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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

News Briefs**Theme of the Bulletin**

Who Are We Post-Vatican II Religious Now and Where Are We Headed? This is the theme of articles in this issue of the *CRC Bulletin*. This topic was the subject of regional meetings that took place from May 2013 to March 2014. Each meeting included a presentation by three panelists followed by a reflection inspired by the latter and the discussions that followed. These articles present highlights of what was said. The full presentation is available on the CRC website: www.crc-canada.org; see the sections Publications/CRC Bulletin and Documentation/50 Years after Vatican II.

General Assembly of the CRC

The next General Assembly of the CRC will be held in Montreal from **May 29 to June 1st, 2014**. The theme selected is: *Beyond Frontiers: A Call to Transformation*. "This theme," explains Yvon Pomerleau, OP, "invites us to take a fresh look at a reality that is now part of both our congregations and our ministries: the presence of people from different cultures whose values, beliefs and history could not be more different." Father Anthony Gittins, CSSP, an expert on intercultural issues, is the guest speaker.

At this meeting, the 60th anniversary of the CRC will be celebrated. A summary of the highlights of each day will be published on the website of the Canadian Religious Conference. Make sure to visit our website at www.crc-canada.org.

Year of Consecrated Life

Pope Francis announced that the year 2015 will be dedicated to consecrated life. The year will begin in October 2014 and will end in November 2015. To mark this special year, the CRC will work with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. A committee has been set up for this purpose. Its members are two bishops, one French-speaking sister and one English-speaking father, two members of new communities and one member of a secular institute. The committee will plan some activities and eventually develop a message addressed to all of God's people.

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An Association

“A mari usque ad mare”

Since its inception sixty years ago, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) has identified all of Canada as its area of focus, along with the inherent challenge of bilingualism.

To accommodate the growing numbers of men and women religious, the CRC created four regions: the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario and Western Canada, with a national office in Ottawa. The first regional meetings were held in 1967. At the dawn of the new millennium, the situation of the Church and of religious life changed dramatically and the CRC was forced to consider restructuring. At the end of 2002, the CRC closed its four regional offices and the national office moved into a new location in Montreal. The CRC's aim to serve the regions remains within the renewed CRC.

At the Service of all Regions

The CRC aims to serve all regions of the country. The General Assembly, held every two years, is a unique opportunity to bring together all the Canadian members. The Administrative Council, for its part, is composed of members from across the country. The Committees established by the Administrative Council (for the moment: the Theological Commission and the Finance Committee) reflect a regional representation.

The CRC office develops activities aimed at reaching members in various ways. Let us mention the CRC website, in both languages, which has links to the *CRC Bulletin*, the *Council Link* and an entire news network. Several formation sessions are organized to be reproduced across

the country. The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation component (JPIC) of the CRC consists of regional groups that work in conjunction with the ad hoc office team. The national office publishes an annual directory that allows all members to stay in touch.

New Initiative

Over the past two years, a new initiative was taken by the Administrative Council and the office to develop the presence of the CRC in the regions. Four Council meetings were held respectively in Saskatoon (May 1-3, 2013), Toronto (October 2-4), Quebec City (January 8-10, 2014) and Moncton (March 19-21, 2014). At each of these meetings, some time was spent exploring the region and its social and religious realities. For an entire day, Council members met with the superiors, JPIC representatives and one bishop from the region to reflect on the challenges of religious life 50 years after Vatican II.

The purpose of this issue of the CRC Bulletin is to offer an echo of these regional meetings (the full text of the articles is posted on the CRC's website). On the eve of our General Assembly and the celebration of our sixtieth anniversary, it is appropriate to remember that the CRC remains an association *a mari usque ad mare*.

Fr. Yvon Pomerleau, OP
Director of the CRC

The Figures Speak for Themselves!

Is it possible to paint a picture of religious life in Canada using statistics? Some figures speak for themselves. Even if they do not explain everything, we must be able to wrap our head around them. For the sake of simplicity and convenience, the statistics will be presented here in rounded numbers and percentages. Besides, precision does not necessarily coincide with accuracy, because the data changes from day to day. This table reflects data gathered back on December 31, 2012.

Throughout Canada, there are a little more than 200 religious congregations, of which 185 responded to our questionnaire. 70% of congregations are female and 30% male. The same percentage applies to French-speaking congregations (70%) versus English-speaking ones (30%). The total number of men and women religious is less than 16,000, of which 80% are women and 20% men, and again, 80% Francophone and 20% Anglophone.

National Distribution

Of the men and women religious living in Canada, 90% originated in this country and 10% came from abroad. Distribution over the national territory is very uneven: 68% in Quebec; 16% in Ontario; 8% in Western Canada; 6.5% in the Atlantic and 1.5% in the Northern Territories.

Age Groups

The breakdown by age group is as follows: 50% are over 80 years old; 44% are between 60 and 80 years old; 5% are between 40 and 60 years old and only 1% under 40. There are only 120 (1%) men and women religious in initial formation, including 40 novices across the country. However, almost 25% of religious live in a nursing home.

Community Living

In terms of community living, the situation is as follows: 45% live in communities of more than 20 people; 15% in communities of between 10 and 20 people; 13% between 5 and 10 and 15% less than 5 people. 8% of men and women religious live alone; 3% with other congregations and 1% with laity.

The number of associates or fraternity members would be around 10,000, of which 1% are consecrated laypeople.

But these figures fail to tell the whole story. They say nothing of the many social and apostolic commitments in the areas of education, health, guidance, catechesis and prayer. What cannot be measured in hard numbers is probably the most important.

Fr. Yvon Pomerleau, OP
Director of the CRC



CRC Administrative Council Meeting IN THE “WEST”

— Saskatoon (SK), May 1-3, 2013



Gertrude Rompre and Michel Proulx, O. Praem.

The CRC Administrative Council was given a ‘flavour’ of Western Canada on the first morning of its meeting in Saskatoon. Gertrude Rompre, director of Mission and Ministry at *St. Thomas More College* in Saskatoon, gave an overview of the political,

social, cultural and religious history of the West. Using slides of various church buildings and other religious institutions, Gertrude illustrated the diversity of the people that inhabit this region of Canada, and the faith and perseverance of the first settlers.

The organized Church in the West is less than 200 years old, with St. Boniface, MB, the centre for the first diocese. Religious women and men were instrumental in establishing the first hospitals and education centres. Indian Residential Schools were concentrated in the West.

The Church in the West has encouraged lay ecclesial ministry, but on-going challenges include: issues with First Nations, the role of women and youth and inter-faith dialogue. Due to its rich natural resources, there is presently an economic boom in the West. This boom brings rising costs and strains on infrastructures.



The CRC Council members visited *Wanuskewin Heritage Park*, which includes a Northern Plains Indians cultural interpretive centre. This national historic site is located 5 km north of Saskatoon.

The Sightseeing Included:

- a visit to the new Roman Catholic Cathedral in Saskatoon — first Mass celebrated in December 2012;
- a visit to the newest Catholic long term care facility — *Samaritan Place* — opened in February, 2012;
- a visit to the construction site of *Trinity Manor* — a 174 unit residence for seniors — which includes independent and assisted living. Some 60-70 religious from eight communities will be among the first residents here when it opens in July, 2014;
- an evening walk along *River Landing Development*.



Cathedral in Saskatoon

The CRC Council members enjoyed an evening dinner at the *Station House* in downtown Saskatoon.



