

The **MAST** *Journal*

In the Season of the 2011 Chapter

We Make the Way by Walking: A Reflection on Our Communal Discernment Chapter

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Wisdom That Endures

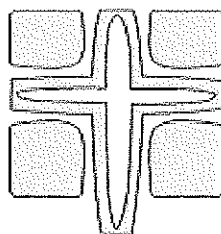
Commission on the Development of the Religious Woman,

Sister Mary Ernest Toolan, Chair, 1968 Chapter Working Paper, Burlingame, California

Commencement Address: Saint Xavier University

Mary Aquin O'Neill, R.S.M.

**The Journal of the
Mercy Association in
Scripture and Theology**



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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,



This issue *In the Season of the 2011 Chapter* rests on a question about how Mercies set a path. Is direction-taking a moment of choice in advance, like the one Robert Frost describes in his poem "The Road Not Taken"? There, his moment of choice presents itself in the image, "Two roads diverged in a wood." Does our community make a decision once and for all when the juncture opens up between a "road taken" and a "road not taken"? Or is our direction-setting better understood as a dynamic that reveals itself over time? Is our road recognized by sign-posts that we find standing to mark our way? Do we come to know which way we are going by reading these postings as we speak with each other?

In relation to the 2011 Chapter, these articles are arranged temporally, in reverse order of composition. Thus, Elizabeth Linehan leads off, in her reflection after the Chapter, having served as a delegate, evaluating the pros and cons of a "chapter of discernment." If it was so particular to the experience of those present, can its effect be translated to those who didn't attend?

Marilyn King helped compile the Institute-wide responses to the planner's question, "How shall we address God?" She synthesizes that analysis in her theological review of biblically-based images of God, and her essay can be read as a prompt for personal prayer.

Julia Upton presented a version of this essay as a public address at the 25th Annual MAST meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, held in June 2011, just prior to the opening of Chapter in Chicago. A professional liturgist, she outlined the changes ordained for Eucharistic celebration that would go into effect six months hence. Her autobiographical introduction draws readers to reflect on the close relation between the Church's liturgical expression and one's personal spiritual history.

Margaret Farley gave an Assembly address for Mid-Atlantic Mercies at Merion, Pennsylvania in April, 2011, in which she talked about the "troubling dissonance between the experience of the majority of women's religious congregations in this country and the assumptions about this experience held by the Vatican," as well as differences among women religious about what constitutes authentic religious life. As we face uncertainties, we do not find ourselves in easy times, but we still claim the hope of the Resurrection.

Norita Cooney, in the months prior to her death in March, 2011, coordinated responses required by the protocol of the Apostolic Visitation. As President of the West Mid-West Community, she composed the essay on Mercy Identity, and it serves as a restatement of our congregational charism, vision and adaptability.

Camilla Burns, a doctoral classmate of the editor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley in the 1980's, specialized in Hebrew Bible. She served in several academic posts, eventually elected as president of her international community. This address was given in Rome in 2005 at the UISG gathering (International Union of Superiors General), where invitational papers focused on themes of religious life associated with the Samaritan Woman in John's gospel and the Good Samaritan in Luke. Unfortunately, the 2005 collection of papers is no longer posted on the *Vidimus Dominum* site, but readers are encouraged to look at presentations from the 2011 UISG meeting.

In the section *Wisdom That Endures*, which retrieves historical documents from congregational archives, it seems apropos to print a Chapter preparation paper from 1968. The chair was Sister Mary Ernest, later Sister Patricia Toolan, known for her creative vision and talent as a speech and dramatic arts teacher at Mercy sponsored-high schools. She died in 2011, this Chapter year, at age 90. Acknowledgments to Sisters Marilyn Gouailhardou and Mary Helena Sanfilippo for providing the editor with this document. We are also pleased to publish a commencement address from 2009 given at St. Xavier University by Mary Aquin O'Neill.

The road that has been taken by the community of Mercy inspires walkers with a range of reflections like these. In the season of the 2011 Chapter, light to show the way ahead comes from thoughtful conversations with these writers.

Yours,

Elise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

Editor, *The MAST Journal*

We Make the Way by Walking:

A Reflection on Our Communal Discernment Chapter

Elizabeth Linehan, RSM

Whenever there is an appraisal involving a rule as to better...action, there is an end to be reached: the appraisal is a valuation of things with respect to their serviceability or needfulness....There is always some observation of the outcome attained in comparison and contrast with that intended, such that the comparison throws light upon the actual fitness of the things employed as means.¹

Older members of what was once the Union remember the historic 1969 General Chapter, which drafted *Mercy Covenant*. This was our interim rule for the period of "experimentation" called for by Pope Paul VI after Vatican II. Since the Chapter was held at the Generalate in Potomac, Maryland, and I lived in Baltimore, I observed one or two days of it.

The mode of Union chapters was parliamentary debate, guided by Roberts *Rules of Order*. This monumental chapter illustrated both the strengths and the weaknesses of this method of communal deliberation and decision-making.

Even then, the Eucharist had become a contentious issue for many. I was present for a significant debate about whether the section on our participation in the Eucharist would include the word "daily" as the official expectation. After long and painful discussion, in which sisters on both sides expressed very strong personal feelings, the body came to a vote: 35 for 'daily' and 35 against. One delegate remarked at the time that this outcome was a perfect expression of where we were.

I believe the tie was a grace. Consider the divisiveness of having such an issue resolved by a margin of one or two votes, as the majority rule model would have it. On the other hand, that model has important strengths. Assuming that the rules are clear and understood by all, and that the process is administered in a transparent and fair way, it is possible to have a well-organized debate

in which the rights of all participants are respected.

In addition, since the process involves stating reasons pro and con, and minutes are generally kept, there is a record available to those not present which will clarify the basis for the decision that has been reached.

The Fifth Institute Chapter in Chicago used a "communal discernment" process. I will argue that this, too, has both strengths and weaknesses,

The recognition that the process (parliamentary debate guided by Robert's Rules of Order) is fair supports acceptance of the outcome, even by those who would have preferred a different one. Issues can be clarified, assumptions identified, important terms defined, so that by the end all should know the implications of their votes.

and I will suggest that some of the communal work we need to do requires a process different from *either* parliamentary debate *or* communal discernment (at least in this form). As examples of alternatives, I will discuss Quaker decision-making at

"meetings for business," and the restorative justice process called "peacemaking circles." My larger point, suggested by the epigraph from John Dewey, is that any process used for decision-making enables some kinds of decisions and impedes other kinds.

My focus will be on the Chapter Declaration, as a main outcome of the Fifth Institute Chapter. The Declaration responded to a question, itself the outcome of a multi-level discernment (the "Loops"). The image repeated often in pre-chapter materials, of "going to the edge" suggested an expectation that the discernment question would be sharply focused and capable of eliciting a radical response. I do not think this expectation was met. For a partial explanation of why it was not, we need to examine the process:

both the preliminary process and the process within the chapter itself.

The "Loop" Process

Early stages of the process surfaced and then refined themes that the members of the community thought important for the Chapter to address. The refinement led to two themes: our identity and our critical concerns. In Loop Three each Mercy Circle formulated a question for discernment, based on the themes. Rather than providing a more precise and specific question about the themes, however, the Chapter question merely restated them: "...where do we need to be led now to come to a deeper response to our Critical Concerns and a radical embrace of our identity?"

No doubt many of the questions submitted by Mercy Circles groups *were* specific.² The synthesis process seems to have smoothed out the edges of sharply focused questions and provided a question that was both more general and more vague. (One delegate remarked on the Chapter floor that the question amounted to "What does

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God want us to do now?")

It is noteworthy that the examples of communal discernment questions given in the book provided to Chapter participants, *Practicing Discernment Together*³, are much more specific: a congregation's decision to give up a valuable ministry; a large region of a church undertaking a cross-cultural mission program in North Africa.⁴

Marilyn King, one of the Loop synthesizers notes in her report on Loop Two, "...the need to look at our 'tension around Eucharist' came through in a number of the reports." She also states that the theme most frequently mentioned in the First Loop reports was our relationship to the institutional Church. This did not emerge as dominant in the next round for many reasons, no doubt, but two that she highlights were "more

important issues to address," and "responding to Critical Concerns is more achievable." Nevertheless, many at the Chapter spoke at tables and at breaks of this issue as "the elephant in the room."

Communal Discernment at the Chapter

The Chapter statement process itself involved four days of work, in "base communities" and "consensus communities," to generate themes and affirmations. It proceeded in small, incremental steps, beginning with an assignment to choose a two-word (adjective/noun) sentence-completing phrase: "In the next six years we need to take significant steps in the direction of..." The results of the consensus table process were posted so that everyone could note points of convergence and divergence. As the responses were fleshed out, a writers group drafted possible chapter statements, and tables submitted feedback. The final draft was presented to the Chapter on Thursday, June 29, 2011 for acceptance. As with the Loop process, the movement was from specific challenges or emphases from tables, to a much more general statement.

The actual vote was taken on this question: "Is this the best statement possible for us at this time?" The unanimous "yes" vote (with two abstentions) appears to be a strong affirmation, but perhaps it is not. "Best possible" all things considered? Or "best possible" as the outcome of *this* particular process, within this limited time frame, with the time allocated in the specific way that it was? More time, especially for plenary (as opposed to table group) discussion might have altered the statement.⁵ A different *process* might have as well. I believe that the specific process we used militated against engaging with a question such as our relationship with the institutional church, with the tensions it evokes among us. Also raised, and avoided, was a strong call to address our unacknowledged racism, another threatening topic

Both the base community process and the consensus group process provided for the possibility of dissent, or at least lack of agreement. If some members could not unite with the majority position at the table, the report that went forward

was to note this. I do not know how often this occurred at tables; mine were able each time to agree on a table response. The concerns of dissenters at tables, however, were aired only there and not in the entire body of the chapter. It is also possible that one set of table groups was actually in disagreement with another set of table groups, so that there was consensus within tables but not *between* tables. If such disagreement existed, the process masked it. Certainly there were whole groups who wanted the chapter to speak more strongly than it did on one or another matter. Our relationship with the institutional church is a clear example. My tables, and some others, repeatedly sent forward strong statements about publicly reclaiming our membership in the church, about systemic injustice in the church, etc., and each time the statements were watered down or absorbed into more inclusive categories. So, finally, the Chapter Declaration says, "We mourn the continued oppression of women in Church and society, unjust immigration laws...." This is at best a compromise statement.

Admittedly, there are risks in opening up for public discussion a question of great importance for most members of a community, on which the community is sharply divided.⁶ We would need to select a process for this very carefully. I think we can learn from other contexts and cultures in this regard. I will focus on Quaker discernment at "meetings for business," and on the Peacemaking Circle process drawn from indigenous cultures and used in some settings for conflict resolution and even for responding to crime.

Decision-Making in the Religious Society of Friends

It surely cannot be said of the Society of Friends (a.k.a. Quakers) that they back away from controversial questions. Quaker meetings, as well as individual members, have given strong, prophetic and risky witness against slavery, against war, for prison reform, at times when these were countercultural. Granting the diversity among Quakers, I will focus on the general decision-making model used in the "meeting for business."⁷

The Quaker model is well described by Michael Sheerin in his study of the Philadelphia

Yearly Meeting, *Beyond Majority Rule*.⁸ I also draw on *Practicing Discernment Together* as a reference for Quaker decision-making.

The initial requirements are the same as for the chapter process of discernment: readiness on the part of each to listen and to speak one's truth with reverence; commitment to seeking the common good; holding one's initial dispositions lightly, in the mode of starting points rather than outcomes to be fought for. The aim in both is a direction or decision around which the group can unite. The key difference, at least for my purposes⁹ is in the nature of the unity sought. Sheerin notes that Friends do not use the term "consensus," nor do they speak of "unanimity." The unity they seek is more complex, and includes several ways of accommodating dissenting voices.

"Central to the Quaker idea of unity-based

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decision making is Fox's¹⁰ idea that there is 'that of God in everyone'....[S]ince the same Spirit speaks in each heart, the members expect to end their meetings united."¹¹

Sheerin cites the current *Book of Discipline* of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting:

...When a course of action receives the general, though not necessarily the unanimous, approval of the group, the presiding clerk formulates the sense of the meeting and it is recorded in the minutes. No vote is taken; there is no decision made by a majority, who override opposition. Action is taken only when the group can proceed in substantial unity.¹²

"Substantial unity" here does not mean simply that most group members agree. In some circumstances a single member who dissents prevents such unity from being achieved. It is after all possible that the dissenter's is a prophetic voice, essential for the community to heed.

Assuming good will and concern for the common good on the part of all, how should a group member who conscientiously dissents from the apparent leading of the group deal with that? And how should the group leader deal with her dissent, should she choose to express it?

The Society of Friends has developed some rubrics for honoring the voices of individuals who dissent from the group conclusion. Sheerin describes three of them (the first two are also explained in *Practicing Discernment Together*, Ch. 8). When the clerk proposes a "minute," of a statement of what s/he takes to be the sense of the meeting, a member can say, "I disagree but do not wish to stand in the way."¹³ This permits the group to go forward with its proposed action, and while the dissenter does not endorse it, she also explicitly agrees not to prevent it.

A stronger option is for the one who differs to ask to be "minuted" as opposed; that is, to have her opposition recorded in the official record. Given the fundamental belief that the Spirit can speak through an individual, a member expressing opposition in this way may lead to some rethinking of the decision, especially if the member is one respected for careful discernment.¹⁴ This action on the part of an individual member still provides a graceful way for the community to proceed, with the consent of the objector.

The third possibility is that the objector will say, "I am unable to unite with the proposal." In other words, the member is not willing to stand aside and have the body proceed with the decision. Particularly if the objection comes from someone who has earned the respect of the members of the meeting, it is likely to be met with an invitation to silent reflection and the possibility of further leadings being expressed. If the matter at hand is sufficiently important, a decision may be postponed.

I believe we can learn much from the Society of Friends about empowering individuals and respecting every voice, within the framework of seeking the common good. Ladislav Orsy's discussion of communal discernment underlines the importance a single voice can have:

Communal discernment should be a process through which the community attempts to appropriate the best insight existing somewhere in

the members, and make it into the community's own judgment.... Communal discernment would defeat its own purpose if sharp insights and well-founded judgments are impeded or watered down to a common denominator acceptable to all. It follows that the internal dynamics of deliberations ought to move toward the highest vision and the most creative decisions that can emerge from the group.¹⁵

Facing Conflict Constructively: Peacemaking Circles

However, in the Quaker meeting for business strong dissent from a proposed resolution is relatively rare.¹⁶ Perhaps we should consider another model (or some features of another model) as we engage the highly contentious issue of our relationship with the institutional church. Such a discussion will be difficult for at least two reasons:

In whatever process we choose, it will be essential that we are led to listen without judging to others' experience, so that we might come to understand how they came to the place where they are. ... Emotional expression in such a context is not only not to be avoided, it is essential to allowing us to enter into the lives of others (to whatever extent we can).

1. Our relationship with the church in some ways frames our lives as Sisters of Mercy. Dialogue about that relationship will – or at least may – take a practical turn. Some possible directions have serious implications for our life as a community (e.g., canonical status; expressions of public dissent).

2. The stance of many of us rest on deep convictions, drawn from long and often painful experience. When our position is challenged, therefore, we tend to become defensive and/ or judgmental of those who differ.

In whatever process we choose, it will be essential that we are led to listen without judging to others' experience, so that we might come to understand how they came to the place where they are. Thus some part of the dialogue will take the form of narrative. Emotional expression in such a

context is not only not to be avoided, it is essential to allowing us to enter into the lives of others (to whatever extent we can).

We cannot know beforehand how we will move forward together from such an exchange, or where we will be led. We must all give up our insistence that there is only one acceptable outcome, or that some outcomes are unacceptable.

