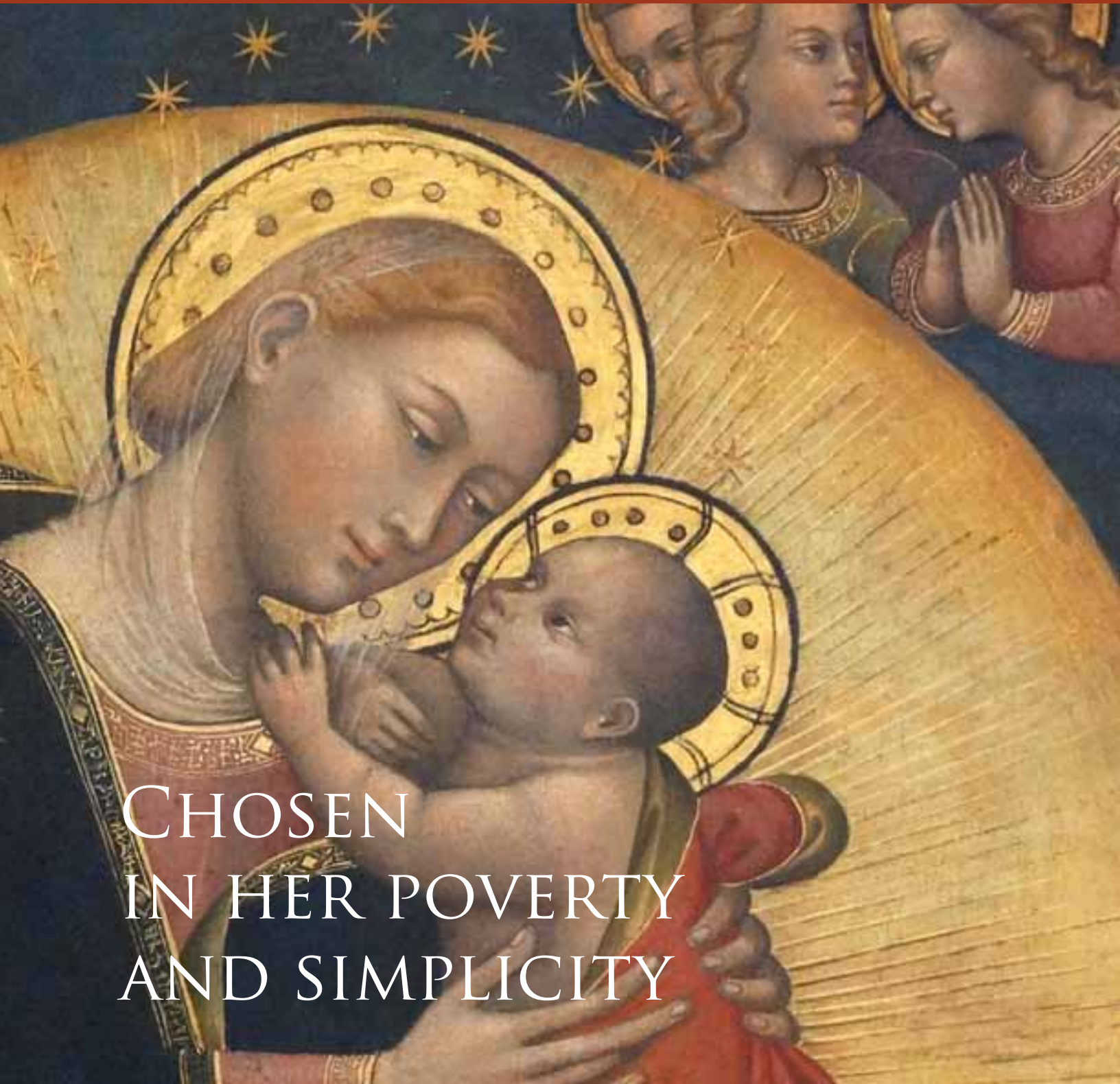


# IMPRINT

A PUBLICATION OF THE SISTERS OF LIFE / WINTER 2016 ISSUE



CHOSEN  
IN HER POVERTY  
AND SIMPLICITY



## MARY, UNTIER OF KNOTS

**H**oly Mary, you put in order and make more clear the ties that link us to the Lord. Mother of God and our Mother, to you, who with motherly heart, untie the knots of our life, we pray to you to receive in your hands (*name of person*), and to free *him/her* of the knots and confusion with which our enemy attacks. Through your grace, your intercession, and your example, deliver us from all evil and untie the knots that prevent us from being united with God. So that we, free from sin and error, may find God in all things, may have our hearts placed in Him, and may serve Him always in our brothers and sisters.

