

Opening Preaching for the Anniversary Assembly Thursday, July 25th, 7pm

Good evening, Sisters and Associates, and Happy Anniversary!
Welcome one and all to this grand celebration of ten years lived through the grace of God.

Let me ask you, “What was the one word you selected to describe what you most want to celebrate during these days?” Call that word to mind, one more time, just for a second.

My word was gratitude. I am overwhelmed with gratitude to each of you, and to our loving and faithful God who has called us to Peace, and who has given us the desire, the will and the ability both to imagine and to create this amazing Congregation, and to live in it these past 10 years!

How did we get here? How was it we came to Peace, whether through union in 2009 or merger in 2012? Truly, we owe a debt of gratitude to our Sister Leaders, who on our behalf, and with each and every one of us, channeled the Spirit of those original founders - - those pioneering women who desired to embrace the Dominican Charism, some of whom sprang up back in the 1800s in the U.S., and others with the same impulse, who set out from Europe to work with immigrants from their home countries. These earlier generations desired to meet the needs of their day, and organized their common lives accordingly.

And here we are today. Can we not see the strands of DNA we inherited from them? The genes they passed on to us are named: MISSION - - ADVENTURE - - and IMAGINATION!

And look at our tree. Many thanks to our leaf carriers who represented each one of us. This tree has life. “The fruit ripens on the tree; the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth, against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit.”¹

And thank you to our dancers who imaged the flowing water for us. They evoked in me the memory of a line from Ezekiel that says: “Wherever the river flows, it will bring life!”² Do you remember how in 2009 we combined vials of water from all the places from which we came?

And, in Revelation we heard Rosemary proclaim: “Behold! God is dwelling with the human race.” And “Behold, I make all things new!” Thank you God, thank you, thank you, thank you!

- All around us we observe the Circle of Life. There is dying and there is birthing. We grow towards the Light even in times of darkness.³ These are the seasons of our life together. And, at past assemblies we have pronounced our commitment *to preach the Gospel in every season, to every one - - no exceptions.*

As we contemplate our tree, our leaves, our sources of hydration and our *roots*, Pope Francis reminds us “Roots are not anchors chaining us to past times and preventing us from facing the present and creating something new.

¹ Howard Thurman, author, educator and Civil Rights leader quoted in On the Brink of Everything by Parker Palmer.

² Ez. 47:9

³ Parker Palmer, On the Brink of Everything.

Instead, they are fixed points from which we can grow and meet new challenges. It does us no good to sit down and long for times past; we must meet our culture with realism and love and fill it with the Gospel.”⁴

I ask again, “How did we get to this point?” As I reflect, I see many images. One is of a highway with three lanes. As we contemplated this new entity, whether through union or merger, there were those among us who jumped into the left lane. They were quick to see the merits of this direction - - this new entity - - and they raced towards it at high speeds. Many of us, perhaps most of us, travelled the middle lane. The speed there was a bit slower because we were busy analyzing risks and benefits. And then, there was the third lane, where traffic sometimes slowed to crawl, and you might say (mixing metaphors) that those of us in this lane preferred at times to dig in our heels and only go forward kicking and screaming!

The truth is, we have all traveled in all three lanes at different times, and we are still traveling in these lanes 10 years later. We put on our blinkers, and we change lanes as we take in new information. This is our reality - - but whether fast, medium, or slow--- thank God we are all on the move!

Everything we did to come to Peace, we did for the “Sake of the Mission.” Each of us, no matter our age, knows she’s on a mission until the day she dies. Granted, “The shape and function of the way we live mission necessarily shifts in keeping with health, energy, and capacity.”⁵ We may move from teaching, or nursing, or parish ministry, “...to holding God’s people in prayer from a care center bed. But it is all mission.

Now let’s go back and remember a little more. What was hardest for you to give up as you came to Peace? Be honest now. Think about what you personally lost, or had to let go of, and the pain of that. We all had something.

Now think for a moment about what you gained. What’s the first thing that popped into your head? - - New friends, new members joining us, new geographies beckoning, new perspectives and ideas brought to us by another who sees the world through a different lens than we?

And, truth be told - - quite a bit stayed the same, or almost the same, and we adjusted.

God named us Peace. Will we ever completely realize the depth of this name and calling?

Founded at Easter, we continue to put our firm faith in the Risen One, who goes before us. What will be next? What new in breaking of God’s Reign awaits us? Are we ready for the next ten years? We will be, if we live out of the abundant gifts we have received to date.

Always we will desire that ‘our deepest gladness meets the world’s deepest needs,’ we will not turn away from the world, but will turn our hearts and minds to the critical needs before us - - to the global migration crisis, human trafficking, environmental destruction, inequality, and all that contributes to violence in families and on our streets.

How will we do this you may ask? We are just ordinary people. We can’t do everything. True enough, but weren’t those early foundresses of old just ordinary women, who with the best lights they had set out to make an ordinary contribution?

⁴ Pope Francis, Christus Vivit #200

⁵ “Religious Life in a Time of Fog” by Sr. Susan Rose Francois, CSJP, chapter in In Our Own Words p.190

Earlier this month Mr. Joe Zarantonello, friend of Sister Elaine de Rosier, visited our St. Catharine Motherhouse and penned a blog. I'm sure you saw it in the Daily News. I found it very moving. In it he celebrates how our Sisters put their hearts together to imagine a way to respond to the horrible opioid crisis. On 4 of July Joe wrote that he toured our property at St. Catherine's. He says, "We encountered seven women walking along the road, and stopped to talk to them, they were six young women who are trying to recover from opioid addiction, and the woman guiding them towards that horizon Bev Lee." When I read of this encounter along the road, my mind immediately pictured seven other women who almost 200 years ago walked that same property with last names like Sansbury, Carrico, Tarleton, McMahon, Hill and Boone. Are they not watching over all of our efforts now and all of our deliberations about how to respond to the acute needs of our time? Like those fearless Sisters of old, we are ordinary people, doing what we think are ordinary things, and with God's grace the ordinary can become extraordinary.

Sisters and Associates, we don't celebrate today so we can pack up and die. Yes, we have our limitations, our aches and our pains, but we believe blessed future awaits us, and we know that our preaching mission still drives us. And we are not afraid. What shall we take with us to help us in the days ahead—days, which understandably will be different from the ones we have known so far? Among the many things we must take, let's be sure to pack genuine affection for one another, and loads of imagination.

Truly, we will have all we need. Our experience of ten years together, and our experience of God's providence, confirms this. Most definitely, we have our mission, or maybe I should say, the Mission of Jesus has us.⁶ God has pitched God's tent among us, "Behold I make all things new!" Happy Anniversary!

⁶ "Religious Life in a Time of Fog" by Sr. Susan Rose Francois, CSJP, chapter in In Our Own Words p.199