In early 2015, Associates across the Society spent time reflecting and sharing about how we understand our relationship with the Society in our country or province. We now share the findings of these reflections. Goal 7 of the Society’s Strategic Plan asks that Sisters and Associates: Articulate how the relationship has evolved and how we now understand it in light of the diversity across the Society.

Hopefully, Associates and Sisters will embark on new conversations that move us deeper into how we understand the relationship in “light of the diversity across the Society”. All reflections will provide rich insights for an international coordinating group of Associates meeting in Rome this October.

(Left) Associates from Melrose, MA with Sr. Mary Samson; (Above) Associates from Dominican Republic
1. What are the gifts and graces of being a Holy Child Associate?

(American Associates)

• Being an Associate has fulfilled a deep yearning to be more prayerful, more in touch with the sacred, more in tune with gratitude, more reflective. Awareness of God’s presence in the world, in my life and in me.

• The grace to deepen my spirituality in collaboration with the SHCJ Sisters, and to be a witness of God’s love.

• Community of people with shared commitment, mission.

• Peace and joy of companions on the journey.

• Practical consciousness of living the incarnational spirituality in our daily individual and collective lives.

• Love visibly in action as we relate and respect every life in each other’s humanity and nature.

• Spirit of simplicity and the grace to be cognizant of the Cornelian legacy.

• Being able to be in relationship with the Sisters has been an incredible blessing in my life. I feel the love and support of the Sisters who have embraced me and given me a spiritual home.

• Having a renewed sense of being united with the Society and all of my very dear friends in the Society.

• The flow of God’s grace through Sisters.

(Associates in Dominican Republic and Chile)

• Coming to know the Holy Child Sisters, praying with them and extending the spirit of the Society to others.

• Getting to know Cornelia, taking inspiration from her.

• Being part of the Holy Child family and part of the local group of Associates.

• Forging friendships and feeling the affection of other Associates.

• Deepened faith in the person of Jesus and feeling his presence; coming to know the love of Christ so as to take it to family and others.

• Growing as a person and discovering in myself capacities I didn’t know I had.

• Becoming an Associate, I fell in love with the Child Jesus whom I didn’t know. I saw his suffering, his humility, poverty, simplicity, his relation to his Father God and his Spirit. I saw him grow to adulthood.

• Provides us with a larger family and a refuge for prayer.

• Giving us a common language to express our spiritual aspirations and our emotions.

• Has supported us in the strengthening our personal prayer.

• Being faithful to the Associate promises is an opportunity to devote more time to God.

(Associates in Africa)

• Gives me an opportunity to be part of a particular spirituality in the Church as a lay woman.

• Gives me the opportunity to share in the spirit and mission of SHCJ as a laywoman and to advance it in whatever way I can.

• Commitment to personal prayer and reflection.

• Spiritual development.

• Ministry that grows out of the spirituality with focus of finding God in all things and helping other to do the same.

• The incarnational spirituality of the child Jesus.

• Respect for human dignity.

• Pillars of association: commitment to personal prayer and reflection; spiritual development; ministry which grows out of the spirituality with the focus of finding God in all things and helping other to do the same; and promoting community life.
2. What are key elements of being an Associate?

**European Associates**
- We agreed it offered each one an opportunity to share and foster their own Cornelian spirituality, with connection to the Society and SHCJ communities. This gives support from being with like-minded people, and provides information and inspiration by the work and witness of each member.
- The witness of dedication to love in action and joyfulness of a world-wide community leads to the empowerment of women and men.
- It also gives us hope for the Church we want for the future.
- Cornelia makes the Gospel real.

**Chilean Associates**
- Prayer, perseverance, commitment, responsibility, unconditional love, humility with self and others, witness, service, and friendship.
- Learning to listen.
- Feeling God’s love and extending it to others.
- Reflecting Cornelia’s attitudes and values in my life, having things in common with her.
- Valuing self and the neighbor.
- Concern for the other; seeing Christ alive in the other.
- Strong formation in the history and spirit of the SHCJ.
- Acceptance of sacrifice, pain sustained with love; accepting the will of God.

