

175th Anniversary: Province of the West Indies

Sister Joan Van der Zyden

As I landed at Piarco Airport, Port of Spain, I was filled with memories of my two year mission experience in Trinidad twenty years ago. It was exciting to be back and even more exciting to be in Trinidad to celebrate with all the Cluny Sisters of the West Indies the 175th Anniversary of the arrival of the Cluny Sisters in Port of Spain. Our presence began with six Cluny sisters arriving in Trinidad on January 29th, 1836. There are now approximately 70 sisters ministering in the islands of Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Dominica.

All the islands were represented at the Mass of Thanksgiving that took place on January 29, 2011 (175 years to the day later). The Mass was celebrated at St. Joseph Convent Chapel, Port of Spain with Archbishop Edward J. Gilbert as the main celebrant and Archbishop Thomas Edward Gullickson, Apostolic Nuncio, in attendance along with many religious and clergy.

Following the Procession of Flags, the Procession of Sisters, the National Anthem and the Entrance Hymn, Sister Juliana Alexander, Provincial, welcomed everyone after which Sister Clare Stanley, General Councilor, shared greetings on behalf of Sister Morag Collins, our



Province Leader, Sister Juliana Alexander giving the welcome at the Thanksgiving Mass.

Superior General. The liturgy itself was absolutely beautiful. The inclusion of creative movement and the choir, made up of students from one of our schools, were blessings in themselves. At the end of the liturgy, Sister Rufina Donat offered words of thanks and everyone was invited to the festivities that followed.

Included in those festivities was the blessing of the Sister Francis Xavier Heritage Hall. The following information was provided in regards to the hall. "When in the late 1970's the original Convent building dating back to the mid 1800's had to be demolished, Sister Francis Xavier, who was then Provincial Superior of the English speaking Caribbean, was determined that a section, at least, of this original building rich in history should be preserved. The wing abutting Abercromby Street was demolished as was the wooden top floor of the main building but the ground floor she preserved. Instead of a traditional roof she had the builders cover this with a flat concrete roof. Her intention was that a top floor would, at a later date, be erected. Other building projects and major renovations in

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On the Move

Sister Teresa Kenny
 Mt. Sackville Convent
 Chapelizod
 Dublin 20,
 IRELAND

175th Anniversary (Con't)

the Province took precedence and the flat concrete roof remained a reminder of the original intent. More than thirty years have passed. Finally in 2011, as we celebrate the 175 Jubilee of the Province, Sister Francis Xavier's intention has been realized and the building completed. This is aptly called Sister Francis Xavier Heritage Hall."

To be with the sisters as the Province of the West Indies celebrated the kick off of their 175th Anniversary was truly an honor. We pray that the events planned throughout the year will



Affiliates Joe and Kathy Madory with Sister Aloysius Ashby at the reception.

be filled with joy. We pray too that the sisters will continue to be richly blessed in their ministries as the next 175 years begins!

Trinidad Bringing Aid to Haiti

Read about the Haiti-Trinidad "Hait-T Project" begun by friends of Cluny in Trinidad to build a new orphanage here: <http://www.newsday.co.tt/features/0,127816.html>

Check out our Website

<http://www.clunysandcanada.org>

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Listen to the Voice of Animal

Sister Anne Marie Liston

Each day the mailman stops at Javouhey House and delivers our mail. Invariably there are at least half a dozen or more pleas from one animal or environmental group or another. Most ask for donations, which they rarely get, and many ask for advocacy for some humane cause in the form of a signature or some communication with an elected official. Their pleas are often heartrending and sometimes shocking. The breadth and scope of the damage and destruction to the various species we classify as 'animal' that the human race perpetrates in the name of science and progress is astounding and very disheartening.

I have to keep reminding myself of the starfish tossed back into the sea and realize that even one act of kindness to a creature of God is valuable. St. Francis of Assisi once said, "It is not simply enough not to harm the animals God has created, rather we must do all we can to help and protect them."

