



January 2014

Envisioning a Future for LCWR and US Women Religious



Planning group meets at Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center in Marriottsville, Maryland

LCWR will engage in 2014 in a visioning and planning process that will position the conference to respond effectively to the needs of leaders of US religious institutes and help shape and support religious life as it moves into a very different future. Recognizing what an important and challenging time these next few years will be for religious life in the United States, LCWR will give significant attention to this planning process so that the needs and dreams of US women religious leaders are carefully considered.

To begin the process, a group of LCWR national board members and staff met from December 9-10 at Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center in Marriottsville, Maryland. Their work, which was facilitated by Marisa Guerin, included naming the critical realities facing US women religious, imagining ways to respond to the calls to Catholic sisters coming from society and the church today, and articulating possible goals for the conference for the next several years.

During their February 2014 meeting the LCWR board members and staff will begin working with these insights and create the visioning and planning processes
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New Leader Workshop

Presented by the
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

March 27 - 30, 2013
University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, Illinois

Space is limited
Registration forms are due by January 21, 2014
Forms are available at

lcsr.org/sites/default/files/calendar/attachments/nlwregistration2014.pdf

The program features an outstanding faculty and presentations that are tailored to the particular challenges of religious life leadership today

Nancy Schreck, OSF
Dimensions of Spiritual Leadership

Simone Campbell, SSS and Christine Rody, SC
Leaders and Canon and Civil Law

Lynn M. Levo, CSJ
Survival Guide for Leading in a Time of Change and Transition
Working Together in Teams

Janet Mock, CSJ
The Doctrinal Assessment of LCWR and its Impact on US Religious Life

Janice Bader, CPPS
NRRO Resources for Leaders

From the LCWR Presidency

Negative Capability: A New Year's Resolution?

by Carol Zinn, SSJ — LCWR President

No doubt, you are already asking yourself, "What kind of title is that for the beginning of a new calendar year?" What happened to Happy New Year?

Well, I was reflecting on Janus, the Roman God of the doorway (from the Latin word, *iauna*, meaning door), with two faces looking in opposite directions: backward to reflect on what is now "certain" and forward to what is uncertain. My reflection led me to wonder of what LCWR is certain as we look back and what is uncertain as we look to 2014? Further, I wondered how will LCWR continue to maintain the capacity to live, fully, between certainty and uncertainty? And, finally, I contemplated what life would feel like if LCWR practiced this "doorway visioning" beyond the month of January?

It was then that John Keats came to mind. It is said that he wrote a letter to his brothers in 1817 in which he pondered what quality some humans possess that allows them to simultaneously acknowledge the unpredictable nature of events and yet conduct themselves with confidence and happiness. He then went on to coin the phrase "negative capability" meaning, to be capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. In other words, Keats marveled at the human capability to live life with joyful certitude while fully accepting that it is filled with uncertainty. That seems to be a New Year's resolution worth pursuing for our times.

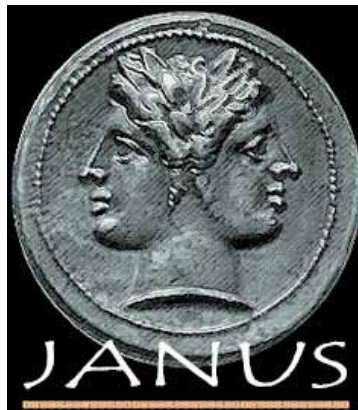
In the last month of 2013 we saw the death of Nelson Mandela, a global moment of the power of transformative and reconciling love. We observed the naming of Pope



Francis as Time's Person of the Year, an unprecedented act of quickly recognizing transformational love when it is lived out loud. We experienced the first anniversary of the Sandy Hook tragedy with its transforming powerful witness of community and resilience even in the face of unspeakable grief. We received the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation, "Evangelii Gaudium," a transforming call for the Catholic Church to joyfully live the Gospel message. And we are about to celebrate the Feast of God-With-Us in the person of Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, the personification

of transformative love. Each of these events focuses on human beings standing at a door with their two faces looking in opposite directions: what was certain and what could only be considered as uncertain. How they stood at the door made all the difference in and for the world.

And so we look forward to what lies before us, unknown, at this time. How ready are we to live our lives fully while accepting that they are filled with uncertainty? How willing are we to hold the tensions of leading our congregations with the realities we face each day? How eager are we to nurture the "new" about which we have been praying since 2010? And how joyful are we as we stand at the door of uncertainty?



