



Symposium Presentation

150th Anniversary of the Basilica

Journey of the Presentation Sisters

In Newfoundland and Labrador

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INTRODUCTION

As our part in celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the Basilica, we, as Presentation Sisters, invited Clar Doyle to write a play - to help us tell our story. He called it "Fire to the Rock," catching in a metaphor the charism of the order, its spirit and journey here to this island Rock. A song written for that play captures something of what we wish to share with you here.

Fire to the rock, Rock from the Fire
From the beginning the Universe desire
To share the abundance, the teeming of life.
Fire to the Rock, Rock from the Fire
Their story then, our story now. (Martin, 2005)

It is a privilege on this occasion to have the opportunity to recall the story of our Newfoundland Presentation presence for indeed it is their story, it is our story and yet it is also your story for it connects us with that beginning desire to share life's abundance, as God's own dream began to reveal itself billions of years ago. We acknowledge this ancient Rock on the Atlantic coast, 350 million years wise, which has shaped - blessed and challenged - all that has been given life here. Our Presentation Story is but one little spiral in the continuing unfolding of the mystery of God's creative dream for us. But our story begins on another island, Ireland in the 18th century.

THE INSPIRATION OF NANO NAGLE

In the 18th century new seeds of God's creative dream had been planted in the heart of a young Irish woman named Nano Nagle who went on to become the Foundress of the Presentation Sisters in Ireland in 1776. Though Nano had been born into a wealthy middle-class

family in County Cork, Ireland, she was keenly attentive to the terrible plight of Ireland's poor under English Penal Law. In response, she risked everything as she gave of herself to help alleviate the ignorance and poverty to which her Irish people had been consigned. Nano's vision in this regard was broad and penetrating, and demanding of herself: "Gifted - at first unwillingly - with a disturbing consciousness of the misery and ignorance of the poor, Nano did more than merely pity their situation. She acted to redress it by entering into their helplessness in ways which called forth life and hope." (Consedine, 1988, p. 61) History attests to how Nano went yet one pace beyond to address far more than just the educational needs of her Irish people. It was said that "there was not a single garret in all of Cork that she did not know." (Walsh, p.50) She provided not only education, but also clothes and food. She went to the homes, nursed the sick, and helped all with whom she came in contact. Nano has been called "a torch-bearer in some of the most turbulent days of Ireland's history ..." "a pioneer of Catholic Education in Ireland's darkest days." (Wyse, p. 31, 34)

In so doing she questioned long-unquestioned social and religious assumptions of her time: that poverty was inevitable in the social structure, that it was a part of the divine plan for the human family, and that to educate the poor was to strike against the proper order. (Consedine, 1988, p. 61)

This questioning assumptions and systems would be a challenging legacy that Nano was to leave her followers. Consedine, emphasized these characteristic in a more poetic fashion:

(Nano) was a woman who, in her simplicity ... dared greatly...
dared to let herself be guided by the Spirit of God.
And when he led her from the warmth of what was safe and comfortable,
out past the four walls of what was "enough" and "reasonable",
away beyond the security of the familiar, tried and proven,
she followed with laughter in her heart.
(Consedine, 1977, p. 195)

God's call to Nano became, in turn, Nano's challenge to those who would follow in Ireland, and to those who later went out as missionaries. Newfoundland became the first Presentation mission abroad, and, as history would attest, the first English speaking foundation of women religious, in what is presently Canada. (O'Neill, 1976, p. 791) That call reverberates in Nano's own words which have become a well-known refrain to many Presentations, "if I could be in service in any part of the world, I would do all in my power." Nano Nagle, truly an amazing yet simple woman, daring yet cautious; forthright to the point of bluntness, yet sensitive and wonderfully gentle; a visionary whose desires reached ultimately to the ends of the earth, yet a practical woman intensely alive to the demands of the "here and now" in which she found herself. (Considine, 1977, p. 9)

Though written of Nano Nagle, Raphael's words surely apply to the first four pioneering sisters in Newfoundland, their spirit an embodiment of Nano's, their dream an extension of hers, and, again, indeed, all part of the continuing unfolding of God's own dream. The missionary spirit of these first four women who so generously and courageously volunteered to come from Galway has borne abundant fruit over the years in the service of God's people, branching out to 51 Newfoundland foundations as the overall number grew to 500 over the years, a reality far exceeding all dreams or expectations. To this same dream we as Presentation Sisters have endeavoured to be faithful over the past 172 years since our arrival in 1833.

