

GOD’S HIDDEN PEOPLE

A Catholic Sister’s Journey with Transgender People¹

On the tip of your tongue is a burning coal and under the coal a story.

Tell it and go up in flames. For the light of the world.

*(Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm*)*

This story springs from both the privilege of knowing and loving transgender people, and from deep sorrow that many of my transgender friends are forced to remain hidden. I grieve that much of their suffering has come from the Catholic Church itself, which I also love and in whose service I have spent my life. After all these years guarding this story, now seems to be the right time to share it, at least in part, so that their lives may come into the light. I raise my timid voice in praise of and salutation to transgender persons throughout our society and in our churches.

A letter to the leader of my congregation: “...As my ability to speak decreases because of my degenerative jaw condition, I feel a greater urgency to give witness to the lives of people who are at best rendered invisible, and at worst considered a danger to society. I have cried a river and prayed a lifetime about when to speak and when to be silent. When is silence prudent and when is it simply cowardice? I’ve often been haunted by the plea of our sister Catherine of Siena, ‘Speak the truth as though you had a million voices; it is silence that kills the world.’ My transgender sisters and brothers lose their families, friends, homes, jobs and too many times their very lives, and yet I basically remain silent in significant ways. It has taken a heavy toll on my soul.”

Meeting the Marginal

¹ In this account the author uses the pseudonym of Sister Monica in order to protect the anonymity of those with whom she is associated in this sensitive ministry.

There are lesbian and gay members in my family and I have had gay friends all my life. I've been richly blessed by their friendship and deeply pained by the way they are often treated. At some point—for reasons I cannot explain – I felt called to a ministry with this group.

My unlikely journey began on a weekday morning in 1996. As Sister Frances and I were arriving at our parish church we saw a couple of women out by the busy highway waiting for business. She parked the car, sat for a minute and said, “If ever I do a ministry not sponsored by the Church I'd like to minister to prostitutes.” And I replied, “If ever I do a ministry not sponsored by the Church I'd like to minister to lesbian and gay people.” She immediately responded, “I'm not at all surprised that you say that.” I was totally taken aback by her comment because this was the first time that desire had been clear enough to me to say out loud. And she wasn't surprised. Life went on as I continued my current ministry. Yet the awareness of a new call deepened and I often brought it to God in prayer.

In 1998, I concluded my term as vocation director for our congregation. After much reflection and prayer I spoke with the leadership of my community about my strong desire to begin a ministry to those in the larger community who are lesbian, gay and bisexual. And I voiced a concern to the leaders of our congregation: “You know, if I start this ministry it will not make us the bishop's favorite people.” And one of our leaders replied, “When we live the gospel we sometimes get in trouble.” I well understood, however, that I was expected to stay under the radar as much as possible. With that sober reality check I was sent forth into ministry to some of the most marginalized members of society.

I did not know any gay or lesbian people in the city where I lived, so I decided the best place to start would be PFLAG meetings. *Parents, Families and*

Friends of Lesbians and Gays is an international organization with chapters in many cities. Fortunately, the local chapter was very active. This was a logical place for me to begin meeting people.

I felt welcomed and comfortable in this group. At the third meeting I attended a new woman was present. The members knew her well, and greeted her warmly. She was a male to female transsexual. A transsexual! I had never heard of people like this, but I immediately felt drawn to her.

I later asked the person who had facilitated the meeting if I might talk with this woman, whose name I learned was Courtney Sharp. Soon after, Courtney contacted me by telephone. I explained that I was just beginning a ministry among those who are lesbian or gay. However, I did not know *anything* about transsexuals. Would she be willing to tell me her story, so I could better understand and be a support and ally to her and others? I remember being amazed to hear myself speak with such confidence. I knew nothing! How could I be so sure I wanted to be an ally? But I *was* sure, and not for one moment in all these years has that sense of assurance ever changed.

Soon after, Courtney and I met at my home. Courtney is a quiet, gentle woman, so I listened very attentively as she shared her story. “Actually, I was surprised that the gender-correcting surgery made such a difference to me,” Courtney revealed. “I hadn’t expected to feel so whole, so complete. I knew I needed to take this step, but I hadn’t realized how significant that decision would be for me.”

I found myself replying to her, “I’m not surprised at all that the surgery would affect you that profoundly.” I continued, “We cannot know who we are without our body. We cannot be who God wants us to be without our body. It is

hard for me to begin to imagine how difficult it must be for those of you who are transsexual to feel that your body and brain don't match."

I still remember the look on Courtney's face as I spoke. She sat still for a moment, just looking at me. Then she pointed her finger at me and said, "You get this. You really do get it. Most people don't. We need people like you because this is a spiritual journey and there are very few experienced spiritual companions who are willing to walk with us."

So there it was. A new call from God had been addressed to me, delivered by Courtney. I soon learned that she was a leader in the transgender community. In her own quiet way she was an effective activist, locally and nationally. She began to tell others that there was a trans friendly Catholic sister in town and encouraged them to contact me. Word got around that I could be a trusted friend. I was fifty-six years old and had been a sister thirty-eight years. I did not know it then, but the most amazing, incredible, graced part of my life was beginning.

Responding to a Call

In 2001 I began to have significant pain in the muscles of my face, a discomfort that seemed to be most affected by eating and talking. Not until 2004 was it properly diagnosed as severe degenerative arthritis of the jaw. The bone structure of my face is significantly compromised, which puts great stress on the muscles in my face. The pain I have is primarily from these traumatized and unstable muscles. Surgery was not an option and I was told that this condition would never improve and could very possibly continue to worsen. This gradual degeneration has continued over the years, reshaping my life.

In the fall of 2001 I made a three week pilgrimage with sisters from across

the US; we visited Spain, France and Italy. This puzzling pain was particularly acute during that time. Gradually it became apparent to my traveling companions that I was not feeling well.

When we reached the Marian shrine at Lourdes, I had little interest in visiting the sites. My face was hurting terribly; all I wanted to do was stay in my room and be alone. But finally I decided to visit the site of the shrine, aware that this would surely be my only opportunity for this experience.

A very excited group of our sisters, returning from the baths at the shrine, insisted that I make this visit myself. They urged this as part of an effort to heal my painful jaw. As I approached, I saw the directive that was posted in several languages: “Before entering the bath make your intention.” Intention? To this point I had no intention of even being there. Did God have some intention that I didn’t know about? I began to wonder, why am I here? What is my intention? Am I looking for healing for the pain in my face? I recalled that several of our sisters were battling cancer. Perhaps I was at the shrine on their behalf.

