

## 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.

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## News Briefs

### Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life

The Year of Consecrated Life announced by Pope Francis will officially begin on November 30, 2014, the first Sunday of Advent.

It will end on February 2, 2016 on the occasion of the World Day for Consecrated Life. The Canadian Religious Conference has planned a series of activities to celebrate this special year. Here's a preview:



1. The CRC staff is preparing one-day meetings in various parts of Canada. Under the theme *Setting out to Meet the other ... the Other*, the activity will include moments of celebration, reflection and sharing among the participants. The dates and locations of the meetings will be announced in the upcoming weeks.
2. A section of the homepage of the CRC website ([www.crc-canada.org](http://www.crc-canada.org)) will be specially dedicated to the Year of Consecrated Life. It features news, video clips, a bibliography and articles on religious life.
3. The CRC's Theological Commission plans to develop a theological reflection on consecrated life in the perspective of interculturality in collaboration with theologians from different cultures and traditions.
4. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in collaboration with the CRC appointed a committee composed of two bishops, one French speaking sister and one English speaking religious priest, 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.

On the CRC's website, at <http://www.crc-canada.org/en/node/1432>, you will find the newsletter published by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, entitled *Be Glad!*

### JPIC National Gathering

The CRC is organizing another JPIC National Gathering. This event will gather from across Canada English-speaking women and men religious as well as their associates and collaborators in the pursuit of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The National Gathering will be held June 2-4, 2015 at the Mary Ward Centre of Loretto College in Toronto. The selected theme is: *All is One: Weaving a Single Cloth for Justice*. For more information and to register, please visit the English section of the CRC's website at: <http://www.crc-canada.org/in/node/1458>.



# The Challenge of RADICAL Welcoming of the OTHER

**T**he CRC 2014 General Assembly challenged us to intercultural living and summoned us to navigate cultural boundaries for the sake of mission in our world today. Fr. Anthony J. Gittins, CSSP, emphasizes that invitation to and inclusion of community members from cultures that are not our own are not enough for today; we must arrive at radical welcome of *the other* within our midst.

He points out that diversity, as important as it is, must go further, and that we must invite those from other cultures to bring their voice, their whole self, so as to engage in total mutual relationship.

This is not an easy task; the personal and communal transformation required does not happen without a profound commitment to deep personal change. In a way, to accept anything less is to put at risk the relevancy of religious life in a world evermore ruled by the effects of globalization.

Fr. Gittins forces us to consider intercultural living for the sake of the Gospel and goes on to suggest that our ongoing presence in the world—perhaps survival itself—may be dependent on it.

These are tough words to hear. Are they true? And do they apply to all of us?

## We Are Interconnected

Religious life is in a period of great transition. The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) sees this evolution at each successive general assembly as many of its participants address the challenges of aging and diminishment within their own congregations.

Why does it matter that we consider this question now at this point in our lives?

**First**, we need to view religious life from an overall perspective, the big picture. Religious life in Asia and Africa is growing at a fast pace, and new communities, although small, are emerging across the globe, including Canada. We are not separate from this. Religious men and women from around the world are part of one spiritual family. Just as the world is becoming interconnected, religious life, too, is experiencing this same interconnectedness.

Fr. Gittins' challenge makes sense to us because it reveals a deeper level of who we are as Church: a Church without borders where radical welcome of the other is constitutive of its very existence.

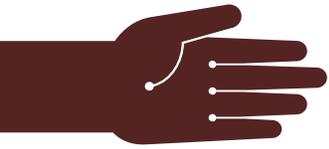
**Second**, we need to remember that religious life is an all-inclusive movement of the Spirit as we encounter Jesus in our midst. Jesus is the ultimate Other to whom we extend radical welcome. Intercultural living can happen in our cities, neighborhoods and ministries, regardless of our various ages and physical realities.

Again, Fr. Gittins' challenge makes sense to us because it forces us to encounter Jesus more intimately as we question our own views of the world and those around us. As religious, we stand in witness to Jesus as the ultimate Other.

The CRC is not exempt from this call. Accepting the challenge to intercultural living does not guarantee more members within our communities, but it is a doorway for all communities, large and small, international or not, to experience and understand the world, the Church, and the spirit of radical welcome at a new and profound level. It is a challenge to which we must say "yes." ❖

Sister Rita Larivée, SSA  
CRC President





# From Invitation to Radical Inclusion

At this year's CRC General Assembly an attempt was made to describe, justify and promote the topic "Intercultural Living," and to urge the members to embrace its potential and then to urge their respective communities to work to make it a reality.

