



SHCJ ASSOCIATES NEWSLETTER AMERICAN PROVINCE

Volume II, Issue 3

May, 2004

FROM THE SHCJ GENERAL CHAPTER IN ROME: UPDATE ON ASSOCIATES DISCUSSIONS

The delegate session of the 25th General Chapter of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus took place in Rome from April 12 to 27, 2004. The work of each day focused on the input and recommendations on the critical questions discussed in the conversation groups throughout the provinces during this last year.

The six final group reports on the Cornelian Family provided material which generated much positive energy among the delegates in our meeting. The Chapter delegates again recognize that Cornelia's charism is a gift for the Church, the People of God. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus and the Associates are two distinct entities closely linked by Cornelia's charism, a distinct reflection of the broader Incarnational spirituality. All who are related through Cornelia's charism rejoice in the diversity of ways in which people share in this charism on four continents and in the Dominican Republic. The Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus and the Associate groups in the three

provinces seem to recognize, too, that this is a new movement in the history of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and the Associates.

The members of the Society encourage all who share this graced tradition with the vowed members to continue to develop an increasing sense of their own identity through reflection on their own expressions of Cornelian charism and spirituality. The Chapter recommends development of the Associates' own leadership and a structure which facilitates this. In light of the recommendations made at the General Chapter, the American Province Leadership Team has asked the Associates Core Team to initiate a process to implement the Chapter recommendations. The Sisters of the Holy Child are committed to support and encourage these developments.

Eileen Moughan, SHCJ; American Province Leadership Team member.

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VISITING CORNELIA'S CHILDREN

One of the first things I do when I go to Grand Coteau on retreat each summer is go to the cemetery to visit the grave of a friend and then to visit the grave of Cornelia's children. We had been told not to go to the cemetery at dusk or later so it was not until the next day that I went. As I entered the gate the thought came to me that I should have brought flowers to put on the children's grave. Now, I am not one to take flowers to the cemetery. I can't even recall ever doing such a thing for I believe flowers are for the living and

I give them frequently to the living but not to the dead, so the thought surprised me. As I rounded the big oak tree however, there nestled among the roots was a bouquet of silk flowers almost new. I figured they had blown off a grave and since there was no way I could identify where they came from I picked them up and carried them down to the children's grave. Imagine my surprise when I found petals (just a few) scattered by the children's grave that matched the flowers I had found. I left the bouquet on the grave and as I have done for years thanked the children

for introducing me to their mother (that is how I first came to know her, through her children).

This note is from one of our Associates, Sarah Brabant, from Louisiana. It served as an inspiration in gathering our content for this newsletter. We thank her for sharing it with us. In this season, as we celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day, we focus on the Connelly children, as well as our own children and how they affirm our faith.

EXPERIENCING GOD THROUGH CHILDREN – *Patrick Cumberland*

The birth of a child alters the life of a father in myriad ways. Among these changes can be new way of experiencing God. My relationship with God has been deepened and enriched immeasurably by the births and lives of my three children.

For me, the miracle of life – the creation of life, witnessing the moment when a life begins - has brought a certain tangible quality to the reality of the Creator. I was fortunate to be present at the birth of each of my children and each time a new, beautiful and complex being emerged that could only be the handiwork of a loving God. In a world filled with skepticism and fear, these few moments of surpassing grace so powerfully refute the dark clouds of doubt. In a sense, their births were sacramental: tangible signs of an invisible reality. Simply, I remember God each time I look at them.

Of course, birth is just the beginning of the many lessons that children have to teach a father about God. I always heard that God’s love is unconditional; like the father of the prodigal son, God will always be waiting for you with open arms if you go astray. Yet, only with children did I come to truly understand the meaning of unconditional love. My love for my children has no strings attached;

there simply is nothing that any one of them could do that could make me love them more or less because I already love each of them to the limit of my human capacity to love. And God’s love has no limit.

My children have also brought my beliefs about God and faith into sharper relief. In passing on our Catholic, Christian faith, I cannot in good conscience pass on that which I have after prayerful reflection determined that I cannot accept. I have worked hard to consider and understand faith and to reflect upon it. This challenge has thus called me to a more intense interiority and prayer life, a more present experience of God.