Nano's faithfulness to the young and the aged, the sick, the poor, the sorrowing, the weak and the needy, along with her spirit of deep faith and trust in God, and her unwavering perseverance

(Wyse, p. 34) were to be the inspiration that gave courage and confidence to all those who followed the lure of her dream as pioneers in education, service and health care. Her charism would spread to 27 countries and her sisters and associates number in the thousands. (IPA 2003 Documents 2003) We turn our attention now to the Newfoundland foundation, the first mission of the Presentation Sisters to leave Ireland.

OUR NEWFOUNDLAND FOUNDATION

Our Newfoundland presence begins with the story of four pioneering Irish women who came to Newfoundland in response to a dream of Bishop Fleming, an Irish Franciscan and then Bishop of St. John's. His desire was to have the Sisters come to help provide improved educational opportunities for the poor of the city, especially young girls. This was significant in terms of his vision of education, with particular attention to the education of females whom he felt had a great, necessary and useful influence on the character of society:

...once they are solidly instructed in the divine precepts of the Gospel,
Once their young minds are enlarged and enlightened and strengthened
By educational knowledge, - the domestic fireside is immediately made
the most powerful auxiliary to the school, and instruction and true
education.... (Howley, 1979, p. 276)

It is noteworthy that even in 1829 there were only three priests serving the people of the whole island, and while concerned with what seemed a lagging practice (Bishop Fleming himself) "was aware that a lively faith was concealed in their hearts." (Considine, 1983, p. 261) It is obvious that Bishop Fleming saw the service of a religious order of women as imperative in order to respond to the demands of a diocese in pressing need. A response to poverty and the lack of

access to a good education was paramount in the Bishop's mind. (Howley, 1979, p. 280) He wrote of his conviction: "... so strongly was I impressed with its necessity, that there is no sacrifice that I would not make for its accomplishment and to ensure its stability." (Howley, 1979, p. 278)

This was echoed strongly in an article in the Newfoundland and Labrador "Independent": "(Bishop Fleming's) invitation to two orders of Irish women was perhaps the most notable part of his drive to increase the strength of the Roman Catholic Church (in Newfoundland)." ("Independent", 2005, O'Neill, p.1)

Paul O'Neill, in an interview, notes how Bishop Fleming saw Newfoundlanders being treated the same way as the Irish in Ireland - and he would not stand for it. ("Independent", 2005, O'Neill, p.1) Among other actions he undertook on behalf of the people, Bishop Fleming went to Ireland and brought back the Presentation Sisters to begin to attend to the education of young girls.

Bishop Michael Fleming visited the Presentation Convent in Galway, Ireland in 1833 to present a request for sisters who would volunteer to come on a mission to Newfoundland. His choice of Galway was not accidental. The superior there, Mother John Power, was a native of Waterford, a place so full of close connections with the many Irish immigrants in Newfoundland. Bishop Fleming's tales of the desperate conditions back home, of his great concern for the children in his charge, and the urgent need for religious sisters who would train youth of the island (in the faith) so that these would in turn train others, met with an enthusiastic, spontaneous YES. (Dinn, p. 15)

Sister Magdalen O'Shaughnessy was to be the first volunteer for the New World, joined by Sisters Xaverius Lynch, Bernard Kirwan and Xavier Maloney. Bishop Fleming, overflowing with gratitude and his own enthusiasm, promised to build a suitable convent and school for them, with the proviso that the Galway community could recall the four sisters after six years if they wished to return at no expense to the community. (Dinn, p. 15) Mother John Power also showed wisdom and prudence in the care of her sisters as she requested this agreement in writing. (Howley, 1979, p. 282) However, as much as they missed their Sisters and Ireland, all four elected to stay.

