

Spring 2016

# Heart



A Journal of the Society of the Sacred Heart, United States – Canada





# ...to Heart

## Dear Friends and Family of the Sacred Heart,

Thank you for reading *Heart* magazine and for connecting with the growing and multi-faceted Sacred Heart family. This letter and this issue of *Heart* bring you both love and a promise of prayer from each member of the Society of the Sacred Heart in the United States and Canada.

The spring issue of *Heart* offers you several reflections that speak of hope in a complex and often broken world. No one needs to look very far to see the effect of brokenness on our world, our families and maybe even ourselves. From the gathering of indigenous grandmothers in Canada to the faith communities of San Francisco to the rebuilding of the community of Ferguson, Missouri, we see and hear of the lives of people who are emboldened and sustained by faith, hope and commitment. I pray that looking at our world through the lens of their experience and perspective will grow your faith and belief that community, faith, day in and day out hard work, prayer and the ever present fidelity of God are the heart of the matter, that is, *discovering God's gratuitous love for each of us and revealing this same love of God to the people and situations we meet along our journeys.*

I ask you to pray for the Society of the Sacred Heart internationally as representatives of the congregation from forty-one countries gather around the theme of Mission for the Emerging Future this summer in Nemi, Italy. As more than 2000 RSCJ internationally looked at the needs of their own people and prayed about the call of the Society's mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it was amazing and spirit-filled to see the convergence of how God is calling us forward:

- To deepen our spirituality and charism, from which springs our strength for mission
- To focus on urgent justice issues and respond to the calls of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*
- To reinforce our educational mission, to reach out to those on the peripheries, and to empower young people for a better future.

Our future is already deeply "on the way." The experience and insights of young people like Julia Basnage, a junior at Sacred Heart Schools in Atherton, California, give me great hope, both in the impact of the Sacred Heart educational mission and in the potential for our emerging future. I leave you with Julia's reflection after spending time with our sisters at Oakwood:

*Thanks to the passion of these women, now I have been empowered. . . it's impossible to talk to women who have accomplished so much and not feel motivated to be a changemaker. It's impossible to sit with these women, who totally embody and radiate love, and not love yourself. It's impossible to hear the stories of the sisters and not leave transformed in some way.*

I invite you to sit down and enjoy reading this issue of *Heart*. We welcome you to join with us in this exciting moment in our history. ❖

In One Heart,

*Barbara Dawson RSCJ*

Barbara Dawson, RSCJ  
Provincial  
United States – Canada Province





Heart is published two times a year to highlight the mission and ministries of the Society of the Sacred Heart, United States - Canada, for a wide circle of friends. The covers, photographs of hearts in nature, symbolic of Christ's presence at the heart of the universe, bear witness to the contemplative dimension of the Society's "wholly contemplative, wholly apostolic" mission: To discover and reveal God's love through the service of education.

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Articles are by Donna Heckler, editor of Heart, except where otherwise noted.

The Society of the Sacred Heart was founded by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat in post-revolutionary France and brought to the United States by Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne in 1818.

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**ON THE COVER:**

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# Building Community: Launch of the Vidyo® Conference System

By Bonnie Kearney, RSCJ

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” as the saying goes, and is that ever true now for the USC Province. It seems a long time ago that the province members began connecting with one another by teleconference. In fact, the first teleconference on record was in January 1977, and the first province-wide teleconference was on January 9, 1983. At that time, we gathered together to hear reports, questions, reflections, and celebrations. In the process we sometimes couldn’t hear, or heard, through unmuted mics, things that we didn’t need to hear, human and animal, phones and sirens. But now, with the province’s new Vidyo system, we will be able not only to hear but see one another.

The province has invested in a new video conference system called Vidyo and has spent the winter months installing and setting up equipment in the various communities to enable participation in video conferencing. We are just beginning to learn all the ways that we can use this technology to build community and to reach out to and learn from others. The first use of the Vidyo system was for a province-wide video conference on April 17. That conference not only allowed us to hear

from our delegates to the forthcoming General Chapter, but we were able to see them, and they were able to hear and see those who contributed affirmations and additions from throughout the province. One important gift of this technology is that we can gather as a province and see one another without traveling very far.

Beyond the province-wide meetings, there is so much more that Vidyo conferencing can add to our mission. At Bedford, New York, the community was already planning a teleconference with an RSCJ in Mexico who has gathered all the ways earlier Chapters have addressed social justice issues. Now, they will have anyone in that expanded

community and their Associates meet by Vidyo conference, be present in a new, more personal way to this aspect of our mission. Provincial committees will be able to utilize this technology and thereby avoid renting cars, cancelled or weather-delayed flights, hours on the road, by sitting “at home.” Each one can be present with others and at the same time lessen our carbon footprint. The emphasis here is not solely on saving money, but on helping the environment, on helping members to be more present; ultimately on bringing together our Sacred Heart family in a more personal and meaningful way than hitherto.



