha, after the little girl whose father pleaded with Jesus for her life, did my own father tell me that while I was in the hospital he had offered me to God if I would live. Shortly after the accident, my family began attending Mass for the first time. I wish everyone could have the experience I did walking into the Church: here was what I had been searching for without knowing how to find it. I was home.

During my college years, I became involved in prayerful witness outside of abortion clinics. I still remember the faces of the women there, especially as they came out of the clinic. Blank. Hopeless. Something of infinite value had been stripped away from them. I longed to ease their pain, and in that longing knew nothing I could give would ever come close to being enough. I began to beg the Lord to take me into His prayer for them; only He could touch this wound and bring true healing. Eventually the Lord would lead me to encounter the Sisters of Life, and again, I knew that I was home.

After I professed my first vows, I longed to love without limits, but I had to be freed of patterns of fear and selfishness in order to have this love purified. How grateful I am to the Lord, for truly forming me as a Father would, for looking not at my weaknesses and failures, but at the deep desires of my heart for goodness. The Cross is painful; yet, it offers a love I long to give. How humbled, honored, and in awe I am that Lord chooses and trusts me to make such an offering of love.

Sr. Talitha Guadalupe

Every summer, I went with other youth from my parish on a week-long trip to an orphanage in Honduras. What always struck me most deeply...

...on these trips was the joy, generosity, and love of the little children. When I found myself among the ten-year-old girls, each one wanted to hold my hand, to smile and pose for a hundred pictures, to sing or play a game, or to give me a woven bracelet that was special to her even though she had only a small cubby filled with her own belongings. Despite their lack of family and of so many material things, and even in the presence of deep wounds and suffering, those children taught me the beauty of

simplicity, poverty, and love. At some point in high school, I thought that I would become a pediatrician and go back to Honduras to work with those beautiful children. But amidst this desire, something else began to stir in my heart, though still without name or recognition – I had a sense that maybe God was inviting me to something even more.

Occasionally, thoughts of Mother Teresa, the only religious sister of whom I had ever really heard, darted across my mind. Maybe the Lord wanted something like that of me? But this seemed crazy – I had never heard of or known of anyone becoming a nun. I had never even seen one. Although I knew that Jesus loved me, I felt so distant from Him.

At Williams College, I met some of the Catholic students and FOCUS missionaries who quickly captured my heart and admiration. I accepted almost all of their invitations: “Sure, I’d love to join a Bible Study!” ... “Sure, I’d love to pray the rosary with you. (Just don’t tell my roommate where I’m going, lest she think I’m a religious fanatic).” As I began to pray, to kneel before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, in our small, dark campus chapel, I began to perceive a quiet voice, which tugged gently at my heart. I begged the Lord to know His will for me. Despite the sweetness of His voice, the fears and apprehensions were still there, holding me back. At this time, I met the Sisters of Life and was immediately attracted by their joy and their authenticity. As my college years came to a close, and my friendship with the Sisters continued, I began to be able to imagine myself belonging totally to the Lord as a Sister.

