

BRIGIDINE LIFE and MISSION UNFOLDING

... Making the Connections 2



The 2014 Council of the Congregation challenged us to look more deeply at the underlying and connecting vision and spirit at the heart of the Congregational Forum Directions.

In a recent interview with theologian Ilia Delio, she was asked:

What are some of the new influences that you would encourage religious women to explore?

Our foundress (founder) began our community and it has always been a little chaotic as time unfolded, as social conditions changed, and the church changed with Vatican 11. We have been attentive to the signs of the times, and now see the needs of women in the Third World or we see we are living in a Muslim neighbourhood, or that our pluralistic world calls for new patterns of relationships” for example. Evolution is a process of moving toward a more complex life, that is, a greater degree of relatedness, more consciousness and deeper union. It is important to attend to what is happening in our midst, what are the new patterns of relationship that are drawing us to something new and deeper, that is, more love, more relatedness, more Christ-like. I think all of culture and society today is calling us into new patterns of relationships. Technology has ushered in a consciousness of globalization where we find ourselves aware of a diversity of people around the globe. What does this mean for us as Catholic Christians? John Haughey, SJ has defined the word “catholic” as whole-maker. We are to be whole-makers in this globalized world.



What is your image of church that embraces the new understanding of evolution?

I like the idea of re-imagining the church. The church is not an object to which we either belong or abstain from, rather, it is a living body, and therefore has, like every living body, the capacity to change. It has the capacity to be wounded, to suffer, to rise again. I have hope that the church can be a living presence of Christ in this unfolding universe. But at present the church has a medieval structure that hasn't changed in 1600 years. We need to ask what of the tradition is meaningful and what needs to become open to change, in order to respond to a world in evolution.

What would you anticipate happening if we do not embrace these new understandings of life, the universe, God?

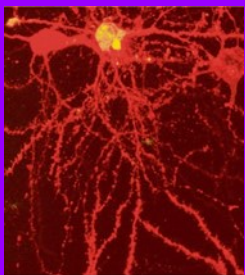
It wouldn't be good. I think we have to look back over the great span of 13.7 billion years of evolution and see that there have been vast amounts of destruction – cosmic destruction and biological destruction... It may be helpful to revisit the costliness of Christian life – what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called costly grace as opposed to cheap grace. What are we willing to spend of our lives so that Christian evolution can become a greater reality for ourselves, for the church, for the world? Are we willing to step outside our comfort zones and risk new things for the church to evolve? It is costly – the whole of evolution is costly. All along the way, creatures have been sacrificed for our life to come into being. If we do not have a consciousness of the costliness of life, we have no sense of evolution, or the gospel for that matter. We have domesticated the gospel, made it comfortable and adaptable to our needs.

I am still getting my head and heart around our life with God in this universe. We still tend to think of our life with God in this universe as something “up there”, wherever there is ... the startling reality is that evolution and God belong together. We have always been within God, within the cosmic whole, and we are destined to be with God for all eternity. I think the last will be much more exciting than “eternal rest”.

**This
Graced
Moment:

Divine
Energy
animating
fresh
possibilities**

Brain cell



Universe

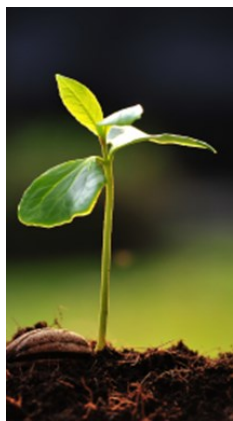
Sr. Clare Nolan is the International Justice Training Coordinator for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. She supports a project in Kolwezi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, in a region scarred by more than 500 years of exploitation: first internal African slave markets, then outside exploitation of resources, from ivory to rubber extraction. Today exploitation and foreign dominance, coupled with corruption, continues.

Three Good Shepherd Sisters (not young) came in 2013 with a vision that included more opportunity for people to participate in society; empowerment; the reduction of abuse and violence. People started calling them “the walking sisters” because they went from location to location, home to home, asking questions and listening. As the sisters heard people’s hopes, they rolled up their sleeves. They opened an informal school known as the Child Development Project to which hundreds of children flocked each day and had plans for an agriculture co-operative, for fish farming, women’s groups and income projects for teens.

Six months later the Farm Alternative Livelihood program – training for an alternative to working in the mines –had materialised with extensive fields ploughed and corn was growing. The land was living, not disfigured. The Child Development Project with 600 children had several teachers, a child development coordinator, a nurse and a social worker. The nutrition program, once only one day per week, now covered five days. Through the Economic Empowerment, adolescent girls, who have lost so much of their childhood, were creating their own traditional dresses. Clare reports that amidst the stark “desperation and hope of globalization the ‘walking sisters’ are teaching her how to embrace our world with a tenderness that has the power to humanize.”

From 2008-2014 Australia’s ‘Big 4’ Banks—Westpac, NAB, ANZ & Commonwealth—have loaned \$19 billion to fossil fuel projects. Catholic Leaders of Religious Institutes (CLRI) NSW, in its newsletter *Watermark*, called on congregations to act by **divestment**— actively withdrawing money from institutions that are unethical.

EarthSong, transferred its finances from the Commonwealth. This action is part of a larger divestment campaign promoted by 350.org, ARRCC, Friends of the Earth, Get Up and others encouraging the withdrawal of finances from banks which are investing in fossil fuel development.



What have you noticed here about religious women living, praying and working in ways that reflect something of the new consciousness? In what ways are we invited ‘to get our heads and hearts around our life with God in this universe as we move into the future’?

Sisters across North America are conducting energy audits of their buildings and renovating them using earth-friendly standards, purchasing recycled paper products and nontoxic cleaning products, choosing hybrid cars for their fleets, sod-busting their land to restore native wetland or prairie, and supporting sustainable agriculture by choosing organic or locally sourced food over standard grocery fare. “We have a small window of opportunity to turn things around, to preserve the planet in some way,” said Sr. Maura Smith, a 60-year member of the Erie Regional Community of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. “Those of us in the upper reaches of adult life are doing what we can. It’s not a one-time fix. We have to change our lifestyles and change the way we do business if we are going to have a sustainable future.”

“As Earth makes fresh things grow, as a garden makes seeds spring up, so will God’s integrity and justice spring forth.” (Is 61:11)

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2016 CONGREGATIONAL FORUM