



A Journal of
Independent
Sacramental
Spirituality

Volume 1, Issue 1
January 2009

In this edition:

What we Hope to Accomplish.....	2
<i>- A note from the publisher</i> <i>by Archbishop Michael Seneco</i>	
The Luminous Mysteries	4
<i>- A Contemporary View through a Social Justice Lens</i> <i>by Mother Meredith I. Moise</i>	
Changed by Same-Sex Marriage.....	8
<i>- A Wedding Commissioner's Story</i> <i>by Commissioner Gregg L. DesElms</i>	
Praying the Daily Office.....	18
<i>- Why don't we do it, and why we should</i> <i>by Father Chris Tessone</i>	

The Gabriel is published quarterly by the Old Catholic Publishing Group,
a ministry of the North American Old Catholic Church.

The opinions expressed herein are solely that of the individual author,
and publication in this journal does not constitute an endorsement.

Subscriptions are available for our print and online editions by visiting our website:
<http://gabriel.ocpublishing.org>

The Old Catholic Publishing Group
227 Tennessee Ave NE
Washington, DC 20002-6427
888-650-1817

Library of Congress ISSN# 1945-3140 (print) & ISSN#1945-3159 (electronic)



What we Hope to Accomplish...

- By Archbishop Michael V. Seneco, SPSA

Welcome to *The Gabriel—A Journal of Independent Sacramental Spirituality*.

Over my years as a bishop in the Old Catholic Church, I am often quite humbled by the level of intelligence that one can find within the clergy of the various “particular churches” in the Old Catholic and Independent Catholic Churches that operate here in the United States of America.

In my time in the movement, I have met men and women in our ranks that are professors at Ivy League universities, have run for Congress, worked for NASA, the State Department, and the Treasury Department. I know clergy among us who have worked in the west wing of the White House, and the intelligence bunkers at the Pentagon, having served our nation at the highest levels, protecting our freedoms. We have clergy that are lawyers and physicians, scholars and authors, artists and activists.

It is our hope that, through *The Gabriel*, we can bring forth the best and brightest in the Old Catholic and Independent Catholic Churches, and give them an avenue to inspire, educate, and provoke both thought and action.

It is my belief that we should not turn solely to the scholars and educators of other institutional churches for our edification and for the preparation of our seminarians. We should look within the movement and within the churches that we currently have, so we can utilize the resources there to plant our churches and ministries, and to educate the next generation of minds and hearts.

We hope that in these pages, you will find information and thought that will both engage and enrage you! This project is not meant to be a ‘ra-ra-look-at-us’ tome or a yearbook where we extol our virtues while simultaneously sitting on them; it is meant to be a tool that will provoke our readers into thought, discourse, and action.

In 1883, the author Alice Mary Elizabeth Scarth, in her book *The Story of Old Catholic and Kindred Movements* described the Old Catholics of the day as, “... *the brave and earnest Germans who left her communion in order that by ceasing to be Papists, that they might be better Catholics.*”

We hope that *The Gabriel*, published 125 years after Mrs. Scarth's observations about our church, will help us to continue on that path she so eloquently described, so that in the end, we can all "be better Catholics."

I hope that you are enriched by what you read here. I also hope that you are inspired: inspired to write for us, write to us, or take action on what you have read.

May the peace of Christ be and remain with you always.



Archbishop Michael Seneco is the presiding bishop of the North American Old Catholic Church. Based in Washington, DC, the church operates fifteen parishes in in eight states and the District of Columbia, as well as several national ministries, a seminary, and is the publisher of this journal.

Archbishop Seneco can be reached by email at mvs@naoldcatholic.com

You can learn more about the North American Old Catholic Church on the internet at www.naoldcatholic.com

The Gabriel—A Journal of Independent Catholic Spirituality
Publisher: The Most Reverend Michael V. Seneco, SPSA, DD, L.Th.
Editor: Mr. Matthew Velic

Editorial Board:
The Most Rev. Michael V. Seneco, SPSA, DD, L.Th.
The Right Rev. Winfield Wagner III
Mr. Matthew Velic
Lama Gurudas Sunyatananda, O.C.

The Gabriel [ISSN1945-3140 (print) & ISSN#1945-3159 (electronic)] is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by the Old Catholic Publishing Group, a ministry of the North American Old Catholic Church, 227 Tennessee Ave NE, Washington, DC 20002-6427. Periodical postage paid at Washington, DC and at additional mailing offices.

Annual subscription rates: \$24.95 per year, \$6.95 is the single copy price.

