

Adelante Juntos



Forward Together

Vol.22 No.1 – April 2020



## Table of Contents

Wrapped in the Love that Touches My Inmost Being	Madeleine Gregg, FCJ
How Can I Keep from Celebrating?	Michelle Langlois, FCJ
Partners in Hope	Madeleine Gregg, FCJ
Spirituality Corner	Ann Marie Walsh, FCJ
Thirsting	Madeleine Gregg, FCJ
Honeymoon Confessions	Laura Krefting, CIM
Entering into a New Culture	Agnes Samosir, FCJ
An Experience of Living through the Corona Virus	Susan Donohue, FCJ
Honest Fear	Michelle Langlois, FCJ
One in Him	Theresa (Terry) Smith, FCJ
Kenny Rogers' and Marie Madeleine	Jennie Abbate, CIM
Dipping into Technology	Ann Marie Walsh, FCJ
A Poem to Remind Us of the Silver Lining	Donna Marie Perry, FCJ
Hope for the Future	Lisa Gilead, CIM

### From the Editor

Welcome to our April-May 2020 edition of "Adelante Junt@s". Thank you to all who have contributed. I am sure that you will find much of interest.

We were unable to produce our newsletter in October-November 2019 but you can tell that ideas are still plentiful in the Area of the Americas and that we are endeavouring to "widen our circles" as the Chapter called us to do - and that in spite of the pandemic that has changed our world.

Please contact me if you have comments or questions to offer about this edition of "Adelante Junt@s".

In Jesus, our Companion,

Theresa (Terry) Smith, FCJ

[terry@fcjcentre.ca](mailto:terry@fcjcentre.ca)





## **Wrapped in the Love that Touches My Inmost Being**

In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, towards the end, St. Ignatius offers two insights, that he calls “notes” or “remarks” about how we live our relationship with God. “The first is that love ought to be put more in deeds than in words. The second: love consists in interchange between the two parties; that is to say in the lover's giving and communicating to the beloved what he has or out of what he has or can; and so, on the contrary, the beloved to the lover. So that if the one has knowledge, he gives to the one who has it not. The same of honors, of riches; and so the one to the other.” Because he wrote the Exercises so long ago (in the 1500s), St. Ignatius’ words are often hard to understand, and retreat directors typically render them in a contemporary way. So, for years, I knew of the two insights as “True love is shown more in deeds than in words” and “Love is a mutual sharing between us and God.”

However, in my retreat last year, I was given St. Ignatius’ actual words of the second note for my prayer. Knowledge? Honors? Riches? I just couldn’t wrap my mind around how these aspects of reality could be a mutual sharing..... I had always interpreted the mutuality to be about life: God, in Jesus, gave His life for me and I, in turn, give my life to God. I decided to work on just the first category of sharing that St. Ignatius mentions, knowledge. Over the course of that day, I spent three separate hours in Chapel trying to pray, trying to open myself to what Ignatius was trying to help me understand as God’s grace for my life, feeling increasingly discouraged at how my mind just skittered away from the text and couldn’t engage it at all.

A fourth time I sat down to pray and in desperation, because I was scheduled to meet my director two hours later and I had absolutely nothing to report for an entire day’s effort, I cried out to God, “God, you know I’m not getting this. I’m putting my time and effort into this prayer and I just don’t understand. How is it even possible that I have knowledge that you don’t have? You know everything!” Almost instantly, I “heard” God speaking to me: “Until you invented the teacher education program you created, I didn’t know how to form teachers in that way. That program is filled with your creativity; your insights about human development; your values of not wasting materials, of collaboration and working together, of working hard, even when you don’t understand the topic, of taking responsibility for your words and actions. That program builds people, not skill sets.”

I wept for 45 minutes, feeling relieved I would have something to report to my retreat director, but mostly feeling an overwhelming gratitude for these words of affirmation for more than twenty years of work as a university professor. I couldn’t even form sentences or thoughts; I could only be present to the experience of being wrapped in the love that touches my inmost being. When I was next able to think again, I asked, “And honor? How can that be? We honor



YOU...how could that possibly be mutual?" And again, it seemed in the next heartbeat, I "heard" God reply, "You had to recognize that you had a gift for teaching; you had to accept the gift, you spent decades developing it, and you offered it generously to the Church and to the world---how could I not honor that? But even more, you've spent 44 years (since I became a Catholic Christian at aged 20 and was baptized into Christ) making yourself a temple of the Holy Spirit—how could I not honor THAT?" And again, through floods of tears, I was brought into a space of peace and joy and to a silence where I could just be still and know that God is (Psalm 46:10).

*Madeleine Gregg, FCJ*



### **HOW CAN I KEEP FROM CELEBRATING?**

I turned 45 years old this past Friday and I celebrated the occasion with gusto. Besides the face to face birthday wishes from Sisters, friends and colleagues, I took pleasure in replying to every Facebook and WhatsApp message, every birthday card, email and text. I relished every one of the dozens of students who passed me in the hallways at my school and shouted out a birthday greeting, and thoroughly enjoyed the classes that welcomed me with a rousing rendition of the "Happy Birthday" song. By the end of the day on October 11<sup>th</sup>, I felt like no one could have been better celebrated than I had been. What a blessing!