Then, quite suddenly, the realization came: I am here for my transgender people. *That* was my reason for being at this place of miracles. I began to weep as I prayed, “O God, You know the depth of their suffering. Because their own sense of themselves does not match the body they were born with, they are misunderstood, judged, and rejected. They often lose everything in life that is good and precious to them. Please accept the offering of my body for their healing. Let these waters that wash over me be for their healing and wholeness.”

My facial pain was not miraculously cured, as some of my sister companions may have hoped. But I knew God had done something in me and to me for my trans people. This confirmation of my vocation to minister in the transgender

community was the most powerful experience of the entire pilgrimage. For all the years that have followed, I continue to unite my suffering with theirs. It has been precisely in my deepening surrender to the pain of my own body--and to the struggles and pain of this marginal and precious group of people-- that God has shown me in most amazing ways who I am and who God is.

Retreats

From the outset, I felt deeply that my call from God has two dimensions. One is to be a companion to those who are broken and burdened, reflecting to them that they are precious and loved by God. The second is to be an advocate on their behalf and a witness to their lives.

First, as a trained spiritual director, I was professionally prepared to companion transgender people in their spiritual journey. I now made myself available to offer them the spiritual support of a directed retreat in the safe setting of the home that I shared with Sister Frances. In a more traditional Catholic retreat experience, a group gathers for prayer and spiritual instruction from a single retreat guide. The directed retreat, on the other hand, offers a few days of prayer, guided by a one-to-one relationship with the director. The goal is to honor one's unique and personal God-quest.

Many transgender people have experienced rejection from both religious leaders and members of the faith community. Not surprisingly, they have come to believe that they cannot be true to themselves *and* be true to God. But there is no way we can pray, or be in communion with God, except in the truth of who we are. We cannot hide from God -- or from ourselves -- and grow spiritually. We can be true to God only when we are honest with ourselves and live with as much integrity as we can. This is the mantra that I have repeated many times to the trans

people in my care (and to many others as well): It is when we are striving to be the person God made us to be that we give God glory and praise.

So our home became a welcoming place offering solace, rest and prayer. In addition to several periods of prayer during the day, the general format of a directed retreat includes a meeting of the retreatant with a spiritual director every day. This format proved unrealistic for my ministry with transgender people. A fundamental issue for most of them is the extent to which they have had to hide so much of their lives--even from those to whom they are closest. During this retreat time they are able to speak openly with someone who is an experienced and accepting spiritual guide, *and* who understands their transgender reality. In these directed retreats, therefore, I often met with a retreatant as frequently as three hours each day. My intent was to encourage each person to experience the whole of life—fears, struggles, desires and hopes—as embraced by the gentle and faithful love of God.

In July, 2002 I had the opportunity to offer a preached retreat to transgender persons in Philadelphia. The theme of the retreat was *Claiming Life through Suffering*. For many transgender people, deep pain and confusion are daily companions. These are accompanied by a conviction that, in their very being as transsexuals, they are unacceptable to God. And their suffering comes as proof of God's displeasure. My assumption was that those transgender people who were willing to join this retreat experience were persons who believed in God and who desired for God to be with them in the heart of their struggle. But they felt battered at every turn. I wanted to reassure them that they are not being punished by God. Rather, God journeys with them and suffers with them. And while those who are transgender experience more than their share of pain and loss, in fact suffering is common to all human beings. And for all of us -- as human beings and as people

of faith -- suffering can be the path to wisdom, compassion, courage, and maturity. I wanted to help them understand that suffering is often the door way into richer life.

So in the retreat we reflected together on the Paschal Mystery – the life, suffering and death of Jesus. For Jesus and for all of us, life comes through death—our daily willingness to die to what is not of God. Jesus gave many examples of reality turned on its head—if you want to be first you will be last; to save your life you must lose it; the seed that does not fall into the ground and die, does not sprout into new life. Our American culture tells us to avoid suffering at all costs, but Jesus proclaims that suffering can be the way into deeper life.

Transgender Awareness Evenings

The second dimension of my call from God is to be an advocate for this invisible community of God’s people and to help other people understand them. Again Courtney was instrumental. At her urging I had organized a gathering of open-minded people to dialogue with her and two of her transgender friends.

Over the next four years, encouraged by the success of that first evening, I facilitated several of these sessions, naming each a Transgender Awareness Evening. I would invite people whom I knew to have an open mind and heart. Many of the participants were religious sisters, members of several local congregations. I was eager to include priests among the participants, to give them the opportunity to meet the trans people among whom I ministered. My hope was that this contact would help them better understand the experience of transgender persons, and thus be better able to minister to them with compassion and spiritual insight. Regretfully, few of the priests who were invited actually joined these

evening discussions.

As the trans awareness sessions evolved, a panel would characteristically include male to female transsexuals, female to male transsexuals, the spouse of a transsexual male to female who remained in their marriage, and the mother of a female to male transsexual. A regular format was established: sharing of personal stories by the panelists, then opportunity for questions and discussion with those in attendance, followed by a good bit of time for informal conversation. Most, but not all, who joined these sessions were Catholic. In addition to a number of Catholic sisters, there were many other people eager to understand the transgender experience. At the start of each session I would encourage those present to “walk in the shoes” of the transgender speakers, at least for this evening. I urged them to be present to the transgender people before them, without making judgments. Many in attendance left with a greater appreciation of these children of God about whom they previously knew nothing. They had allowed the boundaries of their heart to be stretched.

Dawn’s Story

Courtney’s good friend Dawn was the first and most significant transgender person I companioned because it was through my interaction with her that I recognized the gift God had given me to minister in the transgender community. Though she did not live in the same city, over the course of a year we spoke almost every day.

Dawn had grown up in a devout Catholic family, a little boy who was convinced he was a girl. She describes the turmoil experienced: “As a small boy I insisted on playing with girls at school recess. The parish priest was called to make things clear. ‘You must play with the other boys. That is how you will learn

to be the man God wants you to be.’ When I continued to protest, the priest added, ‘it is sinful to not do what God wants us to. God made you a boy and you must be a boy. You must put away these sinful thoughts and pray that God gives you the strength to obey his will for you. If you don’t, you will go to hell.’ The priest then moved out from behind the desk and walked toward me, exposing the wooden paddle he often used to reinforce his commands. ‘I’m going to help you remember this lesson, help you understand the pain of disobeying God’s will.’” Looking back, Dawn recalls, “I began to pray the rosary each night asking Mary to help me feel happy that I was born a boy. But still in my heart, I really hoped I would wake up a girl. But all the prayer did not help. I failed at being the boy I supposed to be.”