With multiple views available at one time, Sisters from communities throughout the province can see and connect with one another in video conference. Locations counterclockwise from top: Oakwood, Sprout Creek Farm, 118th Street NYC, Miami, St. Louis Archives, Halifax, Stuart Conference Center, and Maine.





## An RSCJ Imagines

Imagine how our conversations and our sense of mission can be enlarged by hearing and seeing our sisters in Asia or Africa or South America discuss issues, such as trafficking or clean, accessible water. Imagine how a conversation about immigration would affect us and be broadened by our European sisters' experiences, informing our lives and opinions, impacting how we educate our students and how we interact with our families and colleagues. Imagine that, because we have this technology, we can hear, see and talk with Lisa and John and meet some of their friends from One Ferguson (page 14). Imagine how Irma can have us share her experiences visually (page 6). So many of us are well informed through written material, but perhaps this technology will help inform us through a virtual touching of the differences, brokenness, suffering of our world that may find their way into our hearts. As educators we know the value of experiential learning and how it awakens values and questions, faith and concern.

We, as a province, now have a new tool to use to open ourselves to a world that cries out for spiritual values. Is this not why there is a group in the province working on a virtual spiritual ministry center? Will it provide an opening to invite in people of diverse faith experiences to broaden our realization of the love of God poured out on all people and all the earth? We have a new tool that calls us to touch the others in our midst, for surely John is not alone in being haunted by missing the reality that was around him. This new tool can help us experience our world in new, visceral ways, ways that we can share with colleagues and students, neighbors and parishioners, international sisters. . . . Let us hope it releases our imaginations so that they will bring us into the heart of the world around us, where we meet our brothers and sisters, and in them recognize that "God is in the worn, embattled, broken down layers because God always loved the poor and the weak. This is where to look for our God most, in [oneself] where one is broken and vulnerable, where one is scarred and needs God's healing," *The Whole Earth Meditation*, Joan Sauro, CSJ. ✦

## In Memoriam

*Blessed are those who have died in the Lord; let them rest from their labors for their good deeds go with them.*

***Bienvenida Velez, RSCJ***  
*November 14, 2015*

***Irene Mary Cotter, RSCJ***  
*December 10, 2015*

***Margaret Erhart, RSCJ***  
*December 17, 2015*

***Faine McMullen, RSCJ***  
*December 27, 2015*

***Janith (Jan) Cairns McNabb, RSCJ***  
*January 7, 2016*

***Mary Louise Parkinson, RSCJ***  
*January 8, 2016*

***Mathilde McDuffie, RSCJ***  
*February 20, 2016*

***Margarita Santos, RSCJ***  
*March 8, 2016*

***Caroline Desaulniers, RSCJ***  
*March 24, 2016*

***Felisa García González, RSCJ***  
*March 27, 2016*

***Frances Murphy, RSCJ***  
*March 31, 2016*

***Catherine Seiker, RSCJ***  
*April 2, 2016*

*Full obituaries may be viewed at  
[RSCJ.org/about/memoriam](http://RSCJ.org/about/memoriam).*



# Experiences of Hope in a Broken World

## Irma Dillard, RSCJ, experiences hope in a broken world every single day.

As an RSCJ who ministers to the poor, she is currently serving in two very different parishes: St. Boniface with the Franciscans in the Tenderloin of San Francisco, one of the most depressed, poor and crime ridden districts in the city; and Most Holy Redeemer Church located in The Castro, San Francisco, the first gay neighborhood in the country. Beyond those ministries, she supports the St. Vincent de Paul Society Board as she volunteers at the Help Desk and helps to revamp their clothing, food and household give-away program.

We spoke with Sister Dillard to learn of her experiences, to understand what she sees, to share the brokenness she encounters and the hope that she finds.

## Tell us about the brokenness you find in the world.

I see brokenness every day. I see it with the people I have the honor of working with and serving in San Francisco: Working people, intelligent people, people living below the poverty line, families, single folk, male, female, crossing all cultures, all ages, and all gender lines: brokenness touches everyone.

My personal prayer and experiences have been focused on the brokenness in our world. I cannot simply articulate one story; that just doesn't do it for me. I am experiencing the brokenness when I sit down to talk with someone. It cuts deep. When I turn on the news on TV or radio, open





Fellowship with the RCIA (Right of Christian Initiation) candidates. From left to right: Colin Chandler, Josephine (Josie) Boyd Conn, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, Adora Anderson and Irma Dillard, RSCJ.

a magazine, drive through the city, etc.—brokenness is everywhere. I am continually haunted by the faces and lives of people and yet, at the same time, I am uplifted by the faces and lives of people.

