

Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny
Province of USA & Canada

Connections

South Africa: Renewing the Faith in small Christian Communities

Sister Marie Cooper



Small Christian Communities meet weekly to pray, reflect on the scriptures, share faith, and live out the Gospel in their lives. The members support one another, invite new members to join, and give birth to new communities. (East London, Diocese of Port Elizabeth, South Africa.)

What is happening in small Christian communities today?

Whether here in the USA or abroad, they are dynamic and growing. For the past several years, with my ministry at RENEW International*, I've trained thousands of lay persons to initiate, foster and facilitate small Christian communities (SCCs). This past year, I've helped

launch in the Diocese of Port Elizabeth, South Africa *RENEWAfrica: Gathered as God's People*, a process for founding and supporting SCCs in Africa.

The *RENEWAfrica* and *Gathered as God's People* logos were created by young artists of the Port Elizabeth Deanery. Father Albert Nolan, OP, a South African theologian, graciously allowed his

material to be used for *Meet Christ Today*, the first of the five segment series.

It is a vital ministry in today's church, and a great privilege for me.

Testimonials witnessing to the power of SCCs abound. "It was my Small Christian Community that got me through the tragic killing of my son. I was angry with everyone, even God. Members of my community

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Sister Aine Power

Photo: Sister Joan Van der Zanden

On July 7, 2008 Sr. Aine left Providence for her home visit to her native Doonbeg, County Clare, Ireland. It was the usual exciting and happy preparation time for this regular journey. She was anxious to bring family news back to the folks at home.

How shocking it was then, to learn a month later that Sister Aine had suffered a stroke. It was unbelievable. It brought back so many memories to us who had known her during the fifty plus long years she prayed, worked, and labored here in our Province of USA and Canada. Aine taught in California, in Wilmington and Torrance for many years, and in Newport and Providence most recently.

Sister Aine always loved geometry and has an artistic bent. These two gifts led her to find creative expression in quilting.

Everywhere she went she brought with her a deep faith, a strong commitment to Blessed Anne Marie, a quiet presence and a deep sense of dedication.

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On the Move

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Her devotedness to duty, her sense of humor, her willingness to be of service, right up to the day of her departure for Ireland, were exemplary.

She always had a welcome for the sisters and friends who visited and enjoyed sharing the news. We miss the gracious smile, the ever ready cup of tea, the knowing wink and thoughtful acts of hospitality that were so much a part of her, but we are consoled by the thought that she is back in the land she loves so well and close to her family.

We are happy to hear that Sr. Aine has been making some progress under the expert care of our sisters in Woodlock, Portlaw, County Waterford, Ireland where Sister has been recuperating for the past several months.

We are sincerely thankful to the communities in Ireland for the welcome they have given to Sister. While we are far away in distance Sr. Aine remains close to our hearts and will always be remembered in prayer and affection by our grateful Province.

2009 Cluny Jubilarians



Photo: Sister Joan Van der Zyden

Sister Joseph Edwards

The desire to be a missionary, which I first verbalized during the hard years of the "great depression" while working in St. Pierre and Miquelon, providentially led me to discern my religious vocation with the Cluny Sisters. As a Cluny Sister missioned first in India and then in the United States, I was involved in a variety of ministries. I also met many dear people over the seventy years of my Religious life. Those seventy years have gone like a flash. They were filled with sunshine and shadows, trials and difficulties, joys and sorrows, but Our Dear Lord was always there at my side to bless and sustain me. I now look forward to the joy of being with Him forever in the bliss and peace of Heaven.



Photo: Sister Marie Cooper

Sister Mary Elizabeth McKeever

As I look back over these sixty years of consecrated life in the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, my heart is filled with gratitude. I can only thank God for all the graces I have received. When I entered the Cluny novitiate in Ferbane, County Offaly, Ireland, I wanted to serve God and the Church. Obedience sent me to Australia, Scotland, England, Canada and the United States. There were many ups and downs during those years. The great love and support of my Cluny family and my McKeever family kept me going even when times were difficult. I am deeply grateful for all the kindness and care being lavished on me and the health I have to continue serving. My daily prayer is DEO GRATIAS!

