

INFORMATION

NOTHING LESS THAN EXCELLENCE

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The Christian paradox of already and not yet, the tug between today and tomorrow...

We all know these experiences well and they are particularly intense for those of us in the national office of the Religious Formation Conference now. After all, we are based in Washington, DC, a city alive with the excitement of welcoming Pope Francis in a few days' time. Our office is right down the street from the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception where the Pope will celebrate Eucharist on the afternoon of September 23rd. Already we know that our street will be closed to pedestrian and vehicular traffic from 12:00 am through 11:59 pm on the 23rd, bringing an unexpected holiday to offices, like ours, currently housed in the Hecker Center for Ministry.

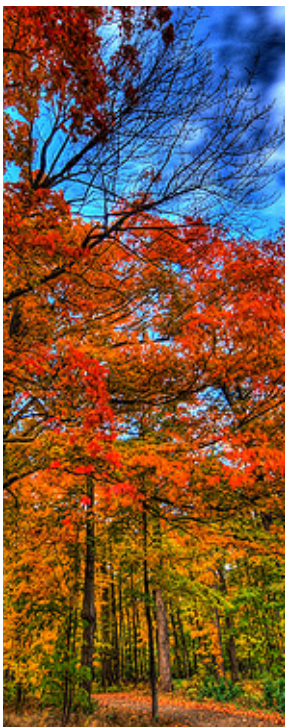
The very theme of the RFC's 19th Biennial National Congress, *Rejoice! God's Tomorrow Beckons*, keeps the future before us as we deal with final preparations to Congress 2015. Other "tomorrows" and "not yet's" await us: we look forward to welcoming Ellen Dauwer, SC, as the Conference's new Executive Director early in 2016 and, as that year unfolds, we will pull up our Washington roots and transplant the RFC to Chicago's Catholic Theological Union.

But we are here, today, in an "already" filled with promise and responsibility. Those of us who are of a certain age may remember the "sacrament of the present moment" from our novitiate years. Today we speak of and practice mindfulness, contemplative attentiveness, and we remember Jesus' admonition not to concern ourselves unduly about tomorrow, which will troubles enough of its own; and we trust it will also bring its own delights! Recalling that Emmanuel came among us in a specific time and place, we believe that an incarnational spirituality calls us to live fully in our particular time and space, our today, with its chores and joys, perils and possibilities. And yet we are pulled toward tomorrow.

In one of her felicitous phrases, Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, speaks of the Spirit as a "futuring presence" engaged with the cosmos, and so with each of us. Both here and beyond, already and not yet, today and tomorrow, with us and ahead of us, reassuring us as we live today and long for tomorrow.

This issue of *InFormation* carries articles that reflect present reality and future possibility. In her article, the "Biblical Roots of Community," Camilla Burns, SNDdeN, traces the different understandings of community as they have been expressed in Scripture and as we live community today. Mary Elizabeth Bednarek, CSC, writes of her congregation's international novitiate an effort today to live into tomorrow. Other features alert you to formative activities and possibilities throughout the country and highlight in particular RFC offerings, especially Congress 2015 and the joint RFC-NRVC Advent Days of Reflection and Renewal.

We wish you fruitful todays...and we hope to see many of you at Congress, as together we rejoice and welcome God's tomorrow!





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The Biblical Roots of Community: Covenant with God and with One Another

Introduction

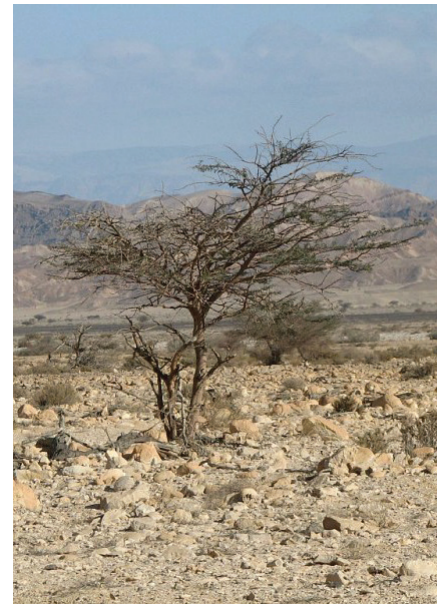
The term "community" does not exist in the Bible but the concept is as old as Adam and Eve. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the human to be alone. I shall make him a sustainer beside him'" (Gen 2:18). Among the many terms in the Bible designating community are assembly, convocation, association, meeting, people of God and household of God. The notion of community not only went through an evolution under the influence of both internal factors and foreign pressures, but frequently competing notions of community coexisted. These situations are reflected in our own time. This article traces the biblical roots of community in both the Old Testament and New Testament to their presence in the contemporary Church documents on Consecrated Life.

I. Community in Old Testament

Israel began as a sacral community, that is, as a people organized tribally under the God Yahweh. On the level of worship, the biblical idea of community is always situated on two convictions: God calls forsaken people to be a Covenant people and those called respond to the experience of God's salvation in their relations with each other—the axis of call and response in the context of a Covenant relationship. The Exodus was the great saving act of Yahweh by which He redeemed Israel and established it as a people. In this event, Israel saw the roots of its nationality and its religion and its great historical motive for belief in the power and will of Yahweh to save. They preserved this new relationship with Yahweh by a Covenant—an agreement by which two parties bind themselves to each other. God's intervention to save them from slavery had made them His in a way no other nation could be. It is invoked numerous times throughout the whole Bible in phrases such as "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.

Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians" (Ex 6:7). "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. (Lev 26:12). Biblical community stems from this Covenant relationship; although the external form changes, Covenant remains central to the meaning of community.

With the introduction of kingship, the tribal-theocratic structure gave way to the more secular structures of the empire. The introduction of kings who were the earthly representatives of God competed with the central ideals of the community: divine deliverance and land conferral. Prophecy was a reform movement that emerged out of the struggle to preserve the essential values of the older Yahwistic ideal of community within the setting of kingship. With the return of the exiles, there was an initiative to rebuild a sense of Jewish community based on the Torah and its interpretive process. "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new





A radical God-centeredness is at the very core of Jesus' own notion of community

Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the Covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a Covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the Covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31: 31-3). Alongside these primary initiatives were several competing notions of community ranging from the other-worldliness of the apocalyptic to a conservative this-worldliness and ideas in between. It is from this wide range of alternative notions that emergent Judaism and Christianity would forge their own definitions of community.

II. New Testament

The primacy of Covenant remains but a new Covenant appears. The Word of God came to earth again, no longer in writing, but in the flesh and blood of a man named Jesus. He proclaimed that in his person that new Covenant was realized. At the Last Supper he repeated the words of Moses (Ex 24:8) when he said: “This is my blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). All those who have accepted the new Covenant have become the new People of God. In Christ, we are united to God closely, loved by God intimately, and taught by God explicitly. The earliest Christians were not only a biblical people who sought to live in continuity with their Scriptures; they were also disciples of a person, Jesus from Nazareth. Their worship of and witness to the God of Israel were influenced by their conviction that Jesus was God’s Messiah, and that through him God had begun a new Exodus.

The New Testament form of community was developed after the death and resurrection of Jesus as a particular interpretation of Jewish religious history in the light of Jesus’ life and teaching. Although Jesus often disagreed with other Jewish communities (Pharisees, Sadducees etc.), there was complete agreement with the constitutive element of a Covenant people: “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors is fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus” (Acts 13: 32-33).

Luke’s portrait of Jesus upends the traditional notion of the messianic community of the end time, advancing it to “today.” “Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:21) and “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house’” (Luke 19:9). Rather than awaiting God’s future salvation, the disciples were called to a life of engagement (Luke 10: 25-42) in the present. In addition, the rules of membership in the community changed from social, ethnic or religious restrictions to include the outsider: the least, last, lame and lost of Israel. “He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4: 17b-21).

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus calls his disciples to obedience to his interpretation of the Torah; the Christian *ecclesia* is a people of a new Torah. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished” (Matt 5: 17-18). Jesus’ teaching flows from God’s Torah: The righteousness (right relationship) and mercy of God revealed in the Exodus events could now be performed by the Covenant people; thus to love God is to forgive and restore the neighbor (Matt 18: 21-35). Jesus responds to the parable of the unforgiving servant with the following conclusion: “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (Matt 18: 35).

The teaching of John’s Jesus is similar to that of Matthew with an emphasis on the disciple’s love for other disciples to nurture community. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34). “And he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’” (John 15: 17b). Jesus

emphasizes the community's love as a response to their experience of God's reign rather than as a requirement to enter into it.

A radical God-centeredness is at the very core of Jesus' own notion of community expressed in his teaching by word and by deed. His wandering on the margins of the social order, forsaking protection and possessions, lacking home and family as well as his forgiveness of and fellowship with sinners and his healing of outcasts defined his understanding of community. The post-Easter church retains these same elements at the center of its life. In summary, the *ecclesia* of God is called forth in worship to bear witness to God's liberating grace disclosed in the new Exodus of Jesus Christ which is the new interpretation of Covenant.

The Acts of the Apostles bridges the canonical Gospels to the Epistles indicating the continuity of community from Jesus to the apostles to the church they founded. Acts qualifies the notion of community by first, emphasizing the church as a missionary community with the role to bear witness to God's resurrection of Jesus, declaring him both Lord and Christ. Second, the Church is an apostolic community with the twelve apostles to guide the community. Third, the community extends its presence in a dramatic sweep: "...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Act 1:8). The community established by Jesus has not changed but now his earthly rule is continued by the Spirit through the Church.

Paul uses the expression "body of Christ" to relate Christ's death and resurrection to his understanding of the Church as a community of believers. The believing community actually participates in the Christ-event which engages them in the New Age of God's salvation. "We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Faith in Jesus restores a sense of community between God and humanity and within humanity. "So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold new things have come" (2 Cor 5: 17).

As the historical Jesus is a single "body," so also the Church is "one body" in him. The merging of the two bodies highlights the mutuality of the community of believers. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 27-28). In addition, Paul's use of "the body of Christ" to characterize the community of believers underscores the continuity between Jesus' mission and the Church's mission. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"

(1 Cor 10: 16-17). Partaking in "communion" recalls the continuity of the Covenant community: Believers gather around the Eucharistic bread and cup to bear witness to God's salvation which they continue to experience together since the death of Christ's body.

