

UNITED IN MISSION

ATLANTIC-MIDWEST PROVINCE

Transforming the world through education

Fall 2023

Exploring Meaning – Searching for Hope!

It probably comes with the **sector**, that educators desire continued learning for themselves. They not only seek new information to be up to date on developments in a certain field, but they also look to be inspired for their own flourishing and to share the sparks of new insights with others. To that end, many attend conferences to network and find support among peers and build new relationships, to meet leaders in the field and/or a possible mentor. Keynote presentations may inspire and perhaps draw one out of one's comfort zone to explore an idea one might not yet have thought of. Workshops sharpen existing skills and invite learning new ones. They allow for an exchange of tips, resources, and

and best practices. Overall, attending a conference may fuel an attendee's motivation to give oneself to a cause, and to deepen commitment and resolve.

These are some of the reasons the Provincial Council of the Atlantic- Midwest Province attends the Annual Assembly of the [Leadership Conference of Women Religious \(LCWR\)](#).

This year's theme was [Drawn by Sacred Mystery – A Journey into Hope](#). Over 800 Women Religious and guests gathered to bring the experience of their life and of our world, 'especially the places of great suffering and pain' ^[1], in conversation with our faith, to - by exploring the mystery of it

all - find new meaning and strength to journey into hope. Prayer - to be drawn into deeper communion with the world - was an essential part of the Assembly. Many conversations took on the form of contemplative dialogue, 'a practice that engages us in seeing not only the whole but seeing from the whole, recognizing our interdependence' ^[2].

For this issue, I have asked members of our Provincial Council to share a key insight or learning from the Assembly, that may also inspire you and your ministry.

Two members of the Council, Sisters Nancy Gilchrist and Mary Roy Weiss, attended the [Canadian Religious Conference \(CRC\)](#), (Cont'd)

[1] LCWR 2023 Assembly Program Book, page 3

[2] Ibid.

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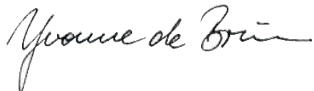
the Leadership Network for Catholic Religious Communities of Women and Men in Canada. The conference presentations were couched in the Emmaus story, engaging participants in topics like 'letting go', so that religious congregations can continue the journey of transformation, ever sharing the grace of knowing God's love in new ways with those whom they serve.

Sister Limeteze Pierre-Gilles, a staff member with [Beyond Borders](#), attended the [National Black Catholic Congress \(NBCC\)](#), which represents African American Roman Catholics and affiliated organizations. The 2023 Congress theme was "Write the Vision: A Prophetic Call to Thrive".

The AM Province and the Mission & Ministry Team sadly mourn the unexpected passing of a beloved colleague and friend, Caelie Haines, director of communications. Please find a tribute to her in this newsletter.

As always, this issue features resources that may be helpful or of interest to you. Please share them as you see fit, to strengthen us all in mission and ministry.

While we live and move through this season of Fall, may we sense the beckoning of Sacred Mystery in our lives and ministry, and faithfully continue our Journey into Hope.



Yvonne DeBruin
Director, Ministry Services



Sister Mary Fitzgerald, SSND, Provincial Councilor



Mary Fitzgerald, SSND

My ponderings over the LCWR Assembly:

The theme of our upcoming General Chapter - Living into Prophetic Witness of Universal Communion - was always at the back of my mind as I listened to the keynote addresses and various presentations at the LCWR Assembly. We realize that we are at a crossroads at this point internationally and we hope to reach beyond and envision creative ways of addressing the needs of the world with the resources and physical limitations we now have. It's an exciting time. Our cross-province dialogue and cross-congregational dialogue afforded us a unique opportunity to listen with the heart to Sisters and Associates in different cultural settings, possibly with different political realities, but the same SSND

(Cont'd)

Mary Fitzgerald, SSND - Cont'd

spirit of openness and welcome to an uncertain future, which as Blessed Theresa said, "Is in God's hands".

I thought of the need to be led by Wisdom, the prophetic role of all the People of God, and the need for simplicity and discernment in identifying and carrying out the mission of God.

