

The Story of a Cluny Vocation

Sister Joan Van Der Zyden
Former Province Leader of USA and Canada,
and currently serving as a Councillor on our General Government Team



Photo: Sister Agnès Thévenin

Sister Joan Van der Zyden

We have all been aware of and praying for those in West Africa suffering from the Ebola crisis. The numbers are staggering and as I am writing, Sierra Leone is suffering from the highest increase of cases in a single week in any country since the crisis began. I continue to pray for them and especially for the people of the town of Moyamba who remain

quarantined. I remember them in a special way because that is where I became aware that God was calling me to religious life. It was the visit of a missionary priest to our parish that sparked the idea of going overseas in the mind of my best friend, Lorrie! After talking about it, I was ready for the adventure. We wanted to go as 'lay missionaries' not as volunteers so we looked for an organization that was connected to the Church. We made inquiries with one religious congregation but they only took women who were interested in religious life. That certainly was not us. They suggested V.I.C.S. (Volunteer International Christian Service), an organization run by the Spiritans. We applied. The following summer (August, 1980), we were on our way to Sierra Leone where we were assigned to St. Joseph Secondary School, Moyamba, a St. Joseph of Cluny Sisters' school. There were three sisters in the community at the time,

Continued on page 3

In this Issue

The Story of a
Cluny Vocation
Sister Joan Van Der Zyden

From the Editor's Desk

Cluny Sisters Looking to
the Future:

Care for the
Integrity of Creation

Human Trafficking

Health Care

Education

A New Pastoral Approach
to Religious Life



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

Editor: Regina Brunelle, SJC
lpbrunelle@gmail.com
St. Joseph Convent
Good Shepherd Square
15 Ray St. N. Apt. 802
Hamilton, ON L8R 2X5
CANADA

Phone: (289) 389-8534

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.

Each year the Church focuses on some aspect of living out our faith. On the first Sunday of Advent, the Year of Consecrated Life opened. During this year Catholic Christians are invited to reflect on this particular way of living out the call of baptism to discipleship. In keeping with this year's theme, Cluny Connections decided to highlight how Cluny Sisters live out their consecration as missionary disciples according to the vision of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey, our founder.

We begin this issue with Sr. Joan Van der Zyden's personal journey to Cluny. The newsletter then sums up the story of our founder's vision and gives you a bird's eye view of how that vision is being lived two hundred years later. It would be impossible in these pages to provide a complete picture of the work of almost three thousand sisters living on every continent, but we hope that the broad lines we offer will give you some idea of the vocation of a Sister of St. Joseph of Cluny in the 21st century. Among other things, you will read about how Cluny Sisters everywhere are particularly interested in responding to the ills of modern slavery. This is not surprising since our founder is especially remembered for her work in emancipating African slaves. Our associates, too, are getting involved. The San Pedro, CA's group hosted Sr. Kathleen Bryant who raised awareness of the tricks traffickers use to snag teen girls. In Hamilton, ON, associates collaborated with the Catholic Women's League to present the documentary *Nefarious*.

Education remains central to the ministry of Cluny Sisters. Discover the new twists to education we are bringing to our basic belief that freedom is the fruit of a sound education for life.

If you would like more information about these issues, click on any of the links on page 8.

Sister Regina

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)

Check out our Blog for news and in-depth
articles:
<http://cluniusandcanada.blogspot.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:

The Story of a Vocation (Continued from Page 1)

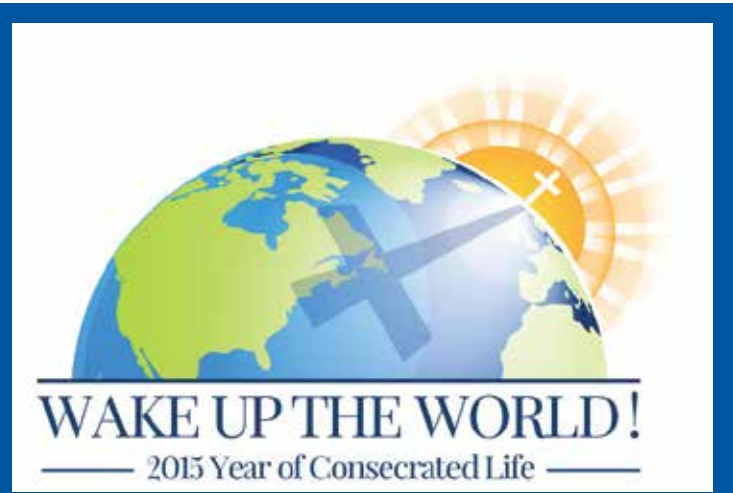
Sister Greta Collins, Principal; Sister Theophane Halpin, the Form 5 Teacher; and Sister Margaret McCabe, director of the clinic. Sister Ethna Hanamy joined the community in our second year there after a visit to her native Ireland.