**Associates in Africa**
- Simplicity, humility, ‘egalité’ of heart.
- Living out the spirit of Cornelia.
- To help in the growth of the SHCJ by promoting vocation.
- To encourage more Associates to join in the work of evangelization.
- Associates are people of diverse backgrounds and culture.
- To seek justice and also ensure that there is fair play in the society where we live and work.
- People are allowed to be themselves and to grow into what God wants them to be because of the incarnational spirituality.
- They are people from all walks of life – professionally equipped to carry out various responsibilities.

**American Associates**
- Prayer and contemplation, returning always to the Spirit for refreshment.
- Interconnectedness amongst the Associates far and wide.
- A worldwide network/web of companions in prayer and faith; being in relationship with SHCJ Sisters, Associates and ministries; community, part of a local, national and global group
- Gathering with local Associates; praying together; no pressure and can just be ourselves and being who God wants us to be-developing our gifts and talents; relationship and just showing up!
- Deep conversation and faith sharing.
- Community – international connection with faith and hope.
- Relationship with God.
- Humility of self in service to others.
- Simplicity.
- Being grounded in a strong understanding of incarnational spirituality.
- Being committed to living a life through prayer and action that reflect the SHCJ mission and vision wherever we live.
- Continually open to God’s grace (Evolving, powerful dynamic) and using graces to meet the wants of the ages (no need to fear).
- Expressing that charism in the lay experience as a complement to its expression by religious Sisters.
- Familiarity with the charism of Cornelia, expressed very well through the four “compass points.”
- Making a conscious effort to “meet the wants of the age.”
- Service and action in the world toward justice, peace, and creation care.
- Committing to the Society’s mission.
- Helping to support the mission in the DR and/or tie-in with SHCJs Ministry.
- Sense of contributing to the mission of the Church.
3. What does "Holy Child" mean?

(American Associates)

• Jesus before his ministry, before his death and resurrection – Jesus, in fact, very much like one of us, a person growing in the world.

• Child of God; Child that IS God; God became man; sharing our humility.

• God’s word coming to life in the form of a vulnerable, innocent, all loving, all accepting infant and child.

• Love and joy and pain and vulnerability and all that goes into a parent/child relationship and being a child of God.

• Innocence and kindness-being able to keep that as an adult, the chapter about moving from being good to greatness.

• Acknowledges the mystery and wonder of God's presence in our world. It is an empowering reminder that where there is life, no matter how fragile, there is always God-given hidden potential.

(Associates in Chile)

• Littleness, tenderness, dependence, needing love.

• Needing others for everything, fragility, strength, vulnerability, purity, innocence, joy, happiness, and simplicity.

• He is Savior, Messiah, Son of the living God, love itself, life, salt and light of the world.

• He is my brother and my faithful friend.

• He came to teach us to live in his peace, joy and love.

What do you think it meant for Cornelia?

(American Associates)

• "Holy Child" means God's infinite love for mankind revealed in the child Jesus. I believe it meant the same for Cornelia, but expressed in different terms.

• For Cornelia God is found in the ordinary, the vulnerable, the daily, the intimate life of people together. I also think that Cornelia’s particular life and suffering tied her deeply to the bond of Mary and Jesus, the terrible pain of the Blessed Mother over the death of her Son.

• Because of a mother's love and heartbreak; the heartache of Pierce; though Cornelia was humble, hurting and marginalized, the Humble Baby Jesus preserved her spirit through her “hell on earth” separation of her own children.

• God is revealed to and as humankind in the form of a child, a holy child; our great epiphany. God chose the Word to become flesh through the miracle of birth. Just as this Child would suffer and die, Cornelia’s child would also suffer and die. Contemplation on this connection perhaps helped her survive this loss.

(Chilean Associates)

• Son like Cornelia’s own son; enclosing all God’s love; the Father made visible in the Son.

• A constant reminder of her own son’s tragic death; consolation in sorrow; suffering accepted in love; total self-giving.

• Cornelia saw incarnated in her own life the suffering of the Holy Child.

• The Child was a challenge to go own growing in humility and self-giving.

