



# The National Association of Vocation & Formation Directors (NAVFD)

December 2017

## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Sr. Mary Rowell, CSJ



*Front L to R: Mary Clare Stack, UJ and Elaine Arsenault, SSS Back L to R: Research Project Director Héctor Acero Ferrer; Joanne O'Regan, CSM; Mary Rowell, CSJ and Ray Douzich, CSsR.*

We have experienced a “short” Advent this year with the celebration of the third Sunday of the season, Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday on which we are especially reminded of joy, leading us directly into our week of preparations for Christmas. The beautiful words taken from Philippians chapter 4 that form the introit at the beginning of the Mass for Gaudete Sunday convey so much to us at this time: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.”

The Board and staff of NAVFD wish each of you, your loved ones, families and communities that deep joy of knowing that the Lord is indeed near. We wish you a very happy, gentle and peaceful Christmas even in the midst of busyness and every blessing of hope and promise in the New Year.

## THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

by Sr. Mary Clare Stack, UJ

Our little apartment in Edmonton faces North and is very close to the North Saskatchewan River Valley which is home to many of our homeless sisters and brothers. We are surrounded by apartments and behind each apartment there is a commercial garbage bin. These bins have become for me an important

symbol of what it means to engage in a “Culture of Vocation.” When this insight first came to me I was startled by it. My immediate response was, “This makes no sense.” However, as each day unfolds and Sr. Catherine and I see more and more women and men

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coming to the bins, I'm gradually discovering what a powerful image the bins provide. Let me explain. Every person who comes is searching and is full of hope that some treasures will be discovered in these bins. Some of these "seekers" readily engage in conversation; others are more reticent. As a relationship is built one discovers the hidden richness of the person and how his/her journey has brought them to this particular moment in life. Some are trusting enough to share a story of a very difficult family life; how abuse or alcohol and drug addictions have brought them to this moment in their lives. Frequently one hears of struggles with mental health. This is certainly not the situation of everyone. There are others who have come from strong family backgrounds, who have been blessed with a good education, families of their own, a healthy pay cheque but who, for a variety of reasons, including the economic downturn, have fallen on hard times. As I listen I often discover individuals whose faith roots are very deep and who, in spite of many obstacles, continue to believe in God's infinite love for them. There is a readiness to "put flesh on that love" in their relationships with those they encounter on the streets.

So, how do these experiences relate to fostering a "Culture of Vocation?" I began this reflection by referring to the spirit of hope that prompts our homeless sisters and brothers to come each day to the bins as they search for pop cans, bottles and other "treasures" that they can sell or which they can use to adorn their humble abode in the river valley. Even though it would appear that theirs is solely a physical hunger, one discovers that many of them have a profound hunger for

our Creator God, a deep yearning to be in relationship with God, others, themselves and all of creation. Our young adults are seekers who, often without being able to identify it, have a profound hunger for God. They search for hope and meaning, a sense of purpose. Often they don't understand that the "longing in their hearts.....O God." In accompanying young adults one discovers that many of our youth today come from families that have not provided the love, the nurturing, the sense of belonging for which we all thirst. There is a hunger for relationships that endure, that help them discover their worth and dignity as human beings, and that nurture them in their efforts to contribute to society in a meaningful and positive manner.

The 2002 Montreal Congress presented a simple but challenging message to consecrated women and men. We were invited to risk journeying with our young adults, to build relationships of trust, to listen to their stories, to encourage them to hope for a better future, to find meaning in the midst of a world that feels, at times, like a garbage dump. Each one carries within him/herself hidden treasures but these treasures are



often obscured by so much suffering. The Congress called us to be human, to open our hearts and our doors so our young adults can come to know us and to discover

that we are people who are in love with God. Pope Francis, in his letter, "The Joy of the Gospel," published 13 years after the Congress, reiterates this same message: "The Congress made it abundantly clear that we need to step out in faith and take the risk to be present to families as they try to live their vocation in the midst of the many challenges of our world today; to be willing to journey with, and to support those called to the single life, and to be a discerning presence with men and women who are trying to determine whether or not their desire to spend their lives as disciples of Jesus, announcing *The Joy of the Gospel*, is genuine."

Too often, I believe, we get caught trapped by the reality of diminishing and aging membership, failing to let the Holy Spirit "fan into flame" the fire of love that inspired our founders and foundresses. Did they have great numbers? No! Was it clear to them what God was asking? Probably not. Yet, God worked wonders in and through them, and will do the same today if we are willing to learn from our sisters and brothers who, filled with hope, come daily to the garbage bins, searching to find the treasures that lie deep within.

Jesus did not "pitch His tent" among a perfect people. He chose to dwell among us in brokenness, vulnerability and fragility, frequently revealing Himself in the most unexpected people and places, even commercial garbage bins!

As we celebrate Christmas, 2017, may we, as consecrated women and men, pray for a renewed

hope in the creative, transformative power of the Holy Spirit who overshadowed Mary and who "right here, right now" is "doing something new, something wonderful."

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH ON CAMPUS

Fr. Dean Henderson—Chaplain at University of Victoria/Carnosun College



In many ways, the zeal and faith of the students on campus is a 'fruit' of the Eucharist itself. They are responding to the call of Christ whom they have encountered through their baptism, their families, their local parishes and youth groups, but chiefly in the person of Jesus whom they love and receive in the sacrament of the holy mass. As Cardinal Ouellette states, "The encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization." It's this missionary summons which the young pilgrims yearn to embrace with ever greater fidelity. The world which they inhabit on campus and in the 'marketplace' is desperately in need of the joy and freedom that only comes with knowledge and commitment to the love and truth of the gospel.

In my role as a Campus chaplain, I'm surprised by two particular characteristics of the young people I meet. One is intensity of many students' pastoral needs as they struggle with bereavement, serious illness and relational issues. A significant contribution to their wellbeing is the healing nature of the Catholic community on campus. It's not too trite to say that Jesus' love is the answer to their need, and it's a joy to be able to offer Jesus in sacraments and pastoral care. The other characteristic which compels me to pray for greater success in this mission is the intellectual and spiritual openness evident among so many who claim no affiliation with the Catholic Church or even the Christian religion. In the words of Cardinal Ouellette: "By once again drawing on its roots in the Eucharist, the great missionary thrust that so marked the history of this country must continue and deepen as it faces the new challenges of secularization." Join me in praying for these young pilgrims who are some of the new missionaries answering Jesus' call to the new evangelization!

### CONFERENCE 2018

Just a reminder that there is an Early Bird Draw for conference participants who register for the conference before Feb 1, 2018. The prize is 3 free nights accommodation at the Sheraton during the Conference. WOW!!!! Register for the conference here: [http://www.vocations.ca/News\\_Events/navfd\\_2018\\_conference\\_registration.pdf](http://www.vocations.ca/News_Events/navfd_2018_conference_registration.pdf)

Remember that hotel booking is separate from conference booking: <https://www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/NAVFDConference2018>

Reservations can also be made by contacting 24 hour, toll-free reservations line at 1 888 627 8161 and asking for the 'NAVFD Conference 2018' group block. The conference rate is \$134.00 per night plus taxes (single or double occupancy and is in effect until March 23, 2018.



### 2018 MEMBERSHIP FEES

Attached find the membership form for NAVFD for the year 2018. The first member of a religious congregation or organization pays \$210 while subsequent members from the same congregation pay \$100. Membership includes a presence on our popular website vocations.ca.

