

Embracing this New Moment

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Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

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In this issue

| | |
|--|----|
| Into the Heart of this New Moment | 1 |
| Anne Karges' Reflection | 1 |
| New Leadership Circle | 3 |
| The Dance of Creation | 4 |
| Letting Go In order to Receive | 4 |
| Choosing a New Direction | 5 |
| MRC Presentation | 6 |
| Nurturing Transforming Energies | 7 |
| Integrating Our Chapter Direction—Sue Wilson | 8 |
| Press Release | 11 |
| Flowers from all Quarters | 12 |
| And Now What? | 12 |

Into the Heart of this New Moment

Anne Karges, our official presider of the founding chapter, read the official proclamation of the indult from Rome announcing ourselves as a new congregation. The work and labour pains of the last four years was brought to a joyous completion. And the best part is that we are all aware that the completion is really a new beginning in our life together. Anne travels from Kitchener to Hamilton for work and so she shared with us her reflections from a CBC interview about how bees live their lives! From this she made the connection to a book of our history, *A Swarm of Bees*. Little did the creators of this interview on the life of bees know that it would make its way into the founding chapter of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada.



“Love will surely lead us to life giving dying and to new life. In our following of Love, Love has led us to be globally aware, to be aware of creation and our environment, to be aware of our interconnectedness and our universe story, to be open to new ventures in our congregations.”

Anne Karges
Chapter Reflection

Chapter Reflection

by Sister Anne Karges, Presider
On the occasion of the Founding Chapter of the Congregation
of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada
November 18-24, 2012



The gospel reading for this day spoke of the gathering of the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. And here we are. Welcome What are we doing? Why are we doing this? **What were we thinking?** Why is this time set apart?

It feels a bit like the youngest child at the Passover meal asking the questions. The story of salvation history, the story of God's mighty deeds is recounted. This is a chapter in our story, intertwined with salva-

tion history – about what has God been doing in and through us. We are standing in the threshold of this new moment.

This is a year of faith and a time to continue to unpack the treasures of Vatican II and to appreciate its impact on church life and religious life. Vatican II was a beginning point of change for most of us in this room as we undertook its call for renewal in earnest and rediscovered our roots, our spirituality and our oneness. We learned from Vatican II how to be engaged in reading the signs of the times.

We have experienced huge leaps in our awareness and consciousness of the world around us. We have lived with the dramatic changes in physics, science, communication, technology, climate change, evolution, creation, ecology, the universe story, Christology, theology, relationships between men and women. We have lived and continue to live in breathtaking moments of human history.

I believe that we have been reading the signs of our times and have responded with the grace of God. The Federation Assembly in May 2006, in this very place, was one of those signposts in our journey. At that time Sr. Patricia Hogan, Federation President gave a memorable presentation. The title was "Where is Love Leading Us?" She reminded us of the strong belief in the power of our charism, of a deep commitment to live our call to active and inclusive love, of a conviction that growth in God springs from the hal-

lowed roots of our ancestors' legacy and gently leads us to explore new vistas "so that all may be one".

In that presentation several "what ifs" were posed...

What if CSJ's became known for their ethic of care for Mother Earth?

What if we began to consider one Administration team?

What if we began to think of a new structure for Congregational leadership?

What if... what if... what if....and now, here we are...

Are we still **willing to go** where Love leads us? Love will surely lead us to life giving dying and to new life. In our following of Love, Love has led us to be globally aware, to be aware of creation and of our environment, to be aware of our interconnectedness and our universe story, to be open to new ventures in our congregations.

Let us hold one another in God's mystery, to be soft and open, in that contemplative stance, as we engage with each other in this chapter process.

A closing remark from the Markham Assembly was an invitation to dance the cosmic dance, searching for new hallowed roots and creating sacred vistas. Before we continue the dance we could learn a lesson from the honey bee as well as from today's proverbial fig tree.

Mother St. John would recount the story: My dear Sisters Abbe Piron

had said, his voice rich with emotion. 'You are few in number, but like a swarm of bees, you will spread everywhere.'

Well like a swarm of bees – As they go searching for a new home – they go out, scout, come back and dance in waggles. It is not one bee alone that decides where they will go. They debate in the dance, by the waggles, by the angles of the waggle. Some will say "go here", some say "go there", one says "stop" by butting their head into the one dancing. And all of this is in done in the dark.

