

CRC Mission

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. The mission of the CRC is to encourage its members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. The CRC supports its members in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for audacious ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.

September 2010

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News Briefs

CRC Events in Western Canada

The CRC has organized three days of reflection in Western Canada. The first two days will be on the theme of “Welcoming Refugees and Immigrants: Theological Reflection and Action.” The sessions will be held on December 3 in Vancouver/Burnaby and on December 5 in Calgary. The third day of reflection will be on the theme of “Our Lady of Guadalupe as a model for justice and reconciliation.” It will be held in Edmonton on December 9. The speaker will be Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, CSB, Bishop Emeritus of Las Cruces, New Mexico. Details are available on the CRC website at: <http://www.crc-canada.org/en/crc-days-reflection-western-canada>.

“The Paris Climate Conference and After?”

The conference series on COP21, organized jointly by the CRC, Development and Peace and Équiterre, is coming to a close. It has been held across Canada for the past several months and the last three conferences will be held in Gatineau on November 23, in Victoria on November 29 and in Edmonton on November 30. For further information go to: http://crc-canada.org/en/paris_climate_conference_and_after.

Virtual Center of the MIC Historical Missionary Memory

On November 8, 2016, the Virtual Center of the MIC Historical Missionary Memory was launched. The Center’s mission is to preserve, disseminate and make accessible the publications of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (MIC), from 1920 to the present day. Thus, the historical missionary heritage of *Le Précurseur* and the *MIC Mission News* is featured on a single website, pressmic.org. A total of 976 issues attest to the congregation’s social contribution and outreach.

50th Anniversary of the Committee of Contemplatives

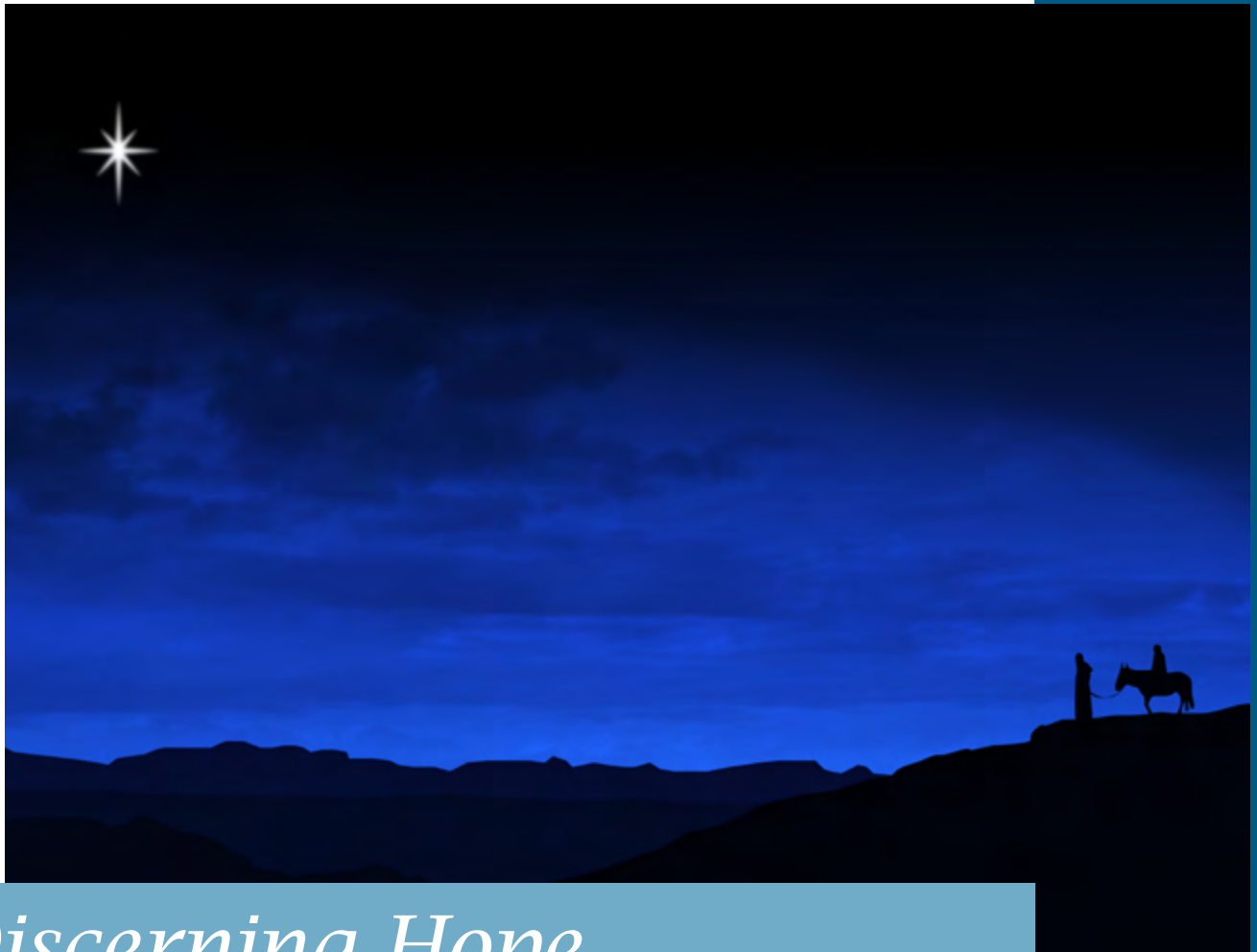
On September 8, 2016, the Committee of Contemplatives of the CRC celebrated its 50th anniversary. During the festivities, a booklet tracing the 50-year history of the committee, then known as the Canadian Union of Contemplative Sisters (UCRC), was unveiled. For more details, visit the CRC website at: www.crc-canada.org.