Now, we in North America know more than a few people, men and women included, who hide any evidence of their birthday after the age of 29, if not before. Aging is not always well celebrated in our Western Society. So how to explain my reaction? Am I simply a product of my genetics? Was I born with the ability to enter into celebrations with joy and excitement? Or you may be thinking that I was raised in a family that always celebrates birthdays with this much delight. Perhaps I've recently survived a bout with a serious disease and am treasuring life all the more? How could a woman, entering more deeply into middle age find such cause for happiness on, of all things, her birthday? 200 years ago, God invited a middle aged woman named Marie Madeleine d'Houet, a mother and widow, to be God's instrument in founding a 'little Society' called the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus. She said 'yes' to this invitation, knowing that she was weak and imperfect, but also trusting that God would be able to use her weakness and the imperfections of all the Sisters that joined this Congregation to found a Religious Society that would joyfully journey with those most in need of God's companionship.





This year, the Bicentenary Year, the Society is celebrating these 200 years in diverse ways around the world. Here, in Edmonton, we are remembering the legacy of the courageous Sisters who braved mosquito swarms, brutal winters and vast distances to found the first Catholic school of the Edmonton Catholic School District in 1888. In other parts of the world, FCJ contributions to the Church, to Catholic Education, to Retreat Work and to various initiatives supporting refugees, immigrants, the poor and the underprivileged are being

remembered with gratitude and enthusiasm. The Bicentenary is a birthday of sorts, and a time to celebrate this Society of women who dedicated their lives to God. By embracing their own invitations to be the instruments of God, they have left a lasting gift to the world.

This small, but mighty, group of Sisters entered into my life in a personal way eight years ago. I first met the FCJs in Calgary, and over the course of the next few years, God used this group of women, with all of their many gifts and imperfections, to help me more deeply experience the transformative love that Jesus has for me. This gift of God's love that the Sisters shared with me changed the course of my life, eventually leading me to want to devote myself to God in a new and exciting way. I stand with them, now, a Faithful Companion of Jesus, too. It is with a sense of humility, but also not without some pride, that I walk in the footsteps of the women who have come before me, teaching in this District that our Society helped pioneer more than 130 years ago.

Knowing and experiencing the companionship of Jesus cannot leave one unchanged. Our Sisters, through their faithful companionship of the people around them, have impacted countless lives. I know this, because they have impacted my own life in a profound, long lasting way. And so, it is not because of my genetics or my family upbringing or the survival of any major disease that I have learned to celebrate the blessings of my life. Rather, it is because of the determined and faithful efforts of this group of women who have companioned with me, helping me to deepen my relationship with Jesus. They have created the space for me to find my strengths and they have loved me in all of my weakness and with all of my flaws. And so, as I celebrate 45 years of life, I can't help but think of Robert Lowry's hymn "How Can I Keep from Singing?" Or, in my case, how can I keep from celebrating?

During this Bicentenary Year, as we rejoice in 200 years of the loving companionship of the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus, let us pray that we can continue to build on their efforts, ever bringing that gift of God's intimate companionship to all those that we meet on our journey.

*Michelle Langlois, fcj*



## Partners in Hope

During the 2018-2019 school year, Shannon Griffin, principal of St. Damien School, a Calgary Catholic Elementary School contacted me about how her school could partner with the Christian Life Centre and the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus to do something good for our Church and world. I knew that the Centre offers a special retreat each January, free of charge, for unemployed people, and that finding funding for that retreat is a challenge, given the current downturn in Calgary's economy. The retreat does nothing to help people find a job; rather, it is a "heart-helping" retreat to offer support, encouragement and a renewed appreciation of each one's personal gifts in a time when people feel quite vulnerable and often depressed. The weekend experience is called "The Gift of Hope".

Together, the principal and I devised a plan: I went out to her school and met with all the students, by grade-level groups. In my lesson, we started with the idea of time: past, present and future. For the past, I asked the children to think of when they were very little—maybe four years old—and remember a time when their grandma came to visit. When she walked into the room where they were, her whole face lit up with a big smile. At that time, as a four-year-old, the children understood the smile to indicate that Grandma was happy to see



St. Damien School

them, but now, in the light of their increasing maturity (aged 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11!), they could look back and recognize that the smile also meant that their Grandma loves them. Knowing

now that love comes from God, they realize that in some mysterious way, God was loving them through their grandma. So, we can't change the past, but we can look back on our memories and learn new things about God's love. The past is God's gift to us.

The present is the only time when we can actually do things, change things, think things.... It is God's gift to us, too. We were created with the gift of free will, so we can choose. That is part of what it means to be human: we can make choices about how we want to grow into our best selves. But the present is really tricky: it goes by so quickly, that pretty soon, it's part of the past!

The future is the time that hasn't happened yet. We can anticipate it, look forward to it, prepare for it, use our imaginations to predict it, and so it is God's gift to us, too. I then asked the children to close their eyes and imagine what job they would like to work at when they are grown up, to make the world a better place. Children suggest: a hockey player, a You Tube producer; a dancer; an engineer; a bus driver---they had all kinds of ideas! Together we thought about the workers that had contributed to their lives, for example, the people who had built the road out in front of the school, and then the people who had planted the trees, and built the school, and produced the cement and bricks and tiles and glass and wood and all the materials that were used in building the school. We talked about how hundreds of thousands of people had worked together to build our city and that we benefit from all their hard work.



I then asked them to imagine waking up in the morning and brushing their teeth and getting dressed and going off to work and working hard all day long. At the end of the day, they would come home tired, to their family... a wife or a husband and some children. They would eat supper and enjoy the evening with the family, and the next day, they'd go off to work again. At the end of the month, they would get a paycheck to pay them for all their hard work and effort and this paycheck would be for several thousands of dollars! But then we talked about where all that money would go: to pay rent or a mortgage, to pay bills for electricity and water, to buy food for the family; to buy new shoes for the children who, when they eat the food, grow bigger feet; to put gas in the car to get to the shoe store, and so on. By the time all the things are bought and paid for, there is sometimes no money left. We talked about going to the store and asking Mom to buy something and Mom saying, "We can't afford that." Now the children knew where all the money of the paycheck had gone.