Anne Lewans, *osu*
Member of the CRC Administrative Council

Religious Life 50 Years after Vatican II

Who Have We Become?

As I thought about this topic and all the memories it brought to mind, I began to feel an excitement about this task. In discussion with others, someone suggested that we look to the changes in our *Constitutions*. Thus began a research project that reminded me of the courage of those sisters who heard the call of Vatican II and acted on it. The following is an overview of our 1950 *Rule Book* and its update, followed by a study of the texts during and after Vatican II, including our last approved *Constitutions* of 2007.

Seek Perfection

In my research of the 1950 *Rule Book*, I was reminded of the focus “to seek for perfection;” the text format was “prescriptive.” In point form were detailed descriptions of rules, practices, prayers, piety, virtues, perfection, authority, obedience, dependence, precedence, detachment from human relationships and limited contact with the outside world. Religious life was to be structured and regular. For growth in “perfection,” each sister was to examine herself on “conformation to the Rule” and to “distrust oneself.”

A Change in Emphasis

The General Chapter of 1964 shows a marked change in emphasis with the opening retreat given in the spirit of Vatican II. We were called “to participate in the New Springtime of the Church,” to keep the congregation abreast of the times in our Western culture.

These were days of learning and change as communication, responsibility, dialogue and consultation became common words to promote fruitful discussions in our communities. This included Returning to our Sources, deepening our knowledge of our foundress by studying her writings and conferences resulting in a better understanding of her spirit and “our” charism.

Revision of Constitutions & Rules

In 1967-68 a special General Chapter was convened for the revision of *Constitutions and Rules* and the *Customs Book*. They were to be reformulated according to the “signs of the times.”

Our “teaching mission in the Church” was to broaden its educational outlook. Living the vows was seen as living an integrated, well-balanced wholesome life for the purpose of bringing the “good news of Christ” through our ministry and presence. Our life of poverty was to show itself as “love” and our concern for the poor was to be more attentive, more active and more generous.

In 1970, we received an outline of *Guidelines and Norms*, not Rules, based on the work of the Special Chapter; in 1983, we received *Transitional Constitutions* and finally in 1985, the approved *Constitutions and Norms* entitled *Together We Witness*. Finally, the present *Constitutions and Norms* were revised and approved in 2007.

Where Are We Now?

Our teaching mission in the Church has broadened from teaching in schools to service with and to the People of God in numerous ways. This includes adult faith education/formation, parish ministry, retreats and spiritual direction, prison ministry, First Nations ministry, social justice education and action, pastoral care and support for poor and marginalized girls and women, in a word, “preferential option for the poor.”

The renewal of religious life these past 50 years has deeply changed us in our personal lives and in the life of our communities. We recognized that we were called to live authentic lives based on the Gospel, not lives “searching for perfection”, but bringing the peace and healing of Christ to our brothers and sisters and to our Earth.

Patricia Derbyshire, SCSL

“My Own Journey in Religious Life”

As a woman religious committed to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, I want to share how being on this learning edge of life in the 21st Century affects my lived-experience and opens me to the future! God's primary invitation to me is to recognize God's evolving presence in the universe, in the world and in religious life.

Called to Protect the Marginalized

Pope Francis' invitation to proclaim the Gospel with our lives, to protect those who are marginalized and vulnerable, to protect God's Creation, and to respond to all peoples with mercy, compassion and love certainly witnesses to the Spirit's call to respond to the signs of our times. So we ask: Who are the marginalized in our society? Pope Francis highlights the elderly.

My community in our Western Province has been through profound change over the last few years. We've sold our major residences and Retreat Centre and moved our senior sisters who need various levels of care into public facilities. On some level we still grieve these losses but many have a renewed sense of being prophetic by reaching out in compassion to each other and to the other residents with the same generosity shown by our foundress, Blessed Marie Anne Blondin. Empowered by their personal relationship with Christ, our elderly sisters continue to nurture community and give hope to others who are lonely, stressed and fragile. Is this not the face of justice?

Making a Real Difference

Whether few or small in numbers, religious who collaborate with each other and partner with other groups can make a real difference. Many of our communities have NGO seats at the United Nations. Women religious continue to pressure countries to stop the tide of violence against women and children especially in the area of human trafficking. Others commit their efforts for significant international agreements to Environmental protocols.

There is an urgency throughout the world to protect our planet. It is incumbent upon Religious to offer wisdom, mentoring and enthusiasm when joining with others to protect God's Creation. We now know that our human footprint contributes greatly to global warming and the possible destruction of our Earth. It makes me shiver to think of standing before our God who is love and owning my responsibility for not caring enough for God's poor and God's Creation!

“We Are to Be Headlights”

Our mission as Religious is to engage society in the 21st Century with all its messiness and proclaim the Reign of God. As Coretta Scott King stated, we are to be Headlights not Taillights. We are called to be mystics, to see with God's eyes the best in each culture. In a sense we are to be a leaven that is intra-cultural not counter-cultural. Being against doesn't bring hope but being passionately alive as justice-makers, peace-makers, women and men who value God's presence in each culture is a worthy vocation. As “headlights” we cannot be afraid to critique those structures and institutions which keep people and our Earth in a new kind of slavery.

Whether I'm sitting with my sister friend who has Alzheimer's or out standing on a street corner to raise awareness about the need for a poverty reduction plan in B.C., or gathering at the Legislature with First Nations and others to protest oil tankers on our Coast, or helping to facilitate sessions on child sexual abuse by clergy, I'm impelled by contemplating the One whose love for each human being and all of Creation gives me courage and hope to act.

As we mentor, model and mirror God's creative justice in our lived experience, we are a “movement” whose fearless commitment will renew the face of the Earth!

Joyce Harris, SSA

Who Have We Become...?

Structural Changes, a Time of Transformation

Religious Life 50 Years after Vatican II: Who Have We Become? Before attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to look at the Vatican Council and the directions which it evoked. Pope John XXIII spoke about bringing the Church into the modern world, opening the doors and windows to let the fresh air in. If we look at the agenda he set forth, we also see the renewal of religious life.

The Four Stages of Renewal

1. Structural changes or reforms which set up collegial-type structures.
2. Rise of ministries and small communities.
3. Return to ecclesial mysticism obtained through communal prayer, meditation on the Scriptures and celebration of the liturgy wherein the Risen Christ is experienced in the community's midst.
4. Emergence of the prophetic dimension of ecclesial mysticism resulting in the community's willingness to challenge oppressive societal structures in a selfless love of the poor.

Ongoing Changes

It appears to me that we have gone through the four initial stages of implementation and are now looking again at a return to stage one, structural changes. During the 1950s, religious life flourished on the North American continent. Large buildings were erected to house novices. Over time, vocations diminished and these structures were converted to infirmaries or sold off. Besides down-sizing, some are sharing their facilities with other religious communities. Some have amalgamated with others of their own community. Still others have disbanded with their members seeking to transfer to larger communities of their own who will accept them.

A Time of Transformation

In the meantime, it is urgent for us to look at what is happening in the larger Church. There appears to be a new spring in the spiritual life of the laity. Religious communities who have oblates and associates see that these are definitely on the rise. This is exciting even for

communities in the throes of diminishment. It is a time of transformation.

Facing the Hard Questions

My own community, the Benedictines of Nanaimo, B.C. faced the hard questions of diminishment and death. Through prayer and discernment, the seven remaining members chose to stay together but the question was how. Although no new members have joined us, our oblates and associates are definitely on the rise. In fact, they are flourishing — we have twenty oblates, seven candidates and eleven associates. All of these are anxious to grow in the life of the Spirit and committed to the Benedictine way of life and spirituality.