The Sisters' letters to their community back home highlighted not only the hardships they endured, including their 25 treacherous days at sea, but equally so the overwhelming response they received from the people and the joy their work brought them. About their journey Sister Magdalen O'Shaughnessy wrote back home of their "most unpleasant journey of 25 days"

On the third day after we left Ireland we had a storm. One of the masts were broken and some others damaged. We were not much frightened because we were almost regardless of what was going on we were so deadly sick . . . we soon had another storm . . . it lasted 36 hours ... the sails were torn to pieces ... the waves were monstrous high. You may be sure there was not a saint in the calendar not invoked during this violent storm. I had a feeling almost amounting to certainty that God would not abandon us . . . I did not regret for a moment the step we had taken.

(Unpublished Presentation Archive Material)

Their arrival in St John's would speak of a more joyful reality as Sister Xaverius Lynch recalled her experience of that day in one of her first letters home:

It was a most grand sight. We crossed the harbour in a small boat and when we came near the shore there were crowds of small boats

full of people, the banks and hill were crowded and as soon as the boat the Bishop and we were in arrived there was nothing to be heard but shouts of joy and acclamations . . . we drove off to the Bishop's house followed by crowds and now and then there were shouts of joy and "You are welcome" and this scene did not end until we got into the house. (Unpublished Presentation Archive Material)

It would seem their perceptions were supported by the local newspaper. The "Newfoundlander", September 26, 1833, ran the following editorial noting the Sisters' arrival in St. John's:

Arrival of Right Reverend Dr. Fleming:
On Saturday morning, September 21, this respected Prelate arrived in the brig "Ariel" after a short passage from Waterford . . . At twelve o'clock His Lordship and the Religious Ladies landed and were received amidst the most vehement and enthusiastic cheering. (Dinn, p. 16)

The beauty of the land itself impressed the sisters. In Sister Xavier's words:

We were agreeably at the appearance of the country which we heard so terrible an account of. All around there is to be seen hills and mountains, perfectly green, interspersed with houses, green fields and small gardens... In fact you would never be tired with the scenery. We are delighted with it and every day we discover fresh beauties.
(Unpublished Presentation Archival Material)

Perhaps not to anyone's surprise, given the province's weather history, one reality the sisters were not prepared for was the extreme cold, not having been forewarned by Bishop Fleming who had seemingly forgotten the rigour of his first years there. One letter back home read:

We are just beginning to feel the severity of the weather. Indeed... we would require all the fervour of our devotion to keep us warm... while the frost is most intense and ready to freeze your limbs off, You are cheered by ... the brilliancy of the sun ... it would appear that the frost and the sun were contending together.
(Unpublished Presentation Archival Material)

In responding to the needs they saw before them, the first Sisters offered not only religious education, but their curriculum also included reading and writing for all ages, art, drama and music, as quoted in “The Newfoundlander”:

The Ladies who in their zeal for Religion have expatriated themselves from their native country, are of the Presentation order of Nuns - a society whose lives are entirely devoted to the imparting to children of the humbler classes in society useful education combined with religious instruction.

