



SHCJ ASSOCIATES NEWSLETTER

AMERICAN PROVINCE

AUTUMN 2014 Volume XII Issue IV

ACTIONS NOT WORDS



New Core Team members (l-r): Sr. Rosemarie Tedesco (PA), Juliet Njoku(NJ), and Ann Donovan (MA)



Thanksgiving Blessings to you and yours!



Stone Harbor weekend retreat. Leaving Mass, Tricia Fell, Eileen Dorman, Juliet Njoku, Pat Burt, and Cathi Duffy

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A Letter from Province Leader

Dear SHCJ Associates,

Greetings to each of you in this wonderful season of thanksgiving! You are indeed a gracious part of the bounty of the SHCJ harvest that we give thanks for again and again.

As we celebrate the beauty of the earth at harvest time, I want to tell you about how the whole Society is focusing this year on the needs of the earth in a time of environmental crisis. This is a major sign of our time and an urgent need that Cornelia would surely have called a "want of the age."

By now you've received the Executive Summary of the Society Strategic Plan, and you'll see in the list of goals that it's part of our Plan to "address the ecological issues facing our planet by seeking a deeper understanding of creation and exercising practical concern for the environment." Specifically, Sisters in all parts of the Society are focused this year on addressing the causes and effects of global warming and climate change.

And we invite all of you to join with us in any way you can to continue to raise awareness and find practical ways to make a difference for the good of all creation.

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Creation, Science and the Incarnation

by Judy Talvacchia

What do creation and science have to do with the Incarnation? Actually, quite a lot. Over the last century, science has broadened and deepened our understanding of nature, the cosmos and the relationship of human beings with them. Research has provided insights into what makes us human to a degree that is unprecedented. Controversy, of course, has accompanied each piece of new information. How does it fit in with our values, beliefs, our current knowledge, practices and customs?

Many disciplines, including theology, have been challenged to examine scientific discoveries and research in the light of tradition; to determine if and how they can be incorporated; to comment on applications of science to the human and natural realms. The task is far from easy and certainly not complete!

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis encourages the Church to engage with science as part of evangelization. He sees no conflict between faith and reason because “both come from God.” What he suggests is “a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself...”¹ Such a synthesis, he says, will give us greater access to the mysteries that transcend the created world – mysteries like the Incarnation on which our SHCJ spirituality is based.

Science has uncovered a created universe vastly larger and more interconnected than we ever imagined. In light of these discoveries, is it enough to understand the Incarnation as God entering the world in the person of Jesus Christ in order to save humanity only? St.

Paul expands that notion to include “creation”. In Romans 8:21, he says “that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom

of the children of God.” In Paul’s understanding, “creation” meant the natural world of our earth.

But now we know that beyond earth is a vast universe that evolved over billions of years. Pope Francis recently commented on this, saying, “Evolution in nature is not inconsistent with the notion of creation, because evolution requires the creation of beings that evolve.”² How do we understand and experience Jesus Christ the savior of all “beings that evolve?”

Theologians today are in active dialogue with science over questions like these, which would require many more articles to explore! Before trying to enter that dialogue, I think it helpful to return to the traditions of our faith and of the Society, with the help of Pope Francis and Cornelia. How can they guide us in approaching the challenges of science and our understanding of the Incarnation?

Pope Francis and Catholic Tradition

During one of his Wednesday audiences³, Pope Francis referred to the biblical view of creation. He said, “In the first Chapter of Genesis, right at the beginning of the Bible, what is emphasized is that God is pleased with his creation, stressing repeatedly the beauty and goodness of every single thing. At the end of each day, it is written: “God saw that it was good” (1:12, 18, 21, 25).” He reminds us that creation “is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.”

The created world is the first place where God was made manifest in a material, sensory form. Creation remains our primary way of experiencing God.