CRC Social Networks

You can now follow the CRC on Facebook and Twitter. These social networks form a whole with the other CRC communication tools. The goal is to provide quick information on the commitments and activities of the CRC, on the life of religious communities, the life of the Church and groups involved in social justice.

Link to Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ConferenceReligieuseCanadienne/>

Link to Twitter: www.twitter.com/CRC_Canada



“Discerning Hope Amid the Challenges”

Timothy Scott, CSB

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) held its biennial General Assembly from May 26 to 29, 2016. Over 300 participants gathered together to explore the theme: *Amid the Challenges Discerning Hope*. Major superiors as well as members of the General and Provincial Councils came together not just to name the challenges but also to explore the deeper meaning of hope.

Foundation of Hope

I took over as Executive Director of the CRC as the Year of Consecrated Life, proclaimed by Pope Francis, was in full swing. The Pope had identified three major themes: *to look to the past with gratitude; to live the present with passion; to embrace the future with hope.*

The third theme is the most important, but also the least explored. Gratitude is an important thing, but what can we honestly say about the future and more importantly, how do we embrace it with hope? In his letter convening the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis wrote:

“We all know the difficulties which the various forms of consecrated life are currently experiencing: decreasing vocations and aging members, particularly in the Western world; economic problems stemming from the global financial crisis; issues of internationalization and globalization; the threats posed by relativism and a sense of isolation and social irrelevance... But it is precisely amid these uncertainties, which we share with so many of our contemporaries, that we are called to practice the virtue of hope, the fruit of our faith in the Lord of history, who continues to tell us: ‘Be not afraid. . .for I am with you’ (Jer 1:8).”

“This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:12), the One for whom ‘nothing is impossible’ (Lk 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.”

We are all of us more or less followers of the “heresy of good works,” for we believe that in practice, everything depends on ourselves, including our collective or communal future. But our faith teaches us quite the opposite. How do we believe in the meaning of the word “hope” that is seen as so precarious for many? I think that is the question.

The crises are obvious; but where are the signs of hope? I propose three of them to you.

Consecrated Life, a Necessity

The first sign of hope is the discovery of the essential character of consecrated life within the Church. In his 1996 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (VC), Pope John Paul II stressed not only the value but also the need of religious life in the Church: “The idea of a Church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore

conform to the intentions of her divine Founder, as revealed to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament” (VC 29).