(Unpublished Presentation Archival Material)

The Sisters’ first year took on a new depth of meaning as they began their work of teaching not only the children but young and old alike, all ripe and eager to learn. The endearing response of the people served to deepen their commitment to their mission. It was said that in addition to pupils of regular school age, that young women twenty years of age and over would joyfully avail themselves of the opportunity for education, religious and secular. (Dinn, p. 20)

Within a month of arriving, our Sisters had moved into a residence which had been renovated for them, formerly a Tavern called The Rising Sun, a name the townsfolk considered to be a propitious omen symbolizing the faith and education which they came to diffuse throughout the country. This building also housed the first school. (Howley, p. 290)

“The Patriot”, a local newspaper of the time... carried the following editorial following the opening of their first school on October 21st where 450 children waited to be admitted:

Seldom has it been our lot to witness a scene of such deep interest... whether we regard the community of ladies ... or the little applicants for admission...or (the Bishop) to whose exertions we owe this blessing. (Dinn, p. 17)

It would surely have been the 450 little girls who would have captured the hearts of the Sisters, reflecting Nano's own first love for the children. Sister Magdalen noted that: "wherever we went, and amidst all our trials we had one consolation, - the children never left us. If we had not the children to work for, we could never have lived through it." (Howley, 1979, p. 296)

Our first sisters continued to be strengthened in their resolve. Eventually other sisters were similarly inspired to come from Ireland, along with a number of Irish women who first came to Newfoundland and then eventually became Presentation Sisters. This would bring to 99 the total number of women who had come from Ireland. ((Unpublished Presentation Archival Material) As they had in Ireland, together these women endeavoured to "... bear the same witness of faith, spread the same glad tidings, (embodying Nano's same) desire to embrace the world's need." (Consedine, 1977, p. 195)

The last Irish woman to come and enter the Community in Newfoundland was Sister Mary Philomena O'Connell who entered in 1911 and died in 1965, more familiarly known as Mother Philomena. The last of the Irish women to die in Newfoundland was Mother Mary de Sales Walsh who died at Cathedral Square in 1968 at the age of 102. (Unpublished Presentation Archival Material)

DEEPENING THE NEWFOUNDLAND STORY

Eventually these Irish women would be joined by numerous local women from Newfoundland who were drawn by their example and inspiration to dedicate their lives to the service of God's

people. In 1834, the year after the first sisters arrived, Newfoundland women began to join the Community. The first of these Newfoundland women was Sister Maria Nugent of St. John's who but because of illness did not stay in the Congregation. Sister Mary Veronica Collins of St. John's was the first Newfoundland woman to enter and stay (1842). Sister Catherine Mullally of Bonavista became the first Newfoundland woman to be take vows as a Presentation Sister (1852). (Unpublished Presentation Archival Material)

The Sisters were to occupy eight different sites over the years, including on Nunnery Hill as it is still known today, and on Long's Hill which, housing six Sisters and more than one thousand pupils, was, by a twist of irony, destroyed in the great fire of 1846:

One of the refugees is thought to have brought the fire into the convent in some smoldering blankets, unnoticed by anyone until the fire in the town was almost out and the convent suddenly began to burn. So rapid was the spread of flames that all the historical Archives belonging to the order were lost. The Sisters had barely time to save themselves and the throng they were sheltering before their convent was in ruins. (O'Neill, II, p. 790)

In 1850, after Bishop Fleming's death, it was Bishop Mullock who laid the foundation on a beautiful site next to the Cathedral for the new Presentation Convent and School which is now the Motherhouse of the Presentation Congregation in Newfoundland. The Sisters moved in to occupy a portion of the unfinished school on October 21, 1851, the 18th anniversary of the opening of the first school in 1833, and took formal possession of the new convent and school on July 2, 1853. (Dinn, p. 19)

Over the years, the Sisters were not only among the key providers of education throughout the island, but they also played an important part in Teacher Training, especially during the first decades of their arrival. The early teachers brought into Newfoundland by The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had a good classical education but no professional teacher training. The Sisters endeavoured to provide that. (Dinn, p. 24-25) Bishop Mullock highlights the significance of the contribution of the Presentation Sisters in respect to Teacher Training in the Roman Catholic system:

Our training for teachers is as good as I have found in any country I am acquainted with. The teachers have all the advantages of the College School, and the mental training and discipline after school hours necessary to qualify them for their future position... The Nuns train free of expense any number of female teachers who present themselves, and we generally send teachers to the outports from the St. John's convent schools. (Rowe, p. 119)

