



Presents

INVISIBLE WORDS

Invisible Words is an exercise in empathy expressed through a public art exhibition featuring a curated collection of signs made by people experiencing homelessness worldwide. The exhibit, events, and thought-provoking programs to inspire service and action will premier at **Martin Luther King Memorial Library** in Washington DC in March 2022.



Photo ©2020 by Invisible Words

Invisible Words features compelling statements that are seen but too often overlooked by Americans every day. The signs reveal a range of emotions: embarrassment, shame, desperation, anger; even humor and political insight. Their words are raw, emotional, and sometimes magnificently poetic. In stark contrast to the sidewalks and underpasses where these signs were purchased from their authors, the exhibition invites the viewer to linger. Pulling aside the scrim of our own discomfort, we can gaze directly at these powerful messages, freed from the awkward interactions and sideways glances with which we often confront them.

Social activist **Wendy Abrams** curated the exhibit. Abrams' previous work includes the public art exhibit *Cool Globes*: oversized globes showing solutions to climate change. Since premiering in Chicago in 2007, *Cool Globes* has toured across four continents and has been translated into nine languages. Regarding *Invisible Words*, Abrams explains that "homelessness is a heart-wrenching and complicated problem. I don't pretend to have the answers, and this exhibit is not intended to tell viewers what to do. Art has the power to make you think; this exhibit was put together to do that, to see things you didn't see before, or see them through a different lens."



Read about IVC's Impact

Invisible Words is brought to Washington, DC, through the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC) and the Eleven Eleven Foundation. IVC is a national lay Catholic organization that harnesses the expertise of individuals over fifty who have the passion and commitment to make a difference in issues impacting the world. IVC members serve among the materially poor in twenty regions across the US, reverently entering the lived experience of others while providing their skills to over three hundred social service organizations. By co-sponsoring *Invisible Words*, IVC seeks to offer a broader audience the opportunity to increase awareness and compassion for people facing homelessness and dire poverty. "Seeing with new eyes is what service corps members do. IVC presents the incomparable experience of *Invisible Words* as an exercise to open more hearts to empathy, and to inspire the service and advocacy that brings real and lasting hope," IVC President and CEO Mary McGinnity explained.

The mission of the Eleven Eleven Foundation is to support thought leaders, change agents, and organizations that work diligently to improve our planet, our health, and future generations. The Foundation feels a deep passion and sense of urgency for advancing society's approach to the Environment, Healthcare, and Education.

Invisible Words will be on display at the Martin Luther King Memorial Library from March 13 - June 30, 2022. The MLK Library is located at 901 G St NW, Washington DC 20001. The library's hours are 10-6 M-W, F, Sat and 12-8 Thursday, and 1-5 on Sunday. For more information, contact: Steve Eberle, Vice President for Advancement, Marketing, and Communications – 410-752-4686 or seberle@ivcusa.org.

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Mary McGinnity

President and CEO
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Catholic Social Teaching

As described by Pope Francis in Let Us Dream

Jesus gave us a set of key words with which he summed up the grammar of the Kingdom of God: the Beatitudes. They begin in the hope of the poor for fullness of life, for peace and fraternity, for equity and justice. It is an order of existence in which values are not negotiated but sacrosanct. Reflecting on the Kingdom of God in response to the way we live in the modern world, the church has developed a series of principles for reflection, together with criteria for judgment that also offer directives for action. It is known as Catholic Social Teaching (CST). While they are drawn from reflection on the Gospel, its principles are accessible to all, seeking to translate and set in motion the Good News in the here and now.

The criteria are truly expressions of love, that is, they seek to set in motion dynamics that allow people to feel loved, especially the poor, who are able to experience their true value.

- Preferential Option for the Poor

We need to always keep in mind how any decision we make might impact the poor. And we also need to put the poor in the center of our thinking.

- The Common Good

We are asked to have regard for society as a whole. The common good is the good we all share in, the good of the people as a whole, as well as the goods we hold in common and that should be for all.

- Universal Destination of Goods

God meant the goods of the earth for all. The goods of life - land, lodging, and labor - should be available to all. This is not altruism, or goodwill; it is love demands.

- Solidarity

Solidarity acknowledges our interconnectedness: we are creatures in relationship, with duties toward each other, and all are called to participate in society. That means welcoming the stranger, forgiving debts, giving a home to the disabled, and allowing other people's dreams and hopes for a better life to become our own.

- Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity ensures that we do not distort the idea of solidarity, which involves recognizing and respecting the autonomy of others as subjects of their own destiny.

Before You Tour the Exhibit

Take a moment to thank God for giving you this opportunity to be open. Ask the Spirit to light your way as you proceed.

Opening Prayer

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end,
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

~ Thomas Merton,
American Trappist Monk &
Roman Catholic Priest

Take a moment to rest, to simply be. What are you feeling right now? What thoughts are going through your mind? Take a moment to record what you notice about your state of being before touring the exhibit.

Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading of Scripture As the Living Word)

Lectio divina is a method of praying the Scriptures. The practice of *lectio divina* traces its roots back to the early centuries in the Church. And while in its beginnings this prayer method was set aside for monks and religious, today *lectio divina* is a widely held practice by many laymen and laywomen.

Lectio divina is a slow, rhythmic reading and praying of a Scripture passage. You pick a passage and read it. Notice what arises within you as you read it. Then you read it again, and then again, noticing what words and phrases grab your heart and noticing the feelings that arise. You respond to God about whatever is stirring within as you read and pray with the passage. Finally, you rest and let God respond and speak to you.

~ Becky Eldredge

The Process (Consider devoting 10-15 minutes to this prayer time)

- Read the passage below slowly. What word(s) or image(s) do you notice?
- Read the passage slowly for a second time. What does this word or image mean to you right now?
- Read the passage slowly for one final time. Using your imagination, place yourself into the scene. With whom do you identify? What are you feeling as you live the story?

From the Christian Scriptures:

Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*” He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn, and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Touring the Exhibit

Slowly tour the whole exhibit reverently, spending just a moment in silence in front of each sign (the tour of the signs may take you about 20 minutes in total).

- Notice what, if anything, catches your attention—don't dwell too long. It could be due to the words and the way they make you feel (e.g., empathy, discomfort, confusion, merciful, sorrow); or, it could be the visual impact of the sign (e.g., the artistry [or lack thereof], the colors and materials used)
- Take note of any assumptions/biases you make/have when looking at the signs.

Be aware of the signs that have the greatest impact on you.

For Deeper Reflection

Choose Three Signs from the Invisible Words Exhibit and consider the following questions:

Sign #1

1. Notice the work. Look silently at it for a few minutes and record your observations. What do you see? What do you feel? What do you think the author is trying to say to you?
2. Think about how you see the world through your various lenses. These could be related to your role in your family, your age, your socio-economic status, your race, your ethnicity, your interests, your hobbies, your passions, or anything else about you.
3. What social conditions does the author invite us to think about? (Social conditions have to do with the role or state of people in a society or community. Examples include poverty, quality of housing, homelessness, educational attainment and quality, unemployment, wage levels, lack of control over the organization of work, racial residential segregation and other forms of discrimination.) What are the systems that create those conditions? What are their parts and how do they work together?

Sign #2

1. How might the author provoke us to think about systems of power (and powerlessness?)
2. How might the work provoke us to think about systems of care (and disregard?)
3. How might the work provoke us to think about environmental systems (and pollution?)
4. How might the author provoke us to think about systems of justice (and injustice?)

Sign #3

1. How might the work invite us to think about political systems?
 2. What roles do people's religious beliefs and assumptions play in the systems the work makes us think about?
 3. Does the author invite us to think about social change? Does it make us want social change, and, if so, what kind? How would systems need to be altered in order to bring about that change?
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End the prayer experience by thanking God again. Ask God's blessings on all of the artists, authors, curators, and sponsors of this exhibit.

If part of a group, consider these final two questions:

1. With a partner or small group, take turns talking about how you see or think about the work. You might see the work similarly, differently, or both. Try to see what your partner(s) notice(s) and ask questions to understand more about their perspective. Possible question starters: Say more about what you mean by.... Tell me more about why you see/think/feel... Take a minute or two to reflect.
2. What did you learn through your conversation? Did your thinking change, shift, broaden, or zero-in on something? If so, how? What new thoughts or questions do you have now?

For information about how to join the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, please contact:

In Washington, DC and Suburban Maryland:

Mike Goggin: 202-277-4447 or mgoggin@ivcusa.org

In Northern Virginia:

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Sources consulted:

Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future, by Pope Francis: Simon and Schuster New York, 2020.

Project Zero: Harvard University: ARTC Handbook – “For Deeper Reflection” Questions



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