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- Joanne Rausch
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Blessed are the Peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God. Matthew 5:9

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Pathways to Peace: Pax Christi and Casa Solidaria Pave Way for New Growth

Pax Christi Little Rock completed its second mission to Puerto Rico, working side by side with Casa Solidaria volunteers in the small barrio of Miraflores from November 12-19, 2018. Eight members of PCLR signed up to work on projects with local community members that would serve to improve the quality of life in this mountain village in the wake of Hurricane Maria. Tasks included reinforcing the construction of a recently built outdoor community center, completing a gravel pathway connecting the center with the main road at the bottom of the hill, clearing land/planting garden areas around the center and building benches for community members to use during meetings. Additional plans had been made to reinforce two homes that were damaged by Hurricane Ma-



Tamara Tahat and Kamille Pagan

ria, but it rained every day and it was not possible to help with the reinforcement of those homes on this trip.

Casa Solidaria had constructed this community center in the two weeks prior to PCLR's trip to Miraflores. It will serve as a meeting place for townspeople to attend workshops to improve their local economy through the organization of micro-businesses. Casa Solidaria works with individuals and families, evaluating each person's motivations/gifts and teaching the fundamentals of small business development.

Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be leveled. The windings shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth, and all mankind shall see the salvation of God. Luke 3:4-5



PCLR Volunteers Getting Started

Peace Offerings

Casa Solidaria also assists individuals in completing the paperwork necessary to obtain government assistance for these projects.

On Friday, November 16, PCLR volunteers were invited to attend a small class at the center conducted by Dr. Margara Reyes Lopez. Dr. Reyes is a social psychologist who provides training to community members in communication and other skills required in business environments. Three of the townspeople who had been helping us that day were present for the class.

The PCLR volunteers worked throughout the week completing the path, the reinforcement of the center, and the clearing of the land and planting of many of the seeds brought from St. Joseph's Center in Little Rock. Each night, volunteers drove less than a mile to a lovely 4-bedroom-house provided by Casa Solidaria. These generous folks allowed the group to stay there without charge, significantly reducing trip expenses. Casa Solidaria offered these accommodations for future visits as well.

On Friday and Saturday, the team experienced a little of what Puerto Ricans have been going through for over a year. A water main broke and there was no water in the neighborhood for about 36 hours. However, this inconvenience paved the way for another meaningful experience. The local Catholic priest, Father Oswaldo, allowed us to come up the hill and use his facilities as needed (he had a water storage tank), sparing major discomfort! The ingenious mission team had already purchased several large bottle of waters to prime the toilets and assure plenty of drinking water. This small setback was rec-



Building a Path to the Miraflores Community Center

ognized as the blessing it was, bringing us even closer to our Puerto Rican friends.

On Sunday, the team made a trip into Old San Juan and went to Mass at the Cathedral of San Juan Bautista. Once again, the music "Lord When You Came to the Seashore" was heard and the team felt as though they had come home. On Monday, prior to the flight back to Little Rock, the team visited the headquarters of Proyecto Matria in the town of Caguas. PCLR and Matria teams spent time debriefing and looking towards the next encounter in March, 2019.

Pax Christi's Monthly Mission



Our custom is to contribute to a different peace and social justice cause at each of our monthly meetings. This December, members have provided Christmas gifts for Joy T. and her four daughters. Helping Hand suggested this family might benefit from support this Christmas. Joy and her girls will be attending the PCLR Christmas party at 6 pm on Thurs., Dec. 13. Members should bring their wrapped gifts that evening to be placed under the tree. All are welcome!



PCLR Team Clears Land Around Community Center

Peace Offerings

PEACE PARTNERS

Peace Partners highlights various peace and social justice organizations that share our vision: active promotion of peace in our neighborhood, state, country and world. The goal is to increase awareness of the many organizations in our area that work for peace through social justice and invite joint ventures between these groups to increase the effectiveness of our mission.