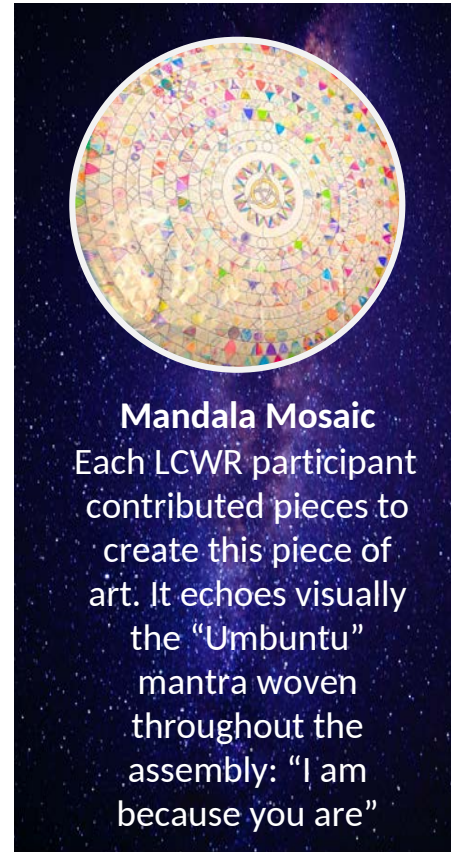
Brian Swimme, the first keynote speaker, reminded us of the Big-Bang theory: the explosion of a star sent forth star dust which over time created planets. We are all made of the same stardust – universal communion. So, our question becomes how do we let go and risk to become prophetic witnesses of universal communion at our moment in time? We need to think outside the box and go to the peripheries to share the message of hope.

All of the speakers at the LCWR Assembly were brilliant in their thought-provoking and challenging presentations.

I leave you with something Sister Barbara Reid, OP, said about Sister Thea Bowman's presentation to the USCCB:

It is much the same as when Jesus tells his disciples in John 6:39: 'and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day.' Or when Jesus is being arrested and he says, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' (18:9)

What I think of when I hear this verse, is the address that Sr. Thea Bowman gave to the US Bishops in 1989 not long before she died. She finished her address by asking the bishops to sing with her and she intoned, 'We shall overcome...' The bishops stood and began to sing with her, but she stopped them, and said, 'No, brothers, not like that. You have to take the hand of the brother next to you as you sing.' And so, they did. As they began again, she stopped them once more and said, 'No, not like that, brothers, you have to cross your arms like we did in the Civil Rights marches.' And she smiled and said, 'that's right, brothers, you have to move closer together to do that. That's how we did it then so that when the dogs came, and the water cannons came, and the police with their batons came, we wouldn't lose any one of the brothers or sisters in the struggle.'



Mandala Mosaic
Each LCWR participant contributed pieces to create this piece of art. It echoes visually the "Umbuntu" mantra woven throughout the assembly: "I am because you are"

So, how will we be a healing presence needed in our world today? May Blessed Theresa, woman of love, accompany us on this transformative journey, ever seeking to know and do Love's will.

Sister Margaret (Peg) Malone SSND, Provincial Councilor

In his presentation on Cosmological Spirituality, Brian Swimme termed **Relationships the most fundamental process in the universe**. He explained that from the initial relationship between subatomic particles to form the element of Hydrogen, to the formation of every other element, to the rise of single celled organisms, to the rise of thinking beings capable of language, progress has occurred because we have the ability to form new kinds of relationships.



Think of the relationships that have developed by and among religious communities in the years since Vatican II.

Our response to the needs of our times led to new relationships with other congregations as we began co-sponsored ministries such as Marian House, Sisters Academy of Baltimore, and Mother Seton Academy. Each of these addressed a need of our times and brought us into new relationships with those we had not worked with before.

The decline in the number of Sisters, the closing or combining of schools, lead to new relationships as we tried to continue to serve those in need. With like-minded groups and individuals, we formed relationships to serve in new ways and places. We began outreach to new populations with different needs. Sponsored ministries such as Caroline House in Bridgeport CT, the SSND Educational Center in Queens, NYC and Corazón a Corazón in Chicago arose to meet need of immigrants needing language instruction and basic education. Training for jobs was the focus of a new ministry in Baltimore at Caroline Center. SisterHouse in Chicago was launched to address the needs of women trying to rebuild lives broken by addiction.

