



SHCJ ASSOCIATES NEWSLETTER

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A THANKSGIVING BLESSING



*May an abundance of gratitude burst forth
as you reflect upon what you have received.*

*May thanksgiving overflow in your heart,
and often be proclaimed in your prayer.*

*May you gather around the table of your heart
the ardent faithfulness, kindness, and goodness
of each person who is true to you.*

*May the harvest of your good actions
bring forth plentiful fruit each day.*

*May you discover a cache of hidden wisdom
among the people and events
that have brought you distress and sorrow.*

*May your basket of blessings surprise you
with its rich diversity of gifts
and its opportunities for growth.*

*May all that nourishes and resources your life
bring you daily satisfaction and renewed hope.*

*May you slow your hurried pace of life
so you can be aware of, and enjoy,
what you too easily take for granted.*

*May you always be open, willing,
and ready to share your blessings with others.*

*May you never forget the Generous One
who loves you lavishly and unconditionally.*

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Connecting with Cornelia and Charism: Spiritually Supportive Community

by Judy Talvacchia

In the 3 previous articles, we looked at Holy Child Spirit from different perspectives:

- Holy Child Spirit is a particular way of living Incarnational Spirituality that inspired Cornelia Connelly and is shared by the Society with the world.
- Holy Child Spirit is first lived in the circumstances of our daily lives.
- Holy Child Spirit, lived in daily life, leads us to awareness and action on behalf of the “wants of the age”.

Reflecting on Holy Child Spirit from these perspectives can be challenging. Holy Child Spirit may be new to us and require time and effort to absorb. Those of us who attended Holy Child schools may still hold on to ideas about Holy Child Spirit that were meaningful for us as students. As Associates, we are called to expand the way we understand and live the spirit that initially formed us. When we reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation that grounds Holy Child Spirit, its many facets can overwhelm or bewilder us. Living Holy Child Spirit intentionally in daily life can challenge us to be increasingly attentive rather than always acting out of instinct. Awareness and action on behalf of the needs of creation can stretch us in uncomfortable ways. Barbara Linen, SHCJ expressed her own sense of challenge in this 2010 blog entry on the SCHJ website:

New understandings of the incarnation will come as we live through new contexts, new times, just as they have in the past. The incarnation as God’s conversation with us, in us, and in the world draws us in the same way it drew Jesus into love. Our life and mission in this world will be continuously renewed by the conversations we are and that we have with God and with each other in our different settings, in a context of friendship. As we pursue renewal of ourselves and of the Society and our mission, we are attending to the realities of our life and our world which we do every day. There is a ‘kind of mysticism of attending to the ordinary’ as it presents itself. There is the hard work of staying with our search for God in the realities of every day, remembering

at the same time our limits. It can be very difficult.

How do we stay faithful to the journey of discipleship we are on as SHCJ Associates, especially when the journey leads us down unfamiliar paths or when the way to proceed is unclear?

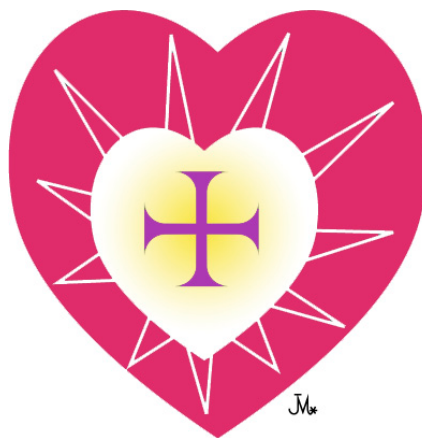
Throughout much of her life, Cornelia sought out a spiritually supportive community. In Grand Coteau, she found support and opportunities for growth with the Jesuits and the Religious of the Sacred Heart. During her time in Rome, Cornelia surrounded herself with Catholic friends who affirmed and supported her newfound Catholic faith. She sought out Catholic lectures and services that expanded

her understanding of the Catholic faith and inspired her to action. She sought out the advice of others when she had questions, doubts, or decisions to make.

