



# SHCJ ASSOCIATES NEWSLETTER

## AMERICAN PROVINCE

### ACTIONS NOT WORDS



Eugenia Ukpo (center) at her commitment ceremony in Anaheim with Associates Cathi Duffy (l) and Debbie Margulis (r) in August



Charlotte Associates and friends gather to be with Sr. Veronica Grover as she departs for Holy Child Center, Rosemont to continue her recovery from a recent illness.



Associate Juliet Njoku(l) with Sr. Sophia Chizo Onuora, her former principal, during a special celebration at New Sharon in July for Sisters attending a tertian program. Sr. Chizo was one of the program facilitators.

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## A Letter from the Chair

Dear SHCJ Associates,

It is an honor to have the opportunity to serve you for the next year as Core Team Chair. I have been an SHCJ Associate since 2006. I come to the Society not as a graduate of a Holy Child school but rather by becoming acquainted with SHCJ sisters serving in the parish of Saint Luke Catholic Church in Mint Hill, NC. I was attracted by the actions and ministries of the local Associates, as well. I had the pleasure of attending the 2008 Gathering at Rosemont and was introduced to a number of SHCJ Sisters and Associates from around the globe. The joy I witnessed in those that serve was contagious and I made my commitment as an Associate in 2010. I have served the last three years on the Core Team, including the past year as Secretary. Witnessing the youthful exuberance of the Dominicans earlier this year at the International Gathering in the DR was inspiring!

I am surrounded by a great group of Associates also serving you on the Core Team. I was expressing to your new Vice Chair, Ms. Bryna Bozart, a good friend, how humbled I was to be elected and perhaps even a little anxious. It seemed odd to not know a goodly number of the Associates around the country. It also seemed a little intimidating to be a male Chair in an organization that is two-thirds women. How do I lead? Bryna, in all her wisdom, said "Now just hush!" and "Listen!...We'll tell you what to do".

(continued on page 8)

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# Mercy in Action

by Judy Talvacchia

“Actions not Words.” These are probably the most recognizable words of Cornelia Connelly to her followers. But it’s not just a slogan, a rallying cry urging us on to productive work. It expresses the heart of her spirituality – we must be the mercy of God to others through action, both interior and exterior. As we cooperate with God’s grace, we allow our inner being to enter more deeply into the loving heart of God whose name is mercy. Our actions in everyday life become increasingly suffused with God’s merciful love. We become witnesses of God to the world in ways large and small. Our acts of compassion lead us right back into the heart of God.

## Heart of God

Cornelia found that the heart of the Child Jesus led her most easily into the heart of God. As she followed Jesus from the crib to the cross, she saw God’s merciful love expressed in concrete action towards those in need, even to the point of death. Jesus made the suffering and the poor the focus of his ministry. Cornelia could do no less.

Pope Francis has the same instinct. In his homily of July 3, 2013, the Pope said, “The wounds of our suffering brothers and sisters are the wounds of Jesus today.” The Pope continues:

“And Jesus asks us to take a leap of faith, towards Him, but through these His wounds. ‘Oh, great! Let’s set up a foundation to help everyone and do so many good things to help’. That’s important, but if we remain on this level, we will only be philanthropic. We need to touch the wounds of Jesus, we must caress the wounds of Jesus, we need to bind the wounds of Jesus with tenderness, we have to kiss the wounds of Jesus, and this literally...We find Jesus’ wounds in carrying out works of mercy...”

## Mercy as Way of Life

Cardinal Walter Kasper, whose book on mercy inspired Pope Francis, said mercy must be a way of life, not an occasional kind action. Both Pope Francis and Cornelia have given witness to ways in which they made mercy

part of the fabric of their lives. For example, I followed Pope Francis’ recent visit to Korea. What struck me was how often he stopped to acknowledge and greet the suffering – families of the students drowned at sea, the severely disabled and the sick. He insisted on enough time to offer compassionate presence, even if it made him late for his next event.

Cornelia’s Prologue to the 1854 Constitution sets forth her commitment to lifelong action on behalf of mercy in these familiar words, “Nourished from the well-springs of this heavenly fountain and fed in the pasture of his divine love, we are to run with ardor in the way he has pointed out and to employ every effort to bring others to taste and embrace the sweet yoke which he offers them...” In the previous article, I reflected on the ways in which Cornelia lived mercy in her spirituality, her approach to religious life, in her educational philosophy and in the daily life of her schools. I described God’s merciful love expressed today in the work of Sisters and Associates in the Batey Lecheria. Many of you could share stories of Sisters and Associates offering compassionate action in daily life, in the community, on behalf of the poor, the suffering and the exploitation of creation in its many forms. What I think invites us to further reflection is the demands of mercy as a way of life. What happens when the “sweet yoke he offers” turns sour?