The Peacemaking Circle process is consistent with this vision. Much current writing about the use of Circles is in the context of criminal justice, where they provide an alternative to the court system for addressing crime, the harm it causes, and how that might best be "made right." However, as Pranis, Stuart and Wedge say, circles are used more widely for addressing other kinds of everyday life challenges or conflicts.¹⁷

The conventional approach to conflict is to reduce it to simple, manageable terms that fit our categories and then to fight the conflict with the aim to subdue it....If there are differences, we want to prove that we're right and the others...are wrong.

A Circle philosophy invites a different approach. We listen to conflicts to discover the potentials for positive change that they may hold for us¹⁸

A Circle may aim at consensus about taking some action, but it may also simply work toward mutual understanding among the members. The latter is a prerequisite in any case, even if the ultimate aim is decision and action.

It is not possible in a short space to describe the Peacemaking Circle process. In any case it permits many variations based on the group's needs, and must ultimately be learned through experience. I will simply attempt to say enough to illustrate what Circles offer that is not fully captured by the other three processes.¹⁹

The outer frame of a Circle is structured by five basic elements: keepers (see below), the talking piece, guidelines, ceremonies (to open and to close), and proceeding by consensus. Beyond these basics, "circles are designed by those who use them."²⁰ This includes setting the specific guidelines and articulating the basic values

underlying the process. Some guidelines are essential to any circle process, however:

- respect the talking piece²¹
- speak from the heart
- speak with respect
- listen with respect
- remain in the Circle
- honor confidentiality²²

A Circle must be or become a safe space for everyone participating. Ensuring this requires extensive preparation, and it usually requires a series of Circle dialogues. It must be fully accessible to all, and provide everyone an equal opportunity to participate. The circular seating arrangement supports this, and so does the use of a "talking piece." Only the person who is holding the

talking piece is permitted to talk. The use of the talking piece supports equal contribution from all, a reflective pace, and true listening.²³

Rather than a chairperson, facilitator or "clerk," the leader of the Circle is the "circle-keeper." *Peacemaking Circles* compares the keeper role to that of a midwife. Keepers "hold open a space that is clear, open, respectful and free," so that balanced dialogue can take place. If participants are sharing the work of the circle as they should, the keeper will be almost invisible. Unlike facilitators, circle keepers are part of the Circles. They speak "as themselves," about their perceptions, emotions, and personal stories. The contrast with the detached observers stance of a facilitator should be obvious.²⁴

Conclusion

Each process I have considered has strengths and weaknesses. What I hope to have shown is that their respective strengths and weaknesses differ, and therefore one process is not best for all occasions, contexts and goals. It may be that features of these (and other) processes can be combined; I do not intend to be recommending a clear and distinct model that stands alone.

We must all give up our insistence that there is only one acceptable outcome, or that some outcomes are unacceptable. The Peacemaking Circle process is consistent with this vision.

The communal discernment model used at the 2011 Chapter had significant strengths, worth preserving. Everyone had voice in her two table groups. Because of the stability of group membership, and because of the faith-sharing context, it was possible to develop a deep level of trust within the groups. This enabled sisters to listen with respect and to speak candidly. Given the values supported by this process, we are likely to use it – or something like it – again.

With that in mind, I conclude with these questions and comments:

1. What kind of question best lends itself to this form of communal discernment?

Ladislav Orsy maintains that “Discernment in its fullest religious sense is about truly great spiritual issues, where neither the simplicity of the dove nor the cleverness of the serpent is enough.”²⁵ Thus, not housekeeping details. Orsy cites the apostolic Council of Jerusalem as a paradigm example of communal discernment. The question at stake was whether gentile converts to Christianity would have to take on the burden of the Jewish law, particularly circumcision. The question is specific, but certainly not minor. Behind it are competing understandings of how salvation comes: through the practices of the Law, or through the grace of Jesus Christ.²⁶

2. Orsy says, further,

...to come together for community discernment can lead to a new awareness of the Lord. Prayerful concentration on seeking his will may not bring a precise answer to a question determined by the community but it may give it the experience of a redeeming presence; a far greater gift than a particular answer would be.²⁷

I think there was such an experience of “redeeming presence” at our chapter, and that it was a great gift. But this gift leaves me with a question about “bringing it home.” The Chapter is a representative body, responsible to the whole community. The community needs and deserves an accounting of what the Chapter did, and why, because it is the whole community that will implement Chapter directions. To the extent that deliberations went on in small table groups, and the “redeeming presence” was experienced directly only by those present, there seems to be a

gap. We, the delegates and other participants, cannot just say “You had to be there.” It is not clear what we *can* say, however.

3. What do we want to do with questions important for our lives, on which we are seriously divided? This has been the focus of much of the paper.

4. Finally, the Chapter Declaration lends itself to a variety of interpretations, especially as we apply it practically. Because there was so little plenary discussion, even of terms that seemed ambiguous to some, there *is no* “canonical” interpretation. We will have to “make the way by walking” with this document. This is a little frustrating, but perhaps fitting for a congregation once known as the “walking nuns.”



NOTES

1. John Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1939, p. 23.
2. For example, one of the Mercy Circles offered this as the Chapter question: “Are we called to become an inclusive, interfaith community committed to the service of the poor?”
3. Lon Fendall, Jan Wood and Bruce Bishop, *Practicing Discernment Together* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007). It is also important to notice that the background of this book is the decision-making tradition of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
5. In the end, some of us expected that the draft Declaration would be considered by the whole body in plenary session (aka “open mike”). This would have allowed the body to hear minority voices, and to acknowledge our differences.
6. As an historical note: an attempt was made to do precisely this in the provinces of the Union in the 1980s. “The Communal Search for Truth” process provided a series of workshops for the grassroots membership of the community to deal with very painful struggles with the institutional church that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
7. The meeting for business contrasts with the meeting for worship, which is not intended to lead to a communal decision.
8. The full title of Sheerin’s work is *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1983.
9. Another point of contrast is the role of the group leader: “facilitator” vs. “clerk.” A facilitator

instructs, explains the rules, perhaps admonishes (for deviations from rules). S/he does not set the agenda, which a planning or steering committee proposes and body approves. Facilitators can suggest a time out for quiet reflection; like the Quaker clerk, s/he feels out the group and asks if it is ready to proceed to decision.

A clerk at a Friends meeting assumes the rules are already known because group membership is more ongoing. The clerk sets the agenda (often with prior consultation), and tries to capture the leaning of the group by formulating a "minute" which s/he proposes to the group. This is a very influential but less obtrusive role.

10. George Fox was the founder of the Society of Friends.
11. Sheerin, 3-4.
12. Ibid., p. 48.
13. Ibid., p. 66
14. Ibid., p. 69.
15. Ladislav Orsy, *Probing the Spirit: a Theological Evaluation of Communal Discernment* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1976: 29.
16. At least, so Sheerin says, and it makes sense given the ability of the group to meet frequently, and the strong connection between the process and the deep tradition of the Quakers.
17. Kay Pranis, Barry Stuart and Mark Wedge, *Peacemaking Circles: From Crime to Community* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2003): xiii.
18. Pranis, et al., 76-77.
19. That is, parliamentary debate, the Chapter discernment process, and the Quaker meeting for business.
20. Pranis, et al., 61.
21. This piece is an object that is easily held and passed around, one that has meaning for the particular group.
22. Pranis, et al., 106.
23. Ibid., pp. 93-94.
24. Ibid., p. 92.
25. Orsy, p. 14.
26. Ibid., p. 15.
27. Ibid., p. 38.

Prayer

Lord, my life can be so cluttered with business and activity that I fail to see you in all that I do.

Free me from the need to have everything planned and structured from early morning till late at night as though there was no tomorrow.

You are there, walking with me in all of my comings and goings. Help me to empty myself of everything that keeps me from knowing you.

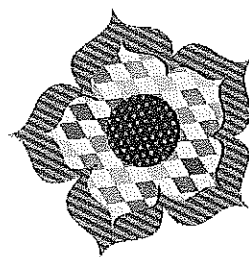
Let me see all my activities on this journey through life as opportunities to experience you in new and surprising and profound ways.

Lord, I pray that I may live always with open hands and open heart ready to welcome you every day into the mystery and wonder of my life.

You are the core of my being.
You are the heart of everything I do.

Amen.

Sr. Norita Cooney R.S.M.
1939 – 2011



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The "New" Roman Missal--Gift and Challenge

Julia Upton, R.S.M.

To any experience each of us brings a unique voice as well as a unique perspective, shaped by who we are and who we have come to be, by the grace of God and the circumstances of our life. As you will come to see, my approach to the subject at hand is shaped more by my life experience than my academic credentials. So my plan is to give you a sense of my perspective, a context for thinking about the third Roman Missal, seeing it as both gift and challenge, looking at some of the resources available, and giving you some advice.

By way of introduction ...

I am a child of the 1950s, the older daughter of older parents who had both served during World War II – my father with the U. S. Army in the Pacific Theater; my mother as a member of the Foxhole Ballet, touring with the USO in the European Theater. They returned from the war more worldly-wise spiritual people, ready to start a family, and I was born nine months later.

I grew up in New York City, and my younger sister and I both attended the parish elementary school where we were educated by the Scranton IHMs, whose special charism in that day and age was surely for music. I attended daily Mass all through elementary school, sang in the parish choir, where we were carefully schooled in the liturgy, initially through the restoration of the Holy Week liturgy. Prior to Vatican II, some of the Sunday masses in our parish were "dialogue masses," in which the people recited the parts usually reserved to the altar servers.

I spent the Vatican Council II years in college in Ohio at what was then the College of St. Mary of the Springs (now Ohio Dominican University), where the emerging Council documents instantly became our textbooks. It was my coming-of-age time, and as an English major and aspiring writer, I even "covered" the Council for our college newspaper. When I returned to New York after graduation, however, it was to a parish experience that seemed untouched by the Council. Indelibly etched in my memory is the image of a woman

who shared the same pew with us at Sunday Mass. At the time of the Kiss of Peace, week after week, I would turn to her and be greeted with a scowl as she violently crossed her arms across her chest. Her attitude reflected my experience of local church in that era. This confused me and left me frustrated. I longed for the participative liturgies I had left behind in Ohio.

After completing a Masters Degree in English, I took a graduate course in theology, still wondering if my experience of the liturgy at the Springs had been genuine or just a mirage. That course in the History of the Liturgy changed my whole life, and set me on the trajectory that has become my life's work. Not just a theorist, I have been fortunate to be able to play an active role in the pastoral application of liturgy to varying degrees on a parish, diocesan, national and international level for a very long time.

Bishop Mugavero appointed me to the Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of Brooklyn in 1978, and I have been actively serving on that Commission ever since. Not only the longest serving member; but over those thirty-five years I have been one of the most active members as well, training legions of lectors and Eucharistic ministers and speaking in countless parishes throughout our diocese.

In 1979 Archbishop Rembert Weakland invited me to serve a three-year term as an Advisor to the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. I will forever be grateful for that opportunity for two reasons. Archbishop Weakland and I have remained in contact for all those years and this has been a blessing in my life. I also came to experience first-hand what one might call Vatican politics with regard to the Liturgy. Work with the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, being a woman, and having dual expertise in literature and liturgy brought me to the attention of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy [ICEL] and I worked with them on a few projects and also as a "ghost writer" for the BCL.

More recently (2007-2010) I once again had the privilege of working with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, now known as the Committee for Divine Worship. Under the leadership of Bishop Arthur Seratelli I had a seat at the table when many of the texts in the new translation of the Roman Missal were being discussed.

Since 1980 I have been teaching theology at the graduate and undergraduate level at St. John's University, after more than a decade in elementary and secondary education. I am a tenured, full professor; the author of six books. Five concern liturgy and sacraments. The other is the history of Angel Guardian Home, a child-caring institution sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy in Brooklyn, New York. Although I am presently serving as Provost at St. John's University, the chief academic officer, in charge of all the colleges, libraries and academic support programs on our five campuses, I continue to teach, research and write.

I confess currently to being obsessed by the life and work of the pioneers in the Liturgical Movement in America, people whose voices need to be heard because they still have so much to teach us. Fr. Hans Ansgar Reinhold *grasped* me and became a mentor despite the fact that he had been dead for almost forty years. For close to a decade, I spent almost all of my spare time reading his 600 or so books, essays and book reviews. Last year Liturgical Press published my liturgical biography of him, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*.

My current obsession is with Ade Bethune, the Catholic Worker artist, whose art, architecture, writings and housing development projects for the elderly poor illustrate so accurately the social dimension of the liturgy. Someday my study of her life and work will see publication, and I can go on to becoming obsessed by someone or something else, but for now I still have a lot to learn from her and so does the Church.

Apart from that particular obsession (or perhaps because of it) I strive to be a well-balanced person and theologian, so recently I have

thought more deeply about what enables me to maintain balance and therefore faithfully help our communities to receive, maybe even welcome, this new translation of the Roman Missal and seize this opportunity to refresh and deepen our experience of Liturgy – the heart of the matter.

Contextual Considerations

Perhaps you are familiar with the Cherokee legend, "The Two Wolves," in which a grandfather teaches his grandson about life.

There is a battle going on inside of me—a terrible fight between two wolves. The evil one is anger, envy, greed, arrogance, and resentment. The good one is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you and inside every other person, too.

The grandson wondered about this for a while and then asked, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

That legend comes back to me often in any number of contexts when I find myself leaning into the negative. I do not ever want to be like that angry woman, so I try to be careful of which wolf I feed.

It is first important for us to remain grounded both in the Gospel and in the history and tradition of Catholic worship, not some nostalgic, colorized version of the past.

Because I was trained and raised by a ballerina, I have a very physical understanding of balance. Dancers can only do all those leaps and turns by being limber and balanced. Balance, furthermore is a delicate synthesis of being

grounded, drawn forth and knowing how to spot. Permit me to explain!

For a ballerina, balance is a delicate interplay between being grounded, drawn forth and knowing how to spot. A dancer needs to feel connected to the floor, perhaps even through the floor. Without that grounding none of those beautiful leaps or spins can be executed. At the same time the dancer needs to be pulled up by an invisible force that makes her or him appear so lithe. Finally during all those turns the dancer only avoids dizziness by spotting – keeping constant visual contact with the same point. It needs to be well-chosen and then devoutly

respected or the dancer will crumple into an embarrassing heap. Since one's balance shifts constantly, at every moment during the performance the dancer needs to feel where he or she is, inside and out.

It is first important for us to remain grounded both in the Gospel and in the history and tradition of Catholic worship, not some nostalgic, colorized version of the past. This requires a close reading of the Documents of Vatican II.—*all* of them. I suggest that it is also a good time for us to look back to the Council, to read about it and recapture some of its spirit. Colleen McDannel's *Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America* is a fine place to start. McDannel is Professor of Religious Studies and History at the University of Utah who weaves her "good Catholic" family's history with events in the life of the contemporary church.

I suggest these times also require us to read other recent documents, while carefully attending to the level of authority these documents carry: Apostolic constitutions; *praenotanda* and rites; and instructions. Instructions such as *Liturgiam Authenticam* and *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, do not replace official teaching of a higher authority.¹ At all times we must allow ourselves to be open to the Holy Spirit and drawn forth by God, by imagining and working for the best that can be.

More than fifty years ago Paul Ricoeur noted that we live in an "age of forgetting the signs of the sacred."² His response to the "forgetting" was not to abandon the old symbols and search for new ones, but rather to work toward what he called a "second naiveté" by reinterpreting the symbols – a "hermeneutical circle" that renders "old symbols newly accessible – without sacrificing either the symbol's integrity or the believer's modernity." His challenge still lies before us.

Background to the Present Liturgical Revision

The "new" Roman Missal is *not* new! It is the same Mass, but the "sound" will be different. This third edition of the Roman Missal was published in Latin in 2002 and has taken almost 10 years to translate. Following the Council there

was an interim rite and a series of instructions while the vernacular was gradually introduced into the liturgy. The Assembly's parts went to the vernacular, while the private prayers of the priest and the entire Roman Canon remained in Latin. The first edition of the Roman Missal, which replaced the interim rite, was published in 1969 and translated into English the following year. There were language changes between the interim rite and the first edition that most people who were adults at that time have completely forgotten about. Their memory, however, might be triggered by this new translation.

