

Where is Love Leading Us?

Presentation by Sister Patricia Hogan, President
on the occasion of the celebration of the 140th Anniversary
of the Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada
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We have watched and listened to our story; We have laughed and maybe we have shed a few tears at what has been; We remember all those who have gone before us and who have left their mark upon our hearts inspiring us with new dreams and strong beliefs in the expansiveness of our charism which is so rich in its potential especially because we know, that those who have forged the CSJ path forged it **with heart** ...contemplative hearts. We could say that Jean Pierre Medaille, Bishop de Maupas and the first six women experienced an encounter with Jesus similar to that of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their hearts were burning with a desire to give of self in imitation of our God who died and gave himself for us. Their sights ready to take on a mission of inclusive and unconditional love – all for the “dear neighbour”. We gather in this space to remember our graced history, to give thanks and praise as we renew our commitment to live “with eyes open, ears attentive and spirit alert, never settled down...” (portrait of a CSJ)

And yes, we *“race toward a rendezvous with God.” “We have not yet won, but we are still running trying to capture the prize for which Jesus Christ captures us.”* (Philippians 3:12)

We have been seized, held, even seduced by God, like the prophet Jeremiah who cried ; “You have seduced me Yahweh, and I allowed myself to be seduced... I used to say “I will not think of him anymore.” Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart imprisoned in my bones. The effort to resist it wearied me. I could not bear it... But Yahweh is at my side a mighty hero. Sing to Yahweh sing praise! This evening we are overflowing with songs of praise. On this joyful occasion we exude with hope and with dreams for our future.

In the video presentation we recalled through Mother St. John, the thinking and the searching that have led us constantly to answer new and old needs and in the last 40 years we have continued to ask ourselves,

For what are we searching?

Where is love leading us?

Perhaps the story on video left you with that gentle burning in your heart – “You have seduced me Yahweh”, and I continue to allow myself to be seduced by God because:

- of a strong belief in the power of our charism;
- of a deep commitment to live our call to active and inclusive love;
- of a conviction that growth in God springs from the hallowed roots of our ancestors’ legacy and gently leads us to explore new vistas “so that all may be one”;
- we know “that we know” the world, the planet, the cosmos need us.

Let us accept the challenge of Carol Zinn and move to “that kind of **knowing** that dwells deep within – a knowing that expands beyond any known boundary – a knowing that races us toward a rendezvous with God,” and enables us to seek ways to carry the CSJ charism to all corners of the earth.

“Divide the city”, we were told in former days, ... today, we divide the world – An International Centre has been established and CSJ’s from around the world are forging new bonds with friends from far flung places. Globalization has made us realize that the pain of the world has created an urgency for us to find ways to

respond to the most urgent needs of people the world over. And we heard from Carol that poverty is

- the most serious problem in the world; and we heard that in 72 hours, water could be distributed to the world. Why does this not happen?
- the most serious environmental problem.

Whether rich or poor the environment is suffering. Surrounded by this cosmic pain we could feel paralysed, however, we do not grow weary because a contemplative heart does not beat with irregular frenzy, but in her rendezvous a contemplative heart beats with a steady, strong and silent rhythm. Knowing the meaning of her "yes" the bearer of the charism yields to the divine, in an act of surrender, a self-emptying, a self-giving.

Dag Hammarskjöld, former Secretary General of the United Nations describes surrender with these words; "You dare your "yes" and experience meaning. You repeat your "yes" and all things acquire meaning. When everything has meaning, how can you live anything but a "yes". Your presence, your commitment, your generous and joyful spirit is a resounding "yes" to God's call which unfolds each day with a new dawn. Each day, clothed in Christ we live in communion with one another and all creation. Each day presents us with opportunities to plant new seeds which will grow hallowed roots and 40 years from now when the Federation gathers to celebrate they will be remembering our present – which will be their past!

What will they think we were thinking?

I sometimes wonder if today [we are thinking](#) that nourishing our contemplative spirit will deepen the dialogue as we listen with an openness to new and seemingly wild ideas. Through listening we arrive at a totally new place because creativity has been birthed through imagining and contemplative dialogue.

As a Federation [are we thinking](#) of new ways for our public voice to be heard? This past year the Federation Board established the creation of the Federation Office for Systemic Justice giving us the ability and resources to respond quickly to urgent social issues .