They are democratic – negotiate, compromise and take 3-4 days to reach consensus. They participate in constructive, democratic, harmonious decision making. They "see" by magnetic fields, feel with their antennae. They communicate through sound bursts with their wings, the number and angles of waggles in a figure 8 dance – of which only the females know the steps,

Although they can fly, they are legally blind, and all this dancing is in the dark. Let us continue the dance and know that we can find the way, where Love is leading us, into the very heart of this new moment.

Acknowledgement of "The Intelligence of Bees: Dancing in the Dark:" CBC Ideas



A New Leadership Circle for a New Moment

We are delighted to begin this new moment in our history with a new leadership circle who is fully committed to helping us move together as a new whole.

"The leadership\membership relationship is marked by mutuality, inclusivity, accountability, subsidiarity, respect and compassion."

The New Congregational Leadership Circle



Sisters Jean Perry, Veronica O'Reilly, Congregational Leader, Joan Atkinson, Anne Karges and Loretta Manzara, Assistant Congregational Leader

Be assured of the prayer, support and commitment of all of us.
We carry you in our hearts and we share the responsibility
and joy of this new moment with you.

The Dance of Creation



Led by our guest dancer, Anita May, we were joined by all of creation—sun, moon, all growing things, fish of the sea and the wind. The playful spirit of the dance let us know that we are part of a much larger whole than only the human and encouraged us to keep expanding our consciousness to include ever more.



Letting Go In Order To Receive



One movement of grace in the formation of the new congregation was the invitation to become more than we are at present while not ignoring our roots. In the language of evolution of consciousness, this movement is described as “transcend and include.” The ritual committee captured this reality of naming ourselves anew in a gesture full of meaning. Each one of us was given a solid-coloured scarf to wear indicating our particular congregation. In a wordless procession, each sister approached her own congregational leader, removed the scarf and gave it to the congregational leader who in turn folded it respectfully and with care. Then she put a new scarf, one that contained the colours of all four congregations, around the neck of the sister. In the silence, each sister brought her own depth of meaning to the transition from Hamilton only, London only, Peterborough only and Pembroke only into the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada.





CONGREGATION OF THE
Sisters of St. Joseph
IN CANADA

Choosing a New Direction Together

Truly Diving Deep and Surfacing

There is a line from the musical *My Fair Lady* [which by the way was shown one night during Chapter] in which Henry Higgins asserts, "By George, she's got it. I think she's got it." The chapter delegates had a similar reaction to the work of the writing committee composed of Kathleen Lyons, Joyce Murray, Nancy Sullivan and Sue Wilson when they presented the third rendition of our direction statement. "By George, we think they got it."

We moved from a well-articulated drawing together of the direction statements of each individual congregation to a more concise statement based on the feedback we gave as a group. However, the second draft, from the perspective of the group, did not quite capture it. We continued to discuss and share ideas, each time getting a little deeper into the heart of the matter. The committee took our further comments and came up with the draft we embraced whole-heartedly as our direction for the next four years. The group wanted brevity and also wanted a question that would challenge and inspire us toward the new in ourselves and in the world. The writing committee also enlarged our sense of the evolving design. While it is, of course, making reference to our document *The Evolving Design*, we are also conscious of a larger field of **God's Evolving Design** of which we are a part. One sister who was not a chapter delegate commented that the statement moved us to the heart of the matter.

*In the spirit of God's Evolving Design
We embrace this new moment
by opening ourselves to ongoing conversion
through a graced evolution of consciousness.*

*And so we ask:
What transforming energies
need to be nurtured and released
in ourselves and in the world?*

Thanks to our writing team: Kathleen Lyons, Joyce Murray, Nancy Sullivan and Sue Wilson

Presentation by the Material Resources Committee

On the Tuesday of Chapter, the Material Resources committee presented us with a “picture” of who we are as a new congregation which included our starting financial position.

We learned about:

- The properties we now own together;
- The increasing use of our chosen communications system, Adobe Connect;
- The launching of new email addresses once our good friends in the Hamilton neighbourhood have worked out any kinks;
- The primary sources of our revenue;
- The next steps in developing our investment policy;
- How staff policies are being co-ordinated;
- New year ends for some neighbourhoods;
- The new management structure for the new congregation.



L-R: John Mockler, Dorothy Freymond, S. Pauline Shea, S. Margo Ritchie, Arlene Kubiak, Bonnie Twyford, S. Michaela Sinclair, S. Mary McGuire, S. Veronica O'Reilly, Cal Lloyd, S. Anne Karges, Mike MacDonald

We also learned what competent staff we have. They have taken on a huge task on our behalf, all of which has added a tremendous amount of work to their already full days.

