

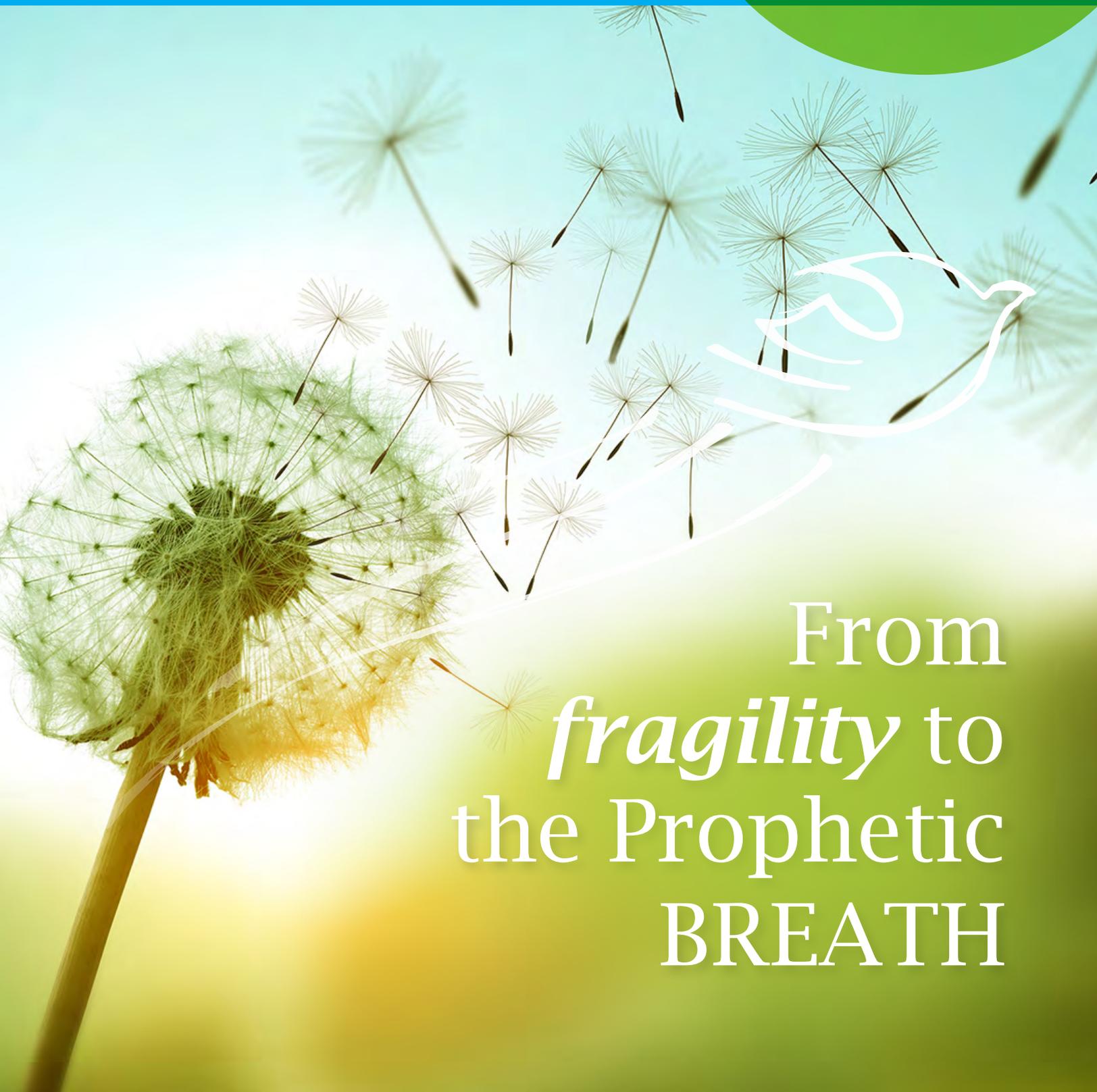


CANADIAN
RELIGIOUS
CONFERENCE

BULLETIN

THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION'S BULLETIN

VOL. 16, No. 1 • WINTER 2019



From
fragility to
the Prophetic
BREATH

In this Issue

3. From Fragility to the Prophetic Breath

The articles in this *Bulletin* focus on the fragility and limits we are experiencing in our Institutes and in the Church, and on the life opportunities that arise from these challenges. *Lorraine d'Entremont, sc*

4. The Charism: A Powerful and Fragile Breath

We depend on the breath that gave birth to us and the breath of the charism depends on us to liberate its prophetic power. *Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS*

6. Religious Life and the Journey of the Prophet Elijah

How can religious life live its prophetic vocation while embracing the limits and fragilities that it is facing? A rereading of the Elijah cycle. *Yvan Mathieu, sm*

8. Impetus of New Life and Dispossession

The experience of our ancestors in faith gives us reason to hope that a new life momentum could emerge from our current fragilities and dispossession. *Michel Proulx, o. PRAEM.*

10. With Christ, Becoming Eucharist

Invited to enter into the momentum of communion and the giving of self taught by Christ, we are asked to learn to become Eucharist ourselves. *Nathalie Roberge, OP*

12. Reflection on Authority in the Face of Abuse

The exercise of authority in the Church has deep roots in Christian tradition. The fact that authority sometimes dishonours itself does not change that reality. It brings out theological questions on the foundation of true authority. *Gill Goulding, CJ*

14. 'Marthas' Garden' — An Experience in Integral Ecology

An account of an initiative by the Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and the journey that led them to a gardening project unlike any other. *Lorraine d'Entremont, sc*, in collaboration with *Donna Brady, csm*, and *Amy Brierley*

16. Evolving into Newness

Small groups of Oblates are forming different kinds of relationships with the Benedictines of Nanaimo. This relationship is a gift that opens up the future. *Margaret Patricia Brady, oSB*

18. The MIC Sisters in China — How God Makes All Things New

The bridging of a missionary experience to God's perspectives. Discerning how God has made things new in the light of these three statements: *everything is connected, everything is given, everything is fragile.* *Celia Chua, MIC*

THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

Margaret Patricia Brady, oSB
Celia Chua, MIC
Lorraine d'Entremont, sc
Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS
Gill Goulding, CJ
Yvan Mathieu, sm
Michel Proulx, o. PRAEM.
Nathalie Roberge, OP

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Louise Stafford, FSP

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

CARON Communications
graphiques

CANADIAN RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE

2715, chemin de
la Côte-Sainte-Catherine,
Montreal, Quebec H3T 1B6
Tél. : 514 259-0856
info@crc-canada.org
www.crc-canada.org

These articles may be reproduced provided the name of the author and the source is clearly indicated.

Follow Us!



From *Fragility* to the Prophetic BREATH

| Lorraine d'Entremont, sc

Epiphany is approaching as this introduction is being written, so the image of guiding star arises. One could say that the guiding star for these articles was CRC's General Assembly 2018 as well as further reflection of the Theological Commission on the presentations and conversations of the Assembly.

Elena Lasida, assembly keynote presenter, summarized the guiding principles of *Laudato Si'* as: *everything is connected, everything is given and everything is fragile*. Our reflection as a commission moved us to focus on the fragility and limits we experience in our congregations and church today, and the possibilities for new life when faced with these challenges.

Reclaiming Our Charism

In "Charism: A Powerful and Fragile Breath," **Gaétane Guillemette** asks if we may have diluted our understanding of charism by equating it with our congregation's particular expression of spirituality, or the characteristic ministries of our congregations. Could reclaiming our charism as an experience of the Spirit, ever fresh, ongoing and revitalizing, give greater cohesion to our religious life, and strengthen its prophetic stance in our time?