POSTMASTER: Circulation records are maintained, and address updates can be sent to
Old Catholic Publishing Group
227 Tennessee Ave NE
Washington, DC 20002-6427

The Gabriel, its logo and contents are © 2009 The North American Old Catholic Church. Nothing contained herein may be used without prior, written consent of both the publisher, and the author.

Mailing list: Occasionally, we make our mailing lists available to other companies whose products and services might interest you. If you prefer not to be included, write to our circulation office at the address above. Please be sure to include your complete information as shown on your mailing label.



The Luminous Mysteries: A Contemporary View Through a Social Justice Lens

-By Reverend Mother Meredith I. Moise

Christ was born in a crucible of resistance. He made his advent during the Roman occupation of Palestine. The child Jesus lived among people who were colonized by a global power bent on absolute obedience. God made His advent in a land wrapped in struggle and longing for restoration. The world of Jesus was thirsty for true liberation, the type of liberation that requires the entrance of divinity and dedication to bring forth a mighty savior that would lead the people on a road of hope, renewal and forgiveness.

Christ offers us a paradigm of leadership, liberation and self discovery. He took twelve largely uneducated country folks and began a movement which has spanned 2000. Whether we view Jesus in the light of his life and resurrection or through the lens of his passion and crucifixion, we acknowledge the effect of His desire to liberate people from their suffering. His compassion has endured the ages. His presence crosses the centuries so much so that we have ordered time by His life.

In the perspective of the life of Jesus, we can model a life steeped in the mysteries of initiation, miracle, service, transformation and hope. By truly imitating Jesus, we can set the world ablaze by being the Good News, bringing joy to those in prisons of suffering, feeding the souls of the lost and being a beacon of goodwill in an age of malady. We can take our rightful place at humanity's table in the Twenty-First century. We are called to be harbingers of hope. The One who gave His life for all demands that we now open our hearts and our minds to the mission of God. We were born for this day.

The Luminous Mysteries provide a roadmap to this mission. By meditating on the events of Christ's life, we are transfixed by the simplicity of His message while being transformed by the power of His actions. Meditating on the mysteries while saying the rosary is a powerful way to fuse our life with the life of Jesus. We can put ourselves in the meditations, feeling, seeing and witnessing the manifestations of God's love. By planting these mysteries in our hearts and minds, we are unconsciously planting the seeds of Jesus' life in our mundane lives. Our imitation of Him becomes a habit, a way of being. We are bringing Jesus to our world. Let's explore the Luminous Mysteries, focusing on the active life and ministry of Jesus, from His baptism to the institution of the Eucharist. These mysteries are luminous because His life brought light to the world.

Luminous Mystery 1: Baptism

The baptism of Jesus is a journey toward self discovery. During the baptism a voice from Heaven calls out the identity of Jesus while ushering Christ into His mission. We must discover ourselves before attempting to lead anybody else. Jesus is coming out. He is moving from one life to another. His true identity is revealed, at least to himself and to John the Baptist. As the Son of God, Jesus had his mission sewn into His DNA. But as the Son of Man, he needed a catalyst to bring forth this awareness.

How many times have we experienced an event that brought us to a new station in life? What did this feel like? It might have been exultation in revelation or dread in discovery. Knowing the mission is important, but we also have to have benchmarks along the way to show us if we are still on this path. The miracle of self awareness is truly profound. We awaken to a new part of self, an expansion of our identity. Our limits are defined and indeed exploded when we find out that He has made us a partner in His mission. Awakening to our vocation as servants of the living God bring a peace beyond understanding but it can also be unsettling. We are called to not only bask in our own salvation but we are called to bring this salvation to the world. In the baptism of Jesus, we see God the Creator affirming the identity of the Son while giving Him permission to start the mission. Have you gotten your permission to start the mission?

Luminous Mystery 2: The Wedding at Cana

This is Jesus' first documented miracle. His Blessed Mother was a catalyst in the revelation of His divinity. She saw a crisis as an opportunity to bring forth the awesome power of God. Although Jesus hesitated to begin His mission there, the event was designed to draw Him out and set Him on His way.

In our mundane lives, God often puts us in situations of crisis to see how we will respond and grow. Each crisis is an opportunity to show the power and love of God. A homeless problem in our respective town or city is an opportunity to provide shelter and food to the Lord's folk. A epidemic of child abuse gives us an opportunity to mentor youth and care "for the least of these." Rising gas prices allows us to be an example of conservation while being stewards of creation. We are of the Earth while caring for the Earth. The wedding at Cana tells us that every crisis is an opportunity for the manifestation of divinity in our midst.