Why do you think she wanted it as our title?

(American Associates)

• Perhaps she chose the SHCJ to help us remember how much God loves us as it is manifested in the life of Jesus and the human experience he had.

• God's love and beauty of creation can be seen in a child and perhaps Cornelia wanted us to see Jesus's face and love in all of God’s creations, especially in those so in need of our help with food, clean water, medical care, and just our presence. God has given us unique gifts to contribute to our community to make it a better place.

• And I think she wanted her Society to be witness to all the joy and pain of human life, and to express it through a ministry of love and care.

• Cornelia may have wanted the title “Holy Child” as a constant reminder to herself and her Sisters of the grace of submission to the will of God.

• I think she wanted the title because of her attraction to the mystery of the incarnation. She wanted the Society to reflect the traits of the Holy Child Jesus – humility, simplicity, charity, joy; to imitate Christ.

• Cornelia has a mother's appreciation of children.
PHOTOS FROM THIS YEAR

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: AMERICAN ASSOCIATES BID FAREWELL TO SR. VERONICA GROVER; EUROPEAN ASSOCIATES IN RETREAT; AMERICAN ASSOCIATES DURING RETREAT; DOMINICAN ASSOCIATES GATHERING; AND EUROPEAN ASSOCIATES GIVING AND RECEIVING HAND MASSAGES AS PART OF A DAY’S REFLECTION.
4. Looking to the future, what are essential components of the Associate relationship?

**(European Associates)**

- We share the same charism and we need to offer a partnership for mutual support. We have a formation programme, but we are reliant on the Society to share in this, as well as with resources, literature, communication, website, themes and material for spiritual development. We need the Society members for spiritual direction, and we welcome our inclusion in preparation for the Chapter.

- We need to find practical ways to gather and disseminate information about each associate province structure, as well as how each functions, so we can identify any common components.

- Each province will need to maintain its own identity, as for each the context is different and important. Each has to develop at its own pace.

- Our relationship with the Society needs to change. Where we were led by the Society we now need to move towards leading ourselves.

**(Associates in Dominican Republic)**

- Decentralization of Associates regarding the Sisters of SHCJ.

- Consensus among Associates with regard to choice of themes for reflection and activities.

- Globalization of Associates creating a communication structure between all Associates.

- We need to become more independent of the Sisters, but we have a desire to be part of the SHCJ family.

- Constitution offfor the Associates.

- Continue maintaining our sense of family.

- Maintain the level of confidentiality in our sharing.

- Use the contemplative dialogue on our sharing.

- Begin to build autonomy.

- Build an organizational team.

- Take greater initiative.

**(Associates in Chile)**

- Communication, persevering commitment, self-examination on both sides; union; means toward mutual growth.

- Getting to know one another better; caring for one another; two-sided interchange of information.

- Having goals/projects both groups take on and work toward together.

- Growth in understanding and living the charism.

- Evaluation of the relationship between associates and SHCJ.

**(American Associates)**

- Need a way to keep our Associates connected to the Sisters if they don’t have a Sister as part of their group for added support, wisdom, knowledge, and prayer of the Society.

- Genuine feeling of oneness and interdependence amongst the Sisters and Associates.

- The Associates in the US have a different future than those who live where younger women are still finding religious vocations. An essential component for the future will be the “internationality” of the Society, and the interweaving of our lay vocation with the religious vocations of younger Sisters. Associates have a very important job to do in making sure that the work of the Sisters in the US is carried forward within the Society as a whole.

- Supporting Sisters not just receiving support from the Society.

- Mutual support through shared spiritual growth, vision, mission, and resources.

- Sharing God’s love for us through fellowship, reflection and service; Communication; simultaneous retreats, prayers, carrying on what the Sisters have begun.

- Ways for Associates to visit Associates and Sisters in other places.

- Connection worldwide but in our own way and know we are part of something larger, faith and togetherness, carrying on the charism prayer reflection.

- A tangible ‘doing’ of a project to fulfill a specific need.

- Intentional support and commitment to the ministries that each Associate participates in.