Being educators, we continue to support educational efforts at the Notre Dame Learning Center in Rochester, NY, at Holy Angles Academy in Demarest, NJ, at Notre Dame Prep in Towson, MD and Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore, MD.

The relationship goes far beyond just financial support, however. Efforts to share our charism have forged a new relationship with you, who serve in these ministries. As colleagues and collaborators, we continue to build a world of justice and equality together.

How are relationships fundamental to the flourishing of your ministry? Which relationships do you cherish? Which ones are a challenge to you? Where are you forging new relationships to advance the mission?

Sister Charmaine Krohe, SSND, Provincial Leader



Charmaine Krohe, SSND

The Journey of Hope

Living in this time of global crisis, in a world fractured by the COVID pandemic, the violence of racism, the urgency of the climate crisis, the polarization of our politics and the stalled immigration reform, calls for a prophetic response from all of us. As we address many of these realities and become more painfully aware of what is happening to many parts of planet Earth, how are we being called to respond? What can we offer in the midst of this suffering?

In her address, LCWR president, Sr. Rebecca Gemma, “stressed the critical need not to lose hope even in the face of the numerous changes taking place in the world and in religious life.” Sister Barbara Reid, OP called us to look at the Gospels as an invitation to journey in resurrection hope.

Brian Swimme, in his address on cosmological spirituality, set the stage for our journey into the wider universe where we find hope and the ultimate act of generosity in the explosion of a star causing a universe to be born.

The theme that resonated all throughout the assembly was that by living the Paschal Mystery--- by living through our daily sufferings, deaths, and resurrections, we are born into the newness of God’s creation. In our daily passion, death, and resurrections, we are being called to a journey into hope.

In this 190th anniversary year of our congregation and in the 25th year of our General Chapter, all that was shared at the LCWR reminded me of our foundress, Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger. She knew she could not accomplish God’s mission alone. She continuously invited others to transform the world, to bring about unity and to build a community of love.

The speakers at the LCWR assembly emphasized the importance of our interconnectedness and the need to build relationships and partner with others in our quest for “the beloved community.” It is essential that we work together as we carry on the mission of SSND and bear witness to hope in our local communities and in the world.

We are called to share the charism of Blessed Theresa and share our hunger for her global vision of society and the love of the people of God, which compelled her to go out to the whole world.

(Cont'd)

Charmaine Krohe, SSND - Cont'd

Blessed Theresa was a woman of her times. What she saw, experienced, and learned shaped her, and influenced her. The circumstances of Mother Theresa's times forced her and other SSNDs to assume tasks and responsibilities unheard of for women of their times. Repeatedly they did seemingly impossible tasks: always changing, always adapting. We have a foundress who lived Trust and Dare... every day, not just in a crisis. Theresa's struggles throughout her life echo our own. Theresa, imbued, grounded in the spirit of the congregation,

was ready and able to say when called, here I am, send me. She calls us into this same journey of

Hope.

What has given you hope? What strengthens your communion in mission? How have you connected, grown in unity and what have been the challenges you faced? In the spirit of our 25th General Chapter, how are you being a prophetic witness of universal communion and hope?

← hope →

Sister Paula Dukehart, SSND, Provincial Councilor



Paula Dukehart, SSND


The LCWR Assembly concludes each year with the presentation of an Outstanding Leadership Award to a woman religious who exemplifies the LCWR Mission. The 2023 recipient was Sister Donna Markham, OP.

A video was shared chronicling the contributions Donna has been making for over 50 years in several fields of ministry. I strongly encourage you to watch the [video](#) which includes Donna's "backstory" (Introduction ≈18 min., presentation of the Outstanding Leadership Award ≈4 min., Donna's response ≈12 min.). To read the transcript of Donna's response click [here](#).

As Donna's story unfolded there in Dallas, Texas, I was immensely impressed by what God has been accomplishing through her.

