

The Jubilee Year of Mercy Open Wide the Doors!

Sister Marie Cooper

Long ago, God taught the Israelites that in addition to a weekly Sabbath, it was also necessary to observe a Sabbath every seventh year, and a special Sabbath on the fiftieth year.

This Sabbath or Jubilee Year was meant to be a homecoming. During the Jubilee Year, all debts were to be forgiven, and slaves were to be set free, permitting people to go home again. (Leviticus Chapter 25)

The coming of God into our world initiated the ultimate homecoming, the "Year of the Lord." In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus announces that the "Year of the Lord" was already begun. "Today," he said of the prophecy of Isaiah, "this prophecy is fulfilled in your presence." (Luke 4:14-21)

Perhaps our celebration of Christmas—with the angel songs, shepherds and kings at the manger scene, gifts and gatherings—is fading



Image: Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board

quickly in our memories as we engage a New Year.

But, now the work of Christmas opens out before us, as Howard Thurman, an

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Thank you.

*P*ayerful best wishes for a blessed and fruitful Year of Mercy! May the New Year realize all that the Holy Father hoped for in calling us to this year of prayerful reconciliation! Pope Francis has challenged us so much this past year through his gifts of *The Joy of the Gospel* and *Laudato Si* and his visit to North American soil. May we live up to his challenges in 2016!

So many people have asked me about the Holy Year; we hope the lead article in this edition of *Cluny Connections* will help clarify its purpose and meaning. One of the Pope's deep concerns is the state of our planet and the impact this has on the poor. Cluny Sisters in Paraguay are trying to address this issue one person at a time, as are our sisters in Ghana who are marking 25 years of service in that country this year.

You'll read about Sr. Genevieve being present for the Pope's address to Congress. Not only was this an unforgettable experience for her, it also opened the door for her to address the problems raised by Pope Francis with her students at Mary Star High School in San Pedro, California.

Last but not least, we hope you will enjoy the delightful story of the live nativity that takes place at Cluny School every year. May it warm your hearts as it always does those of the children who participate and the adults who witness it!

Peace and Joy in 2016!

Sister Regina

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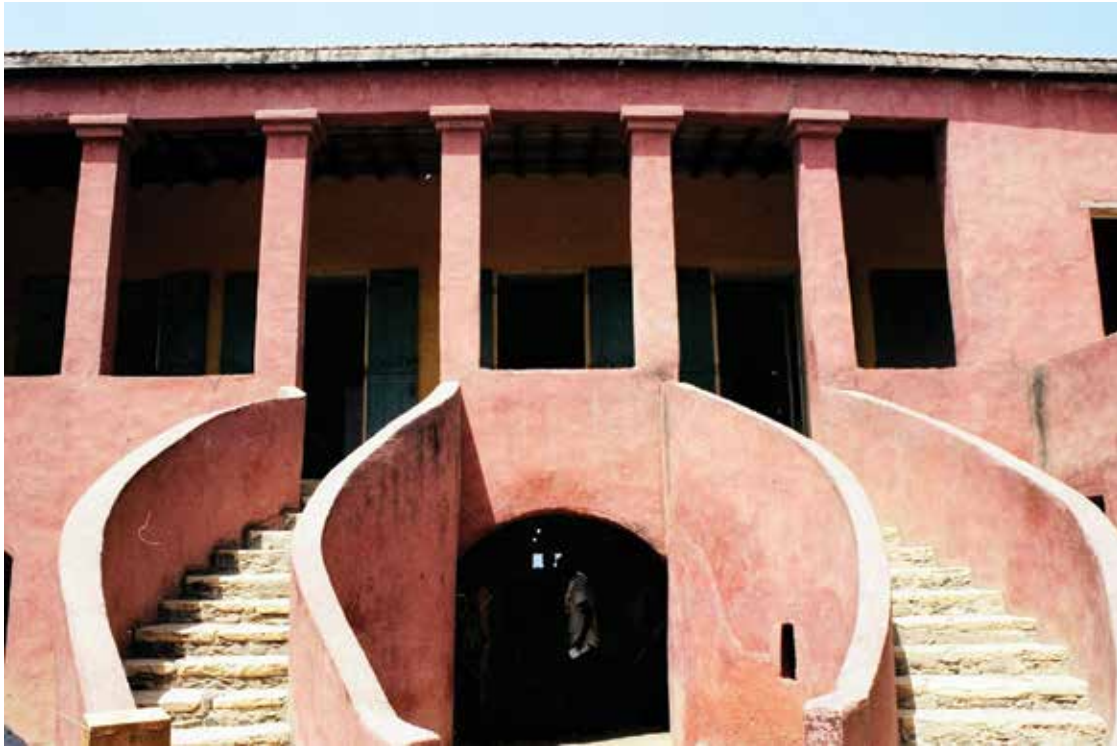