Part of the report included the philosophy statement for the Investment Policy. This statement was crafted by the transition team and seemed to strike a chord with the sisters gathered. During the question and answer session about the Material Resources report, someone offered a suggestion for the philosophy statement. After some more thinking together, we added the sentence below indicated in red.

Many saw the investment policy statement as a companion piece to our new direction statement.

*As the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, we are called to be in communion with all people and all of creation. The life of the world and the life of the planet are at the heart of our commitment. We choose to put our resources at the service of our mission of active and inclusive love. This includes the responsibility to provide for the ongoing care of our Sisters. We desire to make an impact upon the world we inhabit by a commitment to socially responsible investing. Our particular areas of attention are alleviating the suffering caused by poverty and promoting the flourishing of ecological justice. **We are conscious that women and indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by these issues.** We hire investment managers who, on our behalf, commit to the hard work of engaging with corporations in whom we invest to ensure they enact ethical decisions toward the common good.*

Nurturing Transforming Energies

Our new direction mandate asks, "What transforming energies need to be nurtured and released in ourselves and in our world?" To help us answer this profound question, we have asked three speakers to reflect with us during a one hour phone conversation.

Every member of the Congregation is invited to participate in these phone calls. We have asked them to speak for about 30 minutes and then we will open it to question/comment from participants for 30 minutes. We hope these conversations might stimulate our own thinking and keep calling us toward the more.

Elizabeth Johnson

Date: Tuesday, January 15th at 4:00 p. m



Elizabeth Johnson is a Sister of St. Joseph from Brentwood, New York who teaches theology at Fordham University. She is in the process of writing a book reflecting theologically on the work of Darwin. She is working with a title that will be something like, *Listen To The Beasts*.

We have sent her a copy of the Evolving Design as well as our new Direction Statement and asked her to reflect with us on these two documents in light of her own work and thinking. We will also ask her to integrate the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Elizabeth has already responded after having read the Evolving Design. She sees clear links with her own work on Trinity.

Ilia Delio

Date: Monday, February 11, at 4:00 p. m



Ilia Delio is a Franciscan sister and senior research fellow at Woodstock Theological Centre at Georgetown University. Her most recent writing is *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe*. At present she is also working on a new book to be released in the spring.

We have also sent Ilia a copy of the first pages of the Evolving Design and our direction statement. We will ask her to reflect on our documents in light of her work on the Emergent Christ and her upcoming book. In particular we will ask her to reflect on our question, "What transforming energies need to be nurtured and released in ourselves and in the world?"

Connie Fitzgerald Date: TBA

Connie Fitzgerald is a Carmelite sister from Baltimore who has written two remarkable articles that have captured the imagination and articulated the



experience of so many women religious and theological thinkers. Her first article, *Dark Night and Impasse*, written over 25 years ago, still holds true today.

More recently, she wrote a paper presented at a theolog-

ical conference. The article, called *Prophetic Hope and the Purification of Memory* quickly went viral because it seemed to touch a nerve. We are still negotiating with Connie. We have asked her to reflect on Evolution of Consciousness and religious life today. Practically speaking, what might it mean for our new congregation?

“Today, the Christ fields in our midst are developing patterns of sharing, community, cooperation, mutuality, healing, justice and peace. They are quietly hidden throughout the world; they do not make the headlines because they are simply fostering goodness in the world, helping the world to evolve toward greater unity in love. Those who seek to be part of these new basins of attraction are open to new ways of being in the world; they are not threatened by new relationships, nor do they fear loss of their individuality. Rather, their oneness of being opens them up to dialogue and sharing with others different from themselves. They desire to be whole-makers, to live cooperatively and compassionately, to share energies and resources for life.”

Ilia Delio from *The Emergent Christ* p. 145

Integrating Our Chapter Direction

Many of us were moved by Sue Wilson's reflection at one of our liturgies at Chapter. Sue wove the message of the Scriptures into the heart of our newly-minted direction statement. What becomes clear is that there is a richness in our new direction that we will keep discovering for the next four years.

I was in El Salvador near the end of the civil war and I met a woman whose story I have been slow to understand. Elena worked at a human rights organization. She had been arrested and tortured because of her human rights work but had recently been released thanks to the work of international human rights groups.

Elena and I were together quite a bit over the space of a few days but I was still both surprised and moved when she began to speak about her experience of being tortured. She said that the hardest part was when she was sure that she was dying but then she would survive only to go through it all again. Elena explained that for many people, this experience of 'being continually pushed to the edge between life and death' makes their mind snap. And then she said this: "For me, it was my 'grasp on life' that snapped." She told herself that she was already dead — it was just a matter of the dying process coming to its inevitable

conclusion. And in that place of “letting-go,” she was stunned to find herself one-with God. She described it as an experience of “heaven on earth.”