The second edition of 1975, available in English in 1985, updated the text and included other developments in the liturgy. It is the edition in use today. Remember, though, that translation is a "work of human

hands," and while imperfect it still remains an instrument for lifting mind and heart to God. From the beginning there was some dissatisfaction with the ICEL translations and questions about the liturgy in general. In 1979 the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy undertook a complete study of the Liturgy. This involved 97 dioceses and several thousand people on their parish liturgy committees, coordinated by the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions. Each evaluator used a workbook entitled *The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of Mass*. Each ritual element was introduced with an historical survey, liturgical directives, a pastoral reflection, and some suggested questions for discussion. At the conclusion of each section participants were asked whether the liturgical element should remain as is, be modified or relocated, or even eliminated. The overwhelming response on each element was, "leave as is."³

At the same time, beginning in 1983, work began on a revised translation of the second edition of the Roman Missal which would include newly composed prayers. The first pieces emerged in 1992 with the work proceeding in eight parts. These were submitted to ICEL's eleven English-speaking conferences of bishops around the world, which gradually approved by them all. They were sent to the Congregation for

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Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments for approval in 1998.⁴ Silence ensued; *Liturgiam Authenticam* followed in 2001.

Who or what is ICEL? It is an organization that was formed in 1963 to facilitate the translation of liturgical texts into English, thereby developing a vernacular liturgy in light of the reform of the Roman Rite after Vatican Council II. It was established as a joint enterprise of the Bishops' Conferences of Australia, Canada, England and Wales, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Scotland, South Africa and the United States. You can probably immediately see two tangles in that large knot: English, even in English-speaking countries, is not always the same English; and many more countries than those eleven (fifty-five to be exact) have English as their official language. While not financially supporting ICEL, those episcopal conferences also benefit from ICEL's work. More troubling for Rome, though, was the growing suspicion that some non-English-speaking countries were basing their translations of liturgical texts on the ICEL texts rather than the *editio typici* [the Latin text] simply because they had greater facility with English than with Latin.

Liturgiam Authenticam, the Fifth Instruction on the Sacred Liturgy, subtitled an "Instruction on the Use of the Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy" was signed on March 28, 2001 and made public about six weeks later, on May 7, 2001. It supersedes its predecessor, the 1969 guide to translators of the Roman Rite liturgy, *Comme le prévoit*. While the conferences of bishops remain responsible for translations of liturgical texts, subject to the approval of the Apostolic See, the instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam* signaled a different approach to the task of translation. *Comme le prévoit* was based on the principle of dynamic equivalence; *Liturgiam Authenticam* follows the principle of formal equivalence. One approach had as its aim ensuring that texts were in a language that people could understand, appreciate, and be shaped by; the other has the preservation of the heritage of prayer in the Roman Rite and scriptural consciousness as its principal aim.

"New" Roman Missal as Gift?

After all that, you are probably wondering how I see this new translation primarily as a gift.

Not long ago I had occasion to return to the approval process for the texts of the *Order of Christian Funerals*. As I noted earlier, I have done some writing for the Bishops over the years, and one of those projects related to the Order of Christian Funerals – a text that waited several years for approval from the Holy See. I distinctly recall the night John Page dictated all the changes requested by Rome before we could move to the publication of an official translation for which I was preparing the commentary. I still have my red-lined text to prove it. Looking at the gray book again recently, perhaps with Paul Ricoeur's second naiveté, I saw the wisdom in most of those changes that eluded me back in 1989.

The Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* was issued on March 25, 2004 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and dealt with certain matters regarding the celebration of Eucharist. It followed *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, an encyclical by Pope John Paul II, issued on Holy Thursday (April 13, 2003). The Instruction "*On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist*," as it is subtitled, urged us to insure the Eucharist is celebrated in its fullness and in the spirit of *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, and to be cognizant of possible abuses in that celebration. The term "abuse," which is used thirty-four times in the document, was probably unfortunate and ill-timed considering other types of abuse being reported in the press at the very same time.

Redemptionis Sacramentum drew attention to many things that are in the Roman Missal today that have been overlooked. That happens sometimes. At the University we have the practice of post-tenure review. Each tenured professor is observed by a colleague of his or her choice every three years or so, after which the colleague writes a report. The semester I was up for review, I invited another colleague in the field of sacramental theology to be my reviewer. I use a lot of media in my courses and that night was no exception. We were studying the Rite of Penance and I used an excerpt from a January 2001 episode

of *ER* in which a dying bishop celebrates the Rite of Penance with one of the physicians – Luka, for those of you who were *ER* viewers. The bishop began:

May God, who has enlightened every heart,
help you to know your sins
and trust his mercy.⁵

My colleague, ordained for twenty-three years at that point, thought to himself, "Isn't that beautiful?" Just to check himself, though, he went to the Rite of Penance and there discovered *in the rite itself* those beautiful words he had never noticed before. *ER* shocked him into second naiveté, and he was willing to share it with me.

Maybe this new translation will have a similar effect and shock us into second naiveté, giving us an opportunity for the mystagogy that didn't happen with the initial reform, and enabling us to reclaim the connection liturgy should have to the world.

Tension is not comfortable. We would all like to find ways to rid ourselves of it, but tensions, Bishop Trautman reminded me in a conversation a few years ago can "create activity ... and lead to new thinking and dialogue." The challenge is to maintain balance. "We have to be people of balance and prudence," he said. "It's difficult to be in the middle. We'll pay the price." He said that several times, "We'll pay the price." I thought back to the early leaders in the liturgical movement (especially Fr. Reinhold) and the ways in which they had to pay the price over the years.

Writing near the end of his life, Fr. Reinhold observed, "The amount of reform still to come is enormous, especially in the field of the liturgy. What we have seen so far is only what affects the congregation. The inner reform is yet to come ... the visible and audible field of expression will reshape our concepts."⁶ His conclusion, which I echo, was that "we cannot pin our hopes of a 'follow-through' on another miracle. What we now need is hard work and intelligence (and, above all, prayer)."⁷ Liturgically speaking, that can probably be accomplished by doing more with less; by praying the texts, narrowing our focus to one key theme in the homily and hymn texts, speaking and singing with clarity and conviction. This is the very program outlined by *Sacrosanctum Concilium* previously quoted: "in

all their apostolic activity, pastors of souls should energetically set about achieving it [i.e. 'inner reform'] through the requisite pedagogy."⁸

In 1964 Romano Guardini wrote an open letter to the Liturgical Congress being held at Mainz in Germany:

The question is whether the wonderful opportunities now open to the liturgy will achieve their full realization; whether we shall be satisfied with just removing anomalies, taking new situations into account, giving better instruction on the meaning of ceremonies and liturgical vessels *or whether we shall relearn a forgotten way of doing things and recapture lost attitudes.*⁹

We have come very far, and even Fr. Reinhold at the end of his life could say that he was "deeply satisfied" where the reform had gone, but that was still in those heady days of enthusiasm and I fear that we settled without going deeper. Yes, truly a "warm and living love for the scriptures" has been fostered, but somewhere along the line the connection to social

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justice was lost, along with art, elegance, ambiance and reverence. In life one rarely gets "do-overs." This is our opportunity. It's our watch. Let's seize it and not let it slip away this time.

We have resources galore and technology that the previous generation of reformers could not even have imagined. The danger, of course, is that we have too much – too many choices. As I promised at the outset, though, I am suggesting some practical, versatile, colorful tools for your use.

My favorite is the interactive DVD, *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ: Deepening Our Understanding of the Eucharist in Our Lives*,¹⁰ commissioned by ICEL under the leadership of Archbishop Arthur Roche. Five commissioned foundational essays provide the themes and pathways of this resource which uses video, text,

graphics and music to help users enrich their understanding and deepen their appreciation of the Eucharist. It was filmed in churches and cathedrals in the United States, Ireland, England, Scotland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa and includes a broad range of expert commentary from translators, academics, liturgical consultants and practitioners. It is a beautifully-produced resource by Fraynetwork Multimedia, which evokes the biblical imagery foundational to the texts.

It is designed for a range of audiences including priests and deacons, liturgical ministers, educators and catechists, parishioners, including families and adult faith groups, for the whole Catholic community, and can be used in bits and pieces in a variety of settings.

The other two resources I would recommend have Fr. Paul Turner as the principal author. Not only is Turner a liturgical scholar, but he is also the pastor of two Missouri parishes in Saint Munchin in Cameron and its mission Saint Aloysius in Maysville. He links scholarship with pastoral sensitivity that grows out of daily contact with the folks. From my perspective, no one else has his grasp of the issues and the common sense that comes with walking the way with people.

Liturgy Training Publication publishes a set of resources with the unfortunate title, *Understanding the Revised Mass Texts*. Despite its title, the resource is not limited to the texts, but provides a broader approach to Eucharist. There is a set of eight affordable pamphlets which could be made available to everyone in the parish; a booklet, which combines all the pamphlets, and a leader's guide for those preparing to speak with groups about the changes.

Turner's *At the Supper of the Lamb: A Pastoral and Theological Commentary on the Mass* is an excellent resource. In some ways it reminds me of the 1980-1982 FDLC *Ordo Missae* study I referenced earlier. The workbook is a storehouse of information – historical, inspirational and practical. It can be used by individuals or groups and is probably timeless too. If you are looking for the story behind the story

for each of the changes, this is the resource for you. His website [www.paulturner.org] has a wealth of other resources too.

With One Voice: Translation and Implementation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal, published by the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, presents a series of excellent essays by bishops and scholars that fills in more of the background on the translation process for those with an interest in that area and gives some practical ideas on implementation as well, many of which I have put into practice.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website [www.usccb.org/romanmissal] has been up for some time and it also has a list of resources available as well as several YouTube videos.

Challenges Ahead

The first challenge is to remain open and to be hopeful. In a 2010 article in *The Tablet*, "Shock of the New," Paul Turner described his experience of experimenting with the revised translation in his parish.¹¹ As a member of ICEL, Paul had access to the texts; and as a pastor he thought he had a sense of how parishioners would react. Wrong! The article describes his humbling experience, and explains how he revised his approach to implementation accordingly.

So, the first challenge is to stay open; and the second is presume nothing! There is a lot for all of us to learn in this process. Remember my colleague and the *Rite of Penance* cited earlier. The *praenotanda* (or introduction or general instruction) to the 2002 edition of the Roman Missal was translated and published separately. Commonly referred to as the GIRM [General Instruction on the Roman Missal] it has become a source of scholarship in its own right. I recommend the collaborative commentary developed under the auspices of the Catholic Academy of Liturgy and the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and published by Liturgical Press as a valuable resource.¹² We anticipate the publication of a companion

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commentary on the Roman Missal itself by September 2011.

Yes, the revised translations are closer to the Latin, but they also highlight many Biblical allusions – allusions people will understand now in a way they never would have before the Council opened up the sacred scriptures for us. The texts are often more poetic too.

It is of the utmost importance that we nourish hope. We have come so far since December 4, 1963. Do a comparative study sometime of the scriptural texts that are now part of our faith-life that did not reverberate in our churches or our lives before Vatican Council II. We had virtually no weekday Mass lectionary, except during the Lenten season and when some saints' feasts fell on a weekday.

We had only one Sunday-cycle with two readings – none from

the Old Testament. Matthew Connell in his *Guide to the Revised Lectionary* lays it all out beautifully.¹³ We've come so far....

"Does your society have more memories than dreams or more dreams than memories?" Thomas Friedman asks toward the end of his book *The World is Flat*. He writes, "By dreams I mean the positive, life-affirming variety. In societies that have more memories than dreams, too many people are spending too many days looking backward. They see dignity, affirmation, and self-worth not by mining the present but by chewing on the past. And even that is usually not a real past but an imagined and adorned past."¹⁴

"Let us thank God for the Second Vatican Council and its renewal and reform of the liturgy," Bishop Trautman has written. "We do not need a nostalgic retrenchment. We need to revitalize the reform. We need to implement the principles of liturgical renewal given us by Paul VI and the Council Fathers of Vatican II. We need to go back to the example of the early Church, not the Middle Ages, and learn the lesson of a living liturgy. The Eucharist is not a relic of the past. The Eucharist is the Risen Christ today, saving us now. The liturgy is the action of Christ, alive and present, made manifest through His Body, the Church. And at the same time, the liturgy is the action of a faith community striving to be the Body of Christ.

Perhaps my experience of Eucharist is similar to yours. I go to the family table not as a self-assured theologian, but as a sinner – often hungry and weary, sometimes frightened and lonely. I go to be with believers who walk the path of faith with me, because they are Christ to me – they bear me up and call me forth. Together we feed on the word of God – rarely broken open with evocative preaching, but nourishment nonetheless. Together we sing God's praises – not always in aesthetically pleasing tones, but attempting harmony nonetheless. Together we remember the One who walked the way with us, whose dying and rising set us free to be witnesses in this time and place.

At the 1953 Liturgical Week in Grand Rapids,

MI, Fr. Reinhold gave a presentation entitled

"Frequent Communion, Accessible and Integrated."

He was addressing the very devotionism that was limited to keeping lonely Jesus company in the tabernacle, while failing to see or serve Jesus hungering in the world. For Fr. Reinhold that was the whole point of working toward a vernacular liturgy – that we might live the gospel life more attentively. His advice more than fifty years ago might still ring true. "Only gentle, disciplined and cautious work can regain the simplicity we need, and it will take every bit of docility, obedience and humility to proceed in the right direction without creative havoc."

A wonderful resource for mystagogy has been made available by Liturgical Press through the editorial expertise of Barbara Searle and Anne Y. Koester. We are again able to hear from a scholar whose absence from the liturgical community has been sorely missed. When he died of cancer in 1992 Mark Searle was working on a manuscript, *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual, and Social Perspectives*. In the foreword Barbara Searle describes it as Mark's "last will and testament for the praying Church." In less than one hundred pages, we find a depth of scholarship and spirituality that is probably more needed by the praying Church today than it was in 1992. If I were a bishop I would urge every priest in my diocese and every parish liturgy committee to be involved in using this book for theological

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reflection. Mark always had a way of cutting through to the heart of the issue:

The liturgy requires of us a setting aside of the quest for personal satisfaction; it demands self-abnegation, self-emptying, self-forgetfulness, so that our emptiness may be filled with the memory of Christ and with the fullness of his Spirit, in whom we know we are one with all God's people.¹⁵

To be perfectly honest, it still disturbs me that liturgy and justice are not more intertwined in our day the way they were in the minds of the reformers. Thanksgiving week a few years back I was privileged to attend an international meeting of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace held in Mexico City. Presidents of Catholic Colleges and Universities in the Americas were invited to meet with representatives of all of the Episcopal Conferences of the Americas to report on ways in which they were utilizing the recently published (2004) *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. No, I wasn't there as a liturgist, but rather representing the President of St. John's University. Only nine of the 244 catholic universities in the United States [3.6%] sent representatives – none of them presidents. Cardinal McCarrick was there, along with Cardinal Keeler, and it was a privilege to be with

them and to consider how we might draw more attention to the *Compendium*. But in the back of my mind there lingered a deeper question. "Why aren't we doing a better job of linking liturgy to justice and vice versa?" That question is for another day, but one that Mark Searle tackles deftly. Take that question with you, wrestle with it and see if you can find means to strengthen those ties for the sake of the world.

Parting Advice

So, my parting advice is simple:

1. Don't limit yourself to the verbal changes alone. The whole of our tradition has always gone beyond the verbal. Consider it all: the body at prayer: music; processions; silence; etc.
2. Encourage mindfulness. In the beginning we'll have to be mindful, though we can easily we sink into familiarity go on "automatic pilot."
3. Engage in Mystagogy.
4. Connect to the world. See yourself and your communities as being missioned.

One of my favorite elements of revised translation is the dismissal rite:

"Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."