Amen.

- Pope Francis

*(taken from the Holy Father's prayer to Our Lady, Untier of Knots)*

## *He became little, that we might not fear our weakness.*

Dear Friends,

These weeks of Advent invite us to prepare our hearts so that this Christmas we might step beyond the holiday trimmings into a mystery. The most wondrous, hope-filled mystery and reality: GOD BECAME ONE OF US.

The unapproachable, unchanging, all-knowing, all-loving God who is before all things and in all things took a human face. He is the Son of God and the Son of Mary of Nazareth. A child conceived by the Spirit within Mary by her act of faith. In accordance with Judaic law this child was named by His Father (in Heaven): Jesus, and sent into the world of men and women as the Face of the Father's love.

At the Incarnation, the eternal Son of God took on our humanity in its greatest fragility as an unborn child in the form of a human embryo. The God of the universe contained within one human cell! Nine months later, at Christmas, we welcome with renewed joy, Jesus, as a newborn baby. God became little, that we might not fear our own weakness and littleness.

God meets us where we are, in the ordinariness of everyday life and, especially it seems, in those moments when our lives seem to be just a mess. It is then that He opens His Heart that we may encounter His love and know our worth. As His mercy unties the knots in our hearts, we discover the joy of true freedom. This edition of Imprint tells the stories of university students who have been surprised by God and of a woman who reveals the intimate and personal love of God, and so much more! God speaks in the language of our hearts.

Let us ask Mary for a share in her child-like trust and confidence. Then with great simplicity of heart approach the Christmas crèche to receive an Infant's love – that love that meets our own poverty, and in which we will find acceptance, healing and transformation. There we will discover our real identity, recognize the gift we are, and the capacity we have to give the gift of our love to others because of the love we have first received.

***As our Christmas gift to you, all of the Sisters and I will remember you and your family in a Novena of Masses beginning on Christmas day. Wishing you a holy, happy Christmas season.***

In Jesus, our joy,

Mother Agnes Mary,  
Superior General of the Sisters of Life





# ARE WE LIVING

from the culture *or* from God's gaze?

By Sr. Mary Elizabeth, SV and Sr. Elizabeth Ann, SV

## CHASING THE WIND

Too often we forget who we are. In our current media-saturated culture we are constantly bombarded with images and messages telling us who we should be and what we need to be happy. But our hearts tell us otherwise. We can spend a lifetime chasing after success, achievement, and stuff, trying hard to look good and play the part, but underneath the surface the scene is different. Beyond the laughter and fleeting pleasures, we're actually feeling unsettled, empty and alone—longing for so much more. We ask, "Where's the purpose and meaning? I thought I would be happier." We tend to silence these deeper desires and keep ourselves busy and distracted, wondering, "Am I the only one who feels this way?"

## THE GAZE: FINDING ME...IN HIM

There is another way. I shed the masks and become who I really am. It's that simple. Our deepest and truest identity lies in the unshakable gift of our Baptism, the reality that we have been made God's children. It is not something I can earn or merit; it is pure gift, and no one can take it away from me. The truth is, God is my loving Father, who is constantly looking upon me with love, awaiting me, thirsting for my love. It is within this loving gaze that I discover who I really am and find the courage to live in freedom.

"God comes to  
break open everything  
that keeps you closed in.  
He is encouraging you to  
dream. He wants to make  
you see that, with you, the  
world can be different."

-Pope Francis

## STEPPING AWAY / TIME WITH HIM

By living within His gaze, I find the courage to step away from all the subliminal messages and currents of the culture and make time for Him—daily. I leave fear behind, and I find time to listen to Jesus speak truth into the lies I have believed about myself. I give Him the space to reveal His

personal, unconditional love for me—the real me, with all my limitations and weaknesses, and let Him love me there, to show me those special places in my heart that make me uniquely me, those things that make me unrepeatably loveable in His eyes. Most fundamentally, my identity is not something I create, it is a gift that I receive.