For the next decades this boy’s coping mechanism was to throw himself into every kind of “manly” behavior. He became a successful athlete in high school, went on to the Air Force Academy, married his high school sweetheart, and earned a six figure salary as an environmental engineer with a prominent firm.

But eventually this façade came crashing down. The lie was just too heavy to sustain. The pretense was taking too much effort and was deadening her spirit. After more than one suicide attempt, Dawn and her wife separated. She sank into a deep depression, and in addition to losing her family, she lost her job. She could no longer pretend to be the man she wasn’t. But neither could she fathom how to become the woman she knew herself to be.

At the heart and core of her desperation was the fear of God’s response to her dilemma. If she did not transition to the female gender that her heart cherished, Dawn knew she would eventually commit suicide. But the Church taught that suicide was a mortal sin. Yet if she *did* undertake gender transition that too would

send her to hell. When we first met, she spoke at length of the shame and rejection she felt by God. After several hours I gently said to her, “I want to sing you a song. Hear it as God speaking to you.” Holding her hands I sang a song by Libby Roderick.

How could anyone ever tell you you were anything less than beautiful? How could anyone ever tell you you were less than whole? How could anyone fail to notice that your loving is a miracle? How deeply you're connected to my soul.

This was the first time that someone Dawn considered a representative of the Church had affirmed her rather than condemn her.

Now these many years later, Dawn continues to be someone I pray for constantly. While she has found some measure of peace, she is still plagued by depression. My most searing memory is the day Dawn called to say goodbye. She wanted to thank me for my help, but announced she could no longer go on. There was no way she could feel pleasing to God. She was going to bow out of this life. I pleaded with her to come first to visit me. After much conversation and many tears, she again determined to embrace life as she continues her search. The last time we were together I noticed a lovely discreet tattoo of a lotus flower on Dawn's wrist. She had the tattoo etched over the scar left by a suicide attempt many years ago. Now when she notices this evidence of her past choice for death, she also recognizes her daily choice for life. She is moving on with her life and has a hard won PhD in Instructional Design and teaches online courses in statistics and qualitative analysis.

Apprenticeship

In the early years my learning curve was steep. My best teachers were the transgender people themselves, those who increasingly turned to me for guidance

and support in their struggles. In addition, in a wonderful expression of trust, I was welcomed as a member of a few carefully monitored, transgender-only online chat groups. Being part of these intimate conversations, as trans women and men braved the mine fields of transition, provided an invaluable education. I also steeped myself in the available literature from medical and psychological sources. In God's providence, an extraordinary opportunity arose. In 2001 the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association Conference was convened in a nearby location, permitting my participation. This association, now identified as the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), is a highly respected international resource for those serving the transgender community. As I listened to the presenters, I struggled to absorb the data presented in dense professional papers. I felt so privileged to learn from the experts—surgeons, lawyers, psychologists, social workers—drawn from across the world. I was hoping there would be an opportunity to introduce myself to this gathering, since it seemed likely that I was the only religious professional in attendance.

This opportunity came when the parents of a transgender woman from the United Kingdom described a program in their country that included a panel of service providers. I went to the microphone, announced my name, and asked if any religious professional had been part of this panel. With great passion, the speaker responded that the program planners had failed to find a religious leader who was willing to participate. I took a deep breath and announced: "I am a Catholic sister, myself fairly new in this ministry. I am here because I have much to learn in order to be a responsible minister to God's misunderstood and rejected transgender people. It is a great privilege for me to companion them on their journey. I want to apologize to those of you who have been hurt by the Catholic Church. I do not ever want to hurt you. I want to be a reflection to you of your

beauty and goodness.” By this time tears were streaming down my face and I could see others near me who were also moved to tears. When I finished, the approximately four hundred people in the room gave me a standing ovation!

It was at this conference that I met Maureen Osborne and Michele Angelo, both psychologists who are recognized as experts in psychotherapy with transgender people. Early on they became my mentors and supporters, bringing me to Philadelphia to minister from a spiritual perspective to their transgender clients. We have remained friends all these years.

The transgender conference that I most regularly attended was sponsored by the International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE). The format was typical of a national conference: a few plenary addresses, along with many break-out sessions, scheduled over the course of three days. The break-out sessions covered practically every conceivable topic of interest to transgender people. But there had been, to this time, few religious professional participants and minimal sessions on spirituality. At several of these conferences I have offered sessions on spiritual issues in transitioning.

My most powerful experience at an IFGE conference came as I stood in the lobby waiting for one of my transgender friends. Several participants were milling around and walking through the area. Some were familiar to me from previous years, now laughing and talking with their friends. Many of them greeted me warmly as they walked by. Some were clearly at this conference for the first time, looking shy and uncomfortable in their clothes and in their own skin. I always tried to reach out those who seemed ill at ease at the gathering. Some women were strikingly beautiful; no one would have suspected they had ever lived as a man. Some did not pass well; my heart went out especially to them. As I stood in this

place, looking at this amazing spectrum of humanity, I remember being moved by such a strong feeling of love for this community. I recognized how comfortable I was with them. I realized how privileged I was to know them and be part of their lives. And I felt the sacred obligation to reverence the face of God in each of them, to love and support them in their tremendous struggle, and to reflect their own goodness and beauty as God sees them when they look into my face. I can still recall this hotel lobby and the grace of God's love that flooded my heart.

Sara's Story

Sara, formerly David Buechner, is an international concert pianist who teaches piano and chamber music at the University of British Columbia while also giving concerts, presenting lectures and master classes worldwide. She is also Catholic. We learned of each other through mutual friends in 2003 and began corresponding the following year. Her professional career plummeted after she transitioned in 1998. It takes immense inner courage for people to transition but Sara's international reputation brought that struggle to an entirely new level. Thanks in large part to her own perseverance and the assertiveness of her agent, by the time I met Sara she was again performing before international audiences. She acknowledged that her courage to continue the struggle to be true to who she knew she was came, in part, from the pastoral support of an affirming priest and a welcoming Catholic faith community.