Casa Solidaria

Casa Solidaria is an offshoot program of the non-profit organization Proyecto Matria, a group working in Puerto Rico for the past fourteen years. Casa Solidaria has been functioning in a small chapel in the Miraflores sector of Orocovis assisting families who were living in poverty even before Hurricane Maria struck last year. Many residents of the community are unemployed, have speech and hearing problems, are illiterate and have difficulty finding employment. Casa Solidaria assists these families by giving them the tools through empowerment workshops to create small businesses and rebuild their community. This empowerment model is different from most business incubation models as it focuses on people who are "entrepreneurs by necessity," according to CEO Amarilis Pagan.



YOU ARE INVITED TO THE PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK CHRISTMAS PARTY POTLUCK

WHEN: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13 AT 6-9 PM

WHERE: FITZGERALD HALL-DIOCESE OF LR
2500 N. TYLER STREET
LITTLE ROCK, AR 72203

PLEASE BRING YOUR FAVORITE HOLIDAY DISH. PAX CHRISTI WILL PROVIDE FUN BEVERAGES AND A MAIN COURSE.

WE WILL ONCE AGAIN ADOPT A FAMILY THROUGH HELPING HAND AND WE ASK THAT YOU BRING THEM A GIFT TO PUT UNDER THE TREE. WE WILL SEND OUT AN EMAIL SO YOU CAN PICK A GIFT. WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE. PLEASE CONTACT SHERRY AT paxchristilr@gmail.com TO CHECK ON GIFT LIST AND RSVP.



SOLES4SOULS CORK DONATIONS

Over the past month, 412 corks have been donated. Added to the total number of corks (7443) sent out to Soles4Souls previously, our total is now 7855. Please save the corks from those wine bottles and remember to bring them to our next PCLR meeting, drop them off at 415 N. McKinley St., #1040, LR or call 663-5075 and we will pick them up. Thank you!

Peace Offerings

Pax Christi LR Team Reflects on Puerto Rico Experience

Several of the PCLR Puerto Rico team members reflected on the time they spent together in Miraflores. The community experienced with one another was both gift and blessing.



Sandee Haslauer-What an honor it was to go to Puerto Rico with this amazing group of women. . . and George of course. The thing that impressed me the most was watching these women work

the land with hoes and rakes in the rain and mud and on a hillside they could barely stand on. I saw them carry lumber and wheelbarrows full of stones up a vertical path with smiles and laughter. They completed a task I thought to be impossible. I've never seen a more impressive example of woman-power. They are all my heroes!



Mary Hunt-The interior of the island is full of beautiful mountain scenery as well as beautiful people. I was humbled by having a small part of improving their lives in Miraflores. I cannot believe that a group of 50-70+ year-olds were able to complete so much in only a few days. And all of it required jobs where no one was in their comfort zone.

We don't clear back jungles, haul rocks, and construct gazebos in our everyday lives, but there we were with the force of the Holy Spirit getting it all



Janet Lord, Mary Hunt, Susi Blanco and Jan Pipkin
Get Down and Dirty in Puerto Rico

done in the mud and rain! What a beautiful result!

The vision of the Casa Solidaria Matria team is amazing. I am impressed by the way they plan to improve people's lives. They are repairing their homes, building a community center, and starting gardens. More importantly, though, they are guiding the people themselves to start their own businesses so that they can sustain and build upon all of the improvements. The Matria team members themselves are also not in their comfort zones. These are lawyers leading construction and farming projects!

There is so much need there and more people

As generous distributors of God's manifold grace, put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure he has received. I Peter 4:10

Peace Offerings

from the US with expertise are needed to guide them further. In the meantime, they can count on us with God's love in our hearts to do so much more than we ever thought possible ourselves.



George Simon-For me, the whole Puerto Rico mission comes down to one powerful reality: family. This was the second trip for some and the first for others. And both the nature of our work and the conditions under which we worked were quite different. But the same thing appears to

happen each time: people of common purpose and dedication, and with passion and care for one another-some of whom barely know each other-become a true family. There we were, quartered in a place we'd never even seen before, and in short order it was home! We did the family laundry and cooked the family meals. And every day we enjoyed the company of all of our brothers and sisters who live on the island.