Luminous Mystery 3: The Public Ministry of Christ

God's love in action is an ecstatic experience. We see in this mystery, Jesus living His mission, obeying His calling. He is healing, teaching, preaching and loving those who were forgotten or discarded by society. His compassion becomes legend and his presence, in itself, becomes a healing balm for the masses. But with every good work, jealousy abounds. Those who once profited from the misery of the people were angry that this man from the back waters of Judea would challenge their authority openly. The religious authorities of the day were not really interested in bringing God's love to the people. Jesus says they were more interested in the Law and not the love behind the Law.

With strength and courage gathered through self discovery, Jesus goes out to give the masses the Good News. God's love knows no bounds. He began to transform His world by getting to the heart of the matter. This change took place with one life at a time. Each one valued and cared for. In the midst of feeding thousands, Jesus had each and every person there in mind as he multiplied their food. He did not waver in His love for the people nor in His conviction to champion human dignity.

Luminous Mystery 4: Transfiguration

Jesus and his apostles go on retreat. He changes appearance before them. Elijah and Moses appear with Him in confirmation of His work, mission and life. Jesus is affirmed, uplifted and glorified.

Our mission is confirmed by the lives we touch daily. Our mission is justified by the Good News. We are given the command to love God with our entire selves and to love our neighbors. Our transfiguration comes from helping others transform their lives. This is not necessarily about people saying they are saved. This is about people being transformed inside and out. Christ is a radical God with a radical message. Radical meaning root. Christ and the Good News are at the root of who we are as human beings. Christ is radical in that He is the root of all change and transformation. The Good News is radical because it is derived from the root. Our lives tell the dignity of being rooted in Christ and the Good News. Thus, we are transformed and renewed in His image.

Luminous Mystery 5: The Institution of the Eucharist

The Eucharist is the memorial meal. Jesus sits with his friends in the upper room to eat the one last meal. He leaves them with a way to remember Him. He is remembered by feeding others, by caring for others, by being a servant. In one of His last acts, Jesus feeds with His own body and blood. He gives Himself totally to the mission and the work. He gives all of Himself to His apostles and He empowers them to feed others with His life.

The Body and Blood of Christ are His life. In the Last Supper, Jesus gives the elements of His life to those He loves. His life now becomes the meal. He has not compromised the mission, the work of God. His life became justice for the oppressed, food for the hungry and compassion for the downtrodden. He established a legacy of justice. He worked to affirm and assert the human dignity of the masses, grounded in God's love.

The institution of the Eucharist is the culmination of our lives as Christians. It is the cornerstone of our faith. The Real Presence is with us in the Eucharist. It is our souls' nourishment. Christ left us with His Body and Blood because He knew we needed to be fed on this journey toward justice. We need this spiritual food to renew our minds and refresh our spirits. The Eucharist is our fuel for justice.

And just as Christ achieved victory, we achieve victory. The victory of Christ is the triumph of the Good News. The triumph of the Good News is none other than victory over suffering and death. The victory of the Good News is embracing life. When we help one human being embrace life, face life altering challenge with dignity and pursue right, we are agents of this victory.

Meditating on the Luminous Mysteries is the first step to envisioning ourselves as active participants in the life of Christ. We are empowered and transformed by these mysteries. We are deputized, so to speak, as agents for divine transformation, agents of the Lord in this world. We are trusted servants going out on a mission for the Master. Our sustenance is the Eucharist and our lives are enriched by the Son of God, life's authentic foundation and culmination of love.



Rev. Mother Meredith Moise is the vicar for Black and Hispanic Catholics in the North American Old Catholic Church. A noted author and speaker, Mother Moise ministers primarily in the inner-city of Baltimore, focusing on inner-city youth and women's issues, and authors a nationally syndicated newspaper column "Queering Catholicism."

Rev. Moise can be reached via email at: imoises@yahoo.com



Changed by Same-Sex Marriage—A Wedding Commissioner's Story

-By Gregg L. DesElms

(Editors note: This article is an excerpt of a speech given by Commissioner Gregg DesElms in response to the passage of California Proposition#8, which prohibits the State of California from recognizing same-sex weddings as legally binding.)