Biblical Insights

Our biblical scholars chose to reflect on stories from scripture to shed light on the experience of limits and fragility. **Yvan Mathieu** probes the spiritual journey of the prophet Elijah in Kings 1, and sees significant parallels with our current experience in religious life. **Michel Proulx** reflects on the Babylonian exile as a time of great fragility and testing of limits for the people of the Covenant, who move through discouragement to find creative ways to remain faithful to their God and celebrate their faith.

Breaking the Bread for Others

In "With Christ, Becoming Eucharist," **Nathalie Roberge** reminds us of Pope Francis' call to revisit the Paschal mystery of Christ, who, in his moment of ultimate suffering, was creative and loving to the end. At the heart of our own reality, we live our unique paschal journey to become Eucharist ourselves, to break bread for those around us, and for the world.

Foundation of True Authority

As we experience fragility and limits within our Church regarding abuse of power and authority, **Gill Goulding** offers a theological reflection on the foundation and exercise of authority, that invites us to examine the understanding and exercise of authority and power within our congregations.

Inspiring Stories

Our last three articles are stories from the scriptures of life, stories of creative response to challenges. In "Marthas' Garden, an Experience in Integral Ecology," **Lorraine d'Entremont** tells the story of the 'New Growers', an agricultural project of the Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, NS, and the congregational journey toward integral ecology that led to the project. In her article, **Patricia Brady** describes the evolving relationship between the Benedictines of Nanaimo, BC, and their Oblates as a passing on of the spirit of Saint Benedict, and creative of new life. **Celia Chua** finds hope and an invitation 'to go beyond and leave behind ...mental and spiritual limitations,' in her congregations' missionary experience in China.

We hope our offerings will be glimmers of light in your night sky, inviting you to shine your own small or great star, so that the brighter light of Christ may illumine the world with hope. ■

The Charism: A POWERFUL and FRAGILE Breath

Gaétane Guillemette, NDPS
gaetane.guillemette@gmail.com

As consecrated persons, we recognize that the Spirit arouses different charisms for the life and mission of the Church. Our founders experienced the Spirit and they received a founding charism; a charism bearing the Breath of the Spirit, which we live out, one to which we bear witness and for which we are responsible to update and bring to fruition in favour of the people of God. That is what *Mutuae Relationes*¹ reminds us in Section 11.

“The charism of the Founders” is revealed as an “experience of the Spirit” transmitted to their disciples, to be lived by them, **kept, deepened, constantly developed** in harmony with the Body of Christ in perpetual growth.”

Might it be possible for us to get too used to this vital impulse that moves the institute, to take it for granted or to immobilize it and lose that creative breath that ceaselessly calls for “creating something new?”

That is a question that opens us up to reflection on the subject of the charism as Breath of the Spirit, powerful and fragile.

Powerful Breath

To speak of the charism of an institute of consecrated life is to remind us that in the beginning there is the Spirit and that the Spirit blows where it wills. Author and inspirer of charisms, the Spirit spreads its gifts and attributes to those men and women that the Spirit calls; those with the capacity to welcome the unexpected, to communicate the breath and to take the road with Christ in service to the Church and suffering humanity.

¹ Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Mutuae Relationes, Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church, 1978.*



Arrival of Marguerite Bourgeoys in Ville-Marie, (Montreal), New France (Quebec), 1653
– Illustration: Francis Back
– Photo: Bernard Dubois
© Musée Marguerite-Bourgeoys

Published in the
*Theological Commission's
Bulletin, Volume 14,
Issue 1 - Winter 2017*

This powerful and invigorating breath impregnated the heart of the founders, made them go through fire in order to carry out the mission that God confided to them. As a result, disciples gathered around them. As witnesses of the original charism, they experienced the breath that inspired the founders and they contributed to its development once the founders were no longer with them. The community was born and flourished.

However, it must be remembered, the community lives from the creative breath that animates the charism as well as the existence of those who receive and welcome it. The charism comes from Another. It does not belong to us. The breath of the charism is a gift that needs to be recognized, nurtured and brought to the world to cross the barriers of time, culture and place.

There is a grace of communion in the Spirit, in whom everything is connected. The charism establishes us in a relationship of incarnation through our being, our action, our word, all of which is in conformity with the gift received. It is a source of belonging and covenant. It keeps us interdependent with our brothers and sisters and with creation.

It calls us to live in covenant with God and to cooperate with Him in the salvation of humanity. Powerful breath, the charism takes us beyond borders and off beaten paths in an ever-enduring adaptability to the reality of the people of God on the move.

Fragile Breath

At the same time, this gift entrusted to us can be weakened in its deployment. Unable to be fixed in time, the charism is creator of life and must circulate. “The **constant** return to the sources and to the original spirit,” of which *Perfectae caritatis* (n. 2) speaks, implies a sustained and inventive fidelity. As an apostolic body and as a member of this body, we are responsible for developing this gift and updating it through our response to the signs of the times.

The breath of the charism lives in us. It depends on us. There are two inherent dangers that pose a risk to the charism. One is that members of the apostolic body become too used to it; the breath of the charism becomes something static and is in danger of being smothered. Another trap is that of wanting to appropriate it and make the project of God our own project. When this happens, we may ultimately lose the breath and be tempted to arrest the development of this gift.

Some institutes of consecrated life are currently at their “end of life” stage. There are various sociological, religious and community factors that have led to the crisis we are experiencing. Is it possible however, that through our efforts of renewal, we may have underestimated the vital importance of the charism for the institute’s life and future?

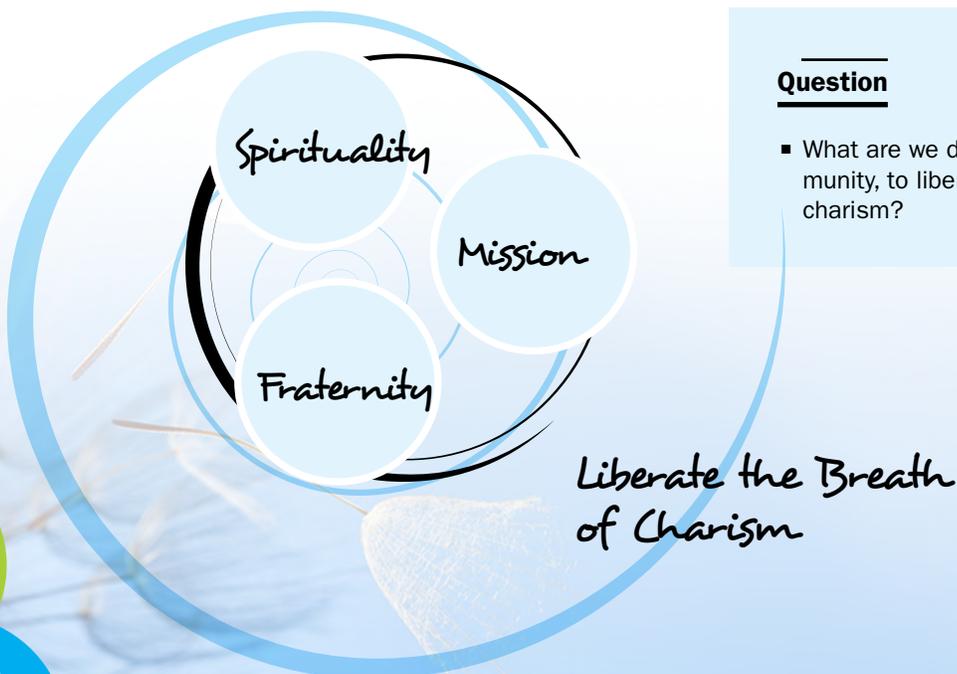
How is the charism taken into account in the initial formation? How does it integrate all aspects of our religious life: spirituality, fraternity, mission, vows, governance, formation? Is it possible that we are suffering from a weak expression that prevents the prophetic breath of the charism from pronouncing itself, in today’s world, through our being and acting?

