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Phase II, 2005

Christy Cogil, CSJ, Concordia
Theresa Kvale, CSJ, Carondelet
Janet Lander, CSJ, Concordia
Dottie Moss, CSJ, Concordia

Artwork - Janet Lander, CSJ
Layout - Susan LeDuc

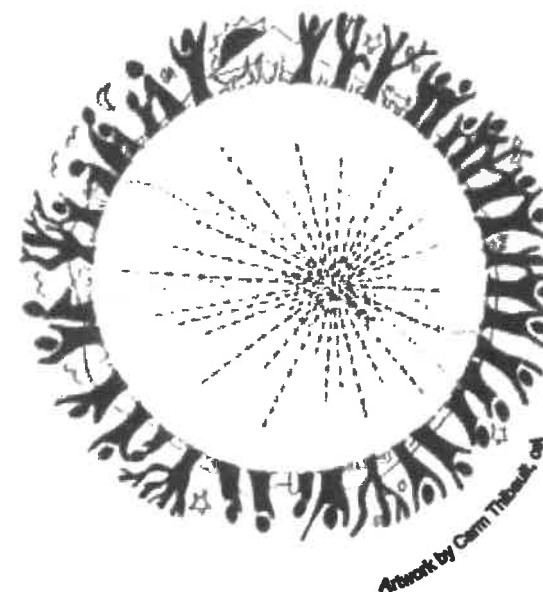
STATE OF THE HEART AND ORDER OF THE HOUSE: A Way of Nonviolence



If you are willing to be transformed, are you
willing to change?

INTRODUCTION

During the summers of 2003 and 2004, Sisters of St. Joseph from throughout the world gathered at the Bearers of the Tradition Institute in Concordia, Kansas, U.S.A. to study the mission and history of the Congregation of St. Joseph, which Jesuit Fr. Jean Pierre Médaille began in France in 1650. In July, 2005, we were challenged to find ways to bear this tradition in our time and circumstances. We offer the simple, concrete practice of sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House as a way of engaging with others and the world, even as we experience personal and international conflicts which tempt us to disengage.



From the outset of this project, we have glimpsed that this practice is a way to nonviolence. We offer to you this simple gift, this discipline of sharing the State of the Heart and Order of the House. May all who take up this practice be seized by God's great love and the desire to globalize love in our world today.

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AN INVITATION

Are you like Einstein who said that the "surest sign of insanity is to do the same thing over and over and expect different results"?

Are you frustrated by the seemingly endless violent responses to problems we face at home, at school, at work, in our government, in our church and on our planet and are seeking nonviolent ways of reaching solutions?

Do you want to deepen your understanding, in today's context, of Jesus' prayer, "That they all may be one"? (John 17:21)

Would you like to develop new patterns of living that are creative, poetic, artistic and holistic, in other words, use other parts of the brain and see new perspectives?

Would you like to be like Gandhi, Martin Luther King or Dorothy Day, a non-violent cultural leader—who is willing to be awakened and to awaken others from the cultural trance in which we find ourselves?

Do you believe we could become better Earth citizens by finding God in all things and allowing God to find us ?

Are you like many searching for meaning for yourself, your family, your school, your work, your government or for your church?

Would you like to be an ordinary mystic of relationships, living the Trinitarian life?

Would you be willing to leave your ego beliefs and connect yourself again to the faces of God?

INVITATION (continued)

Would you be willing to pray the following from Médaille's Eucharistic Letter:

May the Divine Goodness make us understand the nobility of the end and purpose of our (St. Joseph) congregation and help us be apt instruments in making it succeed? (#23)

If you are willing to be transformed, are you willing to change?

If you can answer yes, not necessarily how, to one or more of the questions above, we would invite you to initiate, deepen and broaden the practice of sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House.

OUR HISTORY

Over 350 years ago, Fr. Jean Pierre Médaille and six French women began a new way of living Christianity. They lived in tumultuous times, in towns and in a country decimated by the plague, war and violence, by poverty, chaos and meaninglessness. The Congregation of St. Joseph began with a handful of people who desired to live the spiritual life actively and deeply.

