

Responding to the Signs of the Times

Sister Joan Van der Zyden



Photos: Courtesy of Divi Seema Foundation

Sister Grace Antonysamy with a women's group.

This is a story that needs to be told! Women and children in Diviseema and Kothuru, poor coastal and urban areas in the state of Andhra Pradesh, a few Cluny Sisters of the South-east Province of India and a man from the United Kingdom! What could they possibly have in common? This is a relationship that has been in the making for years. It has evolved from observing, listening,

reflecting and acting. That is what 'reading the signs of the times' takes ... and it has resulted in encounter, collaboration and empowerment.

Encounter: Cluny sisters encounter the women and children each and every day through their ministries. They have also encountered Peter Winchester, who holds a Doctorate in Development Studies, during his work in the region. Quickly, a relationship of collaboration was

Continued on Page 3

In this Issue

Responding to
the Signs of the Times

From the Volunteer's Desk

In Memoriam
Sister Regina Brunelle

Cluny Associates:
Polly Plant
Jesse Rodriguez

Cluny Around the World
Cluny Sisters in Ghana

Hamilton Cluny Associates

Welcome Erma Callender
Anti-trafficking Efforts



**Cluny Connections
is a publication of the
Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny
Province of USA & Canada**

Editor:

Layout: Marie Cooper, SJC
clunymarie@gmail.com
857 North Avenue West
Westfield, NJ 07090
Phone: (908) 728-0090

**Relocating?
Want to subscribe a friend to
Cluny Connections?**

Please use the form below (right)
Just send back your label from this
issue with your new address
attached to:

Cluny Connections
7 Restmere Terrace
Middletown, RI 02842
USA

Reminder: to receive *Cluny Connections* via

Email or to add a friend to the list, please

send name and address to:

clunydevelopment@hotmail.com

Thank you.

It is with great sadness that we bring you the winter issue of *Cluny Connections*, for our editor, Sister Regina, was called home to God on December 18, 2016. We can't claim credit for the issue, for she had it all planned and all we have done is assemble all the pieces to bring it to you - that's Regina: forward looking, creative, and well organized!

This issue begins with a collaborative ministry in the Province of Andhra Pradesh in India. Cluny Sisters together with local women and Peter Winchester from Great Britain bring hope and new life to women and families in collaboration with Peter's foundation. "Cluny Around the World" takes us to West Africa, where our sisters in Ghana collaborate with those who are left behind in the villages when family members must leave, and support the development of strong families, and harmony among the various religious and cultural populations.

Cluny Associates in different parts of the province continue to meet to pray together, reflect on the needs around them and move to action for justice. In this issue, we hear of Hamilton group's efforts to work against the evil of human trafficking. This group also welcomed a new Associate, Erma Callender, and we rejoice at the news of her commitment ceremony.

We also report the deaths of one of our long-time friends and Hamilton Cluny Associate, Polly Plant, and of our California Associate, Jessie Rodriguez.

As Sister Luke's mandate as province leader was coming to a close, we learned that she had accepted a second mandate. She announced that Sisters Mary Josephine Glynn and Marie Cooper would join her as the province leadership team. We congratulate them and offer our prayers and support.

During the week after Christmas five of us Clunys gathered with Sister Regina's nephew Tim and his wife Sue, niece, Mary Lou, and long-time friend Priscilla Morin to mourn Regina and to celebrate her wonderful missionary life. She was a great gift to her family, to all she ministered with over her 60+ years in ministry, to us and to the Cluny Congregation, and she is deeply missed.