Of course, it was not easy to grasp the meaning and scope of the charism of our institutes. It has sometimes been confused with mission or spirituality. The charism cannot be assimilated into one or another of its components: spirituality, fraternity and mission. These three components are interdependent and mutually animate or drive one another. They form a whole that marks our identity and our history.

Liberate the Breath

Have we run out of breath along the way? Even if this is so, there is still time to liberate the breath and make us aware of the strength of the charism as a place of spiritual, personal, community and apostolic growth. We are depending on the breath that led to our birth and the breath of the charism is depending on us to liberate its prophetic power.

As an institute and body in relationship, we have to rediscover the charism as breath never stops creating bonds of solidarity. We have to start again from the breath of the relationship with God and humanity that is revealed in the charism. We have to continually welcome this breath, to live it, deploy it and transmit it. ■



Question

- What are we doing, personally and as a community, to liberate the breath of our institute’s charism?

Religious Life and the Journey of the Prophet Elijah

Yvan Mathieu, SM
ymathieu@ustpaul.ca

How can the religious life of today live its prophetic vocation while embracing the limits and the fragility with which it is confronted? A rereading of the cycle of Elijah the prophet can help us become bearers of the Good News.

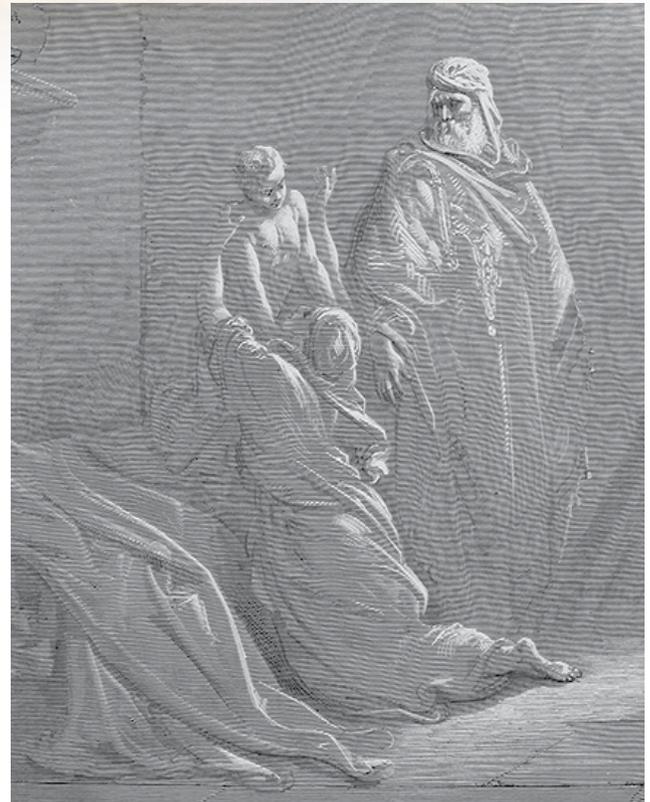
A Powerful Prophet

Elijah arises without warning in chapter 17 of the first Book of Kings: “Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab...” (1 Kings 17:1) His ministry begins in a troubled time. King Ahab, to whom Elijah speaks, “did what is displeasing to Yahweh, and was worse than all his predecessors.” (16:30)

This is very similar to the founding of many of our religious communities, which came into being during or after a time of crisis. In this case, Elijah begins his ministry with power: “By the life of Yahweh, God of Israel, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain these coming years unless I give the word.” (17:1) Although he is called “prophet,” there is nothing to indicate that the Lord spoke to him and ordered him to declare a drought. Yet the Lord obeys him. The drought occurs.

A Prophet Protected by the Lord

Twice, the Lord acts to save the life of Elijah. First, he sends him to the torrent of Cherith where the “ravens brought him bread in the morning and meat in the evening, and he quenched his thirst in the stream.” (17:6) Once the stream had dried up, the Lord sends Elijah to Zarephath: “Up and go to Zarephath in Sidonia, and stay there. I have ordered a widow there to give you food.” (17:9)



The blessings of the Lord also extend to those who help the prophet. The widow and her son can eat with Elijah. Yet “the son of the mistress of the house fell sick; his illness was so severe that in the end he expired.” (17:17) The prophet then took the child and prayed over him. “Yahweh heard Elijah’s prayer and the child’s soul came back into his body and he revived. Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. ‘Look,’ Elijah said, ‘your son is alive.’” (17:22-23) The blessings of the Lord are not limited to the prophet.



A Prophet Who Manifests the Power of God

A new mission awaits the prophet: “The word of Yahweh came to Elijah in the third year, ‘Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the country’.” (18:1) This time, it is God who has the initiative and Elijah obeys.

Like us, Elijah faces the disbelief and indifference of his people. When confronting “the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table” (18:19)¹ on Mount Carmel, he

Questions

- How does our life testify to the power of God? Is it through fire or a light breeze?
- Like Elijah, our communities have gone from an era of power to an era of weakness bordering on death. What path does Elijah’s experience map out for us?
- Like Elijah, we sometimes have the impression of being alone. Yet God sends him to anoint another prophet. He is not alone and neither are we! What concrete collaborations are possible between and among our communities?

says, “How long do you mean to hobble first on one leg then on the other? If Yahweh is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him.” (18:21) And to convince them, he manifests the power of God. He brings down fire from the sky. “When all the people saw this they fell on their faces. ‘Yahweh is God,’ they cried, ‘Yahweh is God!’ Elijah said, ‘Seize the prophets of Baal: do not let one of them escape.’ They seized them, and Elijah took them down to the wadi Kishon, and he slaughtered them there.” (18:39-40) This is an act of power—of murderous power!

A Prophet Whose Life Is Threatened

Elijah pays dearly for this show of strength. His life is threatened and he makes a pilgrimage to the sources. On his way to Horeb, he asks for death (19:4). Arriving at the place of the Covenant, twice he said to the Lord, “The Israelites have abandoned your covenant, torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me.” (19:10, 14)

Like us, he experiences his limits and his weaknesses. At the heart of this experience, the Lord reveals His true face. God is not in a hurricane, earthquake or fire. He manifests himself as “a light murmuring sound.” (19:12) He invites Elijah to leave his solitude: “You must anoint Elisha ... as a prophet.” (19:16)

Finding the Path of Hope

What is the connection between Elijah’s experience and our own? Like him, our communities have often arisen in times of crisis. Like him, we believed in the power of God and our service has made us bearers of a power that our contemporaries constantly begrudge us. Like Elijah, since the Council, we too are returning to our origins, to our founding charism. This return however, has not always yielded the expected fruits. So that, like Elijah, we are confronted with our solitude.

The prophet’s spiritual journey invites us to not shut ourselves away or turn inwards on ourselves. By rediscovering the murmuring sound or light breeze of God’s presence, the source of our vocation, we will be able to pick ourselves back up and bring the Good News to others; inviting them to listen to God who softly calls. ■

¹ *Translator’s note:* Passage translated from the French. In *The New Jerusalem Bible*, the same verse says simply “the four hundred prophets of Baal who eat at Jezebel’s table” with no mention of Asherah; other English-language versions of the Bible do speak of Asherah while still others speak of “prophets of the grove.”