One day, while I was busy cutting some wood to fashion supports for a structure we were building, a young man came up behind me and I heard what I thought was a familiar voice. I turned around and it was "Eddie," someone I'd spent hours with while sealing a leaky roof on the last trip. Our faces both lit up brightly. It was like connecting with a long lost brother. And this scene played out in many ways with many different folks all during our time there. The big takeaway lesson for me on each trip is how connected we are to one another, whether

we bother to be aware of it or not or whether we truly appreciate it or not. We human beings are truly one family. But we're all too prone to forget this. When we remember, joy, harmony, and peace inevitably happens. I treasure these trips. I love my family.



Sherry Simon-I remember very well my first thought as I stood in the rain looking at the "mountain" we needed to clear, the gardens we needed to form, the path we needed to build and the structure that needed to be reinforced. It seemed an impossible

task, and I was so concerned that we weren't the right people to make this happen! Where were all the 20-year-olds? I was worried that we were going to let down our friends and that our trip would be wasted. But, we set out to do one task at a time, because what else could we do? Once we got into it, I noticed that we were laughing together a lot because we all knew that what we old people were trying to accomplish here was crazy! I think maybe there was something about that laughter that made things start to happen.

First of all, people came to help. Two "muy fuer-to hombres" showed up the second day and started helping us hoe up the weeds, dig trenches for the paths and carry rocks up the hill. Then, I started noticing that people were "morphing" their Arkansas "day job" skills to address the needs we had as we worked these novel tasks. Tamara and Mary turned out to be expert gardeners. Susi used her seamstress abilities to put together the path and Janet was right

Peace Offerings

by her side putting down plastic, laying out boards and spreading rocks (she's a nurse). George and Sandee teamed up and did all the reinforcement work on the structure. And Jan Pipkin and I hauled lots of rocks up to the top of that slippery slope, generally laughing all the way. Our skillset was that we like to walk! And certainly, we all took our turn at clearing the land and sorting the seeds. It all fell into a rhythm and at the end of the week our projects were actually getting done. Right by our side at all times were our friends, Kamille, Amarilis, Margara, Javier, Eddie, Leonardo and Jose. They showed us their way and we learned so much. In this space where we knew nothing in the beginning, we had to depend upon one another for some kind of guidance and support. And in the middle of it all, we ended up building much more than a garden, a path and a community center. I believe we actually experienced that special bond that grows when two or more are gathered in His name. . .



Tamara Tahat-It was an honor to work along side Casa Solidaria and Matria members who are striving to help Puerto Ricans who are marginalized. Whether they are the people of Miraflores or abused women, they are looking for a way to rebuild their lives. The hard work we put in on the gazebo and surrounding area is worth it because it is now a beacon of hope, literally atop a hill for the villagers to see. The classes provided and the

space for discussions will hopefully bring new ideas and businesses to the community. It was fun to help make and plant the gardens and I look forward to seeing the end result next trip. Working as a team has strengthened the bond between Pax Christi, Casa Solidaria Matria, and the villagers, letting them know that we are in this for the long haul.

CALENDAR OF PEACE DECEMBER/JANUARY EVENTS

December 13 - PCLR Christmas Pot Luck-6 pm in Fitzgerald Hall., Diocese of Little Rock.

December 16 - ACPJ and Wand Holiday Party at home of Jean Gordon-2510 Hidden Valley Drive.

**January 10 - Pax Christi Speaker's Series-7 pm
Panel Presentation-The Puerto Rico
Experience- Fitzgerald Hall-Diocese of LR**

**January 12-13-Pax Christi LR Retreat at St. Joseph's Farm -6800 Camp Robinson Rd., NLR -
Begins at 10 am Sat, Jan. 12 and
ends with Mass on Sunday morning. Call
Sherry at 258-8653 if interested.**

January 17— Welcome Home Meeting-7 pm- Fitzgerald Hall- Diocese of LR.

Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourself to thankfulness. Colossians 3:15

Peace Offerings

Reclaiming Armistice Day: Remembering the Centennial of the End of WWI and Projecting a Future of Peace

On November 11, 2018, the day celebrated in the United States as Veteran's Day, Pax Christi LR along with Arkansas Coalition for Peace and Justice and



Poppies-Symbols of Peace

World Beyond War memorialized the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. Meeting at The Promenade on Kavanaugh in Little Rock, several speakers shared the history of Armistice Day,



Sherry Simon

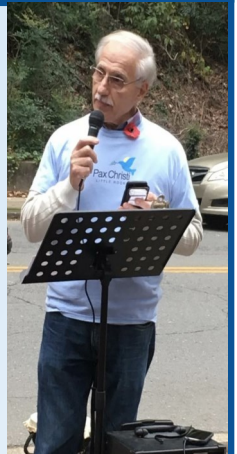
poetry and speeches pertaining to the end of WWI, as well as a vision of peacemaking in a future beyond war. The concept behind this memorial was the reclaiming of Armistice Day as a way to memorialize the end of WWI and project a future of peace. Some believe that we have moved away from peacemaking in changing the name of this holiday. Our veterans certainly deserve honor for their service to country, but the idea was discussed that we would prefer that our loved ones live in a more peaceful world where they would not have to be sent into battle. Celebrating and focusing on peaceful resolution to conflict is one way to move away from violence as an option in our world. Michael Vaughn, a war veteran, provided his view on the



Centennial Armistice Day Memorial

importance of peacemaking and nonviolence.

WWI was supposed to be the war to end all wars. When it ended on Nov. 11, 1918, millions were dead, empires had fallen and the course for the rest of the 20th century had been charted. For years afterward, the US celebrated Armistice Day on Nov. 11 to mark the end of the war. Then in 1954, the holiday was officially renamed Veteran's Day by Eisenhower to commemorate veterans of all wars. This was because there had been two more wars since



George Simon

WWI - WWII and the Korean War. Canada celebrates Remembrance Day on November 11 and Britain has Remembrance Sunday (2nd



Donnal Walker Speaks to Crowd

Sunday in November). In Europe, Great Britain and the Commonwealth countries, two minutes of silence is observed at 11 am every November

He shall judge between the nations and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.

Peace Offerings

Furonda Brasfield Awarded Abolitionist of the Year

The Arkansas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (ACADP) held its annual award banquet on Thursday, November 29 from 6-9 pm. Furonda Brasfield, the executive director of ACADP, was named Abolitionist of the Year. Furonda has been instrumental in addressing death penalty issues over the past few years, particularly in 2017 when she led the organization in working against the attempted execution of 8 men on death row in 10 days. Furonda manages the day-to-day functions of ACADP, including community organizing and policy development. Ms. Brasfield is an attorney who has a long-term interest in social justice issues and criminal justice reform. Recently, Furonda announced that she would be leaving her position with ACADP so that she can put her energy into developing a private practice in her hometown of Stuttgart, AR. Pax Christi Little Rock supports Furonda Brasfield as she continues her efforts to fight for social justice in Arkansas.



Pax Christi Little Rock Supports ACADP

PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK

IS SPONSORING

WELCOME HOME:

A GROUP FOR CATHOLIC LGBT MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES/FRIENDS WHO WISH TO ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

THIS IS AN ONGOING DISCUSSION GROUP FOR CATHOLICS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBT AND ALLIES WHO MAY HAVE LEFT THE CHURCH AND WISH TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF RE-CONNECTION WITH THEIR FAITH THROUGH PRAYER, CONVERSATION AND SUPPORTIVE INTERACTION. THE CHURCH FAMILY IS DIMINISHED BY YOUR ABSENCE. WE INVITE YOU INTO A DYNAMIC CONVERSATION THAT CAN BUILD A BRIDGE. WE HOPE YOU WILL JOIN US IN LEARNING ABOUT ONE ANOTHER AND GROWING OUR FAITH TOGETHER.