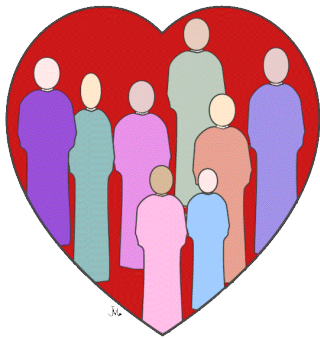
After Cornelia founded the Society, she showed by her words and actions, the deep joy she experienced in the community life of the Sisters. She saw the benefit that a sense of community would bring to the growth of the students in her school. She made sure that Holy Child schools were not just classrooms of instruction but

“homes away from home”. She insisted that students be treated as individuals, nurtured and challenged to become their best selves. Isn’t the sense of community what so many of us who went to Holy Child Schools remember as being distinctive about our student experience?

Human growth and flourishing never happens in isolation but in community. We become our best selves as Associates by being in regular contact with other Associates and Sisters. We grow as we come in contact with others who share a common spirituality but who live the Holy Child Spirit with their own unique set of gifts. Our own spirituality and gifts are both affirmed and challenged when we participated in Society and Associate gatherings. We share together the joy of God’s presence and action in our lives and in creation. It can be a challenge to maintain community when many of us are isolated geographically from other Associates or Sisters. In this age of electronic communication, we are blessed with many opportunities to connect besides the



Connecting with Cornelia and Charism (continued)



handwritten letters and journals that the first Sisters shared. Let's use the opportunities we have to nurture the bond of shared spirituality and mission across miles. We as individuals, the Society and the world we serve will better reflect the reign of God when we "dwell together in unity".

1. What challenges do I experience in trying

to understand and live Holy Child Spirit? Incarnational Spirituality? Meeting the wants of the age?

2. What opportunities do I have to experience community with Holy Child Associates and Sisters?
3. How have I benefited from communal gatherings with Associates and Sisters?
4. How do others benefit from the gifts I receive as a result of the time I spend with Associates and Sisters?

Action Not Words: Friends in Community, Friends in the Lord by Bryna Bozart

Cornelia "sought a spiritually supportive community" (see previous article) while living at Grand Coteau and she specifically befriended the Jesuits of that place. Community life was a strong focus for Ignatius while he was a student at the University of Paris. He entered into a close friendship with seven other students and this formed a companionship which was lived within a communal bonding. In 1534, St. Ignatius of Loyola entered a chapel on Montmartre Hill with these seven men and vowed to remain friends even after completion of their degrees. They chose then to call themselves Amigos en el Senor ...Friends in the Lord.

It seems that this central theme of friendship continued to be a distinguishing characteristic of community life for the thousands of men who followed Ignatius into the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits.

We might wonder how much this affected the Incarnational life and Spirit of Cornelia's vision as she moved towards the founding of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus? We know that, like Ignatius, she was warmly relational and openly inviting of companionship as lived in the mutuality of true friendships...friends in the Lord. She knew the joys and benefits of family life which deeply influenced the communal life she eventually shaped for the Society and for the schools.

As Associates, we have seen and experienced in our gatherings together, in our prayers and mission, how we are closely bonded together.



As the preceding article points out, regardless of the reality of so many of us being separated by miles...we are and remain a community of love, worship and prayer. As an example, the Associates were united in prayer and concern on a national level for their fellow Associates on the East Coast who were affected by superstorm Sandy. There is Something of the Spirit, the Holy Child Spirit, Who unites us in friendships that give meaning and abundance of blessings to the shared experiences we have known and have come to share.

In our Associate communities, we are challenged to consider the needs of our larger community:

- the earth and the care of it,
- the cries of the poor and our response to them,
- the building up of the kingdom in justice for all

Action Not Words (continued)

- the communal reflections of the discoveries of science, technology and the mysteries of the cosmos...

