

## Thoughts on the Jubilee of Mercy in an Election Year

Sister Anne Marie Liston

After our recent freak April snowstorm I went to the window to see what was left of our early daffodils. Miracle of miracles, they were dusted with white and looked rather chilly but were standing tall and brave in the garden. As I watched I found myself humming that old Peter, Paul and Mary favorite, "Where Have all the Flowers Gone?" I really miss their music.

Strangely enough, the remembering of their song found me again as we turned on the evening TV to hear the news. Only this time I found myself thinking, "Where have all the virtues gone?" You know, those things we learn about in church or Sunday school or from our parents and teachers along the way. "Don't call people names", "don't make fun of someone because of the way they look, or their gender, or the color of their skin, or where they were born, or what country they come from", those kind of admonitions. We used to call

it simply being polite or considerate; today I suppose it goes under the rather dubious banner of "political correctness". When did common human decency change into being politically correct?

No one needs to be told we are approaching a presidential election. We are bombarded with reminders at every turn, and each time it happens the time span seems to increase. This time it seems to have sunk to an even lower level and a longer period of time. We do not elect saints to our White House; we choose those individuals who seem to us to have the qualifications and will to better our country. Sure, our system has become more complex and convoluted by time and maybe it needs some readjustment, but it doesn't need to be turned into a "three ring circus" for those who believe that "anything goes" in the name of free speech and getting the vote.

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## Cluny Connections

is a publication of the  
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Province of USA & Canada

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**F**rom where I write, spring is still a promise but we live in Easter Hope! May that hope permeate all our lives as we struggle to understand the violence and inhumanity that seems so rampant around us! In her article, Sr. Anne Marie muses not only about where the flowers have gone, but also about the disappearance of the civility we once knew as characteristic of human interaction.

A delightful, bracing breath of spring passed too quickly when Sister Claire Houareau, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny spent a month visiting our Province, leaving renewed hope behind her. *Cluny Around the World* gives you a glimpse of Sister Claire's native land in our look at the mission of Cluny Sisters in Seychelles/Tanzania.

Is it possible that Sister Genevieve Vigil is celebrating 50 years of religious profession? Yes, it is, and Sister Gen shares some of her story with us!

Speaking of celebrations: this issue shares the story of Sr. Joseph Edwards' "lifetime achievement" of becoming a centenarian on April 18, 2016. Read all about it in "A Girl from Lawn" on page 6.

On April 8, Pope Francis released his apostolic exhortation, "Amoris Laetitia" or "On Love in the Family." Follow this link (<http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>) to the download and a fruitful read!

You may also want to follow the development of the conference hosted by the Vatican from April 11-13 to reexamine the Catholic Church's long-held teaching on the Just War theory. As this issue goes to press, the Vatican has just released the news that the conference, co-hosted by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the global Catholic peace network Pax Christi International, has recommended abandoning the theory. "We need a new framework that is consistent with Gospel nonviolence," the participants wrote. "We propose that the Catholic Church develop and consider shifting to a Just Peace approach based on Gospel nonviolence."

During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, as we await further developments on this issue, let's try to shed some light on the darkness of violence all around us by practicing peace and reconciliation in the many opportunities we have in our daily lives.

Sister Regina

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## The Province Welcomes Sister Claire Houareau, Cluny Superior General

The long-awaited visit began on March 5th when Sister Luke welcomed Sister Claire Houareau at the Providence airport. A native of the Seychelles Islands, Sister Claire was elected superior general at the 2012 Chapter, and since then has been periodically visiting the various provinces and vice-provinces of the Congregation as mandated by our Constitution. Soon after her arrival, she traveled to New Jersey for the first leg of her visitation. She visited with Sister Marie, learned more about her ministry, and met the team at RENEW International. Next, she flew to California where she got to know Cluny Sisters, Cluny Associates, collaborators and Cluny ministries before moving on to Hamilton, ON on March 17.

The Sisters in Hamilton were delighted to celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph with her, using this opportunity to gather Associates and collaborators for Liturgy and a festive meal.