In humble, practical ways, those who were part of the Congregation of St. Joseph attempted to respond with love to each person as a "dear neighbor." They were to be known as the Congregation of God's great love.

...the purpose of our selfless congregation: it tends to achieve this total double union

- of ourselves and the dear neighbor with God,
- and of ourselves and all others, whoever they may be,
- of all others among themselves and with us, but totally in Jesus and in God. (Eucharistic Letter, 22)

Now we understand this way of life as participation in the Trinity: the three persons of God united in eternal relationship with each other inviting us into a communion of love with them and with all other created beings.

Médaille hoped that the Congregation would spread throughout the whole Church. (Eucharistic Letter, 3) His hopes were realized because the sisters responded to the signs of the times in new, creative and courageous ways. People continue to be called to live this mission. If we desire to be transformed, are we willing to change?



OUR REALITY

Today the world calls us to respond again in new ways, to look for meaning in a world and society that seems to have lost its way. We resonate with the call of the Earth Charter to live differently. Yet, we are appalled by the horrors of our time---war, genocide, disease, global warming, the insensitivity to all inhabitants of Earth, and indifference to the life of Earth. Several world leaders have called us to healing. Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez of Honduras is one of these leaders who describes this reality in a speech he gave in Guatemala in 2003 when talking about the United States' invasion of Iraq. He said that the United States did not find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but they are all around us in the form of poverty, racism, social injustice, and the violation of human rights.

We are frustrated by inadequate responses to this century's dilemmas. The global community lacks awareness that we even need *"personal and social healing that requires us to awaken from the cultural trance we are in that deadens us to what is possible."* (Aftab Omer, founder and president of the Institute of Imaginal Studies graduate school in Petaluma, CA)

Our world, church, families and communities are polarized. We see this daily on TV, in the newspapers, movies, lectures, government pronouncements, books and most importantly in our own experiences.

"I can communicate instantly across the world. But can I communicate with the Muslim or Hindu or Sikh who lives in my street? We have conquered every distance except one—the distance between human beings." (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks)

NONVIOLENCE

In the 20th century Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela used the humble, seemingly weak instrument of nonviolent loving action to address pervasive injustice and racism. Like Jesus, this required of them self-emptying, radical discipleship. It called them to act with hope in the face of hopelessness over many decades for the common good of the world. They dedicated themselves to what we in the Congregation of St. Joseph call the mission of unioning love.



The practice of sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House offers us a concrete way to be in communion with each other and attentive to God's activity and presence in our lives and our world. Perhaps the discipline of contemplating our lives and the world with others is a way of practicing nonviolence today.

Nonviolence calls us to choose engagement over withdrawal, relationship and community over isolation and separateness, contemplation of the world instead of ignoring a world in need of healing and reconciling love. These disciplines require of us time for contemplating our lives and the world, humility in sharing life as it is, openness to the other without distinction. They call us to disarm our hearts, to live in God's great love for all people, and to make peace in the world.

WHAT IS REQUIRED OF US

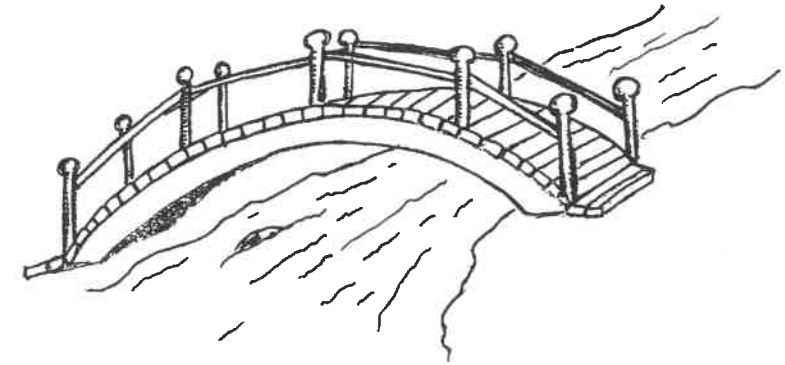
Just as the first Sisters of St. Joseph were creative and innovative in how they responded to their times, we too are called to act in creative ways that require a paradigm shift. Thinking through our hearts could help us shift paradigms. Today we call this emotional intelligence. This term is used to describe a complex ability to regulate our impulses, empathize with others and persist and be resilient in the face of obstacles. This activates under-used parts of the heart and brain.