Paul recognized that community is not a homogeneous group but differences are celebrated as different gifts that the Spirit gives for different ministries. "Now there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12: 4-7). Differences arose not only in the uniqueness of individuals, but also contradictory understandings of the common practices of a community. Some thought there ought to be dietary regulations according to the strict observance of Jews and others thought themselves free from such legalisms. "But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit" (Rom 7:6). Paul employs two criteria for community discernment on these issues. The dietary restrictions were no longer valid given the community's newly found freedom in Christ. Nonetheless, they cannot be practiced in reckless abandon without sensitivity to the growth of the believing community. "But if someone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice', then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience – I mean the other's conscience not your own" (1 Cor 10: 28-29a). "We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me'" (Rom 15:1).

As the continuing representative of Christ's body on earth, the church is viewed by Paul as *koinonia* - a community of believers who share in equal partnership the spiritual, physical, and material benefits of God's generosity. Phil 2:1-2 declares, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship (*koinonia*) with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." *Koinonia* is being in agreement with one another, being united in purpose, and serving alongside each other. The *koinonia* with each other is based on our common *koinonia* with Jesus Christ. "If we say that we have fellowship (*koinonia*) with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1: 6-7).

The post-Pauline church experienced a shift not unlike Israel's transition from a charismatic confederacy to a nationalistic monarchy. As the new church developed, institutionalizing pressures for structure became more

prominent as evidenced in the deutero-Pauline letters (2 Thessalonians; Colossians; Ephesians; Pastoral Epistles, James and Hebrews). This period formed a community where pastoral offices (elder, deacon, deaconesses) developed into hierarchy. 1 Timothy stresses the authority of the ruling elite in contrast to earlier notions of fellowship. “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim 5:17). Ephesians regards the church, not as local, charismatic congregations but as transcendent communities of all believers. “But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2: 4-7). The charisms in Ephesians have taken the form of ecclesial offices rather than particular ministries given by the Spirit to meet particular needs. “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4: 11-12).

Different emphases of community are further developed by a complex of factors such as the delay of the Parousia and especially the threat, and even the experience, of persecution. To adapt to the new situation, the later Epistles and the Book of Revelation envisage the church as a pilgrim people. The social notion of this description comes from conflict rather than integration within society. The primary expression exists in Hebrews but components can also be found in the non-Pauline corpus. Elements of pilgrimage are first, separation from home; second, travel to specific destination; third, hardships along the way and fourth, the pilgrim who completes the journey receives promised blessings. The idea of pilgrimage permits the community to separate itself from the larger society and establishes the values which shape the relationship of the community.

The material becomes intensely futuristic: “Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed” (1 Pet 1:13); “To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7); “Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (Jas 1:12). The pilgrim can look upon the present hardships, even martyrdom, as a test of loyalty and commitment to the coming reign of God. The pilgrim must focus on what lies ahead as the destiny of the pilgrimage.

The biblical conception of the community is centered by the believers’ shared experience of their Exodus from alienation to reconciliation. “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1Pet 2:10). We have seen the transition of this community from a *koinonia* of equality to an institutional mentality concerned with the survival of the tradition and the institution which secures it for the

long haul. The shift was also an outcome of a transition from a household church to a social religion in the Greco-Roman world. The dilemma was in the message of earliest Christianity which stressed the equality of believers and concerns motivated by the urgency of its Gentile mission in light of the imminent in-breaking of God’s reign and a different accommodation with the culture.

As we can see, there is no univocal understanding of community in the Bible but there is an unchanging centrality that the community is centered by the believers’ shared experience of their Exodus from alienation to reconciliation establishing a Covenant which shapes the relationship of community members. The external forms such as the Exodus event becoming a new Exodus in Christ adapted to differing circumstances, but never lost the importance of Covenant.

III. Reflections on Biblical Community in Religious Life since Vatican II

Vatican II initiated a transition in the understanding of the Church as a community which is reflected in subsequent documents on Consecrated Life. Some of us grew up thinking that the church was a hierarchical institution to which people belonged for the sake of spiritual benefits. According to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Church is a *mystery* before all else, i.e., “a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. By its relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind, that is, it is a sign and an instrument of such union and unity” (n. 1). The Church as the pilgrim People of God moves through history, sharing in Christ’s threefold mission as Prophet, Priest, and King (chapter II).

A major issue in the preparation of this document was whether the hierarchical Church should precede a presentation of the Church as the People of God, as in the initial draft, or if it should come second. In a crucial debate of the entire Council, the order was reversed and the Church is presented as the whole People of God (chapter II), which has a certain hierarchical structure to enable the People of God to fulfill its mission in history (chapter III). This reflects the emphases of the two senses of charismatic and hierarchical community in the biblical tradition with primacy given to the charismatic community supported by a hierarchical structure.