How ready are we to live our lives fully while accepting that they are filled with uncertainty?

Let's meet at that door with our faces looking in opposite directions and let our New Year's resolution be that of negative capability, for the life of the world.

Image of Janus:
<http://www.meridiangraphics.net/janus.htm>

Envisioning a Future for LCWR and US Women Religious

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that will engage all LCWR members at both the spring regional meetings and at the 2014 assembly.

Participating in the December meeting were: the LCWR presidency (Carol Zinn, SSJ; Sharon Holland, IHM; Florence Deacon, OSF), board members (Rose Marie Jasinski, CBS; Judy Justinger, SSJ; Sharon Sullivan, OSU; Kathleen Turley, RSM) and staff (Janet Mock, CSJ; Marie McCarthy, SP; Annmarie Sanders, IHM).

LCWR Contemporary Religious Life Committee Meets in DC

Members of the LCWR Contemporary Religious Life Committee devoted much of their fall meeting time to planning the 2014 LCWR assembly, scheduled for August in Nashville, Tennessee.

Meeting at the Washington Retreat Center from November 24-26, the committee prepared for the assembly planning by reviewing some of the major projects and efforts of LCWR. It also provided an orientation for new members Eileen Hurley, SCL (member of the LCWR board), Mary Ann Buckley, SHJC and Ana Lydia Sonera Matos, CDP.



Members of the Contemporary Religious Life Committee (standing) Marie McCarthy, SP; Ana Lydia Sonera Matos, CDP; Catherine Bertrand, SSND (facilitator); Annmarie Sanders, IHM; (seated) Rebecca Ann Gemma, OP; Eileen Hurley, SCL; Janet Mock, CSJ; Mary Ann Buckley, SHJC



BBC Radio reporter Matthew Wells interviews LCWR executive director Janet Mock, CSJ at the LCWR offices.

National and International Media Interview LCWR on the 'Francis Effect'

Several major media outlets have recently contacted LCWR for commentary on the leadership of Pope Francis and the effects of his life and his actions on the US Catholic Church and on women religious. Both LCWR president Carol Zinn, SSJ and LCWR executive director Janet Mock, CSJ granted interviews to *Time Magazine*, *National Public Radio*, *BBC Radio*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Women's e-News*, among others.



LCWR Members Encouraged to Reflect on Emerging Insights

A new LCWR contemplative insight card is now available for downloading. The January 2014 card (pictured above) is available at: lcwr.org/resources/leadership-pathways/ behold.



How little we know, how eager to learn

by Nancy Schreck, OSF
President, Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque

One of the ways our leadership team regularly begins the week of our monthly meetings is to read and discuss an article that at first glance has nothing at all to do with the work of leadership. We call this our “Big Question” discussion.

The article may be of a provocative theological, social, or scientific nature. It may be about cooking or communicating with animals. The point is that it just takes us off center a bit to converse about issues that can all too easily be swallowed by the activities and stresses of everyday life. There are plenty of reasons for putting off these conversations; issues of budgets and health care, sponsorship and future planning have a way of taking precedence over talk of exploration and higher purpose. We do so many perfunctory things in our ministry we often don’t get to simply talk about life.

There is something cathartic when we do it. It has the effect both of sparking our imagination, and deepening our relationship with one another through such conversations. And after all that, it is rather amazing that a number of times some insight from the article and discussion comes around to provide a perspective on the leadership work we are doing.



Any team that has discovered a helpful practice is invited to submit a brief description of the practice to the Contemporary Religious Life Committee via LCWR associate director for communications Annmarie Sanders, IHM at asanders@lcsr.org.



Catholic Sisters in California Launch Exhibits

Several congregations in California funded two projects that tell the history of Catholic sisters in California. The projects draw upon the local display created by the California sisters to accompany the exhibit, *Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America*, while it was on display at the The California Museum of History, Women & the Arts, located in Sacramento.

A “virtual museum” of the photos, artifacts and videos from the original exhibit is now available online at womenandspiritcaliforniaonline.com. In addition, a traveling exhibit suitable for display in churches, schools, hospitals, and special events can be reserved at womenandspiritcalifornia.com.