NOTES

1. See Rev. Francis G. Morrissey, OMI, *The Canonical Significance of Papal and Curial Pronouncements* (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1981).
2. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Symbol: Food for Thought," *Philosophy Today* 4:3-4 (1960), 196-207; here 203.
3. See *Mystery of Faith Study Report*, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 1985.
4. Paul Turner, "Divining the Vernacular Ritual Texts," 87-107 in *With One Voice: Translation and Implementation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal* (Washington, D.C.: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2010), here 95.
5. *Rite of Penance*, no. 42.
6. H. A. Reinhold, "A Liturgical Reformer Sums Up," *New Blackfriars* 45 (1965), 554-561; here 560.
7. Reinhold, 554.
8. CSL, no. 14.
9. "A Letter from Romano Guardini," in *Herder Correspondence* (August 1964) 237-8.
10. See www.becomeonebodyonespiritinchrist.org (accessed July 10, 2011).
11. Paul Turner, "Shock of the New," *The Tablet*, February 6, 2010, ____.
12. *A Commentary on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, edited by Edward Foley, Nathan D. Mitchell, and Joanne M. Pierce (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).
13. Cf. Martin Connell, *Guide to the Revised Lectionary* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998).
14. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar Strauss, Giroux, 2005) 451.
15. Mark Searle, *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual, and Social Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006) 85.

“What Is Your Name?”

To Whom Are We Addressing Our Chapter Question?

Marilyn King, R.S.M.

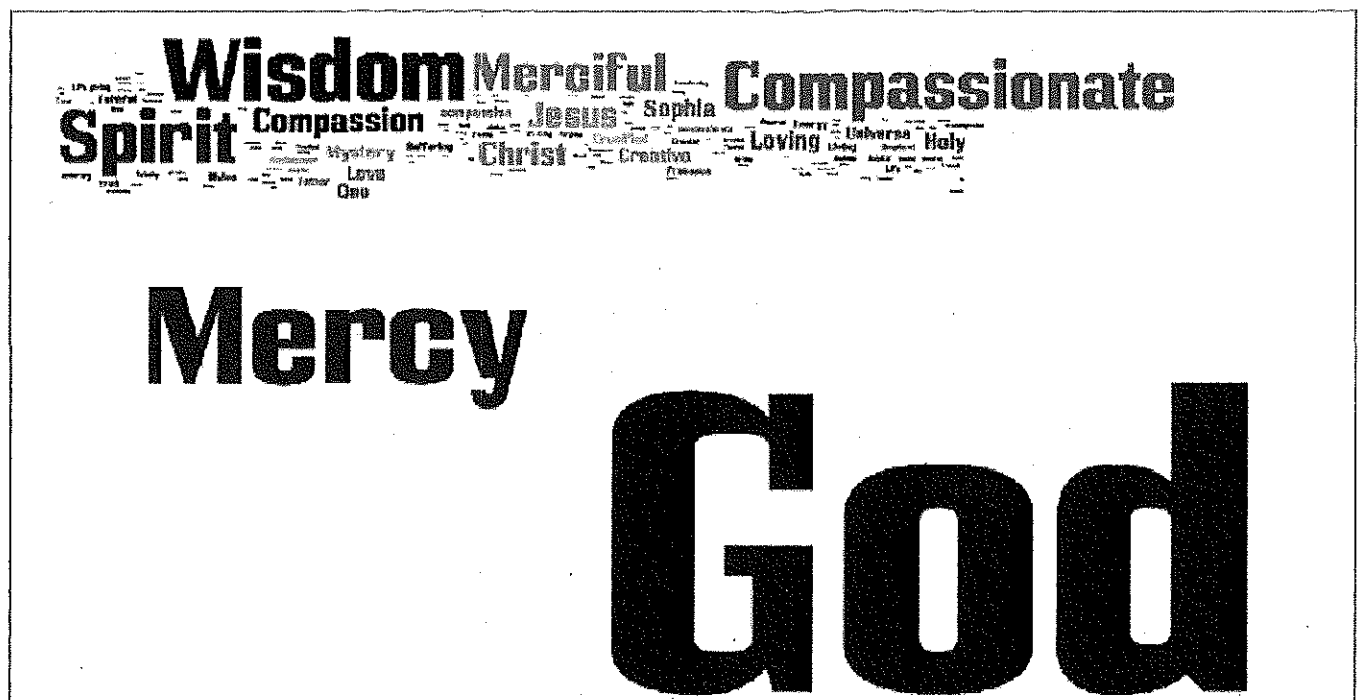
[The Lord said,]” Lead my people...out of Egypt....” But Moses said to God, “When I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you, if they ask me ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?” (Exodus 3.10, 13)

We ask you, God ...where do we need to be led? (Discernment Question, Institute Chapter 2011)

As we gathered in small groups to prepare for the 2011 Chapter, each of us was asked by the Institute Chapter Planning Committee to discern the name of God to whom we were addressing our Chapter Question. Not surprisingly, “God of Mercy” was the most frequently cited. However, along with variations on that name, over one hundred other names were submitted from the groups, some from everyone in the group, some a variety of names from the same group. Below is a “Wordle” analysis of the frequency and number of names given for God that was compiled by Barbara M. Valuckas, SSND, one of our Chapter facilitators.

These were the names by which we asked God to lead us into the next years of the 21st century, just as Moses asked the name of God when he was told to lead the Israelites to freedom.

A prayerful study of these names reveals the breadth and depth of our relationships to God. For the purpose of this article they have been grouped into eight categories: Biblical Names, God of Mercy/Compassion/Love; God of the Poor and Suffering; Christ; God, the ever-present Creator; God, Spirit/ Wisdom/ Sophia; God as Trinity; and God as Mystery.



Biblical Names

In one way, all the titles by which we named God are rooted in the Scriptures. However, the God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures inspired a number of Sisters to address God with direct reference to Scripture passages. For example, God's reply to Moses' request for a name for the God who spoke to him: "I am who I am." Other examples are: God of the burning bush, the God of Ruth and Naomi, "God of the prophets." A bridge to our God incarnate was found in the address of God as "Emmanuel" and the "God of Simeon."

In one way, all the titles by which we named God are rooted in the Scriptures.... Numerous citations from the gospels referred to images of Christ...

Numerous citations from the gospels referred to images of Christ as holy wisdom incarnate, healer, teacher, good shepherd, prophet, transfigured, font of living water, crucified and risen Redeemer, Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Others spoke of their image of God coming from Jesus' parables and teachings: the father of the prodigal son, Jesus resucita a al hija de Jairo, Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The God of Mercy, Compassion, and Love

Scores of variations of God as our God of mercy revealed this name as the pre-eminent name to whom we chose to address our chapter question. Some of these names are: Inexhaustible Fountain of Mercy; God of light and mercy; God of mercy and forgiveness; God of mercy, refuge and challenge; Source of justice and mercy; Merciful God of the universe; Mother of Mercy.

Often linked to the naming of God as Mercy was the name of God as Compassion, for example: O Compassionate Mercy; Father of mercy and compassion; All-knowing and Merciful Compassionate God. Nearly as many who named

God "Mercy" named God "Compassionate." Variations given were: Compassionate God of surprise; Compassionate God of the universe; God of gentleness and compassion. One group linked their name of God to the "compassionate and dynamic God of Catherine."

Finally, in this category, some names connected mercy and compassion with the "God who is love" or "God of unbounded love and mercy." Some names focused exclusively on God as love: Fire of Love, Loving God, God who is unconditional love, Loving God of challenge and surprise.

The God of the Poor and Suffering

Categorizations of the names of God are, of course, somewhat artificial because as we profess in our creed, we believe in one God. Keeping this in mind, a group of names closely connected with the God of mercy, compassion and love, calls on God as the one who identifies with those at the margins. This is the God who "hears the cry of the poor," as one group called upon God. Other names chosen were God of the poor; God of the humble; God of simplicity; God of liberation; faithful, just, tender, forgiving, loving, provident God.

Christ

Many of the Biblical titles cited above refer to Christ Jesus, but so often Sisters spoke directly to Jesus in their address of God, connecting the God of mercy and compassion with the God of *kenosis*, the incarnational God, the God who became our brother, the suffering God. And so, a number of groups addressed their prayer to Merciful Jesus, Compassionate Christ, Christ of mercy, Merciful Redeemer. In this line of invoking the redeeming action of Jesus, others gave the names: Jesus Christ Crucified, Crucified Savior, Crucified Lover, Suffering Christ. Others chose to speak of "Christ, the crucified but risen Redeemer" or "the Risen Savior of all."

God, the Ever-Present Creator

Another group of names centered on God, our creator: loving God of all creation, Creator God,

Source of all life, Creative Energy, Eternally Creating God. This God is revealed in our namings as one who is an ever present presence; an accompanying, serving, compassionate presence; a faithful companion; an indwelling creative presence; Emmanuel. God is the center from which we go forward or stay back, the center of our being, the holy heart of the universe, our great connector. God is animating and empowering, a divine mover, a potter, a God of unending possibilities, a God of hope and open arms ... and Father.

God, Spirit, Wisdom/ Sophia

A move into addressing the third person of the Trinity from the first was evidenced by the titles Creating Spirit of the Universe, Spirit Transforming, and Creative Spirit. The themes of life and Spirit were joined together in these variations: Spirit of Life, Fiery Spirit, Spirit of the Living God; Spirit God and Breath of Life; Live-Giving Spirit (a name chosen several times).

Another view of the Spirit was linked with Wisdom (Sophia in Greek) by addressing God as the Living Spirit of Wisdom. In fact, "God of Wisdom/ Sophia" was the second most mentioned name in the reports, with variations such as Holy Wisdom; Source of Wisdom; Spirit of Creative Wisdom; Spirit of Wisdom and Creative Energy.

Other names connected the Spirit of Wisdom with other attributes, such as, Wisdom of the Years, Wisdom and Providence, Wisdom and Courage, Guiding Spirit, Wisdom and Faithfulness, Loving God of Wisdom and Compassion, Creative Spirit of Wisdom and Mercy.

God as Trinity

Some groups simply called on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit or Trinity, eternally sharing infinite love, Cosmic Trinity; Creating, Redeeming and Sanctifying God. Another

emphasized the relational nature of God by addressing God as "Community of Mercy."

God as Mystery

This article opened with the famous account of the encounter of Moses with the Lord of the Israelites. Further on in the story, Moses asks of the Lord, "What is your name?" The reply, in one sense, was no reply: "My name is a verb." The great I AM is not so much a name as a state of being, the origin of being, the principle of being. In effect, God said: "You can't name me, Moses."

This elusiveness, beyondness, incomprehensibility of God was indicated in more than a few reports. Some groups said simply that "God is nameless" or "God is beyond all names." God is wholly mystery: awesome, incomprehensible, a voice in the wilderness, a holy darkness – and, yet also the Beloved God of Light, like a New Dawn.

What Is Our Name?

When we are born, we are given a name. Outside of unusual circumstances of our later changing our name, we do not choose the name by which we will be called. Others name us. If we pursue the Exodus exchange between Moses and "the Lord," we encounter the exceptional event wherein one names one's self: "I AM WHO I AM." In this unique exchange, it is the questioner who is given a new identity. Moses becomes the leader, the intimate of God, the voice of God.

In this chapter preparation as we prayed together to find the name of God that best captured our chapter question, we were really letting God name us. We actually were exploring the "identity question" that has seemed to haunt us over the years.

Who are we?

- We are women of the Scriptures. We go to the font of God's word when we look for a way to express ourselves.

- We are creedal people. A recitation of our names of God sounds very much like our creed: "We believe in God...creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ...born...suffered...died...rose...."
- We are a community who relates to the "holiness" tradition in the Scriptures. This tradition emphasizes the otherness, the transcendence, of God. God is one whose name is not to be pronounced. God is the one on the mountain to be worshiped and sacrificed to. This is the God of Mystery.
- We are also a community who relates, and overwhelmingly so, to the "loving-kindness" tradition of the Scriptures. This tradition emphasizes the closeness of God, the caring love of God for us. This is the God of Mercy whose name we bear.
- We are a community who is centered in God and who knows God is at the root of each one's own person, is present in our community of Sisterhood, whose face is seen in others, especially those in need, who is continually creating our world while asking for our help in sustaining it.

When Moses approached the burning bush, he heard God ask him to remove his sandals from his feet because the place where he stood was holy. As Sisters of Mercy, we, too, have heard that call to approach the holy and to remove our shoes. But we have taken the story one stage further. We have realized it is not enough to take off our shoes. We also look around to see to whom we can give them.



*We ask you, God of Mercy, who is
Wisdom and Mystery,
where do we need to be led now
to come to both a deeper response to the critical
concerns
and a radical embrace of our identity?*

TRANSFORMING MERCY

Let's stop
feeding the poor
without pondering
why they're hungry

Let's stop
dressing the naked
who have no closets
to hang their clothes in

Let's stop
teaching the children
how to get
the best paying jobs

Let's stop
healing methods
that ignore
the source of illness

Let's stop being women
who permit
men to always
have it their way

Let's become
cosmic members
of a Divine Family
on a perpetual journey

Let's learn
to do it now
even if it might be
too late

Patricia Ryan, R.S.M.

Mercy Under the Signs of the Cross and Resurrection

Margaret Farley, R.S.M.

Assembly, Mid-Atlantic Community
April 6, 2011

I am honored to be with you here today, as you begin your deliberations in this most important Assembly. I come here having read carefully the written materials from your work of the past two years in Consultative Gatherings, Conversation Circles, and a Convocation of the whole (in 2009). I am aware of the fact that not only have you met together many times in preparation for this Assembly, but you are also historically held between your recent Vatican visitation, on the one hand, and the impending Institute Assembly on the other. Whatever may have been a burden for you these past months, will surely also have been a grace – not only for you but for all of us in the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

I have tried to imagine what the theme for your Assembly (“Passion, Purpose, and Promise”) might mean to each of you in this week. As you have sought and now continue to seek a shared direction in ministry, heightened unity and integration in your lives, and a deeper clarity about your identity within the Institute, some things must *matter* to you – and matter a great deal. Only so could you have *passion* for your *purposes*; only so could you hear the *promise* of God in relation to these purposes; and only so could you be trying to translate a divine promise, a divine covenant, into the *promises* you have made to each other. “Passion, Purpose, and Promise” suggest to me that you love some things intensely, and that you intend to accomplish some things effectively – because they *matter* to you, to God, and to the people with and for whom you serve.

You already have more wisdom than I about this theme, having already given it significant content. What I can do, then, is simply this: (1) begin with some observations about the current context in which your theme will be operative – that is, the social, ecclesiastical, and communal situation in which we, as women religious, and as Mercy, find ourselves today; (2) reflect with you on some aspects of our lives that may matter in the

fulfilling of the hope that is embodied in your theme. Throughout my reflections, I want to suggest interpretations of the context, the situation, in which we live; of our yearnings for strength and unity in community; and of our sense of mission – interpretations that, especially in this season, take account of both crucifixion and resurrection.

I. The Context

There are many ways to describe the “situations” in which we live. I want, however, to address particular aspects of our social, ecclesiastical, and communal situations insofar as they may be relevant to your concerns in this

The stark contrast of poverty and wealth haunts our own country and the whole world, as natural disasters but also human-engineered economic melt-downs leave countless people homeless, jobless, vulnerable to the worst as well as the best of human responses of violence or compassion.

Assembly. The limits of time demand that I be highly selective in the descriptions I offer.

The social situation in which we are immersed is, of course, marked by such obvious elements as technological progress yet disaster – as in the catastrophic human-caused eruption of untamed oil in the Gulf of Mexico, and in the current threats of radiation from nuclear plants in Japan. Wars and rumors of war circle the globe – not only in Afghanistan and Lybia, but other parts of the continents of Africa as well as Asia and Latin America. The stark contrast of poverty and wealth haunts our own country and the whole world, as natural disasters but also human-engineered economic melt-downs leave countless

people homeless, jobless, vulnerable to the worst as well as the best of human responses of violence or compassion. Despite the energy and optimism that many of us experienced with political elections a little less than three years ago; a new mean-spiritedness and vitriolic self-righteousness have come to mark the political landscape here and abroad.