From Hamilton, another flight brought her back to Providence where sisters from the Norwich, CT community drove her to their newly founded house. From there, Sr. Claire returned to RI to visit with the sisters at Javouhey House in Newport, our retired sisters at St. Clare's Nursing Home and finally, the Provincial House.

Too soon, the visit ended as Sr. Claire flew to St. Pierre and Miquelon via Montreal to do the visitation of the six valiant missionaries on the Rock lost in the midst of Atlantic Ocean mist and fog! Bon Voyage, Sister Claire! Thank you so much for coming!



Photos: Courtesy Cluny School

**Sister Claire Houareau at Cluny School. Above with student performers. Below with Pamela Biastre Castro, Cluny teacher and Cluny School Graduate.**



**Sister Claire, Sister Mary Josephine Glynn and children at Mary Star of the Sea Parish.**



Photo: Terry Wallace

**Sisters Maria Rocha, Claire, Regina Brunelle, and Maria do Ceu Mendes.**



## Cluny Sisters in the Province of Seychelles/Tanzania

Sister Regina Brunelle

**T**he Nature Conservancy newsletter recently wrote about Seychelles President James Michel's decision to join a growing group of countries that committed themselves to ocean conservation through an agreement with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation and the Nature Conservancy. The project hopes to protect this vital ocean habitat and its fragile marine life. The article describes the Seychelles as "an archipelago of 115 islands in the Western Indian Ocean that is vulnerable to sea level rise, as well as changing temperatures and ocean acidification. Seychelles is 99 percent ocean, and its "blue economy" is built on a productive tuna fishery and ocean-based tourism." Any attempt to save the archipelago is good news for all of us, but especially for Cluny sisters ministering there.

Cluny came to these lovely islands in 1861. Initially, the sisters worked in schools and hospitals. In 2011, when the congregation celebrated 150 years of service to this multi-ethnic population, the Bishop of Port Victoria spoke highly of the sisters' dedication for a century and a half. Times have changed and so have Cluny ministries. The seventeen sisters now working from four communities in Seychelles and the eight sisters in the two communities in Tanzania (that became part of the Province in 1997) nevertheless continue to live the mission God confided to Blessed Anne Marie in 1807.

In a recent report, Sister Nita Servina, current province leader, wrote how the traditional ministries in schools and hospitals have given way to new means of proclaiming the Good News though a small segment of personnel continue in education and hospital ministry.

In Seychelles, three sisters work in the government hospital in Victoria, one in administration and two as midwives, while three sisters direct and serve as nurses in a health clinic in Tanzania. There the



**Sister Alice Vivien (far right) with the "pastors lanwit" team.**

sisters also provide much needed support to mothers and children in a nursery school in Mwanzugi while Cluny involvement in education in Seychelles is now mostly in the form of catechesis in schools and parishes and the formation of the laity through training in communications, active listening, leadership, counseling and spiritual direction.

Evangelization happens now, not so much through teaching in schools and nursing in hospitals, but through outreach to Philippine and Indian immigrants, Eucharistic ministry in homes and hospitals, the support of small Christian communities, and greater involvement in parish ministries. Throughout, the sisters' commitment to a preferential option for

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# Congratulations, Sister Genevieve-Marie on your Golden Jubilee!

Sister Genevieve Marie Vigil

**O**n that hot humid day of August 17, 1966, I began a journey of place and of heart. I wanted to go to a foreign mission when I professed my vows, convinced that I could thus change the world and solve all the challenges of the poor.

What a grace it has been that the world and the Presence of Jesus have changed me! My journey of place led me to Rhode Island, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada and California and in that time my understanding of mission deepened.

My journey of heart led me to work in both traditional and non-traditional elementary and high school education. Each brought blessings and memories of students and parents and co-workers who deepened and stretched my understanding of what it means to be in mission.

Education with and for Portuguese immigrant children in Canada; then working in Los Angeles Unified School District–Adult Division with new adult immigrants from China, Mexico, El Salvador, Korea, Thailand, and so many other countries was an education in itself. As I listened to the challenges and struggles of immigrants and refugees in the Los Angeles area, their courage and graciousness blessed



Photo: Sister Mary Josephine Glynn

**Sister Genevieve Marie Vigil**

me with a new understanding of what it means to be a stranger in a foreign land.

