

## **Journey in Jubilee and Chapter: Flawed but Graced A personal reflection**

As I sit to commit to paper a reflection on my experience of Host Group this Chapter Year, the clock on my computer indicates today's date as June 28<sup>th</sup> 2012. This is a special date because, some fifty years ago today, I - and eight companions - made our Final Profession in the Sisters of Mercy.

While a tapestry of motivations shaped my decision, the primary influence in doing so was the promise of a special relationship with God and the opportunity to serve others. But above all, we religious were, comparatively speaking, on the 'higher' road to heaven! Reality, however, proved otherwise!

The convent hierarchical culture of early convent years was a two-tiered system, those with power and those without. The given script, dictating conformity and its attendant fears, drove the system. Indeed, I can recall instances revealing my awareness that something was terribly wrong. In time, the Love that propelled me into the convent was lost in the scripted minutiae of the institution, the Dream clouded by the establishment.

In time, too, many among us longed for the opportunity to give voice to a new way of being in congregation. Equally, in the years since Vatican II, opportunities to maximize Voice were made available, mainly, through congregational Chapter processes and mutual conversations. And so, in July, 2011, when our Chapter was formally convoked, the Letter of Convocation indicated that a chapter process would be designed such that each Sister would have the opportunity to voice her dream for the future of Mercy. I was, particularly, overjoyed at the notion that a Host Group, composed of volunteers from grassroots, would frame the participative process such "that we might continue doing Chapter differently". [Letter of Convocation, July 2011].

Working with the Harvest Group, a sub set of the Host Group, I was privileged to enter into the heart of the congregation, its pain, its hope, its imagination. Involved with the Harvest Group in generating "a reservoir brimming with the hopes, dreams and concerns of the sisters", [Host Group mercy@live February 2012] we were challenged to be loyal to the story the sisters wished to tell. But, even in the most tiring of days, I was propelled forward on the harvesting journey by anecdotes of local conversations. Sisters seemed to be grasping the idea that Chapter 2012 is a conversation that will *continue* to challenge us in to the future about the *life* of mercy.

The story, therefore, of Chapter 2012 is akin to the story of a Golden Jubilee i.e. a dance between relationship and integrity; a dance that connects the bits and pieces of our lives as we try to find the lost selves, graced and flawed. The early situations in which we found ourselves, the initial life choices made; all seemed to reinforce the notion of 'body here and soul there'. Now, many years later - we realize how this theology contradicts the core message of Christianity i.e. that the locus of our discernment is our humanity. This, my greatest learning of recent years, was confirmed and blessed by the process of the Host/Harvest Group Chapter 2012. Most of all, it was blessed by the sisters' narratives in which complex existential questions existed side by side with the vitiating principles of Mercy in Chapter 2012. Thus, our story resonates with the notion that springtime and harvest are continually one in our lives: "in the same moment, the sickle is reaping *and* the seed is sprinkled; one tends the green cluster *and* another treads the wine-press" [George

Eliot].

The outer world, the world of the body, the world of the here-and-now - realities of many years ago about which I was once repeatedly told to forget - are now things to which I feel very connected. Like many of my sisters in the congregation – and as revealed in the Sisters' cards/doodles - the very things that we learned as non-spiritual are now sources of spirituality and wholeness.

Like my Jubilee Year, Chapter 2012 is, a meaningful point on a long journey marked by search, disillusionment and pain, but characterized by fidelity to the dream of relationship with a God of Mercy and others. Some re-conceptualize this relationship as a union with a "God of Interconnection." My search for integrity – as with my congregation - is now an enabling paradigm in that it allows for different categories of relationships, e.g. relationships with God, relationships with others, relationships with the planet, animal and human as a tightly bundled unit.

As human beings living in human cultures, each of us exists in complex narrative positions. I have always felt out of step with my church and congregation, always calling it, them, and myself to more than we could be. I have always felt myself to be in a place for which there is no known geography, where things are confusing and uncomfortable. Therefore, in the years prior to Chapter Year 2012, I had begun to accept that I would never, ever, have the opportunity to offer/share my views, my insights and the fruits of my studies with my congregation. I had assumed that the only place I could offer my gifts was the 'outside' world. And this saddened me greatly.

And then, as I enter my Jubilee Year, the Congregational Leadership Team offers a process of chapter engagement, the mere articulation of which was a source of healing in itself. The Host Group went on to model and provide a meaningful example of the empowerment of its members and working teams, leading some of us to muse, "have we been changed utterly?"

Surely indeed, a confluence of grace has been flowing through the year of Jubilee and Chapter! A fitting conclusion to our 'chapter learning' may well be "we are one, after all, you and I. Together we suffer, together exist. Forever we will recreate each other." Teilhard de Chardin.

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