- Cornelia’s story cannot be the only focus of the Associate relationship. As new Associates come into formation, more emphasis should be placed on our role in the world as advocates for the things Cornelia wanted to see realized.

- Access to history and info on Cornelia Connelly.

- SHCJ Associates must continue to collaborate with lay associates of other orders and with interfaith groups who share a common mission with the Society and the Church.

- Accepting the power being given to us by God to use this opportunity most wisely.
5. As we move forward, are there elements of the Associate relationship of which we can let go?

(American Associates)
- Dependence on Sisters – need to move beyond having a Sister as the main presence of local groups.
- Need to let go of thinking regionally but rather embrace and act in a broader sense of our internationality as Associates.
- Simplify or eliminate different forms/categories of Association.
- Focus on Cornelia Connelly rather than her legacy today.
- Any areas of mistrust or fears between Associates and Sisters can be let go. Also, if there are any perceptions that the Associates are like the “stepchildren” of the SHCJ, my hope is that they are let go, so the relationship can be more horizontal than vertical and respects the dignity and contributions of all who are called to share in this vision and mission as co-equal partners.

(Chilean and Dominican Republic Associates)
- Prejudice across cultures.
- Become economically independent in relation to the Congregation.
- Let go of the fear of risking.
- Leave your comfort zone.
- Leave behind the attitude that I don’t have to assume responsibility.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Associates Michelle Dugan, Betsy Keating and Maria O. Nwosu, from the American, European and African provinces respectively, were invited to join the SLT and SHCJ province representatives in Nemi, Italy for a “think tank” conference on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

From April 22-24, the group shared discussion of current JPIC initiatives and collaborated on goals for the work ahead. Human trafficking, climate change, and the plight of migrants and refugees were focal points of concern. The Society plans to continue its membership of UNANIMA, an NGO representing international congregations of women religious at the United Nations (UN). Mary Akinwale, SHCJ, who represents the Society on the board of UNANIMA, hopes to further communication back and forth between the Sisters and Associates who are working on JPIC issues and the members of UNANIMA.

Perhaps the most moving moments of the conference occurred as we experienced two versions of Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner’s poem entitled ‘Dear Matafele Peinam’ presented at the UN by the poet herself and also on You Tube accompanied by photographs of her endangered home in the Marshall Islands. This impassioned plea by a mother to her child puts a human face on the threat of climate disaster, bringing us to tears and firing our zeal to protect the Earth, God’s sacred creation.

The JPIC team eagerly anticipates the upcoming encyclical from Pope Francis as an inspiration for shared reflection and action on creation care throughout the Society.
6. Is something missing for you as an Associate?

(American Associates)

• As an Associate I do miss that presence of Cornelia through the Sisters, but we need to bring that out of each other and share it with everyone in our midst.

• Although some use the community as a well to refresh after serving in individual ministries, some seek a common local or national or international action to help define us.

• Need to adapt our thinking more broadly as one, e.g., not US Associates or British Associates.

• Global dimension for prayer requests.

• Getting word out about Cornelia, Holy Child to others.

• Younger Associates.

• As the Society transitions is the Associate vision big enough? What is our identity and/or are we being called to reframe it?

(Associates from Dominican Republic)

• Create a pastoral social service with training included to face the realities that arise when performing this service.

• Become more active within the parish; participate as the group of Associates.

• Return to offering an orientation to Cornelians.

• Increased participation in the mission of the SHCJ Sisters or our own personal service.

• Increase our humility and courage.

• Respect our brothers when sharing, keeping our opinions to ourselves until later.

• A greater dedication to attending every meeting.

(Associates in Chile)

• Communication with those at a distance and the alienated.

• On-going formation.

• Perseverance.

• Recruitment of new and younger Associates.

• Spiritual growth and fidelity to prayer.

• Getting to know Christ more personally in himself and in the other. Every other is a different Christ, said one Associate.

• Concern one for another; union of hearts and minds.

• Attendance at meetings.

• Praying together; sharing.

• A common ministry/service; apostolic zeal; action to back up our words.

• As Associates, we have a distance to go to reach Cornelia’s ideal.