Living a Life of Encouragement

By Jonathan and Sharon Cosper

John Paul II speaks of the love we should have toward one another, in saying that “friendship consists in a full commitment of the will to another person with a view to that person’s good.” We cannot truly encourage one another, build one another up, if we are not invested fully in seeking the good for others. In order to bring encouragement, then, we must be concerned with one another in a real way. Without the concern for another’s good, encouragement can turn to false praise or self-interested flattery that can be motivated for our own gain. As a community, this would be detrimental to our life together.

Living out a concern for others by seeking each person’s good is multi-faceted. Whether in words or in action, we must be rooted in love for one another in order to bring real encouragement. Ignatius of Loyola points out two criteria on love: The first, that love is expressed more clearly in actions than in words. The second, that there is greater love in giving than in receiving. So, to apply this logic to encouragement, we can see that encouragement through action and giving is possibly going to make the most impact. In what ways can we act and give in order to encourage each other?

Encouragement through action does not have to mean that we are busying ourselves meeting all the needs of all the people we come in contact with. Perhaps, rather, by meeting the needs of those that God has called us to directly care for, in our families or through household, we encourage others through this example. I am encouraged by having seen a family in Alleluia be willing to double in size in order to adopt multiple children in order to be one as a family. I am encouraged by seeing a dear friend choose to love a step-mother who has caused deep heartache for her in order to be holy. I am encouraged to see men and women sacrifice to work at our school and do it while owing no man. I am encouraged when mothers are willing to fight the battle of modesty with their daughters in order to allow us to be an alternate society. I am encouraged to see fathers prioritize spending time to build relationships with their sons in order to raise up shepherds. We encourage one another by living out the life that God has given us and doing it through action.

Encouragement through giving is reciprocal. Gandhi teaches that one

Acts of Encouragement

One of our original signers of the Covenant, Bill Beatty, lies covered in get well wishes from Alleluia’s second graders. Bill is in Maryland battling a lung condition. Please keep him in your prayers.
Encouragement

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should “find yourself in the service of others.” “For it is in giving that we receive,” is the same message from Francis of Assisi. Perhaps this is the most beneficial purpose of community life, in that there are always opportunities to serve. Words of encouragement can certainly be a way that we give to others as well. And as Mother Teresa is famous for saying, “It is not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.” Simple actions of love spread encouragement. Encouragement grounded in love, executed in simplicity, is profound. And the real call to community is not one to achieve great things, as we know from Jean Vanier. In Community and Growth he tells us that “A community is only being created when its members accept that they are not going to achieve great things, that they are not going to be heroes, but simply live each day with new hope, like children, in wonderment as the sun rises and in thankfulness as it sets.” If we choose to each live our lives in the center of God’s will for us, we will all be encouraged by the culminating effect.

As Corrie Ten Boom says, “Trying to do the Lord’s work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting and tedious of all work. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you.” And we are filled with the Holy Spirit through prayer. Then, real encouragement flows from us because others are able to experience the Holy Spirit operating in our lives. He is the one that encourages; not us. It is Him working through us. Just as if we find ourselves in need of encouragement, we should seek Him not others for affirmation. For He tells us we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) and to not be afraid. “For I am with you. Do not be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

Bishop Hartmayer recently asked us to submit an article on the development of the Alleluia School of Spiritual Direction. Reflecting on the last two years, it seems that the Holy Spirit has really moved. The school began in June, 2015 as an answer to the critical need in the church for competent spiritual directors. God is touching many Christians and calling them into a deeper friendship with Him. Our pastors are filling the need for directing those who come to them with a need for help in their walk with Jesus, but they cannot possibly fill all the needs for direction that present themselves to them. As a result, many schools have sprung up around the country to train laity and clergy alike in spiritual direction.

The Alleluia Community, seeing this need, decided to serve the church by beginning the Alleluia School of Spiritual Direction. The community serves as hosts for the students coming from out of town, prepares and serves three meals a day and serves as intercessors for the students during the school. This grand “orchestra of service” plays a healing and glorious balm of sustaining love that covers each person involved in the school. The students’ lives are deepened and healed. It is this great outpouring of loving service and prayer that makes the Alleluia School of Spiritual Direction such a rich and moving experience. Without the community members’ love, this school would not be effective. Students returning for the second and third sessions speak of the school and the Community becoming like family to them.

In the last article, we referred to the school as a spiritual cruise ship. It appears it is truer to Fr. Brett Brannen’s description—a spiritual boot camp. The students sign on for not so much a transfer of information but instead, a transformation. The intent of the school is to train people to be able to walk with others on their journey to the Father’s heart. Because it is impossible to give to others what you don’t have, it is imperative that people desiring to mentor others, have a strong prayer life. It emphasizes growth in personal holiness and the schedule includes 2-3 hours of prayer each day.

The school has three sessions. One of the sessions is devoted to Prayer, another to Virtue and another to Healing. An understanding of prayer and how to help others in deepening their prayer lives is the

Alleluia School of Spiritual Direction

By Bev Firmin

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Elders’ Corner


For some years now, the Elders have been in contact with Fr. Peter Hocken and Johannes Fichtenbauer of Vienna, Austria, about a group of communities called the European Network of Communities. They are several dozen communities (many of which grew out of Youth With a Mission) and they are Catholic, Ecumenical and Protestant communities. Johannes is the President of this network.

