



The National Association of Vocation & Formation Directors (NAVFD)

June 2020

EVOLUTION OF 55ISH AND UNDER RETREATS

Michelle Garlinski, SNJM



In almost every newsletter there is a notice of either an upcoming Under 55ish retreat or a report on the previous retreat.

Wondering how the Under 55ish retreat came about? Wonder no more. Sr. Michelle Garlinski will explain in this article.

While attending the NAVFD Conference in Winnipeg May 2016, as a Novice in my canonical year, a question surfaced for me that impacted my journey in formation. *“As a younger Religious in Canada, who would I grow old with?”* A handful of participants at the conference were younger Religious. One of the coffee breaks we began discussing the possibilities of gathering “younger” Religious in Canada and what that could look like.

When I returned to the Novitiate House in Berkeley after the conference, my question remained with me. I continued to ponder and pray with it, paying attention to what was surfacing. I knew that gathering in some way with newer or younger Religious in Canada was important. Conscious that we need to be good stewards of our resources and many Religious Communities are stretched, I knew a separate conference or gathering for the sake of gathering

was not prudent.

As my imagination dreamed of possibilities, it occurred to me that we all make retreat and perhaps that is the vehicle that can bring us together. What would it look like if we offered a retreat for Religious who serve in Canada or whose communities have Canadian connections? This was in the realm of possibility. The three criteria or non-negotiables were: it includes men and women, the retreat leader be Religious and ideally this person be Canadian. As I shared this possibility with my Novice Director, she was very supportive and encouraged me to continue imagining. I knew from a marketing perspective, that if we were going to draw people, the retreat leader needed to be a known and trusted leader. The name that continued to come to mind was Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI. Fr. Ron, a credible and valued theologian, has been sought after for many local and international engagements. Remembering that he comes home to Saskatoon each summer to give a retreat, I thought I would pursue the possibility.

I called the retreat house in Saskatoon and checked for availability and reserved the facility. Then I called Fr. Ron’s assistant who does his bookings. I explained the request to her and said I know this is a “long shot” but it was worth a try. This was now June 2016. At this point, I understood the vow of obedience in a concrete way. I needed to be attentive and free to whatever would

Contact Us

navfdco@gmail.com

Visit Us

www.vocations.ca

www.navfd.info/

Like Us

on Facebook...

[NAVFD](#)

Follow Us

on Twitter...

[@NAVFD2](#)

happen. This required patience and waiting. In the summer, I shared the idea with my local leadership team and a mentor (who also happens to be an OMI!). In October I called Joane again to ensure she had not forgotten about me. She assured me that I would be notified as soon as they looked at the 2017 bookings. After hanging up the phone from that call, I reminded myself that if it was meant to be, it will be and if not, the time is not right. On December 23 I received a call from Joane who said, "Michelle, Ron is a go for the retreat. Just give him a call and make the arrangements." I was overjoyed and I can remember thanking God for sending more than baby Jesus that Christmas!

As the planning began, we determined the theme of our retreat, "*Amidst the Uncertainties – Finding Hope.*" The retreat was July 13-18 at Queen's House Retreat and Renewal Centre in Saskatoon and we had 24 participants from various areas of Canada and ministry; women and men Religious ranging from Candidate to 25 years professed. We were born in ten different countries, spoke many languages and represented two Rites. A conversation with Fr. Ron soon followed the retreat. He was energized and inspired by the experience and offered to lead another retreat in the summer of 2018. With a small planning team at work, we returned to Queen's House July 2018 with the theme, "*Searching for a Covenant of Mutual Support.*" That summer had 21 participants and we birthed the blog website :

www.aroundthewell.ca/



This was a way to continue to connect while we are spread out across the continent. Thank you to Fr. Toby Collins, C.R. for over-seeing this expansion and to my community, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, for funding the website.

At the end of the second retreat, the participants expressed clearly the desire that the retreats continue. We agreed that it should also move around the country. The decision to rotate between Saskatoon and Mississauga was confirmed. And for a third summer, Fr. Ron continued to support us on our journey as Religious 55ish and Under in Canada. In July 2019, the theme, "*Habits of the Heart*" gathered 36

participants at Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga.