Photo: Sister Agnès Thévenin

The slave house on the coast of Senegal, West Africa, where Blessed Anne Marie bought slaves and gave them their freedom.

African-American theologian, educator, and civil rights leader, wrote:

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:*

*to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to make music in the heart.*

This is the work that ushers in the ultimate “Year of the Lord”, the fullness of God’s Reign, when Christ will come in Glory.

Every jubilee year, like this extraordinary Year of Mercy, is a renewed call to the “work of Christmas”, the reconciling mission of Christ in the world. Just as the Door of Jubilee was opened in cathedrals around the world, we, too, must open the doors of our hearts and hearths. We must not only ask God for forgiveness, but also forgive ourselves, “going home” again, to be at peace within. In this Year of Mercy, it’s time to give it all over to God. When we have done this, we are all the more able to open doors for others.

We are called to open the doors of forgiveness and mercy, to take the first step in being reconciled and

restoring broken relationships, forgiving debts. We are called to open the doors of welcome, that the lost, the refugee, may find a home. We are called to open doors of freedom, to make it possible for those who are held bound, or those who are far away to go home again.

Pope Francis on December 18 visited the Caritas Center, a new homeless shelter in Rome’s Termini train station, where he opened a holy door for the Jubilee of Mercy, the first such celebration conducted at a facility for homeless people.

Blessed Anne Marie understood well the “work of Christmas”. She was quick to forgive and offer forgiveness. She worked for the freedom of those who were held bound in any way. She established schools, hospitals and clinics, bought back freedom for slaves, and worked not only to free over 500 slaves in South America, but also made it possible for them to create a true home and a sustainable livelihood. She made a home for orphans, ex-prisoners, and for the mentally ill. The door of her great heart was open to welcome one and all. She gathered others for this work and collaborated with the government and other institutions to make it happen. As we engage in this extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, she shows us the way to open wide the doors of our own hearts, our homes, our communities, our parishes for the “work of Christmas”.



Cluny Sisters in the Province of Paraguay/Argentina

Sister Regina Brunelle

The Catholic Church has been very much in the news since the Synod on the Family and Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Sí*. Long before either topic became front-page news, the 21 Cluny Sisters in the Region of Paraguay/Argentina have been quietly fostering both families and a sustainable environment, since their arrival in Paraguay in 1967. This is not surprising, since the essential dignity of the human person is central to our charism. Sisters reach out to families in the barrios in a variety of ways, the most important being frequent visits to develop the relationships that open the door to identifying a family's economic, human and spiritual needs: the groundwork of evangelization. Bible study is popular; it engages the parents of children preparing for the sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation. Meeting with engaged couples and couples in common law relationships asking for the Sacrament of Matrimony also result in developing a strong support system with the families in the barrios.

