PRESENTATION TWO: Authentic Relationships

Slide 1 – no notes
Slide 2 – notes

Slide 3

We have reached a new depth in our process of renewal and we are speaking in ways that continue to require courage, generosity, and new expressions of living faith. We are speaking with solidarity, with joy, and with conviction. At the same time, may we always speak with humility, with truth, and with holiness. How else will we perceive what God is doing in our midst?

Mary Hughes, OP
2011 LCWR Annual Report
OSF Tiffin Pre-Chapter Retreat 2014

We have changed. We are moving. . . . These few sentences from Mary Hughes’ LCWR presidential report in 2011 capture the qualities that our communal witness to the world ought to be – the qualities of solidarity, joy, conviction, humility, truth and holiness. We have claimed these characteristics of our inner renewal and of our public voice in ways that now hold us even more assiduously to claiming the life form that we have been called to and have embraced.

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Jesus, Life of all life. (Roumanian)
The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind by Cynthia Bourgeault, 30-31.

We return momentarily to this image of Jesus the vine and we the branches. We reflected that this mutual inter-abiding expresses the indivisible reality of divine love. We flow into God—and God into us—because it is the nature of love to flow. And as we give ourselves into one another in this fashion, the vine gives life and coherence to the branch while the branch makes visible what the vine is. . . . The whole and part live together in mutual, loving reciprocity, each belonging to the other and dependent on the other to show forth the fullness of love. This arena, or realm, or kingdom as we have often described it is not only the heaven we aspire to. No, it is both earthly and heavenly. The way in which we connect with this realm (Kingdom, Reign) has everything to do with how we are able to live our part here on earth. That is because there is an energetic continuum that runs through all of creation. The Wisdom tradition (non-dual consciousness) stresses the presence of divine consciousness at every level. God is the web, the energy, the space, the light that allows us to access through our five senses the physical and quantifiable universe. We do that through our psychic energies of attention, will, prayer, and love. These energies may be invisible but are perceivable in the “awakened heart”.

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More about that this afternoon. For now, we will turn to a bit of history including biblical legacy and that of Vatican II.

**Slide 5**

_Fintan Sheeran SSCC. “Religious Life as Fire in the Church”. INFORMATION (Vol. 19, Issue 3) Fall 2009._

As we reflect on our call to authentic relationships in community, we remember that VC II searched for a place to situate religious life in the institutional structures of the church. When the Council could not find one, it was concluded that it belonged to the charismatic dimension of church, to its holiness. Secondly, one of the most significant assertions of the council was that the church as a basic sacrament of salvation is before everything else, a community of love. It is the central axis of the church’s life, not the hierarchical order. Let us recall that when St. Paul addressed problems and scandals in the community, he spoke to the community and expected the community to resolve the difficulties. Thirdly, the Council proclaimed an awareness of the church as a “world church”, rather than a church with its home base in Europe and the western world. For example, Latin America has spoken to the church about the poor at our door. Asia has given us words about humble, respectful dialogue with cultures, with religions, with the poor, and about a theology and strategy for mission that is essential if we are to build the Kingdom of God. Africa brings the richness of diversity in its own unique way. These three orientations – charismatic identity, community of love, and world or global dimension of the church are indicative of our reality as women religious in the church. We respond to the church from these dimensions of our lives. The point at issue is our radical identity and purpose in and with the church. We are called to a relationship of co-responsibility with the Spirit for our world and to a special sensitivity to the needs of the church.

There is a perception that the prophetic role is becoming sharper as our numbers diminish. Fintan Sheeran SSCC says that “prophecy is not a labor intensive enterprise”, but that it is always historically conditioned. The fact of numerical and physical diminishment does not make our prophetic mission less crucial or less possible. In the inverse, its importance is heightened by the need for our presence in a world fraught with danger. Our question centers on how we do this.

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The **charismatic dimension** calls us to see, perceive and understand our reality from the perspective of the gospel; always radically at odds with the dominant consciousness through critique, animation, and sometimes confrontation.

The **community of love** witnesses and brings about the exclamation “See how they love one another!” (because of their connectedness to the vine)

**World orientation** impels us to respond to the joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of the people of this world from the collective commitment to God’s loving presence. It encourages us to consider the vision of the Gospel in the vastness of God’s imagination.

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The Greek word *prophetes* literally means “one who is called or summoned” to bring about one’s own inner transformation as well as that of the community.

The functions of restoring, preaching, and transforming do not have age limits. The Holy Saturday women were not defined by age or possessions or status.

Religious must publicly act out their message by boldly critiquing the structures (political, religious, social & cultural) of their time;

- by valiantly energizing people toward a new way of life that is transforming and life giving;
- and giving witness to their true character by shaping a way of life that has potential to transform themselves and the world.
Albert Nolan:  Hope In An Age of Despair
When the rich man asked Jesus what he had to do to earn eternal life, Jesus asked him to choose God. *Go sell your possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and then join me and my disciples.* In other words, “come into our community of love.” Jesus did not ask the rich man to be destitute, to have nothing to live on, or to beg for a living. He challenged him to join the group of disciples who are not in need because they share everything, and because LOVE is the source of their unity and diversity.

