



SHCJ ASSOCIATES NEWSLETTER AMERICAN PROVINCE

Volume IV, Issue 1-2

Winter-Spring 2006

A NEW THRESHOLD FOR THE ASSOCIATES

In April 2002, an initial gathering held at Rosemont College confirmed a desire to form the Holy Child Associates. Following that gathering, the Core Team and the Society recognized the need to lay a strong foundation by developing a Charter for this organization and a Policy and Procedures manual for members. The Core Team developed a weekend retreat. A first round of four retreats was offered in different parts of the country. The newsletter has been used to provide readings for spiritual thought and reflection. But now, we might say at long last, the Associates have reached a new threshold – one of acting and building upon that foundation – with the appointment of Cathi Duffy as full time executive director.

That spring in 2002, as people gathered to think about a lay association rooted in Cornelia's charism, there were many matters vying for our attention. The Church was at the height of the clergy abuse scandal. The war in Iraq was being planned but had not begun. More recently, we've seen – and some of our Associates have experienced – the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. Persistent feelings of a lack of vision and leadership in our institutions give rise to the sense that the country is adrift and worse. These and so many other circumstances weigh on both our inner and outer lives.

In Judith Lancaster's homily, she shares her perception of Cornelia's extraordinary strength. She gives us an insight into Cornelia's ability to endure without becoming bitter or losing her inner sense of what was right. Her spirit kept her grounded in the midst of hostilities and interpretations of events so very contrary to her own.

Four years ago a group of people reflected and found themselves affirming that Cornelia's spirit spoke to their deep needs and desires. Now we welcome Cathi Duffy with open arms and open hearts. Now, perhaps more than ever, we are ready to come together to explore a relationship with Cornelia Connelly, a woman who believed most fundamentally that human persons are made for warmth and intimacy with one another and with God.

A LETTER TO THE ASSOCIATES

Dear Associates,

I am thrilled to have joined you in late February as the Director of Associates. As a student at the School of the Holy Child, Sharon, I came to know the Society and Cornelia Connelly. Since Sharon, my professional life has focused on database software for 20 years and then, after a degree from Weston Jesuit, on parish ministry as a pastoral associate for 8 years. My hopes are that my business experience will assist you strengthening the internal struc-

organization while the ministry experience will help in creating the avenues for your life to grow in Cornelia's spirit.

I will work primarily from my home in the Boston area while making monthly trips to Drexel Hill/Rosemont. My siblings and their families live in the Philadelphia area and are thrilled by my anticipated visits. I love to travel and look forward to visiting you and members of the Society in the various regions as my role unfolds. Until we meet, you can contact me via email at cduffy@shcj.org.

It is with much enthusiasm that I begin this new ministry. Please share with me your hopes and dreams for the Associates. May we together create an Associates organization in the US that promotes the charism of Cornelia Connelly in our individual lives and in the lives of all we encounter.

Cathi Duffy

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ACTIONS NOT WORDS

AND THE DARK WATERS CAME UP IN THE NIGHT: ONE CHILD'S STORY OF HURRICANE KATRINA

A case worker from CARES, our local AIDS relief agency, called. Could I see another child evacuee? His mother had requested help for he was in trouble at his school. I was seeing a three year the next morning and agreed to see this child in the afternoon. My day was planned or so I thought.

I arrived the next morning to learn that the mother of the child I was to see that morning had to go in for lab work. And the little boy I was to see that afternoon would not be coming in either. His mother had confided late the day before that she was being beaten by a live-in boy friend. Faith House, the local battered shelter, had been called and she was being escorted to court to get a peace warrant. I work with fragile people and cancelled appointments are common place. I packed up my puppets and my magic carpet (an old quilt I put on the office floor) and was signing out when the escorts arrived with the mother and child. I watched as she came through the door, a small thin African American woman and her frail child, all their worldly goods in two ragged garbage sacks. The man in question was outside threatening to do harm to anyone who prevented him from seeing her. She would be kept at CARES until that afternoon when she would be placed on a bus to go to a distant shelter. I moved toward her and said, "I was an abused woman. You are doing the right thing." "Thank you," she said, "I needed to hear that." The case worker introduced us and told her that I was the one who had agreed to see her child. "Could you still see him?" she asked. I turned to him and asked him if he would like to join me on my magic carpet. He nodded and we went into the little office. I said a quick prayer to God to help me, hastily spread the quilt, and motioned for him to join me. He wanted the door slightly open and for me to sit on the edge of the quilt.