## THINKING BIG. TOGETHER.

As I spend time living within God's loving gaze, I begin to look at myself and the world differently. We look together—with His eyes. My goals begin to change, no longer limited, fleeting, and superficial, I dream big. We think big, together. My goals go beyond tomorrow, they are eternal. The most mundane can become exciting, for He weaves everything into His eternal plan. My world begins to change from ME to YOU. And I forget myself and all my self-seeking habits. I begin really living for the other. My choices and decisions are now not rooted in what others think about me, but in truth, in what delights the Lord and is most loving and life-giving to the other. And in this process, I find myself. I find my identity and lasting happiness — and the profound meaning of my life.

*The Beginning* AS A POSTULANT





# The Freedom to be counter-cultural *for love of Jesus*

**1 Natalie Furka**  
Age: 33  
Hometown: Secaucus, NJ  
School: St. Peter's University  
Major: Biology and Philosophy,  
Medical Doctor/Geriatrics  
Fun Fact: I have been to WYD  
with all three of our most  
recent popes – Toronto with  
St. John Paul II, Madrid with  
Pope Benedict XVI, and Krakow  
with Pope Francis!

**2 Jen Risper**  
Age: 29  
Hometown: Moreno Valley, CA  
School: Vanderbilt University  
Major: Human and  
Organizational Development  
Fun Fact: I played professional  
basketball in Europe.

**3 Alida Taylor**  
Age: 29  
Hometown: Grand Coteau, LA  
School: University of Louisiana  
at Lafayette  
Major: Fashion Design  
Fun Fact: I've hiked and  
camped the Amazon  
rainforest.

**4 Colleen Dunn**  
Age: 27  
Hometown: Pleasant Valley, NY  
School: Marywood University;  
Institute of Pastoral Studies  
at Ave Maria University  
Major: Religious Studies  
Minor: Psychology  
Masters in Theological Studies  
Fun Fact: I love drinking  
coffee – especially when  
hazelnut flavoring is involved.

**5 Lauren Brown**  
Age: 26  
Hometown: Brewerton, NY  
School: SUNY Brockport  
Major: Therapeutic Recreation  
Fun Fact: I played rugby in college.

**6 Madeleine Russell**  
Age: 26  
Hometown: Edmonds, WA  
School: Seattle Pacific University,  
University of Vermont  
Major: Food and Nutritional Sciences  
Masters: Dietetics  
Fun Fact: Singing is like breathing  
for me, particularly vocal jazz.

**7 Stephanie Vorpahl**  
Age: 26  
Hometown: San Antonio, TX  
School: University of Houston  
Major: Hotel and Restaurant  
Management  
Minor: Religious Studies  
Fun Fact: I love country dancing  
and my red cowboy boots!

**8 Rachel Foley**  
Age: 25  
Hometown: Blair, NE  
School: Massachusetts Institute  
of Technology (MIT)  
Major: Mechanical Engineering,  
Minor: History  
Fun Fact: I've visited all 50 states  
(34 of which were in the past year).

**9 Martha Evans**  
Age: 25  
Hometown: Mendota Heights, MN  
School: Benedictine College  
Major: Spanish and Theology  
Minor: Psychology  
Fun Fact: I ran the steeple chase (track  
& field) in college.

**10 Desirae Wieseler**  
Age: 24  
Hometown: Faulkton, SD  
School: University of South Dakota  
Major: Mathematics Education  
Fun Fact: I grew up on a farm and  
my favorite food is steak.

**11 Karalyn Finnell**  
Age: 23  
Hometown: Edmond, OK  
School: University of  
Central Oklahoma  
Major: Contemporary  
Vocal Performance  
Fun Fact: Beatboxing is my  
second language. I love  
throwing down a beat.

**12 Brooke Fowler**  
Age: 23  
Hometown: Highland, IN  
School: St. Mary's College  
Major: Religious Studies  
Minor: Social Work  
Fun Fact: I played college volleyball  
at Saint Mary's of Notre Dame.

**13 Emma Brown**  
Age: 23  
Hometown: Orillia, ON  
School: Carleton University  
Major: Journalism  
Minor: English Literature  
Fun Fact: I have eaten a  
chocolate-covered cricket...  
I don't recommend it.

**14 Alyssa Bezreh**  
Age: 23  
Hometown: Needham, MA  
School: Northeastern University  
Major: Electrical and Computer  
Engineering  
Fun Fact: I love to bike and  
do triathalons.

**15 Julie Martin**  
Age: 21  
Hometown: Dallas, TX  
School: Southern Methodist  
University  
Major: Accounting  
Minor: Italian  
Fun Fact: I enjoy eating raw  
cookie dough out of a bowl  
(like it's ice cream)!