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Sandra Schneiders.  *Buying the Field.* 98-99 elucidates the concept of “community life” as found in the Gospels.
The Church is a historical realization in the world of the new kind of family that Jesus inaugurated. It is not rooted in biology or physical kinship or ethnicity or any other kind of natural bond. In other words, **Faith, not blood, is the foundation of this new social reality which came to be called The Church.** Religious women and men choose to incarnate this reality in a special life form in which . . .
- Natural family or one founded by marriage plays no constitutive role.
- RL is not utopian nor a corporation for assuring economic well-being
- Not a benevolent society devoted to good works
- **The BOND of community life is hearing the Word of God and keeping it.** (Luke 8:19-21; 11: 27)
- **We come together with others whom we have not chosen, binding ourselves only by faith and the total self-gift to CHRIST for the sake of the world.** The characteristics of community life as we see it in the Gospels is . . .
  - A non-patriarchal household of faith,
  - Shared discipleship of equals, which . . .
  - Fosters the contemplative quest for God & ministry of its members, and
  - Witnesses to the world the possibility that limited human beings can live the very life of the Trinity and the unity in diversity of totally disinterested and altruistic love among radically equal persons.

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Gospel community life is a witness to what the world is called to become . . .
- A universal, transcendent, and inclusive community no longer divided by family, tribe, race, ethnicity, religion, or class
- Announcing that all natural ties must finally be relativized by the unity to which the entire Creation is called.
  - There is an “eschatological character”: living in the present that which the Church is drawn to live by the end time and realized fully in eternity
Making a public life form of the prayer of Jesus: *that they all may be one. . . As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.* (John 17:22) Even this is not the final goal, but rather *so the world might believe*. (John 17:21)

Slide 10
Moreover, religious life as a community of love is characterized by:
- Voluntary participation
- Egalitarian & interdependent, in the sense of trinitarian interpersonal mutuality, rather than a political one person, one vote democracy.
- It is a network of Gospel-based relationships centered on. . .
Exclusive love of Jesus Christ
Gathered around the Risen Christ
Spirit-empowered equal disciples
• A community of love consists in people who are empowering carriers of the reign or God. Power is a resource to be shared within the community and with others through ministry, and exercised through dialogue.
• Corporate power is available for mission:
  - All speak with authority;
  - All are called to obey, to respond appropriately to what the Spirit is saying through the community’s discourse.
  - Corporate choices are made concerning the community’s presence in the world.

Slide 11
In your communications during your chapter preparatory phases (October 2012), I found this statement:

*Perhaps what we said in this last open forum was less important than the quality of presence that emerged. Over the course of three days, we had grown in our ability to become more intimate, honest and present, even amidst our differences. In our open forum we experienced ourselves as one body. We were in-it-together, holding the tension of our Journey of Transformation differences in a common heart made whole by the union of our love. We had made ourselves more whole. We had become whole-makers. You have truly embodied the words of tomorrow’s gospel where Jesus said . . . Be perfect! To be perfect means to be whole-makers. Let’s take this a bit deeper into paschal mystery dynamics. So, what is this work of being a community of love? What should we be about during this time of change as women of wisdom, as women of justice, aged in prudence and moral stature?*

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In times of change, we are pushed to our limits and squeezed by our finitude and the brokenness of the world. We are tempted to turn away and be complacent; to wish we were dealt a different hand, tempted to hedge our bets, to give as little as possible to preserve our sense of righteousness; to do just enough of the right thing and keep our heads low.

Such moments force us to decide who we really are. The brokenness of the world gives us the opportunity to love and to give ourselves in love to what is.

- Do not refuse reality, but **embrace** it.
- Hold on; **resist tendency toward complacency**.
- **Curb arrogance**; know that God is ultimately in control of our lives & is the source of our human achievements & victories.
- **Reduce self-centeredness** & enlarge our world view.
- **Awaken inner consciousness**.
- **Insistently love creation**.
- **Form authentic relationships**, both personally & communally; live into them with compassionate response for the sake of mission.
- **Receive the “hard grace”** of the Paschal Mystery.
- Allow **graceful giving** to have the last word.

Slide 13
Others have taken this journey before us. Let us consider the testimony of St. Symeon the New Theologian, a Byzantine Christian monk and poet from Galatia, who was the last of three saints canonized by the Eastern Orthodox church and given the title of “Theologian”. In this beautiful poem, he writes:
We awaken in Christ’s body
as Christ awakens our bodies. . .
Let [us] receive the one who is opening to you so deeply.
For if we genuinely love him, we woke up inside Christ’s body
where all our body, all over, every most hidden part of it,
is realized in joy as Him, and He makes us utterly real . . .
and everything . . . is in Him transformed and recognized as whole,
as lovely, and radiant in His light.
We awaken as the Beloved in every last part of our body.