Sara wrote in the *New York Times*,

“In 1975, when I was a teenager, Richard Raskind — formerly the Yale men's tennis captain and a lieutenant commander in the Navy — had surgery to become Renée Richards. It was front-page news in *The Baltimore Sun*. For the first time, I understood that I was not alone. But I said nothing;

in those days I would have been taken to a psychiatric ward to be straightened out.

In an earlier historical time I might have remained hidden. But I am fortunate to have grown up as part of a generation in which so many — black people, women, gays — fought and gained so much. Their bravery and integrity inspired me.

In 2003, the University of British Columbia in Vancouver hired me for a piano professorship and in 2008 I earned tenure. After moving, I was able to marry the Japanese woman who'd been my longtime partner in a marriage ceremony before 125 family and friends.

I see signs of progress in the United States; some American insurers have recently begun to cover transgender surgery. We have emerged in numbers at last, and are no longer invisible, discardable or silent. We clamor for our civil rights and are gaining respect and understanding. My generation has done its reading, listening, learning. Times are changing.” (“An Evolving Country Begins to Accept Sara, Once David” *The New York Times*, Feb. 3, 2013)

In 2007 Sara seized the opportunity to perform a concert near the city where I was living at the time. At last we met face to face. Though she was regaining her reputation as a professional pianist, she still faced experiences of prejudice and unfair treatment. She has a gentle sensitivity to matters of the spirit, a deep longing for God, and a desire to forgive and allow her suffering to lead her to compassion. As those who are spiritual guides know, it is a humbling privilege to be allowed into the most sacred places of a person's life with God. That first visit deepened our connection and Sara returned to my area two years later, as a little detour connected to her California concert schedule.

She visited me again in 2012, thanks to a scheduled concert in a nearby city. Since I was by then living near many sisters in my community, she generously

treated us to a concert. She loves to say that playing the piano is her face time with God. Experiencing her music is without a doubt a gift from God.

Troubles with the Church

Though I have spoken primarily of my ministry in the transgender community, during this time I was also ministering among Catholics who are gay and lesbian. In my years of presence within this community I have tried to be a bridge between them and the churches, where they have often experienced painful rejection. I constantly remind them that in God's eyes they are precious and loved, for I believe it is only when we know we are loved that we have the courage to live with integrity.

The bishop of the city where I lived became aware that I offered spiritual direction and retreats to members of the lesbian and gay community. At the bishop's request I met with the director of pastoral services, whose responsibility it was to ensure that I properly represented Church teaching in this delicate ministry. His manner was gentle as he asked, in a variety of ways, how I responded to lesbian and gay people who came to me for spiritual direction. I answered each time that my role as a spiritual director is to be a guide and companion in their own desire to be faithful to God as best they can. My goal is to guide them more deeply into the heart of God, not to impose my judgment on them. Clearly, this was not the response he was seeking. Next he inquired about the presentations I offer within the gay community. My response was that I assure lesbian and gay people that they are precious and loved by God. I speak about the ways they can deepen and nourish their relationship with God by prayer and living the virtues in their lives. I encourage them, and help them find ways to be supported by other people of faith.

Throughout this session I was aware that my answers did not satisfy him. I had not instructed lesbian and gay people that a homosexual orientation is objectively disordered and that gay sex is intrinsically evil. Since this represents the current teaching of the Church, this is what I am expected to announce and affirm in my presentations. But in conscience I cannot do so, because I do not believe this to be true. Leaving this meeting, I was shell-shocked and exhausted. I knew I would soon be called in for an appointment with the bishop.

A few days later the bishop contacted the leader of my religious congregation, indicating his desire for a meeting with her that would include the director of pastoral services with whom I had spoken, and the vicar for religious for the diocese (who I knew to be very supportive of my ministry) and myself. During the few weeks I had to prepare for this meeting, I prayed daily for wisdom and courage. I asked God for the grace to speak my truth clearly and calmly.

The “conversation” with the bishop was, as expected, a delicate dance. As the other two women in the room sat quietly and listened, the two men talked *at* me more than *with* me. The bishop was particularly focused on correcting my refusal to accept the judgment that homosexual people are committing serious sin by being sexually active. In his mind, this is what the church teaches and therefore this is what I am bound to communicate to those in my ministerial care. As delicately as I could, I continued to state that my training in spiritual direction insisted that my role was not to enforce any moral position but to companion people in their relationship with God. After a few go-rounds in this exchange, the bishop stated very emphatically that I was wrong and he was right. He was also intent to correct my vocabulary. In official statements, the church uses the term “homosexual,” since it believes the words “gay” and “lesbian” are generally understood to be activist terms, used by those who support and promote this deviant lifestyle. He

impressed upon me several times that God's will is one and the same with the current teaching of the Catholic Church. Why, he wondered, did I find this basic concept so difficult to grasp?

By this time, I knew that at the end of the meeting the bishop would ask me directly if I could agree to what he required of me. That was twofold: First, I must explicitly state the teaching of the Church on homosexuality—that a homosexual orientation is objectively disordered and that all homosexual sex is intrinsically evil. Second, I must explicitly state my personal assent to this teaching. I desperately needed to be able to say “yes” honestly. Since that day I have tried many times—unsuccessfully—to recall the precise wording of the question the bishop put to me. But I distinctly remember thinking: “Thank you, God, I can agree to this statement according to my understanding of it.” And so I readily replied, “Yes, Bishop, I can do that.”

Once the initial sense of relief passed, I had to deal with my own deep disappointment. How sad it is that our religious leaders often find themselves locked in a rigid doctrinal system that is at odds with the lives of those in their care. I believed then, and still do, that the bishop was acting with integrity, conscious of his responsibility as bishop. That is all that can be expected of any of us. However my sadness and regret continue.

This meeting was without a doubt one of the most difficult encounters of my life. Yet after much prayer and reflection, a powerful grace emerged. Eventually I was able to embrace this experience as a gift, allowing me to enter more deeply into the pain of those I serve. To be misunderstood and therefore judged wrongly, to be dismissed and demeaned, to be treated as a lesser human being—members of

the transgender community regularly endure this abuse, and worse. The grace of this realization deepens in me with each passing year.