Further to this, The Act of 1892 recognized the Presentation Sisters as one of the institutions qualified to undertake the training of female teachers. (Rowe, p. 126)

Music was a particularly important aspect of the educational tradition of the Sisters, given the talents of so many. "Music was first introduced on a permanent basis to schools on the island of Newfoundland by the Presentation sisters of Ireland who, in 1833, incorporated it into the daily school routine by way of hymn-singing." (Woodford, 1988, p. 31) To quote John Fitzgerald, speaking of both the Presentation and Mercy of Sisters in Newfoundland:

"They did such wonders for the school system . . . but the biggest legacy they left was musical and cultural no doubt . . . The nuns, what they were doing with music education, cut completely across religious boundaries ... It was the nuns who embraced the music festivals; they were the ones who were playing the organs in the Catholic Churches and who invited the Anglican organists and United Church organists up. "

("Independent", 2005, Fitzgerald, p. 2)

The rich musical legacy of the Presentation Sisters has been recognized in recent years by special awards and tributes given to several Presentation women by organizations such as Memorial University of Newfoundland which bestowed an honorary Music Doctorate on one of the sisters, and the Music Council of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, the Kiwanis Music Festival Association of St. John's, the Newfoundland Symphony Youth Choir, and the International Society for Music Education, all of whom paid special tribute to the Sisters' outstanding contribution to music in the province over the years. (Unpublished Presentation Archival Material)

St. John's may have been the primary focus of the Sisters on arriving, but it was not long before in spirit of Nano, Sisters responded to needs in other areas. The first new foundation was to Harbour Grace in 1851 and then to Carbonear the following year. In 1853, Mother Bernard Kirwan opened the first foundation on the Southern Shore in Fermeuse, where she was later buried in Port Kirwan which was named for her. By 1872 there was a foundation on the south coast in Harbour Breton, by 1925 there were houses on the West coast. By 1933, 100 years after their arrival, the Sisters were also ministering in Central Newfoundland. By the mid 1960's, when the number of sisters was at its peak, there were close to three hundred and fifty sisters and thirty seven community houses on the Island. The major focus was on the ministry of education in schools and other ministries which supported that endeavour. A milestone in the history of the Presentation Sisters in the province was the Amalgamation of all its foundations under one leadership in 1916. This enabled more effective sharing of resources and set the stage for the growth of the Congregation and its mission. (Dinn, P. 21)

EXPANDING THE MISSION

The cultural and ecclesial shifts in the post Vatican II era brought changes to ministry and reciprocally to the congregational lifestyle. The call for the renewal of religious life and the forms it took can be evidenced in the language of the congregation's General Chapters, the highest form of canonical desisioning. Some commentary from the Leadership Report of 1991 illustrates something of the movement during that era as well as the ongoing nature of these shifts:

Many of us remember both the excitement and fear of twenty-six years ago as we realized that, after the Council, nothing would ever be the same again. Nor was it! ... At first we called it adaptation and we began a process of change that involved our whole lives - our dress, our structures, our theology and our life-styles. Later as we continued our efforts we called it renewal, then refounding, and most recently, revitalization. And yet twenty-five years after we began, it seems not only have we not arrived, but rather we are now only truly beginning. (General Superior's Report, 1987-1991, p. 1)

In spite of diminishment in terms of number and the aging of membership, there is a spirit and energy evidenced in the above with an enthusiasm for the future. That future would also have its own risks. Margaret Brennan, IHM speaking of that era suggests: "In the midst of life in the post-Vatican world and Church, we (women religious) soon discovered, as well, that the winds of change would also bring clouds and storms and that there would be times and seasons when there would seem to be more shadow than light." (Brennan, 2005, p. 3) There would be pain and resistance, within and without with these changes.

A transition that did cause some consternation in those shifting times can be noted from these Chapter documents as they reflected on the changes in educational ministry focus.