Let’s talk about the “hard grace” of Paschal Love & Mystery
• God did not turn away or reshuffle the cards when creation was broken by human sinfulness.
• God insistently loved humanity, refusing to let it die of self-inflicted wounds, respecting its
  finitude by entering into it bodily – becoming subject even to its sin & violence.
• It is a strange freedom to commit fully to the passion of Christ. At the heart of the Paschal
  Mystery lies, not the cross, but Christ’s Body stretched upon it.
• Christ died watching the world fall apart, but through complete giving to the end (which looked
  like failure), God made resurrection possible.
• It was through “holding on” through complete loss that everything was saved.
• God’s graceful giving has the last word. Paradoxically, life is found in death, the greatest
  poverty of all, We have made a commitment to the poverty of the cross as well as to poverty of
  materiality, of insecurity, of inner loneliness. Less paradoxically, life is found in a love that holds
  on through death. . . Jesus saw the loss of all that God had brought about in his ministry. It is no
  less difficult for us.
• Real suffering is always a surprise. We undergo not simply temporary pain, but real loss. There
  is no guarantee that any crisis will turn out well, that our sacrifices will not be in vain or that we
  are holding onto anything more than a delusion. We could die in the process, but will we die in
  the act of “graceful giving”?

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Suffering & gift, freedom & binding are intertwined truths. We are called to mission through suffering
and prayer and love as much as in active ministries of all kinds.
The activeness of love is a call to bind ourselves to the finitude of others’ lives.
• We “do this in memory of Jesus” in the Eucharist & in our lives.
The Paschal Mystery is a fundamental form of Christian hope & grace.
• In the Paschal Mystery we are given strength to look at the overwhelming need of the world –
suffering, disability, misfortune, injustice – and we receive the courage to respond somehow in
love. There are times that demand action, and other times that burdens are so heavy that we
can only hold on, trying to remain faithful, feeling powerless in our finitude and the needs of the
world.
• We hold on, not with stoic tolerance of suffering, but in love illumined by faith in the possibility
  of salvation.
• The Incarnation, says Hans Urs von Balthasar, does not bring clarity but a deepening of the
  drama.
Our bodies are a fundamental touch point of the Paschal Mystery.
• Finitude, needs, and gift are all embodied experiences.
• As we suffer, our bodies and minds touch into the body of the suffering Christ. Our mirror
  neurons respond to the One we love.
In John’s Gospel of the Passion, the soldiers put their spear into Jesus’ side. Blood and water came out - signs of life. John said, “I have seen it and I tell you so that you may believe.” In a Holy Saturday spirituality, it is appropriate to . . .

1. **Grieve** and do so deeply
2. **To enter into deep prayer**, not just words, but the deep down prayer; contemplative listening to God’s presence
3. **To remember past enthusiasm** - times when you experienced the presence of God
4. **To tend to our relationships** - stay close to the group, the community, the Church, even though there might be "jerks" among us who have been annoying, lacking in credibility, and unfaithful to the Gospel.
5. **Trust** even though you do not know the outcome - how it will all turn out
6. **Have courage and be joyful.**

None of the four Gospels tell us what the disciples did on Saturday, only that “they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment” (Luke 23:56). We don't know what they talked about, or if the group was plunged into silence as they contemplated going on without their beloved Teacher.

What did it mean? There was no one to interpret the signs and Scriptures for them anymore. It must have felt hopeless. We don't talk about Holy Saturday very much. We spend a lot of time on the build up to Jesus' arrest and on his death on Friday. Then, we skip straight to Sunday morning, when the three women came to bring spices to the tomb, only to find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty.

But on Holy Saturday, Jesus has not risen from the dead. The tomb is sealed and Jesus' body is inside. Sometimes, it feels like he's dead and we are left to carry on alone. And yet, even when it seems like the story is over, we know that there's more.

Tomorrow on Easter Sunday, we'll go to the tomb only to discover that someone has rolled away the stone right under the very noses of the Roman guards. The tomb should be sealed, but it won't be, because the grave is no obstacle for God.

Today on Holy Saturday, it is dark and we must dwell on the sacrifice Jesus willingly made on our behalf. He took our punishment and today, he is dead. We should never forget how important that is. Before he rises, he makes the ultimate sacrifice out of selfless love for us. That, in itself, is incredible.

Today, the tomb is sealed. Tomorrow, everything changes.


Centered in the paschal mystery of complete self-giving, we are drawn to contemplating the realities of authentic relationships in our community of love. Take this time now to consider how your participation in Tiffin’s community of love has brought you into a deeper inter-abiding of the All Loving One. How has the community of love transfigured your life? In what ways is this Tiffin community called to influence the world today?