On May 16, 2008, the evening after the California Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal in that state and ordered, pursuant thereto, that same-sex wedding ceremonies could begin one month later, the eleven-o'clock-news on the CBS television network affiliate in San Francisco reported that officials in San Jose were seeking volunteer wedding commissioners. The Clerk-Recorder's office, with its staff of only six persons assigned to the task of dealing with all things marriage-related in Santa Clara county, was expecting an onslaught of applications for both same-sex marriage licenses, and same-sex wedding ceremonies in its little chapel on the lower level of the county building. So it was asking the public for help.

Officials in nearby San Francisco had learned in 2004 just how many applicants there could be, and just how many wedding commissioners would be needed to accommodate them. That winter, then-newly-elected mayor Gavin Newsom attracted national attention when he issued his clerk-recorder's office a directive to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Believing himself to be acting pursuant to the aegis and imprimatur of the equal protection clause of California's Constitution; and responding to things he later said that he found objectionable in President Bush's January 2004 State of the Union address regarding how marriage should only be between a man and a woman, Newsom, his staff, and more volunteer Deputy Commissioners of Civil Ceremonies than anyone at the time bothered to count, solemnized the marriages of some 4,000 same sex-couples -- nearly 150 per calendar day, or nearly 200 per week day -- in the 27-calendar-day period from February 12th through March 11th.

On the subsequent petition of the religious Right, the California Supreme Court halted the ceremonies on March 11th; and the next day it summarily voided all 4,000 licenses. Then the lawsuits began resulting in the Court's ruling four years later, on May 15, 2008, that marriage is the constitutional civil right of all persons regardless of gender.

Little noticed in that ruling, though, was something else: That those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community are what the law calls a "suspect class." Legal experts believe that that sly categorization by the Court as part of its larger ruling will ultimately help ensure that subsequent judicial review of alleged violations of the rights of LGBT persons pursuant to the US Constitution's "equal protection" clause will be undertaken with what the law calls "strict constitutional scrutiny." Many, including myself, believe that that little extra thing which the Court also included in its May 15th ruling, and of which most of the general public took little notice, will be a key factor that will ultimately force subsequent courts of relevant jurisdiction hearing California same-sex marriage rights cases to rule resoundingly in their favor.

Not long after the Court's ruling, the attorneys general from nearly a dozen other US states asked the Court to delay same-sex weddings while conservatives got what would later be known as "Prop 8" certified as a ballot measure on which Californians would vote some five months later on election day, November 4, 2008.

California's Proposition 8 was, as almost every attention-paying American now knows, an amendment to the state's Constitution which restricted the definition of marriage to a union strictly between a man and a woman; and by so defining, eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry commencing on the moment of its passage and onward. The proposition did not address or affect the status of the state's civil unions.

Our nation's judicial record of disdain for the enforcement of laws which fly in the face of the US Constitution's fundamental "ex post facto" prohibitions would likely ensure that those whose weddings were solemnized pursuant to the Court's May 15th ruling, but before the subsequent passage of Prop 8, probably need not fear that their marriages would be voided thereby. However, Prop 8's proponents insisted (and insist, still) that "voided" is precisely what would and should happen to such marriages. Legal experts have said that that would actually be a legal battle quite separate from any which may be fought over Prop 8 itself; and that its outcome may or may not, in the end, be in keeping with however the Prop 8 battle, itself, is finally decided.

It was a worthy battle in which I wanted to be a player, however small; and becoming a wedding commissioner seemed like one way to do it.

The clerk-recorder in comparatively smaller Napa county, where I live, was anticipating so few same-sex applications that he wasn't seeking volunteers to become wedding commissioners. San Francisco still had on its books

more volunteer wedding commissioners left over from 2004 than it would ever need. Contra Costa county was actually closer to my home, and lay between it and the more distant Santa Clara county, it was only the latter within reasonable driving distance of my home which had actually bothered to issue the clarion call for help.

So, I contacted Ms. Alcomendras down in San Jose and signed-up. In fact, I sent her an email and faxed her a letter on the very night that I learned about her need from the TV news report. Roughly three weeks later, in the county council chambers in San Jose, in the witness of cameras from all the local television stations and newspapers, most of the 120 of us who had applied were sworn-in, en masse, and given the official title of "Deputy Commissioner of Civil Ceremonies."

A week or so later, on June 16, 2008, I was in the main chapel of the county building, performing both opposite-sex and same-sex wedding ceremonies on the very first day that the law permitted anyone to perform the latter of the two. So many couples were scheduled that three other temporary chapels were set up throughout the building. Cameras and reporters were, once again, everywhere.

In the ensuing four-and-a-half months, I solemnized the marriages of well over 200 couples in that little chapel, a bit more than a third of the same sex variety. Granted, it was a small thing in the master scheme of things, but it was at least something.