An Impetus of New Life and Dispossession

Michel Proulx, O. PRAEM.
michel.proulx@ipastorale.ca

In 587 BC, the people of the Covenant lived through tragic events. After a siege of more than a year, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and his army succeeded in penetrating Jerusalem. They pillaged and destroyed the temple of Jerusalem and set fire to part of the holy city.

The population was subjected to all sorts of violence: many men were killed, women were raped, and children were slaughtered. King Zedekiah, a descendant of David, was captured and, after his sons' throats were slit in front of him, his eyes were gouged out. Finally, in order to prevent any possibility of the nation's resurgence, a significant part of the population—particularly its political leaders and religious elites—was deported to Babylon.

The Experience of Dispossession

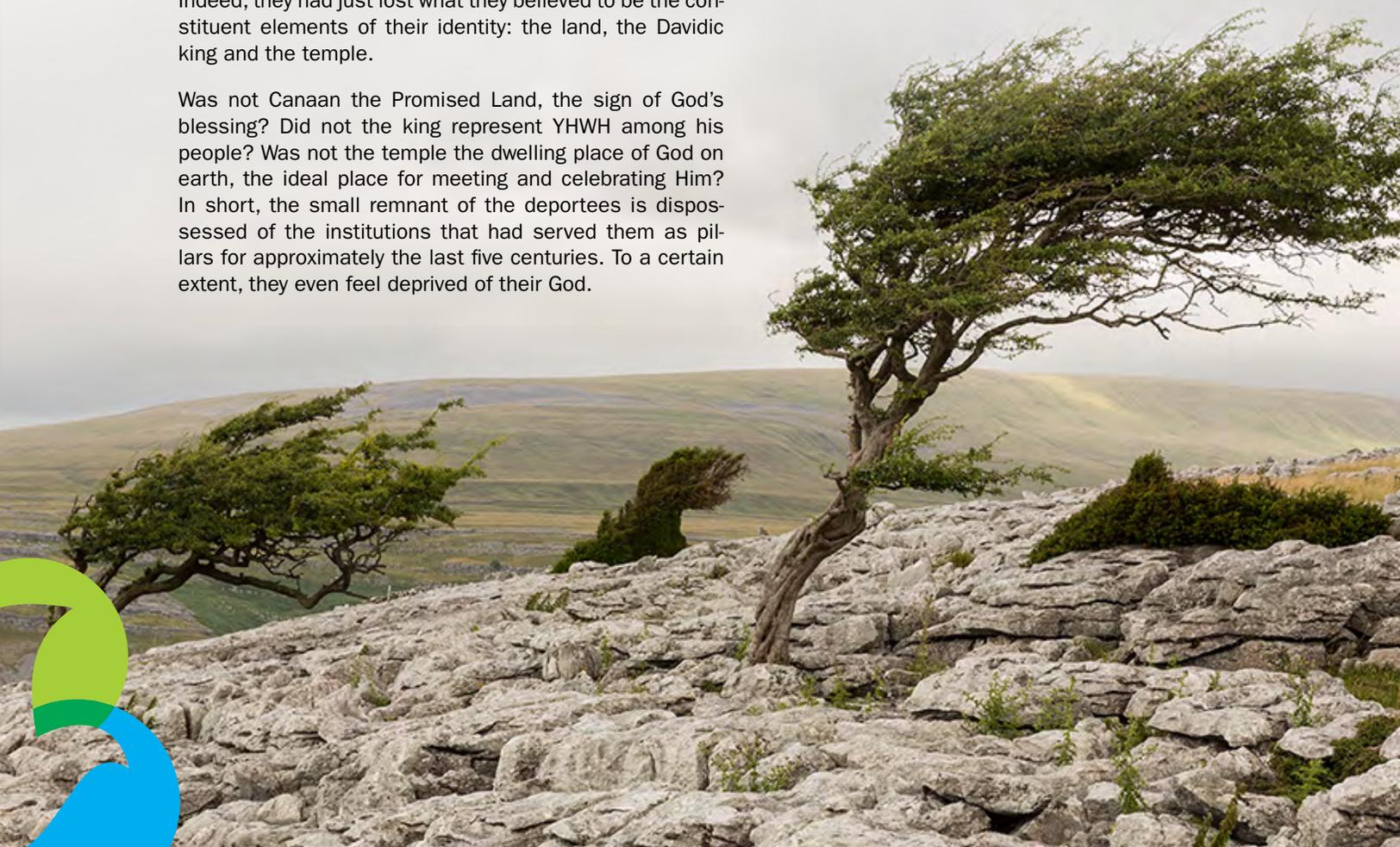
From a human perspective, this catastrophe seemed to sound the death knell of the people of the Covenant. Indeed, they had just lost what they believed to be the constituent elements of their identity: the land, the Davidic king and the temple.

Was not Canaan the Promised Land, the sign of God's blessing? Did not the king represent YHWH among his people? Was not the temple the dwelling place of God on earth, the ideal place for meeting and celebrating Him? In short, the small remnant of the deportees is dispossessed of the institutions that had served them as pillars for approximately the last five centuries. To a certain extent, they even feel deprived of their God.

At that time, YHWH was seen as a national God with jurisdiction over a given territory, outside of which he could not act. That is the theology reflected in Psalm 137 (136): "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept. . . . How could we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (vv. 1, 4)

At first, the exiles do not see any possible future. Completely discouraged, they are no longer able to hope for better days. They say to themselves, "Our bones are dry, our hope is gone, we are done for." (Ez 37:11)

We can understand that the people are going through the worst crisis in their history. For many of them, it is clear that this is the end. They see themselves as a people doomed to extinction. Echoing what he hears around him, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of the dead closed up in their graves (Ez 37:12-13). Certainly, the sons of Israel are in a situation of great vulnerability. They are experiencing fragility and they are reaching the end of their tether.



Parallels with Current Religious Life

This is not completely without parallel to what is happening in religious life in Canada. Our congregations and our communities are also increasingly reduced to their simplest form. This movement of stripping away, of dispossession, is not yet over. Because of our reduction in members, many of our institutions can no longer function as before. Identity landmarks on which we had been accustomed to supporting ourselves are shaken.

Religious life has also entered a crisis phase. Many institutes are on the road to disappearance. Some of our members are suffering in their hopes and wondering if religious life is not in its death throes. Whatever the case, we must recognize that our congregations have not experienced such fragility for a long time.

It is instructive to look into what happened to the deportees in Babylonia. Surprisingly, the people of the Covenant did not disappear. The dispossession and the crisis experienced led them to look at their history and to revisit their oldest traditions. They went back to their sources. This allowed them to discover that what they had lost was not the hard core of their identity. Thus, they discovered that they were still in possession of the essential.

The Lessons of History

On the basis of this awareness, the people of Israel went boldly off the beaten track. Supported by the preaching of prophets like Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah (Is 40–55), with the help of priests and Deuteronomists (a group of secular intellectuals), the deportees were able to demonstrate great creativity rather than clinging desperately to a past.

They provided themselves with new ways to celebrate their faith and remain faithful to the God of the Covenant. For example, the practice of a weekly Sabbath, a ritual celebrated without the need of a temple, began in this epoch. It was also during this period that Judaism began to focus more on listening to the Word than on offering sacrifices.

We note that the experience of dispossession and fragility was the source of a great spurt of new life. Could it not be said that the tragedy of deportation became a time of grace? In fact, it contributed to a tremendous revival of



[...] Judaism began to focus more on listening to the Word than on offering sacrifices.

