



## Act Anyway! | by Micky Wolf

Transition. Seasons. Reading the signs of the times. What does it all mean? If you were to describe your life in one word at this moment, how would you respond? My sense from listening to people over the past year or so is that for many of us our word would touch on one or more of the following: uncertain, difficult, challenging, cautious.

It would be easy to fall prey to deep discouragement with the present state of affairs. Many are jobless or underemployed. Those who hold elected offices seem more interested in character assassination of the opposition than in putting forth ideas and innovative ways to rebuild what is broken and strengthen those who need a helping hand up rather than a shrug of dismissal. An

undercurrent of fear is palatable at times, too often manifesting in either extremes of verbal or physical abuse of others or self, or in motivating us to withdraw



and isolate from the discontent and uneasiness that ripples through our workplaces, communities, homes, and even our places of worship.

If an uneasy fear rumbles around the edges of our spirits and hearts, we may be tempted to dwell on

negative thoughts and dark emotions, unresolved anger, or the deceptively innocuous but no less destructive attitudes and behaviors of timidity and indifference. Sadly, some are given to various fitful outbursts of 'Christian rage' while others perpetuate mournful litanies of woe and worry that proliferate faster than we can change the TV channel or the web site. In the process, our reluctance [or fear] of engaging in meaningful dialogue and loving, Christian action seems to have gotten lost in the rush of daily life.

Heart-inspired commitment to loving, merciful involvement and interdependence with those who may not look, think, feel, speak or even worship the way we do seems more a theological **Continued on Page 4**

**Nick Gambone**, Treasurer, became father for the third time in March. He delights in his young family of all boys while savoring special moments with Danielle, his lovely wife. Life is definitely interesting and busy for this couple and little ones!

**Continued on Page 6**

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Act Anyway	1
Board Updates	1
You Can't Give Freedom Away	2
She Who Sees is Responsible	3
Ministry News	4
The Mercy of Refusals	5
Journey of Discovery	6

### TO PONDER...

*Definition of living the affirming life:  
"Being the whole person God created me to be..."*

*Am I living each moment?*

*Is life an interesting adventure or more mundane and routine?*

*"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."  
[Martin Luther King, Jr.]*

## Board Updates

**Donna Shadle**, Chair, retired in June from a lengthy career in education. Thoroughly appreciating her new 'unscheduled life', she is traveling, enjoying her children and grandchildren, and peacefully pondering God's plans for the next chapter in her life.

**Jeannie Smith**, Secretary, continues her studies in pursuit of completing an undergraduate degree at Kent State University, Stark. As a single, working Mom, she has little spare time [what's that?] but inspires all of us with her openness in following the Holy Spirit.

## You Can't Give Freedom Away | by Dr. Les Carter

Recently I was speaking with a man who had a reputation for being extremely overbearing toward his wife and kids. As I talked with him about some adjustments he could make to help him become more effective in those relationships, I mentioned that he needed to recognize the freedoms of his family members, letting them have the space to explore choices in the many elements of daily life.

The man looked at me and growled: "You've got to be kidding. I can't just give them freedom to do whatever they want because that would lead to chaos and I'm not about to let my family deteriorate with no sense of right and wrong. Sorry Doc, but I can't do that in good conscience."

I replied: "Let me point out an error in your approach toward the subject of freedom. You are speaking as if you have the ability to give your family members freedom, which you cannot do. Freedom is not yours to give away. They already have it. You may not like what they will want to do with their freedoms, nonetheless, they are still free. You can either acknowledge the truth of that or you can choose not to, but either way, it does not change the fact that they are still free."

He looked at me with a blank stare and softly said, "Oh."

When God designed the human personality one of the main features He included in our make-up was free will. There is no question whether some possess a free will while others do not. We each have been given the privilege to choose what we will be. Some people will choose to use their freedom responsibly while others will not. Either

way it is not the prerogative for any person to say if you are free or that you are not. You simply are.

In our key relationships, we can complicate matters when we refuse to acknowledge that others have the privilege to choose what they will do with their lives. People with powerful opinions and preferences may repeatedly attempt to impose their strong wills on those closest to them, and for a while they may appear to "succeed" in controlling others' thoughts and choices. Inevitably, though, the need to exercise freedom arises in each person and when they attempt to follow their own choices, the controlling persons can kick their opinions into overdrive. Power plays will eventually typify the relationships and people will feel repelled by the one refusing to recognize freedom.