It has actually been since around 2004 that we have talked about establishing some kind of youth exchange. This will become a reality this summer when eight young people representing Alleluia Community will be traveling to Poland, Slovakia and Austria for three weeks.

These young people include Rachel Visintainer, Shayna Eyrich, Matthew Eyrich, Tim Dolin, Kevin Hatfield, Joshua Boudreaux and Ryan Boudreaux (from Louisiana) and Conor Fox (Katharine Almester’s cousin). This will be an amazing trip for them.

They need all our prayers. The first prayer need is that they can get an inexpensive round trip flight. Also pray that God will use this adventure to further His Kingdom. If any of you are so led to donate toward their trip, they would no doubt be very appreciative.

God Bless.... The Elders

Meet the Ott Support Group

By Rose Dominey

The Ott Support Group consists of support group head Ross Ott and his wife, Jennifer, and their four children, Tom and Chrisje Molitor and their four children, and Steven and Rose Dominey and their two children. In 2015, our support group was formed in answer to a desire placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Each of the members that are now in the support group felt a calling to form a new support group that was smaller in size and would lead to more intimacy and growth. The goal was for us to pursue community on a more active level and to use the closeness of the relationships to call each other on to growth on a more regular basis.

Although there are a lot of children in our support group, because of our small size, we are still able to be flexible enough to meet 1-2 time a week while maintaining peace within our family schedules. Although we don’t always follow our schedule perfectly, our goal every month is to have an adult meeting, a service project that we do with children, a men’s meeting, and a women’s meeting. All other time spent together is used for growing relationships in a more personal way (such as just “hanging out” in K-Block, letting the kids spend time together, or even running an errand for each other). Due to the small size of our support group, it increases our accountability to meetings and our ability to accommodate schedules.

The fruit that each member in our support group has felt is truly a work of the Holy Spirit. Although there is a wide array of personalities in our support group, God has used our diversity and close relationships to call each other on personally and regularly. Whether it is encouraging someone to schedule ministry for a past wound, or praying over each

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Spiritual Direction

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focus of the session on Prayer. The session on Virtue includes teachings on the virtues and how to help others grow in the virtues, and teachings on the person of Christ, facets of His person, so we can grow to be like Him. The session on Healing covers wounds, issues we all face in our walk to the Lord and how we can overcome them. It also includes teachings on spiritual warfare and how Satan works against us as we seek to draw near to our God. This session we are just completing was on Prayer. Our presenters were Fr. Tim McKeown teaching on different types of prayer, Pastor Tommy Meador of Northwood Baptist Church, North Charleston, SC, teaching on the Our Father, and Bev Firmin teaching on the Discernment of Spirits.

The school is open to any baptized Christian who feels called by the Lord to learn the skills necessary to accompany others in their spiritual walk. We would encourage any community member who discerns a call to develop these skills to call Mike or Bev Firmin. The students must complete three two-week sessions on Prayer, Healing and Virtue, make a directed silent retreat of eight days. They also complete a Practicum in which they guide a person through 16 weeks of prayer toward a deeper relationship with Jesus. They use a scriptural format and meet once a week during the 16 weeks with their directee. The Alleluia School of Spiritual Direction meets twice a year, in January and June.

Ott Support Group Small and Close

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other for problems that arise—big or small. We have not only found ourselves able to grow more personally, but we have also grown in our love for Alleluia. Alleluia is no longer a “big group of people.” but it is filled with more genuine and real relationships that have helped us to grow closer to Christ. The more we build these relationships, the more we feel committed to those in the body because we experience these relationships regularly and we know they are real! Our support group has also been able to invite guests and reach out to others who may be considering community, and people are able to visit without being intimidated by a large group.

The Holy Spirit took a group of people who hardly knew each other, and made us a group of individuals that are passionate about our relationship with each other, with the Lord, and with Alleluia. Our support group is now praying to the Holy Spirit about the direction it will go since the Molitors will be moving for medical residency in June, and the Otts will be moving out to Dearing this summer. Whether the Lord wants to add more families or do something new, we are waiting to see!

We will graduate our first class in June of 2017 and are accepting applications now. Students can begin the process at any time in January or June sessions. We currently have openings for the June session this year. Our students come from as far away as Wisconsin, Missouri, Louisiana and Kansas. We currently have missionaries attending who are stationed in India, the Philippines, and Taiwan. The Family Missions Company regularly sends us missionaries to be trained to minister more effectively among the missionaries themselves and among those they serve. Students come from many areas of Georgia, from our diocese as well as the Atlanta diocese. The Augusta pastors have been very supportive. Our school is held at St. Joseph’s Parish in Augusta. The parish has been very welcoming and loving to the students. Bishop Hartmayer has written to all the clergy of the diocese personally endorsing the Alleluia School of Spiritual Direction and pointing out that having trained spiritual directors available will greatly enrich the people of the diocese.

Anyone interested in applying, or to obtain a brochure or more information, is encouraged to consult the website at www.alleluiassd.com or email the co-directors at mjfirmin@gmail.com or bevfirmin@gmail.com.

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