

BRIGIDINE LIFE and MISSION UNFOLDING

... *Links with current realities*



How might we look to the future with realism and with hope?

We need to look at our cities (our communities) with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares.

(Evangelii Gaudium 71)

Excerpts from an interview with Margaret Wheatley entitled *Living a Discerning Life in a Complex, Harsh World* in LCWR Summer 2014. She highlights the capacities of religious women to deal with change while working for positive change in the world

Q. Women religious are dedicated to bringing religious life forward in a form that meets the current needs of the world and anticipates how it might meet the needs of the future. You have noted that thinking forward is impossible for people fearfully reacting to the present moment. Would you say more about how fear prevents us from thinking forward and hinders our ability to discern wise action for the future?

I want to first say something about fear. There is a wonderful quote by the Persian writer Hafiz who said, "Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I would like to see you living in better conditions." Fear is the simplest place to occupy, and what is so bizarre about fear is that it is never found in the present moment. The paradox here is if we want to think forward we cannot do it from a position of fear, yet all our fear comes from thinking about the future. Fear comes from how we interpret the past and how we worry about what will happen in the future.

The first supposition about thinking forward free from fear is to be fully present in this moment, as well as open to all the information that is out there. Fear gives us such terrible lenses by which to view the future; it can become quite terrifying. When I find myself in fear, I try to come back to the present moment and what is going on right here, right now. What do I have? Who am I? Who is around me? I work at trying to prevent my mind from going into some future fear-filled state. This also works when you are trying to de-

velop a strategy for the future or think about who you want to be in the future. First, you have to take full stock of what you have right now. This gives us a really amazing capacity then to think forward.

Fear has also become a deliberate political strategy. We are told that we have a lot of enemies and are presented with a lot of fearful prospects for the future. What is interesting is that some of those fearful prospects are true, such as those around climate change. But when we are presented with those facts in the context of fear, we tend to say, "Well, we can't do anything about this anyway, so let's just lead a great life while we can."

Is there a potential you see in women religious that we should perhaps attend to more?

For a number of years I had been speaking about organizations that take all their direction from their strong sense of values. In 1992, one of my colleagues told me that if I was going to continue talking about such organizations, I should be working with two groups: the military and women religious. I have worked with both, and he was right. Both of these groups are comprised of people who have a strong sense of commitment to their values, and of course very different means to achieve ends.

**This
Graced
Moment:

Divine
Energy
animating
fresh
possibilities**

As I got to know sisters, I found they were the strongest can-do leaders on the planet. I came up with a slogan years ago which was: If you want it done, ask a nun. Sisters never seem to say no, you all seem to just make it work. I have loved that. I also love the focus on charism, as well as ritual and liturgy. You have the means to create a strong container to hold your separate activities and work in the world. I loved learning what it means to bear witness and to stand with. All of this was so new to me at the time I first met sisters, but now it is just a part of who I am. I also love the fact that sisters pray for me, and I really feel those prayers.

Another valuable lesson I have learned from you is how to create community. A number of years ago I was physically and emotionally exhausted and went on my first-ever spiritual retreat (in a Benedictine community). While on the retreat I met a sister who knew of my work. I was telling her how much I was out in the world working, traveling a great deal, moving from place to place. She just looked at me and said: "You need a community!" It was like a mother saying to a child: you need a coat on, it's cold out there. That understanding of community has really attracted me. One of the greatest needs we all have is coming back together and supporting one another in a very difficult time.

How do we want to be together, to support one another, and also help one another do great work in the world? This is a question that is percolating in a lot of places, and it isn't just focused on women religious. It's a question for me personally. I have a large family, so I feel I have support. But it is critical to also find a community where I would feel supported spiritually.

From all the work you have done with women religious and all the potential you see, are there any liabilities that you have observed that may also hold us back?

I would say a liability is believing the negative messages about yourselves that are directed to you. My observation is that those messages do not come from those you serve, but from elsewhere. My suggestion is that you look at the source of the negative messages before you accept and give attention

to them. It's not easy to avoid internalizing the negative, but I think we do that by observing from where it comes.

There is a great quote from Buddha who said nearly 2600 years ago: "They criticize the silent ones; they criticize the talkative ones. There is no one in the world who escapes criticism." As women stand up more and more in settings all around the world, we are getting more and more criticism. This is part of the last stages of desperation in any organization or culture. We strike out at one another, seeking to blame the others rather than examine ourselves. It is part of the times in which we live.



**As a community,
learning what it means to bear
witness and to stand for justice
for our planet and for the
marginalized in our society**

*"As Earth makes fresh things grow, as a garden makes seeds spring up,
so will God's integrity and justice spring forth." Isaiah 61:11)*

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2016 CONGREGATIONAL FORUM