Of course, also, remarkable humanitarian efforts are mounted, movements to care for Earth are growing, and countless individuals and organizations stand in active solidarity with the marginalized. Progress has been made – whether in the treatment of terrible diseases or in the fragile peace that has been achieved in a few places around the world. Political revolutions may ultimately bring justice and dignity to peoples who now fight for their lives and their well-being.

Yet the optimism of the 60s and 70s is not the mood of the day. We recognize that today's "signs of the times" still call us to struggles against racism and sexism, to movements for economic and political liberation, to respect for genuine pluralism, and to renewed labors to bring about justice, in our own generation, with our neighbors near and far. But we sustain our efforts in all of these regards without being able to count on the cultural energy and optimism of previous times.

The ecclesiastical situation is also grave. Just about everyone, including Pope Benedict XVI, speaks of the church as a "wounded church." Its children are injured, many of its leaders are irresponsible, and its people are seriously disillusioned. Sex abuse scandals continue to emerge in city after city, country after country, and promise to be exposed across the globe. Some of those in positions of power in the church offer dubious interpretations of both our social and church situations. The chief lenses through which relentless judgments are made of whole groups in the church and even whole societies in the world are the lenses of "culture of life versus culture of death" and "continuity and truth versus discontinuity and falsehood." Neither of these

polarized lenses has proved to be very fruitful for the flourishing of either church or society.

Never before, perhaps, has the situation in the Roman Catholic church so closely paralleled the situation in the sixteenth century, just prior to the Protestant Reformation – a situation marked by scandals of sexual immorality, failures in humility and honesty on the part of many church leaders, and rigid theological views that brook little or no possibility of even a generous listening to new

insights into church beliefs and practices. Should worse come to worst again, of course, our response will be different from that in the sixteenth century: No one today seems interested in starting another church, but Catholic co-believers walk away, drift away, in ever

sobering numbers. In a significant sense, the church is broken. The Spirit, we believe, is within it, and God will not fail to assist God's servants. But what kind of cleansing, forgiveness, new life there is to come, is not yet clear.

The situation in the community of Mercy is not, as most of us experience it, one of brokenness. Some aspects of the situation may be tragic, as in the bearing of the burdens of the past, confronting our own "dark side," as Breege O'Neill describes the experience of the sisters in Ireland.¹ There are other aspects of our situation that are troubling and cause for concern. The examples most frequently cited are, of course, decline in membership and rise in the median age of current members. Of course, there is no perfect number for a community's membership and fruitfulness, and ironically we have simultaneous concerns for diminishment in numbers and the challenge of relationship in reconfigured communities that can seem too widespread and too large.

There are other concerns, however, that may or may not be intertwined with worries about membership and internal relationships. The situation in the church, for example, has serious implications for religious communities, including the Mercy community. The recent Vatican apostolic visitation of U.S. women's religious

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communities – although perhaps more benign in actuality than in prediction – reveals nonetheless a troubling dissonance between the experience of the majority of women’s religious congregations in this country and the assumptions about this experience held by the Vatican. It may be that this gap will in the long run be bridged precisely through the apostolic visitation, although many fear it will not.²

Relevant to this gap, there are among women’s religious congregations themselves divergent understandings of key elements in the structure of the lives of women religious. To appreciate this, one has only to compare the recent writings of Sandra Schneiders³ with that of the authors of essays in *Foundations of Religious Life*,⁴ a volume published in 2009 by the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious. Both Schneiders and the authors of the essays agree on at least two important things: first, that there should be profound substantive and judicial continuity between active apostolic religious life in the past and in the present, and second, that it is important to articulate deeper theological groundings for the nature of apostolic religious life especially as it has been sustained from the nineteenth century on. They disagree, however, on whether the “form” of apostolic religious life has reasonably and justifiably changed. Schneiders argues that it has. Specifically, it is no longer what sociologists would call a “total institution” (marked, for example, by uniform dress, common horarium, uniform places and conditions of living, and only corporate ministries).⁵ Moreover, its mode of existence is not “separation from the world,” but – like the church itself – ecclesial commitment to the world.

The authors of *Foundations*, on the other hand, continue to consider these historical characteristics of the “form” of women’s religious communities as essential. It is their conviction that habit, common schedule, conventual living, separation from the ordinary world in order to pursue perfection, and primarily corporate ministries, are the threads necessary to hold together the very fabric of religious life.⁶ In other words, the “form” of apostolic religious life cannot change; and if it has changed in some congregations, this change should be characterized

as infidelity, or at least a mistake. This latter view, as articulated in the *Foundations* volume, appears to be favored by many church leaders.

Many more things could be said about our communal context, in itself and as shaped by society and the church. I will continue to consider some of these, as I turn now to reflect more directly on our communal relationships. Passion, purpose, and promise are all relational terms – referring, I assume, to our relationships with God, in ministry, with all those we encounter on our journey. Surely they also have meaning for relationships in community.

II. Community and Belonging

I said in the beginning that I wanted to interpret not only our interlocking social, ecclesiastical, and communal situations but our yearnings for community and our sense of mission in the light of both cross and resurrection. The church burdens us in certain ways, yet mediates grace for our flourishing; the community has its dark side and its limitations, yet it is not broken; our members are aging, but just as there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, so there is no longer young or old when it comes to sharing in the life of God in Jesus Christ.

As I begin to speak about our relationships within community, I cannot offer formulas for strengthening newly configured and often distant relationships. Community takes place at the local level, the larger community level, the institute and international levels, in the relationships among

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associates, companions, and sisters, and in the friendships that endure across all sections and levels of community. Building community requires the best and most effective structures and practices that we can create. But these are not what I will speak about here. In fact, what I say

may strike you as rather abstract or too mystical to make a real difference in actualizing, operationalizing, making deeper and more effective the relationships we prize in community, and on which our mission depends. My assumption, however, is that how we *think* about these relationships can change how we live them. The symbols we use hold us together as much as our practices. These are what I will address here. I begin with thinking about what I call a "crucified love."

A Crucified Love

Someone (not in community) said to me recently: "Being in a religious community must mean taking Christianity so seriously that you are willing to lay down your life for one another." I have pondered these words and – so to speak – taken them to heart.

We cannot know everyone in community intimately, but we can be ready to lay down our lives for one another. Sustaining the relationships among us requires great love. Every great love, I believe, is a crucified love. What I mean by a "crucified love" is a love that is tried by fire; even as it is crucified, it survives and lives. It holds steady and strong no matter what must be borne; no matter what failings must be overcome, accepted, or forgiven; no matter what limits are experienced in day to day living and working together; no matter what threatens from external forces.

This is the kind of love symbolized by Mary's heart, pierced by a sword of sorrow. It is the love at the center of the meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ, a love that proved that relationships can hold. The point of the cross is, after all, not finally suffering and death, but that a relationship holds. The divine/ human relationship is forever restored, and it holds. And our relationships with one another can hold. There is a love stronger than death that can withstand distance, complexity, limitation, and whatever the forces of evil may bring against it; there is a love that can hold suffering even as it struggles to alleviate it. The

passion and death of Jesus were about a relationship that was eternally sealed, a love crucified but not destroyed, a love that has lived and poured out life and love ever since.

Discipline of Nonfulfillment

Such a discipline is not a practice merely of resignation in the face of what we cannot possess or achieve; it is not a simple acceptance of disappointment and disillusionment; it is, rather, something like the experience of Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, when in utter joy she beholds the risen Christ, yet hears the loving words, "Do not cling to me."

Without a discipline of nonfulfillment, our pining for what we do not have undermines our joy in what we have. This is a discipline that sustains our lives and our loves in a situation that is essentially *already/ not yet*, presence but not full presence, fulfillment yet not complete fulfillment,

being at home but still on a journey. The discipline of nonfulfillment is what keeps alive our longings and our labors for justice and peace, even though we must cry "peace, peace, but there is no

peace." As part of a crucified love, a discipline of nonfulfillment releases, frees and anchors our committed love. It makes possible the richest forms of sustainable passion, single-minded purpose, and faithful promise-keeping.

A part of this discipline and the experience it engenders can be described like this: Our lives are a bit like living on a park bench – not because we are destitute, but because we have here no lasting home. We actually may have many homes, but we have here no lasting home. Whether we wear the same uniform, or follow meticulously the same schedule, or even live all together in the same place, we know that this is not sufficient to make us feel finally at home. Our only hope and our only effective strategy is to make our home in the hearts of one another (I make my home in your heart; you make your home in mine); and ultimately we make our home in the heart of God. Both (that is, living at home in one another and at home in God) require loving with a crucified love. Both require living in the *already/ not yet*. Both

To sustain a great love, a crucified love, ... it has seemed to me that we need what might be called a "discipline of nonfulfillment."

are genuinely possible. Both offer an anchor at the center of life and love, from which we can go forth without ever leaving, and return without ever having been away.

Exemplar of Crucified Love

The *Original Rule* of the Sisters of Mercy declared that "This Institute is founded on Calvary, there to serve a crucified Redeemer." Catherine McAuley began and sustained this congregation with a crucified love. All along the way, she kept repeating words like "We are founding on the cross now indeed ...," and "It has pleased Almighty God to visit us with a large portion of the cross."⁷ Careful always to distinguish small from large portions of the cross, she loved through thick and thin. She loved God, the sisters, and the poor – through the closing of Kingstown, problems with chaplains, financial pressures, travels far and wide so arduous, as she writes later, that "exhausted of temper and strength, I gave up to despair and lay down at full length on a deep sloping rock"⁸ (only to get up again and keep on going). She experienced the burden, even the "torture,"⁹ of her own serious illnesses and injuries, as well as the humiliation of being publicly charged on at least one occasion of lying.¹⁰ But her most searing cross lay in the sickness and relentless dying of the sisters.

As foundation after foundation was opened, it was Catherine who wanted these foundations to be autonomous from Baggot Street, but it was also Catherine who held them together as one. She sent the sisters forth, but held them in her heart. She also actually journeyed to them incessantly, feeling deeply her inability to go to more than one place at a time. Yet her power of personality and her talents for leadership, administration, counseling, forming new entrants in the community constituted what can only be called a *force of communal grace*. Moreover, the massive number of her letters to individuals and whole convents – pouring forth stories, evincing care, sharing courageous hope – made the community somehow one.

Catherine, as we well know, prized above all "union and charity" as the hallmark of community. "Our only boast," she wrote, "is that no breach of charity ever occurred amongst us."¹¹ There were,

of course, tensions in some of the convents, and Catherine herself could experience uneasiness at the possibility of "disedification introduced amongst the Sisters of our order ..."¹² Yet her own love for the sisters evoked love among them, and her sharing in their sufferings, leavened the life of the community. As she wrote to one sister: "I have cried heartily – and implored God to comfort you ... but without the cross the real crown cannot come ... a little bitter in the cup."¹³ Her everyday love was a crucified love, freed by a discipline of nonfulfillment, at one with the fire that she believed God was kindling.

With this background of reflection on a crucified love and on the discipline of nonfulfillment, as well as the vision and action of Catherine McAuley, I turn again to consider the current specific communal challenges of aging and of our relationship with church.

The Challenge of Aging

If Catherine did not have to address the problem of an aging community, she did have to bear the profound pain of sisters dying in astonishing numbers throughout the community. She had ways of *thinking about*, understanding, their dying – not only in terms of, for example,

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accepting the inability to prevent and treat deadly diseases in nineteenth century Ireland, but in terms of divine providence. She let her heart be crucified again and again with the loss of her beloved young sisters. And she stood strong, with the community growing according to the call of the Spirit.

We have a situation where many of us are aging. My response, however, to predictions of the demise of our community, or of religious life, is to paraphrase the words of Mark Twain when his obituary was prematurely published: "Reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated." This response is based not only on observations, for example, about the age of seventy being the new fifty; or the recognition that, in fact, the whole of

our world is aging. It is based, rather, on our experience of fullness of life in gatherings such as this one. All one has to do is to hear of the ministries of all who are present, and to behold the life shining from the faces of all. Here is not yet a dying entity.

Aging, of course, for anyone means that the horizon of mortality gets closer, and that small or great forms of diminishment begin to be felt. And of course it is wise – for many reasons – to engage in new forms of collaboration and sustainability, in preparation for a time when we will no longer be personally present in some, perhaps many, ministries. But it is also important to find new ways of *thinking about* aging, especially ways that are informed by our faith.

I take my inspiration from something that the theologian Karl Rahner said when he himself was eighty years old. He wrote that old age is part of one's vocation: "Old age is a grace (both a mission and a risk) not given to everyone, just as, in Christian understanding, there are other possibilities and situations [thought of] as graces granted to some and withheld from others."¹⁴ In other words, not everyone gets to live into old age, but for anyone who does, it must be part of their vocation.

Attempting to explain this further, Rahner went on to say: "In this connection we should not take facile comfort in the ... erroneous thought that old age, like many other life situations, is a merely external situation ... like a costume in which a person plays a role in the theatre of life ... which he simply drops at death..."¹⁵ On the contrary, if we are to take each person's history seriously, we must understand that old age as a period of life is, like every other period of life, potentially definitive of the meaning of that life. In other words, the final meaning of our life may remain to be determined only when we are old. This, of course, would not apply to what today we call the extreme old, or those of whatever age whose conscious awareness is compromised, and the meaning of whose life is presumably already sealed. But for those who are

aging who can still make choices about their lives, about their faith and hope, about what and how to love: their aging is a part of their vocation. For many of us, this means that we still have much to do regarding our relationships and our ministries. Our lives are not simply running out; they may be coming to definitiveness in a crucified, living love. As we age, it is still our watch, ours along with the middle-aged and the young. As for the younger ones among us, never before has there been so much freedom and opportunity for innovative communal life and ministry. The call to our community remains as it has ever been – the call to receive and to give God's mercy with all our hearts and minds and strength, and to be united as one in a community of labor and love.

Challenges of Community in Relation with the Church

We believe that the Spirit of God dwells in the church, keeping it alive and making it a source of revelation and grace. We therefore need new

We believe that the Spirit of God dwells in the church, keeping it alive and making it a source of revelation and grace. We therefore need new ways to *think about* church that will enable us better to bear its burden and participate in its lifegiving mission.

ways to *think about* church that will enable us better to bear its burden and participate in its lifegiving mission. We can find clues for this in the way others have thought about the fragile dimensions of the church, its woundedness, and its burden. For example, Dorothy Day,

in her desire to understand and to love the institutional church, took seriously (the famous early twentieth-century theologian) Romano Guardini's expression, that the church is the cross on which Jesus continues to be crucified; and it is impossible to separate Jesus Christ from the cross.¹⁶ Out of her own experience of anguish at what she considered the tragedy of the all too frequent failure of the church to see Christ present in the poor, Dorothy wrote, "I loved the Church for Christ made visible. Not for itself, because it was so often a scandal to me one must live in a state of permanent dissatisfaction with the Church"¹⁷

Karl Rahner, too, wrote with astonishing starkness about the later twentieth-century church: "The Church today ... is a burden, [but] a burden that may not be thrown off." This burden, he continued, must not be denied or covered over. Rather, one "ought to feel the whole weight of the often terrifying history of the Church ... and it is only when the scandal of [this] cross ... is honestly accepted ... that this burden can be turned into a blessing."¹⁸

How shall we make sense of this? If the church were only a burden, there would be no point in our continuing to stand among its co-believers. The only reason to remain in a flawed and broken church is because it is also a source of life. We have sustaining experiences and sometimes powerful glimpses of God dwelling in the church – in its biblical, sacramental, liturgical, theological, pastoral, and spiritual traditions, and in the witness of the saints. Indeed, "Our tradition is rich enough to help us."¹⁹

More than this, we have inklings of the power of God's presence in the communal experience of people on a journey, whose encounters with the sacred come in sorrow and in joy, in struggles for justice and peace, in adventurous hope despite partial defeat. In all of these respects, the church has been part of our vocation. We need still to *resist* its abuses and *call* it – and participate in *transforming* it – into its true reality as the People of God. Our love for the church can only be a crucified love, a love for Christ that is inseparable from the cross and the resurrection grace of his church.

