



*Reflection by Sister Mary Deane, PBVM, Union Congregational Leader*

*Celebration of NL Presentation Sisters Fusion  
with International Union of Presentation Sisters  
Basilica of St. John the Baptist, St. John's, NL Canada*

*25 August 2015*

It's been a long journey to this sacred and blessed moment in our story together and all of us here are part of this unfolding journey. As Sharon shared with us her reflection on their journey as a Congregation I was reminded of my first visit here to St John's three years ago for the IPA (International Presentation Association) Assembly which was hosted by the community here. It was a wonderful experience, and the welcome and hospitality that we have received over the past few days has brought back many memories of that graced time. I think I speak for many of our sisters here when I say that we have felt at home since the moment we arrived.

One of the memorable and very moving moments during the IPA Assembly was a boat journey that we made around the harbour. As we sailed back into St John's we had a beautiful ritual during which the story of the four founding Sisters was told through the reading of their letters.

The four valiant women set out in faith and trust and although they never returned to their homeland they were sustained by their deep connections, and encouraged by the love and prayers of their beloved community in Galway. We can only imagine what it was like for the sisters at home who thought they were all lost at sea, only to discover a few months later, after having a memorial service, that the sisters were indeed safe and well.

Earlier this year, the community in Galway celebrated their bicentenary. The story of 200 years of Presentation life and mission in Galway (and beyond through their

foundations) was shared and celebrated with great joy. It was just a wonderful celebration and a great tribute to the commitment and fidelity of the Sisters through the years. A number of sisters from the community here attended the celebrations in March, and there was a felt sense that the sisters had finally come home. You brought with you not only your own physical presence but the spirit of those who had gone before us on and whose shoulders we stand here today. It's a great joy that we have Sisters from the communities in Galway and Kilkenny with us today, they're delighted to be here, as we all are, and very privileged and proud to be representing your mothers and grandmothers. (not to mention our great grannies who are here from Cork....)

That sense of coming home and of being at home with one another is the core of what we are celebrating today. Fusion invites us individually and as Congregations into a new relationship where - in the words of Thomas Merton - ... "it is not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers and sisters, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are." (Thomas Merton – Essential Writings)

Our relationship as two Congregations has been growing over many years. We know there has always been a special connection with Galway and more recently with Zimbabwe. We are also mindful of our connections through IPA, the Conference, and the friendships forged through our various encounters.

In particular we express our gratitude to the commission members who facilitated our journey towards Fusion and helped to grow and deepen our relationships –Srs. Betty Rae Lee and Miriam Martin from here (Newfoundland and Labrador) and Srs Elizabeth Starcken and Paula Buckley from Union. We remember in a special way Sr Paula who died tragically last year and whose anniversary we celebrated just a couple of weeks ago.

Next year marks 40 years since of formation of the Union of Presentation Sisters (Union of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.)

In 1976 seventeen autonomous groups of Presentation Sisters formally came together to form a new Congregation shaped by fidelity to the spirit and charism of our foundress Venerable Nano Nagle. They were joined later by other Presentation groups. A decree formally established the Union, but the process of becoming Union is still unfolding, an inner and outer pilgrim journey in which each of are called to participate.

Over the forty years there have been many visible signs of the transformation that has happened on this unfolding journey of Union. These include the founding of new communities especially among people made poor, opening of new ministries and mission areas in response to the emerging needs, the movement of sisters and mobilisation of resources for the sake of mission. We have experienced and continue to experience much letting go, diminishment, sadness and grief through the deaths of our sisters, the closure of houses, and many ministries that have been handed over. We also experience the joy of new life, rejoicing in our new members, the growth of the Associate and Friends of Nano Movements, and the collaborations and partnerships with others for the sake of mission.

Maybe less visible but no less transformative is the inward journey engaging our hearts and minds. We are continually called and challenged to move beyond our narrow confines, to open our hearts, to expand our thinking and awareness as we become more conscious of our interconnectedness with each other and with all of creation which is expressed through our call to live a spirituality of being in communion.