In her book, Earth Crammed With Heaven, Elizabeth Dreyer described community, as lived together in faith and hope:

“The sense of being an integral member of the human community challenges us to discern what is truly good for the community and to trust our ability to perform this good.” (pg 64)

Our community is intimate and small, and yet also global and huge in the urgency of the cry for our communal attention and intent to do good.

Cornelia says to us today as she said it years ago to her Sisters: “Let us love one another with God, in God and for God.”

I invite you to reflect upon a friend and/or friends who are companioning you today as an Associate in this community of love and action...and to pray a prayer of gratitude.



Poetry Off the Shelf by Barbara DeConcini

Prayer

Every day I want to speak with you.
And every day something more important
Calls for my attention—the drugstore, the beauty
products, the luggage

I need to buy for the trip.
Even now I can hardly sit here

Among the falling piles of paper and clothing,
the garbage trucks outside
Already screeching and banging.

The mystics say you are as close as my own breath.
Why do I flee from you?

My days and nights pour through me like complaints
And become a story I forgot to tell.

Help me. Even as I write these words I am planning
To rise from the chair as soon as I finish this sentence.
Marie Howe

Thou Art Indeed Just

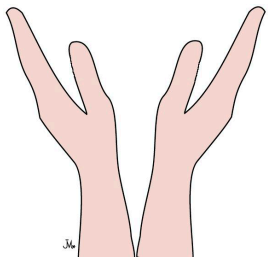
Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavor end?
Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
Now, leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build--but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Poetry Off the Shelf (continued)

Despite the fact that this issue's works are what are usually called "prayer-poems," neither fits the commonplace understanding of devotional verse. Rather, both are prayers of complaint. I am reminded of Cornelia Connelly's advice: "When you pray, sit before God and be more ready to listen than to speak." These folks seem to be at a significantly lower level in their efforts toward contemplation. They have something to say to God—and say it they will!

The speaker in Marie Howe's poem is a mess. She could be the poster child for the difficulty of practicing mindfulness meditation—the continuing effort to focus by freeing our minds of distraction. She wants to pray, she tries to pray, but she cannot still her busy mind, so caught in the ephemera of everyday. The best she can do is to report her scatteredness with brutal honesty. Her earnest cry—"Help me."—echoes the cry of the man in the Gospel—"Lord, I do



believe. Help my unbelief." I love the way her final words meld the worlds of person-at-prayer and poet-at-work, confronting us with the artifice that is the poem. Perhaps composing oneself in prayerful meditation is not unlike composing a poem?

Gerard Manley Hopkins' *Thou Art Indeed Just* is generally included among his so-called terrible

sonnets. These are rigorously structured poems in the sonnet form that manage to read as spontaneous, desperate cries from the heart. In this one, the speaker laments his deep sense of failure; his thwartedness in everything he attempts; his desolation (in the language of St. Ignatius, his spiritual father). For those who are familiar with Hopkins' biography, it is hard not to identify the speaker with the poet himself, no matter the biographical fallacy.

He challenges God, complaining that the drought afflicting his soul stands in sharp contrast to the fecundity of others less deserving, e.g., sinners ("sots and thralls of lust") or even nature herself (birds, "banks and brakes"). He is reminiscent of Job, or perhaps the older brother of the prodigal son, or the laborers who work all day and get the same pay as the newcomers. His psalm of complaint ends with a piercing cry of the heart, made all-the-more powerful by Hopkins' fresh use and placement of words, his so-called sprung rhythm: *Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain.*

There may be at least as many life practices of prayer as there are spiritual traditions. Here we have two prayer-poems which don't fit the conventional notions of piety or devotion. But precisely in not doing so, but rather in engaging in hearty complaint, they betray a striking intimacy with God.