III. Mission and Ministry

Passion, purpose, and promise must of course apply to our experience in mission and ministry. This may be, finally, where they are most important. Your session this afternoon will be an occasion to understand this. Here, however, I will speak of only two things: (1) a model for both mission and ministry, and (2) a work of mercy newly relevant to both relationships and ministry.

Model for Mission and Ministry

The model for our ministry I take from the gospel attributed to John. It is outlined in chapter after chapter, culminating in chapter 15. John

builds a picture, a guide, a principle, given by Jesus to his disciples. "As God has loved me, so I have loved you; as I have loved you, so you are to love one another." On *this* model we are to love and to serve. One way of understanding it is this: Jesus begins with his own relationship with his Father:²⁰ "As God has loved me" – that is, as love flows in the life of God's own self. And how does love flow in God's own life? On a model not of hierarchy and subordination, but a model of complete equality and infinite mutuality. All that the Father (or first person, or Creator) is, is given to the Son (or second person, or Redeemer); all that the Son receives is returned to the Father; and the life that is held between them is the life of the Spirit. Then Jesus says that it is on this model, on *this* model, that God loves us: "As God loves me, so I have loved you." *This* is the kind of love offered, the kind of relationship promised – between God and God's people, God and each human person; a love and a relationship of almost unbelievable equality and mutuality. ("I call you no longer servants ... but friends." John 15:15) And *this*, in turn, is the model that Jesus sets forth for our relationships with one another: "So you are to love one another." This is the model for love and the deeds of love. It is a model not of hierarchy and subordination, but of equality and mutuality.²¹ It provides the root of our moral lives: the purpose of our creation, the rule for right loving, the grace for right being, the principle for right action. There is no more radical notion of community, no more radical a goal for mission, no more radical a principle for ministry.

Isaiah outlines for us the mission that Jesus will eventually announce: "Give the good news to the oppressed ... bind up the brokenhearted ... liberate all captives ... release all prisoners ... provide garlands not ashes for those who mourn ... praise and not burdens for the faint of spirit." (Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:18-19) Attempting to love one another as God has loved us, and to do the deeds of love, especially for the poor, the outcast, the disadvantaged, is our calling. But if we are to sustain wisdom and energy for this calling, according to the model of mission and ministry given by Jesus Christ, we clearly need ongoing transformation of our own hearts. Our communal calling encompasses all of the works of

mercy, but there is one particular work of mercy that has special power to transform *us* as well as those we love and serve. It constitutes not only an external work but a strategy of the heart. The work of mercy I have in mind is the spiritual work of mercy – to “forgive all injuries.”

Forgiveness as a Work of Mercy²²

To forgive is not to be passive in the face of injury, neglect, betrayal, abuse. Indeed, forgiveness may be one of the most active responses possible in the face of whatever sort of breach occurs in human relationships – social, personal, or institutional. We learn something about what forgiveness means perhaps first by being-forgiven. To experience being-forgiven is to experience new acceptance, in spite of ourselves, and the restoration of relationship with now a new future. Jesus points to the mystery of a “forgiven love” when he claims that the one who is forgiven much, loves more than the one who is forgiven little. (Luke 7:41)

The potentially paradigmatic experience of being-forgiven is our experience of being-forgiven by God – an experience of being accepted by the incomprehensible source of our life and existence, accepted even without becoming wholly innocent. (Romans 5:8) The one response asked of us is to *trust* this forgiveness. To trust is to surrender our hearts in our *acceptance* of being-forgiven. It requires an ongoing change of heart. To use of phrase of Emily Dickinson, it is to “drop our hearts” that is, to feel our hearts “drop” their objections, their barriers and burdens, in freedom, accepting eternal Acceptance. This experience foreshadows the ultimate experience of which we have inklings: “By my long bright – and *longer* trust—I drop my Heart – unshriven!”²³

Like being-forgiven, to forgive is also to “drop our hearts,” to “let go” of something within us, in order to *accept* someone who has harmed us. But in forgiving someone, what do we “let go” of? Not our sense of justice, nor a sense of our own dignity as a person. Yet in forgiving another, we let go of something *in* ourselves – perhaps anger, resentment, building blocks of stored up pain. And we let go of something *of* ourselves – perhaps our self-protectedness, ourselves as desiring renewed self-justification in the face of

misjudgment or exploitation by another. It entails in a way the letting go of our very selves, a *kenosis*, that alone frees us to become ourselves. This is a work of mercy that changes us, and provides the conditions of heart to sustain all of the other works of mercy.

It is, of course, one thing to forgive someone who expresses sorrow and remorse for injuring us. But an even more radical form of forgiveness may come if we are capable of forgiving even

To forgive is not to be passive in the face of injury, neglect, betrayal, abuse. Indeed, forgiveness may be one of the most active responses possible in the face of whatever sort of breach occurs in human relationships.

perpetrators of injury or oppression who continue to injure and oppress us, or misjudge or ignore us – both those who know and those who “know not what they do.” Forgiveness in such situations I call “anticipatory” forgiveness – a *readiness of heart* to forgive. It is not to be equated with premature reconciliation or covering over of injury, but rather, it is to be likened to the attitude of heart of the father of the “prodigal son,” who stood ready, with outstretched arms, to forgive his son whenever he might back to him, with our without full repentance. Above all, anticipatory forgiveness is like the forgiveness of God, who yearns to embrace us, if we but turn even slightly to behold and to accept his love once again.

Insofar as we grow in the capacity to accept being-forgiven – by God and by humans, and grow in the capacity to forgive and be ready to forgive, we may better understand not only why cries for reconciliation have come to the fore in our time – in response to seemingly intractable societal conflicts and seemingly infinite needs for social healing. We may glimpse, too, why (according to John 20:22) it is that on the night of Easter, the risen Christ shows his disciples his wounds, and gives them the mission of forgiveness: If they do not forgive, the terrible price will be that the Spirit’s decisive gift of forgiveness will not abide in the community of disciples, nor will it ever change the world. But

the *promise* of Christ is that the Spirit will teach the church the ways of forgiveness, and hence the way of eternal life.

Here may be at least a clue to the mission of a community dedicated to Mercy – to union and charity within and without, and to hope in a crucified love. The more profoundly we understand this special work of mercy, so much the better may we engage in all of the other works of mercy – those ministries of our mission that stand under the sign of both cross and resurrection.



NOTES

1. Breege O'Neill, RSM, "The Future of Religious Life," Mercy International Conference, 2010.
2. For a preliminarily optimistic view of the visitation, see Doris Gottemoeller, "A Visitor's Guide," *America* (Nov. 23, 2009): 11-13. This article is also helpful in its proposals regarding approaches and practices within the actual implementation of the visitation.
3. See Sandra Schneiders, *New Wineskins: Re-imagining Religious Life Today* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986); *Finding the Treasure*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000; *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001; as well as Schneiders, articles on the meaning of Religious Life today, in *National Catholic Reporter*, 2010.
4. See Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, *The Foundations of Religious Life*, Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009. The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR) is an umbrella organization for U.S. women's religious congregations, established as an alternative to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).
5. See Schneiders, *Selling All*, esp. chap. 10; as well as "God So Loved the World: Ministerial Religious Life in 2009," Unpubl. ms. delivered to IHM Congregation, June 14, 2009.
6. See, e.g., Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V. and Sister Mary Elizabeth Wusinich, S.V., "Religious Consecration – A Particular Form of Consecrated Life," in *Foundations of Religious Life*, esp. 29-45.
7. *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841*, ed. Mary C. Sullivan, Baltimore, MD: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004, Letter #175, p. 272-73.
8. *Ibid.*, Letter #93, p. 150.
9. *Ibid.*, Letter #93, p. 151.
10. *Ibid.*, Letter #101, p. 165.
11. *Ibid.*, #110, p. 180.
12. *Ibid.*, #89, p. 141. See also Letter #90, p. 142.
13. *Ibid.*, Letter #168, p. 259.
14. Karl Rahner, "Growing Old," in *Prayers and Meditations: An Anthology of Spiritual Writings*, ed. J. Griffiths, New York: Crossroad, 1981, 91.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Dorothy Day, *By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day*, ed. R. Ellsberg, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983, 300.
17. *Ibid.*, 39.
18. Rahner, "On the Situation of Faith," *Theological Investigations* 20:21.
19. Ladislav Orsy, *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press: 2009, 23.
20. In this biblical context, I am willing to use Jesus' preferred metaphor, but also other metaphors for all three persons in God.
21. Insofar as some forms of hierarchy are necessary in some institutions (e.g., family or even, in some respects, church), the rationale and the goal of any temporary inequality must ultimately be equality and mutuality (e.g., the goal of parents is to assist their children in becoming adults capable of friendship; the goal of the church is not to treat its members as children but to assist them into adulthood, capable of wisdom and love and shared governance and ministry).
22. I have written at much greater length on this, and on its relevance in particular to our world. See Margaret A. Farley, "Forgiveness as a Newly Relevant Work of Mercy," in *Fire Cast on the Earth: Kindling: Being Mercy in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. E. Davis, A. Hannon, M. Lyons, et.al. Dublin: Mercy International Association, 2009, 185-97. Also published in *The MAST Journal* 18. 2008, 40-49.
23. Emily Dickinson, in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. T.H. Johnson, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1987, 108.

Apostolic Visitation: Reflection on Religious Identity

Norita Cooney, R.S.M.

Catherine McAuley was an Irish Catholic laywoman who recognized the many needs of people, especially women, who were economically poor in nineteenth century Ireland. Catherine decided that she and women like her could do something to relieve the suffering of the women and children of her society and so, on September 24, 1827, with an inheritance, she opened the first house of Mercy in lower Baggot Street in Dublin, Ireland. That house, now the International Centre of the Sisters of Mercy, was a place to shelter, feed and educate women and girls.

Catherine's original intention was to assemble a lay corps of Catholic social workers. However, the Archbishop of Dublin, who was impressed by her good works and desirous of seeing those works continue after her death, suggested that she establish a religious congregation to create a stable structure so the ministry would continue. As a result, Catherine and two women at Baggot Street went to the Presentation Convent at Georges Hill to learn about religious life and make their canonical novitiate. On December 12, 1831 the three sisters from Baggot Street made their vows as Sisters of Mercy and became a new religious order in the Church.

I share this history because Catherine is core to our identity as religious women today. As Catherine heeded the call of Jesus to reach out with courage and love to the needy of her time, we, "the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, a religious institute of pontifical right dedicated to the works of the apostolate (Constitutions §1)...strive to serve the needy of our time...by committing ourselves to follow Christ in his compassion for suffering people."(Constitutions §2). You will hear more about our Mission and Ministry later but I believe "Mercy" is the core of our identity and our special charism within the Church.

The Suscipe of Catherine McAuley is also core to who we are. We say this prayer and sing

this prayer whenever we gather to celebrate or to bury a member of our community.

The Sisters of Mercy take four vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and the service of the poor, sick and uneducated. I don't have much time so I will refer you to our Constitutions §22 through §29 which clearly articulate our understanding and our practice of each of these vows. Constitutions §§3, 4, 5 also provide additional context for reflection on the vow of service.

With regard to the question about reconfiguration under the Identity topic, I'm sure by now you are well aware of the reconfiguration that has taken place within the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy. The West Midwest Community is now nearly two and a half years old. We encompass what were previously six former regional communities: Detroit; Chicago; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Omaha, Nebraska; Burlingame, California; and Auburn, California. Our administrative offices are in Omaha but we have work sites in the other five former regional centers.

At the present time our leadership team includes six members, one from each of the former regional communities. When we gather to elect a new leadership team in 2013 we will elect a five-member team and there will be no requirement that there is a team member from each former regional community.

There is also a question under the Identity topic that asks: "Is your Institute moving toward a new form of religious life?" I just want to share a few thoughts on this topic.

I don't think we as a Mercy Community are deliberately moving toward a new form of religious life. I do believe, however, that over the years since Vatican II we have gained new insights on how to live our religious life in the 21st century and how to reach out in more creative ways to serve the needy of our time. These insights are shaped, I believe, by our realization that we are one world and what we do here in the United States has a profound impact on what

happens around the world. I think this realization has awakened and intensified our commitment to social justice and to such issues as immigration, world poverty, climate change, etc.

I believe our spirituality today has also been enhanced by new scientific discoveries about the universe, and somehow our understanding of God has been very much impacted and expanded by this reality. I also think as we have expanded the scope and focus of our ministries we have also expanded the geographic spread of our communities. We are not as concentrated in a limited number of areas as was the case in the early years of our history in the United States. Because of the broader geographic spread we have worked hard to develop our understandings of what it means to be "in community" in new and diverse ways.

Strengths

- Our identity within the church is clear and strong.
- Our charism shapes our decisions in community life and ministry.
- We have a broad sense of Mercy identity including Community, Institute, and other Mercy congregations throughout the world. We have structures to support our Mercy communication and collaboration, including regular meetings of elected leaders. We use websites to share information, prayer and resources worldwide.

Challenges

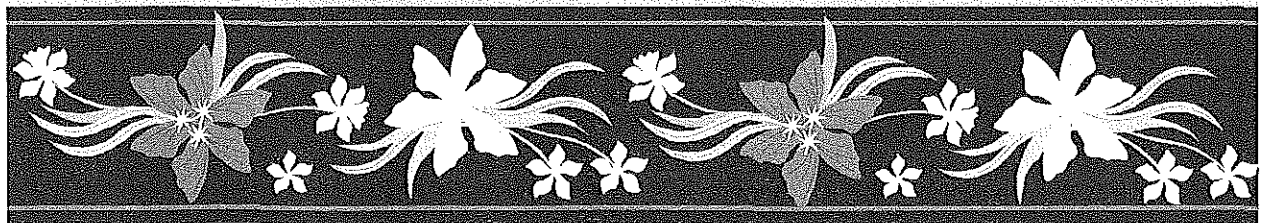
- The public image of women religious is sometimes far from our reality.
- Even within the church there are different perceptions and expectations regarding the identity of women religious.



Apostolic Visitation Questionnaire, Part B

1. Identity of your religious institute (*Vita Consecrata*, 1-5; 14-40; 87-91; *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 5-13; *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 4-11; *The Code of Canon Law*, cann. 573-606)

- Describe the key aspects of your founding charism and how it is lived today.
- How do sisters in your unit understand and express the vow and virtue of:
 - poverty? To whom are they accountable for the observance of this vow?
 - chastity? How is their consecration positively expressed?
 - obedience? To whom are sisters accountable for observance of this vow?
- Do the sisters take other/additional vows? If so, how do they live this/these out?
- In the past ten years, has your unit been involved in, is it now involved in or is it planning a reconfiguration, merger or union with another unit, congregation or other congregations? If so, how has this affected the quality of life of your unit and of the sisters themselves?
- Is your institute moving toward a new form of religious life? If so, how is this new form specifically related to the Church's and your institute's understanding of religious life?
- What are your hopes and concerns about the future of your religious institute in living its charism in the Church?



Consecrated Life: A Reflection at the Well

Camilla Burns, SNDdeN,

Congregational Leader, 29 January 2005

Introduction

We came to Rome from all over the world. Tired from our journey, we sat by a well and asked for a drink. We sat with Jesus, the Samaritan Woman and our religious brothers and sisters and pondered the meaning of consecrated life in the twenty-first century. We drank living water.

Wells are the major source of water in the ancient world. In the desert, their very existence means the difference between life and death. Digging a well is an occasion for rejoicing (Num 21:17). They are so vital to a community that they can become places of dispute as in the conflict between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen 21:25-26). Wells are located in the wilderness (Gen 16:7, 14), in fields (Gen 29:2), and in towns (2 Sam 2:15). They are a source of life.