Today, perhaps only a dozen of us remain from among those who were part of the earlier-sworn group of nearly 120. We are each rotated into the chapel a time or two or three each month. Because I must drive nearly 180 miles round trip, I'm always there all day whenever I'm scheduled, marrying 17 or 18 couples per day, couple after couple after couple. I can say the words in my sleep, now. According to my wife, I have.

And, as I was there on the first day that the law permitted us to marry same-sex couples, I was also there on the last: November 4th, election day, along with the press, yet again.

With the opinion polls warning that Prop 8 had an uncomfortably close chance of passage, and with the election polls closing at 8:00 PM that evening, there were so many same-sex couples trying to get in under the wire that they numbered more than there were time slots available in the chapel. So, at the end of my shift on that election day, with fewer than three hours remaining before the polls closed and we would all begin learning what would be the immediate future of same-sex weddings in California, I conducted a mass wedding ceremony in the very county council chambers

where I had, just four-and-a-half months earlier, been sworn in as a wedding commissioner.

Sadly, Prop 8 did pass. By election night's end, I knew that I had, after all, done my small part to help create that special new class of persons with rights different from those like them who had come before, or who would come after. As I watched the election results trickle in, the percentage of voters in favor of Prop 8 rising with the percentage of precincts reporting, I realized that what we had done, however good it might have felt at the time, hadn't been enough after all.

So, 11 days later, when a national protest against Prop 8 was organized in cities and towns across the United States on Saturday, November 15, 2008, I was there, on the steps of City Hall in Napa, California, dressed in the same pulpit robe and rainbow stole that I always wear when working as a wedding commissioner in San Jose; and speaking to the crowd about, and giving witness to, my personal experience of same-sex marriage. However, unlike most of the other speakers that day, I did so as a heterosexual who had, as it turned out, been changed by it somehow along the way. Like my having become a wedding commissioner in the first place, it was a small thing, but it was something.

I was there because Einstein was right when he said that the world is a dangerous place not because of the people in it who do evil, but because of the people in it who stand by and let it happen. I was there because Dante said, in that same vein, that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality.

I was there because if my work and study continue as they have, I will be ordained to ministry in the not too awfully distant future; and that ministry demands of me that I point out to anyone who will hear it that those on the Right who cite the Holy Bible as justification for the repugnance of their vote in favor of Prop 8 on November 4th are ignorant and obviously haven't actually read the Bible; that when the Bible thumpers who have so co-opted Christianity in the years since Ronald Reagan's election allege biblical prohibitions against homosexuality in such as the oft-cited and, therefore, now-infamous Romans chapter 1, or the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, or Levitical Law, or the shrine prostitutes in Deuteronomy 23, or "strange flesh" in Jude 1... I was there to tell them and anyone who would listen that the Bible simply doesn't say that.

Noting that the word wasn't even coined in English until the 19th century, and so could not possibly have appeared in the original Hebrew or Greek biblical texts, I pointed out that the very presence of "homosexual" in such

as the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible so often cited by proponents of Prop 8 reveals it as not merely a shoddy translation of the biblical languages into English, but, moreover, reels it as a socio-political abomination. The mean-spirited and intentionally hateful agenda of America's religious Right to deprive, by its lies, the most basic constitutional rights of its citizens to simply marry the ones they love.

I was there because I wanted any Prop 8 proponents who could hear me, or who might subsequently read my speech on a web site somewhere, to learn from a heterosexual who believes in the same God as they; and who is, both in that sense, and also by virtue of his sexual orientation, one of their own, that those whom I and others like me have been marrying these past months are, to the last of them, children of God, no less than they.

To them I said that these good Americans whom they so casually deprived of the most basic of their constitutional rights, are our friends, our families, our co-workers, persons with whom we attend PTA meetings, or sit next to in the City Council chamber gallery. They're the pleasant strangers with whom we chat while standing in the grocery line; they're the party at the next table in our favorite restaurant; they're the ones to whom we turn in church to share the peace after the collection of the offering.

To deny these brothers and sisters in Christ the very same right to know the joy of matrimony which we so take for granted flies in the face of both the letter and spirit of the only two commandments that Christ ever gave us in the 22nd chapter of Matthew: To love God, and to love neighbor. Same-sex couples who seek to know that joy are the very neighbors about whom Christ was speaking in those greatest of the commandments upon which he said "hang all the law and the prophets."