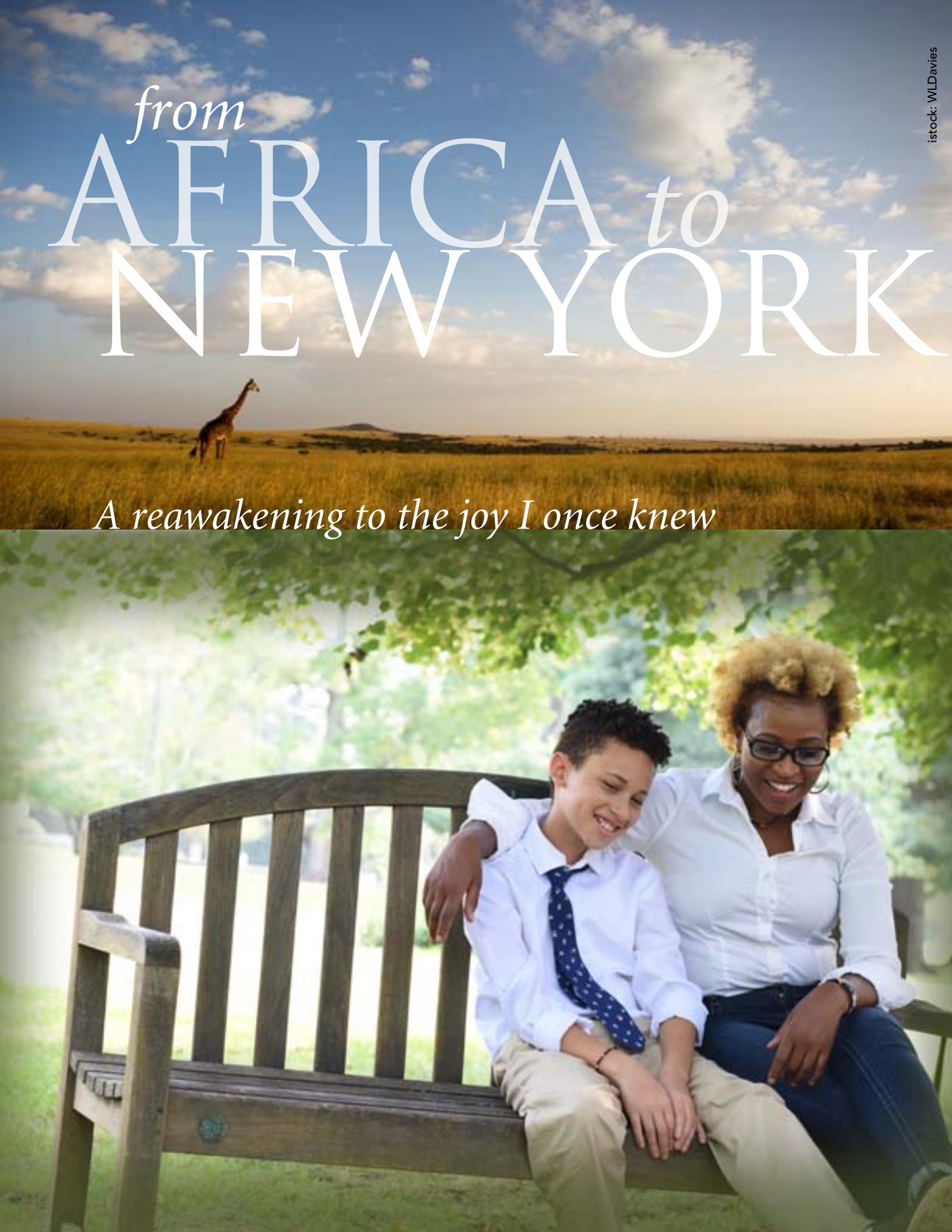
Through spiritual direction, prayer, and reflection, I was coming to an intellectual understanding that I was deeply drawn to the Sisters of Life, but my heart was slow to follow in trust. I needed the grace of God to help me move forward. Then, kneeling before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the answer came: “I want to be free! I want to be free to choose this – to choose LOVE. I want the freedom to choose HIM where I feel so unsure of myself.” In that instant, I felt the joy of true freedom – freedom at the service of love – and my confusion lifted like a cloud. Jesus was whispering to my heart, “I love you...I created you...you are free...trust



Me.” This was His gentle invitation, not a dazzling light of absolute certainty, but the sureness of holding the hand of Someone who loves me.

Now, almost nine years later, the sureness of His hand in mine has only gotten stronger. In His great mercy, He is slowly freeing me to love – to love Him, my Sisters, and the pregnant mothers He has entrusted to me – and to become more and more myself in His love. This is where I have found joy; though the giddiness comes and goes, the deep joy abides. This is the joy of knowing that I am His, and He is mine. It is my hand in His that gives me hope, and, yes, even joy, to stand with a pregnant woman in very difficult circumstances, trusting that Jesus will not abandon her, that He also desires her full and true freedom, and that He has somehow entrusted her to my heart and my love.

