

Chapter 17: HEALTH ISSUES

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30)

There is no doubt that physical strength and wellness have been issues affecting the history of Holy Redeemer. It is appropriate to mention health issues here since God knew ahead of time what He was going to have to work with in establishing first the monastery, then Agape House. *“For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord; ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope.”* (Jeremiah 29:11)

Besides the normal viruses, allergies, sprains and breaks, and consequences of aging that might be expected living in the American Midwest, the Mothers have dealt with three more specific things which have impacted their life together over the years. Mother Paula has progressive muscular dystrophy, Mother Pilar has arthritis, and Mother Pilar had complications from a fall from a horse at age 18.

When Holy Redeemer was founded in 1986, Mother Paula was sometimes using a cane but able to participate in all the activities required for the running of the farm except heavy lifting and the sheep work. Shortly after the move to Bloomfield her mobility decreased to the point of needing a motorized scooter to get around the property, although she was still sharing driving responsibilities and housework. After moving to Greenwood, weakness increased to the point that Mother Pilar and Carol had to take over all driving and household duties. She is now in a wheelchair. Thanks be to God, these restrictions in strength and movement were not accompanied by pain.

Mother Pilar, on the other hand, has dealt with the chronic pain associated with severe arthritis. The arthritis developed to the point that she has, so far, had to have both knees and one shoulder replaced. The fall as a teen damaged a disc in her back, which calcified and impeded her spinal column until, in her 60s, Mother Pilar was threatened with losing her ability to walk. She had major reconstruction surgery on her back.

Carol has been blessed with very good health, although after retiring she has had to face the loss of physical and mental health of both of her parents. She is now full-time caregiver for them and is facing the challenges those health issues present.

These health situations individually and together have affected the women’s priorities regarding time, energy, and money. Understandably, physical well-being has been the topic of much prayer and reflection. Here is an excerpt from one of their 1992 newsletters:

“Sickness shouldn’t surprise us. Even as part of the Kingdom of God, we live in the midst of a broken and dying world. However, Christians are in union with the God Who is Life, whose desire is to heal us and redeem us from destruction. (See John 14:6 and Psalm 103:2-4)

Sickness is a great teacher of humility. When in a situation where our weaknesses make very evident our inability to be in control and basic survival needs are foremost, we get a clear picture of how vulnerable we are. We cannot make it alone. Union with Christ in His Body is our survival.

Sickness quickly tests the strength of inner reserves. Our faith is tried, and the fruit of our life becomes evident. Therefore, we must regularly nurture body, soul, and spirit in every way possible, caring for our body with proper food, exercise, and rest and our soul and spirit by participating fully in the life of the Church.”

Saints Paul, James, and Peter have offered us encouragement in the Scriptures about how to look at difficulties: “*We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28), “*Consider it a great joy whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing*” (James 1:24), and “*You rejoice in this though now for a short time you have had to be distressed by various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith (more valuable than gold which perishes though refined by fire) may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” (1 Peter 1:6)