I was there, also, because I wanted those who had voted for Prop 8 to know something else: that the experience of same-sex weddings had unexpectedly changed me, and that it would change them, too, if there were just some way for them to see what I've now seen, and to know what I now know.

Even those of us in the heterosexual community who may proudly boast a veritable lifetime of empathy for, and socio-political activism on behalf of the plight of our LGBT brothers and sisters; and who understand fully, though probably only intellectually, that membership therein is by orientation and not choice, nevertheless find some mystery in the nature of its attraction... a mystery quite probably borne out of how our opposite sexual orientation limits, most likely at a biochemical level of some kind, our ability to truly identify with our hearts as well as with our heads when it comes to the nature of the attraction of same-sex couples.

For such as we who are heterosexual, the personal witness of a same-sex couple joining hands in marriage has the potential to both surprise us with its normality, and to astonish us with its sameness as heterosexual unions with which we are understandably more familiar, and perhaps secretly more comfortable. Our witness of same-sex marriage has the power to intrigue us with its inherent beauty, and with the lack of strangeness we expected feel at the sight of a same-sex couple's vow-sealing kiss after having been pronounced, as I have now so many times pronounced them: "...married under the laws of the State of California."

Our witness of such moments can help to demystify that which we previously understood with our heads, but not necessarily also with hearts; and so our insight is expanded from the former to the latter... perhaps to our surprise and, invariably, to our delight as well.

That has been my experience... my epiphany.

In a time when statistics show that we heterosexuals are experiencing among our ranks a divorce rate in excess of 50 percent, and two out of three of our marriages fail within seven years, most of the now nearly six dozen same-sex couples who have presented before me for solemnization of their vows boast numbers of years together well in excess of 10, 15, or even 20. Not long after I started doing same-sex weddings, a lesbian couple presented before me who had been together in love and loyalty for 32 long and happy years. Even now, I cannot find an adjective to adequately describe their palpable joy and gratefulness at the reality of their lifelong bond finally being recognized under the law.

And therein lies, perhaps, my second epiphany: the overwhelming sense of indescribable joy and gratefulness that nearly every same-sex couple I have married exhibits as the reality of their new-found and long-awaited right to finally and lawfully sets in.

Palpable also is their profound sense of relief upon meeting me, in my black pulpit robe and sentiment-betraying rainbow stole, as they realize that it is I who will be their officiant. One can actually see it waft across their faces as the corners of their mouths turn-up in a nervous-but-relieved little smile. I've come to understand that the reason, as many of them have explained to me, is that as they drove to the county building on their most special day for which they've so long waited, and which they know will happen but once in their lives, they were quietly filled with dread at what they believed would be the statistical likelihood of their drawing a wedding commissioner who is really only there because it's his or her job; who, either secretly or not, disagrees both philosophically and theologically with same-sex mar-

riage; and who would then telegraph that bias in the manner in which he or she conducts the ceremony that it would be effectively ruined, and would become a lifelong bittersweet memory.

So when I greet them with the most enthusiastic "welcome" that I can muster; when I begin the ceremony with a brief personal commentary in the same theme as this article; when I toss-in a mention of my earlier-stated observation and amazement at the relative longevity of same-sex relationships as compared with opposite-sex ones; when I thank them for choosing that day and that time to be married so that I would have the honor of performing the ceremony for them; and, finally, when I ask them if I may add my blessing or wish that "whom we join here today, let no November ballot put asunder," there is, invariably, a roar of cheering and applause from the witnesses assembled, and the first of what end-up being torrents of deeply emotional tears from the couple.

"Thanks for your words," I have been told on more than one occasion by couples and witnesses alike. "Thanks for making us feel so welcome."

One early-August afternoon, the elderly and wheel-chair-bound grandmother of two dapper tuxedo-wearing gay men whom I had just married curled her finger at me after the ceremony and asked me to draw near so she could tell me something. As the revered matriarch of her family there assembled, her call to me after having been silent up to that moment brought a hush to the room. I knelt beside her chair, steadying myself with my right hand on the front end of its armrest. Putting her frail hand atop my own, she said, softly and with tears beginning to well: "Thank you for what you said to my boys. They've waited so long. I'm so glad that I've lived to see it."

Looking up at the silent faces of her family members who had, by then, formed a semi-circle around us, I noticed that not an eye was dry. The moment had so many layers of emotional meaning for them all that I didn't know exactly how to respond. Looking back at I finally replied: "The pleasure and honor were mine, dear. I, too, am glad you were here to see it. Your boys' faces reveal that they are grateful for your presence, that they have been enriched by your boundless love, and that they are honored by your loyal and unwavering support. Bless you."