We believe the discipline of sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House will help us grow in emotional intelligence and lead us to engage one another in breaking cycles of violence. The ripple effect of responding with compassion could stimulate the globalization of love.

AN INVITATION FROM FR. MÉDAILLE

In *The Règlements of the mid 17th century*, Fr. Médaille offered a number of practices as a way to guide the first sisters. On a weekly basis he suggested that the communities "confer on the state of their Congregation (we refer to this as Order of the House) and the works of zeal ordinarily done" (State of the heart). (p.8) On a daily basis, Médaille encouraged the sisters to "begin their work at home (lace making), sharing with each other the experiences of their meditation in humility and candor. The ordinary context of their lives regularly included: ministry to the "dear neighbor" meaning "...all of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy of which women are capable," recreation, communal prayer, Eucharist, spiritual reading and its discussion in community, personal meditation, and the daily Examen. (p.9)



The daily intentional living of this way of life enables recognition of the movement of the Holy Spirit in each member, in the community, and in the events of daily life and of the world. Thus, the practice of sharing the State of the Heart and Order of the House do not stand alone, but are included in a way of life that integrates body, intellect, emotions and spirit in pursuit of the mission of the total double union.

While Médaille does not give an outline or schema on how the State of the Heart or Order of the House might be shared or prayed, we might be helped by some of the cautions and bits of wisdom he includes in Maxims 62-100. It seems clear that sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House is not something tacked on to prayer or inserted in addition to prayer, but is in fact prayer. This practice is Médaille's invitation to us in the 21st century to engage in the discipline of communal reflection and sharing. It is a way of nonviolence that enables members of a community to attend to each other, the dear neighbor and to God.

We believe that Médaille's original invitation to share the State of the Heart and Order of the House is no longer just for sisters. We hope this practice will be used as widely as possible. For example, Associates might use this practice with their families, as well as at Associate meetings. State of the Heart and Order of the House might be an appropriate prayer to assist a ministerial staff or faith community to become more intentional in living the Gospel.

PREPARATION FOR STATE OF THE HEART AND ORDER OF THE HOUSE

How do we prepare ourselves for sharing this kind of prayer?
From a contemplative stance we begin by accepting life as it is and has been for us: ordinary or exceptional, messy or tidy, connected or disconnected.

What have I found myself thinking, reading, struggling with, pondering?

What have I been feeling about relationships, work, ministry, the news, the world, God?

Where is all of this leading me?

How am I finding the presence of God in all relationships --with self, every sort of "dear neighbor"

(community member, those encountered in ministry, and all those whose lives touch ours, indeed all creation), and every level of community (local, congregational, neighborhood, city, country, church, international and earth itself)?



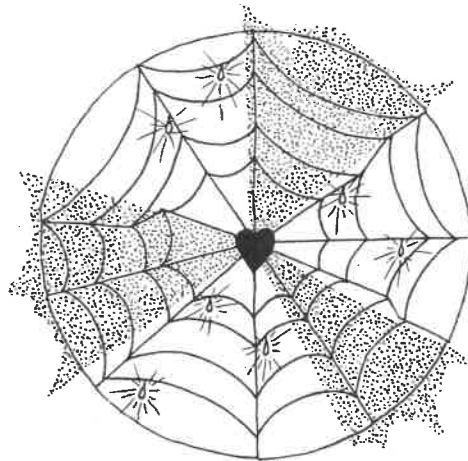
STATE OF THE HEART

Having contemplated what has been happening in our lives recently, each person now shares with the gathered community. Everyone's sharing is received reverently, without critique, judgment, or comment.

