

Playing small doesn't serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that
other people won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God
that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in
everyone, and, as we let our own light shine we
unconsciously give other people permission to do
the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our
presence automatically liberates others.

Nelson Mandela

Christmas 1997

San Francisco

Dear Friends:

I treasure the words above. My friend Jane Pitz sent them as a birthday gift last February and they have provided inspiration, challenge and consolation in a year of significant changes. As this year winds down, with a month of long nights and short days, I pass Mandela's words on to you, as a spark of Christmas light and encouragement.

My leave of absence from the Congregation of Holy Cross expired on May 31st. As the date approached I informed my fellow CSC's that I would finalize my separation rather than return.

Leaving Holy Cross was not an easy decision. I have spent my entire adult life as part of the "Congregation de Sainte Croix". I've taught and ministered in its schools and created two of its newer missions: the Andre Houses in Phoenix and Oakland. Many dear friends and colleagues are part of Holy Cross. I had come to regard it as my second family. But when "push came to shove", that loyalty and devotion, I sadly discovered, were not mutual. So, like many friends, who have endured the pain of separation and divorce, I have chosen to move on with my life "senza rancor", as Mimi sings in Act III of LA BOHEME.

I did not petition for "laicization" since I want to keep open the possibility, at least, of resuming ordained ministry in some other, future, context.

September brought additional change and challenge. The new (one year) Executive Director at the Berkeley Emergency Food & Housing Project, where I've worked the last two years, decided to assert her control of the agency by abruptly firing the woman who had created all of the agency's programs

and was universally regarded as the "heart and soul" of The Food Project. Wendy Georges is a fellow Chicagoan and a beloved colleague in the holy work of lifting up the poor. The homeless of Berkeley revere her as a saint and reacted to her firing with a classic, and prolonged, round of Berkeley "political theatre", but failed to persuade the agency's Board to override the sacking. I told the E.D. I thought her action was shameful and disgraceful and that I wouldn't cooperate with it in any way. When she pressed the issue, the very next day, I resigned in protest. Another cherished colleague stayed, tried to stem the chaos that ensued, but then also quit. All three of us are looking for work.

I am **not** writing this letter from the city shelter. Providence brought about another change -- of address. My sister Marykay, and her daughter Sara, recently moved from Seattle to San Francisco. She bought a house on Telegraph Hill which has a garden apartment that I am now renting. (Talk about timing! I was about to experience the "no room at the inn" aspect of Christmas firsthand!) So I am now a citizen of the City of St. Francis, delighted to be under the same roof with family, and living only two blocks from the cafe where I spent many afternoons in the summer of '74 sipping espresso and writing post cards, while a summer session student at USF.

Recent events have left me disillusioned about institutions of all sorts. I feel somewhat daunted at the prospect of once again applying for jobs. Many of you also know what a discouraging process that can be. I continue to rely on, and to thank God for, the trust, encouragement and support of family and friends. And I continue to be inspired by the witness of good people who stare down the devils of despair with courage and hope. Like my friend, Ca-Rolle, who has fought a valiant struggle to turn her back, forever, on the heroin addiction that once made her homeless. She is housed now (thanks to my recently fired colleague) and busy raising some of her grandchildren. This summer she found out that she had breast cancer and had to undergo a radical mastectomy. In the recovery room, as soon as she had regained consciousness from the surgery, Ca-Rolle demanded that the nurses remove the morphine drip from her I.V. She endured the excruciating pain and discomfort of the following days and weeks without chemical relief, rather than risk any reliance on pain killers or a return to a narcotic lifestyle.

People like Ca-Rolle, and so many of you, remind me that the courage and hope and daring of Isaiah, John the Baptist, Mary and Elizabeth are alive and well to this day! May the birthday of the one they longed for, be, for all of us, a rebirth of tenderness and caring. And as all of our still-unfolding life stories begin new chapters in a new year, please know that you are in my heart.

John J. Fitzgerald
381 Filbert Street
San Francisco, CA 94133

(415)397-6630

Love,
Jitz