In the Objectives of our Mission Statement, we committed ourselves "to develop a public voice and to act together on specific issues of justice in order to participate in the transformation of our world." Together our public voice carries credibility, influence and power to transform unjust systems. We must continue to lobby our Government.

Do you suppose that our Federation Founding Mothers ever dreamed of partnering by creating numerous Federation Standing Committees, or coming together through SAIL, or an International Centre? Hardly, since each Congregation was "jealously guarding its autonomy". We have moved past the "comma" says Carol Zinn, our Formation of forty years is over! [What if](#) each Federation Committee had as an Objective a proposal that could stretch the thinking of the Federation Board? And [wWhat if](#) the Federation Board after conversation, reflection and discernment acted upon the Committee proposals that signalled ways for the six Congregations to "be and act" more as one? [What if](#) we began to consider how one Administration Team could lead the six Congregations? [What if](#) we began to think of a new structure for Congregational leadership? The Sister of St. Joseph is "never settled down, always in a holy disquietude, searching..."

In seeing the suffering face of another we are **awakened** to "an ethic of love" says the Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas: "The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face, summons me, calls for me, begs me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question." (Sacred Longings p. 79)

What a privilege to be known as *The Congregation of Great Love of God*, and such an awesome responsibility! We have fallen in love and our yes implies that we are willing to go where ever love leads us.

- **Are we thinking** that active and inclusive love calls us to dialogue with Church leaders on difficult topics such as homosexuality, priest shortage and deprivation of Eucharist for thousands of people, and what about our place in the Church ?
- **Are we thinking** that such conversations “would provide an experience of our Vision for Mission and create energy and passion for living the Mission.” (*Federation Objective*)
- **Are we thinking** that in our embrace of the dear neighbour, renewing the face of the earth has become a moral imperative for us? Mary Grey, author of *Sacred Longings* describes the ecstasy and the agony of entering into relationship with all of creation: “The vulnerable and suffering earth is at the heart of our healing ministry. Through it we are caught up with the double dynamic of praise, wonder and celebration on the one hand, and lament, grief and a voluntary compassion with the whole of creation on the other.” (*Sacred Longings*. Pg.147)

She speaks of an *ethic of care* which extends to all life forms. **What if**, in rediscovering the mystic within ourselves, CSJ's became known for their ethic of care for Mother earth?

As we renovate or build we have become more conscious of our relatedness to the earth and have integrated into our buildings new technologies that respect and preserve nature. In dialogue with one another we share what we have learned and experience new life in the sharing and our heightened consciousness is like a great awakening which has resulted in spreading hallowed roots and creating new sacred vistas such as:

- our connection with the women at Streetlight ;
- our commitment to on-going education in trafficking;
- our response to the Tsunami and Katrina ;
- our widened scope of networking;
- our willingness to share congregational resources ;
- our renewed zeal for our mission of unity and reconciliation in our Congregations and in the world.

What if we were sufficiently **awake** to experience an annunciation and turn our world upside down? Thomas Merton in *The Ascent to Truth* describes Mary's annunciation in these words: “ When the angel spoke, God awoke in the heart of this girl of Nazareth and moved within her like a giant.... The Annunciation was not so much a vision as an earthquake in which God moved the universe and unsettled the spheres, and the beginning of all things came before Mary in her deepest heart. And far beneath the movement of this silent cataclysm she slept in the Infinite tranquillity of God, and God was a child curled up who slept in her and her veins were flooded with God's wisdom which is night, which is starlight which is silence. And her whole being was embraced in Him whom she embraced and they became tremendous silence. It is the mission of Mary in the world to form this Christ of hers, this Giant, in the souls of all people much as God was formed in Mary. Merton continues this train of thought by quoting John of the Cross from *The Living Flame of Love*.. “The soul believes that **God has moved and awakened**, whereas that which has **moved and awakened is in reality the soul itself.**”

What if, in our rendezvous with God, we “raced” from this place, hearts set on fire ready to empower one another (in new ways) in the passionate living of our mission of active and inclusive love?

What if

Let's dance the cosmic dance, reaching, reconciling, loving – YES – “racing toward a rendezvous with God” searching for new Hallowed Roots and creating Sacred Vistas; “for the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast.., no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there,... The fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose , cast our general solemnity to the winds and join the general dance.”
(Thomas Merton : *New Seeds* pg 297)

Let's sing [“We Will Walk with Justice...”](#)