Over the years we have grown in our sense of Oneness as an International Congregation. [Our vision like Nano's reaches beyond our local situations and has a global consciousness and outreach.](#) (C7)

And so we come to the story of Now. Today is a sacred moment for us as we commit ourselves to journey together as One. Today we celebrate becoming a new Union. It is significant moment for us, a new time in our story. Just two months prior to receiving the decree of Fusion we received formal approval from the sacred congregation in Rome of our new Constitutions, - "Our Way of Life." Today we renew our commitment to live by "Our Way of Life" as we strive to be the living energy of Nano in today's world and enable the unfolding of the charism and mission into the future.

We are grateful for the presence of all of you here with us today. We are united in prayer with our Sisters throughout the world as they celebrate this ritual of Fusion.

Our sisters throughout the Congregation have been inspired and heartened by the willingness of the sisters here to embark on this journey of Fusion, a journey which is no less courageous and hope filled than that of Nano and your four founding Sisters. I've also been deeply moved and humbled by the number of Sisters I've met, especially in the Mother house where I'm staying, who have shared how much this Fusion means to them and how they have been longing for this day.

And so, what of the future ...

As many of you are aware, the Sisters here have become a new Province within the Congregation, the *Newfoundland and Labrador Province*.

We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to your leadership Team, Sisters Sharon Fagan, Sandy Butler, Lois Greene, Angela McGrath and France Molloy. Thank you for all that you have done to bring us to this stage of the journey and for your generosity and willingness to extend your term of leadership for another year.

As Religious there are many questions today as we look to the future, especially in this part of the world? Only God know what the future holds for us yet the temptation can be to focus more on what we have done in the past rather than how we are living the present which also shapes our future.

On this beautiful Island, we can see, feel and hear the abundance of life all around us. A few months ago we were in a very different season of the year. Nature reminds us of the seasons of the year, the seasons of life and the uniqueness and beauty of each season. The cycle of life and death is embedded in nature, in the universe.

God is always creating something new, can we not see it, feel it and hear it?

Can we welcome each new day as gift, an opportunity to live with an open and grateful heart, in fidelity to the gospel and “ Our Way of Life” mindful that “[the quality of our presence, our Prayerfulness and the gift of our lives are of untold value for Presentation life and mission.](#) (C11)

Can we see the abundance that is around us rather than the scarcity, especially the abundance around us in relation to our Associates, Friends of Nano, other Congregations and partners in mission as we respond in new ways to emerging needs.

Can we see our fragility, vulnerability and weakness as a call to a deeper inward journey where we are open to be filled by God in a new way, and to allow the beauty of this season in our life to shine forth in our world.

Can we see our differences, our diversity of cultures and traditions as an opportunity to bear witness to the gospel message of love and unity rather than a source of competition, division, intolerance and fear.

I said earlier that our celebration today is a homecoming, a reconnecting with our roots. Coming home is more than spending time with people we like or being in a particular place. It is about a coming home to ourselves, being at home with each other, with creation and with God. It is a deeper awareness and growing into communion.

It is ironic that in today's world where technology enables people to be more connected to each other than ever before, there is also more isolation, loneliness and alienation than ever before. Maybe a call for us today is to create and nurture the spaces within us, in our Communities and in our earth where we can re-connect at a deeper level with ourselves, each other and with the earth, to live with a deeper awareness of the presence of God in our lives and to share this with all whom we encounter.

As we grow in our sense of Oneness of being in communion, we have a greater consciousness that what we do in any part of the web of life, affects the whole. This includes our thoughts and prayers as well as our actions. We have only begun to grasp the responsibilities and the opportunities of this new consciousness that we are growing into. What we are doing here today sends out sparks of light and energy not only to the wider Congregation but to the whole world.

Here today in this community of living faith, we commit ourselves to continue our journey together as One, always a little further, always one pace beyond trusting that God is within all that is unfolding, that God is ahead of us, leading us forward.

As we journey forward in Union, may the spiralling energies of God renew and transform us so that together we can create something beautiful for our world today and shape the future that is emerging.

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