Vatican Document

In January 2003 I turned on my computer to find, much to my surprise, email messages from my trans friends across the country. Each carried the heading “the Vatican and sex-change”. I took a deep breath, hoping this did not refer to a statement I feared was being promulgated. In my ministry, I am often asked what the church has said about transsexuals. To this point I was always able to respond that the Catholic Church had not yet made any official statement. And I had earnestly hoped that church officials would not speak, until there had been a serious dialogue with members of the medical community as well as transgender people themselves.

But this day my hope was dashed. The article available on the internet stated that a document concerning transsexuals had just appeared. The article’s title, “Vatican Says Sex Change Operation Does Not Change A Person’s Gender,” confirmed my worst fear. According to Catholic News Service, “the Vatican text defines transsexualism as a psychic disorder of those whose genetic makeup and physical characteristics are unambiguously of one sex but who feel that they belong to the opposite sex.” What followed in the text was predictable, but so sad.

Reportedly, the Vatican document insists that because theirs is a condition that indicates mental instability, transsexuals may not marry, may not be ordained or enter religious life. If any transsexual is found to be already in the priesthood, he may continue to function as a priest-- but only privately and if this does not cause scandal. If vowed religious are discovered to be transsexual, they are to be dismissed from the community. And although the official birth certificate may be

changed to reflect the changed sex status, baptism records must not be changed because the surgery is superficial and external and thus does not change the personality.

Asked by my transgender friends to respond to this event, I considered several approaches. First, the article was written by a canon lawyer and addressed primarily to other canon lawyers. Thus the text was not intended to be a pastoral statement addressed directly to transsexual people. Second, the authors were trying to protect the sacredness of the body as the dwelling place of God, and that value is very much worth preserving. Third, the church includes a much more inclusive reality than those in Rome who produce such documents. I encouraged my transgender friends to trust their local experience of Church—all the faithful people who surround us with affection and are trying to understand and support us.

Meeting With a Second Bishop

In 2006 I moved to a new city, where I began again the search for how best to serve the LGBT community. The expected protocol in preparing to provide pastoral ministry in a diocese is to meet first with the bishop, along with the vicar for religious. After the vicar for religious had scheduled this meeting, she reported that the bishop was pleased to learn of my desire to minister in this community. But prior to that initial meeting, this local bishop contacted the bishop in my earlier ministry setting, who identified me as a troublemaker. Before even having met me, this local leader had formed a harsh judgment about me. The vicar for religious alerted me to this development so I was prepared for a difficult meeting. It did not disappoint.

On the basis of a five-minute conversation, with a church leader who himself had met me only once, the new prelate needed no further evidence that I was

unwanted in his diocese. When I informed the leader of my religious congregation about this development, she immediately made an appointment with the previous bishop to clarify the situation. To his credit, the earlier bishop acknowledged that he had misrepresented me to my new bishop. Subsequently -- provided with a letter of clarification from the former bishop, the testimony of the leader of my religious congregation, and reports from my professional references -- the new bishop was satisfied that I was not a troublemaker. In fact, he soon recognized that I was making a valuable contribution to the life of the church through my various involvements. He was grateful for what he understood to be my quiet ministry with the lesbian and gay community.

Actually, my ministry was focused among the transgender community almost immediately. To my surprise and delight, I discovered a large and well organized transgender community and soon began attending the three monthly meetings of various transgender groups—confident that God had a hand in transplanting me in this new location.

At my initial meeting with each of the transgender groups, I introduced myself, explaining that I had been ministering in the trans community since 1999. After each of these initial meetings, to my amazement, someone who had been in attendance contacted me with an interest in further conversation. I recognized this response as a strong confirmation that I was where God wanted me to be. At this initial stage, I had no clear plan for how I would be present to members of the trans community. But I was confident that next steps would gradually become clearer.

The Pope's Christmas Speech

In 2008 another Catholic Church document appeared, to the distress of the transgender community. A few days before Christmas I received several email

messages raising questions about the Pope's Christmas address to the Curia. In this statement, as the news headlines reported, "Pope Benedict XVI has denounced gender theory, warning that it blurs the distinction between male and female and could thus lead to the 'self-destruction' of the human race." I read carefully through the full text of the Pope's statement, to verify whether that lead statement was an accurate reflection of the Pope's address. Indeed, it was. In several long paragraphs Benedict made it clear that anyone who challenges or manipulates the "natural order" of man and woman is a danger to the whole human race.

The transgender man who first alerted me to the Pope's message was a Catholic who had been struggling to stay in the Church. His only comment was "It doesn't get any better, does it? I almost feel the Church door slamming in my face." In the course of the many years I had been in ministry with the transgender community, I had never undertaken any possibly controversial action without first checking with the leader of my religious congregation. But this time I did not hesitate. Immediately I sent an email to the bishop.

Dear Bishop,

I well understand that this issue is not at the top of your priority list, but it's at the top of mine. I have ministered in the transgender community for the past ten years (more so than with gay/lesbians, I might add) and seeing this makes it impossible for me not to speak to you. I don't have any specific expectation of what you will or could do with this information, but before God I am morally bound to say something. The person responding to this news article has been trying mightily to remain an active Catholic, but he's now at the point of feeling so totally rejected by the hierarchy that I don't have much hope he will remain with us.

There are millions of people who are medically determined to be not clearly male or female at birth, and nor are they clearly male or female throughout their lives. They are intersex people and there are about thirty intersex conditions which are very complex.

The group of transgender people I know best are transsexuals. I have been privileged to companion at least 200 transgender people in their spiritual journey toward wholeness and faithfulness to God. They are every bit as holy as you or I and do not deserve the kind of condemnation they get from the Catholic hierarchy.

I would be happy to talk with you about this, if you wish. Better yet, I'd love for you to meet some of these transgender people in my home. I pray for you, Bishop, and thank God for your generous, pastoral presence to most of the people of this diocese.

Peace, Sister Monica

I never received a response from the bishop. I understood that, by his silence, he was choosing to allow me to minister to those who needed me.

James's Story

James contacted me the day after my first support group meeting with the transmen. He was in his mid thirties and had transitioned over a decade earlier. Of somewhat small height, James is balding with a beard and looks very much a man. He was an occasional participant at these trans meetings, and that night he decided to attend.

James identified as male early in his life but had no vocabulary for it. He recalls: "I didn't find the name for what I was until I went to college and spent a Saturday researching in the library. That's when I found the word transsexual. While it was great to be able to finally name "it" I was also terrified. There was so much stigma and pain to anticipate. There were moments in my later teenage years and early twenties when I was suicidal. My identity was trapped in the eyes of my beholders; my reactions dictated in that split second whether they decided if I was male or female."