## Faith, the Driving Force

Everyone present was either a member of an international faith community, or a minister in multicultural situations; but beyond both the international and the multicultural reality lies the ideal of "intercultural living." If *international* simply describes a situation in which people of different nations are involved, while *multicultural* adds and emphasizes a cultural rather than a national component, *intercultural* adds a specifically new component: faith. Faith may not be a factor in international or intercultural relations but is the explicit driving force and motivation of intercultural living.

Many religious orders and congregations are international and multicultural in fact, and yet many members often find that they are trying to coexist *despite* their differences rather than *with* them. Intercultural living becomes possible only when diverse people have a common and explicit faith reason (rather than simply practical or pragmatic reasons) for attempting to discover how personal transformation can lead both to mutual enrichment and the transformation of a whole community.

Relations between employees of multinational corporations may be perfectly civil and professional, without anyone needing to make a radical effort to learn from each other's culture or seriously to modify their own cultural behavior. Likewise, a person may live as a very proper and law-abiding citizen in a neighborhood or city where they come to daily contact with people of many cultures yet without ever becoming firm friends with any, or learning another language. But members of an international religious community share a common faith and a common vision and are committed to a common ministry inspired by their Christian faith. In this case, the prospect of intercultural living is one that, in recent decades particularly, has become an increasingly evident imperative in a globalized world.

In days gone by, religious communities might welcome new members, even from cultures different to their own predominant culture. This was done according to the assimilation model; people were effectively invited to join a pre-existing, well-established and proved community by learning its history, structures and practices, and becoming assimilated into it. The current membership might be most welcoming and hospitable, showing the newcomers how things were done and would be done, but the personal wishes and cultural traditions of the incoming person were of little or no account. If a person was deemed to be sufficiently able to assimilate to the community, all would be well. →



## From Assimilation to Inculturation

But in recent decades, and for several reasons, the “assimilation” model has proved to be “unfit for service” to church and believers.

**In the first place**, candidates from the dominant European and North American nations declined in numbers almost to extinction, while those from beyond increased almost exponentially.

**Second**, we became much more aware of the relationship between faith and culture: culture shapes the contours of faith, and without a cultural “language” to do so, faith cannot express itself in action. Therefore, people must be allowed and encouraged to live their faith through their own culture, and to force them into an alien cultural matrix is to constrain or do violence to the appropriate expression of their faith.

**Third**, Vatican II and the subsequent papal documents of Paul VI and John Paul II particularly, cried out for the development of authentic indigenous theologies and inculturated faith.

The upshot of these developments was a rather abrupt shift in the contours of international religious communities, so that as they became increasingly multicultural, so the numerical superiority of the dominant culture was greatly reduced. New members from beyond Europe and North America were also *cross-cultural*—either by leaving their own original cultures to minister across cultural boundaries, or by becoming assimilated into the dominant culture. At the same time, some members of the dominant cultures remained monocultural, while others, having ministered in the cultures from which new members were coming in increasing numbers, were themselves cross-cultural.

## The Emerging Challenge

Consequently, in recent decades, culture itself has become an increasing challenge to international religious communities. Either their members effectively live in enclaves of members of their own culture, or they attempt some token

modification of their habits—eating, dress, prayer, and so on—but without anyone feeling entirely at ease with, or committed to the resulting *modus vivendi*. The emerging challenge now faces everyone equally: to move away from the assimilationist model, and to commit to a new way of living, in which everyone, not simply those from minority cultures, accepts to work together to establish a *new kind of community*.

Intercultural living is expressed by people of different cultures coming together to build a new community, a new home in which everyone can find a place and yet no one is privileged above anyone else. Each person, in effect, leaves their primary or original home in order to come together and build a new home from the fabric of each person's life and culture. If four cultures are represented, then the members of an intercultural community will actually create a fifth culture, rather as a man and woman become husband and wife, then mother and father to several children, and together they build a home as an ongoing, organic process in which each person is being changed by the passage of time and the developing lives of everyone else.

Intercultural living is a dream that can be realized, with concerted effort to learn necessary skills and to be converted by God's grace. From *assimilation*, the community will be able to move to *mutual welcome* and ultimately to *radical inclusion*.

The CRC General Assembly presentations attempted to chart the passage through these stages by offering a map of the territory to be covered. The actual journey, and the choice of particular itineraries, will be a matter for the discernment of individual communities. ❖

Anthony J. Gittins, *cssp*, Ph. D.  
Emeritus Professor of Theology and Culture  
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA.

## INTERCULTURALITY AND INCULTURATION OF FAITH



Interculturality is of course a vast topic that is particularly relevant to us as religious serving in Canada and abroad. The concept however is hardly of recent vintage: In St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' sending of his disciples to the "ends of the earth" set the stage for innumerable intercultural encounters far removed from Christianity's Hellenistic and Palestinian roots.