Back to the homily of Pope Francis which was given on the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle. Referring to the appearance of the risen Christ he said, “His whole body was clean, beautiful, full of light, but the wounds were and are still there. The path to our encounter with Jesus-God are his wounds. There is no other”. In order to encounter the living God, we must go through the wounds of Jesus present in our suffering brothers and sisters. Paradoxically, our compassionate response to suffering brings us to the loving, life giving heart of God who supports and restores us.

Cornelia understood this paradox. When the demands of her apostolic work sapped her strength, when the wounds of others caused her pain, Cornelia turned to “meditation on the sufferings of Our Lord and a



generous desire to accept suffering for His sake...to meet Jesus in Jerusalem" (CC22:17). There she met not only the crucified Christ, but the risen Christ who still carried his wounds. She remembered that his wounds were in the service of love which always draws God's creation to fuller life. "We must imitate what we love very dearly, and be consumed in loving, as Our Lord Himself shows us ..."(929). As Elizabeth Mary Strub, SHCJ observed in the Informatio, "the secret of her tremendous apostolic energy – God always raised her up with Christ (p. 150).

**Compassionate action in daily life**

Our commitment as Associates must extend to "mercy as a way of life" if we are to follow the spirituality of Cornelia Connelly. This entails, not just actions on behalf of others that make us feel good, but compassionate responses even when they exhaust us, are not graciously received or leave us feeling manipulated. Difficult as it may be, are we not also called to respond with mercy even when we are uncomfortable or repulsed by the recipients of our mercy? Challenges indeed! But we have only to look at the life of Jesus, the witness of Cornelia and Pope Francis to see the necessity and the reason for developing mercy as a way of life. Only through the wounds of the world – of Christ – do we encounter the living God. The reward? Cornelia expressed it as union with God... "that jubilee of heart which had not been

bargained for in this life of accepted suffering" (745. D3). Pope Francis expresses it through an example in his homily: "Just think of what happened to St. Francis, when he embraced the leper? The same thing that happened to Thomas: his life changed."



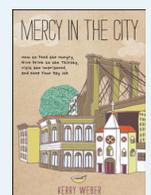
Pope blesses disabled children in Assisi - October 4, 2013. (CNS Photo)

Our lives have been changed by our Association with the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. May we be drawn more deeply into the merciful love of God by following Cornelia in a life of compassionate action.

<sup>1</sup>See the excellent lecture of Cardinal Walter Kasper, May 1, 2014, at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry on Mercy. In it he makes the point that "through the merciful heart of Jesus, we look into the heart of God." [www.bc.edu/encore events/Event Archive/2014](http://www.bc.edu/encore%20events/Event%20Archive/2014).

<sup>2</sup>See Kasper lecture.

To view a video about Mercy in Action, check out Kerry Weber's, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qChm1YpsGjU&sns=em>



# ...on Mercy in Action

## Questions for Reflection

1. How do I touch the wounds of Christ in my daily life?
2. How is mercy becoming a way of life for me?
3. Who are the 'lepers' in my life? What holds me back from offering a compassionate response?
4. How does compassionate action draw me into the merciful love of God?

*“that jubilee of heart  
which had not been  
bargained for in  
this life of accepted  
suffering”*

(Cornelia, D3)



weirrose Associates and Dr. Mary Garrison for the  
One of the women of Batey Lecheria making  
jewelry. See article on Page 8 to learn how you can  
help.



# Update from Dominican Republic

Rafaela "Ruth" Mendez

**Editor's Note:** *This issue we feature an update from Associates in the Dominican Republic. I thank Rafaela "Ruth" Mendez for sharing this with us. What can we learn from our Associates in the DR?*

It is now six months since our International Associates meeting, when we shared so many marvelous moments. We want to continue sharing the special, unforgettable moments of our Associate and Cornelian family.

One of the most important was the celebration of Sr. Ann-Joyce's 19 years of sacrifice and service to the Dominican Republic. Those with whom she worked and shared in many different ways were all present: the prayer group, the teachers, the dispensary staff, Fe y Alegria, old friends, neighbors, as well as the community, and behind it all and organizing it all were the Associates.



The Associates and Cornelians enjoy an annual trip together each July. During that time we evaluate our strengths and weaknesses in the past year. All the Associates participate in this trip. We usually choose an area of our country where we can enjoy some tourist attractions. (rivers, mountains, beaches) This year we went farther away than usual going to the north, through the mountains to the Atlantic coast of our island, to Puerto Plata.



