

## **Living Incarnational Spirituality as Associates**

### **Pillars 3 and 4**

Review the Associate Mission Statement which defines the goals of our association with the Society:

SHCJ Associates of the United States are women and men rooted in the charism of Cornelia Connelly and desirous to grow in her spirit. The Associates strive to bear witness to a life grounded in Incarnational theology. 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.

We use four defining elements to help us achieve the goals of association:

1. Personal prayer and reflection, which mark us as a people of God.
2. Spiritual development, which helps us to discover and manifest the Incarnate God wherever we are.
3. Ministry, which opens us to engage the crises of our time and place and challenges us to embrace an ecumenical vision in a global world.
4. Community, which is fostered through our participation with the Sisters in Eucharist and in community events, in our sharing of the charism of Cornelia Connelly and in our readiness to welcome one another in faith, hope and love.

These defining elements or "pillars" support our association with the Society. They give us concrete ways of giving flesh to our desires for connection with Cornelia, her spirit and the Society. They help us to move from contemplation to action within the context of our daily lives through the lens of incarnational spirituality. What follows are some specific suggestions for living each pillar of association.

More details about practices are listed in the section labeled "Resources".



### **Cornelia's Thoughts**

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

*"Sit in silence before Our Lord and be more ready to listen than to talk. Derby, 1847 or 1848, Spiritual Instructions.*

*"It is because you are ceaselessly in the mountains and valleys, in the streets and in the classroom, that you must know how to remain loving and silent, close to God, in the cell of your soul."*  
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*

*"Prayer is the great source from when the graces of God flow into our soul..."*  
Manual for Novices, 1869

*"Let us love one another and pray,  
Let us love one another and be faithful,  
Let us love one another and be humble,  
Let us love one another and be filled with the charity of God.  
Let us love one another with God, in God, and for God." London, 1851*

*"Work and prayer. Prayer and work. Neither as they ought to be till God, not you, work and pray. Let him reign in your soul and in every movement of your body, not I but Christ in me. D 63.67*

### Pillar 3 – Ministry

Prayer, reflection and spiritual development lead to action on behalf of the reign of God. This is most fully expressed by living daily life in union with the Incarnate God whose redemptive mission continues in every aspect of creation. By becoming human, Jesus sanctified all of human living. Our actions, united with his, contribute to his ongoing work of redemption.

A commitment to action can also be expressed more specifically by joining in apostolic activity with other Associates, with vowed members of the Society, with individuals and organizations in the community. An Associate determines the type of action to undertake by reflecting on life circumstances, abilities and interests. No matter which actions an Associate chooses – whether humble, hidden, public or dramatic – each contributes to the mission of the Society when done in union with Christ. As Cornelia reminds us, “Love what he loves and thus make your life one with Him, being one continued act of love, from night to night and from year to year”. (CC8:88)



### Suggested Practices

1. Intentionally live your daily life in the spirit of Cornelia Connelly by the way you interact with God/self/others/creation.
  - This is the basic practice to which all Associates are called. Can you see this as an expression of ministry in your daily life? Who you are and the way you live will affect everyone and everything in your life.
  - Can you believe that God will use your intentional way of living to advance God's dreams for creation, even if you don't see the result?

How would ministry, in the widest sense of the word, look in your life as an Associate?

Review the remaining practices to discern if and how you are called to incorporate one or more into your life. Are there practices not listed here that you are called to?

2. Gather with other Associates to support SHCJ ministries.
3. Become involved with organizations (religious and/or secular) in your community which address the needs of others and of the world.
4. Embrace a ministry of "pray-er" to pray for the needs of others, of the world and of creation. This ministry contributes to the Society's mission of compassion and love for all of God's creation.
5. Consider how you do/can bring Incarnational spirituality to your existing work/ministry.
6. Contribute time, talent, and treasure to the SHCJ Associates organization.

