

## PREACHING HOPE IN A TIME OF DESPAIR

By Sr. Brenda Walsh, Racine Dominican

The global meltdown is frequently in the news these days. Hundreds of thousands of homes are going into default, banks are failing, and we have the largest amount of job loss in the past two decades. We know there is no quick fix for the current national and global situation. We must have hope and be courageous, creative and compassionate in our response.

How does one have hope in a declining economy, shrinking investments and disappearing jobs and health care coverage? As we journey through life, we can expect many challenges and struggles. Often I meet people who have shattered dreams and plans gone awry. The responses of individuals and groups in each situation are unique.

Chaos can have profound meaning that leads to a deeper search. Creativity can come out of chaos such as job loss, natural disasters and failing health. If we only focus on the problem, the result is we will intensify the pain and become engulfed in fear and doubt. I recall the story of Peter walking on water going to meet Jesus. When he looked down and saw the waves, he began to sink. When he kept his eyes on Jesus he arrived safely at his destination. Choosing hope is the only way to go. Our hope is based on our faith in God, not in a God up there somewhere, but a God who is described in Matthew's Gospel as one who says: "I am with you all days, even to the end of the age." This approach is not a cop out or avoidance of the problems. It is grounding our hope on reliable promises.

One thing is evident. People are no longer in a "shop until you drop" mode. They are sorting out their needs from their wants and limiting their purchases accordingly. Talking with family members about their needs and what living simply means for them will help children and youth to make adjustments with a purpose. Include the children in the planning so that they will not be craving for unnecessary things in times of scarcity. There is a call to be in social solidarity with the poor by sharing not just from our surplus but even from our need. It reminds me of the years I was growing up in my native land, Ireland. Our family motto was: "If we have more than we need. It belongs to someone who has less." Poverty was a way of life for most people there, but they were willing to share their resources with people who had even greater needs.

We can share words of encouragement and hope with people who are struggling to survive. We can also gather in small groups and discuss ways to support each other.

Faith communities can facilitate such gatherings and discussions and come up with some creative solutions for local needs.

This is a time to evaluate the moral and ethical aspects of our economy and discern what “option for the poor” that the global church has so frequently talked about, really means. In the past, poverty brought new creativity and action for the common good.

There is a call to re root ourselves in God, whose supply of mercy and compassion never goes bankrupt. We are also called to bring justice and peace into our political, social and economic life and work to empower those who are dispossessed..

Many times, we see waves of compassion following natural disasters or in times of great need. That can be our response during these difficult times. The hopelessness we see need not be a disaster. It offers us an opportunity to develop a genuine trust and hope in God who really cares. It will help us realize that many of the foundations we built upon were on shaky ground. There is a new call to a revolution in our values, away from material wealth and militarism, and to create communities of compassion, peace and opportunity for all people. Hope comes at a price. It is more than making a wish list. It means expecting that God’s providence and compassion will see us through. It is a good thing to name our hopes and count our blessings, especially in dark times, and work to make our hopes create something new. Complaining will not help. We become stronger and more compassionate by sharing hope.

People of any age or condition can join in the response. A valuable contribution we can call make is to act hopefully and in that way, bring encouragement to those on the brink of despair. A call to hope means to be hopeful even when there are few visible signs. Sometimes the darkest hour is before the dawn. We can all pray and work for God’s outcome for ourselves and others Together we can move the stones of poverty, violence and disease. Our efforts however small, can make a difference. With common trust in our God, we truly can move mountains. We are as small as our fear and despair, and as great as our courage and hope.

Sr. Brenda Walsh is a Racine Dominican