

Glimpses of Artisans of Change

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64), celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing meeting of 1995 and the 10th Anniversary of the start of UN Women was cancelled this year because of the Corona Virus. Thousands of women and girls had invested so much energy and so many hopes in this two week long event and were very disappointed. The Grail, an NGO at the UN, had invited girls from seven countries and five of these girls arrived before the cancellation. Although there was no UN event to participate in, these girl delegates made contact with several groups while in New York. Students of the Academy of Mount St. Ursula had the opportunity to hold a zoom



meeting with Abida, Liria and Marlene from Mozambique, Carolina from Mexico and Noelina from Uganda. After listening to the stories of the girls from Mozambique Dannerys Peralta, an AMSU Senior, praised them for their courage in speaking about their experience of early marriage and membership in street gangs and for having the courage to escape and respond to the help of young women of the Grail, becoming effective youth leaders, strong enough to come to the US to give witness to what girls can do. Arriany Santiago, another AMSU Senior, spoke with compassion about all that they had faced and her commitment to take their message, to reach out and advocate, so that others will not be victimized this way.

Alice Marie Giordano, osu New Rochelle, New York

“Great! I’ll have time to crochet baby booties and afghans!” were my thoughts when I retired at St. Clare’s Villa in Alton, Illinois. Instead, God had other ideas. In addition to the many opportunities to serve others right here at the Villa through smiles, listening, encouragement, and prayer, I felt called to volunteer at the local YWCA once a week with their after-school program for younger children. This involved playing games, reading stories, singing, and helping with homework. At the “Y” I was also able to continue the Race Discussion meetings that I had attended in St. Louis. Now, as I listen to the radio, read the newspaper, or engage in conversation, I find myself noticing racial issues. For example, in reading an article about a local radio station with a photo of the staff, I noticed the lack of a single black person in the group. I called the Station and mentioned that I did not see any Blacks in the photo and that I was surprised because we have talented Black people in town. The person who answered the call was quite receptive to what I had to say and mentioned that he would look into it. Because I want to be of more help with children learning to read, I am saying farewell to the children at the “Y” and looking into an invitation to join the Foster Grandparents Program to tutor children with special needs. So long, baby booties!

Theresa Sarich, osu Alton, Illinois

A justice issue relevant to Montana and other states with a significant Native American population are the number of murdered and missing indigenous women. Native American women are 10 times more likely than the national average to be murdered. In many situations the reports of a women missing are ignored by law enforcement at first. On reservations a murder is handled by multiple law enforcement agencies – tribal, federal (FBI), state, local and possibly by the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs). This inter-jurisdictional cooperation is very problematic. Often as law enforcement procrastinates with various rationales family members and friends begin the search. Usually it is several days or weeks before the body is found if at all. Then weeks or months go by before arrests and prosecution. Many of the missing have never been found and no criminal charges are brought. Montana is in the top 10 states with the highest number of MMIW. Native Americans make up 6.7% of Montana's population and account for 26% of missing persons report from 2016-2018, nearly 2/3 of the cases were women and girls.

I have been participating on a committee to host an event in Billings, Montana May 2 (now postponed due to the corona virus) to call both awareness to and demand action regarding MMIW (Murdered Missing Indigenous Women). Our committee is composed of Zonta women (an international professional women's organization addressing violence against women), several Native American women representing various organizations and myself. We plan to have a short march in downtown Billings to a central space where red dresses* will be hung from an overhang. There are a number of Native American women speakers. One from Angela's Piazza will tell her story of being kidnapped by a Native American man whom she knew and tortured for 4 days before escaping. She will also tell the story of her sister who was murdered. There will be drummers and a prayer leader present.



*Red dresses and the red hand across the face have become symbols of the MMIW movement.

An excellent video: "A Broken Trust: Sexual Assault on Tribal Lands" is available on at <https://youtu.be/-slFVM4ECUk>

Mary Dostal, osu Billings, Montana

For several years I have been a volunteer at Kumler Methodist Church Outreach in Springfield, Illinois. This church has a free clothes closet, a food pantry, and helps with medication expenses. Dozens of senior men and women from more than twenty churches volunteer regularly. They asked me to say a short prayer before the doors open. We are a small faith community that loves to celebrate any occasion along with our hours of helping clients. This week, most volunteers decided to suspend their volunteering due to Covid-19. We promised prayer for each other with hope that we will again serve in this ministry together.

Theresa Davey, osu Springfield, Illinois

What can you do?

I am using the "sheltering in place" to sew surgery masks. Joann Fabric is sponsoring a project to sew masks, with pattern, lists of materials and simple tutorial. Anyone who can sew a straight line, could make one.

Rita Kohut, osu Great Falls, Montana