### SEEKING TO "IN-CULTURATE" THE FAITH

While western Christianity matured in a European context, the Age of Discovery found missionaries accompanying explorers and their armies to Africa, Asia, and (at least from their perspective) the New World. While priests and religious transplanted somewhat uncritically the spirituality and practices of European Catholicism, there were always voices seeking to adapt the faith to new cultural realities being encountered.

These voices are well known to us: Matteo Ricci in China; Bartolomé de las Casas in New Spain; and Marie de l'Incarnation in New France to name just a few. They sought to "in-culturate" the faith first by translating the Scriptures and prayers into native languages, then by identifying elements in the new culture capable of bridging the gap between Christianity and the spiritual traditions being encountered. The methodology was not far removed from Paul's preaching to the skeptical Athenians at the Areopagus.

Theologians have debated the extent to which the Christian message can be extracted from its cultures of origin and transmission, and then inserted into new and different cultural *milieux*. The rather optimistic approach to enculturation embodied in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Nostrae Aetate*

gave way to something more cautious in Pope John Paul II's 1979 post-synodal exhortation *Catechesi tradendi*.

On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted [...] nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.

[*Catechesi tradendae*, 53; see also *Fides et Ratio*, 72]

### SHIFTS IN THE APPROACHES TO MISSION WORK

My own religious community, the Basilian Fathers, took up the challenge of mission work in Latin America at two different times with somewhat different approaches. Following the invitation to the Church from Pope John XXIII, our priests began work in an area of Mexico undergoing rapid urbanization. They saw themselves as missionaries and educators in the traditional sense of the term, attempting to move the population from a kind of cultural Catholicism to something more engaged and transformative.

Inspired by the invitation in *Gaudium et Spes* to read the signs of the times, there resulted a significant shift in both the content and methods of evangelization. This bore fruit both in Mexico and a generation later with a new community of Basilians ministering in Colombia. The latter experience was marked by a greater sensitivity to the cultural realities of Latin America in general

and a deeper awareness that the local Church was rooted in its own history. There was also a sense of reciprocity: anticipating the teaching of Pope Francis, North Americans discovered that prior to engaging in ministry, they needed first to be evangelized by the local Church.

The rapid inclusion of Colombian vocations in local communities also contributed to an important shift in attitude. The terminology also changed: One no longer spoke of *missionaries* but rather of North Americans and Latin Americans together sharing in a common *mission*.

## THE ASIAN EXPERIENCE

More recent theological reflection on missiology has been significantly impacted by the experience of the Catholic Church in Asia, where for the most part Christianity is a minority religion. In 1995 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger called into question the very notion of inculturation, in part because of the way religion is inextricably related to other elements of culture: "For this reason, we should no longer speak of inculturation but of the meeting of cultures, or interculturality, to coin a new phrase." [Joseph Ratzinger. "Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures" *Origins* 24:41 (March 30, 1995), 681]

So in the process of evangelization, when does (and should) inculturation give way to interculturality? The latter term suggests a greater respect for other religious traditions that in Asia are often as old as Christianity itself. The Asian experience has also seriously called into question the facile western distinction between religion and culture. Finally, Asian Catholic bishops have forcefully argued that in their context, evangelization is always dialogical: "The vision of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) for the Church in Asia is to be in triple dialogue—dialogue with the poor, with cultures and with religions." [Archbishop Orlando Quevedo OMI, Secretary General of the FABC, 2009. Cited in "Dialogue: Interpretive Key for the life of the Church in Asia." FABC Papers, No. 130]

## CONDITIONS OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The "dialogue of cultures" called for by Pope John Paul in *Catechesi tradendae* has given rise to important work by the Pontifical Council for Culture (which he founded in 1982) and the Congregation for Catholic Education. In a recent work by the latter, there is a valuable caution that dialogues should avoid an agenda that either relativizes all religious claims or assimilates one side of the dialogue to the other. In the absence of "metacultural critical judgement," no dialogue is possible.

Intercultural strategies function when they avoid separating individuals into autonomous and impermeable cultural spheres; they rather should promote encounter, dialogue and mutual transformation, so as to allow people to co-exist and deal with possible conflict.

[Congregation for Catholic Education: *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love*. Vatican City 2013. 27]

## MAIN GOAL

Finally, interculturality takes on a particular importance in the context of globalization. The explosion of social media coupled with the ever more rapid movement of capital and people across global markets has confirmed Thomas Friedman's basic dictum that the world is flat. Economic disparities between the west and the emerging economies of the third world exacerbate the challenge of proclaiming the Good News, particularly in countries where Christianity has historical associations with European colonialism.