Israel's theology and worship practices. Not to mention that the people of the Covenant did not disappear as had been feared. They are still quite alive 2500 years later!

Does not the experience of our ancestors in faith give us reason to hope that a new impetus of life could emerge from our present-day dispossession and fragility? Are we not seeing the appearance of signs, especially through the current upsurge of a considerable number of affiliates/associates in our communities, but also through an unprecedented collaboration among our Institutes? It is a safe bet that our God of life has other surprises in store for us. Keep your eyes open and let us remain available to his movements! ■

Continuing the Reflection:

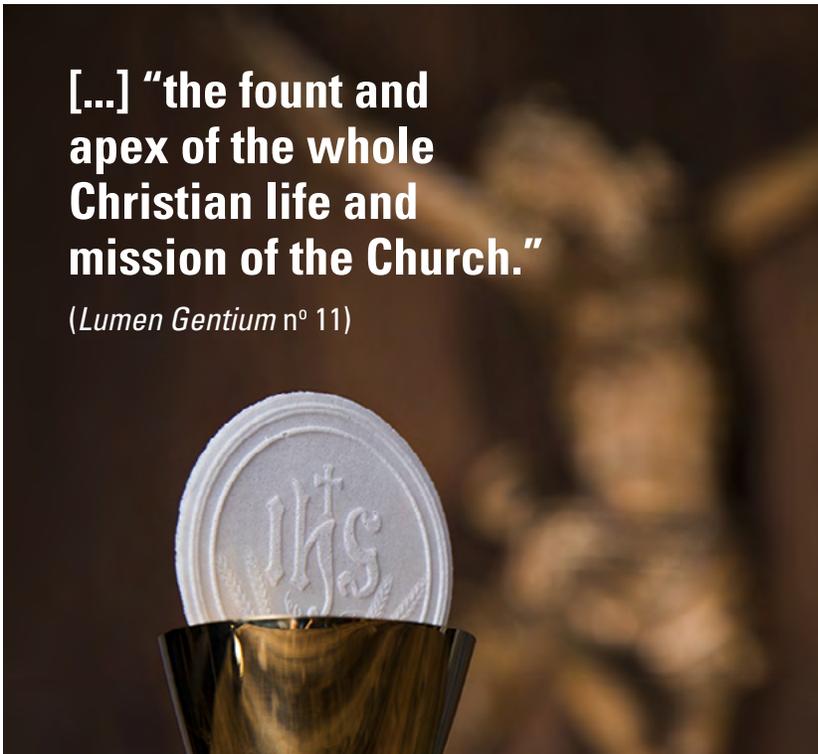
- Under what conditions could our fragilities become an impetus of new life?
- Has our community ever experienced that a downturn of fortunes or a fragility has given rise to new life? If so, go back and meditate on this experience.

With Christ, Becoming EUCHARIST

Nathalie Roberge, OP
sisternath@hotmail.com

[...] “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life and mission of the Church.”

(Lumen Gentium n° 11)



In his recent Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Rejoice and Be Glad (Gaudete et exsultate)*, Pope Francis recalled that “A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness.” (19) As he explains, “That mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him.” (20)

At a time when the Church and our religious communities are facing considerable challenges, Pope Francis is inviting us to revisit the paschal mystery of Christ, so that it increasingly becomes the underlying force of our daily lives. Indeed, fixing our gaze on what was the summit of the earthly existence of the Saviour can only reinvigorate our walk in his steps and keep alive the hope in our hearts.

An Extraordinary Dynamism of Creation

It is fascinating to take note of the extent to which the Christ Jesus—even when faced with the threshold of his death looming on the horizon—is outstretched towards life. One discovers him turned towards the Father in a surge of profound communion. Certainly, the attitude of confidence that animates him does not prevent him from experiencing in his very being the trouble, the misunderstanding and even the sadness with regard to the dramatic situation in which he is immersed—in that, he is in undeniable proximity to us. However, this test of his approaching death does not lead to simple fatalism, or even resignation.

The impasse with which he is confronted leads him to freely give his life to the end (Jn 10:18). More than that, it creates in him an extraordinary dynamism of creation. For it must be noted

that it is in this reality—far from the Hollywood ideal—that Christ invents the Eucharist!

Loving to the End

The fourth Gospel reminds us that on the night of the Last Supper, Christ Jesus went “all the way to the end” of love. What exactly does it mean to go to the end of love for the one who, in his being, is both man and God? If the cross tells us about the life given until its very last breath, the Eucharist becomes a sign of a love that has neither border nor end.

Through this sacrament, Christ materializes his desire to abide with us, in the ever-present act of the total gift of his life. He is Body given up for us and Blood poured into the world of today. This testifies to how important the sacrament of the Eucharist is for our life as baptized. We understand why the Second Vatican Council reminded us that the Eucharist is “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life and mission of the Church.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5)

This act of creation that Christ carries out on Holy Thursday, under the influence of the Spirit, can only be fully grasped in a dynamism of covenant and mission. By this gesture, Christ gives witness to both the intimacy that binds him to the Father—indeed, to the whole Trinity—and to his desire to take up into it the whole of humanity. For Christ, loving to the end therefore means having us participate or share in him, in the abundance of life, which is that of the Trinity. That is true salvation.

Living in Union with Christ

By the grace of our baptism, from which our religious consecration flows, we are invited to enter into this impulse throughout the seasons of our lives. It is this impulse of trust, of communion, of giving of oneself and of creation that Christ teaches us. At the heart of the reality that is ours, we are asked to learn to become Eucharist ourselves.



To do that, there is no other secret than to listen to the Holy Spirit, through everyday events, who teaches us how to break the bread of our life for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. Even the crumbs that we often have to offer can be life giving when they are united with the offering of Christ. In short, it is a question of rediscovering the greatness of our baptismal ministry.

As Pope Francis points out, everything that is lived and offered in union with Christ is “mysteriously fruitful.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 280) From the humblest smile to the most engaging missionary projects, from the acceptance of our limits to the effort to offer a quality of presence to our neighbour—everything can contribute to revealing the love of God in action for today. Everything can invite you to live off this love and get ready to do your work.

On this path of configuration to Christ, let us not get trapped in what Paul Murray calls “the vice of being too sober.”¹ Let us dare an excess of love, knowing that in Christ there is “hope which will not let us down...” (Rom 5:5) In that respect, the Virgin Mary is a luminous model for us. Following in the footsteps of her Son, she is the first

to have embarked on this path of total self-giving in anticipation of the unprecedented promise that God has made. May she help us, in our paschal mystery, to make our life an act of Eucharistic creation. ■

Questions for Going from Reading to Living

- To which dynamism of creation does the Holy Spirit challenge us as a community?
- How can I make more of my daily life a Eucharist?
- Loving to the end; what does it mean for me at this point in time?
- What biblical text inspires and stimulates the gift of myself?

¹ Paul Murray, *Le vin nouveau de la spiritualité dominicaine. Un nectar nommé bonheur*, Paris, Salvator, 2017, p. 177 (*The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality. A Drink Called Happiness*).

Reflection on AUTHORITY in the Face of Abuse

Gill Goulding, CJ
gill.goulding@utoronto.ca

“Abuse in all forms: sexual, verbal, emotional, or any inappropriate use of power within a relationship, diminishes the dignity and healthy development of the person who is victimized.”

This statement was issued November 23, 2018 by the Union of International Superiors General (UISG). It was a prophetic stand expressing “deep sorrow and indignation over the pattern of abuse that is prevalent within the church and society today.”

