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FEDERATION OF SISTERS OF  
ST. JOSEPH OF CANADA

# Newsletter



## President's Message

*Margo Ritchie, CSJ*

*There is nothing left of me.  
I'm like a ruby held up to the sunrise....  
It has no resistance to light.*

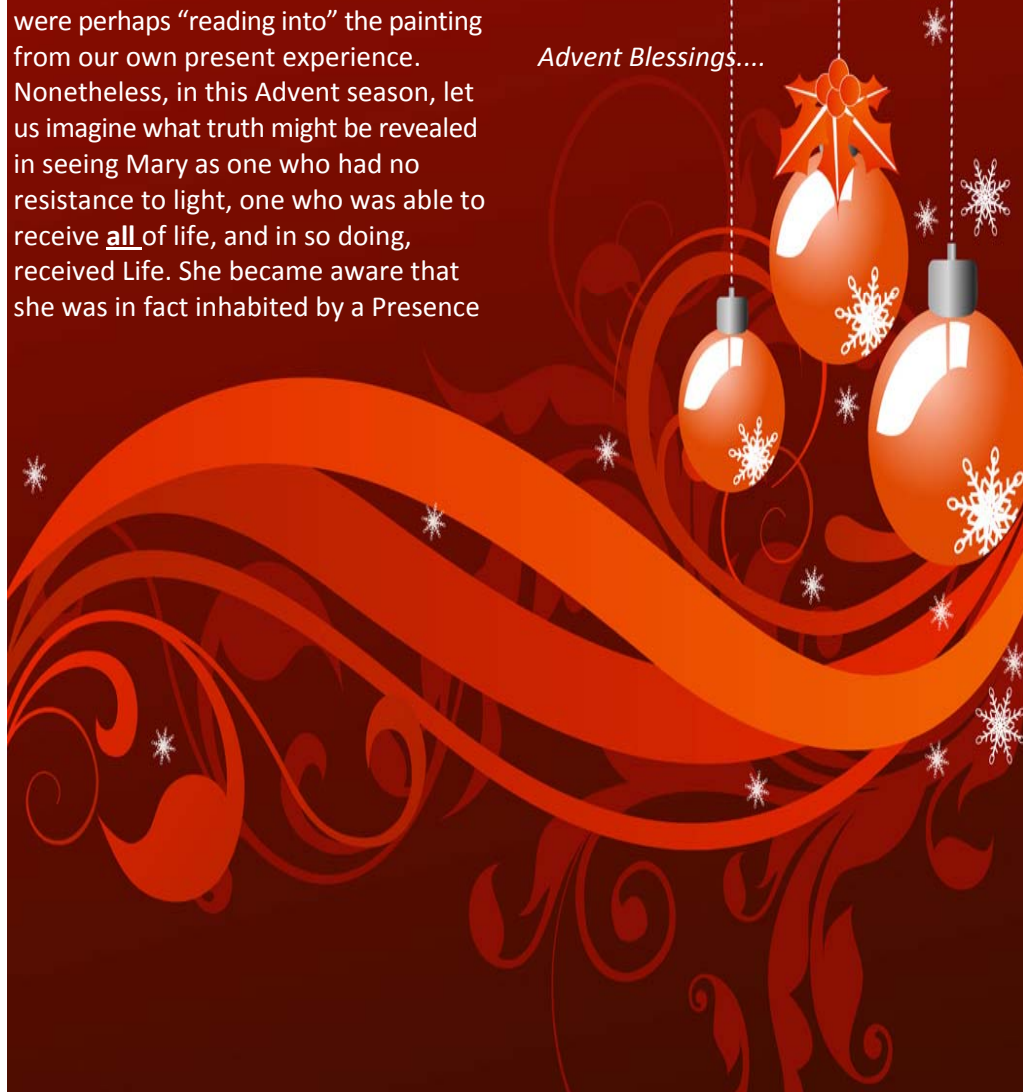
[Rumi, The Sunrise Ruby in the Essential Rumi, Coleman Barks]

Recently at a meeting of a group of Sisters of St. Joseph, several of us were eating breakfast and noticed a piece of art on the wall. It was of a demure and rather coquettish Mary, looking downward and in a sitting posture that suggested she was leaning away from life. Of course, we did recognise that we were perhaps "reading into" the painting from our own present experience. Nonetheless, in this Advent season, let us imagine what truth might be revealed in seeing Mary as one who had no resistance to light, one who was able to receive **all** of life, and in so doing, received Life. She became aware that she was in fact inhabited by a Presence

that signaled her own capacity to receive the sacred.

In truth, it is absolutely no different for each one of us. Personally we are invited into what the mystery of "no resistance to light" might mean for each of us individually given the contours of our own life story. More intriguing though, is our call as communities to have "no resistance to light," to let the corporate soul of the Sisters of St. Joseph be visible, to let our corporate soul be a Presence in our world today.

*Advent Blessings....*



# From the Desk of the Acting Executive Director

Valerie Van Cauwenberghe, csj



Anticipation is the constant companion which stirs our emotions and keeps us alert.