At a moment in time, God became manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. Our experience of God took on a new dimension. During his visit to Assisi⁴, Pope Francis highlighted the relationship that his namesake had with Jesus. “The first thing [St. Francis] tells us is this: that being a Christian means having a living relationship with the person of Jesus; it means putting on Christ, being conformed to him.” St. Francis was deeply immersed in the life Jesus of Nazareth. He introduced the crèche in order to help people to imagine the birth of Jesus. He lived as an itinerant preacher as Jesus did. He bore the wounds of



Microse Associates and an image of the Whirlpool Galaxy for the
From nasa.gov

Christ's suffering, the Stigmata, on his body. Certainly, he "followed Jesus from the crib to the cross" as Cornelia described her relationship with Jesus.

At the same time, St. Francis recognized God's manifestation in the created world. Pope Francis referred to the Canticle of Creation⁵, the beautiful



prayer in which the saint praises all the parts of creation that he experienced during his lifetime. The Pope said, "Saint Francis of Assisi bears witness to the need to respect all that God has created and as he created it."

Later in his homily, the Pope made a visceral connection between human beings and the natural world. "Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement." He reminded us that "We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures." He encouraged us to "help [creation] grow, to become more beautiful and more like what God created it to be." Cornelia would certainly be at home with this last sentiment. The Pope's homily highlighted aspects of the life of St. Francis that influenced Cornelia and her understanding of Incarnational spirituality.

Finally, in a homily for World Environment Day⁶ the Pope offered a thought that connects with Cornelia's call to meet the wants of the age. "We are losing our attitude of wonder, of contemplation, of listening to creation [...], we have drifted away from God, we no longer read his signs."

Cornelia and SHCJ Tradition

Cornelia, of course, expressed her insights about creation and about the Incarnation in the context of 19th century knowledge and beliefs. There are clues, however, in her words and actions that reveal an openness to deeper and broader knowledge in both areas. Cornelia's instruction to "meet the wants

of the age" was immediately put into practice in her educational approach. She offered her students a liberal education at a time when girls especially were trained primarily in practical skills. Cornelia believed that all students should be knowledgeable about the world they would live and work in – a world that scientific discovery and the industrial revolution would change radically in their lifetime. She encouraged curiosity and mastery of a subject, not just rote memory. Her method invited students to lifelong learning.

Her ultimate goal was to draw students closer to God through the example of the Holy Child. She believed that children could grow in awareness of God, however, from anything in the created world, even a stone. (Cornelia offered geology as part of the curriculum.) She took students to the beach, on picnics and brought them outdoors to do their needlework. The natural world was an integral part of their education and of their faith development.



In an article from Exploring the Great Mystery⁷, Caroline Conway, SHCJ reminds us that love of nature and of learning were part of Cornelia's own life experience. She grew up in a beautiful part of colonial Philadelphia; spent part of her married life surrounded by the lush vegetation of Louisiana; immersed herself in the beauty of the European continent and ended her life on the lovely grounds of St. Leonard's.

Cornelia's early education would have been conducted at home by tutors, according to the custom of the day. Helen Forshaw, SHCJ describes it⁸ as "a broad liberal education...references to her accomplishments as a young woman [reveal] that she was fluent in French,



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played the piano and guitar well, was an avid reader and had had singing lessons.”

Cornelia remained a lifelong learner. During Pierce’s frequent absences, she set herself to learning languages, became comfortable with handling finances. In Rome she delved into art and architecture. She used the same curiosity and discipline to study the Catholic Church, to learn about the Incarnation and Ignatian spirituality. Cornelia passed on to her students her own love of learning and of spiritual growth.

Caroline Conway also mentions Cornelia’s “pioneering and adventurous spirit.” Cornelia went with Pierce, with no hesitation, to Natchez and Grand Coteau, the edges of her known world at the time. She planned to begin her religious life in Rome; then agreed to start the Society in England, a land and culture unfamiliar to her. With each move, Cornelia looked for God’s presence and God’s desires for her in the world in which she found herself. She took to heart the Ignatian insight that God can be found in all things. She found God in the earthly life of the Child Jesus born in a stable, hidden and laboring, preaching and healing, tried and executed. The risen Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, she could find anywhere and everywhere.