There are many instances of the abuse of power and authority other than physical and sexual ones. For the most part, these abuses are not illegal and therefore do not lead to criminal charges. Yet in the way the church understands itself these are no less wrong or sinful and impede the church’s unique mission to the world. They dim the light the church is called to be as an authentic witness to faith and charity in the darkness of exploitation, injustice and the violation of human dignity.

Let me be clear. There is an honorable exercise of authority within the church found deep within the Christian tradition. The fact that authority is sometimes dishonored does not negate that reality. It highlights rather some key theological issues concerning the way authority is exercised and the use and abuse of power.

It challenges us to a theological reflection upon such issues recalling the foundation of true authority; the example of authority given by Christ; the importance of dialogue as an expression of authority and the witness of authority, which might lead to communities of discourse for missionary disciples.

The Foundation of True Authority in Intimacy with God

As Christians we share the conviction that the Spirit of God, the author of both plurality and unity, continues to work in our world; inspiring diversity and multiplicity while at the same time creating unity; forming ever anew a diverse and unified people in the universal church.



The desire of our Trinitarian God for a deep relationship with human persons is mirrored in our own human need to relate in depth to one another. This call to intimate relationship with God and with one another is a life-giving word of hope for ourselves, and all with whom we come into contact.

But hope is no easy option. Hope is a double-edged sword. It offers eternal life secure in a loving God; at the same time, it jerks the rug of false security from beneath our feet. It begins in disorientation, often in the face of the collapse of all that is familiar, but it is God’s word of hope that speaks within the half-light of our uncertainty.

A word of hope born in the eager desire of God to share our vulnerability through the Incarnation. A word that finds its fullest expression in the weak gestures of love from a man dying upon a cross in the paschal mystery. A word sustained in our daily recognition of God’s presence among us, nourished by sacramental life and the trajectory of our lives towards the fullness of Trinitarian life.

How are we open to this life-giving word of hope in our communities?



The Centrality and Exemplarity of Christ for All Authority

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel.”¹

Here we have the supreme example of the exercise of authentic authority as service in the way Jesus taught his disciples. Rooted in the profundity of his relationship with the Father Jesus was always reaching out to his disciples and beyond them to serve the poorest and most forgotten.

It is essential that those in leadership are those who have seen the Lord. “If our vision does not witness to having seen Jesus, then the words with which we recall him will be rhetorical and empty figures of speech.”² From this ongoing prayerful encounter with Jesus, there comes the imperative for dialogue with others.

How are we helping to sustain personal encounter with Christ in our communities?

¹ John 13:3-5

² Pope Francis address to the Bishops of Mexico February 13, 2016. This was also quoted by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* Apostolic Exhortation, November 24th 2013, 8.

Dialogue as the Expression of Authority

Fundamental to all dialogue is the call made present in Christ himself, the Word of God in whom God initiates the dialogue. It is this Christ-centred perspective that we must explore further, as it is the primary basis upon which all dialogue stands and to which all dialogue ultimately refers.

Such a Christ-centred perspective also implies that we enter the domain of conversation with a recognition that we are all in need of ongoing conversion to Christ. Accordingly, such a stance should pre-empt the possibilities of arrogance or dominance and facilitate a dialogue that is marked by courtesy, humility and compassion in a common search for truth and reconciliation.

In the attentive listening that forms a key dimension of such dialogue there will be an ongoing reverence of the good in the other(s) to whom we attend.

What characteristics mark the dialogue in our communities?

A Community of Discourse — the Witness of Authority

Christianity when well lived is attractive. It is this witness value that lies at the heart of both proclamation and daily living. Those who exercise authority – and many of us do so both within communities, as educators or professionals of some other form, or through the wisdom of seniority – are challenged to exercise that authority for the well-being of others.

A series of questions to explore in our communities might be helpful. Have we lost a sense of ourselves as ‘kin’ as the people of God ontologically united as the Body of Christ? Is this moment of the Church’s most profound humiliation a radical call and opportunity to an openness and deep purification that we might become once more authentic witnesses to the one we proclaim as head?

The Church is called at this time to an attentive listening to the Spirit at work within the church and beyond. Here, a disciplined re-appropriation of the virtues of vulnerability, humility and compassion would be important. This could assist that disposition of faith and fidelity expressed in the exercise of an authority of service, and a power that empowers the whole church to be missionary disciples. ■

'MARTHAS' GARDEN'

An Experience in Integral Ecology

Lorraine d'Entremont, sc
lorain@setonspiritualityctr.ca

Article written in collaboration with
Donna Brady, csm, and **Amy Brierley,**
Coordinator, Martha Justice Ministry



One of the four priorities arising from the 2018 General Assembly of the CRC is “Promote bold initiatives in favour of an integral ecology and an economy of communion.”

This article is a brief account about such an initiative by the Sisters of Saint Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia. It is also about the congregational journey that led to the project. Known as the “Marthas” in Atlantic Canada as well as on their website¹ this congregation had a peak membership of 460 in 1962. Now they number at 85 members.

I chose this topic because I believe their project demonstrates how congregations in diminishment can draw on the resources of their lived charism, their material and spiritual gifts, and the broader social and theological perspectives with which we now view the world, to create a collaboration that concretely demonstrates integral ecology and ‘economy of communion.’

New Growers — the Project

The “New Growers” project is a gardening apprenticeship program for young adults who want to learn how to do small scale, economically viable gardening. It is hosted on the Marthas’ Motherhouse (Bethany) lands, which have rich soil with a history of mixed farming. Two acres of land are devoted to the program, now in its sixth season.

The Marthas have entered into a partnership with two well-established organic farmers, who mentor up to four prospective new farmers each year. The congregation provides the land, buildings and equipment as well underwriting the educational costs. The mentors coordinate the program, and liaison with the congregation is through the Martha Justice Ministry co-ordinator, who in turn works in collaboration with a core group of sisters and lay members.²

Preparing the Soil... the Congregational Journey

Although the New Growers program began six years ago, the community journey that led to it began some time before that. In retracing it, one can see the co-cultivation of broadening worldviews, expanding theological horizons, and intentional implementation in concrete projects; it was a process that grew like a well-balanced mixed garden.

To begin, there was a history of farming on the land. The farm operation had ended in 1970, though smaller scale gardening continued on the property.

In the 1990’s, the congregation began to explore in study sessions the insights of Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest and anthropologist, who studied new discoveries in science and viewed life as emerging from a single source; all creation is interconnected. He saw the unfolding of the living universe as sacred story, which he named the Universe Story. “Growing into an awareness of this unfolding mystery and our oneness with it has been a major focus in the Martha’s journey with the Universe Story.”³

In 2001, an environmental assessment of Motherhouse buildings and lands was conducted. This was the basis for further decisions about the 370 acres of mixed-use lands owned by the congregation.

¹ www.themarthas.com

² The “Marthas” did a panel presentation at the JPIC Ontario meeting November 21-22, 2018, on the current structure and functioning of the Martha Justice Ministry, and how it has evolved in the past several years.

³ See Marthas’ website, Universe Story.

Five Strategic Directions

In 2002, an Environmental Assessment Resource Committee, which became the Martha Ecology Committee, and in 2015 part of the integrated Martha Justice Ministry, was established to facilitate implementation of the assessment recommendations. Working with consultants, this group set five strategic directions. They were the following: 1) Celebrating and deepening the consciousness of connectedness. 2) Embracing the contemplative dimension of life. 3) Land planning and management. 4) Living in right relationship with all creation. 5) Collaborating and networking with others.

