

## Bernardin Lecture 2014

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### Guest Speaker: Sister Joan Chittister

#### Executive Director of Benetvision

Joan Chittister, OSB, is an internationally known writer and lecturer and executive director of Benetvision, a resource and research center for contemporary spirituality. She currently serves as co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, a partner organization of the UN, facilitating a worldwide network of women peace builders, particularly in Israel and Palestine. She was an advisor for the groundbreaking report, "A Woman's Nation," led by Maria Shriver (2009) and was a member of the TED prize-sponsored Council of Sages, an interfaith group that

developed a Charter for Compassion (2009) being promulgated worldwide with all faith organizations.

Sister Chittister is the author of sixty-six books, a columnist for the National Catholic Reporter ("From Where I Stand"), and a regular blogger with the Huffington Post. Her books include *A Passion for Life: fragments of the face of God* (1996), *Heart of Flesh: a feminist spirituality for men and women* (1998), *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope* (2004), *The Friendship of Women: the hidden tradition of the Bible* (2006), *Uncommon Gratitude* (2010).

Sister Joan appeared with the Dali Lama at both the First Emory (University) Summit of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding and at the conference *Seeds of Compassion*. She was the coordinator of *The Rising Great Compassion*, an interfaith retreat for monastic women at Dharma Drum Mountain Center in Taiwan.

**Tuesday, OCT. 28, 2014**

**Lecture: 6:00 pm, USC Law School Auditorium**

**Topic: "The Common Good: An Uncommon Search For Common Ground"**

the following co-sponsors along with the Department of Religious Studies made this event possible

College of Social Work, University of South Carolina  
Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine  
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Trinity Episcopal Cathedral



First Lady Patricia Pastides-Moore at the book table selling Joan Chittister's books before the lecture.



Seats begin to fill in the auditorium before the Lecture.



Mark Buyck, member of the Bernardin Committee and on the USC Board of Trustees, visits with former USC President John Palms and USC Provost Michael Amiridis.

## Evening Lecture

Dr. Carl Evans, Bernardin Lecture Committee member and retired professor from the Department of Religious Studies, welcomed everyone to the event. USC Provost Michael Amiridis then came to the podium to greet everyone on behalf of the university and Sister Nancy Hendershot, a long-time supporter of the Bernardin lectures, introduced the guest speaker.



Sister Chittister captured the audience with her dynamic personality and challenging presentation. Point by point she discussed what it means in our world today to live in support of the common good. Her appraisal of the ways in which we and our societies do not promote the common good were compelling and sobering.



“What is it that we perceive to be good for everyone?” she asked and how should we go about getting it? In our diverse, multicultural, pluralistic society and world, whose good, whose well-being is going to take precedence? She then turned to look at the Beatitudes, the characteristics of those who are “bless-ed, holy, fully developed spiritually.”



To be poor in spirit, she began, “is to begin somehow to truly understand what others do not have but need and what we have— but do not need.” The second measure, she said, of the life lived in beatitude, is “being human enough to mourn for the plight of those who are living inhuman lives.” Honestly seeking the common good requires that we “be concerned about the effect of our own actions on the lives of others.” To be meek, to live gently in today’s world, she continued, means “to live in a way that my living does not destroy yours.” Humility becomes an ingredient of respect. The beatitude of mercy, the passage says, is given to those who themselves deal mercifully with others. When we, as a society, as a nation, she said, “use the sins of another to treat them as less than human, it turns our own errors into targets we wear for life.”

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, it is said, will be both happy and satisfied. But to pursue this beatitude we must “persist in the commitment for righteousness until at long last, once again, righteousness, justice, and humanity, stamp made in the USA over everything we do: every product we sell, every piece of legislation we pass, every human right we protect everywhere.” We must work to bring freedom and justice to all, as our pledge proclaims.



The beatitude says that the pure in heart are blessed and happy. These are the ones, she says “who see good everywhere and treat everything and everyone as also good, as also gift, as also greatly to be prized. They see God everywhere, as well, and refuse to . . . view the world through narrowed eyes and a wary heart. . . . To be ‘clean of heart’ must mean keeping our eyes on a common good that raises our spirits and our dignity and every level of society among us.”

And the final beatitude says those are blessed who endure persecution for the sake of righteousness, who “even if persecuted for standing with the poor, for defending the oppressed, for supported the causes of righteousness.” Happiness comes, she says, “from being true to the best ideals within us, from being true to the humanity of the entire human race, not simply to the security of our own, from being the best human beings we can possibly become,”

She summarized at the conclusion:

If the common good is an overarching view of the way we want our world to operate, we have been given criteria by which to form it:

- it must be poor in spirit,
- in grief for those whose lives are grievous,
- humble in our relationships with others,
- merciful in our responses
- thirsting for justice in our dealings
- pure in heart about our motives and our behaviors,
- purveyors of peace
- and courageous and fearless in the positions we take in behalf of all these things.

“And most of all,” she concluded, “remember as the writer says, ‘unless we work for the common good, there won’t be any.’ You and I are responsible or bringing it. The only question is will we do our part of that process or not? “



After the lecture everyone crowded around to speak with her and get her to sign books.