Taking into consideration the enthusiasm of our oblates and especially our associates, we decided to adopt the model of the Abbeyfield Houses. This was begun in London, England in 1956 by Major Carr-Gomm, who resigned his commission in the Coldstream Guards to care for the lonely people in the East End of London.

With the Abbeyfield model in mind, we approached Jack Anderson, a local designer-architect who specializes in designing green facilities. Our monastery consists of two houses on Westwood Lake. Nanaimo City statutes limit the number of residents, not related, to five in each house. By joining the two buildings, and adding three or four suites, we would then fit under the category of rooming house which allows as many as twelve non-related residents.

Mr. Anderson has met with the community to take in their concerns and future requirements. Next he wishes to meet with interested oblates and associates to glean input and fresh ideas from them. After this, a plan will be drawn up and a contractor consulted to determine the costs of remodeling and to seek advice if starting from scratch might be more feasible.

This is where we are at present. It is a large vision but it is exciting, life-giving and transformative.

Margaret Patricia Brady, OSB

"Key Insights, Emerging Directions"

In the following paragraphs, I will present very briefly the key insights and emerging directions I heard throughout the day and will classify them according to the five principles according to which the renewal processes of religious life were to go forward.

1. "To Follow Christ"

Key Insights: The following of Christ is our highest rule, especially in continuing his mission of reaching out to the wounded and the poor. We are more knowledgeable and appreciative of Scripture.

Emerging Directions: We seek to find Christ present in our midst and in our world.

2. "To Return to the Charism of our Founders"

Key Insight: We are honouring the charism of our founders and continuing our community traditions.

Emerging Directions: We wish to strike a balance between community and ministry and to become more adaptable. We recognize the need to be astute and capable of handling our financial situations. We commit ourselves to care for our elderly members.

3. "To Participate in the Life of the Church"

Key Insight: We have been participating more fully in the life of the Church; we are more receptive of ecumenism and collaborative ministry.

Emerging Directions: We propose to strengthen our mission focus on ecclesial work, to dialogue with clergy and to collaborate with our bishops.

4. "To Be Aware of Contemporary Human Conditions"

Key Insights: We recognize our need for knowledge of social conditions and for engagement in social justice. With apostolic zeal, we are working toward non-violent relationships and critiquing unjust conditions. We are growing in activism such as writing letters to politicians.

Emerging Directions: We acknowledge the need to become more inter-cultural. We seek to be prophetic in our diminishment, a reality which needs to be for us life and source of life. We are increasing our knowledge of advances in communication technology. There appears to be a greater awareness of Creation spirituality and an upsurge of the gospel of justice and equality. We are recognizing the development of a laity that is growing in their baptismal commitment to participate in the threefold mission of Christ as priest, prophet and servant-leader.

5. "To Continue Our Spiritual Renewal"

Key Insight: We are moving from active ministry to a more contemplative way of life.

Emerging Directions: We are called to deeper prayer and trust. Our discussion focused on our hopes in Pope Francis' leadership and our increasing maturity in religious life. In response to the challenges named in *Vita Consecrata* (1996), Articles 88-92, namely, hedonism, materialism and freedom in obedience, we questioned whether religious today are seeking excessive personal comfort, are accumulating more "stuff" and are developing a kind of independence that resembles "doing my own thing."

Throughout the day, I picked up a climate of agreement that religious today are called to grow in trust in God's plan for the world and to place our hope in the power of the Holy Spirit "blowing" through the Church and directing us, as disciples of the Risen Lord, toward building up the Reign of God with confidence and joy.

Sœur Teresita Kambeitz, OSU

CRC Administrative Council Meeting IN ONTARIO — *Mississauga (ON), October 2-4, 2013*



Queen of the Apostles

On October 2-4, 2013, the CRC Administrative Council met in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada's 6th largest city, located on the shores of Lake Ontario, just minutes from Toronto. The meeting took place at the *Queen of the Apostles Renewal Centre*, under the direction of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Assumption Province. The centre is situated on twelve acres of beautiful property overlooking the *Credit River*, and has a wonderful "country in the city" setting. On October 3, there was a very profitable gathering of over 30 leaders of religious communities to engage in a dialogue with one another, and with the Administrative Council. After the meetings concluded, a dinner at a local Italian restaurant was enjoyed in lieu of a trip to the *Art Gallery of Ontario*, which had to be cancelled due to inclement weather.

Administrative Council's Invited Guests



Alain Rodrigue, CM, Michel Proulx, O. Praem, and Yvon Pomerleau, OP

in Canada for many years.

Fr. Peter McKenna, SCJ, who was the provincial of Sacred Heart Fathers for 10 years, is now the executive director of *Becoming Neighbours*, a companion program that matches immigrants and refugees with members of Roman Catholic religious congregations (19 congregations have committed) and their associates and friends. They provide a presence and act as friends, guides and mentors during the newcomers' initial adjustment to Toronto. A sister and father (or brother) are matched

(150 so far) with each refugee to become acclimatized to Toronto. They meet on a one-on-one basis every two weeks. Every refugee has one person who prays for them every day (240 prayer partners).

Sister Christine Gebel, OLM, represented the *Ontario Collaborative Housing Project for Religious*, which came together in 2011 in Winnipeg under the leadership of Mr. Raymond Lafond, who then came to Toronto to speak to religious congregations.

In June 2012, a core group of a dozen religious communities with members in the Toronto area met to collaborate on a 175-250 unit independent and assisted living residence for religious. It will be owned and operated by *Canadian Catholic Congregational Management (CCCM)*, which operates as a Public Juridic Person approved by the Holy See under the name *Canadian Religious Stewardship (CRS)*. The OCHPR has settled on a site for their residence, behind Providence Health Care Centre in Scarborough, Ontario. This housing project is not just housing, it will be a new way of being in ministry together.



Pierre-Anne Mandato, SCSM

Sister Sue Wilson, CSJ, and Ms. Jennifer Henry spoke about the *KAIROS Community Committee*, made up of the leadership of 60-70 religious. They meet every October and May. *KAIROS*, established in 2001, unites Canadian churches and religious organizations in a faithful ecumenical response to pursue ecological justice and human rights through research, education, partnership, and advocacy. Religious orders have been significant partners with *KAIROS*. They bring their knowledge and experience of the justice priorities of the different religious orders. They work with Indigenous communities, environmental organizations, student groups, and churches, to name a few. The CRC is one of the many *KAIROS* partners.

George T. Smith, CSB
Member of the CRC Administrative Council

Life in Community

A “Voyage of Discovery”

These are challenging times for religious communities, especially for those of us with leadership responsibilities. How do we support our sisters and brothers in the community while many of us are beginning to feel the ‘bites’ of the aging process ourselves. Some communities are dealing with the reorganization and perhaps amalgamation of different provinces while others are choosing or have chosen to close their doors — not easy decisions!

Is There a Future?

Although everything points to a disappearance in North America, I maintain that there is a future. Our future will come from the South where the Church is today. Young women from South America, Africa and Haiti, are choosing to enter communities, at least that is the experience in our community. The leadership in these communities is challenged with providing security and care for the aging members while at the same time providing suitable formation for the new members, always mindful of the age gap between the two groups, with few in between.