Biblical wells are thresholds that often mark important transition moments in life. They have a liminality about them as thresholds. Men and women find themselves betwixt and between when they come to a well. When Sarah sent Hagar away, the angel found her at the spring in the wilderness. In her state of abandonment, the visitation of the angel prompted Hagar to name God, the God of seeing, and named the well after this title, Beer-la hai-roi.

In the Old Testament, betrothal scenes often involve wells. The servant of Abraham finds Rebekah for Isaac at the well of the city of Nahor in Aram. Jacob finds Rachel at a well in Haran and Moses meets the seven daughters of the priest of Midian at a well. One of those daughters is Zipporah, his future wife. There is a basic pattern to these betrothal well scenes in the Old Testament:

- 1 The future bridegroom or his substitute travels to a foreign land.
- 2 He encounters a girl or girls at the well.
- 3 Someone draws water from the well.
- 4 The girl(s) rush home to bring news of the stranger encountered there.
- 5 A betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl, generally after he has been invited to a meal.

Let us continue to sit together at the well and ponder what we learned about consecrated life from the perspective of the symbolism of a well as source of life, transition and betrothal.

Source of Life

If a well is a source of physical survival in ancient times, the bible is a source of refreshment for consecrated life. Vatican Council II inaugurated a renaissance in biblical studies in order to deepen biblical prayer. The Word of God has been placed in the center of life and affects all its aspects. We listen to it with the people of God in the context of our times. Consecrated life has reencountered the Word and engendered a thirst for the Word of God among religious men and women. Growth in faith is the result of listening to the Word. "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). When told that his mother and brothers were waiting to see him, Jesus responded, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). Concrete and concerted efforts are made to study and reflect on the Word of God at all levels of formation. This has become a source of life for consecrated life.

Formation centered on the study and reflection of the Word of God has enriched our apostolic life. Through our ministries the Word of God has become a powerful means of evangelization. Bible study groups and praying with the bible are fostered among the laity and even at encounters with people of different religions. Small communities of faith reading and praying the Bible have flourished around the world. The scriptures are read and interpreted from varied perspectives that emerge from the realities of life and from the needs of marginalized groups.

There is still much work to be done in our initial and continuing formation. The Word of God is available to us as a text but often does not serve as a living source of life because of lack of adequate knowledge and understanding. We sometimes interpret it in a fundamentalist way.

If there has been a failure of the bible among us, it has been due to our literalism, a failure of imagination. The bible is a living text with a heartbeat.

One of Jung's central theses is that all religious statements are rooted in the psyche or soul. The bible is an utterance of the soul. The language of the bible is inescapably drawn to the figurative and symbolic. He thought it was a mistake to teach the bible as a book of information to be believed and mastered, rather than as a book of transformation to be assimilated into one's bones. The bible is the attempt of our ancestors to express their relationship with God through centuries of living. In expressing the profound experiences of our life, we often rely on symbol and story to convey the deepest meaning. We exaggerate the details to express the significance.

I once had a student in a scripture class who understood this human tendency to express experience in embellished speech with an example from her own life. She met her boyfriend in a gymnasium where the atmosphere was less than romantic. She noted that when she and her friend told the story of how they met, they began to add details which in fact were not there. She said, "You would think there was a marching band parading through the gymnasium to initiate our encounter." The more they told the story, the more it expanded in exciting detail. What the young couple was doing with their expanding narrative was not telling us about the incident itself but something about the quality of their relationship. So it is with the bible. The imaginative text is relating deep truth. For instance, what does a burning bush that is not consumed tell us about the experience of Moses and God? It is a marvelous text that awakens our soul to new possibilities which we deaden if we spend our efforts trying to give a rational explanation for an impossible phenomenon in nature.

The question to ask the bible when seemingly impossible events happen is not to wonder about the possibility of the event but to ask what deep experience is being conveyed. If we listen to God in the creative, poetic, written Word, we will also learn to listen to God in the history of our own people and in our own lives. We will hear the deep story within the daily incidences of seeming inconsequentiality. The "marching band" of significance will be heard.

We will open ourselves to the formative and transformative stories of our tradition as well as our own lives.

The inspired imagery of the bible is an important source of its spiritual power. The images astonish us, grasp our attention, haunt our memory, and transform us. For a biblical formation that sustains a life-long commitment, we need to invest in personnel who can communicate the vibrancy and vitality of the Word. Leadership needs to engage itself and its members in biblical reflection at all levels. We must share these resources across congregations and continents so that all may drink from the well of living water, the bible. This is not an option but a necessity. Karl Rahner once said that the Church of the twenty-first century will be contemplative or it will not be at all. This is a matter of life and death.

Threshold of Transition

The Samaritan Woman came to the well in a major life transition. She only recognized it when she met Jesus. The working paper of the Congress describes the transitional moment of consecrated life in the twenty-first century.

Currently, in some countries consecrated life is dramatically impacted by the phenomenon of aging, yet in other places the in average age of religious is much lower. In recent years new forms of monastic and religious life have been added to the century-old forms we know. Some of the charisms that arose centuries ago have taken on new aspects that give them new vitality. After Vatican Council II, consecrated life received a great impetus and underwent important changes. Present socio-cultural and religious contexts demand even more decisive transformations. In the midst of many contemporary changes we perceive the validity and the relevance of the important values that constitute our form of life and we also feel the urgency of living these values in an intense and significant way for ourselves and for others. We are living in a time of grace and challenge (§1).

We are living in a time of transition. Transitions are experiences of liminality. We are betwixt and between, neither here nor there. The cultural anthropologists refer to these experiences as rites of passage represented by the formula of separation, initiation and return. The pattern appears simple, but the complexity lies in the fact that different aspects of

consecrated life are at different points on the spectrum. The same is true of our own personal life. While some aspects are settled at certain times, other features are in transition. We are never completely at one stage except perhaps in death when we make the final transition.

Separation involves moving away from what is familiar. We leave the way things have been. This involves a border-crossing which can be frightening. Even though we see the value of leaving some things behind, we are familiar with them and the unpredictability of the new can be disorienting. We have experienced this countless times in hundreds of details in our lives since Vatican II. We have become accustomed to experiencing the unaccustomed. We sometimes struggle with what was left behind and wonder if our present choices are sufficiently rooted in the context of the twenty-first century. Jonah exemplified this situation well when God invited him to go east and he got in a boat to go west. "He paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord" (Jon 1:3).

As we move to the initiation or middle state of transition, we look at our present context to discover what must be embraced in order to remain faithful to the call of consecrated life. A significant factor that must be addressed is globalization. The confusion and chaos it generates put us in the belly of the whale with Jonah. The pattern of globalization seems inevitable at this moment but the serious problem which needs to be addressed is the nature of globalization. Pope John Paul II has called for a "globalization of solidarity" which addresses the problem of the poor and those who suffer because of globalization. We must renew our efforts to stand with the poor.

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., suggests that the Church of 2025 will be more a Church of the poor than in 2000. If efforts of re-evangelization are not successful, it will also be materially much poorer as well. This is true of congregations. New members are predominantly from poor countries and resources provided by the wealthy countries are diminishing because of aging members and the lack of a large member-base to provide economic support. Our congregations will be of the poor and materially poorer. We give lip service to simple living but must prepare ourselves to live it in reality. A sociologist once

commented that when we give approval to efforts at simple living, we spend our time on the way home from the meeting figuring ways to meet the challenge without changing our lives. We may not have that possibility in 2025.

We not only need to cross the border into diminishment of personnel and finances. We also need to cross into a serious assessment of pluralism and diversity in our congregations. This is not confined to international congregations. Massive numbers of migrating people have now entered countries which used to have homogenous populations. This pattern of migration will affect congregations which used to have homogeneity of membership. Congregations located in one country or even one diocese now look around at a general population which has become more ethnically diverse.

We must go beyond recognition of intercultural membership to that of changing a dominantly western ethos of a congregation to a new reality. In the words of Gary Riebel-Estrella, the western "ego-centric" mode of existence must learn the cultural reality of the "socio-centric" model. This is a daunting task since our own cultures are inscribed in the DNA of our being. We must do it to pave the way for the future leadership of our congregations who will surely be from "socio-centric" cultures.

These initiations or transitions invite us to the last step of return. When we land on the beach after our sojourn in the whale, like Jonah, we will go east and preach the good news. We return knowing something about living with fewer resources and living with another paradigm of culture. We face a world on the brink of apocalyptic destruction.

Our primary task in this world of division and war is reconciliation. The letter to the Ephesians expresses the mission statement of reconciliation.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (Eph 2:13-16).

Efforts at reconciliation give authenticity to our gospel witness. To be faithful to this witness in consecrated life, we must be rooted in the One who invited us. We move to the betrothal scene.

Betrothal

The image of the betrothal scenes at the wells in the Old Testament hover over the wells of the New Testament. The story of the Samaritan Woman invites us to look at this as a betrothal scene. Immediately before this story, John's disciples went to John the Baptist worried that Jesus was now baptizing. John the Baptist responded, "The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice," so the betrothal scene is announced by the arrival of the bridegroom.

All of the usual patterns of betrothal scenes at a well are fulfilled in this story. Jesus, as the future bridegroom, travels to a foreign land. (John takes pains to tell us that the Jews did not share things in common with the Samaritans). Jesus encounters the Samaritan Woman and we know that after their conversation she rushes off to tell the town. In the meantime the disciples return with food but Jesus does not accept it because, he says, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

The only part of this story that does not fulfill the usual pattern is that water and food are not consumed. I believe that John is setting the betrothal scene but through the symbolism of living water and some mysterious food, Jesus lifts the story from the material level to a spiritual level. Jesus does not establish a physical family by betrothal but he establishes a spiritual community, based on worshiping in Spirit and truth. The water he gives and the food he eats is spiritual food. The relationship with the Woman, and hence with all believers, will not be based upon any physical relationship, or physical betrothal, or physical kingdom, but upon spiritual birth.

Jesus offers no material water but says to the Woman, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." In order to have living

water, one must know the giver and the gift. That is what Jesus asks of us as we gather at the well. It took the Samaritan Woman awhile to catch on to his message. She worried about the fact that Jesus did not have a bucket to get water. He tells her that whoever will drink of this water will not thirst again and, more than that, it will become a spring of water in them gushing up to eternal life. Before she knows the giver, the woman asks for the gift. "Sir, give me this water..." After the conversation about her husbands and the proper place for worship, and Jesus saying, "Those who worship must worship in Spirit and truth," she recognizes the giver when Jesus confirms that he is the Messiah.

No one had to tell her to run off and tell the others. She didn't have to think about mission or evangelization. Meeting the giver and receiving the gift propelled her to spread the Good News. As we stand at this well and participate in this encounter with Jesus, we hear again the invitation to know the giver and the gift. Standing at the threshold, betwixt and between where we have been and where we are going, the thirst of our disorientation seeks refreshment. We will know the direction when we recognize Jesus and ask for the gift of living water, and it will become in us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

It is then that we can as Brother Echeverria says,

[G]ive back to consecrated life all of its enchantment. The word "enchantment" refers to everything that produces contagious joy, strong attraction, gentle freshness and stimulating optimism. It awakens grace and friendliness, imagination and fantasy. By its very nature, it gives rise to strength, enthusiasm and hope. (From the closing remark at the Congress by Brother Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverria, President of USG).

The well in Rome nourished us with living water and like the Samaritan Woman, we rushed forth to tell of meeting the giver and the gift at the well. "Your channel is a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon" (Song of Songs 4:15).



Wisdom that Endures

Commission on the Development of the Religious Woman

Chapter Working Paper

Burlingame, California, May 10, 1968

Chairman: Sister M. Ernest

With a view to considering the dimensions of human life as the essential bases of religious development, we studied the positive and negative growth-factors in the areas of survival, love, art, communication and religion.

The concept and reality of survival obviously forms the groundwork and both presupposes and develops those factors necessary to human life and growth on the physical, psychological and spiritual levels. It extends from the obvious and highly variable needs for adequate food, sleep and recreation to the more subtle but perhaps more deeply human needs for a sense of personal worth and an ability to love; and the stability, humor, contemplation and creativity which are concomitant with the satisfaction of these needs.

Each of these needs must be recognized, valued and met within our community with a constant regard for individual differences and universal needs as concretized in each sister.¹

The reality of love as not only a dimension of human life, but also the very force of personal integration, warrants its consideration as a factor of prime importance. A loving person is self-accepting and, therefore, responsible to be self-giving. This demands a willingness to take risks, to listen, to suffer, to grow; and it is only achieved in a constant becoming in relation to other persons. As a community, then, we must take every step to promote and encourage self-acceptance by an appreciative recognition of the uniqueness of each Sister and by the provision of a place for real and therefore continuing friendship.²

The dimension of art in a human life is built on love, on the sensitive and reverent awareness of life which love engenders. It refers, in essence, to a creative life-style rather than a limiting sophistication, to an intelligent and unstudied simplicity rather than an eccentric or even superfluous affectation. Far from its being

superfluous, an appreciation of beauty is essential to human life; and therefore the cultivation of whatever promotes this sensitive openness in us is an important part of our formation and life-long growth as religious persons.³

Communication is an essential facet of both love and art. It involves a sharing of reality and ultimately a gift of self. Obviously, then, the concepts of personal worth and dynamic mutual recognition and esteem again assume a basic importance. In fact, the ability to communicate exists in direct proportion to personal human development, and therefore, it is fostered in a climate of glad acceptance and reverence for the unique differentiation which this growth demands and develops.

Hence, we as a Community must try to be aware of any practices or attitudes which might foster an unnatural conformity and thus the leveling of individual differences. We need to examine our rule, customs and attitude to discern which are the few essential ideas and ideals on which we must agree and which are the merely accidental; and then we must value them proportionately.⁴

The dimension of religion in the human personality is intimately related to all the other dimensions of human life. At its basis lies man's natural desire for an enlightenment which will give order and significance to his life, for a personal contact with the transcendent; in essence, for union with God. The freedom and openness developed in and through the previously considered areas of human growth form the ground of man's capacity for religious experience, the integrity of which can be preserved only in a spirit of deep love, continuing fidelity, and therefore, reverent detachment.

Here man most profoundly transcends isolation and becomes himself, a unique human

person whose development derives from his openness to reality, and accordingly a deeply religious person as the heart of whose being is an openness to God.⁵

We have, then, to work toward a more meaningful integration of the human and of the religious, of the natural and the supernatural. The subtle opposing of these elements, even through an imbalance in emphasis, is a cause of artificiality and unreality in our lives. Our growth in Christ is accomplished in the existential world of relatedness and in the dynamic orientation toward human self-fulfillment made perfect only in Christ.

Recommendations

1. In order to insure that all decisions in the Community be made in light of the dignity of the human person (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, §1), we recommend that the Chapter formulate a statement emphasizing this fundamental reality.
2. Since the development of the Religious Person necessarily presupposes a goal or direction of development, and since this direction is intimately related to a developing Community, it seems essential that the Community's identity be discovered within the context of today's world. This can only be done by taking into account the reality of organic growth of the Community within a changing world. It is recommended that the Chapter give priority to working toward a description of the place of the Sister of Mercy in the Church today, based on the premise that the Community's self-discovery is possible only in relation to that which exists outside of itself.
3. It is recommended that more personal responsibility be placed on individuals to make decisions regarding professional growth and social obligations.
4. It is recommended that creativity be encouraged and various and original points

of view be sought as beneficial to the life of the Community.

5. It is recommended that opportunity be provided for periods of leisure time in an atmosphere away from the work environment.
6. Since real love of others must be preceded by knowledge and acceptance of self, it is recommended that the Sisters be encouraged to avail themselves of competent psychological help such as counseling, sensitivity workshops, etc.
7. It is recommended that the Sisters respond to the needs of those in their area by taking positive action with a view toward involvement in civic projects, parish activities, home visitations, etc.
8. It is recommended that each local house devote one of their first house meetings to discussing the ways in which Community can be created with this particular group and that periodically discussions be held on the progress of this common task.
9. It is recommended that the aesthetics and theory of the arts as well as the experiences in the arts be provided each Sister in order to foster growth in the awareness of beauty and the riches of the human spirit.
10. It is recommended that a Commission on the Arts be established which would meet regularly to coordinate in-service programs in the arts and to investigate cultural opportunities in each geographical area and inform local communities of these.
11. It is recommended that there be provision for articulation between policy-making bodies (e.g., General Council, education boards, health services board and formation team) and the Community at large.