Even in the midst of isolating and soul-crushing experiences like prison and torture, the reality of God’s communion with us can break into our lives with such power that our consciousness is transformed and we are awakened to a new sense of self, to an intermingling of humanity and divinity that erases all sense of boundary.

If we can trust and hold the insights that emerge from such mystical moments, our consciousness cannot help but evolve. Once we have been awakened to our communion with God, earth and each other — in the here and now — our ego’s small sense of self cannot be taken seriously, no matter how much it ‘natters’ for our attention.

The hymn in Philippians takes this shift in our sense of identity even deeper: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” We’re talking about a divine consciousness that “did not deem equality with God as something to be exploited” but took human form instead. It evokes the image of the divine Word stretching out toward all of creation. God empties God’s self into creation and in so doing creates a sacred space in which the human and the divine intersect. And in Jesus Christ we see that a human person, living fully at this sacred intersection, spends his life healing the wounds of violence and exclusion, on both personal and social levels. This is what it looks like when the human person submits to the divine impulses at the core of our being. Our being reaches outward in compassion and justice, much like the divine Word reaching out toward creation.



When Elena became consciously aware of living in that sacred space that holds both the finite and the infinite, she awakened to that in her which could not be defeated by death. And so, when she was released from prison, she went right back to human rights work. And it was the insights from her human rights work, interacting with insights from her experiences of unitive consciousness that enabled her to see soldiers and jail guards as further victims of the civil war, with wounds far deeper than her own physical scars.

Because Elena learned to live in that intersection between the human and the divine, her life was marked by a radical transformation into relationships of compassion and justice.

The beatitudes give expression to this graced consciousness which is able to hold the connection between (on the one hand) the mystical moments that open us to our union with God and each other and (on the other hand) the everyday struggle to live into a new way of being. And it’s the energy of this connection that unites contemplation and justice — the DNA of the Reign of God.

In the gospel, Jesus is standing in the midst of a crowd of people who are painfully poor, and cruelly marginalized from power and opportunity when he offers these beatitude teachings. And here, where divine

love meets the injustice of the world, consciousness is awakened. The world need not be this way! Together they can create change!

To the naked eye, they really don't have much to work with but, as we all learned in the Little Prince, 'what is essential is invisible to the eye'.

The graced consciousness of the beatitudes dares us to risk living at the intersection of divinity and humanity, through the integration of contemplation and justice. And the life of Jesus Christ reveals that this sacred space holds profound transforming energy for ourselves and the world.

But it's very much a place of risk. Jesus was considered dangerous for practicing these beatitudes: For making graced consciousness incarnate in our world; for trusting that God is one-with those who suffer and God draws transformation and new life out of the suffering; for practicing meekness through a life of humble submission to divine energies which, paradoxically, is a meekness that leads him to bold action aimed at subverting domination systems and creating a new space for structures of compassion and justice. He was crucified for living a life of mercy which felt deeply the "ought-not-to-be" nature of suffering and worked to remove the root causes of this suffering; for seeking justice, and for trusting that God delights in meeting us in the poverty and emptiness of our personal and collective lives in order to bring about transformation.

When divine love makes the beatitudes incarnate in the world, it becomes clear that contemplation and justice are at the heart of transformation — and that these dynamics need each other.

Together, contemplation and justice reveal that the structures of consciousness and the structures of society are interconnected.

Together, they teach us that God is powerfully present in that which we have tried to exclude from our consciousness; whether it's some aspect of ourselves that we won't acknowledge or a social group that our society has marginalized — these are the places that God is most powerfully present.

Together, contemplation and justice create an energy field of transformation.

Our conversations this week are calling us to step, consciously and intentionally, into this emerging energy field. The land, the trees, the water, the climate — are all calling us to step into this energy field. The gap between rich and poor, the poverty of indigenous peoples, and the exclusion of migrants and refugees are urging us forward.

This week we have deepened relationships, refreshed our spirits, elected a fine leadership team and opened ourselves to transformation — all for the purpose of stepping together into this new moment. All that remains is to step forward.

