Voices of Sisters
Spirituality




Sr. Jane Marie Bradish must dodge this hole when she arrives for work. The school's main entrance was torn up so the underground power lines could be repaired. (Jane Marie Bradish)



by Sr. Jane Marie Bradish

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Where I live, the running joke is that we have two seasons: winter and construction. The length of each varies depending on the weather. Lately, every place I go, I meet construction.

The church I attend was having window work done; the stained glass needed serious attention. The windows were gradually removed, repaired and returned to their respective places. Every couple of weeks or so, scaffolding was moved around, and different areas of the church were taped off with red "caution" tape. I've often joked that prayer/real God encounters should come with a warning sign of some kind. I never expected caution tape. My initial encounter with the taped-off areas of church brought giggles. Let's be honest: Opening yourself to God means dramatic change — it is not for the faint of heart.

For the past few years our international motherhouse has been under construction as it is transformed into affordable housing for the neighborhood. It was a giant maze of noise and dust and constant detours, one I'm very grateful not to have lived through on a daily basis. Negotiating my way through when I came for choir rehearsals or liturgy was more than enough for me.

I was very conscious that the physical structure was being transformed, and with it our community. The building would no longer "be ours"; instead, the structural heart of our community would be opened in new and once-unforeseen ways. Our foundresses often spoke of responding to the needs of the times; offering "our home" to others is just such a response.

My place of ministry had a major utility failure which resulted in — among other things — the concrete at our main entrance being torn up so the underground power lines could be repaired. It was a little unnerving to walk around barrels and across plywood labeled "hole" to get in and out of the building. And of course, because this happened as the temperatures plunged, filling holes and repouring concrete will take a while. I say "hello" to the barrels each morning as I arrive; it seems a better approach than complaining about them.



Pieces of the roof from Sr. Jane Marie Bradish's residence stand in a pile during a construction project. (Jane Marie Bradish)

And not to be left out, my residence needed minor roof repair. The front yard was piled with debris during the work. It was a quick repair, taking less than two days, but I found myself rattled seeing the volume of decayed pieces that needed replacement.

It seemed everywhere I went and every piece of my life was "under construction." Then a single line of Scripture starting haunting me. Seemingly out of nowhere Ezekiel 36:26 popped into my consciousness. The passage has God promising a new heart in replacement of a heart of stone, and that — once that happened — we would be God's peoples and God would be ours.

Two phrases from a song I can't identify (Google failed me big time) are constant companions: "I will give you a new heart, a new spirit within" and "And you will be my people and I will be your God."

I'm humming them as I write. Belonging to God and being one of God's people — YES. Heart of stone … what?

It's easy to look at the stones of the world: violence, discrimination, human trafficking, pollution, poverty, mental and physical illness. The list could go on. But what was this passage trying to say to me? With a haunting Scripture passage and hymn lyrics running through every part of my being, it didn't take long to find pieces of my heart that can best be described as stony.

There are the things I just can't understand and make me angry. For example, why are people killing each other in random ways and times? As of April 15, the nonprofit research group Gun Violence Archive had counted at least 155 mass shootings in the United States this year.

Elsewhere, children are being exploited globally. There's nothing wrong with not understanding or being angry, but if there is nothing but angst, there are stones.

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There are stones called grudges, usually from when something didn't go "my way" (or a way I agree with and can support). It could be the position I wanted but didn't get, even if the end result is better. It could be the people who speak about me behind my back that I can't seem to ignore. It could be institutional policies that aren't changing fast enough for me.

There are stones I carry from premature, untimely or sudden deaths. Yes, I grieve and celebrate life and have good memories of shared time. But every once in a while, some seemingly insignificant event or memory creeps in and I find myself resenting the events and circumstances around death.

There are other stones, too personal to share publicly, that keep me from being the person God has called me to be. So that begs the question — what do I do? Let's go back to my construction encounters. In none of the cases was the construction simple; things had to be taken apart, repaired and/or replaced and put back together. Each project: windows, remodeling, power restoration and roofing — required money, planning, time and effort.

The same has to happen with all of us. God isn't going to just show up and "fix us." That's not how it works. We need to put time and effort into first identifying and then

softening our stony hearts. I guess I have a project ahead of me.