In 1971, Pope Paul VI applied this understanding to Religious Life when he issued the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio* on the renewal of the Religious Life according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. “The evangelical aspiration to fraternity was forcefully expressed by the Council. The Church was defined as the People of God, in which the hierarchy is at the service of the members of Christ united by the same charity (36). The same paschal mystery of Christ is lived in the religious state as in the whole Church” (24).

Pope Francis has recently encouraged us in *Laudato Si'* to broaden our vision of community.

In 1994, the Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) published *Fraternal Life in Community* in which community in religious life was again compared to that of the Church and the first community of Jesus. Following an exposition of the Church as a Communion, the document explicates Religious Community as an expression of Ecclesial Communion. “From the very beginning consecrated life has cultivated this intimate nature of Christianity. In fact, the religious community has felt itself to be in continuity with the group of those who followed Jesus. He has called them personally, one by one, to live in communion with himself and with the other disciples, to share his life and his destiny (cf. Mark 3: 13-15), and in this way to be a sign of the life and communion begun by him” (I.10).

The document further testifies to what the biblical development of community exemplified: “It is impossible to speak of religious community univocally. ... Today we can admire the ‘wondrous variety’ of religious families which enrich the church” (I.10). The same document reflects an interesting evolutionary consciousness by expanding the context of community. “From accepting with wonder and gratitude the reality of divine communion shared with mere creatures, there also arises conviction of the need to make it always more visible by building communities ‘filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 13:52)” (II.11).

In *Vita Consecrata* (1996), John Paul II again interprets Consecrated Life as a sign of communion in the Church beginning with the community around Jesus. “During his earthly life, the Lord Jesus called those whom he wishes in order to have them at his side and to train them to live, according to his example, for the Father and for the mission which he had received from the Father (cf. Mark 3:13-15). After the Ascension, as a result of the gift of the Spirit, fraternal community formed around the Apostles, gathered in the praise of God and in a concrete experience of communion (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35)” (II.42).

In 2002, CICLSAL published *Starting Afresh with Christ* which approached community as a spirituality of communion. “John Paul II teaches: A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling within us and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body and therefore as ‘those who are part of me’... sharing the joys and sufferings of our brothers and sisters; sensing their desires and attending to their needs; offering them true and profound friendship. The spirituality of communion



also implies the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and to prize it as a gift from God, and to know how to make room for others, sharing each other’s burdens. Unless we follow this spiritual path, the external structures of communion serve very little purpose” (29).

Although directed to the entire world, Pope Francis has recently encouraged us in *Laudato Si'* to broaden our vision of community. “Everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others” (70).

A fitting summary to understanding the biblical roots of community might be captured in a study of the phrase “one another” in the Bible. Let us to be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10), honor one another (Rom 12:10), live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16; 1 Pet 3:8), accept one another (Rom 15:7), serve one another in love (Gal 5:13), be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32), admonish one another (Col 3:16), encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11; Heb 3:13), spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), offer hospitality (1 Pet 4:9), and love one another (1 Pet 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11-12). These are the signs of a biblical Covenant community beginning with Sinai through the new Covenant and extending to the life of the Church today.

A Scripture scholar, **Camilla Burns, SNDdeN**, is Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Washington University in Washington, DC.

This article is an adaptation of a presentation made to ForMission participants.

INTERCULTURAL LIVING: Toward God's Tomorrow

Over the past few years much has been discussed about the pros and cons of an international novitiate. The discussion taps into many of our fears around culture, inculturation, social inequalities, and tradition, to name a few. I believe most formators agree that we ardently desire to facilitate the formation of disciples of Jesus, open to today's realities, ready to give their lives for God's People, especially those in situations of risk. In a time of apparent increasing global violence, how are we being called to a new level of relationship?

The time of novitiate can be a seed-bed of new ways of relating, of unlearning, and learning in an intercultural environment what it means to be part of God's Reign. An international novitiate is a risk. Questions abound particularly if we are considering placing the novitiate in the United States, as did my own congregation, the Sisters of the Holy Cross. What will happen when novices from situations of scarcity encounter an apparent culture of plenty and of unbridled consumerism? How will the novice be able to translate the Gospel message into her/his own cultural reality? If English is not their first, or third or fourth language, how will they grow in wisdom and understanding both of mind and heart? Can we risk the challenge? What needs of today's society does it attend to? Is it truly 'prophetic'? These questions expressed just a few of our concerns. It took us a number of years to walk through our fears, set priorities, and involve the whole Congregation before bringing candidates to the novitiate from the four continents where we serve.

"Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a seed; but if it dies, it produces much fruit." (Jn 12: 24)

Process

In actual fact, our initial foundation as part of the family of Holy Cross, priests, brothers and sisters, was missionary and international. Along the way (and a lot of history), our membership changed and we, Sisters of the Holy Cross, became more American with some "foreign missions." With the renewal of Vatican II, we came to a deeper understanding of our roots and charism and a more international membership. We began to identify, value, and engage with our internationality. Congregational committees, renewal programs, and formation teams began to "look like" who we were. Formation teams on each of four continents were growing.

What spurred change? Two major factors merged. Prominent was the need to grow in a more in-depth

knowing and understanding of the sisters and cultures where we serve. Another major factor was the increasingly global world in which we live, now made even smaller due to social media. Social justice issues have global dimensions.