Where will these new members find the theological, spiritual and psychological help to adjust to living in our communities? Our congregation has found an international novitiate program in Lima, Peru, to answer our needs at this time — CONFER is sponsored by the Conference of Religious of Peru. Yes, our postulants from Africa and Haiti go to Peru for their novitiate! The main challenges are the need to learn Spanish during their postulate, and the great distance from their families. But they seem to take this challenge in stride, knowing that living in a community with roots in North America will probably ensure that most of their lives will be lived far from home! A concern for the future is integrating these young people into older communities in the north.

The challenge for us in North America is considerable: are we ready to welcome these new members into our residences? Are we willing to give up our apartment

living to give them a home in our midst? Young people today are looking for community. Our formation directors tell me that the new members also want communal prayer. And, if possible, they wish to serve with other sisters in a particular ministry. When most of us entered, that was the norm, but now, when we all need to find our own “jobs,” that becomes problematic!

Our “Voyage of Discovery”

While writing this reflection, I felt almost like a Voyager Space Craft as it spins far from earth to explore the outer regions of our universe. In mid-September, NASA confirmed that one of two Voyagers, launched in 1977, is more than 15 billion kilometers from earth and is now in what is known as interstellar space between the stars. It is exciting, wondering what they will see and send back — I too wonder what our future is going to be like.

I will try to imagine it. As the Voyager uses the stars as reference points I too look to see what is happening now. The new members in our communities are our stars! Most are from the South... Given this phenomenon, communities of the future will be multicultural, multilingual, and multigenerational. This type of community will have many challenges, but it could be very rewarding and enriching.

The Spirit will guide us into the future to respond to challenges in unique and creative ways. Tom Rosica, CSB, in one of his reflections states: “Authentic disciples are faithful to the person and message of Jesus yet they are not trapped in the past. It is the Spirit that enables flexibility, adjustment, adaptation and newness to occur, always within a context of fidelity.” (*The Advocate Gives us a Reason for our Hope*)

The charism of our communities will continue in ways that we could never imagine!

Jean Goulet, csc

Polarization and Justice

Why 'Evolving Consciousness' Matters

The gap between rich and poor is creating two solitudes in our cities and in the world. There are those who support pipelines and those who don't; those who think it's urgent to address climate change and those who think it mustn't get in the way of economic growth. And then there's the Roman Catholic Church, where there even seems to be reference to the split between liberals and conservatives in the decision that was made to confer sainthood on both Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II at the same time.

All of these examples of polarization are pointing to struggles of consciousness, to individuals and groups that are looking at the same reality through different worldviews, and therefore understanding it differently. But there's more to it than that. There are also justice issues that fester at the core of these polarizations, that is, inequities that need to be addressed and relationships that need to be transformed. These issues are urging us to go beyond polarization in order to create systemic change; they embody deep yearnings for transformation.

Transformation and 'Evolving Consciousness'

Evolving consciousness is fundamentally about conversion. So, for example, the split between liberals and conservatives will only be transcended as each pole becomes attuned to the limitations and inadequacies of their own perspective. That's when we see that we need the authentic values and insights from other stages of consciousness. That's when we open ourselves to a more integrated stance that carries forward authentic values and embodies them in new ways, in ways that the world needs today.

This challenge illuminates the need for an integrative consciousness that pulls forward the wisdom of the past, integrates it with the new insights of today, and embodies it in new forms that are able to encounter the wounds of the world with a healing, life-giving presence. This challenge exposes the many polarizations in our society as symptoms that are urging us toward a more evolved consciousness, toward integral consciousness.

Evolving consciousness matters because it opens up a path from polarization, pain and impasse to transformation, healing and new life.

The Contemplative and Justice Dimensions

There are both contemplative and justice dimensions to this journey into evolving consciousness. It's contemplative in that it calls us to a deeper awareness of our inner terrain, on both personal and collective levels, so that we might be attuned to the presence and activity of Love in ourselves and in the world. It's justice-based because it opens us to see more clearly how the critical issues that we face are pressing us toward transformation, toward a more evolved consciousness that will find new ways to respond.

The contemplative and justice dimensions of evolving consciousness are urging us to be attentive to the healing, liberating and transforming action of God, not just in our ourselves but in the critical issues of our day, be it climate change, environmental devastation, human rights abuses, poverty, religious fundamentalism, civil war, social unrest, or a blatant disregard for indigenous rights. This is the sacred space where we learn that graced inner transformation and action for wider systemic change interact with each other in ways that create hotspots of healing, transformation and new life.

Many of us have been nurturing a contemplative heart. Now we are being called to release its prophetic and political energies by immersing ourselves in the critical issues of our day, not as a workforce but as 'readers of the signs of the times' who want to influence culture and change social systems. We are being asked to cooperate with profound grace in the world; to see that when we immerse ourselves in the polarizing justice issues of our day and allow these issues to pull us, with others, into a higher level of consciousness, we are — to use a phrase from Ilia Delio — opening ourselves to Christ in evolution.

Sue Wilson, CSJ

Poverty, the Periphery and Praise

Pope Francis' homiletic method is to talk in threes; three points, three themes for consideration. I will imitate him and suggest three areas that are relevant for Canadian women and men religious as we look at our circumstances and imagine our future. The words are: poverty, the periphery and praise.

I. Poverty

In Francis' first week as pope, we had this wonderful phrase: "*Vorrei una chiesa povera e per i poveri.*" My interpretative translation: "How much I want a Church that is materially poor and orientated toward the poor!" Poverty is a value when it demonstrates radical solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

Following Vatican II, we did respond to the call for solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Many religious communities established missions in Latin America and Africa. As well, there were individuals and small groupings who went to a periphery closer to home and who for years have served the poor. A third response was to continue working in traditional apostolates of education and health care, while gradually increasing lay presence and participation, accessing government funding and finally relinquishing control while seeking in some way to perpetuate the charism.

Because of its inherent ambiguity, the third option seems the most problematic, and it's the one that has caught the Pope's attention. If I am interpreting the early signs from Francis, we need to ask ourselves: is the only way forward for our more established ministries in Canada a continued systematic de-institutionalization?

II. The Periphery

The second major term is what Francis calls the periphery. We are hearing again and again about the importance of the Church getting out of its ecclesial rut and moving to where we can encounter the poor and marginalized. Obviously poverty and the periphery are closely related. Francis chooses to lead by example in making his first Roman parish visit to a community on the

outskirts of the city, and his first trip outside Rome to Lampedusa, southern Europe's geographic periphery. Travelling to Brazil for World Youth Day, he visited the inhabitants of the slums of Varginha; again, the economic periphery of Rio di Janiero.

In a meeting at the Jesuit Refugee Centre in Rome, Francis chastised communities who were creating tourist "bed and breakfasts" from strategically-located former religious houses: "My dear men and women religious, empty convents do not serve the Church by being transformed into hotels to make money. Empty convents don't belong to you; they are for the flesh of Christ, the refugees. The Lord calls us to welcome them courageously and generously into empty communities, religious houses and convents." (Visit to the *Centro Astalli* for Refugees, September 10, 2013)

Francis the Jesuit, Francis the religious, is saying something very important to his fellow religious, to us. The invitation is not merely for us to go from our own comfort to serve at the periphery and then return to our comfort, but rather to bring the periphery to the centre, where we are.

III. Praise

The third theme that I suggest for the future of religious life in Canada is perhaps an unusual one: praise. As religious, we need to explore the inner dynamic of our very relationship with God who reveals himself in Christ through the Holy Spirit. I chose the word praise because I think Christian life at its heart needs to be joyful.

