

TAKING THE NEXT RIGHT STEP...

Lead Kindly Light

By Cardinal John Henry Newman (1833)

Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on;
 The night is dark, and I am far from home,
 Lead Thou me on;
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene; one step enough for me....

Whenever I found myself getting upset, discouraged or angry about what was going on in my life or in the world my friend Brother Mike used to encourage me to ask God not for the solution, not for a vision of what will come but "for the next right step." That's wise counsel but tough to hear for someone who wants to get things fixed as quickly and as thoroughly as is possible. Give me a crisis and I'll get right to work, making calls, assembling resources, and advocating. This is a position that worked well when I was a counselor and people often needed immediate responses to keep them safe or avert barren shelves, school expulsion or homelessness.

It doesn't work so well, however, when dealing with systemic problems like injustice, abuse, polarization, and fear. That's when taking the "next right step" comes in and it's often, in my view, painfully slow and inefficient. I'm not good at patience and waiting. When I was pregnant with my second son, the doctor told me on February 2 that he'd be born "any day now." I paced, I "awfulized," I was uncomfortable. I complained, moaned, and felt out of control not just for days, but for more than two weeks. Eighteen days later I cradled new-born Jeremy in my arms. In retrospect I realized that time of waiting was needed to give me the gift of my son—and I remain grateful.

Like many Catholics I'm appalled by the sexual abuse scandal in the church. It makes me physically sick. Whatever is done feels like no more than spitting in the ocean. Big changes are needed and one thing's for sure, as Pope Francis said, there has to be an end to the clerical culture. Okay, I say—let's get busy and clean up this mess. Give me a broom. I want the horror and shame of this sin to be gone. The reality is that the effects of this scandal

will linger far longer than when any new protective systems are put in place and maybe a lot of things need to be destroyed and rebuilt in this process. And so I feel the pain and sit in the muck as I pray and lament. Much as I want to "fix" things, this, for me, seems to be the next right step for now.

It's the same with what is going on in our country right now. Like most Americans I hate living in a divided nation. I don't like being with people when there are things—important things we "can't talk about." I applaud events that bring people from differing sides of the spectrum together to get to know each other as persons and often discover the other is not the enemy and we have much more in common than we are different. It seems so small but the seeds of new life and healing are there, so acknowledging the pain, grieving, patience and involvement are the next right steps for me now.

I work with and love immigrants and refugees and I am saddened that many people fear them and don't want them in our country. So, maybe my next right step is to share their stories with people who haven't had the opportunity to know immigrants and refugees so perhaps the fear slowly—often very slowly—begins to melt and these newcomers are seen as people like themselves trying to protect their families from violence and hunger as any parent would. It's a painful process for all of us.

Maybe our communal next right step is being willing to enter the cloak of night that seems to be enveloping us now—to sit in the grief and uncertainty of the Saturday after the crucifixion; not knowing but hoping there will be a resurrection. It's painful here. I can't see my hand in front of my face. I don't know if anyone else is here. There could be an unseen monster lurking nearby ready to devour me. I'm not sure if I—or we—will survive. But bleak and frightening and painfully slow as this is it just might be exactly what is needed to restore us. It reminds me of the time I fussed and complained in the weeks before Jeremy's birth but later was joyful and filled with gratitude as I nestled him close to my heart and was caressed by his sweet baby breath and the music of his baby sounds. It was worth it. The time of waiting wasn't pleasant. I wouldn't have chosen it, didn't like it, but it was needed.

So for now I'm choosing to live in the uncomfortable place of unknowing and tension. I don't like it, but I believe it is the next right step. Anyone willing to join me?

—Angela Anno



St. Leo Food Pantry is seeking organizations that would be willing to "Sponsor" one month of our operating cost (see numbers to the right).

Sponsor's name will be recognized in the food pantry foyer, on St. Leo's website, in the monthly newsletter and in the weekly Sunday bulletin during their month; and if interested, the organization's members would be welcome to volunteer by working in the pantry serving our clients.

If interested, please contact Casey Betz at 513-921-1044 x 30, cbetzstleo@aol.com, or mail to: Casey Betz, St. Leo the Great Church 2573 Saint Leo Place, Cincinnati, OH 45225.

St. LEO FOOD PANTRY

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