

## FIRST PLACE -- WINNER OF A \$1,500 SCHOLARSHIP

By SARA ALLEN of HAYS KS

### A Future Hope

"The mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph is unity and reconciliation. They strive to unite all people with God and with one another." Being a woman, a Christian, a Catholic, and a daughter of God, I have the responsibility to live my life also in accordance with such a cause. It is incredible that the Sisters are celebrating 125 years, and it would really be amazing to be able to be a part of the next 125. There is a need for unity and reconciliation both for individuals and in the world. Education is a crucial part of that process. My sincere hope is that through my education, I can carry out God's will and be a part of the mission of the Church.

My understanding of unity is that it is the bringing together of individuals for a common purpose to make a difference. It is imperative to begin with the individual and then to expand to other people, groups, and nations. A personal example of how unity expands is from this past summer when I was a counselor for Jr. CYO camp. After a few days with the kids, our last meal together we closed in song and prayer. A circle was created and arms were linked. A couple of priests joined in as they saw this. The circle grew. The love was spread and more room was made. After camp, we all went our separate ways, but we all came to realize we all had something in common. The solid rock of Christ could be shared in our homes and communities.

Living by example is one of the greatest teaching tools I came to know that summer. What I gained from my campers and what they took from me will forever impact my life. The future of the Church is in the hands and minds of the youth. I have

made a difference. I can make a difference. I will make a difference. The education I have gained and will continue to gain through more schooling has been and will continue to be an impetus for me to carry out the mission championed by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

God's heart is never too full to love more of His children. By visually seeing that through my experience as a counselor, I was able to understand that without each other, united in God's love, we would have *nothing*. The world is so fixed on trying to be *something* without Him that we find ourselves dwelling in pain and suffering rather than embracing happiness and joy. We are never truly alone, but until we let the Holy Spirit live in and through us, life will throw us challenges that we alone cannot handle. It is the family, friends, and sometimes even strangers around us who help us along our journey.

.As I reflect on the second part of the mission, I know that reconciliation is also a need of all people and in our world. Being Catholic, the Sacrament of Penance is a tremendous gift that I had once taken for granted. Not always understanding what a privilege it is, I simply went through the motions. However, in coming to realize the magnitude that forgiveness brings to our lives, I now view it as something essential to my faith. How remarkable it is that we, though unworthy sinners, are given the hope of life everlasting with the Lord! And in the spirit of spreading this forgiveness to others, we must also take seriously the responsibility of reconciling with those who we have wronged or who have wronged us. This is truly a Christ-like activity and is a sharing in God's plans for us. A personal story of forgiveness for me took place this past Easter. Being in love is an incredible emotion to be able to express for someone, but when that love is broken, whether for the good or bad, initially pain is felt. When I experienced this pain in my own

life, I was hurt, especially when my questions asked were not answered and I was left to wonder what went wrong and how things could have gone differently. Then I realized that I was only in control of my half of the situation and therefore I had to learn to forgive. Just as Christ forgives us, I must also forgive others. If I am living a life in Christ, then it is not even a question, after all I have been given, to not find it in my heart to forgive my trespassers. While I realize this is difficult sometimes, I am committed to it. No doubt the Sisters of St. Joseph overcame similar obstacles in their ministry and never wavered from their God-given charge. In response to my heart's need to forgive, that is exactly what I did. That Easter Sunday, I put closure to my past hurts and fears. I reconciled with the man who caused me so much pain. Mercy had been given and shared, and once again, I felt God's love enveloping me. I look at the situation today and know that because the reconciliation took place, I will continue to be able to appreciate what I learned during the relationship and have it inform my future decisions.

I have come to realize that things that are true, beautiful, or good rarely make complete sense in their immediate context. I think first of Mary at the foot of the Cross and how things must have seemed so hopeless, but she persevered and was rewarded by seeing the mystery of Easter in its fullness. Therefore, we are saved by this same faith that Mary possessed. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone. The Sisters of St. Joseph have been living witnesses of the power of a unified group of people working together, and the Church is right to be grateful for their witness.

As I attempt to accomplish similar things in my own life, I have found that personally living the mission is rooted in prayer. Contemplative prayer to me is like oxygen to my soul. Without it, I would not survive, and I think others could benefit from

it as well. It is my daily spiritual vitamin to make way for God's graces in my life. A recent image that I have in my mind is when I saw my younger brother feeding ducks the other day. I thought that this is how our loving God relates to us, especially in prayer. When I come before God at such a time, I realize that He is nourishing me in a similar way. It is my firm belief that God will always be faithful and provide this for me.

I have so much in my life for which I am thankful. I have the blessings of a good family and a quality education. In thinking of my time as I child, I have found that I often played 'Follow the Leader.' Then I came to discover that I will never be too old to play that game, that is, as long as the leader remains Christ. I have realized that because I am human I am not capable of being perfect, but I am striving to improve on the life I have been given. The rewards of this are reason enough to face the daily challenge to become a better person. Swallowing my pride and giving myself entirely to the Lord will be a stepping stone to attaining the eternal joy that God has in store for all of us.

Mother Teresa declared of herself, "I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world." I wish to be that same pencil. I desire a change for the better. It is my Christian duty to take that risk of stepping from the known to the unknown and to put God in charge. I want to be an individual who creates unity and reconciliation among all people, with God and with one another.

Finally, in living out not only the will of God but more specifically the mission of the Sisters, I have another quote that comes to mind from Thomas Carlyle. He said, "Show me the man you honor and I will know what kind of man you are." Keeping the man as Christ will be what I need to live out unity and reconciliation in my life as well as what will enable me to spread these gifts to others. Thank you for your consideration of

me as a candidate for this scholarship, and I hope that the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph will live on for many years!