He affirms a positive through a negative, that is to say the necessity of consecrated life within the Church that would otherwise be made up of only sacred ministers and lay people. But why does he take this approach? Is it not enough to have a Church made up strictly of laity and clergy? Although the Church lives in the present, its vision should be focused on the future. The papal magisterium has constantly emphasized this prophetic and eschatological dimension of consecrated life. The Church needs this testimony as a reminder of our own belief in the kingdom of God already realized in Jesus Christ, which awaits its final conclusion with the end of history when everything will be subject to the authority of Christ and God will be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).



Emergence of New Communities

The second sign of hope is in the new structures of consecrated life that emerge. The Church is alive, and like all living things, it evolves according to its divine origins, from the continued presence of the Holy Spirit, and the historical and human circumstances that it faces.

During the General Assembly, we followed a process of discernment to identify the priorities for the coming years. Among the top five priorities, the fourth was listed as follows: “to continue discernment regarding new communities and different forms of consecrated life and their belonging to the CRC; to maintain contact with them.”

In Quebec, as elsewhere, new communities, such as Famille Marie-Jeunesse and Famille Myriam Beth'léhem, have both genders as a constituent element. In the Code of Canon Law, these mixed communities cannot be recognized as “religious” in the true sense of the word. Even though they are composed of consecrated people, they are instead considered as Associations of the Faithful recognized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, a body that was changed quite recently by the Holy Father in congregation of pontifical right. It is quite normal for canon law to be somewhat behind the times when dealing with movements of the Spirit. This is a new form of consecrated life, with many points in common with the religious life that we all know.

It is also interesting that these two communities from Quebec identify themselves as contemplative rather than active, even though they are not cloistered. We'll have to see if, in the coming decades, new mixed communities will play a greater role and be more visible in the Church.

“Staying on the Periphery”

The third sign of hope is in the exploration of the polysemic periphery in an intercultural context. Polysemous is a neologism; it means that the word periphery has many meanings for us as Christians and consecrated persons. Pope Francis is inviting us to go toward the periphery. Prior to the Conclave that elected him Pope, he gave a revealing speech to the cardinals:

“We must get out of ourselves and go toward the periphery. We must avoid the spiritual disease of the Church that can become self-absorbed: when this happens, the Church itself becomes sick. . . . Between a Church that goes into the street and gets into an accident and a Church that is intoxicated with self-referentiality, I have no doubts in preferring the former.” (Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio before the General Congregation of the College of Cardinals, *Sede vacante*, March 2013)

A few months later, he continued his reflection in a speech to the General Assembly of the Union of Major Superiors:

“I am convinced of one thing: the great changes of history have been achieved when reality was seen not from the centre, but from the periphery. It is a hermeneutical question: reality is understood only if viewed from the periphery, not if our gaze comes from a centre that is equidistant from everything. To really understand reality, we have to move from the quiet and tranquil central position and move towards the peripheral zone. Keeping oneself on the outskirts helps one to better see and understand, to make a more accurate analysis of reality, avoiding centralism and ideological approaches.”

A Beautiful Risk

For me, the fact that the contemplative communities are on the periphery, whether geographical or spiritual, gives them an ability to criticize modern society and its presuppositions that are far from evangelical.

Why hope in the future by putting our trust in the contemplative form of consecrated life? First, as Saint Teresa of Ávila said, it would be hard to imagine the Church without their presence. Second, like any living reality, it evolves, it changes. Like the seed in the Gospel, it dies to bear fruit. And third, by its nature, religious life finds its true meaning on the peripheries, on the outskirts, in an environment full of challenges and even dangers. It is a beautiful risk.

I conclude with the words of Pope Francis: “So do not yield to the temptation to see things in terms of numbers and efficiency, and even less to trust in your own strength. In scanning the horizons of your lives and the present moment, be watchful and alert.” ■



CHANGE: A Path of Growth and Life

Aurore Larkin, SGM

The phenomenon of change has always existed and that is most fortunate, because it allows life to flow. That said, however, the changes occurring today are happening in ways that are so fast and complex. Among religious congregations of apostolic life in North America, to mention only those, one perceives a state of breathlessness because religious life must continually live through change. That is true for any other institution and the world in general. Yes, that's a fact!