Fatherhood is a great teacher of a core Christian value: humility. Certainly, changing diapers is a humbling experience. Likewise, working on fifth grade math has been an invitation to humility for me. It is through these types of experiences in ordinary life that we are reminded of our humanness and the expanse of God.

My vocation is fatherhood. It animates my life in a way that nothing else does. I know that it is what God wants for me. I know that it is my sacred duty to do my best with the lives that God has entrusted to my care. And I am filled with gratitude.

CORNELIAN MINISTRIES UPDATE

Cornelian Ministries has been focusing on developing our Cornelian Volunteer program. We are pleased to announce that we have three Cornelian Volunteers. Two have completed projects for other non-profit ministries: Jay Wieckowski revised the personnel policies for South Central Los Angeles Ministry Project and Carolyn Hathaway developed a donor database for Cornelia’s Neighbors and trained the Executive Director on use of various computer programs.

We are working to fulfill many requests: an architect for a

design committee for a new middle school; artists to develop an afterschool arts program for a community center; business people to develop marketing plans; communications experts to design brochures. We cannot fulfill them without your assistance!

If you feel called to be a Cornelian Volunteer or know someone who has expertise to share and would benefit from such an experience, please have them contact me, Suzanne O’Grady, via email at sograd@cornelianministries.org or by phone at 610-527-9170

REFLECTION

We have two articles dealing with children. One discusses Cornelia, Pierce, their children and the situation faced as a result of the parents’ decisions. In the other, a father talks of the impact his children have had on his life – emotionally and spiritually.

As we celebrate Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, what experiences do you recall with your parents? Do you recall your experiences with happiness? With gratitude?

Not all our memories of parents are happy. Sometimes, we recall hurtful situations. Are your memories hurtful? What can be done to heal the pain? Have you prayed for the grace to forgive the actions that caused pain?

How have your children affirmed your faith?

CONNECTING WITH CORNELIA AND CHARISM: CORNELIA AND HER CHILDREN – *Judith Lancaster, SHCJ*

That Cornelia did not ‘abandon’ her children is a fact that Holy Child sisters and others who speak of Cornelia are constantly reaffirming. Yet it is a strand in the telling of her story that has a long and persistent history. The suggestion that Cornelia ‘had given up her children’ was first made soon after her death by Maria Joseph Buckle, her earliest biographer. When Mary Francis Bellasis read what had been written, she made a note in the margin: ‘This expression is not correct, she never gave up her children, they were taken away from her care and responsibility by Mr. Connelly at the time of his defection.’

And yet the idea that Cornelia did give them up persists even today. Just recently, in a reasonably scholarly book, I came across this strange summary of Cornelia’s life:

Connolly (*sic*) has been considered to be highly influential and innovative in the setting up of high standards of education for girls and accounts of the unusual circumstances surrounding her choice of religious life, her former marriage, her husband’s court proceedings seeking restitution of conjugal rights and her curious treatment of her younger children (who were put into care so that she could pursue the religious life) is well documented...¹

‘Put into care’ is an expression that neither Cornelia nor any of her contemporaries would have understood. And, in any case, the Connelly children were never ‘put into care’: after their parents’ separation they were either at boarding school or living at home with their father. Quite apart from this inaccuracy, however, the author is clearly making a comment about Cornelia, suggesting that she made a choice between religious life and motherhood and that she set aside her children in order to become a religious.

Of course, she didn’t. We can easily demonstrate that from her own letters and from the comments of other people. But the problem of the children, of what happened to them, of their separation from their mother and their suffering from their parents’ choices remains. For many people it is a stumbling block to liking Cornelia or finding in her an inspiration for their own living of the Christian life.

Not long ago I shared Cornelia’s story with a young mother of my acquaintance. Her reaction was strong, and not untypical of other women I have met. She identified Cornelia with herself, a wife and mother, and she could not believe that God could possibly have wanted Cornelia to be separated from her children. She had children of her own. She would go to the ends of the earth for them. Nothing, nothing, could be more important than the children. And, as the children were gifts from God, it could not be Godly for her to imagine that God would call her to put some other task before her relationship with them. So, why had this not been Cornelia’s reaction also? How could she live separated from her children? Why had she not given up everything, anything, to be with them?