The Cluny Connections ad-hoc volunteers

Visit us online:

Get to know us better on our website:
www.cluniusandcanada.org

Connect via FaceBook for frequent updates:

[www.facebook.com/
cluniusacanada?sk=wall](http://www.facebook.com/cluniusacanada?sk=wall)

and
[www.facebook.com/
clunyglobalconcernscommittee](http://www.facebook.com/clunyglobalconcernscommittee)

Check out our blogs for news and in-depth articles:

<http://cluniusandcanada.blogspot.com/>
and

<https://clunyglobalconcerns.wordpress.com/>

Address Change

Change __ Correct __ Add __ Remove __

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State/Prov./Postal Code _____

Country _____

Email _____

Please email to:

clunydevelopment@hotmail.com

or send to:

Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny PO Box 66 Newport RI 02840-0001

Check/Credit Card Gift

We invite you to donate through our secure web site donation page at:

[www.cluniusandcanada.org/
pages/share_donate.html](http://www.cluniusandcanada.org/pages/share_donate.html)

Donation by check:

Please make check payable to:

Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny

and send to:

Responding to the Signs of the Times (Continued)

born. As Peter says, “The reason I admire the sisters so much is because they represent continuity and I would like to help them continue!”

Collaboration: This is the new model for mission and ministry. In many cases, it is no longer necessary nor effective for religious communities to found and run multiple outreach ministries and schools on their own. In collaborative efforts, we can partner with other religious congregations, organizations and foundations and expand the mission beyond what any one of the collaborators could do alone. This is what is happening in Andhra Pradesh with the Divi Seema Foundation, local women and Cluny Sisters.

Peter Winchester founded the Divi Seema Foundation to help improve the lives of the poorest people in these areas. He does that through supporting the work of Cluny Sisters. With the involvement of the sisters who provide accountability, the foundation assists at a very practical and local level with the assurance that funds go directly to the neediest. Through observing, listening to and reflecting with the local women, the collaboration extends to those who are actually in need. It is their voice that is most important, for those who have the need are closest to it and understand it best. As those in need collaborate, they can also hone skills and avail of assistance to solve their problems. They become empowered.

Empowerment: One aspect of empowerment of the local women involves coordinating women’s saving account groups. It only takes 10 or 15 local women to agree to deposit a small amount of money in a common fund. The Divi Seema Foundation then matches those savings allowing the women to take out small loans, create small businesses, and better their lives. Currently, there are approximately 3,000 women involved. The sisters run nursery schools and child care to enable the mothers to work, and older children to continue their education.

The Divi Seema Foundation also supports the sisters in their work of empowering children through the hostels and education they provide along with the Children’s Parliaments. In this program focusing on education, awareness and cooperation, children learn to cooperate with one another, voice the needs they see in their villages or towns, report those needs to



Photos: Courtesy of Divi Seema Foundation

Sister Grace Antonysam with Peter Winchester

their parents who take them to the local government agencies to advocate for action.

The foundation also supports the sisters’ nutrition programs which encourage better diets and raising vegetable gardens. In this collaborative effort, the women then help one another and share the fruits of their labors.

This relationship of encounter, collaboration and empowerment has to date made a difference in approximately 6,000 families. To really get a better idea of this dynamic relationship between the local women and children, the Cluny Sisters and the Divi Seema Foundation, watch the trilogy of films available at <http://www.diviseemafoundation.org/film/>

Divi Seema (16:13 mins)

Benefits of Cooperation (5:37 mins)

Divi Seema: Voices of Women (22:43 mins)

Their latest progress can be seen at: <http://www.diviseemafoundation.org/contact-dontations/>

Their latest newsletter is available at: <http://www.diviseemafoundation.org/newsletter/>

In Memoriam

Sister Regina Brunelle

April 9, 1933 - December 18, 2016

Sister Anne Marie Liston

“Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home...” and quietly, without fanfare or fuss our dear Sister Regina left us for home. Perhaps an analogy with a sunrise or a butterfly would be more aesthetic or appealing, but somehow the ladybug, as we call it, seems to fit better. A few years before Regina left Lincoln County, West Virginia, she called the Whitesville Community in great excitement, and a little consternation. It seems that with the spring the native insect population had awakened, and awakened her, as well. A large horde of ladybugs had invaded her roof, and dropping down gently upon her bed, had made themselves at home. We tried to be sympathetic and supportive, and not laugh at the vision before us, but it was hard. If there was one trait we all knew Regina possessed, it was her skill at housekeeping. Each and every ladybug was a personal affront to her way of life. And so, for many years after we delighted in giving her reminders of her favorite insect.

Regina, or Lois as she was baptized, was born on April 9, 1933, in Nashua, N.H. Her parents, Francis and Olivette Brunelle, had two older children, Lorraine and Francis. Those were the depression years and jobs were hard to find. The memories of those years implanted in Lois a sense of value for the hard work and dedication of her loving parents, as well as a concern for all who struggled to meet the ordinary needs of life. A concern that would show itself over and over throughout her religious life. Growing up in a Franco-American family gave Lois the linguistic ability that would serve her well in the years ahead.

On June 13, 1953, Lois and two other postulants entered the newly opened Cluny Novitiate on Brenton Road in Newport, Rhode Island. Active in many activities in high school and a natural leader, Lois did not find novitiate life “a walk in the park”, but struggled to be faithful to the call. Her deep love and admiration of Anne-Marie Javouhey helped her through the struggle. After First Profession on February 2, 1956, she began studies at Salve Regina College, graduating in 1960. She taught at Cluny School in Newport during her years as a Junior Professed until after making Final Profession on August 15, 1962. In September of that year she began teaching at Little Flower Catholic



Sister Regina of the Trinity Brunelle

High School for Girls in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On weekends and summer months she studied for her Masters in English at Villanova University. All the while she still harbored the hope that she would someday “go to the missions”.

Finally, in June of 1968 Lois left for her mission to Haiti. Here she would teach English as a second language in one of our schools and spend her weekends assisting an elderly sister in the infirmary and traveling to a medical clinic at Furcy in the mountains above Port au Prince. This was, in her words, “a magical place for me.”

In 1974, she received the request to return to the United States to prepare to become Formation Director in the American Novitiate. She continued this ministry for nine years in Newport and then in Hamilton, Ontario.

In August of 1985, after a year of caring for her elderly mother, Lois began another “mission” adventure. This time it was to the people of Lincoln County, WV. With the same whole-hearted enthusiasm that marked all she did, she learned community organizing and building low income housing. She fed the poor, found help for the elderly and sick, addressed the injustices of the disadvantaged, earned a degree in counseling so she could also exercise that ministry among the poor, and she did it all with the good humor and grace that was part of her essence. Seventeen years in Appalachia, and she loved it all! Her work and spirit still

Continued on Page 5

In Memoriam

Polly Plant Hamilton Associate

April 24, 1925 – November 30, 2016

Hamilton Associate Terry Wallace

Among the first women to become a Cluny Associate in Hamilton, Ontario, Polly Plant was a pioneer of her time. Born in the wilds of western Canada, Polly eventually moved east where she completed her Masters Degree in Social Work, married her husband Raymond (1931 – 2015), and raised four children. Active in various parish ministries and forward-thinking in matters of the environment, Polly is remembered as a warm, gentle, gracious, and intelligent woman whose thoughts and opinions were always valued by the Associates. Rest in Peace, Polly!

Sister Regina (Con't)

goes on in the Associates and friends who remember her and continue living the Cluny charism in their own way.

Lois' last move was back to Hamilton where she had been the Formation Director for a while and she took up the work of Local Coordinator while volunteering with the Good Shepherd Brothers*. In 2008, recognizing her ability to relate and counsel others, they asked her to take up residence in Angela's Place, a home for unwed mothers and their babies. The young woman who struggled between God's call and the desire for a family ended up surrounded by infants at the end of her life.

And, in the midst of her busy missionary life, Lois stayed close to her family. During their lifetime, she was in frequent communication with her parents and siblings. She maintained close ties with her nieces, nephews and their children. And because she welcomed many of us into her family circle, we are the richer for it.

The "ladybird" is celebrated as a symbol of Mary in many countries, her seven spots representing her sorrows and joys. So too, Sr. Regina knew the sorrows and joys of life. The giving, the working together, the parting and beginning again. As the "ladybird" is a symbol of nurturing, so too, was Sr. Regina, in so many places, in so many ways. Whole-hearted and vibrant as the colors of the "ladybird" Sr. Regina brought life wherever she went.

Godspeed, dear Sister ... fly, fly away home to your Lord.



Jessie Rodriguez California Associate

November 16, 1934 - October 21, 2016

California Associates

Jessie was a member of the Cluny Associates in California for about ten years. Jessie joined the Cluny Associates because she was looking for something that would help increase her spirituality. Little did she know that she would become our inspiration.

Jessie would share her happy and joyful times with her family and her sisters, and if something was troubling her she would simply say that God was helping her through it. It was uncomplicated for Jessie, for she had faith and trust in God in all things. When she began to have serious health issues, she shared with us that she accepted her illness as the path God chose for her, and that He was not going to abandon her. She embraced God's holy will as Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey teaches us.

As a member of St. Philomena Parish, Carson, California she served as a Eucharistic Minister, a religious educator, a member of St. Vincent de Paul Society and a member of the RCIA group. She was a wife, mother, grandmother, sister, and friend.

Jessie began her eternal life on October 21, 2016. She planned the details for her Mass and it was a lovely celebration. In a letter she wrote about her faith journey, there is one passage that best depicts her relationship with God, "I am thankful and thank and praise God to have called me when I didn't know Him." Jessie once had a deep spiritual experience with God which she often spoke of "as being to the mountain top." She always longed to repeat that amazing connection. Jessie, you made it to that mountain top again!

*Clearly you [all] are a letter of Christ
which I have delivered,
a letter written not with ink,
but by the Spirit of the living God,
not on tablets of stone
but on tablets of flesh in the heart.*

(2 Corinthians 3:3)

*Now known as the Hospitalers of St. John of God.



Cluny Sisters in Ghana in the Province of West Africa

Sister Regina Brunelle

Strong family ties supported Anne Marie Javouhey, the founder of the Cluny Sisters, from the moment she first became aware of her call. Her whole enterprise quickly became a family effort as she set about repairing the ravages of the French Revolution upon both the family and the Christian Faith. It's no wonder then, that Cluny Sisters world-wide are so interested in supporting Christian families to the point of making it one of the four key areas of our global concerns ministry.

The sisters in Barra, Ghana noticed the effects on the family of migration and emigration in their area. Unemployment forced men and younger folk to leave to find work and a better way of life, leaving the women and young children behind. Although existing ministries through the school and Cluny Associates already provided good options for supporting families, the Sisters felt more was needed.

In response, they began "Javouhey Family" as a way of helping people who remain become part of an extended family when their other family members are forced to leave the villages. Monthly meetings for adults, youths and children forge new relationships among them as participants delve into the story of Blessed Anne Marie's family. What made it strong enough to withstand the challenges of the Revolution? How can this family become a model for them two centuries later in a very different situation and culture from their own? What role did the faith of the Javouhey family play in giving them strength and the capacity to resist the negative effects of their political reality? They reflect on how the Javouhey family lived Christianity: their virtues and values; their practices of prayer, Scripture reading, and Sunday liturgy; their outreach to the poor and abandoned. Special celebrations like the feast of Blessed Anne Marie on July 15 are opportunities for

the children to impress their elders by expressing their gifts for drama and song in a play after Mass, followed by a traditional African meal together.

Secondly, the sisters decided to increase their visits to families in the outlying villages as a way to become more aware of the many problems facing families today and perhaps help them deal with some of them. Mario's story is a case in point.

Mario went blind as a young child. He would come to the door of the nursery school in his village but always refused to go inside. Having made friends with the Sisters, his family eventually allowed them to bring him to the school in Barra. He is now in Grade 5 and doing very well. "How did things go?" the Sisters asked after the National Exam. "Like drinking water!" Mario replied. In fact, he did very well. Unable to get him into the Serrekunda School for the Blind for lack of a place to stay, the Sisters found him a Braille teacher locally. He is well on his way to becoming a self-reliant young man able to care for himself and his family.

The Barra Community's decision to focus on the family has transformed its ministry. Not only does this focus uncover real needs that can often be addressed, but especially it is *the* opportunity to express solidarity with the people with whom the Sisters share their lives. They cannot always solve the problems raised by dire poverty, disease, or bereavement, but SOMETIMES they can help! More important, though, is the effect of their commitment to the people among whom they live.

Responding to the General Chapter's call for a deeper focus on families, the sisters decided to find yet other ways to support them.

Thanks to Sr. Christine Fefegula, principal at St. Matthew's School in Barra, the school, permeated by a joyful atmosphere that fosters commitment,

[Continued on Page 7](#)

Hamilton Associate News

Cluny Associate Terry Wallace

Erma Callender Joins Hamilton Associates

On October 15, 2016, Erma Callender made her first commitment as a Cluny Associate at a ceremony conducted by the late Sr. Regina Brunelle in the Good Shepherd Chapel in Hamilton, Ontario.

Erma attended St. Joseph Cluny Convent School in St. George's, Grenada before settling in Canada. Erma is an active volunteer in parish ministries at St. Mary's Parish in Hamilton and at Birthright Hamilton.

We joyfully welcome Erma with her quiet strength as our new sister-associate!

Cluny Sisters in Ghana (Con't)

cooperation, hard work and mutual support, has also become a strong advocate of family life. Muslims and Christians, staff and students, respect each other and work hand-in-hand. Assemblies are used to build up sound values and address the problems that inevitably crop up in any school. Parents are very supportive and the school office has become a safe place for them to share their worries, problems and concerns. More than anything else the school has broken down barriers between religions, tribes and nationalities thus fostering positive relations in the town.

The Sisters also promote family life through the Cluny Associates who gather in Barra for their Lenten retreats. They are joined by many of the parishioners, who love the all-night vigil and adoration. One old lady, who doesn't speak English, was asked how she manages to stay awake all night. She replied with the ultimate definition of prayer: "I look at Jesus, He looks at me and I tell Him what is in my heart!"

Associates Respond to the Human Trafficking Crisis

The Cluny Associates of Hamilton continue to explore the myriad of issues related to the global scandal of human trafficking and most recently, the insidious exploitation that has made its way into the business models of so many global corporations and their supply chains.

The August, 2016 edition of the anti-human trafficking newsletter entitled, "Stop Trafficking", revealed an alarming trend of unethical business practices and abuse among global corporations driven entirely by profit and increasing shareholder value.

Appalled by such reports of gross mistreatment of workers and disrespect of the environment, we prayed to the Holy Spirit for guidance to determine the kind of action we, as a small group of concerned women, could undertake as a response to this evil.

After sharing our inspirations within the group, we devised a plan to write a letter to the Dean of Business at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario voicing our concerns and requesting a meeting to discuss the curriculum of philosophy and ethics courses currently taught to young business students and to address the specific issues identified in the "Stop Trafficking" newsletter.

At present, we await a response to our enquiry from McMaster University's School of Business, in hope of raising greater awareness of these serious issues related to a global economy.



January is
Anti-Trafficking Month

Cluny Sisters in the USA and Canada support the international Blue Heart effort:

The Blue Heart Campaign against Human Trafficking works to raise awareness of the plight of victims and to build political support to fight the criminals behind trafficking. The Blue Heart Campaign, adopted by several countries all over the world, seeks to encourage involvement and inspire action to combat human trafficking.

Visit the website: www.unodc.org/blueheart/en



Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny
Province of USA and Canada, Inc.
7 Restmere Terrace
Middletown, RI 02842

Non-profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Newport RI 02840
Permit No. 170



Bringing Hope & Compassion

Responding to the Signs of the Times



Photos: Courtesy of Divi Seema Foundation

Sister Jessie Antony at the blood pressure clinic.

Jesus gave us the example of the fig tree, harbinger of summer. Blessed Anne Marie exhorted her sisters to be alert and to respond to the signs of the times. In our own day, Cluny Sisters continue to nurture a heightened awareness of the realities of our own time and to read the signs that will guide us into a future of justice, freedom and peace. One example is in our lead article on page one about Cluny collaboration with the Divi Seema Foundation, which allows us to reach out in different ways simultaneously to foster empowerment of women.

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