Among those who worked on these projects were LCWR member Gladys Guenther, president of the Sisters of the Holy Family; Christine Doan, archivist for the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary of San Francisco; Patricia Smith of the Daughters of Charity Health System; and Heather Lindquist of Harvest Moon Studios.



What's Happening with Leadership Pathways?

This January, 32 members of LCWR will participate in piloting the materials and process for the foundational module of Identity as a Leader. The module, entitled "Becoming the Leaders We Hope to Be: The Foundations of Transformational Leadership," will have six sections each of which will take approximately one month to complete.

The 32 members who are piloting this material will be formed into four learning cohorts each with a group mentor. Once a month the participants will have the opportunity to work individually with the material, to engage in some online asynchronous conversation and to engage together face to face in an online format. They will be providing feedback to the advisory committee for Leadership Pathways throughout the process. Once their suggestions have been incorporated into the materials, the module will be opened to all members who are interested. Currently there are 20 members of LCWR on a waiting list to participate in this first module.

In addition, in January the national office will send each member some reflection materials and a process aimed at fostering a member-wide conversation on various aspects of transformational leadership. These materials will invite members first into individual reflection and then into leadership-team sharing and reflection. The fruits of these two processes will serve as preparation for reflection and conversation at the LCWR spring regional meetings.

When regions met in the fall they had the opportunity to view and discuss a presentation on Leadership Pathways. As a result of those conversations several regions forwarded questions and observations to the national office. Questions focused on:

- membership and who can participate

- continuity of participation, given the turnover of membership in LCWR
- the possibility for expanding the reach of Leadership Pathways to emerging leaders, congregation members, and associates
- adapting the materials for use with prospective new leaders or congregation members

Three questions focused on the underlying understandings that are informing Leadership Pathways.

- What is "transformational leadership" in this context?
- Since members have different understandings and experiences of contemplation and of process, how will members be introduced to the models used in Leadership Pathways?
- How will this process assist in dealing with the regular problems that confront us and with sharing best practices across congregations?

Below is a brief reflection on transformational leadership as it is understood in the Leadership Pathways process.

What is Transformational Leadership in This Context?

The language of transformational leadership is used in any number of contexts with slightly different meanings and nuances. In the context of Leadership Pathways "transformational leadership" is a way of describing a set of dispositions that, when fostered in the elected leader, contribute to creating an environment in which deep, authentic transformation is possible.

As the leader brings her whole self, just as she is, to the ministry of elected leadership and develops her capacity to engage the various situations that form the daily stuff of leadership with openness and curiosity, to move beyond her own frames of reference and world view and to make her own vulnerability available in the service of this ministry, she creates the environment where something genuinely new can emerge and where all the participants in the situation become more fully available for the transforming action of grace.

Transformational leadership in the context of elected leadership, then, is a way of being a leader that models and fosters a spirit of adventure, exploration and col-

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What is Transformational Leadership in This Context?

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laboration, curiosity, openness and vulnerability within the individual leader, among the members of the leadership team, and among the members of the congregation as a whole. It draws on the strengths and gifts of all who are involved, inviting all into the ongoing journey of personal and communal transformation.

Responses to other questions will be included in upcoming issues of the newsletter. Additional questions may be sent to Marie McCarthy, SP at mmccarthy@lcwr.org.

Becoming the Leaders we Hope to Be: The Foundations of Transformational Leadership

Unit One:
Becoming Learners Together

Unit Two:
Safety, Security and Certainty

Unit Three:
Seeing Things Whole

Unit Four:
Contemplation and Community:
the Ground of Transformational Leadership

Unit Five:
Building a Culture of Shared Wisdom and Leadership

Unit Six:
Envisioning Transformational Leadership

Is Your Leadership Term About to End?

If your leadership term is ending this month, we ask you to submit a change of leadership form found in the LCWR Members Information section (password-protected) of the website at lcwr.org/members/lcwr-membership-information.