12. It is recommended that Sisters be encouraged to publish in the area of their competence.
13. It is recommended that the following suggestions be adopted in the use of television:
 14. A listening room should be provided so that the community room will be left free for those who do not wish to watch television.
 15. Provision should be made for maximum reception in each geographical area, i.e. UHF channels.
 16. It is recommended that libraries with books and periodicals to serve the spiritual, professional and cultural needs of the Community should be provided. It is further recommended that a well-balanced record collection be maintained in each house.
 17. It is recommended that the Weekend Experience or similar activities be continued. It is further recommended that Sisters in the Community who are interested in fostering vocations be encouraged to participate in these activities.
 18. It is recommended that more members of the Community be involved in the work of formation, for example, a Formation Commission.
 19. It is recommended that consideration be given to the length of time for the various stages of formation in order that they best suit individual differences.
20. It is recommended that some consideration be given to varying the structure and placement of the canonical year.
21. It is recommended that the present philosophy underlying the formation program and any further developments be presented periodically to the Community.
22. It is recommended that the validity of the substitution of a period of "commitment to the Community" for the present period of temporary vows with only one profession as perpetual be investigated.
23. It is recommended that all Sisters be given opportunity for continued theological studies.



NOTES

1. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, §§ 57, 59, 61.
2. *Ibid.*, §§ 24, 32.
3. *Ibid.*, §§ 53, 54, 61, 62.
4. *Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication*, §§ 1, 9, 13.
5. *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, §§ 1, 2.

Members of the Commission on the Development of the Religious Woman

Sister Mary Ernest, Chairman
 Sister Mary Annette
 Sister Mary Assumpta
 Sister Mary Deborah
 Sister Mary Francella
 Sister Mary Gertrude
 Sister Mary Janet
 Sister Mary LaSalette
 Sister Mary Martina
 Sister Mary Noreen
 Sister Mary Peter
 Sister Mary Victor

Commencement Address:

Saint Xavier University¹

Mary Aquin O'Neill, R.S.M.

"Everything worth doing hurts like hell." Not my line, though I wish it were. It was borrowed from novelist Tim Gautreaux.¹ I think it a good line for this occasion. During these few golden moments, your pain is over. No more rushing to class, taking exams, writing papers, working in the lab, juggling family, work and study. You have run the race, achieved your goal, earned your degree and will shortly leave here with a diploma. I congratulate you and thank those who helped you on the way. For all of you, it is a great day.

Still, this is a commencement, a beginning, and there are many milestones ahead. Against all the cultural promises regarding the good life, I urge you to continue dedicating yourselves to the things that are worthwhile – to achievements that require sacrifice and pain and heartache and risk and, sometimes, failure. I am not thinking only of the heroic achievements that make the headlines and the movies. In this age of celebrity, it is important to emphasize the heroism of the ordinary and the achievements that sustain a family, a community, a nation.

I have in mind parents who know that the very words "mother" and "father" are implied promises, and who will endure suffering to offer the young the shelter of their maturity, their wisdom, their labor. I think of neighbors willing to take on the burdens of others when disaster strikes or death comes calling. I'm talking about teachers who refuse to give up on students, trying one thing after another until they find the key that unlocks the desire for learning, the drive for what is true and good. My mind goes to the writers, artists, musicians whose works urge us to go beyond, to imagine ourselves better, more compassionate, more thoughtful. I think of doctors whose concern is for the whole person and who stay with patients when a cure is not on the horizon. Politicians willing to sacrifice re-election for the common good, public servants who accord the powerless the same respect for their dignity as they do the powerful. If you know someone like this, ask them. It will be a gift if they tell you what it cost

them to become what they are today.

Who am I to speak to you like this? I wager that if someone asks you next week who your commencement speaker was, you won't know my name. And that is fine with me, as long as you remember that it was a Sister of Mercy. For I stand here today in the place of every unnamed and unsung Sister of Mercy who has given herself to the holy ministry of education. We work at every level, from elementary to secondary to college and university and even in seminaries. Many of those very institutions, Sisters of Mercy founded. If you took the quiz that was published recently in *Saint Xavier Today*, you know that the Sisters of Mercy who came in 1846 not only established Saint Xavier Academy, which became Saint Xavier University, but are also responsible for founding the Catholic grammar school system in the city of Chicago.

Today, Saint Xavier University, the oldest Mercy institution of higher education in the world, is one of sixteen colleges and universities for which the Sisters of Mercy are responsible. This makes the Conference for Mercy Higher Education the second largest network of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. Though the number of sisters on each of those campuses has dwindled, our passion for education has not. We teach and administer, we conduct research and write books, we engage in the arts, and we carry on the saving mission of the Catholic Church in the spirit of our foundress, Mother Mary Catherine McAuley of Dublin, Ireland.

This work is by no means ours alone. The lay and religious colleagues who have joined us in this educational mission – Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, other religion or no religion at all – make it possible for this work to endure, to adapt, and to engage minds and hearts in the 21st century. We are indebted to all of them.

I speak to you today of worthwhile endeavors because you are our gift to the world, our legacy. I speak with the voice of the Sisters of Mercy when I pray that here, in this Mercy University, you have

progressed in love of learning, critical reasoning, just action, open-hearted compassion, desire for what is good, and a capacity to be inspired by what is true and beautiful. I hope that you have increased in spiritual strength in your time here – spiritual strength understood as “a fearless investigation of reality.”² I pray that you will continue to undertake worthy endeavors, even if it hurts like hell.

For the privilege of addressing you and receiving an honorary degree, I am deeply grateful and thank the Board of Trustees of this University, Dr. Angela Durante, and Dr. Judith Dwyer – under whose presidency I was nominated. I will treasure the bond with this institution and with the winter class of 2009.

Let me leave you with a blessing in the form of a poem by Marge Piercy:

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.³

May that blessing be yours.



NOTES

1. December 19, 2009.
2. “Interview with Tim Gautreaux,” *Image*, No. 632:48.
3. Elizabeth Lesser, *The New American Spirituality, A Seeker’s Guide*, Random House, 1999, 43.
4. Marge Piercy, *The Art of Blessing the Day: Poems with a Jewish Theme*, Middlemarsh, Inc., 1999.

In the Season of the 2011 Chapter

Discussion Questions

Burns "Massive numbers of migrating people have now entered countries which used to have homogenous populations. This pattern of migration will affect congregations which used to have homogeneity of membership. Congregations located in one country or even one diocese now look around at a general population which has become more ethnically diverse. We must go beyond recognition of intercultural membership to that of changing a dominantly western ethos of a congregation to a new reality. In the words of Gary Riebe-Estrella, the western "ego-centric" mode of existence must learn the cultural reality of the 'socio-centric' model."

◆ What changes do you foresee happening to the "western ethos" of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas?

Cooney At the end of her summary for the Apostolic Visitation, Norita Cooney outlined two challenges faced by the Sisters of Mercy: 1) The public image of women religious is sometimes far from our reality, and 2) Even within the church there are different perceptions and expectations regarding the identity of women religious.

◆ How do you personally respond to these mis-perceptions and varying expectations of what sisters "ought to be"?

Farley Two different trends can be identified in what constitutes authentic religious life. Margaret Farley distinguishes LCWR communities, those represented by the writings of Sandra Schneiders, IHM, from CMSWR communities, those represented by essays in *The Foundations of Religious Life*.

◆ How would you describe the cultural and theological differences between the two groups, given your observation of how some communities live in convents, follow a traditional horarium, and devote themselves to particular forms of ministry?

King Besides naming God as Merciful and Compassionate, what other description of the divine presence appeals to you personally?

◆ Do you pray to God, to Jesus, to the Holy Spirit?

Linehan "The Chapter is a representative body, responsible to the whole community. The community needs and deserves an accounting of what the Chapter did, and why, because it is the whole community that will implement Chapter directions. To the extent that deliberations went on in small table groups, and the 'redeeming presence' was experienced directly only by those present, there seems to be a gap. We, the delegates and other participants, cannot just say 'You had to be there.' It is not clear what we can say, however."

◆ How do you feel about the caution of this assessment. Can the Direction Statement from the 2011 Chapter be effectively translated to the membership at large?

Upton "Perhaps my experience of Eucharist is similar to yours. I go to the family table not as a self-assured theologian, but as a sinner – often hungry and weary, sometimes frightened and lonely. I go to be with believers who walk the path of faith with me, because they are Christ to me—they bear me up and call me forth. Together we feed on the word of God – rarely broken open with evocative preaching, but nourishment nonetheless. Together we sing God's praises – not always in aesthetically pleasing tones, but attempting harmony nonetheless. Together we remember the One who walked the way with us, whose dying and rising set us free to be witnesses in this time and place."

◆ What is your personal experience of the Eucharist? Does it change, depending on whether you are participating in a Mercy liturgy, a parish liturgy at one parish rather than another, or a liturgy at your place of ministry?

Commission on the Development of the Religious Woman This pre-Chapter document from 1968 doesn't describe a set of virtues that women religious are supposed to develop, but rather a set of attitudes, sensitivities and connections with the real world.

◆ What are the consequences you see, over several decades, for these values having been promoted in the Sisters of Mercy? What is the concept of Christian spirituality that is embodied in this document?

Contributors

Camilla Burns, SNDdeN, is presently a Professor and Director of the Institute of Pastoral Theology at Liverpool Hope University. She has a Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, an M.A. from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, and an M.S. from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. From 2002-2008, Camilla was the Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and resided at the Notre Dame Generalate in Rome. In September 2012, Camilla will join the faculty at Trinity Washington University to assist in the establishment of a pastoral ministry program.

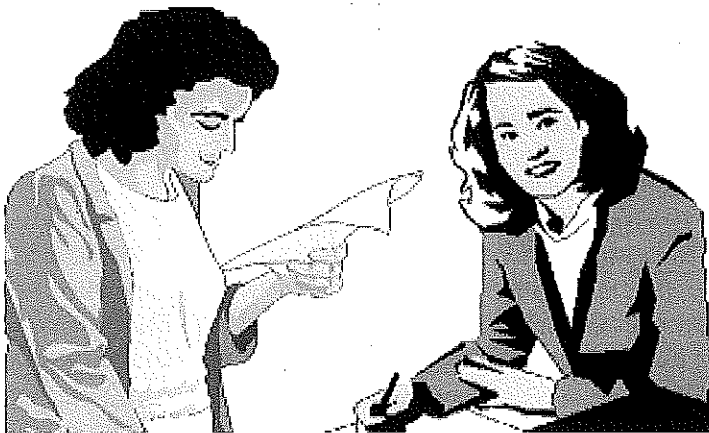
Norita Cooney, R.S.M. (West-Midwest) died in March, 2011 at 71, a Sister of Mercy for 53 years. She was most widely known for her leadership in healthcare but she began her ministry in education—high school and college. She entered after graduating from Mercy High School in Omaha, and earned a B.A. in history from College of Saint Mary in 1962. After receiving her M.S. in sociology from St. Louis University in 1965, she chaired the Department of Sociology at College of Saint Mary (1965-1969 and 1972-1974) and then headed the Pastoral Development Office of the Archdiocese of Omaha from 1974 to 1976. She was Provincial (1979 - 1986) for the Province of Omaha. In 1986, she was named CEO of Bergan Mercy Health System covering institutions in Omaha and Council Bluffs. She served in this position for 10 years, then became chair of the board of Alegent Healthcare System of Omaha, formed in 1995, which consisted of eight hospitals and over 40 healthcare clinics in Nebraska and Iowa. In 2002, Sister Norita was vice president of mission services and community affairs for Alegent. In 2006 she also served as vice president of the Sisters of Mercy Omaha Regional Community as it prepared to merge to form the West Midwest Community. In 2008, Sister Norita was elected president of the Sisters of Mercy WMW Community. She carried out her presidential responsibilities fully for 2 ½ years, even after being diagnosed with cancer in February 2010.

Margaret Farley, R.S.M. (West-Midwest) is Gilbert L. Stark Emerita Professor in Christian Ethics at Yale University Divinity School, where she taught since 1971. She is past president of the Society of Christian Ethics and the Catholic Theological Society of America, as well as being a recipient of the CTSA's John Courtney Murray Award. She has served on many national committees for healthcare ethics, as well as hospital ethics boards. She is co-director of the Yale University Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics, the director of the Yale Divinity School Women's Initiative in Gender, Faith and Response to HIV and AIDS in Africa, and co-director of the All-Africa Conference: Sister to Sister. She is author of *Personal Commitments*, *Compassionate Respect: A Feminist Approach to Medical Ethics*, and *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. In addition, she has written more than seventy-five articles.

Marilyn King, R.S.M. (West Midwest) earned her Ph.D. in systematic theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, with a dissertation: "The Mountain Path: the Spiritual Theology of Thomas Merton." Her educational ministry includes a background of teaching science and math. She currently lives in a "laura," a residence in a rural setting that is designed to balance prayer and ministry, solitude and community, use of material resources and respect for Earth. She is recently retired from many years as Director of Adult Faith Formation at St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral in Kentucky. She has served a term as Executive Director of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology and remains on the Editorial Board. She frequently writes for Mercy publications.

Elizabeth Linehan, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA. She earned her Ph.D. from Fordham University. Dr. Linehan taught has taught at Saint Joseph's since 1976, and was chair of the Philosophy Department there for fifteen years. Her teaching and research interests are strongly connected with ethical issues raised by the use of violence. Her most recent work concerns restorative justice; she is a volunteer facilitator in the Alternatives to Violence program at the State Correctional Institution at Graterford (PA). She team-teaches a course, *Dimensions of Freedom*, in the Inside Out Prison Exchange Program in the Philadelphia Prison System. Betsy has been a Sister of Mercy for fifty-two years, and has been an elected delegate to both Union and Institute Chapters, including the 2011 Chapter in Chicago. She has served as a trustee of Saint Xavier University, Chicago, and the University of Detroit Mercy. At present she is a trustee of Saint Joseph's Health System, Atlanta, GA.

Julia Upton, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) holds a Ph.D. in Contemporary Systematic Theology from Fordham University. She has been Professor of Theology at St. John's University in New York since 1980 where she has taught undergraduate courses in theology and liturgy. She was appointed Provost in 2000 and is currently serving in her last year in this post. In addition to her liturgical biography, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: The Life and Legacy of H. A. Reinhold* (Liturgical Press, 2009). Julie has published several other books, including *A Time for Embracing: Reclaiming Sacramental Reconciliation* (Liturgical Press, 1999).



MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Aline Paris, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST's executive director. MAST held its annual meeting in Philadelphia, at St. Raphaela Center June 18-20, 2010. **MAST's annual meeting will be held June 15-17, 2012 at St. Rafaela Retreat Center, near Philadelphia, PA.** Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list please contact the association's Executive Director, Aline Paris, R.S.M. by e-mail at aparis@csm.edu or by mail at College of Saint Mary, 7000 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE, 68016.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to the association Treasurer, Marilee Howard, R.S.M. at 3920 W. Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822. Inquiries regarding dues can be e-mailed to mhoward@mercywmw.org.

Since 1991, *The MAST Journal* has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have taken responsibility over the years to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Information for New Subscribers and Current Readers

New Subscription: *The MAST Journal* is published three times a year by the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology. To subscribe, please fill out the form below or a copy of it. Make your check payable to *The MAST Journal* and send to Marilee Howard, R.S.M., MAST Managing Editor, Sisters of Mercy, 3920 W. Land Park Dr., Sacramento, CA 95822. Email: mhoward@mercywmw.org

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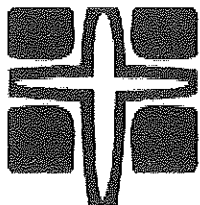
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