Although we were well prepared by V.I.C.S., daily life in Moyamba was certainly different from anything we had ever experienced. The heat, not having our own transportation, the effort needed to prepare meals and go to the market, the preparation of classes by candlelight, everything led to a slower, simpler lifestyle. It was one of the very profound lessons the people of Sierra Leone, in particular those in Moyamba, taught me. Take time! And time was something we had plenty of. There was nowhere to rush to, no shopping mall, no movie theatre, nothing to distract us. I was six months into becoming used to a simpler lifestyle when I received a letter from a friend that spoke of seeing me doing something like this again but as a religious sister. That comment awakened in me the “vocational flame”!

However it wasn't a flame that was jumping around with excitement. The more I thought about it, the more I struggled with it. I finally asked Sister Greta if I could spend a weekend at Leicester, a small retreat house the sisters have in the hills surrounding Freetown. When I arrived, I picked up the Bible and opened it to Psalm 139. I read, “You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest.” I truly felt this was meant for me as I was in such a state over the idea of a religious vocation. God seemed to be saying, ‘Joan, you have a year and a half left in your contract here in Moyamba. Relax! Stop worrying and just BE with the idea!’ So, that is what I did. I returned to Moyamba, continued my teaching and started asking the sisters, one by one, why they had entered religious life.

While in Moyamba, I read the life of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey, the foundress of the Cluny Sisters. Hers is an amazing story! While still a young girl she began responding to the needs created by the French revolution. She entered with the Sisters of Charity but after having a vision of many children of different races she felt God was calling her to found her own congregation. This she did!

Her mission that expanded throughout the world was profoundly marked by her efforts to emancipate slaves. But it was not her accomplishments that spoke to my heart. It was the fact that the God she knew was a God of love, a God who loved her and whom she loved in return. That love was so strong she could not NOT share



Listen to Pope Francis announcing the Year of Consecrated Life on Vatican Radio here:

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/11/29/pope_issues_letter_for_year_of_consecrated_life/1112885

it! The desire of her heart was to make that love known throughout the world because she knew that the love of Christ is the great hope of every person. It was this relationship with God that drew me to her and to the Cluny Sisters. I read about it in her life and saw it in action through the life of the sisters in Moyamba.

I wrote to my parents to tell them what I was thinking about and they encouraged me to follow what would make me happy. In their wisdom, they suggested that when I was finished my two years in Moyamba, I work for a year at home, to reflect on my decision in my own culture. I did that, and at the same time made a connection with the Cluny Sisters in Hamilton. The rest is history. I entered in 1983 and made vows in 1985. While there have certainly been challenges in my journey, as in any person's journey, there hasn't been a day when I regretted my decision to enter, maybe because, in a sense, it was like Blessed Anne Marie. I just couldn't NOT enter! The Lord called me into religious life. I knew that, once I was still enough to hear it and I know today, over thirty years later, that my call continues.

And so, speaking from my own experience, I invite you to still your heart long enough to hear the voice of God. I don't necessarily mean that you will hear God calling you into religious life, but you will hear God calling you into a place of love, into a place of hope, into a place of knowing that no matter where your life may take you, God does not forget you.

Then ...

Who? Anne Javouhey and eight companions
What? Their religious profession of vows
Where? St. Peter's Church, Chalon, France
When? May 12, 1807 just as France was struggling to rise out of the ravages of the French Revolution

That's when Anne Javouhey and the small group who shared her vision began the work of trying to repair these damages by "doing a little good". In the mind of the small band's leader this could best be achieved through education, but it soon became apparent that there were also orphans to be raised; the elderly to be housed and fed; the sick to be healed; the mentally ill to be protected and restored to health of mind and body and very soon the call came to sail beyond France to the colonies. The missionary dimension of the congregation had evolved!

and Now

Who? Close to 3,000 Sisters
What? Responding to the needs of today and tomorrow
Where? In over 60 countries

Check out our new Congregation Global Concerns Page!
www.facebook.com/ClunyGlobalConcernsCommittee

More than 200 years later, the congregation continues to strive to be faithful to the founding gift for the Church given through Blessed Anne Marie. Education in all its forms remains essential to our mission, but the face of how it is being delivered has often radically changed to meet the signs of the times. Today, Cluny Sisters across the globe are fulfilling the mission through both conventional and non-conventional education, new approaches to pastoral care, healthcare, care of creation, and the eradication of modern slavery.

