

Experiences of Hope in a Broken World

Irma Dillard, RSCJ, experiences hope in a broken world every single day.

As an RSCJ who ministers to the poor, she is currently serving in two very different parishes: St. Boniface with the Franciscans in the Tenderloin of San Francisco, one of the most depressed, poor and crime ridden districts in the city; and Most Holy Redeemer Church located in The Castro, San Francisco, the first gay neighborhood in the country. Beyond those ministries, she supports the St. Vincent de Paul Society Board as she volunteers at the Help Desk and helps to revamp their clothing, food and household give-away program.

We spoke with Sister Dillard to learn of her experiences, to understand what she sees, to share the brokenness she encounters and the hope that she finds.

Tell us about the brokenness you find in the world.

I see brokenness every day. I see it with the people I have the honor of working with and serving in San Francisco: Working people, intelligent people, people living below the poverty line, families, single folk, male, female, crossing all cultures, all ages, and all gender lines: brokenness touches everyone.

My personal prayer and experiences have been focused on the brokenness in our world. I cannot simply articulate one story; that just doesn't do it for me. I am experiencing the brokenness when I sit down to talk with someone. It cuts deep. When I turn on the news on TV or radio, open





Fellowship with the RCIA (Right of Christian Initiation) candidates. From left to right: Colin Chandler, Josephine (Josie) Boyd Conn, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, Adora Anderson and Irma Dillard, RSCJ.

a magazine, drive through the city, etc.—brokenness is everywhere. I am continually haunted by the faces and lives of people and yet, at the same time, I am uplifted by the faces and lives of people.

The visuals are very real for me; the faces share the experience of human destruction on all levels: terrorism, fracking, phishing, human trafficking, 21st century human slavery, unemployment, home foreclosures, fear and violence, shootings, etc., etc.

I believe that the root cause of this brokenness is greed and selfishness; fear and oppression. The hurts that people wear generation after generation as both individuals and groups, those hurts take on a life of their own and manifest

themselves in institutions like racism, in the exploitation and economic gain for a few, such as the 1% that we talk about today.

Brokenness is all around us. But we are completely numb to it because we are barraged with so much of it on TV, radio, in magazines that we miss the point that it is real. It is someone's life.

Tell us about the hope you find in the world.

I see, in each person, so much hope. It is all about connectedness or lack thereof. Everyone desires to have a purpose and meaning. Everyone wants to be loved and to love. Everyone wants to belong and be accepted. So when one is

connected, feels a part of something other than oneself, there is so much hope. This happened so clearly with three people in the RCIA.

I am in journey with three individuals in the RCIA program at Most Holy Redeemer. Their stories are full of hope in the midst of all the brokenness. Two were non-believers, both growing up in atheist families. Choosing God and wanting to have a relationship with God meant hope for them. The third grew up in the Bible Belt in the South with the “wrath of God” being the message. She knew she was different most of her life. As a trans-woman she has come through some horrific experiences and has deepened her relationship with God. She can say and she believes that she is “fearfully and wonderfully made by God.” God has called each one of them by name.

How are people finding hope in their lives?

God. Trusting in the love and mercy of God. Trusting in that covenant promise. Being in journey with others and sharing our stories. Where are we letting God speak to us? Do we hear her voice?

The hope is that through connections between others and God that people will gain awareness to commit to change.

I am part of the process. I am in journey with people to assist them to be aware and to be connected. I do that by paying attention, listening to them, letting them talk about their own brokenness. Telling their story is healing and it offers perspective. I can make a difference by being connected to other human beings. We can all make a difference by truly connecting with one another. ❖