That All May Be One….

Our story is simple. We began in a small kitchen in LePuy, France. Six women aided by Father Jean Pierre Medaille, S.J., promised to share prayer, community and service of God’s people. They set about visiting the poor, the sick and imprisoned. The year was 1650.

In 1866, the Sisters of St. Joseph came to Florida at the request of Bishop Augustin Verot. They were called to evangelize and educate the freed slaves after the Civil War.

Today, Sisters of St. Joseph live and serve on every continent, where they continue to share prayer, community and ministry. The Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine, this congregation, serves the people of God throughout the state of Florida.

Seized by God’s love, our Mission is to work in collaboration with others to bring union and reconciliation to our world, “That all may be one.”

SSJ Federation Leadership Assembly

The Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph is a dynamic union of Sisters which moves us to a greater awareness of our oneness in grace and calls us to fidelity to that grace. The Federation has received canonical approbation as a public juridic person from the Congregation for Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome. Its purpose is to continually strive to incarnate the SSJ charism within the mission of Jesus today and in the future.

In early November, Sisters Jane Stoecker and Florence Bryan attended the SSJ Federation Leadership Assembly in Albany, New York. There were 21 leadership teams represented at the Assembly. The purpose, in light of our mission and charism, was to identify realities within and among us, to reflect on the role of the Federation today and into the future, nationally and globally, and to discern and identify next steps.

The Federation Annual Report was reviewed along with the strategic plan for the International Center in LePuy. We received news about the UN-NGO from our representative to the UN.

It was a great blessing to be reminded of our internationality!
**Retirement: Whole and Holy**

On November 18th, Sister Ann Raymond Wood gave a presentation at Our Lady of Lourdes Convent entitled “Retirement.” Sister began by suggesting to the Sisters that one of the primary purposes of this stage of life is to create time and space for moving steadily toward “wholeness” and “holiness.” Using three stories of her grandmother, her mother and herself, Sister pointed to the truths that “suffering brings wisdom” and “God has a master plan” for each of us. Sometimes retirement comes gradually; we move gracefully into a slower pace and a more relaxed setting. For others, retirement is thrust upon them unexpectedly by a sudden reversal in health or complications due to aging. But when we allow God to lead us where he will, the graces are given “to go with the flow” and to realize that “all shall be well.” In closing, Sister gave each member of Our Lady of Lourdes Convent a bookmark entitled “Hope” and a copy of an article entitled “A Spirituality of Aging in Religious Congregations” by S. Janet Malone, CND.

**The Dear Neighbor in the Philippines**

On November 14th the St. James School community gathered to pray and support the needs in the Philippines. Over the past years the students have sent thousands of dollars to the dear neighbors in Haiti. Now they hear the cry of their Filipino brothers and sisters. Father Jean Pierre, pastor, offered Mass for the people in the Philippines. Sister Stephanie Flynn, principal, invited students to make their offerings. The collections raised $1,000 from the children helping children.

The Lord is “he who comes,” and so we must be watchful and remain vigilant. We must await his revelation (because he is already here!). He will manifest himself. Revelation means uncovering something that is veiled, bringing it out of hiding. Manifestation implies a type of transfiguration: it is epiphany (from Open Mind, Open Heart by Pope Francis).

Yes! The Lord is already here; Advent calls us to allow the Lord to be revealed more obviously in us and to us. All we need do is “be alert,” be attentive. How can I manifest his presence to a world that is poor and hungry, looking for “an epiphany”? 
“The Spanish Missions” by Sister Christopher Marie

Sister Christopher Marie loved the Spanish Missions. In her early years in the convent, Sister did social and catechetical ministry on the Spanish Missions in Homestead and Immakolee. Her love for the immigrant caused her to write this story. It will be continued in the next five issues of the “Next Step.” This is just the beginning….

How does one begin to discuss the ministries familiarly known as “The Spanish Missions”? Perhaps it begins with the taming of the Okeechobee with its fertile lands: thousands of acres and so few to do the backbreaking work to find its yield. Farmworkers of other cultures had been employed before, offshore — would it be possible to draw on this source?

And so they came, with their foremen (jefes — pronounced “heffas”) bringing in single men as well as family groups under contract to work these fields. They came with their most prized possessions (their faith and their families) and little else, from Puerto Rico and from Mexico.

And their Florida bishops took note (most of Florida was but yet one diocese). As Archbishop Hurley traversed the state, he saw the need to help persons brought to Florida to, first of all, retain their faith, while working to ameliorate their living and working conditions.

These central areas were designated for the Spanish-speaking priests (mainly from Spain) and the Sisters of St. Joseph to serve in these centers and their surrounding areas. The three Sisters assigned by the congregation for each central area included one Sister with a medical background (one in the original group held a Masters in Social Work from Catholic University). Others were nurses and teachers, drawing upon their catechetical studies background, all with some knowledge of the Spanish language (admittedly Castilian)— meager for “the camps” but with hearts filled with love for a powerless people living in the buses and cars in which they had been transported, with little housing, running water, or sanitary conditions in general— and in some instances, no food. (to be continued in January)

Mission

Seized by God’s love, we work in collaboration with others to bring union and reconciliation to our world, “That all may be one.” Jn. 17:21
This is the time when you arrive,
Beloved Spouse, so suddenly
that you invite those who are awake
and disregard those who are sleeping.

Behold, we stay alert,
Beloved Spouse, in case you come;
our hearts remain awake
while our eyes take their rest.

Give us a place at your stable,
O Love who arrives in darkness,
before the night is over
and the door is finally shut.
Amen.

Celebrating the 200th Anniversary

The Christian Meditation group meets faithfully every Tuesday evening at Villa Flora-Brown Hall Renewal Center at 6:30 pm. This meditative prayer has been a source of peace and refreshment as the meditator disposes self to receive the gift of a deepening awareness of Christ’s indwelling presence, a movement of grace that is a gift from God. They recently celebrated their 200th consecutive gathering for Christian Meditation!