Our small corner of nature here in Newport is the yard behind the house. There our young ginkgo tree grows tall and strong and offers hospitality to our feathered friends in the form of bird feeders. I watch their sudden descent upon the largesse and wonder why they just take a bit and then, as if there were some secret signal, fly suddenly to their haven in the hedges. A few minutes later they repeat the same action, over and over until finally they fail to return and settle for the evening. "Why don't they just stay there, and take their fill, save themselves all that extra flying around," I wonder. But then, that's the human way of thinking, isn't it? We stockpile, tuck things away for 'whenever', make sure we have enough. Perhaps these little creatures take the admonition of Matthew 6: 26 more seriously than I do: "...they gather nothing in barns, yet their heavenly Father feeds them." Granted God does it through us and Ocean State Job Lot, but they do get fed.

If I stay at the window long enough another visitor appears, this one somewhat controversial. The squirrels have a voracious appetite and great agility.



Moreover, they have taken Genesis 8:17 a little too seriously, and "...abound on the earth, breeding and multiplying." The little birds defer to the squirrels and rest in the trees and bushes. Strangely enough, bigger birds benefit from the squirrel's presence because his gymnastics on the bird feeder causes seeds to fall to the ground. The mourning doves, especially, enjoy his sharing. We have tried to chase him away: squirrel proof feeders; lasers; water pistols; and throwing things at him. (This is not abuse, we couldn't hit him if we tried...our aim is too poor.) So what does the squirrel have to say to me? "Keep on trying, don't give up, sooner or later you'll reach your goal." I admire his tenacity, his determination to survive and care for his own. I stand in awe at his persistence in the face of obstacles.

From springtime until recently we had another daily visitor, a female rabbit (probably more accurately, called a 'hare'). She was an early morning and dusk visitor and found our lawn much to her taste. Occasionally she would gather under the trees and join the birds and squirrels for some seed. Obviously, she was eating for two or three because by mid summer we discovered two tiny progeny hiding near the house. Often she would sit motionless in the grass just a few yards from us staring

intently with wide brown eyes, never blinking. Her stillness and calm would communicate itself to me and I often thought, "If only I could be that still and calm at prayer!"

One hot summer day we noticed a foreigner at our bird feeder. It was a most unusually colored bird, which turned out to be a domestic parakeet. The other birds at first seemed distant and unfriendly. The interloper was anxious and hesitant. But after a few moments the 'garden veterans', the sparrows and chickadees, approached and began feeding with the newcomer. At the end of feeding they all flew back to their hedge home and settled. We were disappointed the next day when our new bird was gone but happy to read a few days later of his return to a family in the area. How reassuring to know that even 'our wildlife' find it in their hearts to 'welcome the stranger.'

I can't feed all the birds, or save all the baby seals, or rescue the Asian tiger from extinction, or free the creatures of the sea held captive for entertainment, or the puppies or kittens in science laboratories, I can only care and look for the opportunities to "throw that one starfish back". That is the message I hear in the Voice of Animal in my world.

In Memoriam

Sister Mary Elizabeth McKeever

Mary Star of the Sea Community

Sister Mary Elizabeth's mission was to spread the good news of Christ to everyone. It was a mission she took so seriously that once she set her feet on the path there was no way but forward. She was not a shrinking violet either! Everyone who has known her remembers her imprint!

Truly she loved all people, but Catholic people were the best in her opinion. While she wanted everyone to be Catholic, she never failed to acknowledge that everyone accomplished good, even non-Catholics, though this fact did at times cause her to say, "Imagine, he (she) isn't even Catholic!" She was always fascinated by the Protestant Reformation, probably due in large part to the fact that she grew up in Belfast, N. Ireland, in the 30's and 40's and had to deal with many challenges due to the Catholic-Protestant divide.

When the Legion of Mary began in Belfast, Mary Elizabeth became an ardent member. It was through the Legion that she first heard God's call to a life of total dedication. It is hard for people today to appreciate what a radical choice that was because it took away two aspects of her life that she valued: being a wage earner and going to dances. She worked to help support her family because ten children had been born after her. Her father was the chief wage earner, so her financial assistance was essential. While she worked hard, she also went dancing every chance she got.

At the end of World War II she was 25 years old. She began to think seriously of dedicating her whole life to God. She contacted the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny who arranged for her to enter the postulancy in 1946. When she persevered and made her religious profession in 1949, her parents, family and friends were amazed!