Next, I asked the children to imagine what would it be like if, when they went to work, their boss said, "We love having you work here, but our company isn't making enough money to keep you. We need to let you go." A hand shot up and a child asked, "Is that the same as 'laid off'?" "Yes," I answered, and I could see from many faces that children had had this experience in their families. I continued, "So now there's no paycheck coming to the family, but the family still has to pay for the rent or the mortgage and for the bills and the food. What might the mom or dad who now does not have a job feel like?" "Sad." "Depressed." "Mad." "Scared." "Worried." The students had lots of answers.

So, then I told them about the unemployment retreat and asked, "If people do not have enough money to pay their bills, would they have money to go to a retreat centre and attend a retreat that's meant to help their hearts?" "No," they chorused. So, I invited them to go home and offer to do four little jobs that are NOT their ordinary chores and to ask their moms to give them 25 cents for each job. When they had earned four quarters, they were to trade them in for a looney and bring it to school. If every child at school was able to bring in a looney, the school could pay for someone to make the retreat. They would be retreat sponsors!

The students were immediately fired up with ambition. "I have a piggy bank and I can bring in lots more than one looney!" exclaimed a number of children. "No," I answered. "If each of us does just a little bit and we put all of our little bits together, that's enough." A grade 6 boy pointed out, "We have 330 students in our school—we can sponsor 1.5 people!" "Yes, that might happen," I responded. "That would be tremendous, but even if we manage to collect enough for one person, that's a great thing all by itself!"

Then Ms. Griffin wrote a letter home to the families, explaining what we were trying to do and giving the target date for the looney collection. And a few weeks later, I went to the school and they held an assembly and presented me with a cheque for \$1103.55! I couldn't believe my eyes! The children shared how they had earned the money. "Mom let me put the soap in the washer when we did the laundry," proudly offered a kindergarten student. "I took everything out from under the sink and scrubbed it all out. Since that's where the garbage bin is, it was a mess! Mom gave me TWO Quarters for that job!" announced a grade 3 boy. "I mopped the kitchen floor, but I got it too wet and mom had to do it again, but she paid me



anyway,” stated a grade 4 girl. It was clear that the families took this project to heart. One family sent a twenty-dollar bill with its grade 6 students. Since it was a newcomer family, and the parents did not speak much English, the principal asked someone who spoke their language to explain the project to them and to stress that ONE dollar was the goal. But the mother replied, “When we got the letter, we decided as a family not to eat meat for one meal, and that’s where the twenty dollars came from.” Talk about sacrificial giving!

I had no sooner received the cheque, when a teacher came up and asked, “How much more would we have to give to pay for four retreatants?” When I told her, she took out her cheque book and wrote another cheque for \$36.45 right on the spot! What a blessing! When I returned home and told the Sisters and the others who work at the Christian Life Centre, there was such joy. So many were touched by the children’s and families’ generosity. We feel a real sense of being partners in hope with the school community at St. Damien School!

*Madeleine Gregg, FCJ*



### **Spirituality Corner**

I thought I’d share with you a ‘spiritual nugget’ from one of my retreat prayer times. One of the suggestions we received from the directors of the *First Spiritual Exercises* Retreat that I am making was to place ourselves in the centre of a circle surrounded by the Trinity as we begin our prayer time.



Recently, I have been aware of my own call to deepening the presence of the Trinity in my life. So, I did as they advised. It was/is a good entrance into prayer. The prayer I am sharing was about Friendship and at the close of my prayer, in the Colloquy, I moved back into the centre of the circle. Jesus and I greeted each other first. I/We know that there is a wonderful, deep personal relationship between us. The Father smiled at me and I was glad to see Him. I have a good relationship with Him also as I did with my own Dad –He is my creator, sustainer and strength and then the Spirit and I caught each other eyes. I am frequently in touch with the Spirit, for guidance, wisdom and a sense of doing or saying what will be the greater good for myself and others. So, I was comfortable with all three of Them but knew I had a deeper, *personal friendship* connection with Jesus. Then, the Father and Spirit said to me that they would like to have more than a ‘business-like’ relationship with me. They want it to be a deeper, more personal friendship as





well –not just ‘providing for’, ‘sustaining’, ‘guiding’ me but more! So, as the retreat progresses, I will be spending more prayer time on being open to the ways They want to deepen this personal relationship!

I share this and encourage you to take some moments to reflect on your own relationships with the Father, Son and Spirit. Are They inviting you to come to know the Trinity in a new and deeper way?

*Ann Marie Walsh, FCJ*



### **Listening Beyond Words**

Several years ago, two exhausted and somewhat frustrated looking Grade 9 students came to debrief with me after visits to the Grade 1 and 2 classrooms. They had been sent to share with the younger students the news that the school’s Student Council was organizing a “Hat Day” later that week. The children had listened to the older students explain what would be happening, but then, “They just kept putting up their hands!” the Grade 9 boys told me with pained expressions. They had eagerly asked a succession of questions: Can we wear a fireman’s hat? Can we wear a baseball cap? Can we wear a cowboy hat? And it had gone on. “We told them over and over that they could wear any kind of hat!” the boys exclaimed, at a loss as to why these children had asked so many questions.