Whether we identify the process as inculturation or interculturality, the goal remains the same: the organic development of a local Church that is truly Catholic and at the same time expressive of a local culture purified and transformed by the Gospel. ❖

Timothy Scott, CSB



## The Special Contribution of Contemplative Sisters within the CRC

In 2013 the Canadian Union of Contemplative Sisters (UCRC) joined the CRC forming a Committee within the Conference. The CRC's General Assembly held from May 29 to June 1, 2014 will go down in history as the first time Contemplative Sisters were both present and voting members.

Queen of Peace Monastery, a newly founded community of Dominican Contemplative nuns in Squamish BC, needs to develop links of communion and solidarity with other religious in Canada. We desire that you know about us and we sense that we are called to be a hidden part of your

mission through our life of prayer and monastic welcome. The Assembly was a rare opportunity to meet leaders of Congregations who represent thousands of religious who are giving their lives for the mission both in Canada and throughout the world.

### A Resurrection Moment

I had the grace to be assigned to the table of Sister Josephine Badali, CND. I knew she was the superior of Sister Gilberte Bussiere who had been kidnapped by suspected Boko Haram militants in Cameroon and had been missing for two months. She was perhaps the superior of Canada's newest martyr. One morning, before any general announcement, news spread like wildfire though the Assembly. She is alive! She's alive! Our Sister Gilberte had been released.

How could one not compare the experience with that of the disciples when they discovered He is alive! She is alive! A resurrection moment for all. Gratitude! Joy! It was a tangible passage of Jesus in our midst. Sister Josephine and the Congregation de Notre-Dame are indelibly inscribed in my heart and my prayer. This was a strong CRC experience for me.

### The Challenge of Becoming an Intercultural Community

The conferences of Father Gittins were very pertinent to our reality which is a microcosm of many congregations as well as the world today. Being that no one monastery had been strong enough to begin a foundation in Western Canada; volunteers came from various English speaking monasteries, principally from the USA. With new members joining us from Europe and sisters of Asian and African descent joining us via the US monasteries as well as the recent influx of vocations arriving from Canada, we are indeed a multicultural community attempting to become a radically welcoming intercultural community. →



Photo Credit: Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

Father Gittins, CSSP, articulated the internal dynamic of our multicultural community. We often subconsciously seek our comfort zones and try to reproduce the mono-cultures of our monasteries of origin when we are being challenged to build community that intentionally embraces sisters coming from other cultures. As we discover differences and put these assets 'in common' the Lord is indeed 'making all things new!'

### **Contemplative Prayer, a Powerful Gift**

Could the presence of the Committee of Contemplative Sisters in the CRC be a gift for our time? What would radical welcome look like? It could be as simple as a presence which brings a deeper consciousness of the truth that **contemplative prayer is powerfully apostolic and vitally urgent.**

Contemplatives have staked their whole lives on the folly of this teaching. Considering the great multitude of religious who are now confined to homes for the elderly, we perceive that they too could be a response, a gift, for our time. Their mission has not ended but could continue through the modality of prayer; simply abiding in Love. By faith, we know they will bear fruit. These religious, many of who feel poor and powerless, represent an incredible powerhouse of prayer.

More than ever, now is the time to push back the forces of destruction in our world through prayer. In the face of the world situation today, I hear Therese of Avila say; 'the world is on fire, it is not time to be occupied with things of little importance, so pray!' and the cry of Dominic resounds; O Lord, Have mercy on our world! ❖

*Sister Claire Marie Rolf, OP*  
*Queen of Peace Monastery*  
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## A Look at the Intercultural Reality of Jesuit Communities in Quebec

**A**t the last General Assembly, Father Anthony Gittins, CSSP, invited us to embark on a process of conversion based on a reality that our religious communities are currently living through, that of intercultural relations. As a result of his presentation, we have become more aware that diversity is an asset to our congregations, but only insofar as it leads us to a genuine reciprocity.

Intercultural living is certainly one of the dimensions that religious communities have to live with today, in synergy with a world in which international relations have become “signs of the times.” In this context, interculturality is one of the dimensions participating in the prophetic nature of consecrated life. How to create relations in which the other is recognized in all of his or her dignity in a world that may create people who are excluded? Leaving one’s father, mother

and family to join with others to form another family centred around a common project is certainly a challenge to live with on a daily basis. Even greater is the challenge that arises when these brothers and sisters who are given to us come from another culture!

### Is Internationality a Guarantor of Intercultural Living?

Several congregations have had an international character ever since their founding. But how is this internationality lived? Is the internationality of a congregation the guarantor of genuine interculturality? The Society of Jesus to which I belong has had an international character ever since its inception. The first companions gathered around Ignatius were aware that, as “the product of such different regions and cultures,” they had to consolidate what God had gathered together into a single body. Now present in 124 countries, the Society of Jesus continues to grow, especially in South Asia and Africa.