He had a little toy in his hand, a little stick figure man, a small boat and an oar. He began to move the boat with the man in it over ripples in the quilt. I watched for a time and then said, "He seems to be having a hard time." It was then the child began to talk. He told me that the dark water had come up while the man was sleeping. He finally found this little boat and began to paddle looking for dry land. He told me about the dead bodies bumping into the boat nearly causing it to turn over and the alligators and sharks that followed him. [There were dead bodies and alligators and a colleague told me there also may have been sharks in the waters as well.] He told me about the waves that kept coming and how hungry the man got. He finally caught a fish but the only wood he had to cook it was his oar. He had no choice. He ate but then had no oar. The waves grew in intensity and the little man was thrown out of the boat again and again. I said, "He must be so scared." The child agreed and then I said, "He keeps trying. He must also be very brave." For the first time, a flicker of a smile appeared. "Yes," he replied. "He is." The child continued to tell and show me what the man was going through. Finally he said, "I need to go find my mother now."

Katrina and Rita impacted so many already fragile children, children who were poor, dealing with abuse, illness, discrimination before the waters came up in the night. These children are scattered all over the country or hidden in little isolated communities across the Louisiana coast line. They need to be heard, they need to be affirmed before the dark waters that come up in the night overwhelm them forever.

Sarah Brabant, an Associate who lives and works in Lafayette, LA offered this story of her work with the victims of the hurricanes that devastated the Gulf states

REFLECTION

Over the past several years, we have had many examples of corporate greed driving actions: of those who "prosper and succeed" at the expense of the employees and shareholders they serve.

- ◆ *What do you think is at the root in defining success in "financial" terms?*
- ◆ *How do you maintain a sense or morally right behavior?*
- ◆ *How do you model that attitude and behavior to others? Why do you think it important to do so?*

CONNECTING WITH CORNELIA AND CHARISM — *Judith Lancaster, SHCJ*

The following is a reflection on the readings for the daily mass on Heritage Day at Rosemont College in October 2005.

The readings we have just heard are the ordinary readings for today, readings we might have heard at any Mass anywhere. So they root this celebration of Heritage Day within the life of the world-wide church. And yet, the readings also speak directly and appropriately to us as we mark Rosemont's heritage, and remember with gratitude those Holy Child sisters who founded the college in 1921. Furthermore, through our reflection on the readings we are invited to see all that is good in the history and life and mission of Rosemont reinforced and reflected in scripture, and we are invited to learn something more about ourselves and our own situations.

So what do the readings say? Well, what struck me when I looked at the first reading from Malachi was that we are honoring the women founders of the college, and Malachi speaks of 'a book of remembrance' that has been written in God's presence, and promises that women like those early Holy Child sisters 'are God's own special possession'.

That seems pleasingly appropriate; but it is not the main point Malachi is making today. His main point goes directly to the heart of the mission goal of the college – the goal which says "Rosemont College seeks to develop in all members of the community open and critical minds and the ability to make reasoned moral decisions". It almost feels as if Malachi has looked at this goal and then has asked a very serious question: What sense are we to make of the world we live in where so many do not share these values? Where those who have closed and uncritical minds, who make immoral decisions, are the very ones who seem to prosper and succeed?

This was an important question for the people of Malachi's day. It was an important question when the Holy Child sisters founded the college. And it is still an important question today when politicians, business people, and even some people in authority in the church do not live by the values of the gospel, and yet they seem to prosper and win praise.