I do not have to list the big shifts that we have undergone since the Second Vatican Council, because we are all aware of them. I would like to address a few malaises that we are feeling today and suggest some necessary attitudes regarding those malaises in order to LIVE fully the MISSION and great values of consecrated life. It is affirmed that this is not a crisis of vocations that consecrated life is undergoing, but rather a crisis of faith. This conclusion inhabits me deeply. Perhaps in our day we no longer know how to hear God speaking? Or if we do hear it, our faith is dominated by fear. Richard Rhor says that fear is the greatest enemy of faith and, consequently, of peace.

Tell the Whole Truth

As leaders, we have to tell the members the whole truth about the reality of the congregation and not try to protect them from the major concerns that it is dealing with, whether those concerns be aging and the significant decrease in numbers, the sale or transformation of our properties, the small number of recruits, the finances, the ever-increasing health care, etc.

For the TRUTH to be heard and accepted there should be times developed for discussion to enable the members to engage in exchanges that will allow



them to understand and accept the reality, while expressing the emotions that are connected to it. It is an art to be able to express those emotions, especially when fear, resistance and anxiety dominate.

Despite the feelings of urgency that push and jostle us, let us invite ourselves to take the time to stop for a good while and listen deeply to ourselves. Otherwise, we remain focused on ourselves and the prophetic role of religious life disappears.

The full TRUTH is found in Gospel values supported by an unconditional reception of the preferential option for the poor.

Reduce Ambiguity

There are many causes of ambiguity. We only have to mention the impact of technology and information overload. It is not surprising, therefore, that we might experience a certain paralysis that inordinately delays our speaking out regarding great ecclesial and social injustices and the decisions we must take to update the MISSION entrusted to us.

To reduce ambiguity and to deal with it, Lynn M. Levo, csj, proposes the following; identify the stressors over which we have some control, avoid imagining consequences that have little possibility of arising, consider the risks as an adventure and not a probable danger. Finally, she encourages us to accept one's mistakes and the fact that we don't always make good decisions, sometimes even that making a bad decision is better than not making any at all. (*The Occasional Papers, Living Transformation Summer 2016*, pp. 5-6)

In order to be able to do that, one has to make a lot of room for humility.

Avoid Polarization

Polarization, whether of the right or left, makes community life difficult and collective action nearly impossible. To express it simply in political parlance, people on the right protect the *status quo* and continuity, while people on the left advocate change and reform. Polarization only contributes to chaos and fundamentalist positions.

Neither the polarized left nor the polarized right can make life flow. One is forced to conjecture that the two movements must be in tandem. True prophets please nobody, neither the conservative nor the liberal movements.



Learning to live with the tensions that these phenomena produce is essential for being transforming agents. Letting go is a must for creating a climate of peace and trust. In addition, polarization does not allow one to go towards the periphery to live the prophetic character of consecrated life for the Church and for the world. Perhaps we are too much like the political movements?

Identity Crisis

The question of identity in consecrated life is a critical point for us venturing fervently into the future.

We women and men religious are recognized and identify ourselves too often through the institutions of education, health, social work or the *ad gentes* missions that we have valiantly built. Often on the peripheries and maintained through hard work, these developments earned us a glorious epic and elitist status. And now, for the last forty years and for several reasons, it is no longer possible for us to remain "in charge" of those projects and to maintain them. Hence, an identity crisis! It is not first

and foremost the identity of the individuals that suffer, but rather the identity of our group, our foundation and our lifestyle.

It is not the first time that consecrated life finds itself in the desert. In the desert, the temptations to give up are great. We have lots of models that can inspire us to work on transforming consecrated

life. And the model par excellence is Jesus; it is following him to which we are committed. The journey of Jesus led him to Calvary and that is where new life came to us.

I thank the CRC for allowing me to share this reflection at the beginning of a mandate to lead my congregation, the Grey Nuns of Montreal. ■

The Ursulines of Bruno Share their Story

Opting for a New Governance Structure

In her final legacy to the congregation she founded in 1535, St. Angela Merici offered this advice: "If, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice."