As Conway says, “If she were alive today, she would, no doubt, take delight in space explorations and the scientific discoveries of an ever-expanding universe and would see the Creator God still at work in it all.” Perhaps her invitation to us today would be: “Follow Jesus from the crib to the cross and beyond!”

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have the discoveries of science influenced your understanding of the Incarnation? If so, what has deepened your faith? What reservations/questions do you have?
2. What insights of Pope Francis and of Cornelia invite you to further study and reflection of the relationship between faith and science?
3. How is God calling you to enter more deeply into the mystery of the Incarnation?

¹Joy of the Gospel, p. 181

²Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Oct. 27, 2014

³http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140521_udienza-generale.html

⁴http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131004_omelia-visita-assisi.html

⁵For the complete prayer, go to <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=3188>

⁶http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale.html

⁷See Conway’s article in Exploring the Great Mystery, <https://corneliacnellylibrary.org/search-results-details.php?id=2531>

⁸See “Notes on Cornelia Connelly’s Approach to Education” by Helen Forshaw, SHCJ in the Cornelia Connelly Digital Library, <https://corneliacnellylibrary.org/library-materials/texts/TXT-32.pdf>



Ed Silva is this month's featured Associate. As usual, his story is so interesting and compelling, further testimony on how far-reaching Cornelia's influence is. Ed was born and raised in Lowell, MA (yay again for MA!). He lived there until he graduated from the University of Massachusetts and moved to Philadelphia to attend graduate school. Ed is single but has a married sister still living in the Boston area with her family.



Ed with Associates Kitty Sheridan and Barbara DeConcini at the 2012 SHCJ Jubilee celebration.

After leaving graduate school, Ed was employed by St. Leonard's Academy. It was then that he experienced the charism of Cornelia through the community of her sisters. His friendships exist to this day with Sister Mary Theodosia Linus, Sr. Catherine Quinn, Sister Carlotta, Sister Immaculata... just to name a few. These friendships have spanned the last 40 years. After leaving Philadelphia and moving to Texas, Ed continued his friendship through phone conversations, visits and even having Sister Catherine and Sister Theo conduct quiet days and retreats in his Houston parish.

Through the years Ed has read most books on Cornelia and admired her incredible faith despite so many obstacles and challenges. He feels her presence through the Society of the Holy Child Jesus to this day. Ed feels that Cornelia left a remarkable ministry for all of us to strive for and to grow in within the greater church.

Ed has run a management and training company in Houston since 1988. He is active in his parish and is honored to serve on the Associates Core Team. As usual, we consider ourselves lucky to have another long-term devoted friend of the SHCJ as part of this wonderful group.



The first thing we did to implement this goal in the American Province was to invite Sisters to sign a province statement committing ourselves to these three actions:

1. be aware and pray over recent scientific reports and Church statements and invite family, friends and colleagues to join with us
2. urge our government officials to join the world community to enact legislation which will reduce the emissions of global greenhouse gas and support clean energy
3. commit ourselves to reduce carbon emissions by our activities and life styles so that all God's people, particularly the poor and vulnerable, will not suffer the devastating consequences of climate change

Since the impact of our own small efforts is greatly increased when we join with others, we also enrolled the province in the Catholic Climate Covenant – <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/> If you take time to visit this site, you'll find a wealth of resources and practical suggestions for how you too can enhance the effect of what you're able to do personally for the good of our planet. You might also consider taking the St. Francis Pledge which is part of being a member of this organization.

As the year goes on, I hope Sisters and Associates will find a forum for talking together about these matters for the sake of mutual support and education. I'm not sure just how we might do that, but all ideas are welcome, and I'll continue to explore possibilities with Cathi and the Core Team.

When asked what individuals can do to help the environment, a leader of a global climate movement replied that the best thing an individual can do is join with other individuals!

So that's my hope and prayer and invitation – that together we will do more than any one of us could ask or imagine!

Best wishes for a very happy Thanksgiving Day to you all!

Lovingly,

Mary Ann Buckley, SHCJ
Province Leader

Rainer Maria Rilke

by Michelle Dugan

Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.