The visuals are very real for me; the faces share the experience of human destruction on all levels: terrorism, fracking, phishing, human trafficking, 21st century human slavery, unemployment, home foreclosures, fear and violence, shootings, etc., etc.

I believe that the root cause of this brokenness is greed and selfishness; fear and oppression. The hurts that people wear generation after generation as both individuals and groups, those hurts take on a life of their own and manifest

themselves in institutions like racism, in the exploitation and economic gain for a few, such as the 1% that we talk about today.

Brokenness is all around us. But we are completely numb to it because we are barraged with so much of it on TV, radio, in magazines that we miss the point that it is real. It is someone's life.

### *Tell us about the hope you find in the world.*

I see, in each person, so much hope. It is all about connectedness or lack thereof. Everyone desires to have a purpose and meaning. Everyone wants to be loved and to love. Everyone wants to belong and be accepted. So when one is

connected, feels a part of something other than oneself, there is so much hope. This happened so clearly with three people in the RCIA.

I am in journey with three individuals in the RCIA program at Most Holy Redeemer. Their stories are full of hope in the midst of all the brokenness. Two were non-believers, both growing up in atheist families. Choosing God and wanting to have a relationship with God meant hope for them. The third grew up in the Bible Belt in the South with the “wrath of God” being the message. She knew she was different most of her life. As a trans-woman she has come through some horrific experiences and has deepened her relationship with God. She can say and she believes that she is “fearfully and wonderfully made by God.” God has called each one of them by name.

### *How are people finding hope in their lives?*

God. Trusting in the love and mercy of God. Trusting in that covenant promise. Being in journey with others and sharing our stories. Where are we letting God speak to us? Do we hear her voice?

The hope is that through connections between others and God that people will gain awareness to commit to change.

I am part of the process. I am in journey with people to assist them to be aware and to be connected. I do that by paying attention, listening to them, letting them talk about their own brokenness. Telling their story is healing and it offers perspective. I can make a difference by being connected to other human beings. We can all make a difference by truly connecting with one another. ❖

# Fidelity to Relationships

By Shirley Miller, RSCJ

One of Saint Madeleine Sophie's greatest gifts to the Society of the Sacred Heart, to the Church and to the world was her capacity for relationships. Her commitment to her family, her religious sisters, children in the schools, orphans, cooks and maintenance workers, bishops and priests is legendary. She stayed connected in spite of misunderstandings, miscommunications, unjust judgments, jealousies and long distances. Her 14,000 extant letters give witness to her fidelity to relationships. The motto of the Society that Sophie chose, *Cor unum et anima una in Corde Jesu*, One heart and one soul in the Heart of Jesus, calls on us to be the same. In our chaotic world today, we are challenged and invited to "Let love be your life."

Since the founding of the Society in 1800, hundreds of thousands of relationships and friendships have been born and nurtured in Sacred Heart schools and colleges, in other educational institutions, through the Children of Mary, alumnae/i and Associates groups, in soup kitchens and parishes, in spirituality centers and justice and peace initiatives, wherever the Society has ministered. We have learned what fidelity to relationships means through one another.

Today we are finding ways to connect more deeply with younger people. This spring we have begun conversations with young Sacred Heart alumnae to elicit their guidance in developing and maintaining new relationships. We are grateful for the input we have received from these young women; it is insightful and profound. We asked two of our group to share their thoughts on the theme of this issue of Hope in a Broken World – a response from young Sacred Heart alumnae.



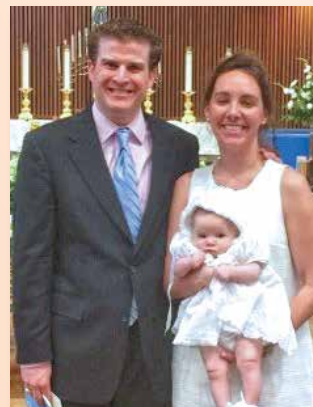
Thoughts by Ashley Michalek Knopp

Hope is a feeling, an idea, an emotion; it has unique meanings and manifestations for all of us. Hope is rooted deep within the fabric of who we are, but more importantly, in how we develop throughout our lives. I have the responsibility and the joy of understanding hope through the lens of education on a daily basis. It is through this lens that we see and experience dreams, goodness and connectedness.

Throughout my career, I have taught hundreds of young women, and what I value most is what they have taught me. I have learned that what we, as humans, desire more than anything is to establish authentic connections with one another. The relationships we build nurture our hope, and it is through these connections that we share our dreams and essential goodness with the world. This goodness, even amidst turmoil and uncertainty, shows itself through relationships that carry, exude, and magnify true hope.

The five Goals of Sacred Heart schools provide the guidance and balance that hope requires to fulfill its potential. Furthermore, they set the framework for how to reflect, act and live each day. I aspire to impart the value of living Sacred Heart values to my family and the young women I teach. As a new mother, my goal is to instill in my daughter the importance of hope, dreams, and the creation of true relationships.