These are big questions, too big to be explored fully in an article of this length. They lead us into the area of discernment. Were the Connellys’ choices well discerned? If they were, what are we to say of the damage to the children that followed? If we decide they were not, what are we to say of the good that has been achieved by all who have loved and listened to Cornelia in the years since?

For me, these are much more important issues than the language about ‘abandoning’ the children. Cornelia did not abandon the children; they were taken from her. But the outcome for the children was much the same: they had to live without their mother. And the outcome for Cornelia was much the same, too: she had to live without them. What was going on for her as she lived out that choice? Did she come to regret it? Was she always confident that it had been the most Godly thing to do?

And, as the inheritors of Cornelia’s vision and spirituality, how do we feel about the suffering that our conception, so to speak, caused Cornelia’s living children? Poor Mercer was left miserable at Stonyhurst, falling further behind in his studies with every week that passed, and died of yellow fever at the age of 20, totally alienated from the mother he had adored. Adeline was transferred from boarding school in England to boarding school in France and then spent the greater part of her adult life living with her father in a state of immaturity

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¹ Barbara Walsh, *Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales 1800-1937, A Social History* (Dublin and Portland, Or: Irish Academic Press, 2002) p.199.

Retreat Schedule 2004

Location	Dates * tentative	Contact
Charlotte, NC	October 15 - 17	Pat & Willa Izzo (304.497.2001; wilpat@frontiernet.net)
Midwest/Chicago	October 15 - 17*	Kathleen Popit, SHCJ (847.625.1573)
Northwest	Fall 2004*	Connie Bush (212.982.2287; cbush@connellycenter.org)
Pilgrimage Retreat in 2005		
Grand Coteau, LA	January 14 – 16	See enclosed flyer.

REGIONAL RETREATS: WASHINGTON, D.C. & ROSEMONT

Two weekend retreats were held during the spring: Washington D.C. in April and Rosemont, PA in May. It seems that when people break the bread of their lives reflecting on Cornelia's experience and their own, it is a sign that the SHCJ Associates are a work of the Spirit and a gift to people's lives. Both retreats were very positive and enriching experiences. Here are some random moments of connection and grace:

- One woman noted that "the opportunity to reflect aloud and prayerfully contemplate the response of others on the journey of faith is a gift for which I am sincerely grateful."

- Reflecting on Cornelia's experience of losing both parents and a brother by the time she was 14 led several retreatants to share how their own early experiences of deaths of family members affected and shaped them.

- One retreatant commented that the religious experience of her childhood was dominated by frightening images of the crucifixion and martyred saints. Cornelia was her first experience of a real and attractive person who spoke to her own life.

- At Rosemont, the liturgy celebrant spoke of Jesus' passion for unity; he invited those gathered to share their passion for the Holy Child Associates. One offered that the different charisms of religious congregations have been likened to different ecosystems and that the Holy Child charism was for her a very beautiful garden to invite others into.

These thoughts don't begin to capture the richness of the weekends; the satisfaction of friendships formed or strengthened. All agreed the retreats were a step on the journey toward formation for the Holy Child Associates.

CONNECTING WITH CORNELIA AND CHARISM

(Continued from page 3)

and dependence that scandalised even her nineteenth century uncles. Frank never knew his mother after he was five or so. Two or three visits with Cornelia when he was an adult are known of, and on every occasion the nuns speak of the pain and suffering of both mother and son. He accused her of loving the nuns more than she loved him. What anguish that must have caused her, and how clear it must have seemed to him...

One message of this whole tragic business may be that it is not possible to make perfect choices, that there is not always a clearly good choice, sometimes not really much of a choice at all. We are called to make the most Godly choices that we can. And when, humanly speaking, we get things wrong, we can learn from Cornelia's strong example to continue to cling to the God who always loves and sustains us.

The next newsletter is planned for August. Do you have any news or regional announcements for fall 2004?
Please forward to SHCJ Associates Newsletter, 460 Shadeland Ave, Drexel Hill, PA 19026 or e-mail: cquinn@shcj.org.
Please mark e-mail subject line "Associates Newsletter."