Upcoming LCWR Dates

Leading from Within Retreat

Redemptorist Renewal Center

Tucson, Arizona

January 19 — 24, 2014

Imaging Justice: A Learning Lab for Leaders and Justice Promoters

Bethany Retreat Center

Lutz, Florida

March 3 — 6, 2014

LCWR New Leader Workshop

Conference Center - University of St. Mary of the Lake

Mundelein, Illinois

March 27 — 30, 2014

LCWR Assembly

Nashville, Tennessee

August 12 — 16, 2014

LCWR Assembly

Houston, Texas

August 11—15, 2015

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Leaders Fast for Immigrant Families

As families continue to suffer separation, immigrant rights, labor, and faith leaders vowed to fast, pray, and advocate for immigrant justice. On November 12 “Fast for Families: A Call for Immigration Reform and Citizenship” pitched a tent on the National Mall and Eliseo Medina (SEIU), Dae Joong Yoon (NAKASEC), Cristian Avila (Mi Familia Vota), and Lisa Sharon Harper (Sojourners) began their fast for justice for immigrant families.

The fasters, following in the path of Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi, hoped to touch hearts and encourage the leadership of the House of Representatives to address the moral crisis of an immigration system that rejects religious beliefs and national values, and denies human rights and human dignity. Their efforts captured the attention of national leaders including President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, Vice-President Joe Biden, and countless members of Congress who visited the Fast for Families tent.

The fasters were supported throughout by others who participated in solidarity fasts for shorter periods and by those who gathered each evening for prayer. LCWR and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men had the privilege of leading the prayer on December 5.

On December 13 as Congress prepared to leave town for its holiday recess, the fasters folded their tent and pledged to join advocates as they prepared for the next phase of the march to support comprehensive immigration reform.

Fast for Families was organized by faith, labor, and community groups including the Church World Service, Faith in Public Life, The PICO Network, the Service Employees International Union, Alliance for Citizenship, NETWORK, Sojourners, Franciscan Action Network, LCWR, and dozens of other groups.

Ann Scholz, SSND leads the December 5 prayer at the tent



Eliseo Medina, a veteran organizer and a disciple of Cesar Chavez, whose water-only fast lasted for 22 days, visits with Marie Lucey, OSF of the Franciscan Action Network; and LCWR staff members Janet Mock, CSJ; Ann Scholz, SSND; and Annmarie Sanders, IHM.

National Faith Leaders Demand Action to Prevent Gun Violence

A year after the tragic mass shooting in Newtown, national religious leaders sent a letter to Congress calling for urgent action to respond to the gun violence crisis. The letter was signed by 54 national religious leaders representing more than 80 million Americans including the United Methodists, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, Sojourners, the Islamic Society of North America, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, and LCWR.

The letter encourages members of Congress to support the bipartisan background checks legislation that a majority of the Senate voted for this past April. The legislation, sponsored by Senators Joe Manchin and Pat Toomey, would help keep guns out of the wrong hands by extending background checks to cover private gun sales in commercial settings. Currently, corresponding legislation in the House, sponsored by Congressmen Peter King (R-NY) and Mike Thompson (D-CA), has more than 185 co-sponsors. The letter to House members encourages them to become co-sponsors.



FAITHS UNITED
TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

Celebrate National Migration Week— January 5-11

Migrants, particularly the most vulnerable migrants: children, the undocumented, refugees, and victims of human trafficking, often find themselves existing in a kind of figurative darkness where their options remain limited and their ability to live out their lives in its fullness severely restricted. Often at risk of violence or exploitation, these vulnerable populations need to be provided support so that they can thrive. Resources are available on the USCCB website at: tinyurl.com/m3teemc.



Pope Francis, in his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, chose the theme “Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World.” In it he points to the growing interdependence and interaction of countries which can and should lead to improved living conditions for the entire human family. “Each individual is a part of humanity and, with the entire family of peoples, shares the hope of a better future.”

He challenges those in receiving countries to change their attitudes away from defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just global community. The pope’s entire message is available at tinyurl.com/kz4vojw.

All are asked to contact their member of Congress during National Migration Week and ask her or him to support comprehensive immigration reform.

- January 7—Send Congress an electronic postcard at www.justiceformigrants.org/index.shtml
- January 8—Call representatives. (Phone numbers: www.house.gov/representatives)

January 11 is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day

Today there are 21-30 million people living in slavery, more than at any time in human history. UNICEF estimates that 2 million children are victims of sex trade each year. The average age of a girl being forced into the US domestic sex slavery market is 13. The following are ideas to help end slavery.

- Learn more about US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking and what women religious are doing to abolish slavery. Visit bakhitainitiative.com.
- Save the number of National Human Trafficking Resources Hotline to one’s phone—888-373-7888.
- Make a contribution to an organization such as UNICEF, ECPAT, or the Polaris Project that fights human trafficking.