After all, we are all connected.



Ashley Michalek Knopp, Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart in Houston, Class of 2002. She is a former teacher of French and religion at Duchesne Houston and was deeply involved in Keepers of the Flame. Ashley currently teaches French at St. Mary's Academy in Denver. She and her husband, Bryan, welcomed their first child, Annabelle Marie, in November 2015.



Thoughts by Meaghean Richardson

### Hope is everywhere, it is a driving force of life.

That is something I learned from my thirteen-year Sacred Heart education, but as a stubborn youth I had to better understand for myself. It took me two degrees in Psychology and Religious Studies to understand the enigmatic balance between head and heart. The faith and hope that I discovered are involved in the betterment and understanding of the self, our world and our universe, and are invaluable and inextricable from life.

Hope almost seems to be a human impulse. It is the drive to make a different future, a better future, and it involves faith in oneself and one's understanding of the world to make it possible. Faith – belief in ourselves, our reality – could be understood as a basic human function. Without faith in the things that are or could be and the hope that things can be fixed or made better, there would be no impetus to get out of bed, to make the day a good one, to care for the affairs of the world, or even to clean one's room. And just like cleaning a room, things may get dirtier before they get better; but it doesn't mean they are broken. If the world were perfect, we couldn't hope for better. The world is not broken; it is a mechanism of and for faith and hope.

Even explorations into the Quantum, the new frontier of physics and the very foundation of our universe, are now seen to infer that we are no anthropic accident, but a fractal of a larger conscious whole. Hope has a purpose. We have a purpose. The world will never be perfect and neither will we, because we can always be better; there will always be hope for better. There will be those who misplace or overlook hope, but it's up to us to carry it in our hearts and to let the world know: hope is never lost and nothing is ever truly broken.

The power of faith and hope in our world permeates everything. I devote my life's pursuits to understanding better the miraculousness that is our existence. How am I living hope in the world? I am hope. We all are.



Meaghean Richardson, Sacred Heart School of Halifax (SHSH), Class of 2007. Vice President of the SHSH Alumnae/i Association.



Rosemary Peeler

**We are grateful to Patricia Rosemary Peeler**, an exceptional woman who made a gift to the Society in her will. A graduate of Grosse Pointe and Manhattanville, Rosemary taught at Manhattanville, Convent of the Sacred Heart, Greenwich, and Convent of the Sacred Heart, 91st Street, New York, for many years. Educator, alumna, friend, musician, volunteer and benefactor, Rosemary died from cancer in April 2013. Her generous bequest to the Society made possible the publication of *Seeking the One Whom We Love: How RSCJs Pray* (available at Amazon.com).

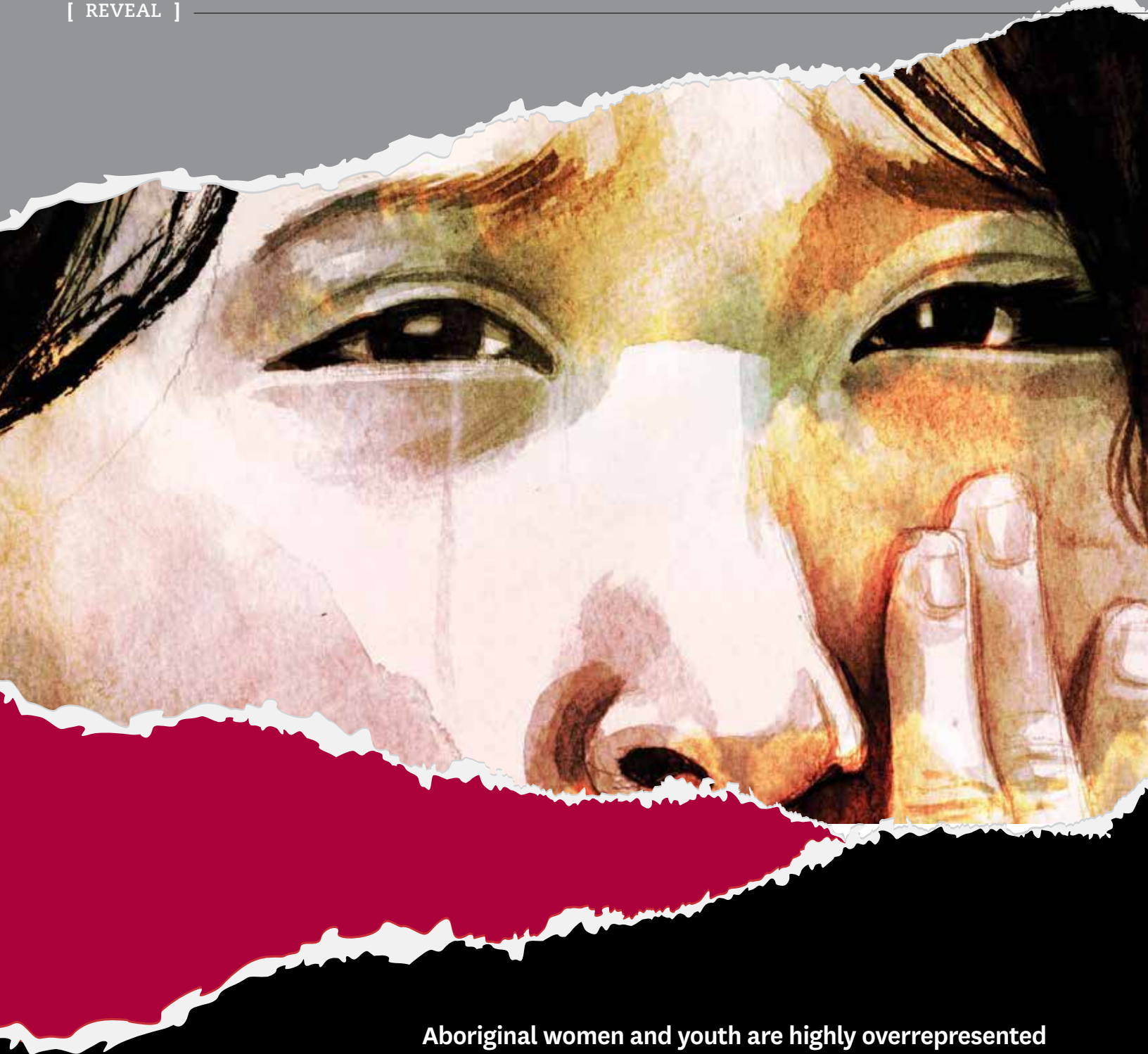
Please consider including the Society in your estate plan and joining the *Cor Unum Legacy Society*. Your lasting gift will enable the Society's educational and spiritual mission to flourish far into the future.

