



*Reflection by Sister Sharon Fagan, PBVM, NL Provincial 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*

The blessing of this day has been waiting for us for a long time  
while we have been making our way here  
The blessing has been gathering itself,  
making ready, biding its time  
praying.

This blessing has been polishing  
oiling the hinges,  
sweeping the steps,  
lighting candles in the windows.

This blessing has been setting the table  
as it hums as a tune  
from an old song it knows,  
something about a spiraling road  
and bread and grace.

All this time it has kept an eye  
on the horizon  
Watching  
Keeping vigil  
Hardly aware of how  
It was leaning itself in our direction.

And now that we are here  
This blessing can hardly believe  
It's good fortune  
That we have finally arrived.  
and it can now open its arms wide to us

Crying

Welcome

Welcome

Welcome

To this new moment ... Jan Richardson

As we gather this afternoon, these words of Jan Richardson lead us to acknowledge that this historic moment, honouring the fusion of the Presentation Sisters in Newfoundland and Labrador with the Union of Presentation Sisters, is indeed a blessing.

Today, we mark the end of a journey that lasted for 182 years in Newfoundland. It was in August 1833 that four Sisters left Galway to come to Newfoundland to open a new Presentation foundation. Since then many faithful women have followed these courageous women as members of our Congregation. We have lived as active participants in the dream of God and the vision of Nano Nagle and listened, discerned and responded to the needs of the times for many generations.

In so doing, we believe that our efforts were blessed and we were able to make a significant contribution among the people within our Church and our world. In a spirit of compassion and justice we have provided leadership and ministry in the fields of education, health care, pastoral care, spiritual renewal, and ecology throughout this province and beyond. Throughout this long journey we have experienced the ongoing steadfast love and faithfulness of our God who has continually beckoned us forth into each new era.

Like most religious Congregations we became conscious that a different future was unfolding before us when the Second Vatican Council took place over fifty years ago. The council issued a call to Religious Congregations to enter a time of renewal so that they might reclaim their founding charism, read the signs of the times and make changes in their lives to meet the needs that were emerging in our Church and our world.

Under the guidance of our Congregational Leadership teams we were faithful in making changes and working toward creating a deeper understanding of the nature and purpose of our lives as women religious. In fidelity to the call of Vatican 11, our lifestyles, our ministries, our theology and spirituality evolved and we continued to Choose Life in Mission in different ways for several decades.

In the early years of this present century scientific discoveries and the emergence of the New Universe Story stretched our thinking once again and a new consciousness of our place in this story began to evolve. We recognized that our God was beckoning us to deepen our understanding of what it meant to be in relationship with the Holy One, one another and the whole community of life. We pondered how we were being invited to participate in an evolving story that was so much bigger than ourselves. Our participation in the International Presentation Association greatly influenced our vision and deepened our connection to our Global Presentation family with whom we have worked together to be a presence of compassion and justice in our world.

At the same time as our consciousness was awakening to seeing ourselves as community embedded into the larger wider web of life, we recognized that Religious Congregations around the world were facing new and challenging realities. We were living in a time when social and religious traditions were changing and impacting our lives. We were no longer receiving vocations to our Congregation, our median age was rising, and personnel available for ministries were lessening. While these realities were significant in leading us to wonder about the viability of the Congregation into the future there were other insights that played an equally important part in our initiating a futuring process in 2002.

We were guided by Mary Ann O'Hara, our competent and skillful facilitator to hold the question ...how do we best serve what is seeking to emerge among us? This became the central question as we discerned in the years that followed.

We prayed and had many conversations together and we grew into a consciousness that opened our eyes to see that connectedness, communion, collaboration and commitment had new meaning for us and we became aware of a broader vision that was calling us to serve all of life. New questions about how we would live into this new awareness rose before us.

At our General Chapter in 2011 we reclaimed our belief that at the heart of consecrated life dwells a sense of mission and this was to be at the forefront our decision making as we looked at our future. Our deep story was calling us to envision the charism of Nano Nagle continuing among us.

At this gathering we acknowledged that a spirituality of being in communion was emerging among us and it was becoming the focus of our life and mission.