Inequality Growing in US and World

Almost half the world, more than three billion people, lives on less than \$2.50 a day. According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty. And they “die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world.” In the USA, arguably the wealthiest nation in the world, one in every six people lives in poverty.

January is Poverty Awareness Month. Information on how to raise awareness about growing poverty in the United States and across the world can be found at www.povertyusa.org. Daily Twitter-length suggestions will be available for re-posting to get the word out about poverty and its root causes. A calendar with daily suggestions for reflection, learning, and action can be found at tinyurl.com/l2u27g6.



LCWR is on Facebook: www.facebook.com/lcwr.org

News from the UN

Post-2015 Development Goals Must Focus on Women

Women are key to sustainable development and equality. That is why the post-2015 development goals must focus on structural constraints to women's progress in education, employment, and political participation, says John Hendra, deputy director of UN Women. "We feel very strongly that it has to be a stand-alone goal that addresses some of these constraints head on, and that across the framework we choose targets that are limited in number but will have a transformative impact on the lives of women," he argues. The full article in the *The Guardian* (London) (12/6) is available at: tinyurl.com/mwj5g8e.



Syrian Child Refugees Exceed 1 Million

More than 1 million Syrian child refugees face stress, lack of education, and separation from their parents because of the on-going civil war. About 75% of these children are younger than 12. "If we do not act quickly, a generation of innocents will become lasting casualties of an appalling war," says Antonio Guterres, UN high commissioner for refugees. More information can be found at: tinyurl.com/ox9h4n7.

Partnership for Global Justice: A Different Kind of NGO

The Partnership of Global Justice (PGJ) is a coalition working in collaboration with others at the United Nations to stand in solidarity with those suffering on the underside of history in their struggle for justice by educating, advocating, and working for equitable global systems.

PGJ is somewhat unique among the Catholic religious NGOs at the UN. Its members include both large and small religious congregations of women and men, as well as colleges, universities, secondary schools, and individuals. The partnership is one of a very few NGOs which offers UN workshops to help members and friends learn about the UN and its agenda. Workshop topics regularly include: ethical global citizenship, the post-2015 agenda, advocacy, sustainability, and economic justice.

One young workshop participant from Toronto wrote recently, "This is a trip that I will not forget for a very

long time. It reminded me about my responsibility as a global citizen to try and help those who are in desperate need of help. I am forever committed to do my part!"

More information about the PGJ is available at: www.partnershipforglobaljustice.com.

Nelson Mandela Remembered

The citizens of South Africa and the people of the world mourn the passing of Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid revolutionary, politician, president, philanthropist, and elder of the global community. In 2007 President Mandela brought together "The Elders," an independent group of global leaders committed to promoting the shared interests of humanity and universal human rights. These are their tributes to their friend, Madiba. Additional tributes and information about The Elders is available at theelders.org.



The world has lost a visionary leader, a courageous voice for justice, and a clear moral compass. By showing us that the path to freedom and human dignity lies in love, wisdom, and compassion for one another, Nelson Mandela stands as an inspiration to us all. While I mourn the loss of one of Africa's most distinguished leaders, Madiba's legacy beckons us to follow his example to strive for human rights, reconciliation, and justice for all. -- Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, Chair of The Elders

Nelson Mandela was a much loved citizen of the world. His death leaves us bereft – it is felt by all of us as a personal loss. There are so many ways that we will remember Nelson Mandela. His determination and courage in fighting for justice for his people, his moral authority, not least in his forgiveness of his former guards, and his valuing of diversity in all aspects of the new South Africa. In old age he became frailer, but his familiar voice was as strong as ever when he wanted to emphasize an issue of injustice, or remind us to listen to those on the margins, and those who suffer. It was an honor, and also very humbling, to be invited by Mandela to join The Elders. We will strive to uphold the values of justice, of listening, and of mutual respect for others that he embodied. -- Mary Robinson, Elder and former President of Ireland