Sr. Mariana Benedicta



istock: WLDavies

from AFRICA *to* NEW YORK

A reawakening to the joy I once knew

FINDING GOD AGAIN through MOSES

We have been blessed to know Chicky since she lived with us at Sacred Heart Convent when she was pregnant with her son, Moses, eleven years ago. With a sparkle in her eye and a smile for everyone, she is a true witness of one who has found joy in the Lord. Here is her story.

I was born in Africa, in the poverty of Africa, in the streets of Africa, but for some reason, I was always happy. We had only what we needed. I was very, very happy with what I had until I came to America. When I came here, I started to see the wealth of America, where people have so much freedom and so many opportunities. But if you look properly, Americans have so much, but they aren't happy. The more money they have, the more Jesus they need. I was given the Catholic faith from my parents a long time ago, but I forgot it. And when I saw the richness of America, and how there's poverty in Africa but the grass is so much greener there, and people are happier, I started to question...who is this Jesus? I got interested in knowing my faith. I knew that if I didn't have a strong faith, I would crash. My faith keeps me having hope for the future.

After I came to America, I became pregnant and didn't have a place to live, so was staying at a hotel. I was so lonely and broken. One day I was sitting down on the bed, and I put my hand on the night stand drawer, pulled it open, and saw the Bible. I picked it up, and the first thing that I opened to was the story of the baby Moses. So I read about how Moses' mother saved him. Then something just clicked. I knew that whoever was in my belly was a boy. And I knew I was very poor, but that there would be a way I could save my child. And his name would be Moses. Then something unex-

pected happened: my happiness grew. It just blew up! I was very excited, because a human being is not like a thing you go to the store for. No – a human being a gift given by God.

When I came to the Sisters the very first time, I sat in front of a beautiful statue of Our Lady, and two Sisters came to talk to me. Me and Our Lady, we journeyed together. If you try to go somewhere and figure it out alone, you're going to be lonely. You need somebody to bring you there. In this journey with my pregnancy, I took Our Lady with me. The whole of my pregnancy, I was saying the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary every day.

I find joy in living with my son, in seeing him grow. He's the gift of God. Seeing my son is a big happiness. God has given me this happiness, by sharing this person with me, and through me, with the world. When it comes to the world, you see people looking like they have everything. They have cars and are building big houses. But they fail to turn around to God and see where all these things come from and say "thank you" to Him. Happiness is waiting for them, but they have never embraced the gift of God.

Joy is the gift of God. It's a gift that He gives, and everybody can have it. But it all depends...are you embracing the gift? Joy is not something you can go to the store and buy. You have to receive it. It's possible for everyone.

God gives to you only what you need. I say to God, "Just give me what I need for me to be able to survive." Jesus never leaves me. Never. I may be tired or whatever, but He never leaves me. He's always there to console me. I live through His happiness. I don't need much because I have His joy. And I have faith and hope. And hope changes everything.

THE SISTERS OF LIFE
Annunciation Motherhouse
38 Montebello Road
Suffern, NY 10901

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Written and designed by the Sisters of Life.

OUR NEW NOVICES!



Pictured from left to right:

(top row) Sr. Chiara Madonna, Sr. Beata Victoria, Sr. Léonie Thérèse,
(bottom row) Sr. Anima Christi Rose, Sr. Maria Augustine, Sr. Claire Joy

Why the name IMPRINT?

[Man] bears within himself an indelible imprint of God.
-*Evangelium Vitae*

It's as if the Blessed Trinity kisses us at the moment of our creation, and our souls remember that kiss of the Divine. His love is forever, and God is no foolish lover. He knows that for the rest of our days, we'll be searching for that which corresponds to this memory buried deep within us. We were made for heaven.

IMPRINT

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