We also affirmed five essential values that are central to our lives. As Presentation Sisters we

- Remain faithful to the Presentation Mission and care of our members
- Live out of the principles of the New Story
- Continue our commitment to International Presentation Association
- Support our Presentation Associate Relationship
- Engage in collaborative relationships with others

We were stretched and inspired by the mystery of God calling us to walk one with others who had a similar focus and shared the same values. With confidence and a sense of unity among us we decided to explore joining the Union of Presentation Sisters.

Under the guidance of the NL and Union Leadership teams of both Congregations and the Commission appointed by them, our sisters entered more intensely into a process of discernment. The process engaged us in reflection and dialogue on personal, communal, legal and canonical aspects of our lives. We spent days of quiet reflection listening to the promptings of God's Spirit. We shared many conversations about our concerns, doubts, fears, hopes and dreams and the implications that might arise as a result of our decision to join or not join the Union.

As pilgrim people seeking to be faithful to a way of life rooted in contemplation, and wonder at the unfolding mystery of God in our midst we learned to hold and befriend our blessedness and brokenness as we moved toward a new moment that was calling. We pondered the signs of the times in an ecological light, leaned into the future and looked at how we might best serve what was emerging.

The spiraling energies of God were not contained as we moved throughout our exploration. They led us through reflection and dialogue to honor our past and to see potential and possibilities with the Union of Presentation Sisters.

We felt welcomed by Union Sisters throughout our exploration process and came to recognize that they were:

- a group that shared a common charism with us,
- a group that held our foundation story,
- a group who were connected to us in various ways over the years,
- a group who shared the five values that were central to our lives
- and a group who believed in the power of living a spirituality of being in communion.

There was no real clear road map on our journey other than the beckoning energies of the charism of Nano and the mission of the Gospel and leaning into wisdom of one another. Using our imagination and creativity and trusting in the movement of God's spirit among us we were drawn to keep the fire of Nano's Lantern burning with the Union of Presentation Sisters.

On January 3, 2014 at the Motherhouse the Congregation gathered for an Extraordinary Chapter and unanimously voted to merge with Union. We acknowledged, honored and gave thanks for what has been accomplished in our past and accepted the challenge to open our eyes to envisioning and committing our lives as members of a larger Presentation entity promoting the charism of Nano Nagle. Although we experienced some fear and doubt our decision to join Union was powered by a vision for a future which we saw reflected through one another and through a call from God to widen our tents and share in the mystery of a greater oneness.

Letters of request were sent to the Congregational Leadership Team and to the Holy See and favourable responses were received by both. On November 1, 2014 the fusion of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Newfoundland with the Union of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was authorized.

The decision we have made has brought us a sense of loss and grief we also hold with pride and gratitude all that we bring to this new relationship with our Union Sisters.

Like our ancestors, who often left what was safe and familiar and followed their hearts, we move towards the future with an integrity that will allow us to face courageously what may come. We carry with us a richness of culture, experience, dedication and wisdom to Union and we anticipate with hope and joy that they will bring new life and energy that will enhance our lives.

It will be a growing relationship of trust and love among us as we seek to serve all of life and participate together in an expansive story which will open us to new moments of grace and transformation. We will walk One knowing the spiral of life will keep expanding and challenging us.

As members of Union, following our Constitutions, we will respond to the Holy One who beckons us to awaken to the Spirit of God present and active in all that exists, to a spirituality of being in communion, and to participate in the universal mission of Jesus Christ.

Today, as we embrace the mystery that surrounds us we honor this sacred and significant moment in our history. We were all born into God's Great Circle of light and we have been and will continue to live our lives as sparks of this Light.

This Great Basilica has held the light and faithful energy of all who have gone before us, of all who are gathered here today, and of all other members of our Congregation who join with us in Spirit on this happy occasion. In this sacred space, let us celebrate with gratitude and joy, this day of great blessing that has been waiting for us. *With hearts full of hopefulness, strong and fragile we welcome a future unknown, knowing Nano will still lead and her lantern light will continue to beam.*

Sr. Sharon Fagan  
NL Provincial Leader