The purpose of the Ecology Committee was to carry out the Chapter 2009 mandate to deepen awareness of the Universe Story, continue ongoing development and implementation of the five strategic directions and to explore more deeply the Christian tradition of creation within the Universe Story.⁴ Additionally, Bethany Retreat Centre was committed to supporting the mandate in its retreats and programs.

Seven years ago, while on a retreat, Florence Kennedy, csm saw the documentary film *Dirt*, which highlights the crucial importance of soil in the living organism Earth.⁵ It inspired her to look at potential uses of the Congregation's land. This was the spark that led to the establishment of the *New Growers Program*.

⁴ See Marthas' website, Ecology Committee.

⁵ This award winning 83 minutes documentary film can be viewed and purchased at www.dirtthemovie.org.

⁶ These ideas are presented more fully in *Laudato Si'*, Ch. 2, *The Gospel of Creation*, and Ch.4, *Integral Ecology*.

⁷ From the 2016 video, *Marthas' Garden*, which can be found on vimeo.com

Sacred Roots...the Theological Journey

In reflecting on this project and the process that led to it, Donna Brady, csm underscores that the scientific discoveries about the origins of the universe urge us to rethink the human relationship with God. She says our understanding of God has been one of a distant God, who sends God's Spirit, or Jesus in the Incarnation. If we see God as present in the sacred, evolving creation process, then everything is a unique expression of some aspect of God. If we want to honor God, we need to honor everything God honors and loves.⁶

While the Marthas have been well connected with the earth in their history, their service has been centered on people and human concerns. Now is the time to expand this same love and care to all of creation, which is in great need of tending so that a right relationship with the human community can be restored. She sees the garden project as a small effort in this direction.⁷

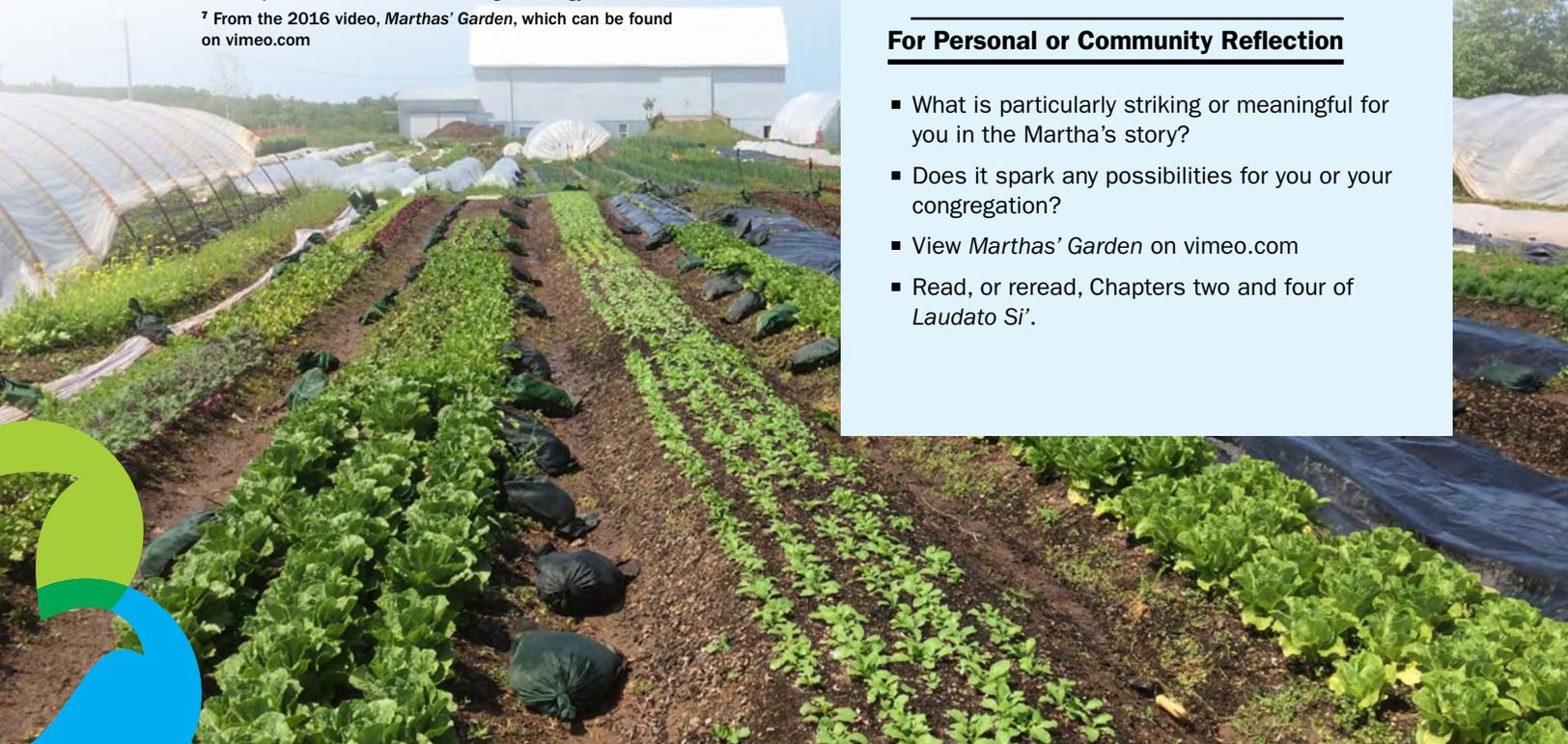
Conclusion

A thousand words on paper cannot adequately capture what has been such a living, evolving process. For a more thorough, engaging and delightful presentation, view the approximately fourteen minute video *Marthas' Garden*. You will find it a rewarding quarter hour, or maybe half hour, because you may want to watch it again. ■

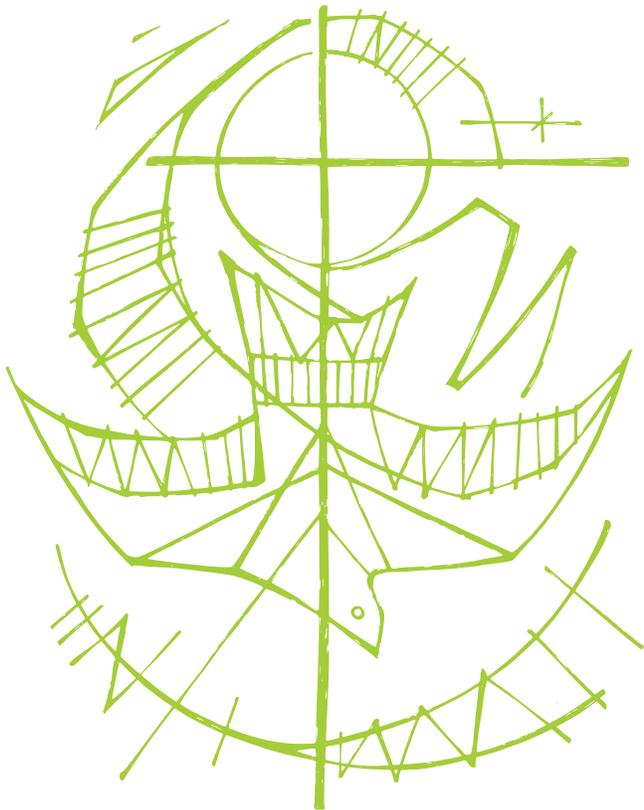
Marthas' Garden / Photo: Sister Florence Kennedy, csm

For Personal or Community Reflection

- What is particularly striking or meaningful for you in the Martha's story?
- Does it spark any possibilities for you or your congregation?
- View *Marthas' Garden* on vimeo.com
- Read, or reread, Chapters two and four of *Laudato Si'*.