Some of Cornelia's Thoughts on Prayer

Prayer is the great source from whence the graces of God flow into the soul.
CC 31:56

Our Lord accepts our thoughts as prayers when we desire earnestly anything good and for his greater glory. And he accepts our tears too when they are good tears.
CC 58:12

"It is precisely because you are called to live busy lives, that you must lead a life of prayer"
Spiritual Instructions

"They only who listen hear the voice of God...is mine a listening soul?"
CC 54:36

"Take care not to lose the interior spirit by the pressure of activity."
CC7:1

Meet the Associates by Barbara DeConcini

In this issue, we meet Juliet Njoku, an SHCJ Associate originally from Nigeria who is now living and working in New Jersey.

BD: Juliet, welcome to the pages of the SHCJ Associates Newsletter! Many associates met you in person at this past summer's gathering, where you participated in a panel on the topic of "Actions not Words." So, tell us a little bit about yourself! Where are you from originally?



JN: I was born in Eastern Nigeria, in a village called Uburu in Ohaozara. My parents, Willie (late) and Christiana, migrated with their three girls (I was the middle child) when we were still very young to Lafia to pursue a better standard of living. The rest of my siblings--three boys and another girl--were born in Lafia.

BD: Since our readers will be quite unfamiliar with your country and town of origin, can you tell us a little more about what it was and is like?

JN: My village, though rural, was filled with aspirations. The biggest desire was to have the chance to go to school. Kids typically walked very long distances with excitement to get to school. The village where I was born is known principally for rice farming and salt processing (from the local salt lake). While the men are typically involved in cultivating and harvesting the rice (with the help of the women and children), the women also do salt processing for their own income. My father farmed before he moved to Lafia, where he initially got into transportation and later opened a mill.

BD: Are the other members of your family still living in Nigeria?

JN: Yes! My siblings are all living in the eastern part of Nigeria and in Abuja, working and going to school. My older sister, who lives with her husband in the east, gets to visit the village often and keeps me informed about home. My mother has visited the U.S twice for a few months. I hope my siblings will get to visit someday, if they succeed in getting visas.

BD: How did you come to know the Society?

JN: I had a passion for reading from an early age and dreamed a lot about traveling and exploring. I completed my elementary education a year ahead of schedule, having successfully passed the advanced exam for entrance into secondary education. What

happened next was incomprehensible to me! I believe it is my only recollection of some form of rebellion against my parents.

Here is what happened. Notwithstanding my excellent performance in the exam, my name was not on the list for any of the government secondary schools. Even though they conceded that a big mistake had occurred, my parents insisted that I go back to complete another year in grade school. It seemed that my dad was just not prepared to complain to the examination board, which would have meant taking on the bureaucracy. "Just repeat the grade and take the exam the following year," they instructed. Oh, how I dreaded going back to that grade school!

And then I got an unbelievable break. My uncle mentioned that the Holy Child Sisters were starting a new private secondary school in the village of Duduguru. Evidently, they were still conducting interviews for admission. The very next day, I went with him for an interview. I met Sisters Sophia Chizo Onuorah and Ann Schulte. After the written and oral exams, I learned that I did very well and had been admitted! I couldn't have been more delighted to receive a list of items to bring and instructions about starting secondary school.

St. Kizitos Girls Secondary School in Duduguru is about 12 kilometers (30minutes ride) from Lafia. The school at the time had one building with a couple of classrooms, an office, and a staff room. There were some temporary classrooms, which were actually containers. Sometimes these containers got brutally hot, sending us out under the big trees for our classes!

Students from a distance rented rooms and lived among the villagers. I was lucky to have my uncle living and running his pharmacy store in the village, so I lived with him. In my sophomore year, I moved into the newly built dorm. We had to do our own cooking!

BD: It sounds as if your Holy Child education was an important turning point in your young life.

JN: I believe meeting the Holy Child Sisters was providential and God's way of ensuring that I stay on a path that led me closer to him. The Sisters made us feel at home in an effortless manner, their simple community living, sharing and caring, struck a chord within me.