When I met him many years later there were two areas of his life as a

transgender person in which he still struggled. One was his Catholic identity and the other was his hidden life as a transgender person. Like many other trans people, his friends often challenged him with the question, “Why do you stay in a Church that doesn’t want you?” He had never been able to respond in a way that satisfied his questioner or himself. He did not want to leave the Church but felt rejected by official statements of the hierarchy. At his initiation, we started a small Catholic trans group that met monthly at my home, to discuss matters Catholic and trans and to offer each other support.

James did not have negative personal experiences with Catholics and actually had some positive encounters. “My parents were both raised Catholic and I was confirmed as a teenager. After many years of not participating in church life, I returned to the Catholic Church at thirty. When I shared my trans status with priests in confession, it did not go poorly. While I was consistently the ‘first one’ that each priest knew that they’d spoken to, they were all kind, and sent the message of ‘go forth and live.’ I stayed quietly in the shadows.”

With my encouragement James came periodically to my wonderful Catholic parish. The pastoral staff knew of his transgender status and always warmly welcomed him.

For a number of years James had been living comfortably as a man. But he was now beginning to struggle with the fact that he still, to a great extent, kept his previous life secret. He describes it this way: “I lived what trans folks call a ‘stealth’ existence for years. I didn’t tell people of my history. People I met had no reason to suspect I was anything but a ‘normal’ man. Only the friends that stuck with me throughout were aware of the issues I’d faced; only they had the images for what I had been in their memory. About ten years on, I started to realize that I had very few people I could be completely open with, about

‘anything.’ I was censoring myself to others because I didn’t want to tell anyone that I wasn’t ‘fully male’ as that assumption on the part of others was still so validating to me. I had created a new darkness. I have had to confront issues over friendships, stealth, intimacy, and my own sexual orientation that I’d left buried.”

As is the case for many trans people, James had adopted the coping mechanism of staying clear of close relationships—and now he had a lot of catching up to do. In all of this I was friend and spiritual guide to him.

I have known him now for eight years. James is close to his family, has many friends and an excellent job as an engineer with a large company. He has learned a lot through complex relationships, both personal and professional. He has many gifts and talents and enjoys a number of hobbies. He is an activist and speaker both within the transgender community and in the larger community. He has grown in self knowledge and confidence. It has been a joy and privilege to companion him and be counted as one of his friends.

Mentoring

By 2002 I was companioning transgender people from many parts of the United States and beyond, thanks to the internet. When I attended transgender conferences I would hear a familiar refrain, “Are you training other nuns to do what you do? We need more like you!” So I began to inquire of transgender people from various parts of the country: “Are you aware of other sisters doing what I do?” Always, without exception, the answer was “no.” Also, it was not uncommon for me to be told that my name had been mentioned at one or another trans conference. I would always ask, “Did any other sister’s name come up as well?” And again, the answer was always “no”. I had asked the leader of my

congregation to inquire of leaders in other congregations, to learn if there were religious sisters involved in ministry among the transgender community. In every instance, the answer was “no.”

At a national conference of gay and lesbian Catholics in 2007 I met a sister who was eager to learn of my ministry. She had been praying about the possibility of undertaking a ministry within the LGBT community, so our meeting was surely providential. Acknowledging that she knew nothing about transgender people, she asked if she could spend a week with me for a trans immersion experience. I was happy to welcome her.

Several months later, on our first evening together we attended a concert by a well-known local transgender woman. After the performance we lingered awhile for pleasant and easy conversation with some of my trans friends who had been in attendance. Over the course of the week we viewed several videos focusing on the process of gender transition. In addition, I gave her reading material that would provide important background information. I invited a small group of Catholic transgender persons to my home for dinner one evening. We also joined several other trans friends for coffee during the week. By the end of this week she had spoken with male to female transsexuals, female to male transsexuals, cross-dressers and one intersex person. Now exhausted at the end of this full week, she continued to ask questions as she struggled to integrate what she had experienced. Within a year, she had attended several transgender conferences and had begun to companion transgender persons in her own city.

The following year a sister from my congregation approached me, eager for an experience with the transgender community as part of her own discernment about future ministry. Her week unfolded much as had the previous immersion

experience. She, too, was deeply affected by her introduction to the local transgender community. Her goal, she announced, had been to broaden her horizon. And this goal had been richly achieved. As she prepared to depart, she assured me that she would be forever changed by the transgender people she had met. She encouraged me to invite other sisters to this kind of immersion experience.

Her affirmation served to confirm my sense that I should begin preparing other sisters for this ministry. I had been anguishing over this possibility for a few years, never sure that the timing was right—in the face of the risk of being discovered by a bishop who could terminate my ministry. Now I seemed to be moving closer to taking the first concrete steps toward it. It felt wonderful, and I felt no fear.

But in a matter of just two weeks all these plans were put on hold—once again. Just as I was feeling confidence, ready to start training sessions, physical distress intruded once again. I experienced yet another bout of serious facial pain caused by my jaw condition. Now I was finally over my fear of “coming out” in acknowledging my transgender ministry and preparing others to join the effort. But I had to face the fear that I would not be able to follow through on commitments because of my somewhat unpredictable chronic pain. In all the years that I had dreamed about training others, that was as close as I came to that goal. And I now knew that dream would not be realized.

In addition to mentoring these sisters I had the opportunity to mentor some priests. At the beginning of 2010 I was contacted by one of the few transgender persons in the city who was also a practicing Catholic. Having finally told her wife that she was a transsexual, her wife declared that she would speak with their

pastor about this development. I assured her I would try to get an appointment with the pastor before her wife met with him. I was able to see the pastor just a few days later, bringing materials with me to provide him with some background information. He was totally gracious, open, respectful and eager to learn about transgender people so he could minister well to both his transgender parishioner and her wife.

Returning home from that successful meeting, an idea reemerged. I had been only minimally successful in previous attempts to encourage priests to attend the trans awareness sessions I had conducted. Over the years I had heard from transsexuals many incredibly painful stories of ignorance, insensitivity and verbal abuse by priests. And while priests had been one of my target groups in designing these awareness sessions, only very few members of the clergy actually attended. Perhaps, I thought, more might participate in a session designed *only* for priests!