Our traditional ministry in the school system, which has been such a vital part of our heritage, is becoming less and less. ... Even in places where we have been involved in school ministry over many years, we are now sometimes present in different ways, responding to new needs. In the spirit of our mandate we have been open to new calls and we have accepted requests to expansion of our ministry in Newfoundland and Labrador, to university teaching in Ontario and educational ministry in the West Indies. ... (We) are stretched by the globalness of Nano's vision.... (Leadership Report, 1995, p. 7)

This report also makes mention of the challenges of ministering beyond the cultural realities of the Sisters and a strong summons was given for respectful attentiveness to the beliefs and traditions of others with the focus on empowerment for transformation of injustices. (Leadership Report, 1995, p. 7) It also acknowledges the movement that had been occurring of a greater global consciousness and the sense of the interconnectedness with all of life which would develop and become more fully articulated in subsequent Chapters. Some of the history of that development follows.

MOVING BEYOND THE BORDERS

To this point it is apparent that the pioneering spirit of Presentation sisters in Newfoundland was tempered by the geographical demands of serving in many small and isolated communities on the island itself. The commitment to quality education in the whole of Newfoundland meant that the impetus for mission concentrated on the opening new convents and the service in many schools across the Island's three large geographical regions. The tendency towards a more monastic spirituality and lifestyle may also have been a factor which kept the focus of mission on the island of Newfoundland. However, in 1977 the Sisters were invited to go beyond the province

in a collaborative educational ministry with the Irish Christian Brothers in Toronto where they served for twelve years. Later, in 1984 the congregation responded to a request from Bishop Peter Sutton to work in Labrador in education and pastoral ministry where the sisters participated until 1998. (Unpublished Presentation Archival Material)

In the 1990's our Sisters were invited to go to work in the West Indies. Once more it was the Christian Brothers who initiated the conversation which led us to in Dominica in 1993. The effectiveness of that collaboration prompted an invitation from Antigua in 1995, where the focus would be education and teacher training, reminiscent of the Sisters who first came to Newfoundland. Bishop Donald J. Reece of Antigua spoke candidly: "I am encouraged to write to you with a request. ... Because Catholic Education is of great importance to me and the local circumstances being what they are, it is imperative that I have a Religious as Administrator." (Unpublished Presentation Archival Material) The Bishop was also aware of the challenges involved in finding suitable personnel but he called on their faith and their commitment to the kingdom, "if you would possibly be able to find a Sister (or two or three) to send me - even for the short term." (Unpublished Presentation Archival Material) It is also significant that Nano Nagle had sent some of her first pupils to the West Indies to teach what they themselves had been taught. It would seem the Sisters have come full circle today.

The next ten years would show an even greater diversity of ministry which can be summarized from the Leadership Report of 2003. The Presentation Sisters of Newfoundland and Labrador, as of 2003, are living and ministering in six dioceses, two provinces and three countries. The

ministries take them around the province – from the Northern Peninsula, to the Newfoundland South Coast. They continue ministry in the Caribbean for educational and pastoral ministry in Antigua and Dominica. They no longer minister in Labrador. The energy for mission continues to manifest itself in ministries that reach out directly to the poor, educational ministry in schools, literacy training, family support services, holistic spirituality programs, health care, ministries supporting youth, pastoral ministry in hospitals and in parishes, parish administration, Diocesan catechetical Programs, providing ministry and housing for mentally handicapped adults, providing supportive housing for women, ministry among our Associates, and Peace and Justice for the Integrity of all Creation, congregational service, our elected leadership and various other volunteer ministries. (Leadership Team Report, 2003, p. 13-14) While for many of the older Sisters today, their prayer is their main ministry as they faithfully continue to offer support wherever it is needed. In the words of the Narrator in Doyle's play:

Through it all, we try to prompt and practice a spirituality that invites others to a great meaning in their lives, through community and the practice of justice... with all peoples and Creation Itself. For many of us now our prayer is our work - we were given to saying that work is our prayer - now we know the full circle of this. (Doyle, 2005)

The diversity of ministries described above may appear less focused than the initial response of the Sisters to Catholic education in Newfoundland. The challenges and changes in a postmodern, multi-cultural global village have had their impact. At the same time, by exploring recent Chapter Direction statements, it is possible to appreciate a growing clarity of mission, a more singular vision within an expanded global consciousness. The authors would identify two

preeminent themes that have textured this development, intentional collaboration with others, and peace and justice for the integrity of all creation.