This is the sightseeing lift we took.



Some Associates, family, and friends on our outing.

We had the election of our Coordinating Group in August. Those elected were:

Coordinator	Guillermo Campusano "Guillo"
Secretary	Rafaela Mendez "Ruth"
Special Events	Melania Fortunato
Treasurer	Dominga Hernandez

This team will launch a new year in September. The team meets once each month to prepare for the general meeting, and plan activities. Doing what Cornelia tells us. *"So we ought to begin again, with the most sweet, holy, loving Child Jesus, a humble God."*

Our goal this year is to take some time out to pray silently during each meeting as we used to when we were smaller. We want to shorten the conversations that take place in our meetings. Many of us only see each other once a month. We admitted that we have not been taking regular enough time for our personal daily prayer during the past year, and our goal is to improve that. We will use *Moment by Moment*, the book by Sr. Carol Ann Smith on the Spiritual Exercises to pray this year.

In the years 2014-2015, we have the privilege of having the best retreat guides come to us. Sr. Carmen Torres will give a retreat on weekend of Nov. 15&16. Sr. Elizabeth Strub will give a retreat only for the Associates at the end of January, and Sr. Nancy Bello will be here in the Spring. These retreats will follow the theme of silent prayer.

The group of Associates/Cornelians continues to grow with the addition of a new baby. Nicauris Luciano will give birth to her first child, a boy, in October. We celebrate with her, share her joy, and wish her happiness and strength.

# Walt Whitman

by Michelle Dugan

## When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged  
in columns before me;  
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams,  
to add, divide, and measure them;  
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where  
he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,  
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;  
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

## A Noiseless Patient Spider

A noiseless patient spider,  
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,  
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,  
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the  
spheres to connect them,  
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile  
anchor hold,  
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere,  
O my soul.



As a poetry fan and a Philly native, I have always loved the fact that we have a major bridge named after a famous poet. Walt Whitman is a household name across America; his elegy for President Lincoln, "O Captain, My Captain," is studied in school, and many of you may recognize the title of his collection of verse, *Leaves of Grass*, first published in 1855. The poems I share with you here can all be found in that volume, which begins as follows: "Come, said my soul,/ Such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one)." Whitman expresses a vision akin to our own SHCJ incarnational spirituality. "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars." Over and over again, his poetry affirms the goodness of the created world.

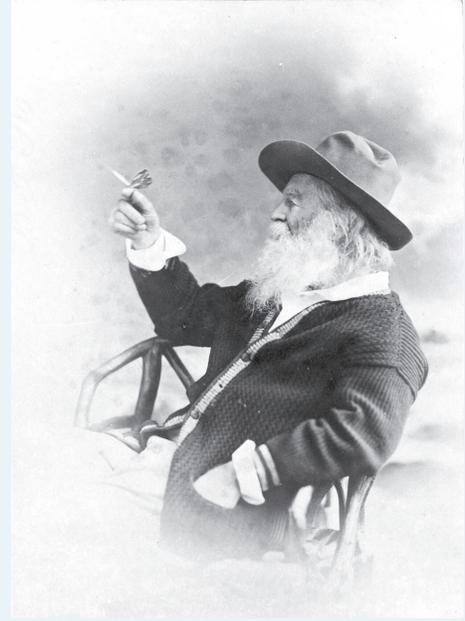


Melrose Associates and Sr. Mary Samson for the  
From nasa.gov

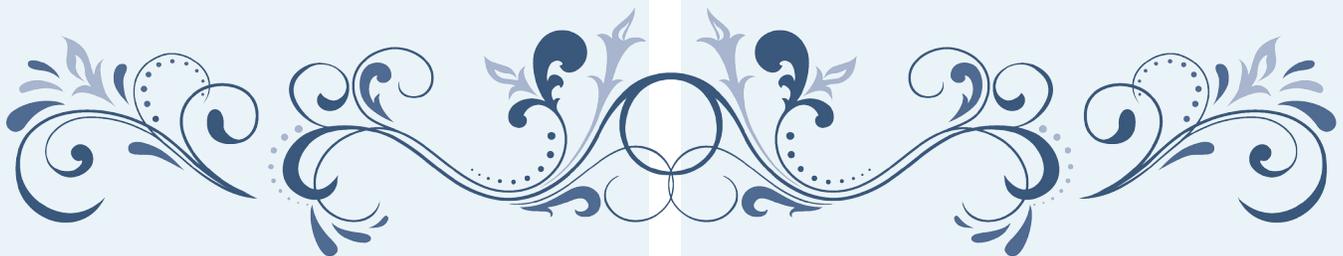
"When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" is the poem that first led me to further exploration of Whitman and *Leaves of Grass*. The repetition and lists, so characteristic of Walt Whitman's poetry, tell us here that human attempts to understand the cosmic mystery are no match for direct experience of the natural world: "When... when...when...proofs, figures, columns...add, divide, and measure..." The poem pivots on the line, "How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick." The poet leaves the lecture room, not in an angry huff, but "rising and gliding." The closing image is utterly simple yet brings the reader to a profound awareness of the vast mystery of the universe. Body and soul are one in this mystical moment of perfect silence with the stars.