Sue Wilson

Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

Step Into a New Moment

Press Release: Created by Joyce Murray, Sue Wilson and Margo Ritchie

On November 22, 2012, in Markham, Ontario, a new chapter was opened in the long and storied history of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Four of the six Canadian congregations---Hamilton, London, Peterborough and Pembroke joined together to become one new congregation---the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada. They recognize within themselves the impulse of the spirit toward creating a global community in which all may flourish. With Sisters of St. Joseph in 57 countries around the world, this large network allows them to partner with others on such important concerns as human trafficking, the growing disparity between rich and poor, gender inequity and ecological perils.

In a very moving ritual on the first evening, Sisters wearing different solid-coloured scarves according to their congregations, came forward, removed the scarf and gave it to their Congregational leader. She in turn gave each one a multicoloured scarf which included all four colours of the original scarves. Sister Ann MacDonald, who came to the meeting from Malawi, Africa said, "Coming from such a great distance for our Chapter and returning to Malawi with our symbol of the scarf, will now remind me of our new founding moment as CSJ women."

On the first day of the five day meeting, the group set to work on naming their priorities for the next four years. The Sisters embraced the new moment, opening themselves to an ongoing conversion, rooted in a graced evolution of consciousness. From this foundation, they committed themselves to discern and engage in the transformation that is needed in order to move toward a more just world that supports the thriving of all of life.

One way in which they wish to contribute to a more inclusive and just world is in the use of their resources. They have chosen socially responsible investing for their pooled resources. The philosophy statement which guides their investments highlights two particular areas: the elimination of poverty and the promotion of ecological justice. They are conscious that women and indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by these issues. Use of their investments becomes one more way to claim a public voice for the common good.

A new leadership of five sisters was elected to animate these promises among all the sisters. When asked what her hopes and the hopes of the sisters are for this new moment in the history of the sisters of St. Joseph, the newly elected congregational leader, Sister Veronica O'Reilly stated, *"We hope to sustain our serious commitment into this new moment with the grace of God and the continuing partnership of those who share our hopes for a better world."*

The Sisters departed from Markham heartened by the spirit and energy evident among them and conscious that the renewal of Vatican II in which they have been engaged for over 50 years has led them to this new moment. They continue the journey, faithful to the unfolding of God's design in their life together.

Flowers and Love

from All Quarters . . .

We were well accompanied in our movement to becoming one congregation. On the first evening, during the ritual, flowers from our sisters in Sault Ste. Marie and Toronto were already on the stage. The next day, we were delighted by a delivery of flowers from our Associates\Companions along with their love and promise of prayer. We also received bouquets from our legal firm, Carters and from the Grey sisters of Pembroke. As well we received love, prayer and support from so many of our collaborators.



And Now What??

We are not finished. The Transition Team and the new Leadership Circle will be working hand in hand to continue the process. The fact that three of the present transition team are on the leadership circle will help with a smooth transition.

There is a small committee under the leadership of Margaret Blake looking at a design for a directory for the new congregation so that we can more easily be in touch with each other.

As well, the new leadership circle with the transition team will be continuing the governance\mission circles conversations begun at chapter.

Even as this goes to press, there is a meeting to begin plans for the installation of the new circle on March 19, 2013.

In the meantime, the present congregational leadership teams in each neighbourhood continue to function and keep things afloat until the March 19 transition.

Upcoming Meetings of the the Transition Team & the Congregational Leadership Circle

December 5 at 9 a.m. to noon – a conference call using Adobe Connect
January 3—5, 2013 meeting in Peterborough
February 4—7, 2013 in London
March 3—5, 2013 in Hamilton

Merci . . . Gracias . . . Thank You!

To all our committee members who worked to create a very meaningful chapter experience.

Chapter Planning Committee

To the Chapter planning committee for making things flow smoothly and for including all the pieces for discussion that made for good decisions. Also, for carrying the stress, unbeknown to the rest of us, of Donna Gunn's illness that did not allow her to come to be with us. Quite simply, we are all grateful.



L-R: Sisters Pat Valeriote, Bonnie Bryson, Joan Atkinson, Helen Russell, Lucy Germain, Dianne Towns, Lucy Godfrey and Mary Vandersteen (absent)

Liturgy Planning Committee

To the liturgy/ritual committee for planning the very moving opening ritual of the scarves that will be a lasting memory to all of us, for the beautiful liturgies, the music that carried the emotion of the moment and for the flexibility as you kept adjusting according to what was happening in the group.



L-R: Sisters Mary Rowell, Rosanne Logel, Loretta Manzara, Shirley O'Rourke, Carole Anne Guay, Pauline Coulterman, Jane Fischer, Doreen and Joan Atkinson (CPC liaison)