## When I stopped trying to create myself By Sr. Pia Jude, SV

### *First Profession* AS A SISTER OF LIFE

*Bishop Andrew Cozzens with*

*(back, left to right)*

*Sr. Gabriela Maria Mega, SV*

*Sr. Magnificat Rose, SV*

*Sr. Maria Christina, SV*

*Sr. Elizabeth Grace, SV*

*(front, left to right)*

*Sr. Pia Jude, SV*

*Sr. Jordan Rose, SV*

*Sr. Cara Marie, SV*

Entering the Sisters of Life as a postulant was not only a ‘yes’ to God’s plan for my life, but a ‘no’ to the culture in which I had been immersed: a ‘no’ to the “create yourself” mentality that Facebook and social media had lured me into—promising me that I would be happier with myself if I was happy with the girl on the screen; a ‘no’ to the demands of fitting in to a society that was polite, casual, and looking for the woman who could do it all. Uttering these ‘no’s’ required a leap of faith into something unknown—my own self.

Through much of my 20’s, fear and restlessness filled my mind and heart. So often the voice of the world would say, “If they only knew who you were, they wouldn’t like you.” Or, “If you only knew who you were, you wouldn’t like you.” Maybe I would be boring without my degrees, cute dresses, and fancy parties. These lies kept me living in tension, each foot in paddle boats that were moving ever so slowly apart. But upon receiving the

religious habit and entering novitiate, my whole being—both inside and out—revealed, for the first time, my best kept hope—that I am loved.

Beginning a life of integration brought peace. It stood in stark contrast to the effects of my attempts to create myself, feelings of “not enough”—not pretty enough, not fun enough, not appearing happy enough... On the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, at my Profession of First Vows, before my family and friends, the old self met the new me. My ‘yes’ to Jesus reached down into every crack of insecurity and fear of becoming the real me, and filled it with love. The pressure of creating myself was replaced by the knowledge that I am one who is deeply desired by her Creator. Jesus, on the day of my profession, invited me to discover that the true image of myself is a reflection of Someone good and beautiful—and that is more freeing than any Facebook post could convey.



*Perpetual Profession* AS A SISTER OF LIFE

(back left to right) Sr. Ann Catherine, SV, Sr. Brigid Ancilla Marie, SV, Sr. Maria Emmanuel, SV  
(front left to right) Sr. María Laetitia, SV, Sr. Grace Dominic, SV, Sr. Maeve Nativitas, SV



## Campus Life / when questions run deep

What is the meaning of my life? How can I find happiness? Is it possible to be loved as I am? These questions run deep in every human heart. In our mission of evangelization on university campuses, we have a unique window into the lives of college students which are filled with joys and struggles, difficulties and achievements. We see up close the deep longing of human hearts- and how in the sometimes wayward search for fulfillment the Hound of Heaven never stops seeking us out.



3

### Snapshots of the Heart

*From our encounters with thousands of college students and young adults we would like to introduce you to three people who were searching for answers to life's big questions. Audrey, Trey, and Dan each have had a unique journey that has led them to the One who is the answer to our deepest longings.*

snapshot

1

By Sr. Maris Stella, SV

**W**e first came to know Audrey when she joined our ultimate frisbee game on campus. A natural-born leader, with a knack for hospitality and making others feel comfortable, she is fun and easy to be around. We began meeting with her monthly while we were on her campus and attended the Bible study she hosted for other women on campus. By the time she graduated from college she had a completely new understanding of her beauty and dignity as a daughter of God. She is a smart and disciplined student who recently graduated near the top of her class with a degree in aerospace engineering. With humility and openness, she shared her failures and victories with other women.

#### **How has your vision of God changed over the years?**

I always believed there was a God but never really thought He had an investment in my life. I thought that after I was created He just turned the other way and said, "Good Luck." My image of God was a rule maker more than Someone who I desired to follow.

Not until my 5th and final year of college did I begin to see God as Someone who loved me and wanted to have a relationship with me. I began to see the goodness He made in me and that my dignity did not come from anyone else but Him. But I still struggled to believe that God could ever satisfy the desires I had for love, companionship and intimacy.

#### **Tell us about how your time in college**

I dated a lot of different guys; I can only remember about a month where I wasn't actively searching for another relationship as soon as I got out of the previous one. Coming into second semester of my 4th year in college, the guy I was dating and I broke up and I was devastated, not because we weren't dating anymore but because my self-worth was tied up in those relationships. Being single meant I had nothing, which meant I was worth nothing.