Collaboration with others

In the 1983 Mission Statement a fresh articulation of collaboration was made and the discussion sowed the seeds for shared ministry and encouraged working with others in more dynamic ways. In order to carry out the varied ministries to which the Sisters were called, other lay persons joined with them to work side by side, to serve on the various Boards of the Congregation, and to offer needed expertise. They also assumed ministries once held by Sister members. As well as this ongoing collaboration across the variety of ministries named above there have also been some more formal connections and commitments made. One aspect of that developing collaboration would express itself more clearly in Associate relationships: “After many years of study, reflection and dialogue we now wish to accept the challenge of inviting women and men who desire to deepen their spirituality and who feel called to promote the spirit of Nano Nagle to walk with us in associate relationship.” (Leadership Report, 1999, p.15) There are presently fifty-one women and men associates sharing in the mission in a variety of ways.

The North American Conference of Presentation Sisters is a long standing connection which has provided a growing collaboration for over fifty years. The Conference was formed in 1953 with members from the seven North American Presentation Congregations. For much of that time only the General Superiors met in the Assembly, but since the year 2005, all members of the elected leadership teams were included. “Our annual North American Conference meetings

connect us with our sisters on the North American scene and provide us with a forum to exchange ideas about our life and mission.” (Leadership Report, 1995, p. 4) The biennial Presentation Institutes, sponsored by the Conference brought members together to strengthen the bonds of sisterhood and deepen the awareness of their common charism and heritage. Further collaborations have developed between age group gatherings, justice network relationships and vocation ministry connections. However, as recorded in the Leadership report of 2003, though there have also been difficulties with this Conference, yet the reorganization of the administration, the goal of a common Convergence of grass roots membership, and a common charism have maintained the interest and commitment. (Leadership Team Report, 2003, p. 16) The most exciting aspect of this collaboration is a work in progress. It is a joint ministry project scheduled to take place in September 2005 in New Orleans. Five Sisters from the Conference (two of whom are from the Newfoundland Congregation) are to participate in this innovative ministry experience where personnel, resources and passion for mission will be shared across the continent.

A second relationship of significance, the *International Presentation Association, or IPA*, was described in the 1991 Leadership Report. This Association was formed in 1988 and comprised the leaders from the North American Conference of Presentations, the Australian Society of Presentations, and the Sisters of the Union. The Major Superiors at this assembly began to shape the spirit of a corporate initiative: “... drawn together in unity and collaboration for the sake of mission.” (Leadership Report, 1991, p. ___) The Newfoundland Leadership report describes the spark that would continue to grow.

We stand at the beginning of something new as we continue to discover ourselves as global women. The future development of IPA remains a mystery but one that energizes and excites us as we move closer to almost four thousand other Presentation Sisters throughout the world who share our charism.

(Leadership Report, 1991, p. 30)

The IPA has continued to develop and the 2003 Assembly in Australia included congregational leaders, members of the justice network and members at large. One important aspect of this connection is our *Non-Governmental Organizational* (NGO) status at the United Nations.