We were feeling more confident about the summers of 2020 and 2021 as speakers and facilities were reserved. Our planning team invited Sr. Bernadette O'Reilly, NDS and Fr. Larry Gillick SJ, summer of 2020 and Sr. Mary Rowell CSJ in 2021. All seemed to be going well, until March 2020 as Covid-19 entered the global human experience.

After a few meetings, the planning team realized that gathering in July 2020 in Saskatoon will not be possible. I suggested a virtual retreat with the use of Zoom and the assistance of a tech person. Could this be delivered without compromising the essential elements of a retreat? Though not ideal, we agreed it is possible.

We discussed what elements of a retreat are most important to maintain, and can those be achieved through this medium?

The answer was yes. Our facilitators were open to trying this model and we will gather virtually around the theme, "*The Surprising Journey of Prayer.*"



Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

The onset of the Covid-19 virus forced our reality to become very limited. It also offered an opportunity for our 55ish and Under group to gather on Sunday afternoons for community, support, and sharing. Each week our "Afternoon Delight" group averaging 8-12 people, also affords us the occasion to practice our Zoom skills! These calls somehow minimize the distance between us.

We continue to go forward with a freedom and trust that the Holy Spirit will guide our next steps and enlighten our decisions. We, Religious 55ish and Under in Canada, are most grateful to those who have paved the way with and for us. The support of NAVFD and our Religious Communities on this journey is immeasurable.

People ask me about the future of our retreats, and I am reminded of Fr. Ron's words in our first conversation as we ended our call, "The retreat will happen. It is too important for it not to."

For details about the July 2020 Virtual Retreat, see the next page.

SR. NATHALIE BECQUART WEBINAR

Br. Denis Claivaz fpm

Late last year Toronto hosted "Rise Up" a coming together of over 1500 young Christians to manifest their faith in many diverse ways. It was also a golden opportunity for Religious Men and Women to meet at the "side bars" of the conference to strategize, exchange ideas and generally charge our batteries amongst a flurry of activities. It was during one of these "coffee breaks" that TAVDA and Sr. Nathalie planned a workshop at Loretto College on Friday, May 15, around the theme of the Youth Synod, which she helped facilitate, and *Christus Vivit*, the document of Pope Francis that followed.

Along came COVID 19 which threw so many plans into confusion. Sr. Nathalie readily agreed to replace the workshop with a Webinar and so we threw open registrations to all and sundry. Nathalie's reputation was the selling point as many of us had been exposed to her at our NAVFD Conference in Hamilton. 87

people ended up registering for the event.

Nathalie, being a great teacher, allowed a participant of the Youth Synod in the person of Julian, a Canadian studying in France, to give his testimony about the impact the Synod had and is having on his life. Wow! What a great way to get our attention. Superbly done.

Nathalie then took us on a journey with the *Christus Vivit* document. She had already sent us select excerpts from the document and allowed us to go into small groups to deal with them through the median of questions. It was great to be able to discuss matters with those we had not met before. Thanks for this opportunity.

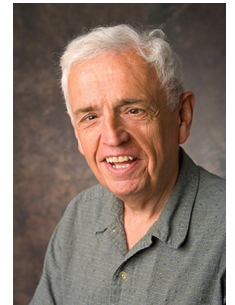
All in all the feedback from the Webinar was extremely positive. Thanks to Nathalie and Julian for their wonderful input. Thanks also to NAVFD and TAVDA for sponsoring and organizing the event.



THE SURPRISING JOURNEY OF PRAYER

SAVE THE DATE for Religious 55ish and under

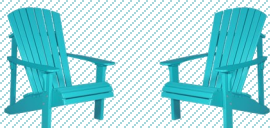
As we are all navigating during these unprecedented times, we are unable to participate in the retreat in Saskatoon. However, we will offer the retreat **VIRTUALLY!**



Begins Monday July 27 (later afternoon/early evening) to Thursday July 30 (late day).

Cost: \$100 per person. Guiding our retreat experience will be the same:
Sr. Bernadette O'Reilly, NDS and Fr. Larry Gillick SJ.

Registration is open! Visit aroundthewell.ca or email directly to Ndscgen@rogers.com for more information and registration details.



This newsletter will resume in September. In the meantime, all of us at NAVFD wish you a summer with some restful moments even in the midst of some very restless moments in our lives and world today.