The next day I called several priests whom I knew and trusted, to see what they thought of this idea. All agreed that a number of priests would be open to such a session. I was given the names of several potentially interested priests, and encouraged to pursue these contacts. I began by making telephone calls to explain who I was, the focus of my ministry, and the session I was planning. After these initial telephone calls, I sent each priest a follow-up letter repeating these details. Next I sent them an invitation to the session at my home. This invitation read in part:

If you got a call tomorrow from a transgender person seeking guidance and support, would you feel confident responding to them from an informed position on this subject? The vast majority of pastoral ministers would not.

Please consider attending a two hour session in which you will hear the stories of four people who are transsexual, learn the official position of the church on this

subject and have some time for dialogue with them. I am aware of four Catholic parishes in the city that have a transsexual parishioner.

I have been ministering to transgender people for ten years and have seen the tragic consequences of uninformed religious professionals from many denominations.

Of the thirteen priests and one deacon who had received invitations, seven priests and the deacon were able to participate. In the afternoon session that gathered in February 2010, these ministers went out of their way to be warm and welcoming and supportive of the four Catholic transgender panelists. In fact, the priests were trying too hard! They were so much in “minister mode” that they could not shift gears and allow themselves to admit their ignorance and be instructed by my trans friends. At first somewhat frustrated, I was later encouraged by comments made during the break. At least three of the priest participants came to me and asked, “So what’s the next step after this session?” I heard them say to the panelists, “You are most welcomed to come to my parish. I hope I see you there.” How that warmed my heart. The facial pain that resulted from my speaking during the planning and actual session was well worth it.

Sometimes one is tempted to ask “What difference can one session make? Or one conversation? Or even a few sentences?” But repeatedly I have learned that even a little bit of kindness and respect can relieve years of pain arising from repeated rejection. That afternoon my four trans friends felt heard and cared about. They felt a little more visible in the Catholic Church, and the priests who attended were a little more informed and sensitive.

The third instance of mentoring I will speak of here came in 2011. I was once again struggling with a situation in which the trans community was rendered invisible and there was nothing I could do about it. The Scripture reading for the liturgy of the day was from Exodus and the last sentence of the passage

proclaimed, “God will fight for you. You have only to keep still.” (Exodus 14:14) It became a mantra for me and gave me great comfort and strength. “God, you will take care of them,” I kept saying. “I just need to be still and trust.”

Four months later I received a phone call from James and Evelyn Whitehead, educators and authors who have written about sexuality and spirituality for many years. For decades they have been among the most respected professionals giving a voice to pastoral theology and ministry in the Catholic Church. Having often included discussions of homosexuality in their work, they were convinced that it was now time to educate themselves on the life journeys of transgender persons. Would I will be willing to mentor them? How could this be? The Whiteheads were asking help from me? I was ecstatic with joy! God answered my prayer in a way I could never have imagined. These well known and respected professionals would lend their voice on behalf of God’s precious transgender people.

I joined them at their home in Indiana, where we spent two days discussing the trials and challenges that transgender people face. As a developmental psychologist, Evelyn was intrigued by the psychological challenges that confront transgender individuals. James is a pastoral theologian, eager to explore the journey of faith of transgender persons. During these days the three of us began to develop a comfortable way of collaborating. Through this collaboration, our work together has been enriched and deepened and will undoubtedly be a great gift for the transgender community, the Catholic Church, and beyond.

Though the leader of my congregation is supportive of this ministry, she have been clear and consistent in acknowledging that I must be vigilant about not bringing myself to the attention of ecclesiastical leaders. That includes being

cautious even within my congregation, lest an un-accepting sister report me to a bishop. I have great empathy for the dilemma in which congregational leaders find themselves. On the one hand, they are strongly committed to reaching out to those most marginal in our society who need a voice for justice. On the other hand, they have all had the unfortunate experience of spending an enormous amount of time dealing with a single sister's action that a particular bishop finds unacceptable. That is precious time needed in other ways for the life of the congregation. I always keep the leader of my community apprised of the developments in my ministry. She needs to know, and she wants to understand more fully the transgender ministry to which I am committed.

In February 2013 I had the great pleasure of providing an opportunity for the leadership team of my community to meet at my home with two of my transgender friends, Sara Davis Buechner and David Johnsrud. David flew in from the southwest US and Sara flew in from Canada in order to be part of this gathering. As the seven of us sat in my living room that evening, I told the leadership team that in the transgender world, we were making history. I was quite sure that it had never happened before that the leadership of a religious congregation met with transgender people for the express purpose of being educated by them. Sara and David shared their story and the women in leadership were attentive and gracious. I was filled with gratitude.

David's Story

I met David at a transgender support group. He arrived a bit late for this, his first meeting, and seemed very flustered. Since he was a newcomer, group members were eager to help him feel welcomed. Each of us made a brief introduction, and then David spoke. He stated his birth name softly and later in the meeting stated that David would be his name in the future. I remember feeling

grateful that he had mustered up the courage to come -- given that he did not know anyone in the group and had no clear idea what to expect from these meetings. David was attentive and made an active contribution. At the coffee break I went up to him and said, "I'm *so* glad you came. I know you'll find the support you need from this group." I wanted to hug him. Instead I just held his hands as I spoke. He seemed grateful but uncomfortable and looked away from me.

David contacted me the next day and asked if we could meet. A few days later he came to my home and for the first time spoke his story to another person. I was the first person to call him David. We met twice more before I moved to another state but we remained in regular contact. David was 42 years old when we met. He has a Masters degree in acupuncture, a Bachelors degree in nursing and currently works in the emergency department of a large hospital.

David was well practiced in going through the motions of living. He had trained himself not to trust others or himself. For decades he felt apart and not like other people and was convinced he would never be "normal". He spent much of his life attempting to fit in and even cultivated false selves and false aspects of himself to achieve a sense of identity.

In a letter to me he said: "I was accustomed to getting by in the world by keeping significant parts of my life hidden. This is just common wisdom on many levels, not to mention basic self-preservation. I well understood back then that I was permanently exempting myself from all the rituals and generational expectations of life by embracing this hidden life. I accepted the bargain, not because I wanted exemption from the larger society, but because I wanted to be in a world where I was not expected to hide parts of myself that other people are actually expected to display." Finally David recognized that he could no longer deny his transgender reality. It is at this point that he attended a support group meeting, where he and I met.