Congregation Leadership to Gather in Portugal in 2009

From May 1st -31st, Cluny Sisters in Torres Novas, near Fatima, Portugal, will be hosting our Cluny leadership from around the world as they gather for the Council of the Congregation. During these days of prayer, celebration and sharing, the sisters will follow an agenda that has been drawn up by Sister Morag Collins, our Superior General, to help maintain and strengthen the unity of our Congregation, and to guide its growth and development. As our Provincial, Sister Joan Van der Zyden and all our other Cluny leaders prepare for this Council of the Congregation, our prayers are with them.

Cluny School Dedicates New Building

Kathleen Clair

On Wednesday, October 8, 2008 the Cluny School family gathered to celebrate another milestone in their expanding dream - the dedication and blessing of the wonderful, newly renovated school, housing all the students in one building. The ceremony began with students leading guests in the Pledge of Allegiance and God Bless America. Mr. Jack Regan, the principal, then welcomed guests, and Sister Joan Van der Zyden, Cluny School Trustee and Provincial, offered the opening prayer. Sister Joan gave a brief history of the school and its journey from the first kindergarten class which opened in 1957.

Pastors from three Newport County parishes came to bless the new facility. Mr. Regan thanked the many benefactors who supported the project. He praised Robert Healey, chairman of the building committee and his team for their unyielding persistence in seeing the project through. Students presented



L-R: Sister Rachel Racine, Gavin Megley, Sister Gisèle Ménos, Maeve Kirwin (daughter of Cluny Grad Rowan Kirwin), and Mrs. Noreen Drexel cut the ribbon.

A tangible expression of Unity, our school theme this year, is this bringing together of the whole student body under one roof.

Mrs. Noreen Drexel, a trustee of the Allette McBean Charitable Trust, which has been so generous to the school, with a basket of handmade thank you cards from the entire student population.

Sisters Gisèle Ménos and Rachel Racine, from the Cluny faculty, joined Mrs. Drexel along with PreK student Maeve Kirwin and Eighth Grader Gavin Megley to cut the ribbon. The event concluded with

the choir singing the Cluny School song. Guests enjoyed a reception and tours of the new facility.

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Cluny Sisters in Tanzania

Responding to urgent Needs in Health Care and Religious Education

Sister Mary Patrice Watson

About a hundred years ago, French Cluny sisters first went to the island of Zanzibar in East Africa to care for the lepers. After many years of ministry at Walezo, they left. It was a long time before another group of Cluny Sisters could be sent to that area. On New Year's Eve 1998, three English-speaking sisters, Sisters Philomena D'Souza, Esther Bambi Waku and Anne Faure arrived in Tanzania. Not only did they reestablish a Cluny missionary presence in a republic created by the unification of Zanzibar and Tanganyika, they were from India, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Seychelles respectively, forming one Cluny community. In every way, their arrival highlighted the amazing way in which Blessed Anne Marie ever calls and connects us.

The sisters went to Tanzania in response to the late Archbishop Mario Mgulunde's appeal for Cluny sisters to run a parish dispensary in the remote village of Mwanzugi in the Archdiocese of Tabora. The sisters and their ministry at the new dispensary were very welcome.

Today, the dispensary has greatly expanded. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The sisters have a lay staff to help them provide treatment and services in several different departments including in-patient care, maternity and free maternal and child health care. The sisters also provide a program for the empowerment of women teaching

