

Our World: A Context for Exploring the Evolution of Religious Life: Linda Haydock snjm

Good morning and good afternoon. I begin by thanking the Chapter Planning Committee, the PLT and Donna for extraordinary leadership in these unprecedented times and for pivoting to make this Chapter possible.

I have to admit, I was more than hesitant when the committee called me to share with you on the evolution of religious life. Then came the Covid crisis and the uprising on racism, and the committee said “Linda, we hope you will incorporate these realities into your presentation.” To be honest, after I listened to all the hopes rising from the committee, panic set in.

Today, I come as your sister, with a perspective that I hope will merge with our multiple perspectives as we pursue meaning making, as one province in our one SNJM congregation, as part of one Earth community.

In my first presentation, I will speak about our world and current reality as a context for exploring the evolution of religious life with **four** emerging trends.

In my second presentation, I will speak about how our congregation and province realities call us to live into the four trends and to embark on a transformational journey.

As we begin this journey all our dominant systems: economic; political; ecological social-cultural and ecclesial are breaking down. This we know.

In our world today, we have an **economic** system that is based on autonomy, anxiety and greed.¹

Our **political** systems have become a toxic mix of polarization, division and ideological fixation. Winning is more important than the welfare of people. The power and privilege of the few depends on the oppression of the many.

Our **social-cultural** systems are unraveling. Racism is raging. Sexism is sabotaging women everywhere. Our young worry about their future while elders struggle not to feel worthless.

Our **ecclesial** system is seeking relevance while deeply embedded in hierarchical and patriarchal systems thinking that binds and blinds the institutional church from the transforming power of God and liberating message of Jesus.

Our **ecological systems** are on life-support with species vanishing at an alarming rate.

Some people are anxious “to go back to normal after the corona virus. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than normalizing inequality, exhaustion, depletion and disconnection...,” Said so well by Sonya Renee Taylor.²

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. “From Anxiety and Greed to Milk and Honey.” *Sojourner Magazine*, February 2009.

² Sonya Renee Taylor. Tweet, April 2, 2020

This entire breakdown necessitates a **new story**, a systems breakthrough, a conscious evolution, a great turning!³ This great turning is a cultural and spiritual awakening. We must change the defining story, and create global community.⁴

Sisters let's ask ourselves: what is the story **we** want to live by?

Pope Francis says we are not "living an era of change but a change of era"⁵ and Thomas Berry says "we are in between stories."⁶

It has been over fifty years since we had a dramatic change of story as woman religious in the Vatican II era. Now once again, the story is changing for us. How is the evolution of religious life manifesting itself? I will name four specific ways that religious life is responding to the signs of the times and the call of the people and planet. A few things bare repeating from the time of our CLT visits.

Global Sisterhood and Solidarity:

In our globalized and multicultural world, our common mission as women religious gives us a unique opportunity to network and leverage our resources, both human and material.

The presence of sisters with migrants in Sicily, which Pat Murray spoke of in her LCWR presentation, was comprised of sisters from eight congregations and nine countries who were called to respond to a global need in a local context. Perhaps one of our Basotho or Peruvian sisters may be among the next ones called to a new kind of inter-congregational mission. Global sisterhood makes this possible. Talitha Kum, the global movement of religious in 90 countries and 34 networks to end human trafficking is making enormous strides. Common purpose and technology: **hope is rising**.

Our solidarity across congregations, different cultural groups, and collaborating organizations is gaining strength as we deepen our intercultural learning and living. Through relationship building across language, interfaith and diverse cultural contexts, religious life of the future is moving toward a smaller, intercultural and intergenerational way of being.

Collaboration and Partnership for the sake of life and mission:

Sr. Laurentina Motseki from Lesotho just finished an inter-congregational formator training program in Rome, and by the way, she was just elected the Provincial of the Lesotho Province. Recently, I was on Zoom with 796 sisters primarily from the Conference of Latin American

³ Terry Patten, *New Republic of the Heart: An Ethos for Revolutionaries—A Guide to Inner Work for Holistic Change*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2018

⁴ David Korten, *The Great turning: From Empire to Earth Community*. Kumarian: Bloomfield, Berrett-Koehler: San Francisco, 2006.