Having unwittingly given voice to feelings that her family members had had for perhaps as long as the whole of some of their lives, the silence was then broken by their dissonant murmur of simultaneous comments of acknowledgement and gratitude. Though it had been a civil ceremony which, by law, contained neither mention or symbol of religion, the Holy Spirit

was nevertheless in their midst, making its presence known, and transforming them all with a subtlety and effectiveness which only it can so deftly manage.

I am, then, a blessed heterosexual whose intellectual understanding of same-sex marriage has been irrevocably changed by his unlikely experience of performing its ceremonies in the little, makeshift chapel on the lower level of the county building on Hedding Street in the hustle and bustle San Jose, California in the heart of high tech Silicon Valley. Though she does not yet know it because I have not yet written her the letter telling her so which I now plan, I am deeply grateful to Gina Alcomendras for the opportunity to both serve there, and to have been witness there to an outpouring of boundless love and commitment which I believe would astonish, by its sheer normality, a thoughtless religious Right that has worked with such misguided diligence to demonize the LGBT community, generally, and same-sex couples, specifically, with its hate-filled rhetoric and crafty biblical misdirection.

If I had my way, the lot of them would be required to spend a day in that little chapel with me so that they could see what I've seen, and know what I know. No Christian of good faith and conscience could possibly be present for such outpourings of unmitigated jubilation as it has now been my privilege and honor to witness without being somehow changed by it.

A profound irony is the lesson about the true nature of marriage which Prop 8's proponents could learn from the very LGBT community whom it so despises. Some of the greatest lessons of the very Bible to which they so earnestly cleave is filled with such clever ironies. That they've so missed their true messages both comes as little surprise, and begets great sadness.

Bishop Fulton Sheen once wrote that love is a sign, a symbol, a messenger, a telltale of the Divine saying that every human affection, and every ecstasy of love, are sparks from the great flame that is God. In the same-sex weddings I have performed in the little chapel in San Jose, I have been touched by the sparks of that great flame illuminated, most unexpectedly, by their blinding light.

I signed-up to be a wedding commissioner back in June just to help out as what I felt at the time was something akin to a philanthropic act. In my ignorance and arrogance, I believed it quite likely that I would be giving far more than I'd ever be getting back from the experience.

One warm summer day in late July, after I had just completed a same-sex ceremony and the little chapel, filled to capacity, was exploding with rejoicing and congratulations, a woman standing next to me leaned in and said, a

bit wryly: "So, then... this ain't such a bad gig, eh? I mean... you're feelin' the love, right?"

Pausing, briefly, I leaned back in her direction and replied: "If you only knew."

In the four-and-a-half months leading up to election day, I could recall only once when, just by chance, there didn't happen to be any same-sex couples among the dozen and a half that I married during my shift that day. Driving home afterward, I was surprised by how I had missed the higher level of excitement and happiness which, I have observed, seems to characterize most of the same-sex weddings ever-so-slightly more than most of the opposite-sex ones. But, alas, I did not despair, confident in the knowledge that there would be more on future days. Back then I was stupidly confident that Californians, not being historically known for taking away anyone's constitutional rights, would never in a million years approve Prop 8.

On the day I gave my speech while standing on the steps of Napa's City Hall, my most recent shift in the little chapel just one day earlier had been the first time that the clerk-recorder's office had scheduled me since Prop 8 was passed a little more than a week earlier.

"There were, of course, no same-sex weddings yesterday," I lamented to the crowd, "and there will be none next time I'm scheduled... or the time after... or the time after that."

Lowering to my side the sheets of paper on which my speech was written, I looked across the crowd of those assembled and said into the microphone: "So, then... maybe what I'm really here for is to ask you all to get out there and fight. Don't let them take this from you! Make sure there are more same-sex weddings to which I -- to which we all -- may once again look forward."

And so now we wait while jurists decide. At this writing, the California Supreme Court has agreed to hear arguments perhaps as early as March of 2009. Considering the complexity and stakes of the matter, a ruling will likely not come for some time thereafter; and regardless what said ruling turns out to be, the losing side will almost certainly not rest until the matter is finally before United States Supreme Court, which could take years.

Until then, there will be no same-sex weddings in the little chapel. While that will be bad for all the socio-political reasons that I have described, and which others out there in the world are able to explain far better and more eloquently than I, it will also be bad because, in the end, that woman of wry

wit who leaned-in toward me on that warm July afternoon was absolutely and prophetically right.