The four key persons, from left to right: Sister Denise Hinz, Sister Louise Hinz, Sister Alexis Taphorn and Sister Marian Noll next to the statue of St. Angela Merici

Marian Noll, OSU

This directive from our foundress made it easier for the Ursulines of Bruno to change their governance structure from a leadership team to a volunteer committee format.

Discerning Governance Options

At a community gathering in preparation for the 2016 assembly, each of the sisters said she would be willing to help in leadership according to her abilities, but no one expressed a willingness to accept the position of designated leader.

As a result, the leadership team and two other sisters formed a Futures Committee to discern possible governance options for an aging community declining in numbers.

Main Issue

The committee worked closely with a canon lawyer who advised that the community avoid developing a tight and burdensome structure for our "twilight years". The main issue, she said, is that the sisters be assured that they can live fruitful and happy lives in their twilight years.

Further discussion clarified the reality that governance needs to fit our energies; we need to distribute responsibilities rather than centralize them with a few people. We could go to a simpler format without putting more pressure/burdens on an individual.

Key Areas

In studying options for a new form of governance, the committee noted four areas needing continued attention: Business Affairs, Community Archives, Community Enhancement (celebrations, gatherings, retreats, etc.) and Community Sustainment (health, dying and death issues). Members were invited to volunteer for participation in these committees.

Constitutional Changes

A subsequent community gathering studied constitutional changes in governance:

- The life of the Ursuline community is led by means of a committee structure. Rooted in St. Angela's vision of dividing her sisters into four areas of the city of Brescia, committees are developed to direct the enhancement of community life, the sustainment of community life, the community archives and the business affairs.
- Committees are formed, according to the needs of the community, for a two-year period during a biennial assembly which will also receive and review financial statements and other necessary reports. The assembly will include all the sisters who are able to attend.
- The role and responsibility of each committee will be according to established guidelines. Committees will each select a key person to serve as a connection to the general membership. One of the selected key persons will be the contact person to any level of the church and to civil authorities.
- The key persons will serve together in guiding the life of the community. It will be their responsibility to gather the entire community from time to time to further the spirit of unity and cooperation among the members. If it becomes necessary, a member from another religious institute may be invited to assist.



Community of the Ursulines of Bruno

These constitutions (accepted with a two-thirds majority) were sent to CICLSAL for acceptance *ad experimentum* for two years.

Moving Forward with Hope and Trust

The first Biennial Assembly of the Ursulines of Bruno was held September 16, 2016 and, saw the directives accepted with a two-thirds majority. Each of the four committees selected a key person, and the four key persons chose from among themselves a sister to serve as the contact person for any level of church and civil society.

A final show of hands revealed a unanimous acceptance of this new two-year governance format.

With hope and trust in the Spirit, we begin this way of shared responsibility in community governance. ■



When a Mother House Becomes a Green House!

Stéphanie Gravel

“Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle . . . and consumption, in order to combat this warming.”¹

That is how Pope Francis invited us to care for our common home, which is the earth. The Sisters of the Congregation de Notre-Dame (CND) took this request seriously and undertook a greening of their Mother House! Let’s see, in concrete terms how this change is enabling a new life as well as the challenges that it represents.

Sister Fernande Cantin, CND, superior of the Mother House, shares her thoughts on this major shift:

***Describe for us the project
“Greening the Mother House”?***

SOEUR FERNANDE: At the outset, I would say that this project met the values of the CND and our preferential option for the poor which was the basic orientation chosen at our 2011 General Chapter and renewed with fervour at the 2016 General Chapter. These motivations, as well as the interventions of resource persons such as Norman Lévesque of the Green Churches Network, Normand Roy of Équiterre and Ghislain Lambert, head of maintenance, facilities and equipment at the Mother House, all helped the sisters of the community and the staff to enter into this project that has been on-going for two years.

¹ Pope Francis (2016), Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, paragraph 23, consulted October 21, 2016: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

The first step was to measure our environmental footprint. In order to do that, we asked for help from an expert in the field, Mr. Normand Roy of Équiterre. He toured the house, met with the sisters and carried out a survey to calculate the impact that the people living at the Mother House had on the environment. An action plan was then submitted to the congregation's authorities who selected thirteen actions for us to act upon.