When I speak to someone such as this strong-willed father and husband, I explain that when we become partners in freedom with our loved ones we greatly lower the possibility of losing influence. For instance, if his wife disagreed with a decision he made, he could acknowledge her freedom to think as she did. This would lead him to respond to her in an understanding manner rather than his usual dictatorial way. Likewise, when he spoke to his teen-aged son about his social schedule, rather than mandating what he'd better do, he could discuss choices with him, truly letting him have some say-so in his life. This man looked perplexed at me as I explained this idea to him and asked: "But if I let my family members

go free, won't that result in mayhem?"

I appealed to his common sense and asked, "Can you see that as you continue in your controlling pattern, you are slowly but surely losing them? Your wife has spoken more than once about divorce and your son avoids you like the plague. So tell me what you have to lose by recognizing the truth that they have been given the ability by God to choose what they will be."

Once again that blank stare came upon him as he said, "You got me."

Acknowledging freedom does not mean that we succumb to chaos and anarchy. Opinions and preferences can still be discussed out in the open. Consequences can still be implemented when people use their free will in harmful or uncooperative ways. The difference would be in the lack of coercion and persuasion and commands. Interestingly, people who recognize the freedoms of others find that their influence increases and the likelihood of harmonizing goes up, not down.

You can choose to ignore the freedom that indwells each person in your life, but get prepared. When you act as if stubborn control is the better alternative, you will ultimately have fewer and fewer people who care to know what you think. ■

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## She Who Sees is Responsible | by Rose Mary Dougherty

I can't remember when I first heard these words. I think I heard them in my early days of religious life. As I recall, they had something to do with keeping places in order. For instance, if you noticed dirty dishes in the sink or something spilled on the floor, it was your job to "tidy up." The words seemed to put in perspective how I had been living my life for some time. Anytime I noticed the pain, the ill-temper, the problem of anyone else, I thought I was responsible for taking care of it. I had to "tidy up" the situation.

No one had really told me that in words before. I was probably just projecting expectations. But now people were telling me plainly: "She who sees is responsible." At the same time, however, the very same people were telling me about custody of the eyes. They were telling me to look at only as much as I needed to see to get where I was going so I could avoid unnecessary distractions. This, they told me, would help me keep my focus on God.

Many beginners in religious life, with me, had difficulty with this practice, but I took to it. Subconsciously I put together this corollary: "If I am responsible for what I see, then I am not responsible for what I don't see." So I chose not to see much of anything. I was tired of trying to figure out how to take care of so many situations. Custody of the eyes gave me a "holy" excuse to stop being so responsible.

Then I began to hear about discernment. For me, at least initially, it translated into, "be responsible" all over again. In the language of discernment I heard the imperative to open my eyes to all of life. God was there in every situation with something in mind for me to do. If I listened hard enough and long enough, God would tell me what the doing was.

As I look back now, I think the intent of discernment as it was introduced probably had something to do with hearing God's invitations in all of life, with joining God in caring for the world. But I was almost back to where I was before, being responsible for everything. Now, however, I had some sense that God was involved in that responsibility. Still, while I baptized my figuring out with some earnest prayer, I went on as

*"I notice I am different and it raises questions in me."*

though it was all mine to do. Not only did I have to figure out my life, I had to figure out everyone else's also. Often I brought to situations and encounters my own myopic view of what needed to be done and imposed that on others.

I'm not sure when this "fix it" attitude began to change. Maybe it began to change as I accumulated sufficient evidence to know that I wasn't doing a very good job of figuring things out, even with the best of intentions. But I suspect it began to change as every once in awhile I found myself meeting people and situations differently. I noticed that, when I wasn't looking for clues but could just allow people and situations to be as they were, I saw them with new eyes. It was as though just a simple openness in me evoked some truth from another which I had not known before. In turn, that truth evoked new truth in me. As the two truths merged, new possibilities were created. I was no less responsible, but response was given me as I participated in the truth of another person or situation. I didn't have to figure anything out; it seems as though the guidance was given in the moment.

The experience of simple openness still

does not come easily for me, but when it is given, I notice I am different and it raises questions in me. For instance, I have noticed, especially in spiritual direction and other situations where I have a designated "giving role," that when I am drawn out of that role, when I'm just able to be present, one human being with another, for whatever might be given, I feel so palpably blessed by God through the other. No one of us needs to have any answers. Together we create new possibilities.

This makes me wonder about some of our "helping professions." What would happen if we dropped the helping roles and came from a place of mutuality? What would happen to the responsibility and accountability of the professional? Do the parameters and guidelines of helping professions free people for the dynamic interchange of truth and appreciation of the other's beauty or do they inhibit receptivity to truth and goodness?