I decided that since guys hadn't made me happy, maybe I should try the whole God thing out. A friend convinced me to go to Confession to get a clean slate. 14 years after my first Confession, I went to Confession for the second time



in my life. I desired to see what it meant to live a Christ-centered life, and I knew if I tried to do it by myself I would fall back into my old ways, so I immersed myself into the Catholic community in every way I could.

### **How have you discovered your true self more?**

#### **Were there “masks” you took off?**

On the surface I looked innocent and good because that's how I wanted others to see me and how I truly wanted to be. But deep down I struggled with many temptations of lust that stemmed from desiring to be loved. I told myself over and over again that the way I was living was OK and normal, but deep down I knew it was all a lie. I was ashamed and disgusted with myself. I saw myself as damaged and dirty and thought, “How could God or anyone ever love that?” I tried to hide my sins from everyone and pretend like none of it existed. I was so scared of what others would think of me if I asked for help. I thought that that they would only see my sins and not me.

Eventually, I stopped lying to myself and began to learn where I was tempted and to work through these thoughts and actions. Most importantly, I began to invite God into this part of me that I so wanted to hide. With a lot of help from people who love me deeply, I started to understand that I am not defined by my sins. God can take a bad decision and make something beautiful from it. I am learning that God is gentle and patient and will wait for us as long as it takes. He is love.

### **What was preventing you from truly loving yourself? How did your friendship with the women in your Bible study help you to grow?**

I had this intense desire to love others and to be loved by others, but that didn't translate into me loving myself. During my last relationship before my reversion to the faith, I decided to get a semi-permanent form of birth control called an IUD. I never saw the problem with birth control and thought, ‘Hey, if it means I won't get pregnant, then great.’ There is a saying that girls use sex to get love and guys use love to get sex. I was trying to catch a glimpse of the love and intimacy I desired. Instead this caused many wounds to build in my heart and eventually I just became numb to the pain.

After my reversion, I wanted to learn about the Church's teaching on sex and birth control. I began to see my use of

birth control as taking something beautiful God created (my body and my fertility) and altering it with chemicals.

Each week at the end of our women's Bible study we would make a personal challenge that we would hold each other accountable for. For a long time my challenge was to love myself. One year after getting the IUD, I decided to get it removed. I wanted to be just me, exactly the way God had created me, without altering anything, and to treat my body with the dignity it deserved. The next week at our Bible study, I told the group that I had accepted the challenge, and did the most loving thing I could for myself in as long as I could remember: I removed the IUD.

This totally transformed how I saw myself and others. I began to see the men around me as created by God - it affected everything. I became cautious of how I spoke to others, the intentions of the text messages I sent, the clothes I put on my body. And above all, I began to love and respect myself.

### **After you graduated from college, you decided to make a pilgrimage- A month long walk in Spain to the tomb of St. James. Can you share about your journey on the Camino?**

The first 5 days of the Camino were probably the hardest days of my life. I didn't walk with anyone, I didn't eat with anyone and I experienced the most profound loneliness I have ever felt. I desired community

so much and didn't understand why God would do this to me. All that was left to do was to pray and sit with Him in these moments. I realized that in my life I could be stripped of everything from material goods to companionship, but I could never be stripped of His love for me. No matter what happens in life I will always have God with me walking through life together.

In life, one of the least complicated things we can do is walk. It is simply putting one foot in front of the other. Sometimes this walking is filled with joy and beautiful times, but sometimes it involves suffering when every step you take is excruciating. Sometimes people are put into our lives to walk with us; we never know how long they will be there, but we can be thankful for the time shared with them. And other times we may feel abandoned and lonely, like nobody is walking with us. But then a small voice in your head says, “Keep going, keep putting one foot in front of the other. I am always with you and I will never leave your side.” Jesus promises us He will never abandon us and when all hope is gone we can always look to Him for strength, because in our weaknesses He makes us strong.

**“Jesus is the Lord of risk,  
of the eternal ‘more’...  
Following Jesus demands  
a good dose of courage, a  
readiness to trade in the  
sofa for a pair of walking  
shoes and to set out on new  
and uncharted paths.”**

*—Pope Francis*

A person with a backpack is walking on a set of train tracks that recede into the distance. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The person is wearing a plaid shirt and jeans, and their backpack is visible. The tracks are made of metal rails and wooden ties, and there are some trees and a building in the background.