Some concrete actions have been carried out over the last two years. We now buy fair trade coffee as well as organic vegetables and fruits. We have installed bike racks at the front and back of the building, a grease trap in the kitchen, a composting system, a green library, an irrigation system and electrical outlets with automatic shut-offs to reduce our electricity consumption. We also used our plants at the main entrance to reduce asphalted surfaces and thus improve air quality. Finally, the most important accomplishment is planned for 2017: we are planning to improve the heating and electrical system, which will significantly reduce our greenhouse gas production. There is even a sister responsible for butterfly pupae. In October, we released some endangered monarch butterflies to let them fly to Mexico!

Have these changes raised questions among the sisters?

SOEUR FERNANDE: One has to admit, as with any change, that reactions are different from one person to another. It is still an unfinished process; one that is being welcomed and supported by the community and staff, provided that they receive clear information about the project on a regular basis. One of the resistances to the project stemmed from its novelty and the uncertainties that it produced. It required several changes within the Mother House.

How did you go about maintaining unity in the community?

SOEUR FERNANDE: Mainly, in dialogue with each and every person, explaining the project and giving the information necessary to help the sisters understand what it entails. As the sisters received information, their fears diminished. They asked questions and received appropriate responses.

We brought in Norman Lévesque, Director of the Green Churches Network. He really had a very special way of guiding us. He isn't a bulldozer! He respected us in our process. His attitude helped us! He presented the elements of the project from a theological perspective. He did not oblige us to do anything. Instead, he first met with the lay staff for about 40 minutes. Then he met with the sisters for a more substantial meeting that lasted over an hour. It led to an interesting dialogue.

What encouraged us is that Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, the Archdiocese of Montreal and Maison Bellarmin are members of the Green Churches Network. Also, we got a lot of momentum from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. We have read and reread it, both in the local community and in all the community's groups. It provided a strong impetus for kicking off our project.

Are these changes enabling life and growth?

SOEUR FERNANDE: For us, the "Greening the Mother House" project is one that truly connects to the Congregation's values: justice, sharing and our preferential option for the poor. For example, fair trade coffee is an opportunity for us to pay a fairer price for coffee and encourage local farmers. In the words of Pope Francis, "this is a moral commitment that is not optional." We have carried out the changes in the spirit of the CND and in that way, the Mother House can serve as inspiration for community groups from all continents. We don't consider ourselves as a model, but rather as an inspiration to others, because many look towards the Mother House to see what happens there.

Finally, the most important thing for us was to maintain unity among the sisters: we are all undergoing a process. The Pope's encyclical helped us to adopt these changes, which have become genuine places of growth for the whole community. Little by little, we entered into this ecological spirituality presented by Pope Francis and we are coming out of it as a more mature community. ■



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It's Never Too Late...

Lise Barbeau, scsl.

For decades, religious communities have seen lay people commit themselves to living the charism of their congregations. The Sisters of Charity of Saint Louis who are present in 10 countries, entered this lay-empowerment movement in Canada in the 1980s. It was a bit later that they entered the movement in the “younger” countries where the pace is sometimes slower; however *it is never too late...* No, it is never too late to gather together lay delegates from eight countries.

A Little Bit of History

Our congregation was founded in 1803 by a Parisian in Vannes, in Brittany. Her name was Louise-Élisabeth de Lamoignon and she was to become the Countess Molé de Champlâtreux. The young wife and mother saw her life deeply shaken by a profound conversion in the midst of her years of happiness. Her life took a definitive turn at that time towards service to the poor and the destitute. A few years later, she experienced upheavals of another nature: the deaths of three of her young children,

the tragic death of her father and the condemnation of her husband to the guillotine during the French Revolution. The religious vocation of Louise-Élisabeth grew thanks to the fact that she managed to forgive her country and because of her desire to live her trials and ordeals with heroic generosity.