During the 1990's, the International Formation Team worked toward providing a unified initial formation program while ensuring cultural diversity. In the early 2000's, concerns were raised regarding future leadership and the need to know our newer members. In some areas, our formation personnel was limited in resources; in others, we lacked sufficiently trained personnel. We wanted to offer our newer members access to personal growth support, as well as a renewed and evolving understanding of consecrated life, ministry, and intercultural living. Because of diverse educational systems and other factors, the two-years of novitiate was seen as the best common time for this to happen.

An ad hoc committee was formed to explore possibilities. In 2004, recommendations were given to the General and Extended Leadership Teams, criteria were elaborated for the decision-making process, and from 2006-2007, a detailed and 'on-site' assessment of the four existing novitiates was made. Members of the novitiate communities were interviewed, ministry sites visited, complementary programs examined, availability of resources and opportunities studied. In 2007 the information and insights, implications, and concerns were amply reviewed, discussed, and discerned.

A final decision was made by the President of the Congregation, with the consent of her council, to form one international novitiate at the mother-house. In 2008 existing programs were reviewed, cultural adaptation explored, visa requirements and travel examined. In all, five years of decision-making, planning and preparation went into the "beginnings".

The General and Extended Leadership Teams and the International Formation Team reviewed and discussed each step along the way. A new team was prepared to lead the international novitiate and the sisters receiving the "new event" were invited to various open discussion sessions. In 2009 we received our first international novitiate group.

Challenges and Learnings

Besides the normal challenges of every novitiate experience, there were added ones! Stories, frustrations, and laughs lie behind each challenge. For brevity's sake, I will just list some of them.

- Diversity in the novices' preparation and background;
- Cultural adjustment, culture shock, and the process of reverse culture shock upon the novices' return to their countries of origin;
- Learning how to use Western, electrical appliances for cleaning and cooking; adjusting to each other's food as well as to American food;
- Skills for intercultural living and the integration of various languages, tribes, cultures;
- For some, English is a struggle;
- Health care in general; in particular, finding doctors, counselors, and spiritual directors sensitive to women from other cultures;
- Weather (particularly in northern Indiana!);
- Working with consulates in various countries to obtain an R1 visa;
- Maintaining the integrity of the novitiate, particularly initially, when the novices were of such visual interest;
- Parallel 'formation' from some sisters on campus.

What has helped to make it a positive experience and what are some of the learnings?

It has truly been an endeavor that has involved the whole community and, in particular, all the sisters who are part of our mother-house. Besides giving classes in their various areas of expertise, they serve as mentors and English tutors. The sisters in the infirmary share their stories and experiences and are eager to listen and encourage the novices. It has brought a spirit of hope and involvement to our sisters in the United States and greater understanding of this country's difficulties on the part of the novices through their weekly ministry and three month ministry experience. The availability of spiritual directors and counselors is assured. Weekly participation in the Intercommunity Congregational Novitiate in Chicago has been enriching for the novices as well as staff. Most importantly, the experience is teaching all of us that we have much to learn from each other as well as much to offer.

Community living has always been challenging! Intercultural community living is doubly so. When our learned social dynamics are radically different from those of the other, when ways of thinking, expressing, and understanding are not only distinct but divergent, we are stretched and called to a new place of respect, patience, seeking, and transparency. Frequently we are invited to go beyond the mind to the heart. Compassion, loving concern, and new understandings become daily bread. An openness to be a continual learner both of cultural diversity and generational difference is essential. An international novitiate is a total commitment to be embraced on a daily basis.

For the Novitiate Team, some specific needs would include a facilitator as they work out areas of conflict and toward mutual understanding; outings together without novices; vacation, spiritual direction and counseling as needed. It



would be helpful if team members could live and work together a sufficient time before beginning the novitiate. Team members new to the country should be in the country a significant time to work through their own cultural adjustment. It would also help immeasurably for the team to have some training in intercultural practices. This is surely an area of study that includes much more than just 'living together'.

For the candidates coming to the novitiate, we have found that a six to eight-week orientation period for cultural adjustment and group building is essential. Besides the usual novitiate program, we include bi-weekly meetings on intercultural living; a weekly integration day; a communal 'check-in' before beginning a new week; times of sharing our story and family of origin; times of play, encouragement, hugs and fun!

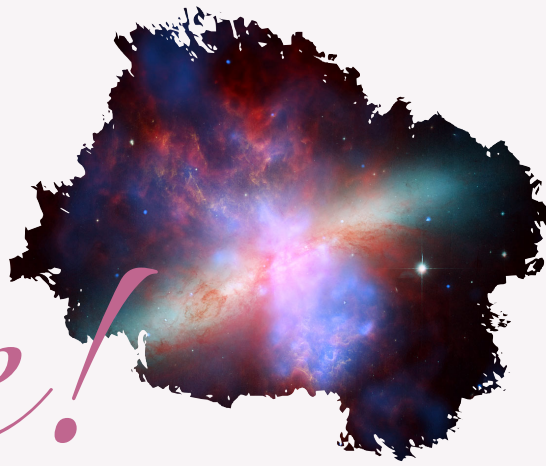
Novitiate formation is always about today and tomorrow and tomorrow promises to be even more 'global' and intercultural than today. Inclusive ethnic, tribal, cultural relationships within the Kingdom of God become tangible and practical in an international novitiate. It is a space of learning, reconciliation and preparation for the world we pray to come.