# The journey I never had to pack for.

istock: biglike



# TREY

*is a senior in college and pursuing a degree in civil engineering at Colorado State University. He is the oldest of six children of whom the youngest three are adopted. He is president of the Catholic Men's Fraternity Phi Kappa Theta.*

**Sr. Maris Stella:** One afternoon, when I went to lunch in the cafeteria on campus with a group of students, I ran into Trey who I recognized from the catholic center. I sat down at his table for a moment and I asked him how his Christmas break was and he shared his story.

## *London, Dublin, Prague, Barcelona, and Rome...*

**D**uring my junior year, I was tired and bored with college and looking for adventure. On a whim, my friend Connor and I booked plane tickets to Europe. Part of the goal was to experience the world, but I was asking questions and searching for meaning; I was looking for something. We flew to London, spent New Year's Eve in Dublin, and went to Barcelona, Prague, and Rome. We met great people and saw beautiful things, but I remember a week into the trip thinking, 'What am I missing?' I was restless, something wasn't clicking. We finished our trip in Rome. When we got to St. Peter's Basilica I was overwhelmed by the beauty. I went to the Eucharistic Adoration Chapel, and seeing the Lord, I was amazed.

I remember sitting down and thinking, "No way..., this, this is what I have been searching for, who I have been looking for." It made me think about all my desires. I realized at that moment that only God can fulfill every one of my thirsts. I experienced the love that can be found nowhere else. After thousands of miles of travel I found Jesus Christ, He is the fulfillment of my longing. I felt like He said to me, "I am here all the time, in all of your life. It's the exact same Me that is in the business and craziness of your normal life too." I don't need to travel all over the world to find Him. He is here!

What was the best part of my trip? That moment more than anything. I realized that Jesus was what I was longing for.





## Taking off the masks we wear

*[and letting His Mercy heal]*

***The FOCUS missionaries on campus seek to build friendships with students and through the witness of their lives introduce them to the person of Jesus. Dan is a FOCUS missionary who shares his story in order to invite others to realize that they can always begin again.***

I was raised Catholic but was always half in and half out. In college, I started going to daily Mass and had a good Catholic girlfriend. But, towards the end of college, my parents got divorced. I started acting out of this place of hurt and abandonment. I didn't know how to handle this wound from my family. I was looking to hurt those who hurt me. I broke up with my girlfriend. I started smoking marijuana every day, drinking all the time, and eventually doing hard drugs. Because I was still getting good grades, I thought I was OK. But in reality, I was depressed and was sliding deeper and deeper into addiction. Before I knew it, I was doing things I never thought I would do. I was extremely broken.

One night, I went to a party at a friend's house. Everyone was drinking and doing drugs. The next morning I woke up and was in a horrible place. I sat up and realized I didn't like my friends. I couldn't believe my life. I looked around for some alcohol or drugs because I was trying to numb myself. I couldn't find anything so I decided to drive to my mother's house to take a nap and get some food.

When I got there, for some reason, I spilled my guts to her and told her everything. She just sat there and listened, and said, "Dan I have something to say to you:  
I love you.  
I forgive you.  
I will always love you.  
I will always forgive you."

This totally broke the mask; the house I built was completely shattered. She could have criticized and yelled at me, but she showed mercy. It was my first taste of God's love. My life changed completely

because of the way my mom responded. I moved back home and started to change my life. I became aware of how much I needed God. I have come to see that God allows these crosses and allows brokenness so we can come to rely on Him.

God saves people,  
Jesus transforms lives.  
He transformed my life.

*As a FOCUS missionary, Dan serves on campus by leading bible studies and mentoring men in their relationship with God. He recently led a group of students through a 90 day study and fast in order to break addictions to pornography.*

# “Is something missing?”

## 4 Steps to finding greater meaning in life

**Have you ever felt like** there must be more to life, and wondered how to find what's missing? Do you want your life to be full of purpose and meaning but don't know how to get there? Try these 4 steps to self-discovery:



### 1. Tired of the tension

Time out. Take a minute to reflect and become aware of what's going on inside. Living a compartmentalized or fragmented life is totally draining. The effort to change like a chameleon to meet the tastes of others, or to avert judgment or criticism can be paralyzing. Underneath it all is usually a fear of what others would think if they knew the real me. This is not the fullness of life we desire.

### 3. Allow His love to heal you

Restart with a clean slate. Jesus is waiting to lift your burdens in the Sacrament of Confession and set you free. Be bold – find a quiet spot and ask Jesus to help you see yourself as He sees you. Allow Him to love you in those places where you feel you have to hide yourself from others, receive the healing warmth of His mercy. Allow His perfect love to cast out all of your fears. Pray for the grace to receive the gift of yourself, to know and to believe, with all your heart, that you are His beloved son or daughter.