WHEN: THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 2018 7 PM

WHERE: DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK-FITZGERALD HALL-

CONTACT: SHERRY WITH PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK AT paxchristilr@gmail.com

PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK SPEAKERS SERIES

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2018

7 pm

Pax Christi LR team members share their experiences in Puerto Rico following their second mission trip (November 12-19). Puerto Rico continues to recover from damages sustained last year in the wake of Hurricane Maria.

WHERE: Fitzgerald Hall-St. John's Center LR
2500 N. Tyler Street, LR AR 72203

QUESTIONS: paxchristilr@gmail.com

Peace Offerings

An Advent Prayer

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a wonder at the wisdom and power of Your Father and ours. Receive my prayer as part of my service of the Lord who enlists me in God's own work for justice.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a hunger for peace: peace in the world, peace in my home, peace in myself.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a joy responsive to the Father's joy. I seek His will so I can serve with gladness, singing and love.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me the joy and love and peace it is right to bring to the manger of my Lord. Raise in me, too, sober reverence for the God who acted there, hearty gratitude for the life begun there, and spirited resolution to serve the Father and the Son.

I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose advent I hail. Amen.

Dismiss all anxiety from your minds. Present your needs to God in every form of prayer and in petitions full of gratitude. Then God's own peace, which is beyond all understanding, will stand guard over your hearts and minds, in Jesus Christ. Philippians 4:6

Pax Christi LR is Planting Seeds for New Growth

Pax Christi Little Rock is planning their second annual retreat on January 12-13 at St. Joseph Center of Arkansas. This beautiful old orphanage that has been reborn under the steady guidance of Sandy DeCoursey will be the perfect context as we seek to discern our path into 2019. St. Joseph has been transformed into beautiful gardens and the folks who work there share a vision of environmental stewardship that is contagious! Just as they are preparing for the spring and new life, Pax Christi Little Rock hopes to plant seeds of peace and justice that will grow and make an impact on our world.

Please join us as we move forward in our quest for new growth, one heart, one person at a time. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Sherry at 501-258-8653 or email paxchristlr@gmail.com.

I planted the seed and Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. This means that neither he who plants nor he who waters is of any special account, only God, who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters work to the same end. Each will receive his wages in proportion to his toil. We are God's co-workers, while you are his cultivation, his building. I Corinthians 3:6-9

Advent Light: Finding Christ in a Dark World

By Sherry Simon

It is so easy for the depth and beauty of this Advent season to be lost in the midst of our culture's commercialism and hype. I personally feel overwhelmed every year as the season seems to approach more and more quickly. I'm not ready. So it makes sense to stop for a moment and consider the powerful symbols that surround us, the gift of Advent, reminding us of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I was looking for something to give me some light during this winter season when it is often difficult to find hope in our days. In my search, I wandered into this passage of scripture:

Finally, my brothers, your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is true, all that deserves respect, all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous, or worthy of praise. Live according to what you have learned and accepted, what you have heard me say and seen me do. Then will the God of peace be with you. Philippians 4:8-9

When I think of Advent, I am first reminded of the light provided by the Advent candles. That light that brightens our days and guides us to the birth of something new in our lives. Collectively, the candles represent the four weeks of Advent. Each candle is a milestone on the journey from prayer and penitence to the miracle of the birth of Jesus.

Here are the meanings behind the lighting of each candle:

First Sunday of Advent-Candle of Hope

As the light of this first candle penetrates the darkness, we realize that God's light and love does the same and that we can hold fast to the hope that He will keep His promises to us.

Second Sunday of Advent-Candle of Faith

This candle reminds us of the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. In spite of the trials we find on our path, we are called to remain faithful

that Jesus is coming and to prepare for His birth.

Third Sunday of Advent-Candle of Joy

This candle moves us from hope and faith to the joy of knowing, beyond a doubt, that Jesus will soon be born. We are getting closer to that glorious new birth.

Fourth Sunday of Advent-Candle of Peace

This candle recognizes the angels' announcement of the coming of our Lord, and their anthem of peace on earth and good will towards all of creation.