I have also had some wonderings about discernment and responsibility. I begin to understand my part in discernment differently than I had before. Discernment for my part perhaps has only to do with cultivating a disposition of openness, or at least wanting that disposition and praying for it. Responsibility shifts from a heavy, "I've got to respond, to do, to fix," to an easy, "I can respond. I have 'response ability'; share in God's creative response for the world."

Discernment and responsibility come together for me in the words of Thomas Kelly in which he reminds us that when we "center down" and live in that Holy Abyss that is dearer than life, our life projects, our sense of responsibility for the world are again and again revised.

**Continued on Page 5**

## Act Anyway! [Continued from Page 1]

or philosophical ideal rather than a personal choice to live as Christ would have us to live.

If our journey through this life is to be understood as taking one step at a time, maybe herein resides the wisdom; neither you nor I individually can fix all that is broken or weakened but together we might make a pretty good team.

Think you don't count much, or have only a little to offer? Think again. And in the process, I encourage you to allow yourself to feel the feelings of your thoughts. Why? As we learn to acknowledge, identify and give ourselves permission to feel the fullness of our emotions and express them in healthy and loving ways, we begin to live more fully as the unique human being God created us to be. Ponder this—if feelings and emotions are of little value, why have they been included on some many occasions in describing Jesus' life among us?

The truth is there is no such thing as a bad emotion, however, in being gifted with a range of emotions we can express them as hurtful—through our dark sinful nature—or, as mercy and justice—through our light side, our

Spirit inspired and transformed nature. It only follows that the more we acknowledge and surrender the former at the feet the Jesus, the more likely the latter can be lovingly imparted through our choices and actions in daily life. A good place to begin might be in learning to associate our thoughts with discovering the underlying emotions. For instance, thinking discouraging thoughts often invokes feelings of sadness. Thoughts that revolve around uncertainty or being cautious often induce feelings of fear; thoughts that dwell on challenges and difficulties may veil feelings of anger, bitterness and resentment. The goal is not to eliminate or minimize either our feelings or our thoughts but to give them opportunity to be integrated.

Let's say we make the choice to accept and 'feel our feelings', what next? *Act anyway*. Reckless? Probably, *unless* we begin to truly believe *all* the emotions God has given us have worth and value when wielded in boldness and compassion. A simple analogy: filling the tank in my car is requisite to sparking the

myriad of reactions necessary to take me from point A to point B. However, that does not mean I need to ignore the laws by speeding or driving recklessly, putting others or myself in danger.

*“The truth is there is no such thing as a bad emotion.”*

So it is with our emotions. God has given them to us as an important part of the 'fuel mix' that moves us through our daily lives. Too much at one time and we risk a head-on collision or a

trip into the nearest ditch. Too little and we end up stalled out at the intersection for the day.

Thinking and feeling from our Spirit-led being can open the door of our hearts to limitless opportunities to choose actions of mercy and justice. And, Lord knows, in these times we are in desperate need of communities of human beings willing to risk stepping out in love fueled with those kinds of thoughts and emotions. ■



## Ministry News

We are excited! As we continue to discern the direction of the Ministry, we are taking action in several ways. The first change you will notice is this Newsletter—different format, but we hope, filled with helpful and encouraging ideas and information. Secondly, as time and resources allow we will be unveiling new ways to communicate and share the vision and mission of *Living The Affirming Life*. Stay tuned! In the meantime, we invite you to consider offering your gifts and talents to this Ministry.

We are in need of volunteers in the following areas:

- Administrative Assistant
- Treasurer
- Individual with experience in layout and graphics for print and/or electronic media.

Give us a call—we look forward to hearing from you!

*Thank You!*



Okay, Lord, if you say so!

## The Mercy of Refusals | by Catherine Doherty [Adapted from *Coming Home*]

“My desires are many and my cry is pitiful but ever didst Thou save me by hard refusals; and this strong mercy has wrought into my life through and through. Day by day Thou art making me worthy of the simple great gifts that Thou gavest to me unasked... Day by day Thou art making me worthy of Thy full acceptance by rescuing me ever and anon from the perils of weak, uncertain desire.” [Gitanjali No. 14, Rabindranath Tagore]

How many of us could repeat Tagore’s poem again and again as we see God’s plan unfolding in our lives? Truly each of us could write a personal salvation history in which the Redemption hasn’t taken place “once and for all” but is taking place day by day. Many of us, however, do not begin to notice the mystery that is thus at work in our lives until commitment to a life calling—be it marriage, priesthood, lay apostolate, or religious life—forces us to face ourselves as we never did before. It is then that we perhaps admit for the first time that we did not merit such a wonderful husband or wife or vocation, that we are not worthy to change the bread and wine into the divine food; that we dare not preach the Gospel of Christ which we so inadequately live.