Sometimes, maybe even most times, what we seek to communicate is not expressed adequately or fully by the words that we speak. If we look for them, we recognize many instances in our daily lives where one thing is said, but the meaning or the intent behind the words is very different. Take a common expression like, “I had such a busy day.” In my experience, this phrase can have many different meanings, including “Please ask me more about what happened today; I want to talk,” or “Please help me with the task I’m doing; I’m exhausted.”

Recently, I was waiting in a very slow line up at a fast food restaurant, when I heard the soft grumbling and cursing of a man behind me. Guessing that he must be frustrated with the poor service, I finally turned to him after a minute or so and offered to let him go in front of me, as I was in no hurry. He refused my offer, even when I pressed him, but continued to complain about the service, about the political leanings of our province and about the lack of leadership

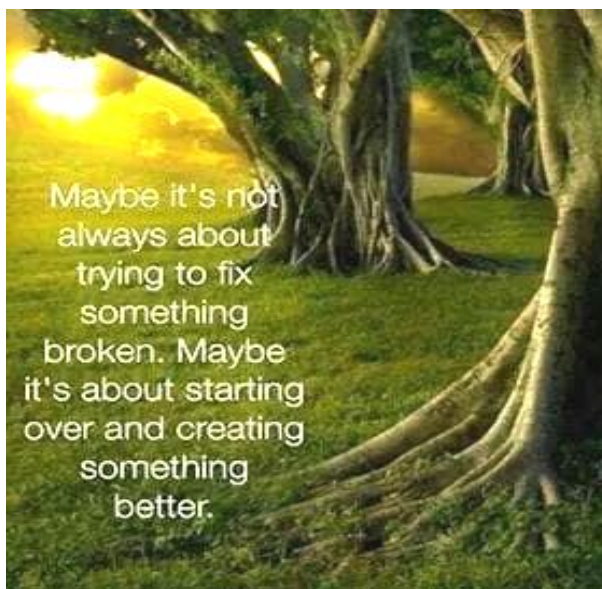


in the country. It took me a few seconds to realize that he wasn't asking for better service in the restaurant, but for something much more fundamental: He wanted someone to hear him. My first instinct had been to solve a problem. As a Faithful Companion of Jesus, though, I was called to respond to a "thirst."

Marie Madeleine d'Houet was inspired to found the Faithful Companions of Jesus by a number of events in her life that moved her deeply. One such event was in 1817 when she heard Jesus speak the words "I thirst" from a crucifix that she was praying before in a chapel in Amiens, France. The desire to respond to Jesus' thirst in the people that she met motivated her for the rest of her life, and it is what motivates us as those who have joined her Congregation. Part of the challenge of responding to that thirst is about trying to listen to those around us, especially for the hidden yearnings underlying the words that they say.

If those young children listening to the Student Council members had had a different level of awareness, they might have been able to say: "I matter," or "I need to be heard," or "I want your approval" to the Grade 9 students standing before them. Or, at a more fundamental level, they might have expressed "I thirst for love and companionship," just as all of us do. As we strive to accompany a world that thirsts for love, let us pray that we will be able to hear the yearnings and desires that lie beyond the words of the people we meet.

*Madeleine Gregg, FCJ*



*poster contributed by Susan Donohue, FCJ*

## Honeymoon Confessions

Warning to readers: This reflection mirrors my rather disjointed experience of Lent. I kept getting lost. If it sounds confused...you got the message.

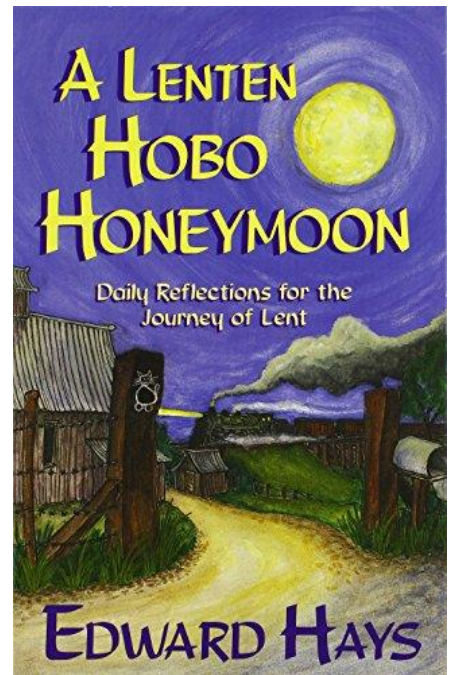


Flat. Disinterested. Resentful. These are just a few of the words I used to describe my feelings about the onset of Lent. (Oh yes, and yuck). In the past I have welcomed this season as a time where I take a few more tottering steps toward the Kingdom. This year Lent felt more like a burden. I dreaded those same old readings and glancing through my collection of Lent resources left me cold. The Spirit must have got tired of my whining and booted me in the butt. In the midst of conversation unrelated to Lent I found myself confessing my apathy to Sr. Liz. After a few thoughtful questions she suggested a book by Edward Hays. She passed it to me after Mass and I didn't look at it until Shrove Tuesday. I have to be honest. If I had browsed through it earlier, I might have looked for a way to escape reading it. However, I recognized a challenge from God when I saw one and I rather reluctantly made a deal with Him to read the book daily.

The first thing I had to overcome was the title: *A Lenten Hobo Honeymoon*.

Only the first two words seemed remotely connected to my view of the six weeks that was to follow. Next came the use of bewildering stick drawings to illustrate the points. Many of these were used by hoboes in communicating with each other.