Although the international character of the Society of Jesus is not necessarily visible in every one of the communities or Provinces, the fact remains that Jesuits from a variety of cultures are called upon, either by their studies or by their work, to live in communities that are not necessarily of their own culture. The Province of French Canada and Haiti thus includes Canadian Jesuits and Haitian Jesuits, as well as others. Nearly half of Haitian Jesuits are currently studying outside of Haiti, including here in Quebec City and in Toronto. Moreover, Canadian Jesuits are in the process of uniting into a single Jesuit Province. We are already seeing, in addition to the challenge of language, different cultural approaches that we have to face.



## Prevalence of the Cross-Cultural Model

It seems to me that it would be wishful thinking to say that our communities, made up of Quebecers, Haitians and Jesuits of other nationalities, are living in a state of perfect intercultural living. If I look at how the situation is lived here in Quebec, it strikes me as being rather a trans-cultural or cross-cultural model. Whenever possible, everyone maintains their own lifestyle within a fairly permissive group in which everyone takes advantage of the situation without necessarily always committing themselves fully to it.

Before being a religious of the same congregation, we are first Quebecers, Africans and Haitians, and this relationship of national identity is a first challenge. Rather than becoming more fully aware of what unites us, we risk locking ourselves into a cultural and national identity where the other is “other” before being brother.

## Diversity of Relations and Their Tensions

One day, a young Haitian Jesuit told me: “For Haitians, the collective dimension is more important than the individual dimension.” It is true that solidarity is easily established between Haitians, so that even people who do not know one another quickly become close. Hence, young Haitian Jesuits quickly develop between themselves a very strong spirit of fellowship among peers. However, this solidarity may also have negative effects when, within a larger community, a small group of Haitian Jesuits form a nucleus that sticks together or, as when confronted with the face of authority, a companion might be inclined to cover his guilty compatriot.

The relationship of the individual with the group or community may also be subject to tension depending on whether one comes from a society that is more affected by a traditional culture or by a modern—or even post-modern—society. Does the individual develop his identity as a subject of his own existence or in reference to his family and the larger group? It seems to me pretty obvious that family ties in Haiti are much stronger than in North America since the family, in Haiti, often remains the primary factor of belonging.

The relationship to religion is also a factor that can lead to misunderstanding. It's one of the points we noted in our relationship between Francophone and Anglophone Jesuits in Canada. For me, accustomed to living in a secularized society, my religious reference points are different than those of my Haitian or English-Canadian Jesuit companions and I see also that my status as a priest or a religious doesn't have the same importance as in a society like Haiti's, in which priests, religious men and women are held in higher social esteem.

Finally, another challenge is making our own vision and our own values into universal criteria. There are certainly elements that reach the heart of every person, regardless of culture, but there are also elements that seem to us to be essential and which we do not question.

I like to repeat a true story told by Father René Fumoleau, Oblate missionary among the Dene people in northwestern Canada, who was preaching on the parable of the house built on rock. Since he did not know the Dene language, he was using a translator. After Mass, he remarked to his translator that the translator had spoken much longer than the preacher had. “Well, Father, you said that the sensible man built his house on rock and the foolish man built his on sand. Well, I repeated that, and then I said, “That is for the white people. For us, the sensible man is the one who pitches his tent in the sand because you can put the stakes in deeper than on rock. Plus, if he pitches his tent on rock, that's where the rain and the wind will be able to get a better hold on the tent to blow it down.” So, what seems obvious in one culture is not necessarily so in another. ❖

*Jean-Marc Biron, SJ*



# INTERCULTURALITY

## Challenges of Today... Way of the Gospel... Colour of our Future...

It is interesting to note how the Catholic Church—and especially consecrated life—has been able to cross frontiers, bring together diverse peoples in a common faith and even bring people from different countries, cultures and education under one roof to form community. These secular experiences, lived in the name of the Gospel, should make of us, for our world, experts on interculturality and internationality—in the worlds of Paul VI at the UN in 1965, “*experts on humanity.*”

However, to hear the concerns shared with us at the last CRC General Assembly, internationality and intercultural living remain significant challenges, even for congregations that have spread out over almost every continent and have men and women religious from different countries and cultures in their ranks.

Many do not consider themselves “international congregations,” since they are not “essentially missionaries,” and have difficulty conceiving their future together, “*those from here*” with “*those from somewhere else.*” Others, on the other hand, with a more or less diverse “membership,” are proud of their “internationality” and grasp the future with hope for the fruitfulness of their charism in migration, while recognizing the complexity of “*being congregation beyond all our frontiers.*” Hence the observation that “*...internationality does not just mean a physical presence in different countries of the world. We must all assume the*

*attitudes and characteristics that mark an international and multicultural congregation.*” (Aline Marie Steuer, csc)

### “EVERY CULTURE IS PLURAL”

Beyond internationality, intercultural relations introduce another level of complexity because every culture is diverse. Moreover, several cultures coexist within a same territory with greater or lesser difficulties of cohabitation. We have not all learned to “cultivate” our life in the same way.