We experienced the effectiveness of the ministry of our NGO representative, and witnessed her collaboration with other religious congregations and with the vast numbers of NGO's at the United Nations on issues related to women and children, indigenous people, the environment, sustainable development and human rights. (Leadership Report, 2003, p. 17)

This larger, global collaboration was celebrated during “Presentation in an Emerging Universe: Sharing our Stories along the Way”, a Congregational Assembly in St John’s in August 2005. As a follow up to the 2003 IPA gathering in Australia, Newfoundland invited Presentation story tellers from Australia, Zambia, India, Ireland, and the United States. (Assembly Flyer, 2005, Unpublished Presentation Archival Material) The need for systemic change to bring about peace and justice for the integrity of all creation was clearly present as well as the joy and delight of such a rich cultural experience..

Peace and Justice and the Integrity of All Creation

The second major theme that emerges from the Newfoundland Presentation Chapter directions was identified as Peace and Justice for the Integrity of All Creation. The 1983 Chapter Statement refers to imitating Christ the liberator and “bringing a compassionate presence to the poor and

oppressed of our time.” (Our Vision for the Future, 1983, p. 7) A Commission of Peace and Justice was begun in 1983 with the mandate to initiate an education program on the theory and practice of social justice. (Leadership report, 1991, p. 5) The directional statement from the Chapter of 1991 brought the justice dimension into sharper relief. “We commit ourselves to action for the change of unjust systems, especially those of which we are a part.” This was to involve sisters individually, locally and congregationally in collaboration with others. The focus was to empower the poor with special attentiveness to women. (Leadership Report, 1995, p. 3) Many of these same issues are contained in the Chapter Statement of 1995, with an evocative addition, namely, that the just relationships are extended, “so that we may be in respectful and just relationships with one another, with all humankind and planet earth.” (Leadership Report, 1999, p. 3) By the Chapter of 2003 the principles of the universe and the life of the New Cosmology, or the New Story by Thomas Berry, inspired the Chapter Statement, and pushed toward a vision of mission that is inclusive, particular and deeply sacred:

We celebrate the blessings of life’s grand diversity.
We long for communion with all creation.
We desire wisdom to discern the ways.
We commit ourselves to be midwives of spirituality
of peace, justice and the integrity of creation. (Chapter Statement, 2003)

The unity and diversity which was dreamt of in the Chapter of 1983 was incorporated into the fabric of the Directional Statement of 2003. There is also a sense of the breadth and depth of the Grand Story to which the Sisters refer and their place as community within it.

When we consider the whole story of our universe, our little piece of history within our Christian tradition and within our congregation is very small indeed. These last four years in the life of our congregation are but a tiny moment in the vastness of life’s time. Yet, it is our time and in the words of Walter Bruggeman...“What God does first and

foremost is to trust people with their moment in history to do what must be done for the sake of the whole community.” (Leadership Team Report, 2003, p.

1)

It would appear in the development of these themes, that the evolving understanding of “community” has come to include the whole Cosmos. The Newfoundland Sisters have been animated anew with the same disturbing spirit which pushed Nano to question her social and religious assumptions, in order to call forth hope and meaning in her time. (Consedine, 1988, p. 61) “Her story then, our story now.” (Martin, 2005)

In conclusion, the mighty Atlantic Ocean gave those first four Irish Sisters, Magdalen, Xavier, Xaverius, and Bernard, a glimpse of the vastness of life, the wildness and wonder of facing the unknown. It showed them a taste of the delight and the beauty in the great and small. The bounty and barrenness of this land (or province?) has nurtured and limited the hundreds of those daughters of Nano who have followed them. In the circle of their spirits, and with all the courageous women who have gone before, the story of Presentation life in this province continues.

If this were an ordinary story, it would end here, but, since this small story is a part of the Great Universe Story, the Story of God’s Great Unfolding Dream, we may all have to wait for the next part of the Story, for the next Chapter! We conclude, returning to the song which began these reflections:

We come to today and the story of now
Our hearts full of hope, strong and fragile
We long for a future unknown yet a dream
While Nano still leads, her lantern light beams;
Fire to the Rock, Rock from the Fire
From the Beginning the Universe desire

To share the abundance, the teeming of life.
Fire to the Rock, Rock from the Fire
Our story then, your story now! (Martin, 2005)

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