I began to wonder how her experience on a very high-profile stage might be replicated through the lives we each live and the service we provide in much smaller settings.

I offer you a few excerpts and questions for reflection on your own ministry as a leader drawn from the introductory video mentioned above ... (Cont'd)



Donna Markham has spent most of her life in significant leadership roles – often breaking professional barriers as she envisioned possibilities and courageously made them real.

**Can you imagine similar words being said of you in the context of your ministry as leader of an SSND sponsored/co-sponsored ministry?
What would it take for that to occur?**

Donna became known for her well-honed capacity to grasp the needs of those being served and to implement changes to best meet those needs.

Reflect on how this statement relates to your vision as a leader and the inspiration for your efforts, day after day.

Very quickly she became known as an outstanding leader, administrator, and visionary as the organization addressed the needs of people living with immense human suffering due to environmental disasters, political injustice, and harsh social realities.

Consider the challenging circumstances you encounter in your ministry. Pray for those you serve; for your colleagues, collaborators and supporters; for yourself.

The choice of a life centered on God and the Gospel was clearly one that fit Donna's deepest aspirations. Donna has begun each day with quiet time with God - knowing that spiritual depth is a necessity for effective leadership.

What simple practice is part of your life as you prepare to step into your ministry each day?

“God’s reign draws all creation into communion; it pulls us human beings into action on behalf of the good that we hold in common; it invites us into community, into reverent communion.”

This conclusion of the LCWR Assembly was an experience for me of the theme writ large -
Drawn By Sacred Mystery: A Journey Into Hope.
May it be so for you as well.

Sisters Nancy Gilchriest, SSND, and Mary Roy Weiss, SSND, Provincial Councilors

In May 2023, we had the privilege of participating in the bi-lingual Canadian Religious Conference, a meeting of religious sisters, brothers, and priests that happens every other year. The theme was that of transformation, that the future of religious life needs to be renewed in order to proclaim the Good News in today's complex world. The creative energy of the planners and participants presented the transformative journey by embracing the image of the Emmaus Story throughout the conference.

In reflecting on the Emmaus story, the participants recognized that the transformation that occurred in the disciples is the same transformative process that religious congregations are called to today. Just as the two on the road walked with Jesus, religious congregations experience those stages of sadness, mystery, encounter, and revelation in dealing with diminishment and property sales. By letting go of what we know, we can embrace what is revealed to us when our eyes are opened to possibility.

The transformation is not that the real and the ordinary change in the midst of us, but we change in the midst of the real and the ordinary. In the words of Mary Wickham, SM, "What are the old roads that will enable the new music?"

Another key learning (from our time at the Canadian Religious Conference) was the wisdom in acknowledging the need to establish the "new roads for that new music." There was a presentation by a specific group of contemplative



Nancy Gilchriest, SSND + Mary Roy Weiss, SSND

Sisters who could no longer maintain their traditional cloister. After much prayer, they established a monastery devoted to biodynamic farming. They listened to the people who were curious about their farming, and eight women joined who wanted to live *Laudato Si'*. Their contemplative life was revitalized because of their letting go and letting the Holy Spirit guide them in their "new music."

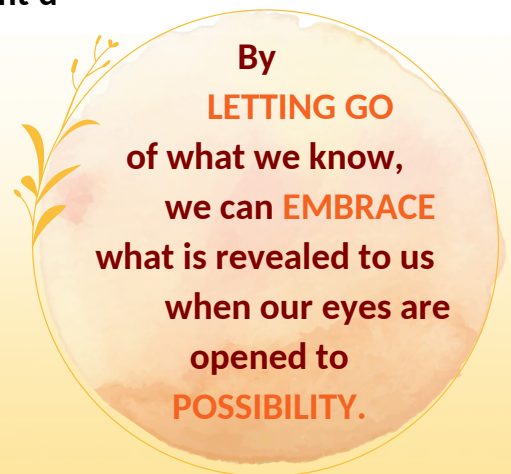
The Journey of transformation seems to be the call for religious life in the 21st century. Our convents may be different structures, and our ministries may be distinctly about being rather than doing. There are two things of which we can be certain: God's love is always with us, and God consistently reaches out to us.