### **Pillar 3 – Resources for Ministry**

Below are more detailed suggestions for Associate ministries suggested above. Look them over briefly to see if any attract you at this time. Refer to these resources in the future, if you feel called to reflect on your current ministry or to explore other opportunities. A good time would be around the feast of the Epiphany when Associates renew their commitment.

#### **Ministry in Daily Life**

To deepen your awareness of how you can and do live daily life as a collaborator with the Word made Flesh in bringing about the reign of God:

- Reflect on the Beatitudes – Matthew 5:3-10. Understand that Jesus is speaking of the basic values and attitudes that mark the life of a disciple. See the beatitudes as guides to ministry in daily life and look for opportunities to practice them in your own life.
- Reflect on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, the Church's expression of concrete actions motivated by Christian love by which we help our neighbors obtain what they need spiritually and materially. The works of mercy are not optional, but essential to living a Christian life. Our motivation, as SHCJ Associates, comes from the desire to embody God's mercy and boundless love in the world.

- The spiritual works of mercy can be summed up as instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.
- The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead.
- As part of the daily examen, think of one way that you have intentionally lived Incarnational spirituality during the day; consider what you might do in the day(s) to come.

## **SHCJ Ministries**

The ministries of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus are focused on meeting the wants of the age. For many years, the Society worked almost exclusively in the field of education. While this is still a major focus, the wants of our age have drawn the Society into other areas of ministry such as social work, legal assistance, chaplaincy, spiritual direction and retreat work. In all of these endeavors, however, the Society's primary mission continues to be living the Incarnation by being an embodied presence of God's merciful love in the world. Some resources for collaborating with SHCJ ministries:

- Consult the website for the American Province of the Society which lists all of their sponsored ministries: <https://www.shcj.org/american/how-we-serve/ministries/>
- The American Province website also has links to the European and African Provinces for a view of the international ministries of the Society.
- Contact Sisters/Associates in your area for information about local SHCJ ministries.
- Contact the Associates Core Team for information about opportunities for collaboration in Holy Child ministries at [associates-usa@shcj.org](mailto:associates-usa@shcj.org).

## **SHCJ Associates**

In the United States, the Associates of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus are organized by a part time, volunteer Core Team of nine people. The active involvement of Associates is essential if the Association is to grow and thrive. Consider offering your time, talent or treasure to help build up the Associates and their mission. Contact the Associates Core Team to discuss ways in which you might become more involved at [Associates-usa@shcj.org](mailto:Associates-usa@shcj.org).

## Other Ministries

The lens of Incarnational spirituality allows us to see opportunities for ministry in every facet of life. There may be pressing needs in your own community that would benefit from your involvement in both religious and secular organizations. As an Associate of the SHCJ, your grounding in Incarnational spirituality and in the inspiration of Cornelia Connelly enhances your actions on behalf of others, no matter what form your ministry takes.

The workplace is also fertile ground for the influence of Incarnational spirituality. Your ability to be the presence of God's compassionate love is especially effective in this area of life. Even if you never discuss your spirituality or your association with the Society, the way in which you talk to co-workers, the way you treat them, the way you do your job - all of this will communicate your spiritual values.

Reflect, by yourself or with others, on the ways in which Cornelia influences/inspires choices you make in the workplace; in organizations or projects in which you participate.

## Pillar 3 – Reflection Questions

- What God given qualities, gifts, talents do you offer to the world?
- How do you minister through prayer?
- How do you practice ministry in daily life (e.g. to family, friends, others)?

- What opportunities might you have for ministry in daily life that you haven't considered?
- What opportunities do you have through SCHJ ministries/initiatives? Through Associate initiatives?
- What opportunities are there in your community?