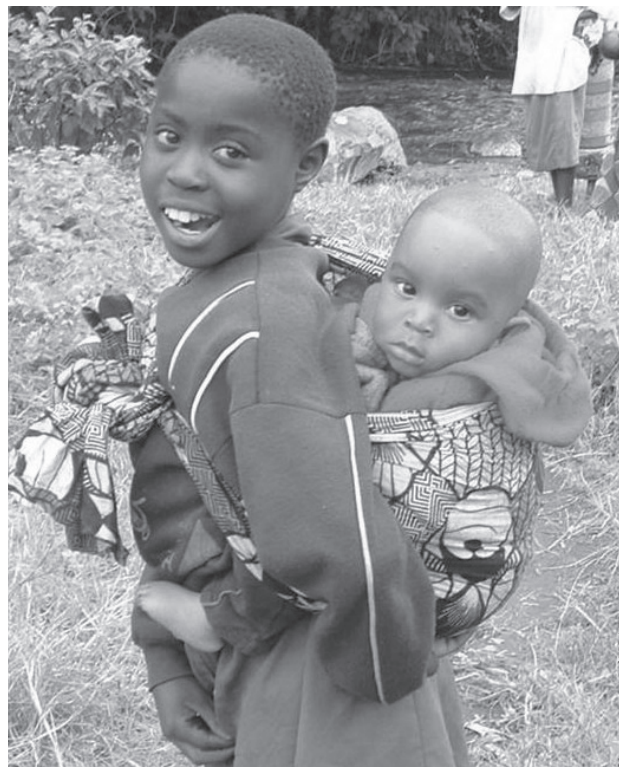
them skills so they can become independent. In addition, the sisters are engaged in such pastoral work as visiting the sick and elderly, and teaching catechism to children in and out of schools.

Sister Aline Nicette recently wrote that Tanzania, which is poor in so many ways, seems to be very rich in religious vocations. Soon after the first three sisters started their work in Mwanzugi, a number of young women began showing signs of being attracted

to their way of life. Then the sisters began getting letters from girls who wanted to join the Congregation.

The sisters decided to open a second community, where they could welcome young Tanzanian women who desired to follow in the footsteps of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey. The late Archbishop Mgulunde graciously loaned them a house in Tabora town which would serve their purpose. This 'Come and See' community was inaugurated on February 11, 2003 under the patronage of Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey.

In February 2007 the sisters had the joy of having their first Tanzanian,



A Tanzanian girl with her sister.

Sister Christina Matthias, profess vows in the Congregation. Since they do not have a formation house in Tanzania, Sister Christina made her formation in West Africa. Two Tanzanian aspirants will follow Sister Christina's path in 2009.

Someday the sisters in Tanzania hope to be able to build their own formation house. The current Archbishop, the Most Reverend Paul Ruzoka, has offered them some land. They do not have enough money to build yet, so for now, having a formation house in Tanzania, where there is great hope for Cluny vocations, is still a dream to be realized.



Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny

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Bringing Hope & Compassion

South Africa: Renewing the Faith in Small Christian Communities (Con't)

would stop by and visit and pray with us. They helped start the healing process and supported our family."

"My SCC is the place where I grow in faith and in my prayer life. We support one another in living out the faith."

RENEWAfrica begins with a parish mission. Janet told us: "On the second night, we had an anointing service. I prayed that God would heal me from this emptiness I've always felt. As the priest prayed over me and anointed me, I knew I was healed. I am so filled with joy, I want to tell my story to everyone."

At the diocesan Launch of RENEWAfrica in the Port Elizabeth Deanery, close to 3,000 people from all ethnic backgrounds joined

together for the celebration of Eucharist with Bishop Michael Coleman and the priests of the area. Each parish presented a bowl of soil to the bishop who mixed it all together at the beginning of the celebration. Before being dismissed, each parish received a lighted RENEWAfrica candle from Fr. Jerry Browne, Director of the Diocesan Pastoral Development Office, and a bowl of the mixed soil, a symbol of unity, from the bishop.

Parish Launches followed on the next Sunday. All 70+ parishes of the diocese now have SCCs meeting regularly and are committed to SCCs as a way of being church: creating a communion of small communities in the local parish.



Photo: James McKeown

Sister Marie Cooper conducting a training for Small Community Leaders in South Africa.

*RENEW International, founded 30 years ago, fosters spiritual growth by empowering individuals and communities to encounter God in everyday life, deepen and share faith, and connect faith with action. Materials, both Lectionary based and thematic, and training are available. For more information, visit the website: www.renewintl.org or phone 908-769-5400.

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