The *Théâtre Parminou* troupe illustrated that very well at the CRC General Assembly. How does the original group—often the holder of decision-making power at all levels—manage to let go of its instinct of ownership and its tendency to entrench itself as the standard and to measure all cultures according to its own values? The history of colonization and evangelization reminds us of how difficult this adventure of living together is, even with our best intentions and good will.

Blessed Basil Moreau, when founding a congregation of Fathers, Brothers and Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1837, wanted to combine the efforts of the members of his religious family to meet the educational and evangelization needs of the France of his time. However, fairly quickly, he began to risk his sons and daughters out-

side their borders (in the United States, Canada, Bengal, Algeria, Poland, Italy, etc.).

In his Circular Letter 174 (1867), he urged them to expand their heart: *“Let us not limit our interests to the narrow confines of a particular house, a province, or our own country. This would be egoism and self-seeking. Rather let us be one with all our houses, and regard none as a stranger to the one in which we dwell.”* Today, Basil Moreau's ideal still challenges us, despite our assumed efforts to “think congregation, do congregation, live congregation... beyond all our frontiers.”

When, in 2005, the General Chapter elected the first Congregation Animator from a country in the Global South, Haiti, it was simply a question for chapter members to choose a sister that would be able to help the congregation embrace and live the orientation chosen for the next six years; we were all sisters equally responsible for the present and the future of the legacy bequeathed to all of us by Basil Moreau.

## INTERCULTURAL LIVING INITIATIVES

In our desire to be increasingly aware of living interculturality and internationality, and “to choose the rest of our history together,” several initiatives are enabling us to keep moving forward towards this ideal, all while knowing what it will require in terms of conversion and rooting of the God of Jesus Christ, God of inclusion and unconditional communion. Allow me to briefly introduce three of these initiatives.

**1. Interregional apostolic groupings** (formerly networks) have enabled sisters from different regions working in the same sector (education of children, of youth and young adults, of women, in pastoral work, in social justice and the environment, in art and creativity, and in mentoring) to “network” and help one another in their mission interest. Annual statutory meetings take the delegates to one or another country where the congregation is established and allow them to open themselves up to the “other” reality of each region and to “com-prehend” from what horizon of wealth and poverty, beauty and degradation, struggles and challenges come those they call “their sisters.”



- 2. The 2009 Forum** united the entire congregation for a two-year period around a common reflection on our new plural identity, under the theme: **One Heart, One Passion...** for “*putting our hands together for the work of resurrection,*” addressing the complexity of identity, diversity and communion; this approach was celebrated with a week-long meeting, open to all sisters, associates and lay missionaries who could make the trip.
- 3. The international novitiate** established in Peru enables younger members to get to know one another while learning to be exposed to another culture, to experience the reality of being both “stranger” and “sister,” to get used to “the different” and to experience the learning of one of the three languages adopted in Holy Cross.

However, the road is long and many questions remain. How can we truly identify with Jesus, the borderless Pilgrim, the Stranger become Friend, to build today culturally pluralistic and evangelically inclusive congregations, congregations that are prophets of “other relationships” at the heart of the very ambiguity of our globalized world? ❖

*Kesta Occident, csc*



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## Cultural Diversity, a Treasure to Celebrate

Hello, I'm Mother Pierre-Anne Mandato, Superior of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary. I'm originally from Italy and I have been living in Quebec since 1972; I did not know a word of French when I first arrived here. To properly situate interculturality within our community, we have to go back in time.

We have woven a genuine social fabric in Montreal North, particularly in terms of our health and education resources. This vibrant contribution to the people here would not have been possible without the efforts of a small group of women who came here from afar in 1949. Some ten-odd of them from Italy conceived and gradually realized the work of Marie-Clarac in Quebec.

### **Seven Cultures but One Community**

The recruiting of women religious in the 1950s and 1960s was also carried out by these women under the leadership of Mother Anselme-Marie Parisotto. You must understand that interculturalism is the basis of our whole

approach. This continues more than ever since here, on Gouin Boulevard, we are women religious from seven countries living under the same roof.

I find it so rewarding that I continue to allow young people from Latin America to come here to do their formation. Some of them return home to help local communities, but a good proportion of these new women religious stay here to support us in our many activities.