### 2. Name the masks

Be honest with yourself and ask: “What masks am I wearing? When do I present a false image of myself? In what ways do I cover up my true self or try to deceive myself, acting inauthentically? Where does my real identity rest? Do I find my value in what I do, in how I look, in the car I drive, in what others think of me? Do these often unrealistic or superficial standards bring me down and weigh on my heart?”



### 4. The freedom to give the gift of love to others in your unique way

Ask yourself: “When do I feel most fully and truly alive?”

What brings joy and a sense of fulfillment? Where do I find freedom to be myself? Where is my love fruitful?” Sometimes, we have a hard time seeing our gifts and strengths. Ask a friend or family member to point out the ways and places that they see you thrive. Through this self-knowledge, you can find that place to give the gift that only you can give. Our lives and our love are meant to be creative, to bring others to life.

*“Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”*

-St. John Paul II





# WORLD YOUTH DAY, **KRAKOW, POLAND** JULY 2016

Pope Francis and 2.4 million young people from the United States and around the world, came together to celebrate and worship Jesus Christ, the Center of their lives.



## THE MERCY CENTRE IN KRAKOW

Our Sisters had the tremendous privilege of working with the Knights of Columbus to host the Mercy Centre, the largest English Speaking Site at World Youth Day, from July 26-31, at the Tauron Arena. Over 18,000 young pilgrims from across the globe poured in each day to hear an array of speakers and concerts, and experience opportunities for prayer, Confession, Adoration and time to connect with other young people from around the world.

One of the most unforgettable events was the Night of Mercy, with Matt Maher and Audrey Assad providing the music for a Holy Hour in the arena, packed with young people from floor to rafters, singing their hearts out in worship and kneeling in Adoration during the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Bishop Robert Barron put his previously prepared notes aside and gave an amazing homily on the power of the Cross. Later, in his blog, he wrote, "As the Lord was brought slowly up and down the aisles of the ground floor of the stadium, the music swelled, and young people wept, called, stretched out their hands, and prostrated themselves. I thought, 'This is just what it must have been like when Jesus entered a town...' I can't remember another time in the last thirty years when I felt the presence of the Lord more vividly."

We pray that the graces of encounter, healing, conversion and vocation bestowed upon the young people of World Youth Day Krakow will multiply and bear fruit in abundance, throughout the world and in the Church for years to come.

**View footage at:** [www.youtube.com/user/KnightsofColumbus/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/KnightsofColumbus/videos)



## **GIVEN: The Catholic Young Women's Leadership Forum**



The GIVEN Forum brought together 300 Catholic women, ages 20-30, from every state in the nation, for a week-long immersion in faith formation, leadership training and networking. Held in Washington D.C. in June, this full-scholarship event featured talks by Catholic lay and religious women, time for prayer, and the chance to go deep in conversation.

All too often, in a culture of fierce competition that sets up structures of superficial measurements to determine our personal worth, we need to stop for perspective before falling into the trap of judging ourselves in the light of our apparent weaknesses or failures. The three pillars of the Given Forum: Receive the gift you are; Realize the gifts you've been given; Respond with the gift only you can give, could be a program for each of us in embracing the dignity that is our birthright.

**Talks available online:** [www.givenforum.org/given-audio-and-visual-recordings/](http://www.givenforum.org/given-audio-and-visual-recordings/)



# just for Lucy

istock: Adam Smigielski



*For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

*Jeremiah 29:11*

## A Chat with Lucy

*By Sr. Marie Veritas, SV*

***Our friendship with Lucy began many years ago when she started as a volunteer to care for our gardens. She has a gentle heart, a love for nature, and an artistic flair that draws out beauty. After attending our Hope and Healing Retreat she decided to enter the Catholic Church. Lucy is filled with the light and love of the Lord and radiates a peace that is rooted in her deep trust in God's Providence.***

### **Can you tell us a little about your life?**

I had a really good family. But I was in the entertainment business for 20 years. I partied and made wrong choices. I became a drug addict and a workaholic. I had three abortions and two surgeries, which left me unable to ever conceive again.

### **What was the experience of your heart in those early years?**

I had really lost touch of who I was. I wasn't thinking about God anymore. I was denying the woman that God created me to be. I chose to put off the important things in life – things that give life real meaning, like motherhood. But I was just selling myself short. I was hurting myself.