Thank you for your fidelity to the Religious of the Sacred Heart. You have shared hope and courage and friendship with thousands of RSCJ along the journey, and our lives have been transformed because of your love. ✝

—Shirley Miller, RSCJ,  
Director of Mission Advancement



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Aboriginal women and youth are highly overrepresented in the statistics on human trafficking, i.e., anywhere from 15-50% of persons trafficked in Canada, although they represent only 4% of the population.



# Human Trafficking Prevention: PACT-Ottawa's Project Northern Outreach

By Sheila Smith, RSCJ

Project Northern Outreach is a partnership between PACT-Ottawa (Persons Against the Crime of Trafficking in humans) and a core circle of twelve Ojibwe Nookmisak (Grandmothers) from Manitoulin Island and the north shore of Lake Superior.

Head grandmother, Isabelle Meawasige, from Serpent River First Nation in Ontario, and I began to talk about a potential partnership during the summer of 2014 when we were together in India to participate in Women's Worlds Congress. Grandmother Isabelle shared about the need for human trafficking prevention in the remote Anishinabek<sup>1</sup> communities in Northern Ontario. "We don't want to lose any more of our girls," she said to me.

It is well-known by Aboriginal<sup>2</sup> peoples in Canada and backed-up by academic research that one of the key root causes to trafficking in Aboriginal women and youth is the breakdown of their societies and cultures due to the imposition of colonialism. One example of a colonial policy in Canada is the Indian residential school system, which caused great havoc in Aboriginal communities. However, the disparities caused in the past continue today through the imposition of government structures and policies that still disfavour Aboriginal peoples in Canada. For example, discrimination is evidenced in the research, which shows that Aboriginal women and youth are highly overrepresented in human trafficking, i.e., anywhere from 15 to 50% of persons trafficked in Canada are Aboriginals, although they represent only 4% of the population.

After many months of proposal writing with a team from PACT-Ottawa, Project Northern Outreach received some short-term funding from Public Safety Canada to address sex trafficking in Anishinabek communities. The Project respects the Anishinabe view that Nookmisak are the highest



The Nookmisak and Pact-Ottawa holding the talking stick in recognition of the mutual partnership and the support of the Nookmisak circle.



The PACT Mission: To recognize the human dignity and promote the well-being of all trafficked persons.

authorities, educators and keepers of cultural and foundational laws. Project Northern Outreach supports the core circle of twelve Nookmisak as they come together to understand the nature of human trafficking in their communities, to work as a collective to raise awareness, to prevent human trafficking, to support and help those who have survived.

The core circle of twelve Nookmisak, along with three representatives of PACT-Ottawa, gathered in February 2016 and twice in March. The goals of these meetings were to support each other, pray in ceremonies, learn, share stories, gather resources, and decide on action steps for the way forward. The Nookmisak welcome frontline service workers, students, Chiefs, et al. into the circle and create partnerships to learn from one another and work together.