Care for the Integrity of Creation

Exploiting the earth and not allowing her to give us what she has within her, can no longer give life.

(Pope Francis on Environment day)



Madagascar



Portugal

Throughout the congregation - in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia - Cluny Sisters are striving to do their bit for creation "groaning in agony". Notably, the province of Madagascar has recently developed an organic farm as an educational center for young Malagasy and other nationalities represented in our schools. Novices in several provinces are learning to green the landscape and grow their own food; children in Cluny Schools everywhere are being challenged to plant trees, recycle waste, use recycled materials, and live simply so that the wounds of our earth may heal for the benefit of future generations. The enthusiasm of the young in adopting this way of life bodes well for the future of the earth.

Human Trafficking

Anne Marie Javouhey loved Africa and its people. It is not surprising that her compassion led her to spend a good portion of her life working towards the liberation of African slaves. Today, Cluny Sisters throughout the congregation are committed to righting the wrong of human trafficking which Pope Francis has called a crime against humanity. Whether through efforts to educate

ourselves and our Associates, about, or draw attention to this crime, educating the young about the dangers of human trafficking in modern society or directly working against the crime as happens in Nepal and India, human trafficking is at the top of the Cluny agenda for every province as well as for our Associates.

In Southwest India

Sr. Jeena Valiyapampil works with an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) against human trafficking, rescuing minors (boys and girls) forced into prostitution and child labor. During recent rescue missions, Sr. Jeena was involved in rescuing more than a hundred youngsters. Some of the girls were pregnant; many had already been infected with HIV and sexually transmitted diseases and the child laborers were in woeful physical condition. As a lawyer, Sr. Jeena is following these cases all the way from the lowest court to the supreme court of India. The province is entering into an agreement with the NGO to open a Sheltered Home for trafficked victims and to provide better rehabilitation opportunities for their reintegration into society.

Other initiatives include consciousness raising, supporting anti-trafficking organizations and initiatives, education of girls and young women, promoting the empowerment of women and taking a public stance against modern slaveries.



Sister Jeena Valiyapampil



South-Central India



The Philippines

Join Cluny Sisters on February 8, 2015
on the First Worldwide Day of Prayer
to End Trafficking

From the desk of
Blessed Anne Marie

In Sierra Leone there are more than 500 little girls who have been seized from the slave traders, and twice as many boys. From this number they are allowing us to choose some between the ages of eight and ten with whom to start our school. (Letter 62)

Healthcare

Cluny sponsored medical clinics exist in just about every mission in the Global South.

The clinic in the mountains of Furcy is the only medical facility available to hundreds of people who live in the huts hidden away in the mountains. Sometimes they walk many miles, even days, to come for help. Thanks to a volunteer medical team that often includes even a dentist, the clinic provides a variety of medical services to as many as 500 people every Saturday.

Cluny Sisters still retain the ministry to persons suffering from Hansen's disease that goes back to the days of AMJ. The way they do it is different, though. Today, the focus is on prevention and early detection involving an intense collaboration with lay people from many villages whom the sisters have trained to identify the symptoms, deliver the medications and follow-up on the patients.

Sisters in both Africa and India have developed a vibrant ministry to people with HIV and epilepsy as well. Preventive medicine controls the spread of disease while education aims at overcoming the fear and prejudice so often connected with these illnesses.

At the Rehabilitation Center in Moyamba Sr. Joyce offers physiotherapy to stroke and polio patients. Staff also trains parents to continue the work at home. It is such a joy for both staff and parents to see the children raising a head and smiling as the therapy begins to work its magic! Unfortunately, the Rehab Center has had to shut down for the duration due to the Ebola outbreak since all their work is bodily touch, forbidden by law for the duration of the outbreak. The Center was built entirely by local labor with funds raised by the Mandarino Memorial Fund in Staten Island, NY.

The Ebola Epidemic

The Moyamba District of Sierra Leone has been most affected by the Ebola epidemic. To date, none of the sisters has caught the virus, though some of their families have. Caught in the grip of the confusion, fear, grief and deprivation caused by the virus, the sisters continue to promote life and healing. The medical clinics operated by the sisters are not equipped to care for victims of Ebola but they do continue to provide medical care for other illnesses.

Loreto Clinic in Makeni is located in the District of Bombali where the greatest number of confirmed



Patients in the waiting room at Loretto Clinic in Makeni

cases of Ebola has been identified. Suspected cases are referred to the holding centers where people showing symptoms of the disease can be isolated.

One of the biggest challenges in ending the spread of Ebola is how to change the deeply rooted cultural belief that "there's no heaven if the body is not washed". There is some progress in the towns and cities, but the villages are still struggling to abandon their cultural burial practices.

