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Holy Child Associates

American Province - USA



"Even a broken tree can bear fruit."

Rick Warren

Photo by Jon Daw on Unsplash

ACTIONS NOT WORDS

Vision of Associates

One in Spirit,
Holy Child Associates
collaborate with the Society
of the Holy Child Jesus to
embody the charism of
Cornelia Connelly
in our everyday lives while
responding to the
wants of the age
with generosity.

Mission

Holy Child Associates of the United States are women and men rooted in the charism of Cornelia Connelly who want to grow in her spirit. The Associates strive to bear witness to a life grounded in the Incarnation. Associates are called to help others believe that God lives and acts in them and to rejoice in God's presence in our midst.

The charism of Cornelia Connelly
is grounded in the gospel message
of the Word Made Flesh
and centered in the mystery of God's life and presence
in the lives of women and men.

From the Chair

As the seasons change, the Core Team is changing too! Three Associates will join the Core Team at our fall meeting – Catherine Glatts, Shalonda Neeley Guttierez, and Mary Sciarrillo. Catherine is a graduate of the former St. Leonard's Academy in Philadelphia, PA. She has been active in the SLA Alumnae Association and with Hope Partnership for Education for many years. Shalonda is the Executive Director of the Cornelia Connelly Center in New York City. Mary was the Dean of Students and Head of the Upper School at Oak Knoll School of the Holy Child in Summit, NJ.

In addition, Maureen Duffy, SHCJ will join the Core Team to represent the Sisters. Maureen has had a long and varied ministry career in her more than 50 years as a Holy Child Sister. We will be the recipients of her wisdom and experience.

Regina Zoot, SHCJ will be the PLT Liaison to the Core Team. Regina is a nurse by training and a member of the American Province Leadership Team. She will bring a welcome international perspective to our group.

Tricia Fell, Desmonde Pringle, Sandy Lovascio, and I will continue serving on the Core Team during the coming year.

Last but not least, Camille Leonowitz will join our team part time to offer Administrative Support in addition to her work as Assistant Archivist. This will allow us to focus our efforts more fully on programs and initiatives that will benefit the Associates.

We have a talented and dedicated team who will serve with energy and dedication. Welcome to all!

Wishing you every blessing,

Judy Talvacchia, Core Team Chair

Associates-USA@shcj.org

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by Anne Ayella

Share the Journey

In reflecting and praying about this article, I marveled how "bearing fruit" is as much an action of God's people as it is of God's trees and plants. As Pope Leo put it, "Love only bears fruit in self-giving, when we are willing to lose a little of ourselves to make room for another, to lose a little time to listen to a friend, and to lose a little comfort to share in a time of hardship."

With this in mind, I thought of the new Associates, Patty Wechsler and Patrick Tully and the ways they are willing to lose a little of themselves to make room for another. They went through the discernment process and commitment ceremony in mid-August to share the spirit of Cornelia and to dedicate their God-given gifts and talents to meet the wants of the age. As we consider new Associates whose love bears fruit in self-giving- we are reminded of the deep connection we share with all of God's creation. Even though we are all broken people, with God we are very capable of bearing fruit where God's will leads us.

Venerable Cornelia Connelly has said that "God is ever ready to bring forth fruit where we least expect it." That quote of Cornelia's made me think of another Holy Child Associate, Shalonda Neeley Gutierrz. Shalonda is the Executive Director of Cornelia Connelly Center in New York City. She shared a "Graced Moment" back in August which really touched me as she shared that "the way to God was not what I imagined. It was hidden in the mission I was trying to serve." Shalonda goes on to share "for years, I thought I was helping students believe in their inherent value but step by step, God was helping me believe in mine." God certainly brought forth fruit where Shalonda least expected it.

As we wrap up the Season of Creation 2026, we celebrate God's many gifts to us and our responsibility to care for what he has given to us: the land, the sea, and especially one another. One priceless gift is the gift of water, which we often take for granted while others struggle for access to safe drinking water. (The average American uses about 82 gallons of water each day.) Our actions can make a difference. We may not be able to match Pope Leo's generous grant of $100,000 to expand the availability of clean water in El Salvador; but if we work at conserving the water we use and prevent the pollution of water sources, our simple steps will directly impact others.