In 1950 Sister Mary Elizabeth (Sister Immaculata back then) was among the twelve Cluny sisters sent out on a four-week ocean voyage to Melbourne, Australia. They were to begin new Cluny foundations there. She and four others went to Kew to organize a home for elderly ladies. Seven years later, Sister Mary Elizabeth moved to Weribee where she took charge of the seminary dining room. All the seminarians and students soon learned what the words 'order and cleanliness' meant to her.

In 1964, after a year in Paris, France, she was assigned to the Province of the USA and Canada. Here she undertook a variety of ministries in Newport, RI, and Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Later in life she enrolled in the Nurses' Aid Program at Newport Hospital, and was a proud graduate. She loved caring for others, and was very devoted to Sister Philomena McCann during her time in the infirmary in Newport.



Sister Mary Elizabeth on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee.

The last of her ministries involved helping in the sacristy at SS. Peter and Paul Church in Wilmington, California. At the same time, Sister Mary Elizabeth reconnected with the Legion of Mary and all their good works. When she was in Newport, Rhode Island she had been active in the Legion of Mary, and she was quick to reconnect with it in Wilmington, California where she became their spiritual guide. She visited the sick and shut-ins, officiated at vigils and grave-side services as requested, and spent many hours in the adoration chapel.

She was ardently Pro-Life. As part of her morning prayer at 4:00 a.m. she "baptized" all the babies aborted in the previous 24 hours. She went to every rally; sent donations to many Pro-Life causes and recited the Rosary for the Unborn every day.

The move to Mary Star of the Sea Convent was a little more difficult for her than it was for the rest of us as she became more confused. At the same time, she loved hearing from Fr. John Provenza that she was his favorite Cluny sister, and she always perked up when she had a chance to visit her Grade Two class.

God's final call came to her very peacefully on September 22nd, with the community gathered around her. That morning her passing was truly as gentle as silence. All of us who knew and journeyed with her will miss her, but we love to think of her organizing the choirs of angels, meeting friends and watching out for us.

Cluny Associates Conference Trinidad, West Indies



Paula Hamilton, Cluny Associate from San Fernando, Trinidad

Sister Mary Patrice Watson

Nikita Foncette, student at Cluny Providence Girls School, Port of Spain, Trinidad; in the background members of the Port of Spain Associates group.



Sisters Gisèle Ménos, Regina Brunelle, Maria Rocha and I were invited to join with fifteen sisters from the Province of the West Indies for an International Associates' Conference at Emmaus Centre in Trinidad. Sisters Regina, Maria and I were able to travel a few days before the Conference began so we were treated to some extra time as tourists. Here's how Sister Regina described it: "From the moment of our arrival, the welcome was fabulous! I was struck by the lively and reverently celebrated liturgy at Assumption parish on May 2, which gave us a glimpse of the vitality of the People of God in the West Indies. I marveled at the beauty of creation during tours of Moka, Chaguaras, Maracas Bay, Blanchisseuse, and Paramin Mountain. A drive through Maraval into Laventille and up to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima revealed a poorer side of Trinidad and another aspect of the people."

On the evening of May 5, all of us participants gathered in the Emmaus Centre conference room for the opening session. After praying to the Holy Spirit, the West Indian sisters sang a beautiful hymn to Blessed Anne Marie composed by their own Sister Claire Joseph. Though we were not able to join in that night, we soon caught on and added our voices to those of the West Indians. The only business on the agenda was to jot down our hopes, expectations and resolutions for the week. These rough notes were collected by the secretariat and made into mini-posters that were soon posted in the conference room for future reference. It was also pointed out to us that in order to realize the conference's theme, Sharing the Charism globally and locally – Associates in Changing Times, we would gather twice a day either for presentations or related group work.

Because Sisters Elizabeth Brown-Russell and Francis Kelley from the Province of New Zealand/Philippines could not be there, their presentation came to us via e-mail. It was titled "The History of the Associates in the Church and in the Congregation" and read by Sister Clare Harris, our moderator. After hearing it, we broke into small groups to share with each other the histories of our own Associate groups. This sharing ended with everyone thanking God for the grace-filled similarities and differences so obvious in our experiences.