One of the aims of Project Northern Outreach is to adapt PACT-Ottawa's existing educational material to make it more culturally relevant for Anishinabek audiences. Revising the educational materials is not only necessary for information transmission in communities. It is also essential for training frontline service workers, police, educators, medical personnel, child welfare workers et al., so that they understand how to work within Anishnabek systems and cultures when confronted with situations of human trafficking.

The funding for Project Northern Outreach came to an end on March 31, 2016. However, the work does not end. The Nookmisak continue to organize themselves in phase two of the project, which is now called Nookmisak Nangdownjgewad (Grandmothers Taking Care). This change in name expresses a shift toward greater understanding of mutual recognition, as PACT-Ottawa becomes aware that their role is not to do *for* the Nookmisak. Rather, they participate in a more solid partnership that recognizes the role and contributions of each.

The mutual partnership between the Nookmisak and PACT-Ottawa was solidified when a talking stick, carved from white willow was given to Project Northern Outreach.



Head grandmother Isabelle Meawasige and Sheila Smith, RSCJ, building a partnership.

It was a gesture of recognition that symbolized and actualized the experience of mutuality being lived between the Nookmisak and PACT-Ottawa. The purpose of the talking stick is to help support the work of the Nookmisak circle, which became the core of Project Northern Outreach.

I was presented with the talking stick<sup>3</sup> and asked to be its keeper. This honour and responsibility involves recognition that the keeper of the stick is a bridge between PACT-Ottawa and the Nookmisak. The keeper of the talking stick has the responsibility to care for it, use it, and bring it each time the Nookmisak gather.

The talking stick is passed around the sharing circle at each meeting. The gift of the talking stick is a gesture of mutual recognition. It symbolizes hope that the cultural struggles between PACT-Ottawa and the Nookmisak in their work together to help end trafficking in Aboriginal women and girls in Canada are worthwhile; and the gesture was a real experience of the gratitude in which we all participate.

As the work continues, the Nookmisak have identified the following priorities to prevent and address trafficking of Anishinabek women and youth: to raise the importance of the teaching and healing roles of the Nookmisak; to advocate, educate and create awareness about human trafficking; to strengthen cultural competency; to further develop Anishnabe-centered educational material; to present at community-based educational events; to work with persons who have survived and their families; and to continue to support one another in this work. ❖

1. Anishinabe, Anishinabek (plural): used by the Ojibwe/Chippewa, Odawa, Potawatomi, Algonquin, Delaware and Mississaugaa Tribal Nations to self-identify as individuals or collectives.
2. Aboriginal peoples in Canada comprise three groups: First Nations, of which there are approximately 614 nations, Inuit, and Metis.
3. Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres, "I Am a Kind Man" [www.iamakindman.ca/IAKM/YouthSite/the-healing-circle.html](http://www.iamakindman.ca/IAKM/YouthSite/the-healing-circle.html) (accessed March 30, 2016). In the Anishinaabe clan system of governance, a talking stick or feather is used to facilitate talking, sharing, or healing circles, and is used in decision-making. The stick or feather is passed around the circle, and the person holding it has the opportunity and responsibility to speak his/her truth. "Using a talking stick or feather in a healing circle can help the person focus him or herself to have a deeper awareness into their inner world, or inner feelings. As each person has the opportunity to speak, the object gets passed to the next person. It doesn't have to be in any certain order."



# Seeking the One Whom We Love

By Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ

**“Always be ready to give an account of the hope that is in you.”** So wrote the author of the First Letter of Peter (3:15). But what is the source of that hope? Where does it come from? How is it nurtured? What keeps us “hoping against hope” in the dark stretches? What sustains us in face of personal tragedy or public chaos or dryness that can numb the soul?

A new publication of the Society of the Sacred Heart, *Seeking the One Whom We Love: How RSCJs Pray*, offers an amazing variety of responses to these questions. In this book fifty-five Religious of the Sacred Heart respond to an invitation to write

about prayer – not what they have read about it or what they think about it but how they actually pray. Though the book is not explicitly about hope, these pieces provide glimpses of how their personal relationship with God supports and sustains a hope-filled life.

The title is drawn from words that Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat wrote to one of her religious: “What difference

does it make how you pray provided your heart is seeking the One whom you love.” Sophie was utterly free in her teachings on prayer. What a relief for all of us to realize that there is no “right way” to pray, no necessary pattern. Essentially, prayer is seeking God in a myriad of ways that deepen that precious relationship.



The essays vary in length and style. Some include poetry, photographs, a pencil sketch, a water color. Throughout the book there are lovely short quotations on prayer, mostly by the Society’s founding mothers. An appendix contains the section On Prayer from the *Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart*, a re-articulation of our charism, written in 1982 in response to the invitation of the Second Vatican Council.