Sometimes

however, we are surprised because what we anticipate does not happen in the way that we expected. Anticipation presupposes hope. We read in Lamentations 3.21-24: *“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end: they are new every morning: great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him’.”*

We are about to begin a season of anticipation which we call Advent, a time of waiting and preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus. We are called to strengthen our faith, renew our hope and deepen our love. Is Advent a particular opportunity to awaken every morning to the newness of life in us and around us?

As Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada we are living in a time of anticipation – a time of futuring – a time of hope. We do not know how events will unfold, but we will take the necessary steps to ensure, as far as possible, that we plan and prepare to meet our future with hope and courage. History suggests that this is what Sisters of St. Joseph have done throughout the ages. Are we any different than our foremothers? I think not. Our hope

from the Federation Office is that this Advent will envelop us in deep faith, lively hope and enduring love.

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Romans 5,1- 6*



## Note to Everyone from Sister Veronica O’Reilly

As the Michaelmas term of this year draws to a close I am, as you may know, moving on after two terms in the Executive Director’s position at the Federation. And, at year’s end, the first phase of the Oneness project morphs into a busy and energetic 18-month phase that will be largely membership-driven. The coordinating function of the first phase will now be subsumed under new groupings of persons who will, with all those involved, galvanize us in the spirituality and praxis of greater Oneness. From the experiences of other groups with whom we have consulted this promises to be a rich and exciting time of deeper contemplation, new

relationships, and renewed hope and vitality.

At our Board Meeting in October I had an opportunity to thank the Presidents, Executives and Boards with whom I have worked so enjoyably, **Sister Valerie Van Cauwenberghe** who capably picked up my ED duties in the past two years, the Wisdom Circle who worked so generously in solidarity with me in the Oneness Project, and **Margaret Magee** whose competence, cordiality and generosity have made working with her a delight. This Newsletter is an opportunity to thank all Federation members, individuals and Committees, who

carry forward our Mission. It has been a privilege to witness the workings of the Holy Spirit in the lives of good women deeply committed to the reign of God in our world and time. May we be truly joyous and may our tribe increase!

**With affection and solidarity,**

**Veronica O’Reilly csj**



# The Green Window— Part 3

from the Federation Ecology Committee



## Is There Enough Food for All?

The answer you will get to the question: “Is there enough food in the world to feed all the people of the globe?” depends on whom you ask, where you ask, and when you ask. If you ask someone like the theologian **Sally McFague** you might hear: There is enough for abundant life for all – we need only share the resources more equitably. **Elizabeth Johnson’s**, **David Korten’s** and **Carol Zinn’s** responses would be similar, as would Jesus’ response. If you ask someone in a refugee camp in Darfur, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Columbia, Lebanon, Dominican Republic or Kenya you will get instead a response about the number of refugees dying daily from hunger. If you ask a CSJ community member, a family member, an associate: “Is there enough food for you each day?” you might get very different responses. And there would, for certain, be a different answer if you asked groups of financially secure Canadians, new Canadians and Aboriginal persons. The CSJ *Green Window* perspective is that there are enough resources to feed all. However, there is a global food crisis that is very real - humanly constructed – but real. It is due much more to the inequities that our global financial systems and social systems create than it is to the failure of the earth to provide sufficient foodstuffs. It is due to our skewed priorities as individuals and nations, and to the priorities of some of our global political organizations. It is due to our lack of consciousness of the interdependence of all life communities, including the global human community in all its diversity. At the S.A.I.L. 2009 gathering, **Sister Sue Wilson (Lon)** spoke about the kind of transformation of consciousness to which we CSJs are called. She named the emerging consciousness “symbiotic consciousness.” Such consciousness brings both personal and communal transformation. In the dialogue with Sue and **Sister Joan Atkinson (Lon)**, S.A.I.L. participants gained additional insights.

**Sister Helen Smaggus (Pem)**, a counselor/therapist, reminded us that symbiosis facilitates the development of bonds of intimacy necessary for interpersonal relationships. **Sister Mary Sheridan (SSM)**, from her knowledge and experience as a biology teacher, reminded us that symbiosis is the life process by which one organism attaches itself to another in a mutually life-enhancing and interdependent relationship in which both benefit and live. Sister Sue’s message was that symbiotic consciousness facilitates a deeper, ever-expanding awareness of how we need and depend upon God, and how God depends upon us to bring about personal and interpersonal transformation. According to Sue, symbiotic consciousness is how we relate to God. It describes the quality of that relationship.

In CSJ spirituality – a truly incarnational spirituality - symbiotic awareness also means developing and maintaining mutually life-enhancing relationships with the dear neighbour: relationships as basic as sharing food and ensuring enough for all.

What could that look like?