To the extent that as women and men religious we can en flesh the Gospel call to embrace poverty for the kingdom, move toward an existential periphery and bring to our life and ministry an attitude of joy and praise, God's work and our own will continue.

Timothy Scott, CSB

Challenges and Directions for the Future

Our panelists have, among themselves, courageously and creatively limned the patience, the perseverance attendant upon our moment as religious and they've taken a little flight here and there into the unknown. Both attitudes and actions are directional as our day together is intended.

Directional Goals

All of the panelists reflect, in one way or another, their awareness of context and its importance: historical, cultural, religious, theological, spiritual, ecclesial, scientific and cosmological. They acknowledge these contexts as essential to understanding who we are in this post-Vatican II moment and who God might be inviting us to become out of the chaotic mix we call modernity and post-modernity. Nothing is more meaningful than knowing who we are in this moment and why we are in this moment.

This was addressed, whether in the careful delineation of our wonderful mission efforts since Vatican II in the face of epochal internal and external revolutions, or in the process and consequences of de-institutionalizing and declericalizing, or in the challenging understanding of ourselves as participants in a new universe story of Creation and Incarnation that calls us to levels of greater consciousness. These are surely directional goals.

Hope in the Darkness

Then, too, listening to our panelists I became aware of the deep, assured faith that each one expresses. Just three years ago, I was asked to be part of a retreat entitled *Hope in the Darkness*, and I spent a good deal of time on the apophatic aspect of faith. I remember quoting a well-known theologian to the effect that "the characteristic of faith today is pervaded by a certain darkness, emptiness, silence, risk, the cross, akin to the dynamic of apophatic mysticism, even while the drawing near of the sacred is recognized in fragments of healing, beauty, liberation, and love in the human and natural world, understood anew as luminous sacraments of divine presence." (*Friends of God and Prophets*, Continuum: New York, 1998)

One other thing seems common and clear to our panelists: each of us in our congregations hears from the God of her or his experience a clarion call and a sending forth in mission with others in Christ. This most basic ground of our being, and the necessity of living in it and from it, is expressed with passion in different fields of enterprises but, in each case, it touches into that spring of the first graces from which the hope of moving forward still draws its strength.

All three panelists, in various ways, touch on the person of Christ, ranging from the personal relationship that drew one to religious life and sustains her there, through the Cosmic Christ of Teilhard de Chardin who holds together the whole evolutionary presence and pulls it forward with us toward greater complexity and unity, to the Christ of the Trinity through whom God is revealed in our innermost being through the Holy Spirit. These seem to me to move us somewhere beyond more recent academic discussions of higher and lower Christologies.

Openness to Transformation

Prophecy, that gift that we ideally offer in the Church and in the world, is variously modeled, from the serene witness of joy to the witnessing of loving patience. In our current demographic, it is modeled in our imaginative responses of prayerful partnering, generous support of new life, active loving care of each other, and contact where possible with those who are the flesh of Christ.

Prophecy is modeled, too, in that openness to transformation through immersion in the world of the sanctified periphery, and in contemplative service of those needs, with energy that allows us to witness on the barricades of impasse and injustice, with hearts open to dialogue and alternate solutions. The sweetness and joy that gospel living engenders render powerful witness to restless and seeking hearts.

Veronica O'Reilly, CSJ

CRC Administrative Council Meeting IN QUEBEC

— *Loretteville (QC), January 8-10, 2014*



Ursuline Spirituality Centre

The first Administrative Council meeting of 2014 was held at the Ursuline Spirituality Centre in Loretteville, Quebec. We were warmly welcomed by Ms. Lianne Brochu, coordinator of the Centre for Spirituality.

The first big snowstorm of the year disrupted travel and prevented two speakers from attending the meeting; in addition, three members of the Council were stuck in airports across the country...

350th Anniversary of Notre-Dame de Québec Parish

Sister Carmen Gravel, PFM, offered a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the activities of this jubilee year. Michel Proulx forwarded it to the CRC Council members. Further information on the celebrations of the 350th anniversary is available at: <http://notredamedequébec.org/en/feasts-of-the-350th>



Holy Door, Quebec

Association of Major Superiors of the Diocese of Québec (ASMDQ)

Father Gérard Blais, SM, president of the association, said that the ASMDQ is similar to a mini-CRC as it comprises the major superiors of the diocese of Québec.

The ASMDQ plays a supporting role to the leaders of congregations of the diocese who need support in managing longevity versus living a full life to the end.

The association works in close collaboration with the diocesan authorities. Historically, men and women religious worked in schools and hospitals, and many are those who continue as volunteers in works related to the charism of their community.

Several work in difficult social settings to help the poor, others provide a valuable contribution to the New Evangelization, while others support cultural works.

We are witnessing a constantly growing phenomenon, that of the associates in our congregations: people who want to live our spirituality and participate in our mission.



Great importance is given to the protection of the religious heritage, and, again, a fruitful collaboration exists between the diocese and religious communities.

Several congregations live together in one house while keeping their autonomy and identity but sharing the common areas. These communities gather in the same infirmary for good health care.

The members of the ASMDQ who are attentive to major issues, such as the end-of-life care bill and the Quebec Charter of Values, have sent personal messages to their MP Father Michel Proulx, president, expressed the wish that the CRC be informed in the future when the ASMDQ takes such initiatives addressed to our politicians to make sure that the CRC does not duplicate them.

Élisabeth Villemure, SMNDA

Member of the CRC Administrative Council

“The Service of Leadership Has Enriched My Life”

When I responded positively to the request to share my personal experience on how I exercise my leadership today, I could not help but compare it briefly to how my predecessors experienced it before me.

When I entered the community, the ideal I had of the leader of the Congregation was that of a “super woman” with all the qualities that made her a “role model” who had considerable influence on all members. As the years passed, this style was less and less common and the superior increasingly appeared to me as a woman like any other with her own abilities and difficulties. Except that I was far from thinking that one day I would be called to serve as leader of my congregation. I was even certain that it would never happen...

“We Are Leaders Made for these Times”

I got to work earnestly, seriously, with a saying of Clarissa Pinkola Estés in my head egging me on: “Do not lose heart, especially, do not lose hope. Most particularly because, the fact is — we were made for these times. Yes. For years, we have been learning, practising, been in formation for and just waiting to meet on this exact type of commitment. [...] Always remember that you were chosen, prepared from all eternity to live what you are living in this moment in time.”

I trusted this saying and also one that was revealed to me some time after my election. One night, I heard clearly: “I will be with you as a single light.” A message so strong it woke me up. I rely on it every second of the day. Recognizing the infinite in us and complying with its call is what it means to liberate ourselves and it is then that the Lord can work in us.

I am given wonderful support by the members of the General Council with whom I always seek to create a consensus before making any major changes. Each councillor has her specific responsibilities and we meet to make major decisions bringing to bear all the experience that each one has acquired. There are no full-time general councillors; all have a specific task.

Meeting the Needs of Aging Sisters

The congregation’s average age is now 80 years old. To increase the sisters’ collaboration in the internal mission, last year we formed two major groups in the motherhouse, each superior with four sisters and one lay community worker as assistants for help and support. They thus meet all the needs required by aging sisters.

We must be realistic and my priorities are to ensure that the sisters reach their potential in their living environment, that they remain and feel Anthonians of Mary through to the end, that they have the services they need. In our planning, we try to put everything in place to ensure the safety of all the sisters to the last.