⁵ Pope Francis. "Address to the National Conference of the Italian Church, Florence." November 10, 2015.

⁶ Thomas Berry. *The Dream of the Earth*. Berkley: Sierra Club, 1988, 2015.

Religious (CLAR),⁷ and on another Zoom with hundreds of religious from Western Europe and LCWR to explore the call of religious today and into the future. The consensus amidst our diversity? For the sake of the mission and those on the margins, we must go from autonomy to solidarity, from collaboration to partnership and from Earth destroying practices to life sustaining care of Earth, our home.⁸

Hope is rising when this past month a Dominican Sisters collaboration invested \$46 million to seed the new Climate Solution Funds. The Tacoma Dominicans, a covenanted community, with few members and few resources participated. This **is** hope rising for our planet.

Hope is rising when we collaborate with and support the vision of young emerging leaders. Let's watch this short video clip of Valerie Kaur, Divinity and Law school educated community activist at a watch night service at Metropolitan AME in Washington D.C.⁹

It is with woman like Valarie, those in our educational ministries, and all in our SNJM ecosystem, that collaboration in mission is possible. For the viability and vitality of religious life, partnership is a non-negotiable.

Charism of Religious Life:

Any young sister or new member in North America knows that the future is trans-charism, trans-cultural and trans-community. This is not to the diminishment or detriment of any one charism, but rather a richer, fuller call to live out the expansiveness of offering our shared charisms to the world. Thank you to our Peruvians for living ministry on the margins with many groups and congregations. **Hope is rising.**

Embracing our Vulnerability:

Margo Richie, a member of our Canadian religious leaders' group, invites us to ask, "What If **all our years** of religious life, do not diminish what it is we are offering with our lives, but rather **magnify** what is ours to offer?"¹⁰ This is a shift in mindset and heart-set.

What if **simplicity** for us is a new source of energy, not a reduction of our lives?

In our **stillness**, who we have been, who we are and who we will be emerges.

In our **humility**, we combine our sense of a meaningful contribution with the awareness that we are part of a greater whole.

⁷ International Union of Superiors General. "Re-imagining the Future: Religious life in Latina American and the Caribbean," Conference of Latina American Religious (CLAR)."Zoom, June 12, 2020

⁸ International Union of Superiors General. "Re-imagining the Future: Religious Life in the USA." May 12, 2020

⁹ Valarie Kaur, "Sermon at the National Moral Revival Watch Night Service." YouTube, February 8, 2017, Youtube.com/watch?v=qQ7QIKG70LE

¹⁰ Richie, CSJ Margo. "Deepening the Field of Integrity." *The Occasional Papers*, Winter 2018

In our **interdependence** we hold our paradoxes with curiosity and creativity. This way the elephants in our SNJM and religious life living rooms, evoke our imaginations rather than provoking our frustrations. It is part of our prophetic vocation to keep alive the ministry of imagination.¹¹

Sisters, let us remember, in this time when tsunami-size change is necessary, being **small** and vulnerable has the potential to contribute to significant change.

Let me illustrate with a new perspective on a familiar bread-making metaphor. In an earlier era of religious life or organizing, we would say a tipping point happens when we have a critical mass: more people; more sisters. In our emerging understanding of an evolutionary and interconnected concept of systems change, it is the “who” not the “how many” that is the difference maker. In bread making, flour is the largest ingredient, the mass. The smallest ingredient is the yeast. The yeast makes all the rest grow. Smallness has nothing to do with the potential to make change happen. However, the yeast must be mixed thoroughly with all the other ingredients. Bread bakers rarely see the first signs of growth as the answer to good bread. The growth must rise again and again, yes hope must rise again and again in spite of everything that pushes it down. The yeast is defined by its resiliency¹². As SNJMs, we can be the yeast that activates a new story.

Being **vulnerable** is a gift we bring. Let’s do a reality check. During this corona virus who among us is an essential worker? It’s essential now to ask ourselves, how will we become **essential** in the great turning, the new story?