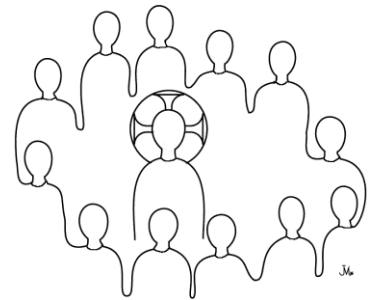
## Pillar 4 – Community

Shared goals can be more easily attained and lived with the help of a supportive community. We strive to provide opportunities for Associates to come together with other Associates and/or Sisters for prayer, sharing and socializing. Opportunities also exist in our daily lives – both to deepen Incarnational spirituality and to manifest it to those with whom we interact. Our families, friends, parishes, places of work, civic organizations, etc. can be sources of support and witness in the practice of Incarnational spirituality. Your own location and circumstances will be the context for the practices you choose in order to foster community.

### Suggested Practices

Review these practices to discern which of them would help you deepen your bond with the Society, the Sisters and other Associates.

- Celebrate Eucharistic liturgy with others who are committed to Incarnational spirituality.
- Attend or lead prayer services with an Incarnational theme, e.g. for the feast of the Epiphany.
- Celebrate feasts, significant events of the Society.
- Participate in a faith sharing group, either in person or online.
- Maintain contact with retired Sisters as a way of mutual sharing about living the charism.
- Participate in projects with the SHCJ, with Associates or with organizations in your own community that embody God's compassionate and boundless love.
- Work with other Associates to develop and support our organization (e.g. subcommittee, contributing to newsletter/website, planning/ participating in formal gatherings).
- Be a presence that reflects/reminds others of God's presence with them.





## **Pillar 4 – Resources for Community**

Resources have been offered in previous sections that help to foster community. Community grows by participating in these activities with Sisters and/or Associates. Community is also built by sharing with Sisters/Associates your experiences of ministry in daily life, in your parish, with religious and secular organizations in your local area and beyond. It is a source of inspiration and of bonding for Sisters/Associates to know how each one lives out Incarnational spirituality and the example of Cornelia Connelly in different facets of life.

## **Pillar 4 – Reflection Questions**

- What opportunities do you have to connect with Sisters and/or Associates in person?
- What opportunities do you have online – through livestream events, social media, Zoom gatherings, etc.?
- Do you have opportunities to host or initiate community events?

## Conclusion

In a talk given to Holy Child Associates in Mayfield, England in April 2009, Sister Judith Lancaster, SHCJ summarized what an Incarnational spirituality means for us today. Because God chose to become a human person:

- We know God as relational.
- We desire to live fully human lives.
- We see the world as fundamentally good.
- We see God in all things.
- We live in a life affirming way.

She expresses Cornelia's vision of Incarnational spirituality in contemporary terms. Cornelia's ministry was always focused on "meeting the wants of the age." Incarnational spirituality gave Cornelia the lens with which to recognize God's presence and action in her day and age; to adapt her ministry to cooperate more fully with God in a particular time and place; to manifest God's mercy and boundless love in ways that were accessible to her contemporaries.

Today the Society and we as Associates are called to do the same. We are called to use our talents, the fruits of our prayer and spiritual development - the very self that God wants us to be - in service to the wants of our age.



Our involvement as Associates goes beyond affection for the schools we attended, for the Sisters we know and love. We are part of God's larger project of bringing creation to the fullness of life. God's project depends on our generous cooperation. Cornelia showed us a particular way of entering into cooperation with God – through the humble and hidden life of the Holy Child Jesus.

May her spirit and the vision she left inspire us to make our own unique contribution to the coming reign of God in union with the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

## Concluding Reflection Questions on the Four Pillars of Association

1. Do I see the world created by God as fundamentally good? Why or why not?
2. How does Cornelia's understanding of the world as loved by God affect my way of relating to others? To creation?
3. Do I see my own human flourishing as a part of God's loving plan?
4. In what ways do I (can I) live in a life affirming way?
5. How is God calling me to cooperate in bringing fullness of life to the world?
6. What in Cornelia's response to God inspires me to give myself more fully in service to God's project for the world?

*The invitation comes from God, and to him  
you must give your answer.*

*Don't talk about what you are going to  
do for God, but*

*reflect on what God is doing for you.*

*(D73:209)*