As different as each entry is from the others, there is a remarkable cohesion in the collection, a deep longing for God and a commitment to a life of prayer whether in times of consolation or darkness. “Above all,” the book’s introduction states, “the bedrock of these essays is what binds Religious of the Sacred Heart together: a common search for the One whom we love, a struggle with the tension of being wholly contemplative and wholly apostolic, and a longing to make God’s love visible in the heart of the world.”

The early response to the book has surprised and delighted us. A March book launch in St. Louis attracted an enthusiastic crowd. Some of the Sacred Heart Network schools have planned their own book launch or class on prayer or faculty discussion group. The book is now available through Amazon or Barnes and Noble. It can also be ordered through your favorite local book store. ✦



Co-editors Therese Fink Meyerhoff and Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, at the book launch party in March.

# Ferguson – A City of Hope



(AP Photo/David Goldman)

Lisa Tebbe, left, embraces her husband, John Powell, both of Ferguson, Missouri, while looking over the sidewalk memorial near the spot where Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson.

## “How did a social justice teacher not know?” The question haunts John Powell to this day.

John teaches social justice as part of the theology curriculum at Villa Duchesne and Oak Hill School in St. Louis. His wife, Lisa Tebbe, is an alumna of the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles, where she is the admissions director.

The pair have grown up, worked in, researched and lived a life focused on social justice. So, how did they not know? How did they not see or understand the tension in Ferguson, Missouri, where they have made their home for nearly ten years?

Looking for a great home in a diverse community some years ago, Lisa and John were out for a Sunday drive when they spotted the home of their dreams. They moved to Ferguson in 2006 engaging in the community; they loved Ferguson, they were home. “As we drove down the street, people would stand up from their gardening and wave; Ferguson had the small town feel for which we had longed,” Lisa recalled. New events, new businesses were popping up, and Lisa and John found themselves participating, supportive, and proud of their community.

August 9, 2014, they were sitting at home listening to music, Lisa said, when she received a text. Someone had been shot in Ferguson, on the east side

of their town, not three miles away. Surprised, she got online to look for information and was stunned to see that, at the time, the body had been lying in the street for four hours already. A few hours later protests and prayer services started at the police headquarters, just a few blocks from their house. What was happening?

John speaks of the paradox “of being attracted to an area for its diversity, its community feel, and yet, not being aware of the injustices occurring right in their area.” After the shooting of Michael Brown, that changed. John and Lisa engaged in the community in deeper, more meaningful ways. They started attending meetings and protests and prayer services. They learned about the court systems, the way the community functioned. They heard their fellow Ferguson citizens share their stories of being pulled out of the car for a simple traffic violation and having obscenities screamed at them. That was not the Ferguson that Lisa and John knew.

If being a student, in fact a teacher, or administrator, in a Sacred Heart school has taught them anything, it is to find your passion, stand up and make a difference for people. And that they have done. The social justice teacher and his wife realized that they wanted to, in fact needed to, put into practice what John was teaching in the classroom. For them personally, Lisa offered, “that is the silver lining,” and do they ever practice those teachings now.



A group emerged in the aftermath of Michael Brown's shooting called ONE Ferguson; developed by engaged community members, it was founded to bring a voice to the city council in an effort to drive the foundational changes needed in the community. John is a deeply committed member of that effort. Whether the topic was city activity, a new police chief or Department of Justice discussions, ONE Ferguson is an important voice for the community focused on both changing what was wrong and encouraging all community members to participate in making the change. Sometimes, helping the hurting community know that they have a voice is the hardest part. So, sponsoring community dialogues, city council candidate forums and debates, encouraging the community to vote are all part of the work that needs to be done.

As the community continued to try to heal, the City of Ferguson resurrected its Human Rights Commission, designed to eliminate discrimination in housing,



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A vibrant heart painted on a board that was used to cover broken windows in Ferguson, Missouri, is a visual sign of the hope in the community.

public accommodations, and employment; ensure fair treatment of individuals in the community and, importantly, expedite complaints. John sits on that commission. The Commission received a state award for the work it is doing, but John and Lisa quickly point out that the work has only just begun.

The wounds are deep and the work will take years. But John and Lisa are hopeful that in the work being done a model will emerge that can change the dynamics, the conversation not just in Ferguson, not just in St. Louis, but in the country.

Yes, they believe the root cause is still racism, something not fully and deeply understood by many. But they see much hope. They see hope in the faces, in the people of Ferguson, in so many coming together and engaging as a collective to make changes. They see hope in those who are working so hard, dozens and dozens of people in the past eighteen months, with families and jobs and very busy lives who are finding time to be involved, run for city council, knock on doors, to get people engaged.