May we be transformed to have the grace to extend God's love to those within our reach. *(Cont'd)*

Reflection Questions:

Where might you find yourselves in the Emmaus story?

What might you be called to let go of in your ministry, in order to enable "new music"?



Sister Limètèze Pierre-Gilles, SSND



Limètèze
Pierre-Gilles, SSND

Love is the Perfect Bond of Unity

In July 2023 I attended my first National Black Catholic Congress at the Gaylord Resort and Convention Center in Maryland. It was a gathering of 3,000 Black Catholics representing over 80 dioceses in the United States including many Black Women Religious representing the National Black Sisters Conference.

I participated in the daily celebration of the Eucharist, gave praise to God with an amazing gospel choir, listened from the heart, and prayed. It was an exciting unifying time of loving encounters. I was delighted to see and be with so many Black People who were also excited to see and be with each other.

Seeing so many young Black People at the Congress was the most moving for me. It was clearly a thread of hope. They were given special recognition throughout the Congress and there were special activities that they all attended. At the end of his homily, Bishop Jacques Fabre-Jeune, Haitian and Bishop of South Carolina, called all young people to the front and talked directly to them. Then he challenged all participants who work with young adults, especially young people of color who are affected by the decisions we make, to include them in the processes, to be mindful of their skills and provide them with leadership skills. It is easy to lose them when they are not included or don't play an active role in our ministry, Sister Josita Colbert told me later.

(Cont'd)

Sister Limèteze Pierre-Gilles, SSND- Cont'd

Congress XIII attendee, Sandra Coles-Bell, Executive Director of the National Black Sisters Conference, invites everyone working with young adults of color to approach any encounter from the Spirit of God. "That makes life better," she said.

Sister Nicole Trahan, FMI, invites all Catholics who partner with us in our ministry to accept the invitation to attend Congress XVI. The name National Black Congress should not prevent anyone from attending and participating. It is an opportunity for a deepening of our desire to improve our relationships, especially with our Black sisters and brothers.

My invitation to everyone, especially our partners in ministry, is to make room for meaningful encounters, to continue to pray for a world free of racism, hate and violence, and to work for policies that honor the dignity of the whole person no matter color, ethnicity, nationality, social status, education, or sexual orientation. Let us continue to pray and work for love, love that embraces all, love that gives everything, for it is truly the perfect bond that unites us all.



In Memoriam: Caelie Haines, 1969 - 2023



Caelie Haines

Ministry Services mourns the unexpected passing of a beloved colleague and friend, Caelie Haines. On September 9, she made her final journey home to God. Caelie shared her gifts, talents and expertise as director of communications with our province. She was a warm, kind, and generous person who was an integral part of our province. She is deeply missed. May our prayers be a source of comfort to Caelie's family and to our SSND family. May she rest in peace. [Read her obituary.](#)



Resources

Board-Staff Interaction: What's Acceptable, What's not? [Click here](#) to access the resource.

Embracing Unity, by Sister M. Rut Koprucha, SSND Provincial Leader, Poland:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2z2Tnp0kL7EcEgmFsEve0UmcwQj_eiZu

"Called to Action" Podcast: by SSND CP Province – uplifts work in our five focus areas – new episodes released every other week!

[Called to Action: A School Sisters of Notre Dame Central Pacific Podcast \(google.com\)](#)

SSND Turns 190! Join the celebration by finding our Foundation Day Prayer [here](#).
[Large print edition here.](#)

"Arc + Dove" Podcast: a 5-episode podcast that seeks to present the faith, resilience, and hope of Black Catholics in the U.S., with a particular focus on Baltimore: Click [here](#)!

2023 Jubilee Celebration: The livestreamed September 2023 Province Jubilee is available!
[Click here to watch!](#)

Events

Upcoming Ministry Formation Sessions:

October 20-21, 2023
Villa Assumpta, Baltimore

March 1-2, 2024
Villa Assumpta, Baltimore

Sustaining the Fire Within retreat:
June 25-27, 2024
Cranaleith Spiritual Center
Philadelphia, PA

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