Finally, I would simply say that the mission entrusted to me in 2007 and renewed in 2012 is, for me, a responsibility that enriches my life and that I readily share with my team of councillors. Moments of prayer, silence and contemplation are beneficial to me and are a preparation for a new start every morning. Concern for the well-being of my sisters constantly pushes me forward to try to understand what the Spirit wants from me and my community in this special time that religious communities are going through.

France Croussette, AM
General Superior

My Commitment in Religious Life over the Years

First of all I want to tell you a little bit about why I joined the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. At Lac-des-Aigles, my native parish, there was no college. Occasionally a Brother of the Sacred Heart visited our school. We corresponded and I ended up going to secondary school in Amqui. I enjoyed then the presence of the Brothers among us, the activities and the quality of the education. So, following my studies to obtain my first teaching license, I opted for religious life.

My first teaching assignment was with handicapped children and young people with difficulties. And all my years of teaching were spent in similar classrooms.

The Shift towards Social Justice

In my retirement, I came to Rimouski mainly to live with young people at *Villages des Sources*. Gradually different commitments to social justice presented themselves: at the *Arrimage*, a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts, and at the *Arbre de Vie* (Tree of Life), offering shelter and meal services for the needy; participation in a community group against poverty in Eastern Quebec; participation since 2003 in the Social Justice Committee of Men and Women Religious of Eastern Quebec and participation in the Quebec JPIC Committee of the Canadian Religious Conference.

After my commitment to the *Arbre de Vie*, at the request of our bishop I founded, with a sister, the *Fraternité du Pain* (Fraternity of the Bread), a place of sharing and exchange inspired by the Fraternity of the Suffering Servant in Brazil.

Finally, I participated in the creation of a Social Justice Committee in my community.

The Shock: Jesus and the Poor

How is it that all my commitments have a connotation of justice and poverty? At some point, I realized that, during my 29 years of teaching, I had always worked with troubled youth. And one day, I got hold of a small book, *Scandal: Jesus and the Poor* (*Scandale: Jésus et les pauvres*). Little by little, I became aware that by being with the poor, I could not help but be on the same path upon which Jesus himself had walked.

Political Involvement

But we must go further still. Thus at the JPIC-Québec Committee of the CRC, we question ourselves on current issues, we take a stand, we do not hesitate to sign petitions, on occasion we present submissions to the government, and we write letters.

Faith and Commitment

I want to cite two quotes by Pope Francis. While he was still a cardinal, he said: "Faith is not a possession, but a mission." And I would add that if the Church does not want to grow old, it should come out of its shell and go out to the periphery.

On June 7, 2013, in a meeting with students and teachers of the schools run by the Jesuits in Italy and Albania, Pope Francis improvised a spontaneous dialogue by answering ten questions. To a question on political and social involvement he answered: "Getting involved in politics is a Christian duty. We Christians cannot be like Pilate and wash our hands clean of things. We need to get involved in politics because it's one of the highest expressions of charity. It takes the common good into consideration. Lay Christians must work in politics."

My journey of faith and commitment is in line with the call to be witnesses of the Gospel: witnesses of Jesus, of his Word and of his actions.

Gaétan Sirois, FSC

The Renewal of Religious Life Is Ongoing

Vatican II awakened a spirit of renewal which never ceases to mark out the way of the baptised and that of consecrated persons. The *aggiornamento* that was set in motion by Paul VI's *motu proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* in 1966 aimed at Christological, ecclesiological and pastoral renewal of institutes of consecrated life. The path that was opened by this process of renewal aroused a new dynamism which did not come to an end with the renewal of *Constitutions* as some might have thought. It was a starting point, not a destination.

At the same time that we were revising our Constitutions, there were many departures from communities, vocation recruitment fell apart, apostolic works were lost and our social effectiveness was eroded. Add to that the aging of our members, the difficulty of adjusting apostolic life to the ever-changing social realities, and the fact that some communities were disoriented and turned in on themselves. It is easy to understand that in 1980 it was still difficult to admit that we were in the midst of a crisis. In whatever way we faced the crisis, it was irrevocable and we found ourselves in the desert. Our journey had led us to necessary shifts.

Shifting to Interdependence

Having understood that our charism is a gift from God for the Church, we could not keep it for ourselves; we had to share it with others. The understanding of the place of laity in the Church encouraged us to share our charism with laity and clergy. On their own journeys, many mutually recognized a common vocation in relation to a charism and journeyed toward spiritual families where together they became heirs and co-bearers of this heritage.

Being increasingly aware of our need for one another, we can allow ourselves to share mission with others. We learn to move from self-sufficiency and independence to interdependence by taking the risk of establishing new

relationships for the sake of mission. There are some experiments in this area where responsibilities are shared among religious and laity, with organizations or between institutes for an apostolic project undertaken in collaboration or partnership.

We could say that, in the last 50 years, we have been in a perpetual state of learning and discernment. We seek the will of God within our personal lives and in the life of our institutes. We learn to let go of many things and to advance in the desert not knowing where it will lead, filled with hope that our journey will contribute to the liberation of life.

Walking Together as Disciples

As our institutes are experiencing increasing diminishment, new life-forms are being born and developing. The tree of consecrated life continues to branch out and to multiply in the field of the Lord. During the last 50 years, several hundreds of new communities have been founded throughout the world; 59 of these are in Canada, 37 of which in Quebec.¹ We are invited to dialogue with these new communities and to journey in the redefinition of our identity as persons consecrated to God and to the mission of the Church.

The crisis that cracked open our cement walls dug a passage with an unknown destination from which something radically new can emerge. A newness we have the responsibility to sow and help grow. We have to become "transmitters" of life who, in faith and hope, dare to set out and accept to prepare the way and make it possible. Whether we are crossing the desert or on a path of growth, long-term communities and new ones need to walk together as disciples of Christ.

Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS

¹ Rick van Lier, *Entre tradition et innovation: nouveaux instituts, communautés nouvelles et nouvelles formes de vie consacrée au Canada* (Between Tradition and Innovation: New Institutes, New Communities and New Forms of Consecrated Life), soon to be published with the Acts of the colloquium *The State of Consecrated Life in Canada*, (Concordia University, Montreal, January 26, 2013), Wilfrid Laurier University Press (Waterloo), 2014.

"Live the Parable of the Good Samaritan"

We were touched by the talks of the three panelists and the reactions from the audience reflected the relevance of the points presented. Used to working as part of a team, I would have preferred to react as part of a group and present a structured text but allow me to informally point out the issues that have affected me.

As a first step, to let oneself be touched one must listen, hear, see, look, feel, experience, discern, choose, decide and act; in a word, "live the parable of the Good Samaritan."

Revisiting Basic Values

The three speakers revisited basic values: seekers of God, we are called to develop evangelical attitudes, to choose and respect life, to believe in the dignity of persons especially those who live on the margins, to ensure a quality of presence in relationships, to adjust to reality by developing our self-confidence, courage, joy and hope. The participation of the laity in our mission is fruitful and supportive. The partnership between communities is promising. Cooperation, interdependence and shared mission are ways forward.

Highlights of the Three Talks

What struck me in the presentation of **France Croussette**, general superior of the Antoniennes de Marie Sisters:

- Persons in authority are women like any others with their strengths and limitations.
- We moved from a model of perfection to a simpler, more collegial style with attitudes in which God's mercy is a forgiving presence. Lucidity and liberty go hand in hand.
- The exercise of a dynamic leadership respects God's design for each sister, reflects the spirit of the Constitutions, supports the mission, elicits the cooperation of all members, and values the work of each and every one.
- A golden rule: ensure consensus before making changes. Gradually we realize that we are fashioned for the times we live in and the task becomes enjoyable, exciting, but always challenging.