Mary Elizabeth Bednarek, CSC, is assistant director of her congregation's international novitiate in South Bend, IN, and a recent participant in RFC's ForMission program, class of 2015.

Rejoice!

GOD'S TOMORROW BECKONS

19th Biennial Congress of the Religious Formation Conference



PITTSBURGH, PA

CONGRESS:

November 5-7, 2015

PRE-CONGRESS:

November 5, 2015

KEYNOTE PRESENTERS



Daniel Groody, CSC
Janet Mock, CSJ

CONGRESS LITURGIST



Stephen Steinbeiser

Further information about
Congress 2015 can be
found of the RFC website:
www.relforcon.org

**Registration is
now open.**

CONGRESS SEMINARS



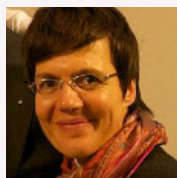
David Couturier, OFM Cap.
*Faith Interrupted: The Religious Imagination
of Millennials, Its Challenges and Opportunities*



Linda Gibler, OP
*Consecrated for Compassion:
What the Earth Might Teach Us about Tomorrow*



Loughlan Sofield, ST
The Formator as Leader

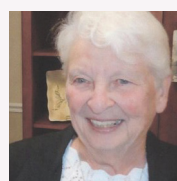


Julia Prinz, VDMF
"No One Mentions Courage"
*International Religious Life: A Model for
Relationships in a Globalized World*

PRE-CONGRESS WORKSHOPS



Steven Wirth & Connie Schoen, OP
*The Practice of Contemplative Dialogue:
A Path to Personal and Communal
Transformation*



Helen Cahill, OP
Orientation to Formation
The Paradox of Formation: Who Is Being Formed?



ADVENT DAYS OF REFLECTION AND RENEWAL



ADVENT can be the ideal time for busy vocation and formation ministers to slow down for much needed self-care and intensive prayer. This year, NRVC and the Religious Formation Conference (RFC) are collaborating to offer their members four days in the desert to focus on transformation and the journey of faith. The program will be held at the Redemptorist Renewal Center in Tucson, AZ. Situated in the foothills of the Tucson Mountains in the beautiful Sonoran Desert, it is a site that appeals to the nature lover and gently challenges city dwellers. Overnight accommodations include private room and bath as well as internet access and all meals. The retreat center is approximately 20 minutes by shuttle from the Tucson airport (TUC). For more information about the facility, go to: <http://www.desertrenewal.org/index.html>. *Please do not call the Redemptorist Renewal Center for reservations.*

LEARNING TO LIVE AND PRAY IN JOYFUL HOPE

This Advent retreat experience offers vocation and formation ministers opportunities to embrace spiritual practices characteristic of traditional Advent spirituality: waiting, accepting, anticipating, listening, heightened awareness, gratitude, silence, and pondering into the depths of the heart. These practices aid us along the way of our hurried lives and especially help us to slow down a bit during the hustle and bustle of the commercialized rush to Christmas. Our days of reflection and renewal will offer participants a needed pause that will refresh bodies, minds, and souls with inspiration that flows from the season's scriptural readings, music, symbols, and rituals. Come join us as we pave the way for our hearts to wait in joyful hope to celebrate the wonder and peace of Christmas, not just for a day but the whole year long.

December 14-17, 2015

This program begins at 5 p.m. on Monday, December 14, and ends at 10 a.m. on Thursday, December 17.



Presenter

Sister Addie Lorraine Walker, S.S.N.D., Ph.D. has been a School Sister of Notre Dame for over 30 years. She served as provincial leader of the Dallas Province of S.S.N.D. for nine years. Currently, she is Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and founder and director of the Sankofa Institute for African American Pastoral Leadership at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. Sister Addie Lorraine earned a Ph.D. in religion and education from Boston College in 1996, and now ministers as pastoral and practical theologian in university, high school, and parish settings and formation programs and retreats for religious congregations. She recently was a contributing author of *Power of Sisterhood: Women Religious Tell the Story of the Apostolic Visitation*.

Program fees

Fees include three meals, materials, speaker, and facility fee. **RESIDENT:** \$675 – NRVC or RFC member. Room reservations are for 3 nights with a check-in on Monday, December 14 and a check out by 11 a.m. on Thursday, December 17. If you need to arrive earlier than Monday or stay later than Friday, please contact NRVC for reserving additional days (based upon availability). *This program is limited to 25 participants.*

Register online at www.relforcon.org

TIDBITS

Looking Ahead...

UPCOMING WEBINAR: Retirement: An Invitation to Transformation

Presenter:

Paula Cooney, IHM

When:

Wednesday, November 17
3:00 pm

This webinar is a collaborative offering of the RFC and the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO). Watch for registration information.