In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your
senses,
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

"II, 29" ["Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower"] by Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Sonnets to Orpheus*, anthologized in *In Praise of Mortality: Selections from Rainer Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus*. Edited and translated from the original German by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows. © Riverhead, 2005.



As the dark days of winter approach, I find Cornelia's concept of accepted suffering coming to mind. In "Let the Darkness Be a Bell Tower," the celebrated poet Rainer Maria Rilke presents a similar vision of the way that "such intensity of pain" can transform itself into something positive, leading us to spiritual growth. The poem

is actually an excerpt (II, 29) from Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, published in German in 1923 along with his master work *The Duino Elegies*, and translated into English here by Joanna Macy. As with all poetry in translation, the beauty of the original language can never be reproduced exactly; nevertheless, the translator's art deserves its own recognition – and our gratitude.

Rilke begins by addressing the reader as "quiet friend" – immediate intimacy, immediate trust! – and asks that we begin by breathing. Before he even confronts the pain in the second stanza, he has already given us the central image of the bell that rings on high. That which "batters," through the rhythm of change, "becomes your strength." Only after this

encouragement, this powerful fortification, does Rilke dare us to look suffering in the face with the poem's pivotal line: "What is it like, such intensity of pain?" Who has not wondered this very thing when learning the story of Cornelia's life, especially the tragic deaths of her children?

In the third stanza, Rilke brings the reader to the crossroads – the meaning resides in "uncontainable night." A true mystic, the poet invites us not only to join him in the darkness, fearlessly, but to "be the mystery." The last stanza returns us to renewed life. Now the central image is water, and now the reader and the poet, as if they are one voice, proclaim, "I flow...I am." Accepted suffering did this for Cornelia. I imagine this line could have been hers: "If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine."

Promoting Cornelia in 21st Century

by Anita Martineau

Under the leadership of Sr. Veronica Openibo, SHCJ Society Leader, the Cornelia Connelly Promoters Committee met at the Cherwell Centre in Oxford, England from September 30 to Friday, October 3, 2014. The purpose of this meeting was for the Committee to consider ways in which Cornelia Connelly and her charism could be promoted in new and contemporary ways in our modern world. Sr. Tina Chikezie served as coordinator and facilitator of the meeting.

Members of this international group included both SHCJ sisters and SHCJ Associates:

Sr. Veronica Openibo (Rome)
Sr. Teresa Okure, Sr. and Sr. Tina Chikezie from the African Province
Sr. Anne Stewart, Sophie Rudge, and Rose Amuah (European Province)
Sr. Helen McDonald and Anita Martineau (American Province)

The initial discussion focused on the committee's objectives and the link between this committee and the Cornelia Connelly Canonization Committee. Past efforts by the Canonization Committee to explore and clarify the complex canonization process were reviewed. That committee determined there was an essential need to increase efforts to promote broader knowledge of Cornelia and her charism as a foundation to obtaining the miracles required to hopefully move her from the current designation of "venerable" to "blessed" to "saint."

Current resources available about the life of Cornelia Connelly were reviewed. Sr. Helen Forshaw, Archivist of the European Province, presented to the committee a review of primary and secondary source materials available in the Cherwell Centre, followed by a tour of the Archives there. She created two topical exhibits for the committee: Cornelia as a mother of her children and reflections on Cornelia from people who had known her personally in her lifetime.

Sr. Judith Lancaster made a presentation to the committee to help the group consider the framework of Cornelia's life they will promote. She presented different visual images of Cornelia throughout her lifetime and asked each member which appealed to them the most. The varied responses highlighted the need to explore the implications of how questions are answered such as:

- If the committee chooses one picture rather than

another, what difference will it make to how people react **to Cornelia**?

- What implication does this have as the committee begins to think about promoting Cornelia in the 21st century?
- Will the committee need different approaches for different audiences?
- In promoting Cornelia, how does the committee deal with her complicated story?
- Is text still relevant? How does the committee keep up to date with modern technology?