Like Cornelia's actions in her day, our concrete actions are much needed in today's world to comfort, heal, and renew all those hurting and struggling. May we respond to God's call to be persons of hope and joy even amid suffering and hardship as Blessed Cornelia Connelly did so beautifully.



Photo by You Le on Unsplash

by Judy Talvacchia

Meet the Associates

It is always a source of delight to see how people from very different backgrounds and interests are attracted to the Society. Our new Collaborative Associates Patricia (Patty) Wechsler and Patrick Tully followed very different paths to association with the SHCJ.

Patty met the Sisters as a high school student at the former School of the Holy Child in Sharon Hill, PA. Her experience was unique in being part of the last graduating class of Sharon in 1973. She said this allowed her to have a very personal relationship with the Sisters and her classmates – connections she has sustained through years of active involvement with the Sharon Hill alumnae.



L to R: Cathi Duffy, Patrick Tully, Patricia Wechsler, Barbara Bartlett, SHCJ, and Francine Gunther, SHCJ

Patty's Sharon class used to sing for the Sisters during the Christmas season. During one of these events, she took a long look at the Sisters and noticed the deep peace and faith that were evident on their faces. This resonated with the faith that had always been important to her, and over time had become deeper and essential. The Sisters also projected a sense of belonging and community that were attractive to her as a single woman with no children. In time, she realized, "I want to be part of them."

She became as Associate in 2013, although her nursing career limited how actively she could participate. After retiring from 47 years of service, she had more time to engage with the Associates. She asked to begin the discernment process, culminating in her formal commitment on August 17, 2026. She already has ideas about projects she'd like to initiate for the SHCJ with Associates from the Philadelphia area.

Patrick Tully knew of the Sisters from the schools they staffed in his area, but he did not come to know them personally until more recently. He and his three siblings grew up outside Philadelphia, steeped in the culture and Catholicism of his Irish immigrant parents. Catholic education deepened his faith – a faith rooted in the message of the Gospels and enriched by Catholic history, liturgy and sacraments.

Patrick earned a bachelor's degree from La Salle University and a master's degree from Villanova University. Over the span of a 36 year career with the phone company, he held a variety of jobs before retiring as a project manager. During those years, he raised a daughter, Julia, with his wife Margaret Fox-Tully, Executive Director of the Holy Child Network of Schools.

After retiring, Patrick became acquainted with Holy Child Sisters while working at a physician's office where several Sisters were patients. When the physician retired, one of the Sisters asked if he was interested in becoming a driver to take them to medical appointments. He has now served in that role for 4 years, and it's brought him great joy. The Sisters appreciate his kindness and willingness to listen to stories about their ministries.

Patrick knew very little about the Associates when he was invited to consider joining. The late Mary Samson, SHCJ hoped that more men would become Associates and told him he had "the spunk to be-

con't. on page 8

by Linda Tarney

Care of Creation

"Love only bears fruit in self-giving," he said, "when we are willing to lose a little of ourselves to make room for another, to lose a little time to listen to a friend, and to lose a little comfort to share in a time of hardship." Pope Leo XIV

This profound quote from Pope Leo XIV so masterfully describes the actions of fruit and nut trees in the natural phenomenon called "mast fruiting". In this biological wonder, not just one tree of a species but a collective of trees produces a mast fruiting the same year. As Robin Wall Kimmerer states in her book Braiding Sweetgrass, "Not one tree in a grove, but the whole grove; not one grove in the forest, but every grove; all across the county and all across the state." The trees have been storing carbohydrates in their roots for several years depending on their species to produce a massive, synchronized bounty of seeds, nuts, and fruit. They selflessly lose some of themselves to produce new trees, as well as provide life via nutrition for some of God's other beautiful creatures (birds, deer, people, squirrels, etc.).

How do masting trees decide if they are going to put their resources toward growth (putting down roots or leaves) or toward reproduction? There are several theories or factors that may influence trees to mast produce, but none have been totally proven. Weather is a factor in that a warm, dry spring will lead to more of the trees' wind-pollinated flowers turning into fruit (like acorns). Also, climatic conditions in a certain region could drive the synchronous behavior that leads to a mast year. Besides climatic cues, trees may communicate through wind-transmitted volatile organic compounds or through mycelial fungi in the soil to cue it is time for a mast year.