Hays also used vocabulary common to hoboes and added some of his own zingers. 'Sin-chewing' for example is refusing to be washed in God's forgiveness. This collided head on with my deeply embedded belief that Lent must be spent giving up everything that is life giving and digging into sins, even ancient ones. Gossiping is sharing the bad habit of sin-chewing with others. "Who me? Do that?" It's one of my favourite pastimes. The phrase 'sweating money' means that before one gives alms, she carefully judge whether the receiver is sufficiently worthy. Me judge others? Far from a spontaneous loving act, 'sweaty money' is more of a transaction; "I'll give you this and in turn I will look good and holy especially if I just happen to mention it to others." Related is the idea 'charity - justice'. Mindlessly donating on-line was my version of alms. Hays proposes spending time pondering and praying about the nature of the injustice and trying to connect somehow with the recipients of my charity. I was being asked to use my heart more than my "all about me" calculator. That gave me a first glimmer of how love could alter my perspective.



If the stick figures and vocabulary took me by surprise, the overall perspective knocked me flat. Lent as a honeymoon with God? A time to grow in greater love? I was too busy entangling myself in my sins. One of the early reflections asked me, "What did you do on your honeymoon



with God today?” Sadly, my answer was, “Ummm, obsess about our financial situation and make lists of things to do.” On the upside I found Nan Merrill’s *Psalms for Praying* fed my heart on several snowy honeymoon mornings.

A later reflection asked whether I was skimping on the time spent with my beloved. The follow up question asked about the quality of time spent on my honeymoon. Hays used one of his zinger words to drive it home. ‘Crummy’ was used by hoboes to describe the end of a dry loaf of bread given as alms. Was I offering God crummy time at the end of a long day? Or just a few crumbs squeezed in here between critical activities: scrubbing the bottom of the garage bin, updating the grocery list or looking up recipes for black bean soup for example.

The Good News is that in the last couple of weeks of Lent, Fr. Hays and his hoboes worked their way around all of my barriers and planted themselves firmly in my heart. The most powerful moment of Lent came when I encountered this short prayer, “May I find hidden pleasure in being your lover this day and know the secret and intimate joys in a honeymoon with you.” Regret rushed in but so did joy. I could feel them both in every bone of my body. The regret came from my honest assessment that the honeymoon was more about me, my ego and my inadequacies than about my Beloved. And the joy came from certainty of that enormous Love enfolding me at that moment. A Love waiting patiently for me at every moment.

*Laura Krefting, CIM (Edmonton)*



### **Entering into A New Culture**

When I told people in Myanmar that I would be missioned to Calgary, Canada, most of them made a similar comment, “Wow! What extreme weather you are going to have!!” Yes, I agreed with them and yet I had faith that I could learn how to cope with the cold.

Then, here I am... I have been in Calgary since August 2019. It has been truly a great time. The first thing I did, based on my knowledge of intercultural living, was to learn how to adjust to the very different weather from weather in tropical countries and to get to know Canadian culture.





I often visit Google and YouTube videos to get guidance on how to live in a very, very cold place. I find four effective tips which have become my new habits: daily morning walk around Lindsay Park in order to warm my body, put on more layers to keep myself warm, drink water a lot and learn to walk on ice!! Yes, these new habits have kept me alive and eager to get to know more Canadian culture.



I have been blessed to have so many wonderful people, including our FCJ sisters here, CIM and FCJ Centre Staff, who introduce me to local cultures and fun activities during winter. Laureen CIM gave me an unforgettable experience of standing on skates for a few seconds!! Terry FCJ taught me how to make a snow angel. And after waiting for weeks for wet snow, on April 16, Terry and I made a snowman!! Then, soon after a snowman's photo went public, I received a message of joy: "Congratulations! You are now officially a FULL Canadian!"

While learning culture, I also take some programs at the FCJ Centre, including the Spiritual Direction Training Program and online courses on Dreams and Nonviolent Communication (NVC). As much as I can, I am involved in the FCJ Centre activities and in the Indonesian Catholic Community of Calgary.

Rumi's poem: "A Guest House"  
often echoes in my mind...

*"This being human is a guest house. Every morning a new arrival.... Be grateful for whatever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond."* Yes, I feel blessed and grateful being here in my new mission.



Agnes Samosir, FCJ





## An experience of living through the Corona Virus

Ever since news of the coronavirus broke and got steadily worse across the world, I kept hearing Sr. Breda O'Farrell's words, *"Honey, it matters little what happens to you; it's what you **do** with what happens to you that really matters."*

These were certainly words of wisdom that have sustained me throughout my life and offered me meaning, hope and a way forward in difficult times.

During my time in self-isolation I had ample opportunity to reflect on what is happening in our world today during this pandemic. There is fear, doubt, restlessness, loneliness, depression, anger, blaming God, blaming others, suffering and death but there are also courageous acts of self-giving, creativity, compassion, generosity and unity. Over and over I hear, "we are in this together"! I also had opportunities to reflect on what is happening within myself: What is really important in my life? What is essential? What is worth living for? I recognize I could easily slide into fear, anxiety, restlessness, negativity and hopelessness. Then the voice ...*what you do with what happens to you is what really matters*. I really do have a choice. This journey, of course, is a process and I haven't figured it all out yet. It will unfold, under the Spirit's guidance, and there will be a way of seeing with new eyes that will create a healthier way forward for us as human beings and for our planet.