What if we chose, even institutionally, to buy locally whenever and wherever possible. For example, the London Sisters at 485 Windermere Road have decided to refrain from buying some items when they are not in season. What if our Congregations, or small groups of Sisters, or some individuals tried to match more closely our food expenses to those of lower income people? What if we chose to pair up with refugee families, Aboriginal families, Ontario Works families, or families on disability pensions in Canada to try to create a more equitable food supply among us? Would it cause each of us to be inclined to spend less money on food, even as each of us makes sure our diet is healthy and sufficient? There are two divergent ways of looking at having equitable global food supplies. Both approaches address hunger. One, “Food

Security,” focuses on “the amount of food available and peoples’ access to it.” ([www.devp.org](http://www.devp.org)) It functions within the current market economy of supply and demand. Donor governments seek to alleviate hunger through shipping food supplies around the globe. The other, “Food Sovereignty,” is a concept developed by Via Campesina in 2007. This international group of peasant farmers and civil society activists define Food Sovereignty as follows: “Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food policies rather than markets and corporations.” (Declaration of Nyeleni, Mali 2007, in Backgrounder 1 at: [www.devp.org](http://www.devp.org)) Via Campesina has made a difference.

**What difference can we make? What influence can we have on the global markets? What impacts do my attitude, purchases and use of food have?**

Such questions may feel disempowering, but they can help us discern how we can use our voices and our actions to help make the changes needed to ensure food for all. These choices can be empowering! There are rich resources to help us respond:

Development and Peace: [www.devp.org](http://www.devp.org)  
International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty: [www.foodsovereignty.org](http://www.foodsovereignty.org)  
The Hunger Project [www.thp.org](http://www.thp.org)  
Bread and Faith [www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)

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### OUR MISSION STATEMENT

**UNITED BY A COMMON STORY  
AND CHARISM WE  
SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF  
CANADA FORM A FEDERATION  
WHOSE PURPOSE IS  
TO FOCUS AND EMPOWER  
ONE ANOTHER  
IN THE PASSIONATE LIVING OF  
OUR MISSION OF ACTIVE  
AND INCLUSIVE LOVE.**



*We wish our Committee Members peace and joy for the Advent Season. The Federation Office very much appreciates their dedication which provides a large step towards keeping us all connected and interested in the efforts of others.*

## FEDERATION COMMITTEES AT WORK—2009

### ◆ Archives Task Force

The Ad Hoc Archives Task Force representing the six congregations continues its diligent work to research and compile a biographical database for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada. This database will include the biographies of almost 2,400 Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada who died in community from 1855 to 2008. The idea was conceived towards the end of 2005 and the group is now at the proofreading and editing stage for most congregations. Many thanks are due to the archivists who have diligently worked at this detailed task over the last several years. It is hoped that the fruit of their labour will be available for every sister in a consolidated form for 2011 – the 160<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year.

### ◆ Associate/Companion Leaders

The busy group of Associate/Companion leaders gathered at the North Bay Motherhouse in late May and enjoyed a couple of days of planning and sharing. At each meeting the group continues to share the individual work of each congregation – everyone enjoys hearing what others are doing. Other discussion has continued to define the role of the representative from this group who is serving on the Federation Office for Systemic Justice Standing Committee - ongoing aspects of justice work will be shared with that Committee and information and ideas brought back to the Associate/Companion leaders. A decision was made to postpone a hoped-for further conference in 2011 but this idea may reemerge at a future date. A meeting of this group is planned for early spring 2010.

### ◆ Ecology Committee

The dedicated group of Sisters on the Ecology Committee continue to produce valuable information for the congregations in the form of articles for this Newsletter. Moving from the expansion on the Millennium Development Goals, you can now read the “Green Window” writings with topics to this point covering Carbon Footprint, Food Security and Food Sovereignty. The “Walking Sacred Earth” retreat was again successfully presented in May 2009 and plans are afoot to explore directions for faith formation in eco-spirituality, a topic which has the potential to become a Federation Retreat. N.B.—check the Federation website([www.csjfederation.ca](http://www.csjfederation.ca)) for information on the early July 2010 Village Earth Program and Practicum at the Villa St. Joseph Retreat Centre in Cobourg.

### ◆ Federation Office for Systemic Justice Task Force

The Annual Report for the Federation Office for Systemic Justice, prepared by Sister Sue Wilson, is enclosed as a separate insert with this issue. FOSJ Newsletters have proved a continuing source of much interest. At a recent meeting of the Standing Committee, much appreciation was expressed by the Federation Office and representatives from the six congregational for the valuable work undertaken by the staff in the Justice Office.

### ◆ Vocation Committee

Yet another dedicated group that meets together each year to share what each congregation is doing to foster a culture of vocations. Efforts include daily/monthly e-prayers, speaking about religious life in parish and school settings, retreat weekends, evening of prayer and discussion with young people, giving public witness to the goodness and the joy of religious life, giving support and encouragement to women considering religious life and to all who are seeking a deeper relationship with God. All members of the Committee are looking forward to the National Association of Vocation & Formation Directors Conference to be held in Toronto March 14-17, 2010 with the theme “Let Your Life Speak ... Vocation Alive”