The presentation by **Gaétan Sirois, fsc**, reflects the commitment to social justice and to the service of marginalized populations. Teacher, facilitator, close to those seeking dignity and justice, he was able to engage with people, to get involved in social issues. As citizens, collectively questioning the decision-makers' projects is a form of political involvement, a form of charity that takes into account the common good. He spoke about and questioned Bill 52 on the end-of-life care. Some elements of this law require reflection, clarification and the need for guidelines.

Gaétan Sirois established links with community groups, stressed the importance of fraternal communities where bread and the Word are shared with people from all walks of life, an opportunity to let oneself be evangelized by people living in poverty and exclusion.

Gaétane Guillemette, ndps, drew for us a great historical fresco of religious life after Vatican II. Renewal, discovery of the Church-people of God, a Church that loves the world, a Church of communion.

Hopes-Crisis-Wilderness. Necessary shifts despite vulnerabilities, diminishment and difficult planning. Repatriation of vibrant forces must ensure proximity with people and the transmission of the charism that is God's gift to the Church. The governance of our institutes requires boldness, foresight, wisdom. Difficult choices invite us to live the Paschal Mystery, to restore the area of the world which is close to us.

Between the dream and the reality, do what we can, keep hope and creativity alive. We are going through a learning process. We are "transmitters," bridges between what is and what is to come. Openness to new communities is a path to explore.

Lorette Langlais, sbc

Administrative Council Meeting – Moncton (N.-B.)

CRC Administrative Council Meeting IN ATLANTIC CANADA

— Moncton (N.-B.), March 19-21, 2014

On March 18-21, the CRC Administrative Council had its last regional meeting in Atlantic Canada, in Moncton, New Brunswick. Situated in the Petitcodiac River Valley, Moncton lies at the geographic centre of the Maritime Provinces.



The meeting was held at the motherhouse of the Sisters of Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur who are celebrating the 90th anniversary of their foundation this year. Welcomed warmly into their home, all enjoyed the hospitality of the Sisters and staff.

Focus of the Meeting

The focus of the Administrative Council meeting, the final one prior to the General Assembly to be held the end of May in Montreal, was lengthy discussions on the items to be presented at the Assembly. Attention centred on the updated By-Laws and Statutes of the CRC as well as the report of the Committee on the future of the CRC. It is hoped that the membership will provide direction to the incoming Administrative Council regarding priorities for the next two years.



Photo: Council members from left to right: Pierre-Anne Mandato, scsm, Alain Rodrique, ccm, Anne Lewans, osu, George Smith, csb, Michel Proulx, O. Praem., Yvon Pomerleau, op, Rosemary MacDonald, csm and Annette Noel, sp. Missing: Élisabeth Villemure, smnda, Peter Novecosky, osb.

Meeting with the Leaders and the JPIC representatives

On March 20, there was a gathering of approximately 60 religious representing leadership teams and the Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) representatives from 10 Atlantic congregations. Most Rev. André Richard, csc, Archbishop Emeritus of Moncton, was also present. This day of sharing with one another and the Administrative Council was appreciated by all. Following the meeting, the Council enjoyed a meal at a local restaurant noted for its creative seafood dishes.

Rosemary MacDonald, csm
Member of the CRC Administrative Council

The Evolution of the Service of Leadership since Vatican II

In 1962, at the opening of the Vatican II Council, I was 16 years old. I was more preoccupied in leading my basketball team to victory than in following what was going on in Rome. But still, who knows, my leadership in my team was probably a good preparation for my leadership in my congregation because, in both cases, we have to learn winning strategies, to know how to make good passes, how to be one with the other members, learn good communication skills and do “smashes” that amaze!

Since Vatican II, the service of leadership in religious congregations, as in the Church, has experienced transformations. One of my co-sisters once said: “In the past, when we talked about the general superior, we called her ‘reverend mother’... then we called her ‘mother’, then ‘sister’, then by her ‘first name’... before long”, she continued, “we will call her the ‘good lady.’” Imagine, even I had to experience a particular transformation. Certain sisters who used to call me ‘Dolly’ now call me ‘Dolores’ because it seems that Dolly is not appropriate for a general superior!

Being with Others

This little story is still relevant and shows the change in mentality or in familiarity that happened over time. It also shows that the leaders came down from “ABOVE” to be “BELOW” with the others.

Jesus showed us what being a leader means. He himself came from “ABOVE” to be “BELOW” with others, making his home with us. Jesus was the leader by excellence and he showed that true leadership is circular: he sits down **with** his disciples, he walks **with** them, he eats **with** them, he is **with** them, he challenges them and he talks to them of what a servant should be or should not be.

In our communal and personal experiences, we gradually understood that being a leader is to be a disciple, it is to be humble and not to look for places of honour or of power; that it is to hear and to listen to Jesus who

says to us: “You know that the rulers of nations act as tyrants, and the powerful oppress them. It shall not be so among you.” (Mt 20:26)

At the beginning of our congregations the general superior and superiors decided everything, or almost everything: few consultations, little communal or personal discernment. Today, it is the general superiors or the superiors who have to adjust themselves, who sometimes have to submit to the needs, the desires of the sisters. At times, the sisters do their discernment directly with the Holy Spirit and, when they come for dialogue, they will say: “the Spirit and I have decided.”

However, I have to admit that the responsibility as general superior brings about happiness and gives a chance to live wonderful encounters and sharings with the sisters, the other leaders, other congregations, bishops, and other people we meet at various events.

“Let us Be True Disciples”

The fact of our leadership becoming more circular instead of pyramidal opened a dialogue, a possibility of discernment which moved us to greater freedom and a new commitment in new places and new realities. Circular leadership gave the sisters a chance to discover their own personal charism and to be able to share it with others. Circular leadership also gave the general superiors and superiors freedom to love their mission and to find happiness in being servants.

Today, the service of leadership invites us to double our trust in God’s loving plan for humanity, to live a radical conversion in our following of Christ and to give to the power that is entrusted to us its true meaning, that of the power of love, of supporting and of encouraging. My sisters, my brothers, may we be true disciples... this is our leadership.

Dolores Bourque, FMA

“Social Justice Is an Integral Pillar of My Faith”

In 1984, I was given by Sister Odette Léger, the general superior at the time, the responsibility of coordinating the Social Justice Committee of our congregation. My first initiative was to invite Guy Paiement, a Jesuit well known for his commitment to social justice, to speak at a large gathering of the Sisters of Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur. For me, his lecture struck a deep chord on several levels. First, he demonstrated that social justice is an essential and integral pillar of my faith. Later on, he introduced me to social analysis and I became much more aware of the economic roots of injustice.

Multiple Commitments

In the mid 1980s, a fellow teacher spurred me on to seek social justice. She was a Marxist and a harsh critic of the Church. As part of one of her projects, I spent three months in Nicaragua. This was at a time when the Jesuit Ernesto Cardenal was a minister in the Marxist-leaning government of Nicaragua. Officials from the Daniel Ortega administration told me how, for them, the commitment to the poor meshed well with their duty as committed Christians. During my stay there, I worked to establish a Bachelors of Food Science and Technology program and equip a food science laboratory. Thanks to this experience, I have seen people highly motivated to get out of poverty through their own efforts.