Religion and spirituality had not been a part of David's life and he assumed the truth of many negative stereotypes of Christianity. He had no desire to be religious as he understood it, but something in him was seeking a spiritual life. He periodically attended services at various churches, but nothing seemed to satisfy. Though there was a big hole in his life where hope, confidence, trust, and love should be, I could see in him the potential for life that he could not yet believe was possible. God in me recognized God in him, and eventually David came to recognize the lure of God within himself. Gradually he trusted himself to God. I knew that part of my role in his life was to mentor him as he learned to allow himself to feel, to be vulnerable, to trust himself, others and God, to forgive, to love. David is articulate, reflective and able to recognize connections and patterns in his thinking and behaving. He could integrate what he was learning and make difficult decisions leading to more honest, authentic life. I was allowed the privilege of watching him gradually come alive and claim his own personhood.

Of his journey David writes, "I am continuing on my transition path and my spiritual path, which I now understand is the same thing. I have been sober for two years, and now I facilitate the transgender men's meeting at the center. I have been taking hormones for almost two years, and I hope to have my first surgery sometime in the next year. Becoming the man I am meant to be is an ongoing process and is the focal point for my personal, spiritual, physical, and professional development, and is certainly the best decision I have ever made."

Journey's End

A Farewell Party: In mid-2010, I left the city where I had lived for four and a half years and that I loved so much. Since 2007 I had been cutting back on my diverse and rewarding ministry. I could no longer be a spiritual director for the

many who came to me, nor give talks and preached retreats. I had terminated my involvements at the diocesan level and no longer attended national conferences. Even my own transgender ministry was curtailed because of the pain.

But before my departure, this vibrant transgender community gave me a farewell party. The gathering was absolutely wonderful. I felt surrounded and embraced with such love. As the meal ended the testimonials began. Many of those gathered expressed gratitude for my presence in their lives. James had been asked to give a more formal expression of their appreciation of me.

We have been blessed to have her in our presence these past four years. For some of us, it's been a curiosity to have a Roman Catholic nun be so willing to reach out and accept us. Wow! How can this be? Some have seen her at meetings and events, been to her home, spoken with her and felt her presence. Some have felt the pain of past rejections by their own church leaders and members, and society in general. They have been able to ease that pain and begin to heal by sharing it with Monica. Some have gone on retreats or had spiritual direction with Monica and been able to expand their understanding of themselves, God, and their relationship with God.

Some, like me, have grown as a person because of her presence. I certainly would never have gone to a national Catholic conference of gay and lesbian ministry and given a presentation on my history as a trans person if this nun hadn't been a part of my life! I wouldn't have been a part of other panels. I have become a stronger whole person, losing my stealth blinders and compartmental closets. I might not have held on to my faith as a Catholic.

If there are tears today it will be because we're going to miss this dear nun, Sister Monica, and the blessings, the gifts, and the life she has brought to all of us.

Monica's effects will continue long after she's left us. Thank you, Monica, for being part of our lives.

After a long bear hug for James, I spoke to the group, telling them how precious they are to me, how much I love them and would miss them. I wanted them to know that they are at the very heart of my life. I told them that when I see them I see the face of God, and my most fervent prayer for them is that they come to know how deep and wide is God's love for them.

Gathering Up the Years

I have been a presence of God for the transgender community for sixteen years. I've cried with them, celebrated with them, prayed with them, and watched them grow into the freedom of the children of God as they gradually claim the truth of who they are. This experience has been a privilege and a gift; this community has given me immense joy. One of my trans friends recently said to me: "I belong to a group of people you have to keep hidden in order to practice what God has called you to do. The church hierarchy forbids you to be present to me—to be a mentor and a beacon and a go-to person and a catalyst for incredible, indescribable positive change. And yet you still do it."

Yes, I do it gladly--but at a price. For all these years I have lived with the heavy burden of this conflict: In order to protect my religious community from censure by the hierarchy I have to keep my transgender community hidden. But to protect my transgender community I must bring them out of hiding, so that they can be seen and where the injustices against them can be brought into the light. If only I could give witness to the goodness of transgender lives and help people understand them better! I've been approached many times over the years by journalists wanting to write about my ministry in the transgender community.

Always I have had to decline, aware of the risk to my congregation of such public attention.

Over and over I am encouraged to tend the wounds of the transgender community, to companion them in their grieving, to assure them God loves them, but to do it quietly, under the radar. It's too risky to speak out on behalf of these precious children of God. So there is the conflict: my responsibility to my religious community which I love is in tension with my call from God to serve the transgender community, which I also love.

Continually I bring this question to God in prayer, "Am I doing what you want for the transgender community? Have I spoken when you wanted? Been silent when you wanted?" In all these years the response has never been a clear *yes* or *no*. But God has increasingly brought me to a place of greater peace. The following is one expression of the conviction I have written of many times in my prayer journal:

Back and forth the door goes—yes, I was wrong to remain silent so long. Yes, I was right to remain silent! Back and forth, and I'm weary of it. But the hinge remains in place whichever way the door goes. You want, and I want, that my inner self be grounded in your merciful love for me—in whatever position I find myself. Right or wrong. Being prudent or being a coward. Talking or not talking. Having answers or having no answers. Feeling like a success or feeling like a failure. It doesn't matter... This is your work, not mine. They are your people, not mine. You love them much more than I do, and you want what is good for them much more than I. When your time is right, they will have the support they need. And it won't look anything like I've imagined.

Into Retirement: Praying for the Future

In June 2010 I moved into a wonderful little house at a location near a large community of my sisters. My jaw condition now requires that I live alone, because speaking is often painful. For the rest of my life I will need to be intentional about how much talking I do. I have begun a new bittersweet lifestyle. Active ministry as I had known it all my life was now ending. No more presentations, retreats, spiritual direction, and much more. The only part of active ministry that I could continue was the most important—corresponding with transgender people all over the country and being available for periodic telephone conversations.

The gift of my new life is another dimension of ministry -- prayer. After thirty years of longing for more solitude and prayer time, I now have this precious experience. I absolutely savor the time I have now for prayer and reading. Though this schedule does not always prevail -- since life defies such neat ordering -- I generally spend most mornings in my lovely small chapel. The afternoon is spent tending to the rest of my life, with a focus on corresponding with trans people in need of a supportive companion for the journey. There continue to be new people who write asking for prayer and guidance. What an absolute gift my life is now—to be able to pray so much for them and for our sacred, fragile, wounded world.

Sister “Monica”

November, 2014