Similar in the simplicity of its central image, "A Noiseless Patient Spider" connects the physical and the spiritual realms. The individual being, whether spider or human soul, stands alone "in measureless oceans of space." Neither spider nor poet, however, remains detached but instead "tirelessly" and "ceaselessly" sends out the threads of connection: "filament, filament, filament out of itself...musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them." This work is an act of faith, not unlike prayer, tenacious in the face of what seems at first a "vacant vast surrounding." The soul is confident that the bridge will be formed, "the ductile anchor hold." Though these threads are light as gossamer, they have the strength to tie the universe together.

There are times when Whitman's intensity can seem overbearing, challenging us to see reality through his eyes. "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,/ Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself." Is this arrogance? He continues: "Why should I wish to see God better than this day?/ I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,/ In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass,/ I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is sign'd by God's name,/ And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,/ Others will punctually come for ever and ever."



For me the exploration of *Leaves of Grass* is only just beginning as I recognize how this celebrated poet of American patriotism not only embodies his era but transcends it, connecting his experiences of daily life to the deepest mysteries. "I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,/ If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles./ You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,/ But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,/ And filter and fibre your blood./ Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,/ Missing me one place search another,/ I stop somewhere waiting for you."



# Letter from Chair

(continued) by Bob McHugh

The good Sisters have been trying to teach me to be more contemplative in my life so I tried to discern God's will for me from Bryna's comments. Elijah did not find the Lord in the wind, nor the fire nor the earthquake but by only listening to the gentle whisper. And so as my first act as Chair, inspired by Ms. Bryna, I reach out to all Associates and ask that you let me hear from you so that I may listen. Tell me who you are, tell me your story as an Associate. Tell me how the Core Team could serve you better. Tell me how we might "grow younger" as Associates and attract youth. Tell me about your ministries and how other Associates might participate in them. Tell me how we can connect those isolated Associates like Sarah Brabant "in the Louisiana swamp" as she calls it. Tell me how we can be better community. Tell me how we can raise funds to help support the organization or to help support other Associates ministries. Tell me how you can help in all the above!!

You may contact me at [robert.mchugh@frontier.com](mailto:robert.mchugh@frontier.com) or join me on Twitter and follow me at [@SHCJA\\_BobMcHugh](https://twitter.com/SHCJA_BobMcHugh). I will share or retweet to the larger group your thoughts with your permission.

Let's have a joy-filled year!

Peace

Bob McHugh



A small sampling of the beautiful items that the women are making to support their families. The women of the batey need and appreciate your help.

# Batey Beads

by Barbara DeConcini and Cindy Platko

## **BATEY BEADS NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!**

Batey Beads is an SHCJ Associates program that works with women and young people in Batey Lecheria, Dominican Republic, to make jewelry, rosaries, and sewing projects. SHCJ Sisters Ann-Joyce Peters, Mary Alice Minogue, and Kathleen King run a Montessori School and a health clinic in the Batey, serving the poorest of the poor—Haitian descendents of sugar cane slaves whom the Dominican government will not recognize as citizens. The dollars we collect from selling the women's projects enable them to feed their children.

We have been working with the women and youngsters and selling their projects for more than five years, but if we are to continue, we need to find more Associates to help! There are many ways to get involved. Here are a few:

- Host a Batey Beads tea or wine social in your home for your friends.
- Set up a booth/table at your local parish or school bazaar or social event.
- Explore the other churches, school, and neighborhood groups in your area to see whether you can set up a fair trade table at an event.
- Contact senior citizen centers to offer to host a fair-trade sale onsite.
- Remember Batey Beads when you need a gift for a friend.
- Take several pieces to sell to your friends and family at work and social events.

Most of all, please know that we will make it very easy for you to host a sales event. Just contact us for more information and help.

For jewelry (necklaces, earrings, bracelets, anklets), contact Barbara at [bdeconc@emory.edu](mailto:bdeconc@emory.edu) or 215.787.0832.

For rosaries (knotted, in various colors) and sock dolls, contact Cindy at [cindyplatko@yahoo.com](mailto:cindyplatko@yahoo.com).