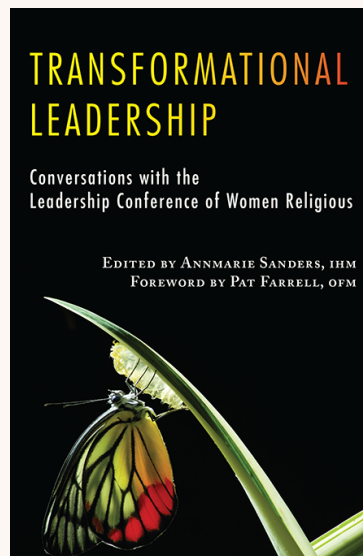


A Valuable Resource...

Transformational Leadership, a collection of conversations and interviews initiated

By LCWR over the years is now available from Orbis Books (www.orbisbooks.com).

Look for a review of Transformational Leadership in the next issue of InFormation.



Now Available:

Care for God's Creation

A video series, offered collaboratively by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCC)

For further information:

www.usccb.org/news/2015/15-123.cfm

The Prophetic Imagination: From Generation to Generation

The lead article in the Spring 2015 issue of InFormation, "The Prophetic Imagination ..." by David Couturier, OFM Cap, is now available in Spanish in the Members section of the RFC website. We acknowledge the generosity of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word (CCVI) of San Antonio, TX, in making this translation available to RFC members.

A Request for Assistance

Two women religious, Judith Schaefer, OP, (jschaefer@cotterschools.org) and Helen Marie Burns, RSM, (hmburns@mercywmw.org), are writing a book on a new theology of religious life. They would welcome others' contribution to this theological endeavor, and in particular, the reflections of those working with newer members and/or newer members themselves. If this invitation appeals to you, please contact either woman at the above email addresses before October 31, 2015.

TAKE NOTE

Region 1

Next Meeting: September 18, 2015. Topic: The Implications of Family of Origin on Formation. Presenters: Barbara Johnson, FSE, and Elizabeth Endee, FSE. Location: Holy Spirit Provincial House and Health Care Center, Putnam, CT. Contact Michele Bisaillon, dhs, at dhsjoy@sbcglobal.net

Region 2

Initial Formation Programs (open to all in formation) begin on Saturday at 9:00 a.m. and close Sunday at noon and are held at St. Joseph Renewal Center, Building 4, 1725 Brentwood Road, Brentwood, NY 11717, unless indicated otherwise.

September 19-20, 2015

Community Life: Balancing the Circles of Life
Presenter: Mary Catherine Redmond, PVBM

October 10-11, 2015

Leaders of and Participants in Church Prayer
Reverend Thomas Dente

October 31-November 1, 2015

Communication Skills
Linda Buck, CSJ
(This session will be held in Hampton Bays, NY)

February 6-7, 2016

The Vows
Don Bisson, FMS

March 5-6, 2016

Crafting Authentic Community
Ruth Harkins, IHM

April 2-3, 2016

Ecclesial Identity: Bearing the Face of the Church to a Wounded World
Catherine Nearney, SSJ

Fees: Member Congregations:

If you register and pay per session \$200 per person, per session; \$1200 per year

If there are 6 or more members coming from your congregation full price for first 5 (\$180 or \$200) \$140 for rest (covers room and board)

Fees: Non-Member Congregations:

\$230 per person, per session

For additional information, Mary Walsh, CSJ, at walshm@csjbrentwood.org

Region 3

- **In Search Classes:** Intercommunity program for those in the initial stages of formation. Classes meet Thursdays September to April.

September to December

Communication and Empathic Listening
Donna Kelley, IHM

Family Systems

Steven Albero, OPraem

January to April

Communication and Empathic Listening II
Donna Kelley, IHM

Liturgy (6 weeks)

Marianne Mulzet, SSJ

History of Religious Life (6 weeks)

Diane Collesano, S.C.

Contact:

Lucy Klein-Gebbinck, MMS, at lucymmscanuck@gmail.com or Mary Glackin, IHM, at mcglackin17@gmail.com

- **In-Search Workshops at Immaculata University, Immaculata, PA**

October 10, 2015

NRVC Symposium: New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity
Presenters: Mary Johnson SNDdeN, Patricia Wittberg, SC, Mary Gautier, PhD

April 9, 2016

Spirituality under the Dome
Presenter: James Martin, SJ

- **Meeting of Formation Directors:** September 15, 2015, November 2015 at the RFC Congress, February 9, 2016 and May 3, 2016.

For further information, contact Mary Glackin, IHM, at mcglackin17@gmail.com or Paula Nowak, OSF, at paulaosf@hotmail.com

- **Peer Supervision,** contact Mary Mester, RSM, at MesterM@aol.com

Regions 4 and 6

- **Total Formation Program:** For men and women in all phases of formation, their mentors and formative persons

November 20-22, 2015

Presenter: Sr Simone Campbell, SSS, on Catholic Social Thought

April 22-24, 2016

Presenter: Massimo Faggioli, Ph.D. Topic: Vatican Council II

Dates to save in 2016-17

9/16-18 (Martha Campbell), 11/18-20 (Tere Maya, CCVI),
4/28-30 (Nancy Schreck, OSF)