I close with an excerpt from a Christopher Fry poem:

*“Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul we ever took.
Affairs are now soul-sized.
The enterprise is exploration into God.
Where are you making for? It takes
Some many thousand years to wake,
But will you wake for pity’s sake!”¹³*

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U.S.-Ontario Province Chapter
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¹¹ Lederach, John Paul. *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Peace Building*,

¹² Ibid

¹³ Fry, Christopher. *A Sleep of Prisoners*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951

Evolution of Religious Life—Our Congregation and Province

Let me begin our time with a very simple Congregational snap shot. Let's take a look at the slides.

We journey from 1843 with 3 members to 1859 with 72 members in the congregation, then a hundred-year leap to 1967 with 4643 sisters.

Today, just about fifty years later in 2020 we are 676 members in the Congregation and our projection for about 15 years into the future in 2036 is for 161 sisters in our congregation.

Let's look at a couple more slides of our coming reality in 2036. This is the profile of our SNJM provinces for people that are under 80.

The picture looks like this for sisters under 65 in 2036

We must ask ourselves, as we did earlier, with whom will we form partnerships for the sake of life and mission?

Clarissa Pinkola Estés says "I urge you, ask you, gentle you... do not lose hope, the fact is we were made for these times," as we choose to evolve ourselves, change our structures and live fully "The Life" we vow as women religious.¹⁴

The Earth Charter is clear "We stand at crucial moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise."¹⁵

Let's pause to consider our reality and then let's sing. You are all muted, so sing *In Every Age* with gusto.¹⁶

As we address the province needs and plan together, this time is not just about the call to leadership for a few of us, but it is a call to **all** of us to embrace the evolution of religious life, as I addressed earlier by:

- Joining in a **global sisterhood**, including with our own SNJM members and affiliates globally;
- **Collaborating** and **partnering** for the future;
- Living the **charism of religious life** and
- Naming, claiming and proclaiming our **vulnerability** as a gift that we have to offer as we stand in solidarity with those struggling for liberation in our world.

¹⁴ Pinkola Estés, Clarissa. "Letter to a Young Activist During Troubled Times." May 21, 2020. www.mavenproductions.com/letter-to-a-young-activist

¹⁵ Earth Charter Commission. "Earth Charter." 2000. www.earthcharter.org

¹⁶ Sullivan Whitaker, Janèt. "Land of the Living." Music CD, 2000

In our quest, what if the Corona Virus is the medicine we need and the Black Lives Matter movement is the call we heed in the evolution of religious life?

In the midst of this unprecedented Covid crisis and systemic injustice, incremental change is not sufficient. It will take radical change in us and in our world to transform the refugee crisis, environmental degradation, racism and every “ism” in our midst.

Where is hope rising?

“There is hope in the in the insightful observations of two soulful young people, Julia and Jonathan, who use the metaphor of metamorphosis for our time.

There is hope that what is dying is the caterpillar of immature humanity in order that the metamorphosis yields a **stunning emergence**. What results in this **initiation**? Our evolutionary process will be truer, more heart-connected, resilient and generative.” We SNJMs are entering a chrysalis moment. We don’t have all the answers to what happens next, but we are here with one another, albeit virtually, to explore the deep questions together.

Nature has lessons for us. The frenzy of the caterpillar or perhaps for us, our former lives, eventually give way to a process of dying, a mature surrender. This is our entrance into the paschal mystery. The **imaginal** cells in the process goo, link together, re-organize themselves and become the butterfly.

With initiation, there is transformation, there is an element of dying or shedding so we can become the butterfly. With most rituals of initiation, there is an uncertainty, we do not know what lies ahead, but we do know that the initial chrysalis phase is a sacred time.¹⁷

Our world, and SNJMs are in the midst of a critical initiation about our future and the evolution of religious life. Perhaps the world is in a time of a global chrysalis. The imaginal cells are appearing everywhere, in every corner of the world, people are rising, are marching, are providing small and large gestures that bring us hope for the great turning, creating a new story.