We are known for our energy, our dynamism and our avant-gardism, but none of that will ever come at the expense of our faith. Before the Lord, there can be no language barrier. We pray three times a day. We do a spiritual reading at the table and we devote ourselves to worship twice a week. I insist on a strict community life. All the sisters support one another, especially at those times. Taking advantage of your invitation to speak on this topic, I sought the opinion of those who share our daily life in Montreal North. ➔

## Testimonials

The first to recognize the merits of this approach was Sister Rosa. She had never thought about moving here until 2006. She smiled, recalling her journey. “Those who are just getting here really remind me of myself when I said yes to this community; at the time, I was living in the hinterland of Chile, an hour and a half outside of Santiago. Our faith is deep, living in the midst of Jesus. It’s the same charism. The Word of God is, after all, universal.”

These words were quickly supported by Sister Angelica, who was supposed to spend a year in Quebec. She is still here twenty-three years later. “Communication is certainly not a problem in our community. On the contrary, we inspire one another. Of course, fundamentally, each person lives her faith according to her own culture, her origins, but we inevitably add a flavour, a different colour. That’s what makes its beauty, its richness.”

## Getting Out of Comfort Zones

As Superior of the community, I really like what I see. It contrasts with the decorum that we have been accustomed to in Canada. It really does not bother me that our ceremonies are a bit different when it’s these young women’s turn to prepare them. If we ask them to get involved, we mustn’t be afraid to leave our comfort zones.

## Helping Each Other to Go Further

What raises more questions for me is the *populist side* of the faith when some of the postulants get here. In my view, the process has to be strengthened and deepened. If we compare previous decades, we see clearly that the young candidates have been subjected to too many outside influences, the Internet for example. We have to get back to basics and I am relying on our excellent formation directors to help them understand our apostolate.

To cover this issue, I thought I could give you the testimony of Sister Jacinthe, a nun from Montreal. Here is what she has noted:



“Over the past fifteen years there has been a clear opening-up to the world with all these new arrivals. I have been accompanying them a lot in recent months. It’s true, there is a bit of a shock about the food, the habits of various people. But that doesn’t last long. There are things that are more important, more profound. I love that we can actually sing and pray in different languages. It’s really an asset for me to listen to singing in Italian, English or Spanish. But it doesn’t stop there. It always leads to beautiful discussions, anecdotes, stories about what we have just experienced. We are privileged to experience some very important liturgical moments. In my case, it explains my whole journey about helping others to go further.”

## Intercultural Living, an Asset

I hope that after reading these words, you are able to understand the happiness inside me as the *Superior* of this beautiful religious community. You know, we live in a unique environment on the banks of the Rivière-des-Prairies. It surprises most of the girls who come here to prepare themselves for community life. I quickly tell them that our environment is magnificent, but that it has all been acquired through great sacrifices made by the women who preceded them and who also came from foreign countries. So, for me, for us, intercultural living is an asset in both our religious and professional life.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Canadian Religious Conference, which is celebrating its 60 years of existence. ❖

Mother Pierre-Anne Mandato, scsm

# Being Young and yet a Member of a Congregation Founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century

## A Symbol that Speaks to Me

An image comes to mind when I think about my situation as a young woman religious in a community founded more than 350 years ago. One day, while I was meditating, I saw the image of a tiny sailboat connected to a huge tall ship by a white thread. Two years ago, my co-novice Andrée and I took our first vows in the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, in Montreal, or, as we say familiarly, the CND. As a visual, we had selected two small sailboats heading out to sea, “propelled by the Spirit.” When I first chose the sailboats as a symbol, I wasn’t thinking about the meditation I had done. You’d say: that image haunts me! Well, I’d say you were right!

I want to share with you who I am—the *little sailboat*; who the CND is—the *tall ship*; what treasures are on board; and, above all, the wealth and depth of this mysterious link, this white thread connecting us!! The farther I go, despite the surging sea and sometimes violent winds, the more I realize how my involvement in the community is stimulating and full of hope.

## First, the Little Sailboat...

I come from a religious, but non-practicing, family. My parents had trouble with a religion that was too “constraining,” so they decided not to impose the same thing on us. They did, however, have us experience the sacraments. I had the joy of meeting Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist at 8 years old. At Villa Maria, my high school, I was entitled to a faith education thanks to the Sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame and also to my religious instruction teachers, who were excellent and made the material exciting. Later, in college (CEGEP), I chose the career of actor.

In 2004, when it was going fairly well professionally, everything got turned upside-down. I felt the urgent need to once again find my own way! I went to live for a time of solitude at the monastery of the Trappist Monks in Oka. There, after three days, in the heart of silence, I met Christ; or rather I met him again! A monk had suggested I read a book about Saint Therese the “Little Flower.” When I read: “*My vocation is love*” — what inspiration and what gratitude I felt within! That is what I aspired to as well: *To be love.* ➔



## Experiencing Mission Abroad

When this about-face happened, I was thirsty for truth, for authenticity. I also had a strong need for someone to help me in my walk in the footsteps of Christ. At a Taizé meeting in 2005, I made the acquaintance of a young CND sister, Marie de Lovinfosse. As I looked at her, I asked myself: is it possible to be young and also be a CND?! That was the moment when I reconnected with the Congregation.