### **What masks were you wearing?**

As an addict, I spent a lot of my life not wanting people to know what I was really up to. I had good jobs, but I was caught in addictions. It's like travelling two roads that are getting further and further apart – eventually you can't walk them anymore.

### **Was there a particular moment in your journey that you felt changed the trajectory of your life?**

The first step was probably going to Alcoholics Anonymous, where I was brought back to the idea of God. It got me clean. Once you're clean, you can move forward and forgive yourself for past mistakes. A friend introduced me to the Sisters of Life Hope and Healing Mission for those who had suffered after abortion. It helped me to understand the root of my addiction, and to love and trust people again. It opened me up to the faith that had been calling me for years. I have never felt so much a part of a space and a family. I am so pleased to be Catholic today. I really am. It's a beautiful thing.

### **How do you experience the presence of God?**

At Mass every Sunday, in the Eucharistic prayer, it says that God entrusted the whole world to our care. I have a deep connection to all life on this planet - that connection is God... it's the Holy Spirit. I never feel alone because of it. When burdened, we can always invite God in. [Then] it's really very simple... God is in our hearts. God forgave me a long time ago, and I know that He never left my side, even through all those years that I was going down the wrong roads. [Like St. Paul said]: "Thanks be to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more that we can ask or imagine."



### **How has the Lord revealed your true self to you?**

God sends his messages in so many ways; when you get those signs, they're unmistakable. I remember one February morning, on the Hope and Healing retreat, I found a ladybug on my desk. I'm in the landscaping business, you know, and ladybugs are so important in the garden. I thought it was dead, but when I went to bury it, I saw it was alive. Then I found another ladybug under the Our Lady of Guadalupe card – the one where she says, "Am I not here who am your mother?" – and then another one. I was like, "Why are there 3 ladybugs on my desk?" Then I realized: I had three abortions. I went and told Sr. Marija Joseph, and she said: "Well, you know how the ladybugs got their name, right? They were named for the Blessed Mother." There's this whole story how, in the Middle Ages, pests were devouring the crops in Europe, and the farmers prayed to the Blessed Mother. Thousands of ladybugs showed up and saved the crops, and after that they were called ladybugs. I took from that, the souls of my three children are still present. You see, my father didn't believe in life

after death. In fact, he believed that you lived on in your children, and here I was now, with no children. I went in the chapel, and sat looking at the Cross, and I really realized that it is true: that the soul is not extinguished! That life goes on! That Jesus' Resurrection is real! This was huge for me, you know? And at the precise moment I'm having this revelation, the sun came through the window and shone right on me. The whole thing was a huge sign from God.

### **Would you say that the God's Mercy opened up a new understanding of yourself?**

I made bad decisions every day for so many years. But even just by travelling that path, I've become empowered to help heal the hearts of many women, so they can finally become the women that God created. In working with both the Hope and Healing Mission and Alcoholics Anonymous, I've come to realize that service is so important. You've got to help other people. You've got to get outside of yourself. God's happiness has to be shared. You have to give away what was so freely given to you. My experience, strength, and hope is what can help other people. All you have to do is tell your story... otherwise, what were all those years for, if God wasn't preparing me for this? I don't want any young woman to have a story like mine.

### **What is the experience of your heart now?**

Every day, I wake up joyous and I go to bed fulfilled. I don't seek perfection, but progress. I was in my fifties before I figured out what gives life meaning. I came to see that God is in control, not me. I try really hard to control anger and negativity, because it's a block to my happiness. I can restart my day in a moment. I pray: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He leads me beside still waters. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He restores my soul.... My cup runs over!" I don't live in shame. I just remind myself of those things. Because, you know... life is pretty good!

### **Lucy's words for us all:**

#### **What would you say to those who are trying to find themselves?**

We have to find our way back to God. It's all about having God in your life. God's waiting for us to come back to Him. He's already given us everything that we need to be happy and successful. He is already in our hearts. God does not need our help to make us – but in order to re-make us, we must become His partners. At the World Youth Day in Brazil, Pope Francis said "Go. Be not afraid, and serve." That really stuck with me. Get the focus off of yourself. Do not isolate, but get busy. Have courage in spite of fear. We have to act. Connect to God's power working in you and don't give up! Mother Teresa said, "The fruit of faith is love, and the fruit of love is service, and the fruit of service is peace." Our joy will be contagious if we serve.

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