Choose one or several incidents from my preparation and reconstruct them according to time, place, persons, outcomes, my actions and how I felt at the time.

Next, I ask myself questions such as: How does this experience remind me of other events in my life? How does it mirror a scripture or a maxim? Is there a pattern or a theme in my life that this event relates to? How am I feeling as I remember it?

Lastly, I listen for movements within: What is moving in me now? Am I being drawn to something deeper? To gratitude? To action? What inclinations or desires do I sense within? What is happening within me? In this way, I feel and interpret what I have contemplated. (Marcia Allen, csj, *Obedience to Grace*)



ORDER OF THE HOUSE

Order of the House is an opportunity for communal contemplation. After the community spends some time hearing each member's State of the Heart, they reflect together on how the Holy Spirit is moving among them, within their communal heart.

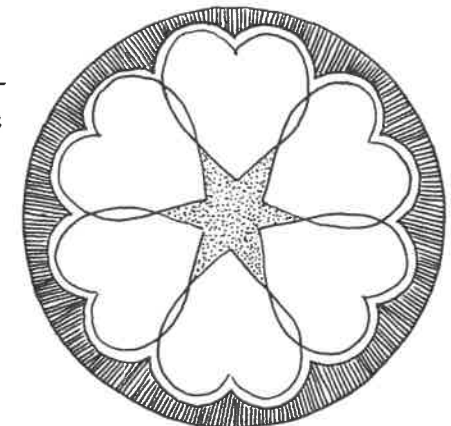
The following questions may be helpful for this reflection:

- How do we see God's love moving in these stories?
- How do these stories reflect our responses to God's love?
- How do we see God working in our lives?
- What is moving in each of us as we listen to our reflections?
- How are our hearts being moved, challenged, inspired, drawn?
- Each person seeks to name what is happening within.

Then the community asks:

- What do we look like as a group?
- What seems to be coming together for us?
- What is opening up as possibility?
- How do we respond?

Finally, is there a symbol or image that might guide the group's remembering of God's action in us until the next meeting? The group reflects on a word of wisdom, song, phrase, poem, scripture, maxim, or anything that captures how they were moved during communal reflection. (Marcia Allen, csj and Bette Moslander, csj)



CONCLUSION

Sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House is a tool to listen for the movement of the Spirit within the community. It can help us discern in an ongoing manner if we are being faithful to the mission and how we might minister to the needs of the "dear neighbor," while being conscious of our gifts and limitations. We witness to and with one another the presence of God among us and the fruits of God's presence. Any decision arrived at by the community as a result of having reflected on the Order of the House can be tested against the question,

Does it contribute to fullness of life and unioning love in the world?

What we might hope for in the practice of State of the Heart and Order of the House would include the following:

- * expanded trust and love of the "dear neighbor" with whom we are sharing;
- * increased depth of consciousness regarding the interconnectedness of all creation and our mission of unioning love and reconciliation;
- * greater awareness of God's activity in the world thus, strengthening faith and hope;
- * a fuller responsiveness to the stirring of the Spirit, the ability to be a word, an act of God in our time;
- * development of the habit of nonviolence;
- * personal and communal growth and healing;
- * a growing sense of what it is to live the charism and mission of the Congregation of St. Joseph in our world now and into the future.

The State of the Heart and the Order of the House prayer has the potential of being leaven in the broader faith community, the workplace, the neighborhood, our society, and in the world. Those utilizing the practice will participate in co-creating God's Design for a just, peaceful and loving world where the prayer of Jesus is made manifest—"May they all be one as you Father are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us; so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21)

APPENDIX 1

CONTEMPORARY ECHOES OF MÉDAILLE'S CHALLENGES

In The Power of Intention, Wayne Dyer offers two key insights:

A. The need to reconnect ourselves with God or the power of intention, by letting go of the six ego beliefs: (*Médaille's putting off the old self:*

Maxim 93)

1. *I am what I have....my possessions define me*
2. *I am what I do... my achievements define me*
3. *I am what others think of me...my reputation defines me*
4. *I am separate from everyone...I am alone*
5. *I am separate from all I am missing in my life...life is disconnected from desires*
6. *I am separate from God...and depend on God's assessment of my worthiness.*