Marie accompanied me in my quest for an answer to this call that I heard growing stronger and stronger within me. She also told me about “*Jeunes en visitation*,” a CND program enabling young women to live a mission experience abroad. I went to Cameroon for six months. There, I discovered that I had the missionary soul! I learned a lot from contact with the Cameroonian people, their lifestyle and their living faith.

## The Onward Journey

When I came back, I decided to take classes at the Institut de pastorale des Dominicains (the Dominicans’ Pastoral Institute). Years of part-time studies clarified the rest of my course for me. I made my request to become a postulant or candidate of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame in 2009. In 2010, canonical novitiate: courses at the inter-novitiate of Montreal, meetings with CND sisters to learn more about the community and its history.

In August 2012, I took my first vows. I had left port and had set sail out to open sea on my voyage, propelled by the breath of the Spirit. I admit that there were times when I lost my way, but fortunately there is this thread that connects me to the tall ship. The crew of the latter is confident and it has to be said there are some on board who have experience, even many years of experience!

## Let’s Talk about this Tall Ship...

For more than three centuries, in each generation, women have heard the call to live in the spirit of Marguerite Bourgeoys and to continue the same mission in the Congregation that she founded. This spirit, this charism of Visitation Pentecost is, in my opinion, a *sign of hope* for today’s world

in which every man, every woman tends to want to retreat into his or her own “business,” and religion. The spirituality of the Visitation is really appropriate for reflecting and acting on our way of doing Church today. Following in Mother Bourgeoys’s footsteps, by adopting the *journeyer* lifestyle, the sisters of the Congregation have to continue their mission of liberating education, especially in the context of the new evangelization in which we find ourselves.

## Openness to Difference

In 1659, Marguerite Bourgeoys recruited four women from France to form a community. Since then, they have been joined by women from Canada, the United States, Japan, Central America and, more recently, Cameroon, all women who wanted to follow in the footsteps of Mary, in the manner of Marguerite. The Congregation now numbers about 1,150 sisters.

I am currently living with a young Honduran, an English-Canadian and three Québécoise sisters. How is our life together a sign of hope? *Openness to difference*. Difference especially in terms of the rhythm of life—Sister Mariana is teaching me a lot about that. I still have so much to learn about not being in a rush, about taking the time to experience things one at a time, not to worry—“Don’t worry!” she often tells me. Learn to be grateful for the moment that we are simply living, have confidence in the future, let time take its course...

## The Intergenerational Dimension

The intergenerational aspect is another richness of our community experience. During my apostolic novitiate, I was telling a friend that I was living with two Sisters of close to 80 and 70 years of age. She said: “I don’t know how you do it!” I immediately replied: “But, it’s exciting! I learn so much from them and they from me! We are open to one another, we want to grow together; each contributes according to her abilities to the harmony of our togetherness, to the solidarity that we share with the poor.” ➔



Moreover, speaking with young women religious and religious friends, we realize how much we thirst to hear the stories of vocation of the members of our communities. When someone talks about the first time she felt the call, the original Breath of inspiration comes back to her and it even unites and drives us! Testimony about the experience of receiving the call is very important; it is a burning fire, full of enthusiasm. And that affects us as well! So, there is a trade: our youth stimulates them and vice versa. Our living together in love, isn't that also a "mission" in a society that is experiencing this intergenerational and intercultural reality?

### Participation of Lay People in the Mission

As soon as she arrived in Ville-Marie, Marguerite Bourgeoys lived and worked closely with other pioneer men and women. The Congregation is still currently practicing collaboration in many ways, but it has been especially enriched by the presence of approximately 900 associates, both men and women, found wherever CND sisters live. I see that as another sign of hope. Even though the Congregation is of an ancient tradition, it is also of its time. It took seriously the

changes proposed by Vatican II: make visible and proclaim the Good News of Salvation brought by Jesus Christ; get closer to the reality of people impoverished by life. The Associates, according to their state in life, are fully involved in the same mission.

### And that Thread: Sign of Communion, Unity, Closeness—What about it?

This thread that connects my little sailboat to the tall ship of the community, you will have guessed... it is Christ. I first attached myself to Him and the community came... through Him, with Him and in Him! Even though He tries me, He always gives me what is best. He is the great captain and Mary is never far away. And even today, He continues to call young people who are wondering about religious life in the CND. ❖

*Violaine Paradis, CND*