Yes, the virus may actually be a bitter medicine in this time. However, we are confident **hope is rising**.

Hope is rising when SNJMs, vulnerable as we may be, make a mask, make a statement, make it to a march, or make someone’s day while we shelter in place. This is our moment to make a difference.

I want to share a brief video clip from the movie *Harriet* about making a difference.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hartsell, Julie and Hadas Edwards, Jonathon. “True Health: What if the Virus is the Medicine.” *Kosmos Journal*, Spring 2020

¹⁸ Howard, Gregory Allen and Lemmons, Kasi. “Harriet.” Screen Play, September 10, 2019

In 1859 at the same time SNJMs were embarking on mission to Oregon, Harriet Tubman was conducting the Underground Railroad from Maryland to Ontario Canada in response to the Fugitive Slave Law.

These 160 years later, let's be inspired and moved by Harriet and our foundresses.

In the very near future, our new congregational Evolving Governance Committee will invite us to another new journey to deepen our expression of interdependence as an SNJM community and global citizens. Simultaneously our General Chapter Coordinating Committee will call us to a year-long General Chapter journey in partnership with others.

Our journeys, many over the years, required of us deep and abiding faith, hope and love in a God who will not abandon us on the journey. As the journey unfolds for religious life, the congregation and the province we will need to hone our mind sets, heart sets and skill sets. We will need to take a fierce look at reality, be agile, adaptable and act with foresight. Let's be confident that hope will rise in us for the journey.

Recently our PLT and CLT leadership teams had an opportunity to meet with Ted Dunn who accompanied us with resources from his new book *Graced Cross roads: Pathways to Deep Change and Transformation*.

Let me share just a few insights from our meeting and his book.

There is grief, loss and hard choices in the journey ahead. However, we can choose to create the conditions for the Spirit and grace to guide us. Quoting Helen Keller, Dunn says 'A bend in the road is not the end of the road, unless you fail to make the turn.' "Some communities will fail to make the turn, or wait until it is too late."¹⁹

From a CLT perspective, we know each province will need to attend to its emerging reality. Each will need to evolve in a way that fits its cultural milieu and circumstances but not in isolation or we will not make the bend in the road.

"We can't do in 10-15 years what we are doing today, or at least not in the same way. Change, Dunn suggests, is just a new arrangement of things. Transformation on the other hand is a process that shifts our patterns, practices, norms and values along with the structures to support them.

What could happen at a graced crossroads? All of us can name significant transformative experiences in our lives that give us glimpse of what is possible. Our personal and communal experiences of transformation usually **free** us for what will come next.

¹⁹ Dunn, Ted. *Graced Crossroads: Pathways to Deep Change and Transformation*. St. Charles: CCS Publications, 2020

Deeper relationships among us and deeper connections with our world will **hollow us out.**²⁰ “As we journey into the mystery that seems beyond our grasp, but not beyond, grace, we fulfill our role as co-creators with God.”²¹ In this crucible of the Covid we enter into transformative visioning together. This week we gather the wisdom within us and around us and we weave a new story.

I quote Sr. Margo again, who aptly suggests that “within our contemplative consciousness, we are deepening our field of integrity which will enable an emerging future that has more capacity for love to be visible. When it comes right down to it, what could be more generative than this?”²²

Sisters, hope is rising!

Do you hear it in this excerpt from Denise Levertov’s poem *Beginners*?

*“But we have only begun
to love the earth.
We have only begun
to imagine the fullness of life.
How could we tire of hope?
—so much is in bud.
How can desire fail?
—we have only begun
to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision
how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.
We have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.
So much is unfolding that must
complete its gesture,
so much is in the bud.”²³*

Sisters let hope rise in us! Let hope rise in our world!

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Cannato, Judy. *Radical Amazement*. Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2006

²² Richie, CSJ Margo. “Deepening the Field of Integrity.” *The Occasional Papers*, Winter 2018

²³ Lacey, Paul A. *Selected Poems of Denise Levertov*. New York: New Directions, 2003