Malachi's answer to the problem is to point out that God does not judge as we do, and to promise, in God's name, that all who struggle to live by the truth – who strive to develop open and critical minds and to make reasoned moral decisions – will be treated with tenderness and compassion by God, whilst the arrogant and unprincipled, however immediately successful they may seem, will ultimately not please God.

Cornelia Connelly, who founded the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and inspired the women who established this college, believed exactly the same thing. She was, pre-eminently, a woman with an open and critical mind, who tried always to make reasoned moral decisions. But she was continually censured and criticized by her contemporaries, continually judged by them and found wanting. As a creative and innovative educator – and as a woman – she received very little encouragement. She was decried as arrogant and domineering and ungovernable. She was denounced by bishops and priests and education authorities.

She could easily have been discouraged by so much criticism. She could have given in to self-doubt. She could have railed against the unfairness of a world in which her hard work and her vision and her desire to do good were so unappreciated, where person after person whom she hoped would support and encourage her turned against her.

She could easily have said, with the people of Malachi's day, "It is useless to serve God; what is the good of keeping God's commands?"

Malachi 3:13 – 20a

You have spoken harsh words against me, says the Lord. Yet you say "How have we spoken against you?" You have said, "It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the Lord of hosts? Now we count the arrogant happy; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape."

Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God, and one who does not serve him.

CONNECTING WITH CORNELIA AND CHARISM

(Continued from page 3)

But she didn't. When the early sisters came to report fresh criticisms they had heard about Cornelia and about the Society of the Holy Child Jesus whose beginnings she was nurturing, she always responded in roughly the same way. And Malachi would have approved of her response. She would not allow herself to be swayed by the harsh judgments of her contemporaries or drawn into wondering whether she should behave as they did. Instead, as today's psalm puts it, she placed her trust in the Lord.

Whatever fresh injustices or new allegations were leveled against her, she refused to be drawn into anger or self-justification or resentment. She refused to be influenced by her critics or to believe that their judgments were sound or to be relied upon. She always answered the sisters in the same way, saying simple, "We are who we are in the sight of God, nothing more – and nothing less."

Out of all the things she wrote and all the things she is reported to have said, I think that is one of my favorites, "We are who we are in the sight of God, nothing more – and nothing less." God's judgment is the only one that counts. And God's judgment will be not only rigorously truthful but also generously compassionate.

As the year goes by – and all the years ahead – we can be fairly sure that we will encounter criticism and disapproval, and that our values will be challenged by those who do not share them. It will not always be easy to stand firm in the face of negative judgments and ridicule – especially when those who criticize us seem to be more successful than we are. It will not always be easy to remain true to the principles and ideals that are at the heart of a Rosemont education.

But today's gospel is full of encouragement for the road ahead. None of us is expected to find in ourselves the ability to live lives of integrity. On the contrary, Jesus says that this gift will be *given* to those who ask for it. "Ask and it will be given to you. Knock and the door will always be opened to you."

Of course, the possibility of this gift from God brings its own challenge too. Will you ask for the gift, or will you settle for the easy, shifting road of compromise and fudged values?

Very near to where I live in Oxford, in the chapel of one of the university colleges, there is a painting by the Victorian, Holman Hunt. It depicts Jesus standing with a lighted lantern and knocking on a door, a door that looks as if it has not been opened for a very long time. All commentaries on the painting say that this is the door of human heart, and they point out that there is no handle or key hole on the outside. It can only be opened from within.

God leaves each one of us free to open ourselves – or not. But if you ask, if you open, God will enter. God will support and encourage and sustain your choices, will keep your mind open and critical and enable you to make reasoned moral choices. Do this and life is yours.

Luke 11:5-13

Jesus said to his disciples, "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,' and he says in reply from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.' I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

"And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg?

If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven

The next newsletter is planned for May/June 2006. Do you have any news or regional announcements for winter?
Please forward to SHCJ Associates Newsletter, 460 Shadeland Ave, Drexel Hill, PA 19026