Subsequent presentations led us to enlightening discussions and prayerful considerations. They included such topics as: The Spirituality of Blessed Anne Marie – A way for Associates to Share Her Vision, Values and Mission; Integrating Associates – Bridges of Hope for the Future; and Spirituality for a Technological Age. We also looked at two key questions that sparked good energy and action: How can our Associates locally and globally network more? and How can we situate St. Joseph, his vocation, dignity and mission in the life of our Associates?

On May 9, 2010 many of the West Indian Associates joined us for an Associates' day. While most of them were from the Trinidadian groups, one came all the way from Dominica. Like our West Virginia Associates, the group in Dominica continues to gather even though the Cluny sisters are no longer there. Altogether there were about 60 Associates present. Along with the usual items, the day's agenda included a few unique ones too. They were: a great trivia game on the life of Blessed Anne Marie; group work to create an Associate mission statement; and an incredible cultural presentation. With regard to the last item, all of the West Indian offerings were first rate to say the least, but we were not prepared for 'culture.' We had prepared an offering more in the line of 'entertainment.' However, Sister Gisèle redeemed us. According to reports she stole the show when she showed everyone that "they are definitely not too old to Salsa." (West Indian Newsletter)

Throughout our visit, Sister Annetta Alexander, Provincial, organized trips so 'the four Americans' could see as much of Cluny in Trinidad as possible, and other places as well. Thus, on our last day, we went to Cumana, the Cluny vacation house we have heard about forever. Even though it was raining, words cannot adequately describe our experience. In a sense it pulled together all the blessings of these days for which we truly thank God, Sister Annetta and all the sisters of her Province for the blessings of praying, recreating, remembering, sharing, nurturing, touring, sharing, and going forth with renewed energy to minister to and with our Cluny Associates.



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Bringing Hope & Compassion

Africa Rise Up! Cluny Sisters Gather for First African Assembly

Sister Clare Stanley

On the 1st of December 2010, 51 sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny on mission in Africa and Madagascar and the entire General Council Community gathered in Cap des Biches, Senegal for the first assembly of its kind on the African Continent. The Sisters of many different nationalities represented the sixteen countries which make up the provinces and regions: Senegal, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Madagascar, Angola, Congo, Mozambique, Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Tanzania, Niger and Mali.

The theme, *AFRICA, RISE UP!* was in the context of the theme of the second African synod – *The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace*. You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:13, 14)

Sr. Morag Collins, our Superior General, opening the Assembly said, “With this sense of a historic occasion which allows us to revel in an honorable past, we are ready to assume our responsibility to carry on the same mighty task of today in the light of the Second Synod for Africa ... to accept the Church’s challenge to work for reconciliation, justice and peace for all people wherever we are.”

Cardinal Theodore Adrien Saars of Dakar gave us a brief presentation on the Synod, outlining both the challenges facing the African continent and what gives us hope. He reminded us that out of love for Africa, we should not be afraid to go against the flow. Only dead fish go with the flow.

Fr. Barthelemy Adoukonou, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture touched on the cultural perspective. There was a lively discussion on the subject of witchcraft, superstition and the increasingly common phenomenon of people purporting to receive messages directly from God.

Sister Teresa Okure, a Sister of the Holy Child and a renowned Scripture scholar from Nigeria, led us in interactive sessions through the topic “What the African Synod means for religious communities”. Her expertise, knowledge of scripture, dynamism and general approach enabled us to talk about difficult and sensitive issues with refreshing openness and honesty. She challenged us to hear the call to something NEW and to revisit Anne Marie Javouhey’s love for Africa and what that love led her to do.

In the days that followed we continued to reflect, to share, to discuss and to pray so as to find a new stimulus in our work of evangelization “in that portion of the field that the father of the family is giving us to cultivate; the more thorns and brambles there are, the more we ought to hope that by our labor the good seed will yield a hundredfold.” (Anne Marie Javouhey)

It was truly an experience of a New Pentecost, a God experience. “Glory be to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to God from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen”. (Eph. 3:20)

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