In the years 1990-2000, with the collaboration of the late Fathers Guy Paiement and Benoît Fortin, Capuchin, I worked on the Justice and Solidarity Team of the Diocese of Moncton. We organized meetings to raise awareness of social justice among the public and the clergy. We also filed briefs to the government.

I remain convinced that the renewal of faith is about commitment of the heart and soul to the poor. Whether my actions are political, such as lobbying, or charitable, such as providing assistance with food and other basic needs, my neighbours will not need an interpreter to understand my motivation. The heartfelt commitment to social justice crosses all language barriers.

The Impact of Working in Networks

When I work in networks, my actions have the greatest impact in advancing the cause of social justice. I spent over 12 years with the Common Front for Social Justice (CFSJ) of N.B. What a valuable learning opportunity! Former union activists, especially those who are committed to creating a better world, are top-notch strategists. They taught me to adopt a broader vision and to better target my commitments to try to create a more just world. They do not hesitate to confront political injustices.

The analysis done by the CFSJ helped me see who are the winners and who are the losers of the new government policies.

The slogan of the Common Front for Social Justice is: “Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.” (Nelson Mandela)

Possible Avenue

To answer the opening question, “Where are we, post-conciliar men and women religious, and where are we going?”, here is what I am proposing as a possible avenue for our congregations:

- Let us open a very welcoming heart to the poor. Listening to their problems while searching for options on how to manage is the key to genuine openness.
- Let us share with people who live in poverty a part of what we have, trusting that the Providence will not let us down.
- Let us support one or more organizations whose goal is to break the cycle of poverty.
- Let us work for systemic change by encouraging, for example, reintegration into the labor force by means of training in technical skills, with sessions on self-esteem, all this in an atmosphere of respect for marginalized people.

Auréa Cormier, NDSC

Vatican II Religious

Who Have We Become?

When I look at what we have become, what strikes me immediately as different today from fifty years ago is our emerging world view, termed by some the new cosmology.

It arises from new scientific knowledge which shows the entire universe, including human beings, to be evolving, and interrelated in ways previously unknown. This expands the context in which we have seen ourselves as religious and gives rise to new questions about our place in this context as we explore its implications for spirituality, theology, community and ministry.

While some among us are passionate about engaging the new world view, others do not share the same enthusiasm and so some wait in less than joyful hope for this new view to be grasped. In our congregations, we seem to be in a position of straddling world views. Meanwhile, we are living in the place to which we have moved in the renewal and adaptation we embraced as Vatican II mandate, and in the particular situation of our congregations. I present a snapshot view of where I see us, using the traditional tripod of the religious life: prayer, ministry and community as my focal points.

Prayer

By prayer, I refer not only to personal prayer, but to all the components that nourish our lives spiritually, including liturgy and the spiritual resources of our charisms. We are probably more authentic in our personal prayer than we once were and more diverse in our spirituality, both within congregations and between congregations. This diversity creates challenges and tensions for communal prayer which ideally would be a source of unity. We struggle with a variety of issues around Eucharist which can become more divisive than unifying in some circumstances. Charism seems to be the common spiritual resource to which most of us can adhere and refer to in discernment.

Ministry

The shift from institutional ministries to a variety of individual or smaller scale ministries is obvious. We are aware of our diminished visibility as a result of this

shift, as well as its implications for local community life, congregational identity and financial stability in some cases. We are also aware that some of these newer ministries have brought the light of the Gospel to places where it would not otherwise shine and may point to future directions.

An emerging trend in ministry is collaboration among congregations of similar charism, or international collaboration around particular issues such as human trafficking. Here in the Atlantic region, we have the Maritime Project, a collaboration of Sisters of Charity Federation congregations working to address homelessness and housing issues.

Community

I turn now to community. Beginning with the local level, we know that more of us are living singly or in twos, and fewer of us are living in community groups of three or more. While it is not the canonical norm, this reality does sometimes result in creative incarnations of community that may be indicators of future community patterns. Over all, what is this experience telling us?

What Next?

We face a reality that neither Vatican II nor ourselves would have predicted fifty years ago: the current average ages of many of our congregations. The viability of some religious institutes in Canada and elsewhere is a pressing question at this time and I feel it is urgent to ask the critical questions and have the pertinent conversations about it in our particular settings. This is not only to have security about the future, but primarily to discern how we may witness in diminishment and leave the best possible legacy.

As new life came from naming realities, may we courageously do the same now, in the hope that new life is possible for us, whatever shape it may take.

Loraine d'Entremont, sc

Consecrated Life and the Image of a Butterfly

Where is consecrated life in Canada going? Who are we called to be in the future? The summary of the day's conversations is framed along elements of transformation supported by the image of a butterfly: a symbol of transformation, resurrection and the butterfly effect.¹

Transformation Does Not Happen Suddenly

In biology, the term "instar" refers to the varied developmental stages through which arthropods move until they reach maturity. "The process of transformation consists mostly of decay and then of crisis."² Almost every member of a religious community has experienced the transformation of religious life in the echo of Vatican II. But, in the spirit of all life-forms, the moment has come for another "instar," another process of decay and crisis making possible another transformation.

One Can Actually Do Re-Visioning

Women and men religious can have the confidence to enter another transformation because transformation has always been central to religious life from the original. In the past fifty years the intense change occurred in every dimension of their lives. Now another instar is upon them.

Knowledge of the "Signs of the Times"

Each presenter emphasized the need to know the "signs of the times." Such signs are evident in society: demographic shifts, the role of women, the changing family, poverty, the attention to ecology, the impact of technology and social media, etc.

Identification of the Essentials

In broadest terms, there are three existing visions:

1. The non-elitist vision whose members reject religious life as an office of the Church and see the canon-

cal status of religious communities as a deterrent to growth.³

2. The apostolic vision which understands the fundamentals of religious life to be consecration by profession of the evangelical counsels through public vow within a particular religious institute wherein members exercise some external apostolic works with emphasis on common life and soundness of doctrine held and taught.⁴
3. The ministerial vision which imagines religious life as a charismatic life-form built on total, lifelong consecration to God to the exclusion of any other life commitment (perpetual profession), integration of contemplative life of personal and shared prayer with a whole-hearted commitment to full-time public ministry in service of the reign of God, community lived in mission (rather than in fixed abodes), consecrated celibacy, total personal economic interdependence (evangelical poverty), and prophetic obedience in mission.⁵

Sensitivity to the New Images Emerging

The emerging transformation is evident in new or renewed images: the new cosmology, right relationships, recognition of our complicity in the woundedness of people and Earth, participation of women in almost all dimensions of public life, social/ecological justice as an absolute pillar of faith, a new form of visible presence for congregations/institutes, use of theological reflection processes and acceptance of theology as contextual — God meets humans in this time and place.

We are invited to be co-creators with God, weaving the tapestry of the New Creation, a tapestry even richer and more beautiful than the old one was.

Elizabeth M. Davis, RSM

¹ Flowing from the new understandings of ecology, there is a belief in chaos theory that a small change at one place in a system can result in large differences in a later state — theoretically a hurricane can form because a distant butterfly flapped its wings several weeks earlier. The butterfly effect was so named by Edward Lorenz.

² Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006), 81-3.

³ Marie Chin, RSM, *Hunger for Right Relationships*, Presentation to the Congregation of Notre Dame Visitation Province in Halifax, Nova Scotia, July 2003.

⁴ Taken from the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Apostolic Visitation of the Religious Institutes of Women in the United States (December 2008). See www.apostolicvisitation.org/en/news/resources/InstrumentumLaboris.

⁵ Sandra Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, Paulist Press, 2013.