It ain't a bad gig. I did feel the love. And I miss it.



Gregg L. DesElms is a 52 year old management consultant living in Napa, California and serves as a sworn deputy commissioner of Civil Ceremonies for Santa Clara County, California. He is studying for ordination with the North American Old Catholic Church.

Commissioner DesElms can be reached by email at gregg@greggdeselms.com



Praying the Daily Office: Why we don't do it, and why we should

- By Father Chris Tessone

O *God, make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me.*

These words open most hours of the Daily Office in many of its traditional forms. Whether prayed by Catholics, Anglicans, or Orthodox, the Office—also called the Liturgy of the Hours—has been central to the life of the Church from its earliest centuries. Although the hours of the Office are best known as the prayer of priests and religious, they belong to the entire Church, and in recent decades the Office has enjoyed greater popularity among lay people. We Independent Catholics and Old Catholics are a sacramental people, so the Eucharist is at the center of our life together. However, the Divine Office is sometimes neglected in our movement. This is unfortunate, because it is such an important part of our heritage and is well-suited to some of the unique circumstances that set us apart from other ecclesial communities.

We work hard in our communities to bring the Eucharist to as many people as possible, often people who are neglected by other churches. A great deal of our energy goes into our communal life on Sundays and solemn feasts. The Office provides us an exceptional opportunity to remain connected in our prayer life on a day-to-day basis, even when our small communities cannot meet in person. The hours are liturgical—not merely personal—prayer, so even when a single Catholic prays the Office alone, he or she praises God with millions of others in the Church militant and with the entire company of the saints. It is a powerful way to remain connected with our own local communities and with our wider tradition.

Another thing that is challenging for our churches is catechesis. When just getting Sunday Mass together can be a struggle, plumbing the depths of the Catholic theological tradition and teaching those riches to neophytes and older Catholics can be impossible. Here again the Office is quite powerful. The Psalms are a school for prayer that mirrors our Lord's own prayers while he was among us. Beyond the weekly or monthly course of Psalms, many forms of the Office offer excerpts from the writings of theologians and mystics—particularly those forms we share with our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, such as the Liturgy of the Hours, the monastic Office, and the pre-conciliar Roman Breviary. The readings given at Vigils (sometimes called Matins) are invaluable for catechesis, because they link the liturgical calendar to a comprehensive theological vision grounded in the Church Fathers and Mothers.

Perhaps best of all, the prayers found in the breviary are well-suited to a modern age where communities that love one another deeply find themselves dispersed geographically—whether all over town or across an entire country. It is quite easy to pray the hours with others over the telephone, using free conference call services and other technologies. Very little is taken away from the beauty of praying with another in this manner—it is even possible to chant the Office over the phone! For religious orders or other groups that can only meet in person a few times a year, praying the hours over the phone can be a wonderful way to maintain ties and help members remain responsible to one another for their spiritual lives.

These thoughts are far from theoretical. Sharing the Office with my sisters and brothers in the Independent Catholic/Old Catholic movement has kept me grounded as a priest and helped me reach people who need spiritual sustenance, particularly young people. It gives me a common language with Christians of all stripes—from my high-church bishop to evangelicals and other Protestants for whom the Psalms are a beloved book of prayer. It has helped sustain me through difficult moments where I doubted my vocation—merely knowing that others were joining me in praying one of the hours helped me through when perhaps I did not want to pray at all. Best of all, my love for the Office has given me my primary ministry, serving as chaplain to a group for progressive, liturgically-traditional folks I started with one of our jurisdiction's seminarians. We meet for prayer from the Monastic Diurnal each Monday night by conference call, giving many of us a richer communal life with other Catholics.

Much of our focus as Old Catholics and Independent Catholics has been on celebrating the Eucharist in small, powerful local communities. That is as it should be, since there are so many people who are spiritually hungry and are not being fed by larger, more institutional churches. But we cannot neglect the things that nurture stronger, more disciplined Christian discipleship and help the Church grow into its calling from God: catechesis and day-to-day, not merely week-to-week, community. If we are more intentional about promoting the Divine Office, by teaching it to our seminarians, by making it an part of parish life, and by praying the hours at our gatherings, we as a movement can achieve even greater things... and all to the greater glory of God!



Father Chris Tessone is a priest of the Independent Catholic Christian Church, and pastors Our Lady of Peace parish in Raleigh-Durham North Carolina.

Father can be reached at tessone@gmail.com

**The Gabriel
227 Tennessee Ave NE
Washington, DC 20002-6427**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED