

Sisters Gather in Province Assembly

Sister Mary Patrice Watson

After our Province Assembly/Chapter at the Carmelite Retreat Center by the thundering waters of Niagara Falls in October of 2005, we were due to come west for our next one. As it worked out, we met at the Center for Spiritual Development in Orange, California, near the home of Disneyland. Apparently, the Spirit delights in leading us from one vacation resort to another! Even our pre-Assembly journeying was full of Spirit-energy.

When Sister Joan Van der Zyden officially called us to gather for Province Assembly 2009, she wrote some thought provoking words for us to ponder. However, they were only words. It was up to us to respond to the Spirit and "give them flesh". Thus, they eventually became the action and grace of Province Assembly 2009...

Sr. Joan: *We have seen a lifetime of God's loving action in our lives ... and we stand firm in our belief that this love continues to call us forth.*

As we gathered that first afternoon, we were very aware of our diminished number. For various reasons, sixteen from our '2005 Province group' were not with us. However, they were present through pictures and prayer which had a special place at our gatherings. Although our diminishment obviously concerns us, it did not become a major focus of our discussions thanks to the gifted presence of some special women: Sister Clare Stanley, a Councillor from our Generalate in France; Sister Joan Henehan, CSJ, our facilitator; and Kelly Murphy, from our Province finance office.

The Assembly was planned around seven themes from our Province calendar and a four-stage



Sister Clare Stanley,
General Councillor

Appreciative Inquiry Process. As the first day's theme was *Impelled with passion for the mission*, we were energized, enlightened and moved by three presentations. That of Sister Clare was titled, "Mission and Diminishment from the Perspective of the Congregation." In it she posed three key questions which moved us through the Appreciative Inquiry process. The questions were:

How is God calling us to mission in this Province?

How can we be faithful to our charism as a Congregation in this Province?

What would Anne Marie Javouhey do if she were here?

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Editor: Mary Patrice Watson, SJC
 clunywatson@hotmail.com

Mary Star of the Sea Convent
 853 W. 7th Street
 San Pedro, CA 90731-3091

Phone: (310) 328-1807

Layout: Marie Cooper, SJC
 clunymarie@gmail.com

857 North Avenue West
 Westfield, NJ 07090

Phone: (908) 728-0090

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Thank you.



Sister Joan Van der Zyden

Reflecting on the past 25 years, I thank God for the many graces received! Looking toward the gift of the next 25 years, I simply say, "Yes Lord!"

Sister Joan Van der Zyden



Sister Brigid Costelloe

I thank God for my community and friends. During these 60 years it's been good to be companions on the journey, together searching for a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Sister Brigid Costelloe

Lots of Sisters on the Move!

In October, the nine sisters living in Wilmington, Torrance and Monterey Park all moved to Mary Star of the Sea Convent in San Pedro, California. They will be sending news of their new home and ministries your way soon. Meanwhile, we congratulate them and remember them in prayer.

On the Move



Sisters: Elizabeth Butler, Andrew Crean, Mary Glynn, Teresa Kenny, Ena Maguire, Mary Elizabeth McKeever, Loretto Moynihan, Genevieve Marie Vigil and Mary Patrice Watson

Mary Star of the Sea Convent
 853 W. 7th Street
 San Pedro, CA 90731-3091

Sister Laetitia O'Donoghue
 Jeanne Jugan Residence
 2100 South Western Avenue
 San Pedro, CA 90732

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Sister Joan's Province Report was listed on our agenda as, "Cluny at Home," and it ended with a repeating question: *What is the Spirit asking of us right now?* To that question, Sister Joan's answer was always the same: I hear the Spirit saying, "It is time for yet more prayer and discernment."

Speaking of discernment, Kelly Murphy of Brenner McDonagh and Tortolani once again looked at TRENDS with us. It is a method of Tracking Revenue, Expenses, Net Income, Demographics and Savings so that we can make the best possible financial choices in terms of our mission.

Sr. Joan: *We gather remembering and celebrating that love in all of our yesterdays and silenced by the power of that love in each of our todays.*

On Day Two, our theme was *Impelled with prayerfulness*, so much of the day was spent quietly reflecting on the previous day's presentations. Once again there were two questions to guide us: What are the key experiences of our "yesterdays" that I need to grieve, embrace, and celebrate? What is God saying to me today? It was amazing how each day's scripture readings, and very often the homily



Sister Regina reporting on the work of her small group.

as well, touched upon something from our sessions. Certainly, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, all of the staff and each Jesuit who celebrated the liturgy helped to make this a truly graced experience for us.

Sr. Joan: *We gather seeing and knowing that Jesus... has filled our lives with his love to such an extent that we could do nothing else but share that love with others.*

The reflections of Day Two prepared us for Day Three when the theme was *Impelled to keep moving on* and we actually began the Appreciative Inquiry Process with DISCOVERING or appreciating and valuing the best of what already is. Through interviewing each other, we identified values we all hold as Cluny Sisters and want to carry with us into the future.

From here we moved to Day Four and the theme *Impelled with love for all*. At this stage we once again tapped into material from our interviews so as to engage in the process of DREAMING and imagining what might be the mission of our Province in five years. We also took a look at groups to whom our Province is already reaching out in love.

Sr. Joan: *We gather knowing that the love of Christ impels us into the unknown of our tomorrows.*

As we approached Day Five, the theme was *Impelled to see Christ in everything*. It seemed we were doing just that as we processed from DREAM sharing to DESIGN. In fact, there were so many ideas on some of our papers that we had to do much dialoguing to streamline



Hard at work: L-R Sisters Andrew, Teresa, Maria, Luke and Mary.

our choices for the future Province mission. We eventually agreed on two: our internationality and liberation of the unfree. The next day was equally challenging as we were impelled into the future. In the Appreciative Inquiry Process we were involved in creating our DESTINY, making sure our future mission is not "pie in the sky when you die." (Sister Joan Henehan) In other words, we worked out some concrete ways in which these two 'dreams' will become real for us. Each sister then wrote and signed a statement of commitment to this mission.

Our Assembly officially ended with a beautiful prayer service, during which Sister Joan, our Province Leader, presented each of us with a candle commissioning us to go forth and bring light to the mission.

As we ended Province Assembly 2009, we prayed:

*Inflame our hearts, Oh God of love,
may we be your light of love.
Inflame our hearts, Oh God of love,
let your love burn deep in us.*

Being Christian in the 21st Century

Sister Regina Brunelle

Some years ago my community gave me the gift of a sabbatical time. During those months I was introduced to “the new Cosmology”. Though I already had some awareness of the awesomeness of the universe in which I lived, reading the writings of Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Michael Dowd and others during that course opened my eyes to wonders of which I had never dreamed. Pondering the marvels of God’s creation in the universe gave new meaning to so much Jesus had said! I understood that, not only is creation a revelation of God but also that I am one with all created beings since the energy that breathed life into me was transmitted through billions of years of God’s outpouring love at every phase of creation. I came to realize that we humans are the mind of our planet, the eyes through which our planet looks out upon the universe. That led me to a new understanding of discipleship and Christian morality.

What does it mean to be a Christian in the 21st Century? As it has since the beginning, it means to follow Jesus, of course. But as the human spirit has responded to the Holy Spirit’s guidance over the past 2000 years, our understanding of what Jesus taught has broadened and deepened. Jesus’ prayer for unity on the night before he died is a statement of our oneness with every aspect of creation. Christians must reverence and respect everything that God has made. If we alone among all creatures are gifted with the power to reflect, it follows that we are responsible for its well-being. That’s a shift in an attitude that led us to think that creation was there for us and that we could use everything in it to satisfy our every whim. Years ago, Matthew Fox wrote: “A morality of reverence will also be a morality of responsibility—not a responsibility based on duty and fear of disobedience, but a morality based on care for what we cherish and revere.” (quoted in Dowd, Michael, *Earthspirit*, 1991)

In his recent address to the United Nations, President Obama stated that we must “take responsibility for the preservation of our planet.” Noting the conference on climate change the day before, he cautioned, “If we continue down our current course, every member of



... our Earth home is in crisis.

this Assembly will see irreversible changes within their borders.” Changing that, said the president, involves transforming our energy economy in such a way that the poorest nations are both helped to adapt to the problems that climate change have already wrought, and enabled to travel a path of clean development.

It is increasingly clear that our Earth home is in a crisis. If we want it to continue, it’s time to adopt a ‘morality of reverence’, accept human responsibility for its condition and make the hard choices that will restore to health what “we cherish and revere”. As Michael Dowd points out, if we will choose to live ecologically, Earth will continue to flourish with life and awareness and our children will be saved. If we conclude that ecological concerns have nothing to do with Christian morality and are neither ours, nor the Church’s business, most likely humans will disappear from Earth

In the hope of nurturing an attitude of responsibility and reverence for the earth, the next few issues of *Cluny Connections* will be featuring the themes of the Cluny Calendar for the year 2010, *Voices of the Cosmos*. God grant that we may all let “the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus!” (Phillippians 2:5)



Cluny Sisters in the Andaman Islands

Sister Mary Patrice Watson

Who will ever forget what happened five years ago—on December 26, 2004? On that day, a terrible tsunami struck South Asia bringing death and suffering to thousands of people from all parts of the world. Because modern technology can bring pictures from everywhere right into our homes, we all saw, felt and responded to the anguish of so many of those people. Do you ever wonder what's happened to them? What life is like for them now? Today we'd like to share with you what it's like for our sisters in the Andaman Islands.

On December 15, just ten days before that Indian Ocean earthquake/tsunami, five Cluny sisters began a new community in Ram Nagar, a mission on one of the Andaman Islands. So they were there! Actually there are 550 islands in the Andaman group, but only 26 of them are permanently inhabited. That will give you some idea of how isolated and tough an Andaman mission might be. Ram Nagar is situated about 746 miles from mainland India and 218 miles from Port Blair, the Islands' capital. Although Ram Nagar has a beautiful, tourist-attracting beach, what attracted the sisters was the desolate area hidden from the tourists – the land of the Jarawas. The Jarawas are an aboriginal tribe in India that are facing extinction – they number about 350 – due to government policies and isolation.

Because of their previous isolation, there are added challenges for missionaries and others who want to help them now: little is known about their language and culture, and they are more vulnerable to disease and exploitation.

Considering how difficult the situation in Ram Nagar would be, all the sisters in our South East India Province were consulted before a community would be founded there. Then those below age 50 were free to volunteer. Some of the volunteers needed a year to study the culture and languages, while others needed less preparation. Eventually five sisters were ready. During the inauguration ceremony, the new community was placed under the patronage of Mary, Morning Star. At that time, Cardinal Telesphore Toppo expressed his happiness that the sisters had come to serve the Jarawas in this remote corner of the world. After the ceremony, all the sisters were prepared to stay there to do pastoral and social work among the Jarawas. However, that was not to be.

Just ten days later there was the December 26th earthquake/tsunami and God's plan unfolded. First, three sisters went from Ram Nagar to Port Blair to help with the relief efforts. Although one sister eventually returned to Morning Star community, two remained in Port Blair to help organize work with Caritas and Catholic Relief Services.

By 2007 the Cluny sisters had officially established a community in Port Blair at the request of Bishop Alex Dias. Today they run a small kindergarten as well as continuing with the diocesan social program and parish pastoral work. In Ram Nagar the sisters continue their ministry to the Jarawas through parish evangelization.

In union with them, as well as all of our sisters missioned on distant islands, let us pray that Mary our Mother, Morning Star will keep everyone safe and walk with us.

Sister Jaise John from the Andaman Islands community provided much of the information for this article. However communication with her was interrupted after the devastating earthquake in Indonesia on September 30th, and we haven't been able to reestablish a connection with her.



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Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny
 7 Restmere Terrace
 Middletown, RI 02842

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Bringing Hope & Compassion

2010 Province Assembly



The Assembly Gathering

L-R Front Row: Sisters Andrew Crean, Bernadette Lapré, Gisèle Ménos, Loretto Moynihan, Ena Maguire;

Second Row: Sisters Marie Cooper, Genevieve Marie Vigil, Teresa Kenny, Regina Brunelle, Mary Patrice Watson, Clare Stanley, Luke Parker, Ceo Mendes, Mary Glynn, Joan Van der Zyden, Rachel Philippe Racine, Eugenia Brady, Maria Rocha

Province Direction Statements

We commit ourselves

to work for the liberation of the unfree, both ourselves and others, in particular on the issues of:

- education
- trafficking
- race and class discrimination
- environmental concerns

to foster Cluny Internationality through:

- dialogue with the Generalate in discerning the future
- a continued response to the needs of the mission
- advocating for Cluny NGO status at the UN
- expanding present relationships with our sister provinces

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