Representatives from the three provinces then shared ideas from their constituencies on what would be helpful for promoting Cornelia in the three regions. These included conferences and events, improved use of websites and the Cornelia Connelly Digital Library (<http://corneliaconnellylibrary.org>), resource materials, collaboration with

the media, international internships, outreach to the Vatican/parishes/schools, personal witness, and use of existing SHCJ organizations. There is a need for greater availability of existing resource materials across the provinces, particularly in Spanish. The committee is looking forward to the publication of a new booklet to be released soon on Cornelia's life by Judy Talvacchia, an Associate in the USA.

The Committee took a day trip to St. Leonard's-Mayfield where Headmistress Antonia Beary provided a welcoming reception and a tour of the school facilities. The group also visited such inspirational and historic sites as the graveyard, Stone House, and the tomb of Cornelia Connelly in the chapel where Mass was celebrated.

On the final day, the Committee met to discuss a Plan of Action. Sr. Veronica will meet with the Society Executive Leadership Team to discuss the opportunity of a follow up meeting, perhaps in the USA, since the possibilities to continue this important committee work are many. Initial steps will be taken to explore:

- promoting Cornelia in Catholic media
- wider distribution of existing materials and Judy Talvacchia's new booklet on Cornelia
- the creation of a short film about Cornelia's life

Promoting Cornelia Abundance

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Cathi Duffy



- promoting a Young Associates group through the use of existing SHCJ organizations worldwide, World Youth Day attendance, and international pilgrimages
- developing an internship program for participants to visit Holy Child communities to learn about Cornelia Connelly and her legacy in action
- further study of Cornelia's journey of faith and charisma

The importance of keeping all members of the Society updated on the ongoing work of the Promoters Committee was noted. The Committee expressed deepest thanks for the warm hospitality extended to them by Sr. Angela O'Connor, the other sisters and staff at the Cherwell Centre, and the European Associates. Thanks were also extended to Sr. Tina Chikezie for her extraordinary efforts in organizing and facilitating the meeting.

On a personal note as one who was graced to serve on this committee, I would like to share with my fellow SHCJ Associates in the Americas that your ideas, needs, efforts, support, passion, and prayers about promoting Cornelia and her charisma were heard and appreciated by the committee. We are aware of the many and varied stories from you about how Cornelia's example has provided you with an enriched relationship with God and others in your family, workplaces, and communities. Whenever you share with others through word and action the impact of Cornelia's story in your life, you are contributing to the work that the Promoters Committee cannot do by itself and answering an important call. Indeed, your participation has the greatest impact of all. As you continue to seek Cornelia's intercession for yourselves and others in your petitions, please share with us any miracles that occur, particularly those that result in physical healings.

Please know I welcome hearing your thoughts and questions on this subject. I can be reached at anitamartineau@verizon.net.

Accepting the call to be an Associate yields an abundance of gifts for each of us, to the [Society of the Holy Child Jesus] to which we commit, and to the Church and world we inhabit.

In this autumn season of bountiful harvests, let us each reflect on the many gifts that have entered our lives since we first affirmed our commitment to the spirit and mission of [the Society of the Holy Child Jesus]. What are the fruits of my Associate relationship this past year?

This month, celebrate the abundance of your fruitfulness and offer thanks to God who lavishly provides these gifts.

Like all harvests, this is a time for clearing the fields, vines, and trees of all the produce. The harvest is a time of letting go. In what ways am I called to let go of gifts that have been fruitful and abundant? And with the letting go, pray too for the gift to be ready to lie fallow until a new season of planting. God of abundance lead me.

God of abundance

You shower gifts on me

too bountiful to comprehend

from the bounty of clean water, nutritious food, and comfortable housing

to the love of family and friends and others who journey with me.

You call me forth to share all that is me, all that is gift.

Lead me to 'Yes'.

Lead me to share my abundant life

with those who are in need of the gifts I have to give

to share from my abundance but also from my poverty.

Lead me to choose always Your loving and compassionate ways.

Lead me always to praise You, O God of Abundant Love!

Amen.

In September, Associates met in Stone Harbor. This reflection and prayer grew from our weekend reflections. It was published in NACAR's October 2014 e-newsletter. For more info on NACAR, check out NACAR.org. Dear SHCJ Associates,