As survivors return from the distant treatment centers, the sisters and their lay teams of trained 'carers' listen to and support those showing signs of post-traumatic stress. Those identified as needing long-term professional mental health care are referred to Loretto Clinic's two trained mental health nurses.

Education

Some examples of a new twist to education that sets the captive free are:

St. Joseph's School for the Hearing Impaired in Makeni, Sierra Leone where the sisters are developing university level training programs for teachers of both, the hearing impaired and the blind; schools for the very poor who otherwise could not go to school in places like Suduku, in the Kono District of Sierra Leone; using schools for paying children during the day and for street children and child laborers in the evenings in Africa, India and the West Indies; education for the care of creation particularly in India, Madagascar and Chamblanc, France; courses in cooking and baking offered at Furcy, high above the city of Port au Prince.

Cluny Sisters are also engaged in a variety of lay leadership formation and evangelization programs

such as the oversight and delivery of parish religious education programs in the USA; Renew International in the USA, with outreach to Canada and South Africa; pastoral ministry, retreat work and spiritual accompaniment wherever the congregation exists; youth ministry and after school programs as in Haiti, Peru and India; teacher-training for child protection in the Gambia; working with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone and street children in danger of being trafficked, especially in Nepal, India, and Africa; education for sustainable development in Madagascar, West Africa, India, South America; education about rights and the protection of children, notably through the Bal Surasha Abhiyan Trust in India where the sisters provide shelter for street children in danger and offer programs to sensitize the population about children's rights and child protection issues, not only in Kalimpong, but also in the villages where children are easy targets for various forms of trafficking.

In several countries, sisters provide prisoners with marketable skills along with health care. In St. Louis, Senegal, for example, the inmates and their families receive free medical care along with spiritual support. Since babies born in prison are left with their mothers, Sr. Catharina, a nurse, provides them with everything a baby needs to stay healthy. Along with a lay team, the sisters help lift the boredom of the inmates' days by teaching them embroidery, sewing, and painting, skills that will help support them financially when they are released.



Street children under the care of Cluny Sisters in India.

A New Pastoral Approach to Living Religious Life

In 1993, some of the members of the South-West Province in India discerned the call to a new radical way of living the gospel in the midst of the people. Going beyond traditional ways of proclaiming the Good News, this 'call within a call' gave expression to a way of living in solidarity with the poor. The sisters refer to it as the New Presence. It gives life to an alternate, non-institutional way of living religious life. The sisters give witness by sharing in the simple life style of the community and their solidarity with the poor while focusing on the most disadvantaged. It is a non-threatening approach to people, their religions and cultures, recognizing everything good and noble in them and enriching them with Gospel values not preached in words, but lived out in their daily lives. Once a certain level of empowerment is reached, whereby the people can continue their journey on their own, the sisters move to another place and begin again. Three communities are living this way of life in the dioceses of Bellary, Gulbarga and Belgaum.



A Cluny Sister working with young single mothers at risk.

Conclusion

Two hundred years ago, the young Anne Javouhey said 'yes' to a somewhat veiled call from God to respond to the urgent needs of her time. The 'how' was never as clear as the 'come, follow me'! In one of her letters she wrote, " God reveals his will to me only one drop at a time!" The women who follow her call today also strive to say 'yes' by responding to the unmet, urgent needs of the day. Sometimes they, too, struggle with the 'how' in the midst of so many demands. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few! Any takers out there?



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

For further Information about Anti-trafficking Efforts:



Pope Francis' World Day of Peace Address No Longer Slaves, but Brothers and Sisters

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/pa-pa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviigiornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html

- National Educators to Stop Human Trafficking
<http://nesteducators.org>
- Stop Human Trafficking – Awareness, Advocacy and Action
www.stopenslavement.org
- Government of Canada – National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking
<http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/ntnl-ctn-pln-cmbt/index-eng.aspx>
- Canadian Women's Foundation – End Sex Trafficking
<http://canadianwomen.org/trafficking>
- Men Against Sexual Trafficking – Canada
<http://mast-canada.com/Default.aspx>
- Global Freedom Network
www.globalfreedomnetwork.org

- Walk with Me - Survivor Support Services
www.walk-with-me.org
- Rising Angels – Survivor Support Services
www.facebook.com/risingangelscanada



The Blue Heart Campaign

The Blue Heart represents the sadness of those who are trafficked while reminding us of the cold-heartedness of those who buy and sell fellow human beings. The use of the blue UN color also demonstrates the commitment of the United Nations to combating this crime against human dignity.
www.unodc.org/blueheart/en/about-us.html

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