They started feeling hope profoundly on the morning after the non-indictment of Ferguson Officer Darren Wilson in November of 2014. The question that arose was "What do we do the next day?" So, Lisa explained, "At 9 a.m. we went out to where the unrest had been to try to help. And scores of people were already there: they were there with brooms and



Lisa Tebbe and John Powell actively participate and support ONE Ferguson as it works to bring the voice of the community forward to the city leaders.

dustpans and supplies. Many were not even from Ferguson; they just came to help."

John and Lisa see and feel the Sacred Heart charism daily in their hometown of Ferguson. The RSCJ who have touched the lives of Lisa and John have "given me the moral compass to do what is right and follow my truth," Lisa shared. And, while the question of how did John not know haunts him, the hope that the social justice teacher and his wife are bringing to this broken community is profound, as together they work to reveal God's love in the heart of Ferguson. ✝

*The wounds are deep and the work will take years. But John and Lisa are hopeful that in the work being done a model will emerge that can change the dynamics, the conversation not just in Ferguson, not just in St. Louis, but in the country.*







Julia Basnage with her advisors, Kristin Kelly and Serene Williams, as she prepares to present to the NWSA Convention.

Just as the RSCJ have so inspired Julia, so Julia's paper and associated website are making a profound impact on many. Her audience was moved to tears by the work she shared. Her advisors, well, you can hear the pride in their voices. But, perhaps most significantly, the sisters she interviewed themselves are so thrilled, so honored, so humbled. Upon hearing of a story Julia wrote for the school newspaper about her project, the sisters wrote her a letter, all twenty of them, personally thanking her and expressing their joy that the students at the school were learning about their work. Always with the heart of an educator, the sisters continue to want the eyes and ears of youth opened to the possibilities and hope of the world.

Julia will continue to play her part. She wants to continue this work she has started with the hope that she can "help create an area for women who are empowered by their faith to be celebrated and heard." This young voice has so much hope for the future and offers that "understanding the RSCJ's history of change and being connected to people who feel the same makes me feel as if I can be a part of the change." Stay tuned, for without fail, we will be hearing more about Julia Basnage. ❖

## An excerpt from Julia Basnage's paper to the NWSA Convention

*"Even in my school's Catholic community, assumptions about the Church are usually hostile; you don't hear a lot about good things happening for women in the context of a historically well-established patriarchy. The stories that the sisters shared made me question whether these assumptions about the church were even true. Instead of hearing stories of oppression, I learned that every RSCJ is offered resources and opportunities because of her vocation; empowering educational opportunities, and international connections are just a few. The sisters have accomplished almost everything I can only hope I'll do in my lifetime. From them, I've learned that Catholicism and feminism can and do interplay in beautiful ways that are rarely celebrated.*

*... Everywhere the sisters have taught, they have given children the tools and opportunities they need to set the world on fire. Thanks to the passion and mission of these women, now I have been empowered."*

*tools and opportunities they need to set the world on fire.*

## Celebrating Our Sisters

**The Religious of the Sacred Heart** reveal God's love in the heart of the world in so many different ways. We want to begin to celebrate their work with you, so that you know of all the service they are doing to reveal God's love. So please, look for this new section in upcoming issues of *Heart* and join us in honoring these women and the amazing work they do.



**Sister Carlota Duarte** was featured in the Global Sisters Report, a project of the *National Catholic Reporter*, about her Chiapas Photography Project, started in 1992 to train hundreds of indigenous photographers – Mayan Indians – to tell their own stories through pictures.

<http://bit.ly/1X8KH69>

<http://bit.ly/1QSeEQo>

**Sister Gwendolyn Hoeffel** spent most of the last fifty years living and working in Japan. She met with Brett Davis in New York City to talk about her work for Davis' oral history book project about Catholic women religious. Her story was shared by the Global Sisters Report, a project of the *National Catholic Reporter*.

<http://bit.ly/1IN9vfT>



**Sister Cecile Meijer**, our NGO representative at the United Nations, received an honorary degree from the University of Roehampton on March 16, 2016. The University of Roehampton in London, England, which celebrates its 175th anniversary, conferred on Cecile the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*, in recognition of her support of social development and human rights.

<http://bit.ly/1VK9Bts>

*Do you know a RSCJ who is making a significant impact in your community?  
If so, we would love to hear about her at [editor@rscj.org](mailto:editor@rscj.org).*

*How do you know what God wants you to do in your life?*



Explore how to listen to God's personal call to you on our new website, [rscj.org/vocations](http://rscj.org/vocations). Learn about the discernment process and what life is like as a Religious of the Sacred Heart.



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Explore on your own or contact our vocations director, Mary Pat White, RSCJ: [vocations@rscj.org](mailto:vocations@rscj.org)





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The Sacred Heart in Ferguson, Missouri; **Ferguson – A City of Hope**



A Grandmother and RSCJ Collaborative is shared in **Human Trafficking Prevention: Ottawa's Northern Outreach**



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**Lighting the Fire**

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