Working with at-risk students in areas of economic poverty certainly challenged my perceptions and biases about “those people”. In the lives of so many young people, I witnessed and shared in the pain of different types of violence. It was humbling to listen to stories of forgiveness that challenged my own understanding of what forgiveness, loyalty, and love look like. I continue to work in education and each day brings laughter and the challenge of encouraging young people in their search for who they are.

In my Cluny Community I have been privileged to meet so many women who carry the light of faith and hope in total availability to the Reign of God through their lives lived for justice, peace and love. Through their witness I have learned that mission is wherever God leads me. The One who called me fifty years ago continues to surprise me on the journey. For that, I am truly grateful!

## Thoughts on the Jubilee of Mercy (Continued)

We have had presidents who were less than polished and cultured. Andrew Jackson’s friends nearly demolished the interior of the White House with their rowdy celebration of his election; Ulysses Grant was a fine general but not often sober; and certainly there were moral inadequacies all along the way. We do not elect saints but humans like ourselves and we trust that in their heart of hearts they love this country as we do, and will put the common good of all before everything else.

In this year dedicated by our Holy Father to compassion and mercy we pray for greater understanding and

acceptance of each other and greater kindness to all. Let not the apparent contradiction of our everyday life with its TV projections and newspaper headlines let us forget the really important things. Let us pray, and reflect, and discuss, and discern as we select another leader for our country; but let us do so in the light of grace and wisdom from the Spirit.

May our next leader, male or female, of whatever race or political persuasion, or economic class or religion realize that they are instruments OF THE PEOPLE AND FOR THE PEOPLE and may they “do right, love goodness, and walk humbly with their God.” (Micah 6:8)

# A Girl from Lawn

## Cluny Centenarian: Sister Joseph Edwards

Sister Regina Brunelle



**Sister Joseph Edwards**

Some time ago, we came across an article by Brother J. B. Darcy entitled “Out of the Past: Newfoundland Nuns Throughout the World”. “It has been said,” he wrote, “that no matter where you go in the world a Newfoundlander will have been there before you!” He proposed to prove this by writing in a series of articles about young women from Lawn who entered religious life. Nora Edwards was first on the list!

She was born in Lawn, Newfoundland on April 18, 1916. That’s right: 1916! Like so many other young women during the depression, Nora left home to seek employment in St. Pierre and Miquelon, islands off the east coast of Canada belonging to France. She was 16 years old!

It slowly dawned on Nora that God was calling her to become a missionary nun. She discussed her feelings with Msgr. Poisson, C.S.Sp. then Prefect Apostolic of St. Pierre. He introduced her to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, the only nuns on the island. Since the nuns had just finished a novena to St. Joseph for vocations, they looked upon Nora as an answer to prayer!

Nora, however, was in no hurry to come to a decision. She visited the convent regularly, getting to know the

Sisters and one of them gave her French lessons. Finally, two years later when two of the Sisters were going home to France for a holiday, Nora decided to join them to enter the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny at the Motherhouse in Paris. Her initial formation completed, she received the habit and (not surprisingly, given that novena!) the name Sister Joseph of Our Lady. She pronounced first vows on March 20, 1939. Two weeks later, she was sailing for India without even a good-bye to the folks back home in Newfoundland.

Beginning her missionary work in Chandernagore, near Kolkata, in 1951 Sister Joseph was transferred to Cuddalore, South India. Many are the stories about India with which she regaled us novices when she visited the novitiate in Newport! Among our favorites were the stories about the day she walked into the dining room to find a boa constrictor draped from one leg of the table to another! And, the night she went up to the dormitory to find a monkey on her bed wearing her nightgown and nightcap!

During her time in India, she was engaged in a variety of ministries, including teaching and working with the elderly. When the Indian climate began to affect her health, she was sent back to the Motherhouse to recuperate. Her health restored, Sister Joseph was among the founding Cluny Sisters of the Province in Rhode Island.