These symbols of light reveal to us what cannot otherwise be seen. We are not alone in our daily struggles. There is an energy beyond our comprehension that is eternally present in every moment. It is present even in those dark hours when we feel totally abandoned. Perhaps that is the importance of Advent. I am reminded by the many candles that, by habit and tradition, I placed throughout my home. Something beautiful is coming. The world is not meant to live in darkness and the winter will end. And I am reminded that the light of Christ leads all to see one another and connect in peace. We thought we were alone, but the light reveals that we are surrounded by others who are there to walk with us and grow in love.

So, I hope that we don't move too quickly to the Christmas season. Let us surround ourselves with the anticipation that comes with the Light of Advent. Consider the possibility that the richness of life is found more in the graced light of the journey than in the achievement of the destination.

**Prepare the way of the Lord,
Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God.**

**Every valley shall be filled in
And every mountain and hill shall be made low.
The rugged land shall be made a plain,
And the rough country a broad valley.
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.**

Is 40:3-5

Peace Offerings

LESSONS FROM THE MOTHERLAND

By George Simon

I made my second mission trip to Puerto Rico last month. And it was a bit unusual. You see, I was the only male among our 8 missionaries. On top of that, our partners at *Proyecto Matria* and *Casa Solidaria* were also mostly women. Naturally, it felt a bit weird to me to be the only man among so many women. And I must confess I was more than a bit nervous about how things would go. But these women graced my time there in ways I could never have imagined. And my experiences with them taught me some lessons I'll never forget.



The name *Proyecto Matria* has an interesting story behind it. The word *matria* loosely translates into the feminine version of fatherland. And its female founders named it that purposefully. They found it more than a bit curious that so many countries refer to their homelands with masculine terms. But that's really quite understandable. After all, it was mostly men who, through force and aggressive leadership, conquered both the lands and their indigenous inhabitants to carve out the swatches of territory that define our present countries. But it's also been mostly men, who, in their quests for various things like the earth's precious resources, political power, social domination, etc., have not only butchered each other but also ravaged the land – mainly to preserve the fruits of their conquests. All the while however, and for far too much of history, women did most of the grunt work, always in the background. To be sure, the right to own property and to vote are fairly recent developments, even in so-called advanced societies. Nowadays, of course, women have some greater visibility and influence. But they've always been there, quietly and dutifully making it all work.

What I witnessed in Puerto Rico would humble any man. Women my age were carrying heavy buckets of

materials up steep hills (sometimes sliding and tumbling in the mud). I saw them swinging machetes to clear incredibly thick brush (my dear wife still has a nagging case of "machete elbow"). And the women our small group partnered with not only had it all organized, they pitched in with the plowing, hoeing, planting, etc. In their advance planning, they saw to it that we would have free accommodations – perhaps a bit spartan by our standards, but darned near luxurious by the standards of the community we came to serve.

I like to cook, so I took care of most of the evening meals. It may sound strange, but it was just one way I felt I could help nurture these wonderful women who gave so much of themselves to help nurture the Puerto Rican motherland back to health. And there's so much to do. Among the men who largely run state and municipal services, there's been a lot of infighting. And if the population in an area didn't happen to vote for the party in power, well, they're likely to go without for days on end when something goes wrong. To be blunt, it's the men in their cronyism and corruption who've made a mess of things. They've kept things a mess, too. And it's been largely women, in grassroots movements like *Proyecto Matria* and *Casa Solidaria* who've been doing most of the cleanup. It's more than comforting to know that they tirelessly continue their efforts when we're not there to help.

Next mission trip, we're likely to have some more men among the troops. And I will certainly appreciate both their company and their special gifts. But I wouldn't trade the experience of this last trip for anything. Unique displays of strength, resilience, determination, and fortitude were everywhere. And they were as inspiring for this man to witness as they were meaningful for him to embrace as life lessons. This place we've come to love, Puerto Rico, needs a lot more nurturing if it is to survive and prosper. And women have a vital role to play. I'll do my best to help the men who accompany me next time appreciate that. And I'll pray the same for our world. It needs a lot of nurturing right now, too.