In Paraguay, as in so many places, the scourge of human trafficking has taken on epidemic proportions, destroying the lives of women, adolescents and children. To address the issue, the sisters began by educating themselves through a variety of contacts with specialists in the field. The next step was to study the reality of the local scene. The ravages of trafficking are immense, especially among the poor. It is not possible to address them all at one and the same time. The sisters opted to focus on the most vulnerable: young children and high-risk adolescents caught in the web of drug trafficking and addiction. Again, education is key and women have always known that the best way to the mind and heart is through the stomach! So, enticing nutrition programs are paired with educational activities that empower youths to resist drugs, prostitution, pornography and child abuse. Job training for teens helps them find work, yet another very important barrier to victimization.



A sister working with a group of teenagers.

Fast Facts About Paraguay

Location: Landlocked country in the center of the southern half of the continent
Population: 6,158,000
Capital: Asunción; 1,639,000, one of the oldest cities in South America
Area: 406,752 square kilometers (157,048 square miles)
Languages: Spanish, Guaraní
Religion: Roman Catholic
Currency: Guaraní
Life Expectancy: 71
GDP per Capita: U.S. \$4,300
Literacy Percent: 94
Cluny Sisters in the country: 21
Number of Cluny Communities: 5
Vice-Province Locations: Asuncion (3 houses), San Pedro (1), Buenos Aires, Argentina (1)
Vice-Province Founded: 1967

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Pioneers Celebrate 60 Years of Religious Profession

Sister Regina Brunelle



Photo: Sister Luke Parker

Sister Bernadette Lapre



Photo: Sandra Hong

Sister Regina Brunelle

It was the feast of the Sacred Heart on that lovely June 11th, 1953. The novitiate for the Province of the United States and Canada on Brenton Road was finally ready! Bernadette Lapre from Fall River, Massachusetts was already there busily engaged in helping get the house ready for the formal blessing next day when Lois Brunelle from Nashua, New Hampshire arrived. Sr. Joseph Edwards greeted her at the door and, thinking she was one of Fr. Maguire's students come to help, shoved a vacuum into her hands and disappeared in a cloud of dust! Luckily, Sr. Antony came along and rescued the perplexed young woman dressed in taffeta and heels clutching a vacuum cleaner as she wondered what she had got herself into!

The answer to that question for both Bernadette and Lois was a 60-year on-going journey with the Lord that would take them far from Newport, RI to places

like France, Rome, Haiti, Canada and several States in the USA.

Asked what the journey has meant for her, Sr. Bernadette declared, "I always wanted to be a nun from the age of five. I wouldn't have changed my life as a religious for any of the lives my 16 brothers and sisters had for all the world, including my 27 years in France. I developed relationships there that have lasted until now and that still give me joy. God is good and has been very good to me!" Lois, who had become "Sr. Regina" commented, "Who could have dreamed such a journey? The joys and challenges in my life have woven such a rich pattern I could never have imagined it! The only word that captures it all is GRATITUDE! Every day stirs up awe and a deepening joy in me in the face of the wonders the Lord has done for, with and through me! Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!"

Associates' Updates

Cluny Associates in California, Hamilton and West Virginia received associate pins in special ceremonies during the visits of Sr. Luke Parker, Provincial of the Province of the United States and Canada.

On September 20, the ten members of the California Associate group made first commitment after a month long preparation reflecting on the theme "Everyday God come be with us". Sr. Luke, Province leader then pinned each one with the Cluny Associate pin.

Maureen Harper from Hamilton reports on the event there:

On October 17, 2015, Sr. Luke delighted us by participating in our monthly meeting. After a time of fellowship, we gathered in the lovely chapel in the Bishop Tonnos Senior building at Good Shepherd Square for a beautiful commitment liturgy. All of us individually voiced the renewal of our commitment as Associates of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny. Sr. Luke then pinned each of us with the Cluny associate pin. Mary Jean Marcuzzi, making first commitment, blessed us all by her obvious joy! We were all grateful for the reflections, graces and joy of the day and our unity and friendship in the Lord as we strive to live the charism of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey.

Cathy Marino writes from West Virginia:

After months of anticipation, the WV Associates met at St. Francis Church, Logan, WV on November 1. We welcomed Sisters Luke and Marie who had traveled to our small Catholic Community to bring us the blessings



Photo: Sister Marie Cooper

Sister Luke presents Cathy Marino with her Associate Pin

of a pinning ceremony followed by commitment as Cluny Associates. Seventeen of our twenty three members stepped forward as their names were called. Then, those ready to make a commitment to Mother Anne Marie stood and promised to follow her ways. The ceremonies closed with the singing of "Beata Anna Maria."

During the celebratory dinner that followed, we were able to share about the work we are doing as associates in our respective communities such as working with Catholic Charities, helping in a food pantry, taking communion and food to the sick and providing transportation to needy neighbors. We are grateful to Sisters Luke and Marie for making this day a beautiful, blessed event we will remember for a long time.

Paraguay (Con't)

As is true among many poor rural populations, deforestation is a serious issue, so another important part of the sisters' work is education for repair of the earth.

Trash is a major problem in the barrios. Children learn how to use and re-use everything for new purposes such as compost for the garden; how to grow their own food and plant trees native to the region in an effort to develop and sustain a healthy environment.

For Cluny Sisters in Paraguay/Argentina, that the light Pope Francis has been shining on the very work in which they have so long been engaged is a blessing and an encouragement!



Children eating at the canteen.

Living Nativity at Cluny School, Newport, RI

William Lippe
Principal of Cluny School

The annual Living Nativity took place at the beautiful Cluny School campus on Thursday, December 10th at 6 p.m. This reverent reenactment of the first Christmas, in which the entire student body participated, was performed under the nighttime sky and featured live animals and choral music. Despite the threat of inclement weather, the rain held off and the temperature was comparatively balmy.

Initiated several years ago by Cluny parent, Hilary Davidson, and directed this year by another Cluny

parent, Stephanie O'Connor, the Living Nativity has become an Advent event at the Cluny School. The half-hour presentation, which was open to the public as part of the 2015 Christmas in Newport festivities, drew a good-sized crowd. All were able to enjoy hot chocolate and sweets before and after the presentation thanks to the generosity of many Cluny families. The annual event is provided as a gift to the Newport community to express the true meaning of Christmas.



Photo: Cluny School

Angels, shepherds with a live sheep and wise men approach the crib.

Did You Know?

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity-January 18-15

Fr. Paul Wattson, founder of the Franciscans of the Atonement, (of Graymoor, Garrison, NY) initiated a Church unity octave in 1908. The World Council of Churches soon followed suit and began publishing resources for the octave in 1926. A French priest, Fr. Paul Couturier, was the first to express the basic Catholic position on prayer for Christian unity: “we

pray for the unity Christ wills by the means He wills,” a position the Second Vatican Council made official in The Decree on Christian Unity.

In the spirit of this year of reconciliation and mercy, perhaps our prayer this year could include unity among peoples of every creed. Jesus himself would want no less.

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Bringing Hope & Compassion

Did You Know? (Continued)



**Cluny Sisters
Launch Silver Jubilee Year
in Ghana.
Congratulations, Sisters!**

Sister Genevieve-Marie Goes to Washington!

As I sat on the Upper West Terrace of the Capitol Building in Washington DC. on Thursday, September 24th watching a giant Jumbo-tron capture Pope Francis as he approached the Capitol, I was filled with anticipation, gratitude, curiosity. I shared in the palpable sense of excitement among the thousands who had gathered in the cool morning air to listen to the Holy Father. A week earlier I had received the unexpected gift of a trip to Washington DC and a ticket to be in the audience of the live telecast of the Address by Pope Francis to a Joint Meeting of Congress.

The enthusiastic and genuine welcome of Pope Francis, united the diverse audience who had gathered to catch a glimpse of the man and to hear his words. The vision of inclusiveness to which Pope Francis invited all Americans generated a sense of holy energy and grateful hope among us.

My trip to Washington has been a great blessing that continues to challenge me to be that witness of hope and joy that is the call of Pope Francis to each of us.

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