- Letter to Senate and House Budget conferees, as well as Senator Reid and Leader Pelosi urging them to support children and families by ending sequestration, reversing its effects, and renewing the nation's investments in the future. LCWR (11/21/13)
- Endorsement of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility's "Statement of Principles and Recommended Practices for Confronting Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery." LCWR (12/1/13)
- Letter from Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence to Congress on the anniversary of the Newtown tragedy calling on members to take legislative action to pass the Manchin-Toomey bill (Amendment to S. 649)/King-Thompson bill (H.R.1565) to expand gun background checks for gun show, internet, and commercial sales. Janet Mock, CSJ (12/9/13)
- Letters to members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees urging members not to include immigration detention bed mandate language in the appropriations bill that funds the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for FY 2015. LCWR (12/9/13)
- Letter to President Obama urging the Administration to request flexibility to transfer funds between the accounts for detention and alternatives to detention and reject the principle of a mandated daily detention level in its FY 2015 budget request to Congress. LCWR (12/9/13)



NRVC Receives Grant to Establish Fund to Assist Communities with Candidates with Student Loans

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has awarded the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) a \$2.55 million grant to establish a fund to assist religious communities with candidates who have student loan obligations. In addition, the GHR Foundation has approved a grant of \$193,000 for the initial costs of setting up an office for the fund. NRVC will issue a press release and provide more detailed information as it progresses with this initiative.

In 2011, spurred by anecdotal evidence that educational debt was an obstacle to vocations, NRVC secured a grant from the Hilton Foundation to commission the "Study on Educational Debt and Vocations to Religious Life," conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolates (CARA). The 2012 study clearly demonstrated that student loans held by young people were a serious barrier that complicated, delayed, or thwarted many vocations to religious life.

The fund that the Hilton and GHR Foundations are now helping launch is NRVC's response to ameliorate the problem that religious communities face in accepting candidates with educational debt and, more important, to increase the number of women and men entering religious institutes.

Within the next month, a project director will be hired to oversee the establishment and incorporation of the fund, and help with selecting a board who will in turn hire an executive director.



Continuing the theme of Congress 2013, "Rooted in the Mission of Jesus: Reaching Out to the Margins," the Religious Formation Conference will offer a series of workshops on the implications of mission in the 21st century for members of religious congregations. Presenters in the series will be Richard Gaillardetz, PhD, Joseph Professor of Theology at Boston College, and Caroljean Willie, SC, PhD, NGO representative at the United Nations, Sisters of Charity Federation. More information will be forthcoming and posted on www.relforcon.org.

May 2-3, 2014
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
Latham (Albany), New York

September 19-20, 2014
Felician Franciscan Sisters
Chicago, Illinois

September 26-27, 2014
Providence Health and Services
Renton (Seattle), Washington

October 10-11, 2014
Atchison Heritage Conference Center
Atchison, Kansas

October 17-18, 2014
Our Lady of the Lake Convent
San Antonio, Texas

Annual Offerings

ForMission Program

A two-year formation program for those in or preparing for formation ministry. A new class is forming in June 2014. The first of four residential sessions will be held June 3-11, 2014 at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. More information and application materials are available at www.relforcon.org/programs/formission or by calling the RFC office at 202-827-4564.

Life Commitment Program

For women and men in first profession preparing for their final commitment.

July 22-30, 2014

Bergamo Center

Dayton, Ohio

www.bergamocenter.org

Webinars

Information on upcoming 2014 webinars:
www.relforcon.org/programs/webinars

An Advent Reflection

by Jim Hug, SJ

A graphic with a dark, starry background and a glowing, fiery orb at the bottom. The text is overlaid on the image.

An Untraditional Advent Meditation

The Incarnation of God began billions of years ago when the earliest forms of matter were ignited and began the vast cosmic expansion that is home to us all today.

Billions of years passed as God patiently worked, preparing creation to bring forth the divinely human Jesus. When that work was complete, in the sacred Fullness of Time, there was an eternally important but little noticed event in which, as Elizabeth Johnson noted,

"Real blood was shed at this delivery, by a poor woman of peasant society far from home, laboring in childbirth for the first time. And it was holy."

The centuries since Jesus began to open our eyes to our deeper humanly divine reality have witnessed God quietly continuing to develop the Incarnation slowly among us, building communities of trust and hope that may one day evolve with our help into a world of peace with justice and love for all. On that day, conscious of the divine life we each embody, we will embrace God within and among us all.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin reminds us:

"Above all trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally, impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We would like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient on the way to something unknown, something new; And yet it is made by passing through stages of instability And that may take a very long time. . . ."

"Only God can say what this new spirit forming within you will be. Give the Lord the benefit of believing that His hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself In suspense and incomplete."