- **Formation Directors** meet formally at each of these gatherings on Saturday evening
Location: Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center, Villa Maria, PA; contact Elaine_Davia@bshsi.org
- **Peer Supervision** (Columbia, Maryland) contact Elaine Davia, CBS at Elaine_Davia@bshsi.org
- **Peer Supervision** (Cincinnati, Ohio) at Mount St. Joseph; contact Betty Finn, SC at elfinnsc@earthlink.net
- **Peer Supervision** (Sylvania, OH) at Sophia Center; contact Rachel Nijakowski, OSF at srachel@sophiacenter.org

Region 5

- TBA

Regions 7, 8, 9

- **Intercommunity Pre-Novitiate:** Meets one weekend a month in Racine, Wisconsin from Sept.-May
Contact: Marsha Speth, SP, at mspeth@spsmw.org

Region 8

- **Intercommunity Novitiate** (serving also the southern part of Wisconsin): Weekly, all day meeting held on Tuesdays, Sept to early May; different presenter, different topic each week. Also four three-day overnight workshops per year at Siena Retreat Center, Racine, WI. Contact Rodney Bowers, SVD at rbowers@techny.org
- **Temporary Profession:** Contact Judith Davies, OSF, at jdavies@dioceseofjoliet.org
- **Peer Supervision:** Contact Helen Cahill, OP, at claret_center@claret.org

Region 9

- TBA

Region 10

- **Inter-Community Novitiate (ICN):** Meets weekly. Contact Tom Horan, OMI, at thmshoran@yahoo.com or Joye Gros, OP, at jgrosop@gmail.com
- **Monthly supervision:** Contact Joye Gros, OP, at jgrosop@gmail.com for more information.
- **Next RFC Meeting:** April 18, 2016, 5:30 pm (pizza), Loretto Center, Webster Groves, MO. Presenter: Binu Edathumparambil, MSFS. Topic: Psycho-spiritual Development during Initial Formation. Rsvp to Joye Gros, OP at jgrosop@gmail.com.

Region 11

- TBA

Region 12

- **Inter-community Pre-Novitiate Program:** Meets monthly at Our Lady of the Lake Convent, San Antonio, TX, September – May, with various topics and speakers for each session.
- **Inter-community Novitiate Program:** Novices (Canonical & Apostolic) and Annually Professed meet fivetimes during the course of the year beginning in September and ending in April. Different topics and speakers are presented throughout this time
For further information on both programs, contact Kathleen Goike, IWBS, at skgoike@gmail.com

Region 13

- TBA

Region 14 South

- **Regional Meetings** take place during lunch period of ICF class; see information below
- **Inter-community Formation Program (ICF):** Every Monday from September 22, 2014 to May 4, 2015 from 9:45 to 3:00 pm at Lovers of the Holy Cross Convent, 14700 S. Van Ness Ave, Gardena, CA 90249
Contact Sue Dunning, CSJ, at sdunning@csjorange.org

Region 14 North

- Inactive

Region 15

- TBA - Contact Coralie Muzzy, CSJP, at cmuzzy@csjp-olp.org

REGIONAL CONTACTS

Region 1

Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont,
Rhode Island,
Massachusetts, Connecticut
RFC Contact: Patricia Moriarty, RSM
pmoriarty@mercyne.org

Region 2

New York, New Jersey
RFC Contact: Robert Clark, FMS
Rscfms@gmail.com

Region 3

Eastern Pennsylvania
RFC Contact: Mary Glackin, IHM
mcglackin@juno.com

Region 4 and 6

Western Pennsylvania, Maryland, Dela-
ware, Virginia,
West Virginia, District of Columbia,
North Carolina
RFC Contact: Elaine Davia, CBS
Elaine_Davia@bshsi.org

Region 5

Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana,
Arkansas, Georgia, Florida,
South Carolina, Puerto Rico,
Virgin Islands
RFC Contact: TBA

Region 7, 8, 9

Michigan, Indiana, Illinois,
Wisconsin, Iowa
RFC Contact: James Paradis, OSA
jdposa5@aol.com

Region 10

Eastern Missouri
RFC Contact: Joye Gros, OP
jgrosop@gmail.com

Region 11

Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota,
Minnesota, Wyoming
RFC Contact: TBA

Region 12

New Mexico, Texas
RFC Contact: Kathleen Goike, IWBS
skgoike@gmail.com

Region 13

Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma,
Western Missouri
RFC Contact: Noreen Walter, SCL
nwalter@scls.org

Region 14 North

Northern California, Nevada, Utah
RFC Contact: TBA

Region 14 South

Southern California, Hawaii,
Arizona, Guam
RFC Contact: Sue Dunning, CSJ
sdunning@csjorange.com

Region 15

Washington, Oregon, Idaho,
Montana, Alaska
RFC contact: Karen Hawkins, SP
Karen.hawkins@providence.org

*RFC Members from Canada and from
other countries attend events in the region
of their choice.*



If Ever

Isn't it all
worthwhile

— to throw one's life
into the whirlpool
world,

not knowing when
or where or if ever
it will come out again —

no imbursement,
just gift?

Julia D. E. Prinz, VDM, will be a seminar
presenter at Congress 2015.