Evolving into *NEWNESS*



Keynote speaker Elena Lasida at the CRC's General Assembly in 2018 put great emphasis on the prefix "inter". She spoke of interdependence, interculturality, inter-relationships, intercommunion as well as intergenerational. I would like to address the inter-relationship between Nanaimo Benedictines and their Oblates.

Oblates are men and women who attach themselves to a Benedictine monastic community so as to live their Christian lives more deeply. By prayer and work they manifest the presence of Christ in our contemporary world. Through their oblation, that is, "their self-offering" they live the word of God according to Benedict's Rule in their own churches, homes and workplaces. Some Oblates have become Associates, that is, they live in closer proximity to the monastery in order to pray with the community, share monthly meals and study of the Rule and spirituality.

Margaret Patricia Brady, osb
pbrady@bethlehemcentre.com
lindatotzke@shaw.ca

Passing On the Spirit of St. Benedict

Nanaimo's Benedictines are only seven vowed members; they are in a state of active transformation, passing from death to eternal life. While the vowed monastic community will be decreasing numerically, their Oblates are flourishing being seventeen, six of whom are also Associates.

In the past, the Oblate team planned six yearly retreat days. During one session, Oblates met in small groups and shared how their individual lives had been enriched by following the spirit of St. Benedict. Feedback on this was positive. It was agreed Oblates would meet four times a year in their geographical area. A format, structure and content was provided.

Subsequently the prioress and a team member met with each group. Then one person from each group was chosen to act as a facilitator. These met for two days of training in listening skills and small group leadership.



Members of House of Bread monastery gather with Oblates for morning praise.
/ Photo: Sister Germaine Chrupalo

New Life Emerges

When Oblates met in their own homes, questions arose about inviting non-Oblates to join them. The team devised a process for their inclusion. Thus, new life has begun to emerge here. Being with others, communicating and intermingling has opened many to respond to God revealed in the lives of their brothers and sisters. Put simply, here is an open system drawing participants into something new, transformative.

It reminds me of a Lonergan Workshop I attended several years ago at Boston College. During a small group sharing session, I sat next to a nuclear physicist from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She spoke of her growth in faith in terms of her work—watching the interactions of matter and energy.

Conditions being exactly right under her nuclear powered microscope, where at first nothing was visible suddenly life sprang into being. As soon as it did, immediately it united with other newly appearing life forms. She spoke of the unity and oneness of life permeated by the Divine Presence. Is this not how the Spirit of God draws all created beings into unity and oneness, communion? This is what is happening between Benedictines and their Oblates and then radiates into the larger faith community.

Illia Delio, OSF says, “We can get weighed down by what seems to be aging and dying but I am encouraging us to stretch our vision because we are living in an expanding universe—and it is quite exciting.” (LCWR Occasional Papers—Summer 2012, p. 4)

The Best Is Yet to Come

While small geographical groups of Oblates embrace everything from inter-relationships to intercommunion between vowed Benedictines and themselves, this relationship is a living gift to the present-day church. Being wholly open, ministering to one another, being prayerful and contemplative; this evolving relationship is close to the grassroots. Together they hear and heed the cry of the poor in today’s world. May they be blessed as the gospel comes to life within them—brightening the way to the future and its ultimate fullness, eternal life. ■

Discussion Questions

- Have you felt the transforming energy of the Spirit as your community strives for a deeper relationship with your non-vowed members or friends? Explain how.
- What more can you do to deepen this relationship?

[...] an open system drawing participants into something new, transformative.



THE MIC SISTERS IN CHINA

How God Makes All Things New

Celia Chua, MIC
celiachua111@yahoo.com.tw

I have been teaching in China for almost 13 years, from 1995 to 2018. These visits are gateways to some significant encounters with three local religious women's congregations whom the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (MIC) have assisted for almost 100 years. Our first departure to China was in 1909. The MIC Institute is the first women's missionary institute founded in 1902, in Montreal (Quebec).

The aim of this brief reflection is to bridge my lived experience to God's perspectives. In other words, I want to see how God has made things new! It is a journey of hope that helps me to go beyond and to leave behind my mental and spiritual limitations.

Three Missionary Movements

To situate my missionary experience is to recall three missionary movements. 1) The reception and formation received from foreign missionary institutes coming from European countries to Canada. 2) The founding of local missionary institutes whose members are sent to serve as missionaries to foreign countries. 3) The collaboration in the training and formation of local diocesan institutes whose members were sent to foreign missions.

The exile of the MIC sisters from China around 1957 illustrates the passage from *being missionaries for others* to *being missionaries with others*. Here is the process that shows this change.

Applying Three Key Concepts of *Laudato Si'*

In May 2018, during the General Assembly of the CRC, there were three key concepts formulated by Elena Lasida, inspired by her reflection on Pope Francis' encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*. The three key concepts are as follows: *everything is connected, everything is given and everything is fragile*. Today, as a member of a missionary institute, I also ask myself how these essential elements can be applied to the Institute, keeping in mind the perspective of God's eternal Love, a process of change consist of simply embracing the future in a spirit of thanksgiving.

EVERYTHING
CONNECTED!

EVERYTHING
IS FRAGILE!

EVERYTHING IS GIVEN!

Everything Is Connected

We are created as one and our lives are interconnected. I do believe that the Holy Spirit, the Breath of life, connects us. Likewise, there is a saying in Chinese Daoist philosophy that *our lives are interconnected* through the *spirit of Qi*. *Qi is believed to be the spirit, the breath of life.*

Whether in the past, in the present or in the future, the presence and contributions of foreign missionaries were known to assist in the establishment of local diocesan Chinese women's religious congregations, which are now challenged to find new and vital ways to live religious life in their cultural, social and political contexts. The Spirit of God's life connects us interdependently in our identity and mission as missionary disciples of Jesus.

Everything Is Given

I marvel each time I listen to stories about how the MIC sisters of former years in China had given the best of what they had, *love of God and love of others*. The resulting circle or network is in essence, what and whom LOVE is; freely received and freely given. In this circle of love, the local Chinese religious minister actively in different services to their brothers and sisters, especially the most vulnerable and poor.

Everything Is Fragile

Fragility of human errors and misunderstandings, wars and exodus of the past left some wounds that need to be healed and forgiven. Today we can do better by letting God fulfill His promise: *I am making things new*. Through the learnings that we can glean from the life and teachings of Mary of Nazareth, who is always present in human's struggles, I believe that nothing is impossible to God. God's love is constantly accompanying us and surprising us. ■

Our Reflection Continues

- As members of missionary religious institutes, have we forgotten our collective history?
- Can we let God's love and surprises accompany us in times of fragility to move beyond our mental and spiritual limitations?
- Can we recognize the new things God is making for us?

THE CRC AT A GLANCE

Mission Statement

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 250 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

“The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.”

Mission statement adopted in 2010

Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.

CRC Publications

Published three times a year, the *CRC Bulletin* presents reflections on different aspects of consecrated life in relation to the orientations and objectives of the Canadian Religious Conference.

Issued monthly, the *CRC Newsletter* (formerly *Le Lien CRC Link*) provides information on the commitments and activities of the CRC, on the life of religious congregations, on the life of the Church and on community groups involved in social justice.



CONFÉRENCE | CANADIAN
RELIGIEUSE | RELIGIOUS
CANADIENNE | CONFERENCE