Bishop McVinney, having graciously welcomed the Cluny Sisters when the Oblates of Mary Immaculate brought them to their retreat house in Manville, R.I., then asked for sisters for the Cathedral Rectory in Providence. Sister Joseph was one of the sisters assigned there. In May 1953, she did a short stint at the Manville retreat house, but soon she was off to Philadelphia’s St. Joseph Home for Boys (Grades 6 through 12), run by the Spiritans for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. She would spend 23 years there where she was in her element! The boys called her “Mama Joe” and she twisted them around her little finger with the promise of “eats” whenever she wanted help with one of her projects! Her favorite time of the year was Halloween because she so

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## A Girl from Lawn (Continued)

enjoyed creating costumes for the boys who clamored for her help because those dressed by Mama Joe always won a prize! Some of these 'boys' are still in touch, even occasionally visiting her from Philadelphia. Sadly more than a few lost their lives during the Korean War. They are still on Sister Joseph's prayer list.

The year 1976 was a sad year for the Cluny Sisters in Philly: times change and now the archdiocese had decided it was time to move from the "home" concept to the bungalow style of sheltering children who were Wards of the State. The community was relocated to Rhode Island. Sister Joseph went to Stella Maris, Newport where she again found joy among an elderly population. From 1984-1993 she returned to Our Lady of Providence Community where she served as secretary to the Vicar for Religious until she retired in 1999; but even then she continued to serve as sacristan in the community.

Age and infirmity finally caught up with her, though, and she was transferred to St. Clare Home in July, 2006. She busies herself with reading and taking part in the activities provided by the Home. Her favorite is painting, and she is really good at it!

On April 18, 2016 Cluny Sisters and friends old and new gathered at St. Clare's Home in Newport, RI to give praise and thanks to God for the gift of Sister Joseph Edwards on her 100th birthday. Among them were her Cluny Sisters; St. Clare Home Chaplain Fr. Tom O'Neil; Bishop



**Surrounded by her "Philly Boys"  
Louis Faiolo and his wife, Roseann,  
and the Bangert twins, John, seated and Joe, standing.**

Louis Gelineau who had known Sister Joseph when he served as Bishop of the Diocese of Providence; Fr. Richard Walsh, former chaplain at St. Clare; Fr. Julian, OSB, and, of course, her faithful boys! St. Clare staff prepared lovely tables for the festive dinner served in the Home's dining room after the joyful celebration of Eucharist. Students from Cluny School later joined the celebration. They added much joy and energy to the occasion, delighting everyone with their musical concert! When the last guest had gone, Sister Joseph was found where she loves best to be: in grateful prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Ad Multos Annos, Sister Joseph!

## Cluny Sisters in the Province of Seychelles/Tanzania (Continued)

the poor is evident, especially as they journey with individuals and couples struggling to overcome spiritual or psychological issues; the drug addicts and alcoholics they seek to re-integrate into society, and the street people of the night.

Sister Alice Vivien writes about her participation in an inter-faith ministry. "I am part of a group of twenty eight 'Pastors lanwit' she wrote. These 'nighttime pastors' walk the streets of Victoria, Mahe from 10:00 p.m. on Saturday nights to 2:00 a.m. Sunday mornings, interacting with the homeless, the lonely, and people who work nights, listening to their stories and offering them a way to bring about positive change in their lives. While five are on the streets, three prayer partners

are back at the base praying for the pastors and their 'flock'.

The Seychelles Islands may be one of the smallest countries in the world, but Cluny Sisters there continue to make a major contribution to the Church's mission through their service in the Congregation. Not the least part of this contribution, by the way, is their giving us Sister Claire Houareau as superior general. Sister Claire, herself a Seychellois who had worked both as a nurse and in the field of education before becoming leader of the province, was elected to the general council in 2000. In 2012 the General Chapter elected her superior general. Thank you, Seychelles, for sharing your treasure with all of us!



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*Bringing Hope & Compassion*

## Cluny Sisters Celebrate 150 Years in Sierra Leone Congratulations, Sisters!



Today, there are 13 Sierra Leonian Sisters in the Congregation. One, Sister Clare Stanley, serves as Second Assistant on the General Council. Congratulations and thanks to all Cluny Sisters who have served and are now serving in Sierra Leone for these years of fidelity to the mission!

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Please remember the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in your will. Thank you.