They were versatile, always introducing us to new and exciting opportunities despite the limited

Meet the Associates (continued)

resources available to the school. Growing to be strong, creative, and independent, taking the child Jesus with us always—these were the values the sisters inculcated in us. Always and everywhere we were urged to bear in mind our motto: Actions not words. The relationship with the sisters was one I held so dear that I was sad when graduation day arrived!

BD: What came next in your life? Education and a career choice? Starting your own family?

JN: Yes. All of that. I went to the University of Jos to pursue a law degree, then on to the Nigerian Law School, graduating from the latter in 1997. Then I completed the one-year obligatory National Youth Service Corps.

BD: What is that?

JN: The National Youth Service Corps is a mandatory program of service to the nation for young graduates of colleges and universities. I completed mine in Abuja in 1998 in the legal department of the Central Bank of Nigeria. My duties ranged from vetting legal documents to going to court with a senior colleague to represent the interests of the bank. After that, I accepted a position in a law firm in Abuja, performing mostly corporate duties at the Corporate Affairs Commission with occasional court appearances. I worked there until I came to the U. S.

BD: Wow! That must have been quite an intense career development and transition at your relatively young age. And you also married and started a family during this time?

JN: Yes. It was my father's dearest wish that I should marry someone from my village. He complained about women who marry men from distant towns and never bother to visit home again to see their folks. My husband is from my village and that made my dad very pleased. But then we moved over to the U.S together. My husband works in the behavioral health field. My husband and I have two loving and amazing daughters, who are 10 years old and 7 years old.

I've been working with the New Jersey State Judiciary since 2002, and find it exciting and challenging because of the dynamics of the work we do. Our work involves enforcing court-ordered sentences with adult offenders and ensuring compliance with the conditions of their sentence.

BD: It sounds as if you have plenty to keep you busy and out of mischief. But I expect that you still manage to have some special interests and passions

that are all your own. What do you enjoy doing in your rare free time?

JN: I stay active with my parish community of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Lindenwold by carrying on the wonderful legacy of singing that the SHCJ taught us—in both the parish and the Camden Diocesan choirs. I'm also a member of the Racial Justice Commission and the Black Catholic Ministry Commission of the diocese. I find so much joy in the annual Mass in the African traditions which we organize and celebrate. When things quiet down in the summer, I love to travel and explore new areas of the United States.

BD: What attracted you to join the SHCJ Associates?

JN: I was able to re-establish contact with the Holy Child Sisters sometime in 2001 when I learned



that some of the Sisters I knew from home lived and went to school in the Rosemont area. I had no knowledge about the SHCJ Associates until sometime in 2008. I was immediately intrigued by the prospect of reconnecting with the spirit of the Holy Child and

expressed a desire to begin the process of discerning. Sr. Mary Bryan was gracious enough to commit to guiding me through the process of learning more deeply about Cornelia Connelly and Incarnation Spirituality and Cornelia's profound journey of starting her community. I made my commitment as an SHCJ Associate in 2009.

BD: How has being an SHCJ Associate affected your everyday life?

JN: The SHCJ Associates relationship has helped me to practice reflecting more often with the resources made available to us intermittently. The community of Associates scattered all over the United States and beyond yet united in prayer for one another, adds richness to my life here in the United States that feels like having an extended family. The regional gatherings I have been able to attend afforded me opportunities to meet a lot of the Associates and really connect with some.

BD: What are your "dearest hopes" for the SHCJ Associate relationship?

JN: My sincere hope for the Associates is a continued growth in the spirit of the child Jesus that others may be drawn to seek a closer relationship with Jesus by our own lives of Actions not Words.



*I thank my God, whenever I think of you;
and every time I pray for all of you,
I pray with joy,
remembering how you have helped
to spread the Good News from the day
you first heard it right up to the present.
I am quite certain that the One who began this
good work in you
will see that it is finished
when the Day of Christ Jesus comes.*

Philippians 1:3-6