Louise-Élisabeth left everything to go to Vannes in 1803. She understood that it was through love and forgiveness that she could best contribute to restoring her country...and by giving hope to youth without a future. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Church of France was struggling with the rise of anticlericalism. Ironically, this would contribute to the expansion of French communities outside France which turned out to be the case for us. In 1898, we departed France for England; in 1902, it was for North America. In 1910, we would go from Quebec to the United States and then to western Canada. In 1945, it would be to Haiti and then after Vatican II; it was to Mali, Senegal, Martinique and Mexico that we ventured. After the 1939–1945 war, the sisters in France responded to Madagascar's call.

Helping One Another to Live the Charism

In most of the countries where we work, lay people gather around the Sisters to make a commitment to living the charism. Since the means available to fulfill the charism are unequal across continents, we have to help one another; thus the aim of the meeting that called lay delegates together in September 2016.

We have a well-structured training program in North America. However in other countries we want to act immediately to respond to the call of poverty and misery for action. That is what a Malagasy mother is doing; she has just begun her training as an associate and is already encouraging all her relatives to join her to help feed some forty poor people every week. Elsewhere, lay associates are more attracted by the young Louise-Élisabeth who struggled with suffering. If she found the strength to forgive and to work to rebuild the Church... then they too can share the same vision *"to be witnesses of the mercy of God."*

Where It All Began

It is never too early to bring together women and men from different cultures who share a common ideal. The international lay associate meeting in September brought together some people who have been committed for more than 20 years and others who are preparing for their first annual promise. We talked about prayer, the pledge of commitment, the mission, group facilitation, human growth and time management. In short, we touched on everything that presents challenges. This sharing in an atmosphere of multicultural prayer is precious for a congregation. With the sisters in charge of groups and overseeing delegates from their country, these committed lay persons have taken giant steps forward.

The proximity to Vannes is a particular advantage; the delegates can gather in the room of the founding member and taste the intimacy of the place. They walk in her footsteps on their way to the Cathedral while admiring the old ramparts or the narrow and picturesque streets, which date back to Roman or medieval times.

In Vannes, so much of what we see speaks to us about the woman who founded our Congregation. From our elder sisters and their anecdotes from an earlier day to the streets bearing our foundress name and the famous city gate of *Porte Saint-*



Blessed Louise-Élisabeth

Vincent, from where one catches sight of the Port de Plaisance and its beautiful marina. It is no longer the *Port de Commerce* of the early 19th century, which saw so many young girls spend their days begging or offering themselves to the passing sailors. Vannes is now a city that is modern and ancient, rich in souvenirs of all kinds. It is on this esplanade of the Port that more than 4,000 people participated in the beatification of Louise-Élisabeth on May 27, 2012.

A Crazy Dream Come True

The 23 delegates to this September's session shared the same sentiments and the same desire *"to restore in mercy and justice the humanity wounded by evil and suffering."* They are more determined than ever to extend gestures of solidarity and sharing, hope and forgiveness to those around them. They left the session re-energized by the words spoken in an atmosphere of freedom.

No, it is never too late to create these kinds of solid bonds that can be maintained through prayer, communications and by the proposals adopted at the end of the session: *"Hope, joy and confidence in the future! Our charism is alive and well and we feel like passing it on."* ■

To Change Is to LIVE

Julien Alain, csc

It's autumn. I see the trees painting their leaves in all the colours. With the diminishing intensity of the sun's heat, soon they will fall and leave the branches and trunks in dormancy. Nature is constantly going through a process of change, to which it continues to give life. With the light of spring that will recreate the conditions favourable to their re-emergence, the buds will burst forth again. The trunks will continue to grow year after year, to gorge their branches with sap, to give back life. The trunk may grow old; it always gives new leaves, new fruit, once spring returns.

What does nature tell us by its continuous transformations? Changes are part of life. So it is with human life.

Necessary Apprenticeships

Through many learning events, children progressively update their vital human forces by passing through different levels of psychological organization.¹ They develop a physical and psychological autonomy. They increasingly harmonize their affective and cognitive dimensions. As teenagers, they become able to affirm certain values and provide themselves with a code of ethics with which they enter into adult life.

As adults, they face many challenges² to cope with the changes. As they deepen the meaning they attribute to their lives, they make their own changes based on their own benchmarks and values.



