Opinion
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by Mary Ann McGivern

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I have visited the wall between Israel and the Palestinian West Bank. I have spent a two dozen July weeks standing at walls in Northern Ireland. I've stood a number of times at the growing wall between the U.S. and Mexico. I never saw the Berlin Wall, but a friend, a Lutheran pastor near Hamburg, told me that reintegration, after the Berlin Wall was pulled down, was difficult. No surprise there, really.

There's an article in The New York Times about that German wall. On Feb. 5 this year, the wall had been down for as long as it had been up, 28 years, 2 months and 26 days. But big differences remain between East and West — about immigrants, about nationalism, about capitalism and materialism, about Germany's role in the world.

Despite the peace accord, the walls still stand in Northern Ireland neighborhoods. The Israeli "fence" has not brought peace to Israel and the Palestinians. The U.S. wall has not solved our immigration problems — desperate immigrants die in the desert while human trafficking and drug trafficking flourish.

Robert Frost was being ironic indeed when he said, "Good fences make good neighbors." Fences create lasting enmity.

The public Belfast City Cemetery was opened in 1869. They divided the cemetery and dug a ditch down the middle. They built a wall in the ditch and buried it. Protestant graves are on one side of the wall, Catholics on the other.

The walls themselves could be described as scars of war. The builders all think walls will solve the problem. But even when the walls come down, the scars will be there.

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[Mary Ann McGivern, a Sister of Loretto, works with people who have felony convictions and advocates for criminal justice.]