Some readings have been extremely challenging but helpful. Pope Francis, Ilia Delio, Joan Chittister, Ron Rolheiser, Richard Rohr, Fr. Christopher Jamison OSB and men and women religious have offered some insights for this time. Many have spoken of the need to go into our 'inner rooms', "our cells" in the Monastic tradition, to be with our God in solitude, in prayer and contemplation and to hear from God in the silence. What is God seeing that I'm not seeing? What is the bigger picture? What needs to collapse, to be let go of, so that something new can emerge? Something that will bring about a deeper sense of hope and love in our world. Something that will help us to see more clearly that God is ultimately in charge. As we spend time in our "inner rooms" in our cells, we are invited to bring the whole world and our planet with us. We are in this together with God. For it is in God that "we live and move and have our being." Acts 17:28.

Many of the writers speak about this time as a desert or exile experience. What did the desert teach the Jewish people when Moses led them out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land? They didn't think it would take so long, 40 years, and we hear that when things were not progressing as they had hoped, they became discouraged and doubted. They found it difficult to deal with uncertainty, with insecurity. They complained to Moses. "Why did you lead us into the desert to starve, to get ill, and to die?" Exodus 14:11. Many would have preferred to go back to their normal life, to slavery in Egypt, to a life they knew. In this pandemic I can hear that voice of complaint within myself. When will this be over? When can I get back to a normal life? When can I get on with some work and actually accomplish something? When will I be able to do what I want, when I want? When will I be able to have a bit more control? Richard Rohr reminds us that *"Recognizing our lack of control is a universal starting point for a serious spiritual walk towards wisdom and truth."*



Jesus had his own desert experience where he spent 40 days alone with God, fasting and praying. He wrestled with his inner demons in the solitude and the silence of the wilderness. He felt his own vulnerability. What kind of leader would he be as he struggled to discern his mission – God’s mission? How would he bring about the reign of God? What were his hopes and dreams as he embarked on this new mission? He was God’s Beloved Son which was confirmed for him in his baptism in the Jordan. Should he claim this title and proceed with power, glory, might, honour, creating a sensation so that people would believe in him. Or should he embrace the words of Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of God is upon me, because God has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. God has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” As he spent time with God and his own heart’s desires, he came to realize that his mission, God’s Mission, was to be accomplished in poverty, humility and obedience. Yes, this path would lead to suffering, rejection and death, but there was also new life in resurrection. God was with him to encourage and strengthen him.

Our time in the desert during this time of isolation offers us many opportunities to allow God to transform our small selves. Through prayer, reflection and the spiritual exercises we can get a deeper understanding of what motivates us each day as faithful companions of Jesus. Why not use this precious time to go into our “inner room”, “our cells” more often and hear what God has to say. At the same time we can take the whole world with us and fulfill our Chapter Call to “Widen our circle of love,” - our circle of compassion. The following poem may help us to overcome our fears, doubts and preoccupation with adversity and allow God to enlarge our desires:

Like a flower in the desert  
I had to grow  
In the cruelest weather,  
Holding on to every drop of rain  
Just to stay alive.  
But it's not enough to survive,  
I want to bloom  
Beneath the blazing Sun,  
And show you all of the colours  
that live inside of me,  
I want you to see  
what I can become.

*Christy Ann Martine*

*Susan Donohue FCJ*

## HONEST FEAR



I'm a Religious Sister and I feel afraid. That's right. I've said it.

I am a prayer-saying, Mass-attending (via livestream, anyway), Jesus-loving FCJ Sister, and yet I find myself living with a pulsating core of anxiety in my inner depths. It seems to delight in drawing my attention to the eerily quiet streets outside my bedroom window, the apprehension I experience regarding my changed role as a "virtual" teacher and the ever-increasing number of Covid-19 infected people in my province and beyond. "There's no end in

sight," it likes to whisper to me. "Who knows when life will return to normal?"



I don't like being afraid. Maybe you know some people who are the same? One pious Catholic recently shared with me that only people without religion or spirituality could truly be fearful of the pandemic. After all, "we know that there is more that comes afterwards," he reminded me. And of course, he has a point. Christianity subscribes to the understanding that death is not the end, and so how could any Religious Sister fear the uncertainty that this virus has brought into our day to day existence? Right?

Besides, who could forget that the Scriptures remind us 365 times to not be afraid? In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus took an arguably scolding tone with his disciples when they were fearful: "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" I mean, if the disciples weren't supposed to fear a raging storm on the sea, why should I fear the effects of a worldwide viral infection?

And yet, the reality is that I do feel fear. I'm informed enough to know that it's unlikely I'd die of the virus myself, but that doesn't mean that Covid-19 can't massively impact the lives of the people around me. Denying the fear doesn't make it disappear. Pretending that it doesn't exist doesn't mean it stops murmuring to me. And reminding myself that eternal life awaits me and my loved ones on the other side of suffering makes the anxiety no less alive inside me. So what to do?





For me, help with this question lies in the Book of Psalms. In Psalm 22, King David cries “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.” There is no denial of anxiety here. David touches his fear, he acknowledges it, he cries out to God for help. He suffers through the pain of his “unfaith” and his feelings of separation from the Creator. Who knows how long that sense of disconnection from God lasted for him? Days? Weeks? Only after he had suffered through this experience could he say later on in the same psalm: “For [God] did not despise or abhor, the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.”