From Decade to Decade

Each decade, they take another step by meeting a new challenge. With the real representation of self that they acquire, they become inwardly freer and avoid the trap of wanting to change others and their social circle when faced with obstacles. They choose to change themselves based on what they want to do with their life.

Like landings in a staircase, these phases take place in line with one another. Each stage builds on the achievements of the previous one and serves as the basis for the next. Each person goes through them according to their own specific itinerary and finds in them a new integration of the facets of their personal identity (body, executor/doer, individual, psychosexual and psychosocial)³ and an increased actualization of his human vital forces.

First Decisive Turning Point

In their **twenties**, young adults feel responsible for taking charge of their life by adhering to a code of ethics that enables them to orient their options and conduct. They choose to earn their living through their profession or trade and use a vocation to what they want to make of their existence. They need to use their achievements to verify that life can make sense. This learning will allow them in their **thirties** to give priority to reflection instead of focusing

¹ Jeannine Guindon. *Vers l'autonomie psychique: de la naissance à la mort*. New Edition. Montréal, Sciences et Culture, 2001, p. 22-70.

² Ibid., p.112-119 ou Jeannine Guindon. *Sans frontières, les forces psychologiques*, Montréal, IFHIM, volumes 3, Nos. 1-2 (1988); 4, Nos. 1-2 (1989); 5, Nos. 1-2 (1990); 6, No. 1 (1990); 11, Nos. 1-2 (1996).

³ Ibid, p. 398-408.

on experience. By learning to internalize, they are increasingly able to orient their commitments in a free, responsible and appropriate way through the values that they have made their own. This first decisive turning point allows them to enter more into themselves.

Increased Internal Freedom

In their **forties**, half-way through their existence, they become capable of a solitude that opens up to others. They realize that they are the only ones who can assume their life cycle, which they know to be unique, and this allows them to renounce certain expectations vis-à-vis their social circle. With the meaning they give to their journey, they make choices and renunciations to guide the rest of their existence and further expand their inner freedom. Their achievements and inner coherence enable them to play the role of mentor with the generations that precede them.

Transmission of Wisdom

Individuals in their **fifties** give meaning to their existence by communicating the fruits of their learning. They get their second wind and refine their perception of their human entourage and what contributes to the physical and psychological well-being of people.

The level of interiority reached at this point in their life allows them to pass another decisive turning point. They learn to relativize events and to see them from a perspective that embraces all components of reality. Their more refined representation of their self and others allows them to better situate events in their context and the people on the path that is their own. Expanding their universal love, they know how to make others benefit from their wisdom.

Listening to Needs

In the **sixties**, the challenge of adults is no longer to start from their experience to share the fruits, but to identify the needs of their entourage to meet them. They have no more evidence to give. Their life finds meaning in their response to the human needs perceived around them. If they see its usefulness, they find the means to offer their contribution to what they have identified as important. They seek to humanize the living conditions of the com-

munity in which they find themselves so as to make it increasingly suitable for the growth of people.

Contemplative Look

As if they were looking with present-day eyes through the rear-view mirror of their existence, people in their **seventies** update the meaning of their personal journey in the context of the historical period in which they have lived. This contemplative gaze reveals — as if in a parade of visions — the meaning given to their life. They see how, in the present, they have assumed the past to make possible a future in which people would grow and their entourage would be one of quality. They can thus leave their entourage with illuminating paths for the future.

When the **last stage of life** comes, adults whose mental health is intact can give meaning to those years of final maturation by emphasizing the essential that they draw from their history and which takes precedence over their own personal history. It is from that meaning that they can then freely decide to make death “their death” and thus leave, as their last personal contribution, a testimony of integrity and inner coherence to the following generations.

Decisions and Changes

How to deal with changes? How to anticipate them? How to make free, responsible and appropriate decisions that will continually ripen the meaning I give my life?

Such decisions are not experienced as an obligation in which I tell myself that I have no other choices. Nor are they taken under the impact of emotions or drives that leave the possibility of not following through when the motivation is no longer there.

Such decisions require being open to one’s entourage and others and to take into account my inner benchmarks to guide my life throughout my existence. So, even at the end, “my death,” becomes my final decision to bear witness that life can have meaning to the very end. ■

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