Trees make excess fruit/seed only when they can afford it. This surplus of high caloric fruit/seed (to help creatures survive the winter and trees to reproduce) is most often explained through the "predator satiation hypothesis". This hypothesis says that by producing a deluge of seeds/fruit trees after satiating the voracious seedeaters there will be enough seeds leftover for new trees to thrive. According to Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Together, the trees survive and thrive."

When it comes to mast years, will the warmer temperatures from climate change affect these ecological events? It all depends on the trees as some wait for a certain temperature threshold

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Photo by Emmalee Couturier on Unsplash

Poetry Off the Shelf

Work Song Part II - A Vision (Epilogue)

by Wendell Berry

If we will have the wisdom to survive,
to stand like slow growing trees
on a ruined place, renewing, enriching it…
then a long time after we are dead
the lives our lives prepare will live
there, their houses strongly placed
upon the valley sides…

The river will run
clear, as we will never know it…
On the steeps where greed and ignorance cut down
the old forest, an old forest will stand,
its rich leaf-fall drifting on its roots.

The veins of forgotten springs will have opened.
Families will be singing in the fields…
Memory,
native to this valley, will spread over it
like a grove, and memory will grow
into legend, legend into song, song
into sacrament. The abundance of this place,
the songs of its people and its birds,
will be health and wisdom

and indwelling light.

This is no paradisal dream.
Its hardship is its reality.

From "New and collected Poems", Counterpoint Press

by Michelle Dugan



Photo by Alexandra on Unsplash

In a little over a week this past summer, three iconic Americans passed away: Dolly Parton, Gloria Steinem, and Wendell Berry. While Berry (1934-2026) was almost certainly the least known among the general public, he was a celebrated writer and passionate advocate for creation care. In 2013 his poems "The Peace of Wild Things" and "The Hidden Singer" appeared in this column of the newsletter, exploring the relationship between sustainable agriculture and incarnational spirituality. "Work Song: Part 2, A Vision (Epilogue)" is one of nearly 200 poems in Berry's New Collected Poems (Counterpoint Press, 2013). It is a clarion call for us to "have the wisdom to survive" and to ensure a livable future for our descendants.

The poem opens with the powerful image of "slow growing trees/on a ruined place." Berry invokes the seven generations principle, telling us that "the lives our lives prepare" will be "strongly placed" to thrive "a long time after we are dead" only if we, like the trees, do the work of renewal. In the stanzas that follow, the beautiful vision unfolds, a stark contrast to the "greed and ignorance" that have caused so much damage to the earth. In addition to the leafy forests and clear running water, we humans are a part of "the abundance of this place." Everything that is essential and precious to people – our families, our stories – will flourish "native to this valley," "spread over it/like a grove," turning "song into sacrament."

The final couplet of "Work Song" makes an unequivocal statement. That aforementioned "indwelling light" is "no paradisal dream." The sacramental nature of the world itself must be recognized, the land cherished and tended well. Determination is required to do whatever it takes to save our common home for future generations. Wendell Berry's vision is a work song and an epilogue that leaves us hopeful: it may be hard, but it can be done. Nothing is impossible with God.

Encore

Associates, con't.

come part of the group." She gave him Associate material to read which planted the first seeds of interest. When Associate Sandy Lovascio later approached him after her own commitment, he was ready to take the next step. He joined Patty in the discernment process under the mentorship of Barbara Bartlett, SHCJ and Associate Cathi Duffy. Patrick joined Patty in making their formal commitment on August 17th.

Since then, Patrick has been touched by the support and gratitude of the Sisters. He is collaborating with Patty and Associate Dian Taylor-Pringle to host social gatherings for Sisters at Holy Child Center with the assistance of Philadelphia area Associates. Patrick hopes to be a support to other Associates and to continue the supportive relationships he has developed with the Sisters.

We are blessed by the energy and commitment that Patty and Patrick bring to the Associates and to the SHCJ!

Creation, con't.

to reproduce while others take cues from the difference in temperature from year to year. Those trees that need a certain temperature to reproduce will be at risk due to earlier and longer growing seasons from warming temperatures. Climate change induced extreme weather events are certainly a stressor to trees, as well as invasive species and tree pathogens. And if climate change alters mass fruiting other species in God's ecosystem would feel the effects (be broken).



Photo by Ben on Unsplash

NOTABLE AND QUOTABLE

"(Our good God is ever ready) to bring forth fruit where we least expect it."

- Venerable Cornelia Connelly

If you feel drawn to the Associates or would like more information, connect with us.

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