Many of us are afraid during this difficult time of illness and uncertainty and separation. Our lives are turned upside down. People are becoming ill and some are dying. Others are losing their jobs and are concerned about losing the ability to look after their families. We are physically isolated from our social circles and many of our loved ones. It doesn't help anything to say that we shouldn't be afraid, or to tell each other to stop being anxious. Instead, like David, we are called to acknowledge and touch this dread and to cry out to God in our pain. It is only through this honest awareness within ourselves and ongoing candid conversation with our God that we can develop compassion enough to engage with the anxieties of those around us. Let us walk with each other authentically through our collective pain and fear, knowing that this pandemic will eventually end and the joys of the Resurrection really do await us on the other side of Covid-19.

*Michelle Langlois, fcl*



## One in Him



While listening to St. Matthew's Passion on April 5, I heard some parts with the phrasing of Marie Madeleine. It seems to me that our foundress was soaked in Scripture and totally united with Jesus. She knew him through the Word and personally in herself. Perhaps you also heard the same thing.

"Drink from it, all of you; for this is my Blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins . . ." In other words, 'I would give everything I have, even life itself, to have this name, Faithful Companions of Jesus.'

St. Peter's desire to be faithful and then his denials remind me of the advice we as novices learned was given by M. Philomena Higgins: to pray daily for perseverance. I presume that M. Higgins' teachings were true to those of the first General Superior.

Jesus' plea in the garden that his Father might remove the cup of suffering is followed by his complete submission to God's will. Marie Madeleine shared the same intense desire to do what God wanted and to do that with fidelity and joy.

It is interesting to ponder if Marie Madeleine's knowledge of Scripture came solely from the texts read at Mass and from her time of prayer and growth under Fr. Varin's influence while at Parassy. I suspect that it was her practice of being an open vessel before God that enabled her to take in the Word and be formed by it. Jesus was an empty vessel because he emptied himself as we heard in the second reading on Palm Sunday, Phil. 2:6-11, and in Mt. 26:28. Marie Madeleine could have said with St. Paul, "I live now not I, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)

*Theresa Smith FCJ*





## Kenny Roger's Words and Marie Madeleine

I've heard it said that there are no such things as "coincidences". And I do believe that unbeknownst to us, the Holy Spirit is always at work in our lives. It's in this context that so many small "things" seemed to fall into place this spring. In mid-March, I returned from a trip to California just as the Coronavirus was really changing how we would be living our lives going forward. I was trying to decide what to do about my next CiM meeting for my formation group. We are in the module learning about Marie Madeleine's 'hopes and dreams' and her ability to discern. At our February meeting everyone took home a copy of Chapter V of *Marie Madeleine's Memoir's* entitled: "*Madame d'Houet Establishes Her Society in Switzerland*". I asked my group to read the chapter so we could discuss it at our March meeting. Each day the severity of the pandemic became more apparent, and almost hour by hour decisions were being made about how to "live our lives by



social distancing" and limiting our contact with friends and family. Especially for older people. And so, needless to say, I cancelled our CiM meeting planned for March 23rd. All over the world federal governments, and here in the USA, governors of different states, were giving recommendations that soon became orders to "stay in place" and "self quarantine." It has been unnerving to say the least.

However, on March 20th, a Country Music legend, Kenny Rogers died. I can't say I was a big fan of country music, but as strains of his music filled the airwaves for the next few days, Marie Madeleine popped into my head! There had been times as a CiM leader that I had unwittingly used one of Kenny Rogers's most famous song lyrics to explain in a nutshell, a strength to me at least, of Marie Madeleine. She always knew "when to hold them, and when to fold them" (from "The Gambler"). It was then that *Chapter V of the Memoirs* came back to me! Marie Madeleine's decision-making skills were really evident in this chapter. Thinking things through, while trusting her instincts, helped her start a foundation in Switzerland. Knowing early on that she would have "crosses" to bear, she was able to trust that she was helping God, who in her words, was "doing everything" to bring souls to Him. Her example of discerning through researching her options, taking time in prayer, and then trusting in God, helped her start foundations, and when necessary, to move on. She knew 'when to hold' them, and 'when to fold them'. Because of her trust in God, she never looked back. Marie Madeleine was an example to her Faithful Companions, and in the years since her death in 1858, FCJs have discerned when and where many foundations should begin. Some lasted for over 100 years. Some were closed relatively quickly. But always with prayer, discernment, research and trust in God's will.



This brings me to the decision the Sisters had to make recently about the future of St. Philomena School. For many reasons, the Faithful Companions of Jesus knew that their future involvement in St. Philomena School would have to come to an end. As sad as I was to learn this, I also knew this decision didn't come easily, or without much thought and prayer. Through



God's providence, Sr. Bonnie Moser met the provincial of the Religious Sisters of the Sacred Heart at a meeting. The RSCJs had established a network of Catholic Independent Schools that in many ways mirrored St. Philomena School. After about 18 months of work behind the scenes, the announcement was made in September of 2018 that St. Philomena School would become part of the network of the



RSCJs. This insured the school's future as a Catholic Independent School.

The generosity of the Sisters throughout this time of transition has been remarkable in many ways, but then again, it's so "FCJ-ish"! Because I am a CiM, many faculty members asked my thoughts. I was able to tell them that this incredible act of kindness was what was best for St. Phil's, and for them. I told the teachers that Marie Madeleine, and her Sisters, "knew when to hold them, and when to fold them". It was also remarkable to me that after 200 years, two strong women, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, and Ven. Marie Madeleine's lives would come full circle. Their shared dreams for education and care for the earth and the poor will be a foundation for St. Philomena students for years to come. For this we are grateful.