B. The need to connect once again to the faces of God, who is pure love, pure energy, and pure intention. (*Médaille's seeking God in all things:*

Maxim 73)

1. *Creativity*
2. *Kindness (kindly power---raises the serotonin levels in the giver, receiver and the observer)*
3. *Love*
4. *Beauty (find beauty in the present)*
5. *Expansiveness (absolute need and desire to share and seek more expressions of God)*
6. *Limitlessness (endlessly) abundant---not just huge but never stops.*
7. *Receptivity (open to all without distinction, willing to recognize and be recognized, to give back what I have received)*

Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme speak of changing our image of our world from being a collection of objects to a communion of subjects. This too finds its echo in our early documents.

Peter Block in his book, The Answer to How is Yes, says,

"When no answer satisfies, and people continue to act as if they do not understand, then the wrong question is being asked." (p. 43)

Block suggests we move from How questions to Yes questions, for example:

Instead of *"How do you get those people to change?"*

ask *"What is my contribution to the problem I am concerned with?"*

and instead of *"How long will it take?"*

ask *"What commitment am I willing to make?"*

Block asks: *"What is the question that, if you had the answer, would set you free?"*

Echoing Médaille, he writes:

"Freedom is not doing your own thing, but just the opposite. It means we are the authors of our own experience. It means we are accountable for the well-being of all that is around us. It means we believe that we are constituting, or creating, the world in which we live." (p. 46)

"Our desires are given life by their demand for touch, vulnerability, disclosure, surprise, and raw feeling....It is the wonder and connection to the earth, to humanity at large, and to something more important than anything that can easily be talked about." (p. 73)

Maxim 73

Live out your life with one desire only: to be always what God wants you to be, in nature, grace, and glory, for time and for eternity.

Maxim 93

For the three faculties of your soul desire this perfection:

for the memory to forget things and self in order to remember little else but God;

for the intellect, to see God in all things: God's glory, God's will, God's contentment solely; for the will, the one freedom to go to God, to love God, to embrace all the dictates of God's Providence with all the love of your heart.

APPENDIX 2

Do You want to Read more about Nonviolent Dynamics for Relationships? These books will assist you.

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APPENDIX 3

PRACTICING NON-VIOLENCE

Thomas Merton

Today I realize with urgency the absolute seriousness of my need to study and practice non-violence. Hitherto, I have "liked" non-violence as an idea. I have "approved" it, looked with benignity on it, have praised it, even earnestly.

But I have not practiced it fully. My thoughts and words retaliate. I condemn and resist adversaries when I think I am unjustly treated. I revile them; even treat them with open (but *polite*) contempt to their face.

It is necessary to realize that I am a monk consecrated to God and this restricting non-retaliation merely to *physical* non-retaliation is not enough—on the contrary, it is in some sense a greater evil.

At the same time, the energy wasted in contempt, criticism and resentment is thus diverted from its true function, *insistence on truth*. Hence, loss of clarity, loss of focus, confusion, and finally frustration. So that half the time "I don't know what I am doing" (or thinking).

I need to set myself to the study of non-violence, with thoroughness. The complete, integral *practice* of it in community life. Eventually teaching it to others by word and example. Short of this, (religious) life will remain a mockery in my life.

August 21, 1962



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With gratitude to

Bette Moslander (CSJ, Concordia)
Marcia Allen (CSJ, Concordia)
and Barbara Baer (CSJ, Wichita)

we dedicate this booklet.

The Bearers of the Tradition Institute
was born of their passion for the
history and mission of the Congregation
of St. Joseph.

To contact the authors of this booklet:

Christy Cogil - ccogil@juno.com
Theresa Kvale - tkvale@usa.net
Janet Lander - janetmarycsj@yahoo.com
Dottie Moss - dottiemossesj@hotmail.com

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at 708-579-8935 or via email sjp@csjlagrange.org.
The cost is \$2.00 each plus shipping.