At this moment of commitment we are finally ready to enter willingly into God’s school, which we have been attending only grudgingly until now. Now we recognize how merciful God was when the person we thought we loved left us, when the plans for the ideal city we wanted to build crumbled into dust. We see how merciful God was when we were lonely at parties, and when our plans to go abroad fell through and we went on a retreat instead!

Each of these “refusals” on God’s part caused pain; they broke open the shell that enclosed our understanding. Thus we were free to seek goodness where before we sought only charm. We were free to look for reality where before we were escaping into dreams. These refusals of mercy freed us to seek truth instead of illusion, to struggle for love instead of popularity. In other words, to turn to God who *is* goodness, reality, truth and love.

God is infinite. This means that because we are small creatures, we have only begun to accept him, just as the little chipmunk, scurrying along one of the trees on the rim of the Grand Canyon, is only beginning to take in the beauty and splendor of this divine work. And just as

the chipmunk is not awed by the beauty and immensity of the place in which he lives, we too are allowed to discover only as much of God as we can take in.

If then we continue to let God direct our course, we too may say with Khalil Gibran, not “God is in my heart” but “I am in the heart of God.” Since we are little, we are often narrow, though the two need not go together! We are tempted again and again to protect our wounds with privacy instead of healing them through openness. We limit ourselves to selected friends instead of expanding our hearts to include the love of all our brothers. Therefore, instead of saying to God, “Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for Thee to fill with music,” we wail, “My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; when I come to ask for my good I quake in fear lest my prayers be granted” (Gitanjali No. 28, Tagore).

This is our natural reaction, because we are aware that that “training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.” That is why each day we must allow God to redeem us once more through the mercy of his refusals. ■

### She Who Sees is Responsible [Continued from Page 3]

We know what to do and what to leave undone. Many of us enter that Abyss from time to time. We go to retreats. We have a daily prayer time. We might try, for a short duration, to be really prayerful when we are with a person or engaged in a project. But then it seems there is too much to be done for us to stay there. So we leave the Abyss to be responsible, to get on with life. Thomas Kelly’s invitation is to live in that Holy Abyss. To live in that Holy Abyss is to

see the world with God’s eyes and to live in God’s prayer for the world. There in that contemplative space we come to know God’s caring love. We don’t have to create that caring love, or figure out its implications for our caring. As our vision clarifies, the very awareness of what we see contains authentic response. We are given “response ability” for what we see in that moment. ■

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***"Helping you become all  
that God has created you  
to be..."***

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**"The power of old cultures diminishes only when people pay the price of risking the behaviors that generate new ones." [George Wilson SJ]**

### **Board Updates [Cont. from Page 1]**

**Henedine Aldana**, Board Member, was accepted into the 2012 Class of the Ignatian Spirituality Institute [John Carroll University]. To say she is ecstatic with this new opportunity to be trained as a spiritual director would be putting it mildly. Her joy radiates to all she encounters!

**Micky Wolf**, Executive Director, completed her non-fiction book. She is in the process of submitting the work to potential agents/publishers along with beginning the research for her next project. While writing is a primary focus, Micky is also concentrating on program development for Affirmation Ministries. She is also available for individual and/or group spiritual

direction and as a presenter for workshops or retreats. Please feel free to contact her as to how she may be of service to you or your organization. Further information about any of these services is available on our web site. ■



## **Journey of Discovery | by Micky Wolf**

### **To Ponder:**

**Do I really know who I am?** As unique beings created in the image and likeness of God, no two of us are alike. It is true we share aspects of being human, but the similarities stop there. The first key to understanding who I am—in order that I might do what I am uniquely created to do—is learn how to discern my thoughts and feelings.

### **15 Minute Exercise:**

Find any spot, any place, any time of the day. Set a timer for two minutes. [A cell phone will work fine.] Read the following statement, then start the timer. Writing



or journaling your discovery is optional. Be creative!

### **Statement: The 5 things that give me joy are?**

DO NOT include family as this is often a given; the objective here is more personal awareness of self.

When the timer rings, stop. What is your list of 5 things? After a few minutes, reset timer and reconsider the

statement, only this time, note what feelings or emotions are present. Can you identify 5 things? Can you identify any emotions? If you had difficulty with either part, relax and repeat the exercise over the next several days. ■

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