*Jennie Abbate, CiM, Portsmouth*







## Dipping into Technology!

The FCJ Centre's closure due to the virus has meant a cancellation in many scheduled programs and those coming for individual spiritual direction cannot come into the building. I have long been doing some spiritual direction via Skype with directees at a distance but now, I am doing it with Calgarians as well. It works quite well and is a great help to keeping up connections with directees. Skype has also enabled me to have weekly meetings with the three women I mentor in our Spiritual Direction Training Program (SDTP) and the four of us have found the sharing easy to continue. The SDTP Team will meet with the whole group through Zoom this week. I am also making a retreat myself with the Ignatian Group (CASEA) who offered an 18<sup>th</sup> Annotation Retreat with materials based on the First Spiritual Exercises by an Australian Jesuit, Michael Hansen, S. J. It is a five week retreat in daily life. We meet via Zoom every Sunday Night for Group Direction and sharing on our prayer experiences. The theme of this retreat is: Inner Peace in Divine Love. It was a very good addition to my Lenten and Easter time journey.

The Tuesday of Holy Week, I ventured a bit further into the world of technology. With the help of the Centre's Communications person, Natasha as host, I offered an hour of Prayer and Reflection on the Seven Last Words of Jesus. Oh, my goodness, I was anxious as the hour drew closer and I was here in the office, prepared but looking at a blank computer screen! However, about 15 min. before the 7pm scheduled beginning time, Natasha told me that the FCJ Sisters from Manila had joined and asked if I



wanted to have a chat with them before opening to others! It was so wonderful to be able to see them and to chat a bit with them –the wonders of technology! Then she opened to others and I could see them on my screen. As I began with the Welcome and Opening Prayer, my anxiousness left and God did what He so often does for me—God took all of the anxious worries away and I was just as much at ease as I usually am giving the evenings in our own chapel! God is so good!

On Thursday of Holy Week, Sr. Helen and I joined in with the St. Philomena School Zoom Holy Thursday Prayer Service in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. Brian Cordeiro, the Principal, asked if I would say a few words before the prayer ended as it was such a special day (our 200<sup>th</sup>) for the FCJ Sisters. What a joy it was to see and hear the beautiful Prayer Service and to pray along with about 150 participants: faculty, staff, students and their parents, Board members and Fr. Ray Malm who often comes to celebrate the school Masses. Brian welcomed everyone and teachers and students did the readings from their own homes, we all prayed together and Fr. Malm gave a lovely reflection. The Service ended by everyone singing the School Song with great gusto! I was very moved by this experience and had tears in my eyes by the close of it. When the Prayer Service was over, Brian asked Helen and me to stay on along with some of the teachers and Fr. Malm. We had time to chat and catch up a bit.



What a treat that was and how many memories it brought back for Helen and myself! So, all in all, my appreciation for the wonders of technology has grown and I am getting more courageous in using it for continuing to *Widen the Circle of Love* as our Chapter reminded us to do.

*Ann Marie Walsh, fcJ*



### **A Poem to Remind Us of the Silver Lining**

(from the Fountains of Mission Newsletter)

Yes, there is fear  
Yes, there is isolation  
Yes, there is loss  
Yes, there is death  
But,

They say in Wuhan after many years of noise,  
You can hear the birds sing again.  
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet,  
The sky is no longer thick with fumes but blue and clear

They say that in the streets of Assisi,  
People are singing to each other  
Across empty squares, keeping  
the windows open so that those who are  
alone may have the sounds of the family around.

They say that a hotel in the west of  
Ireland is offering free meals and  
Delivery to the housebound.

Today, a young woman I know is  
Busy spreading fliers with her number  
Though her neighborhood so that  
The elderly may have someone to call.



Today Churches, Synagogues  
Mosque and Temples are preparing to welcome and shelter  
The homeless, the sick and the weary.

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality,  
To how big we really are.  
To how little control we really have.  
To what really matters.  
To love.

So, we pray and remember that:  
Yes, there is fear, but threat does not have to be hate.  
Yes, there is isolation but there does  
Not have to loneliness.  
Yes, there is sickness, but there does  
not have to be disease of the soul  
Yes, there is even death but there  
can always be the rebirth of love.

Wake to the choices that you make as to how you love now.  
Today, breathe.  
Listen,  
Behind the factory noise of  
Your panic, the birds are singing again,  
the sky is clear, spring has come,  
and we are always encompassed by love.

Open the window of your soul and  
Though you may not be able to  
Touch across the empty square.  
Sing!

Father Richard Hendrick  
*(contributed by Donna Marie Perry, FCJ)*



## Hope for the Future

As I sit here in front of my computer the news plays in the background. The story that captures my attention is that of the Calgary Fire Department showing up at a Senior's Home to sing Happy Birthday to a resident who has just turned 100 years old. The family, the Mayor, and the Chief of the Fire Department are all there to celebrate all the while mindful of social distancing.



The next story focused on the many ways people from around the world were trying to bring some joy and compassion to the most needy and the medical staff during this difficult time. I was quite touched by these positive news stories as so much of the daily news has been truly difficult to hold.



The need to find some good in these times brought to mind my own recent experience while out walking just last week. I encountered a young couple out for a stroll while their son was riding his tricycle. He was ahead of his parents. Respecting the rules for physical distancing, I attempted to step onto the street so that this young boy could keep riding. Much to my surprise, this child stopped, and I assumed he was waiting for his parents. As I continued my walk, I heard the mother praise her son for maintaining the right physical distance. So young to be taught such hard lessons!

In the midst of this crisis... where have we found hope? Could it be a simple prayer for a better world for the children we see? For they are the future!

*Lisa Gilead, CiM (Calgary)*

