

Charism Alive

A Franciscan, Missionary Spirit of Conversion and Peacemaking

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FOR THE LAST twenty years one challenge placed before religious communities, if they were to be authentic, was to "live" their charisms. Charism has become a household word in every formation program. Yet, for so many Religious, myself included, when asked to name their charism, a certain hesitancy comes over them, to succinctly describe what it is. One day I rather inadvertently picked up our Constitutions and opened to Chapter One: "Our Nature and Purpose." Reading again, the first three inches of print, I began to feel like the blind person who started to see "trees walking." With electrifying clarity the following phrases stood out:

- 1) we follow the Franciscan Rule
- 2) we are Sisters of Penance
- 3) we proclaim peace and reconciliation
- 4) we are founded by Mother Mary Ignatius

It stands to reason that a description of our "charism" should be contained in an explanation of our nature and purpose. Yet how true are the words of Isaiah, "They have eyes but don't see and ears but don't hear!" For me it was a "eureka moment," perhaps connected with having a new, definitively approved copy of our Constitutions, perhaps connected with 1994 being the Centennial year of the death of our Foundress. In the next few pages I would like to describe the wonderful connections that seemed to come for me in relation to our charism and the confirmation I found in the words of Mother Ignatius in her Diary.

WE FOLLOW THE FRANCISCAN RULE

We call ourselves Franciscans. A theology of vocation speaks of "personal charism," by which a person has innate gifts or talents given them by God and through which they find themselves attracted to others with similar propensities. There is a sense in which a person is "born" a Franciscan, as equally one could be born with leanings toward either Dominican or Benedictine spiritualities. Elizabeth Hayes, you, and I were all, in this sense, born into the Franciscan family with its own particular family traits. "Before you were born I knew you, I formed you in your mother's womb," Ps. 139.

Thus both Elizabeths, Hayes and Lockhart, were following God-given inclinations when they found themselves, without actually pursuing it directly, in the Franciscan tradition. I believe it is no coincidence that Doctor, later Cardinal, William Manning suggested to Elizabeth Lockhart, foundress of the original community to which Elizabeth Hayes belonged, that they follow the Franciscan Rule and complete a novitiate with the established community of Franciscan Sisters in Glasgow, Scotland.

An Evangelical, Relational Lifestyle: One hallmark of our Franciscan life is that we espouse what is called an "evangelical" lifestyle. Ours is a vocation in which reciprocity or exchange is key. We envision a world that is inter-connected, interdependent, and charged with a dynamism

emanating from God at the center. Foundational to this way of life is a spirituality that focuses primarily on the quality of our relationship with the Lord and with one another according to the values of the Gospel. Jesus' life is present within each person. He is brother to all and, therefore, we are sisters to him and to one another.

Imagine yourselves gathered in a circle with God in the center. Each one looks upon the face of the Lord, through a life of prayer and contemplation. At the same time we stand next to each other in community; thus contemplation and community are integral to each other as two sides of the same coin. Our relationship with God through prayer is expressed through our relationships with one another in community. Our communal life contains relational structures which provide for varying levels of interaction: spiritually, socially, ministerially, physically. These relationships are the foundation out of which flows our witness in mission. What is fundamental to this understanding of our calling is the belief that each person is unique.

The Uniqueness of the Person: Francis said in his Testament, "God has given me brothers/sisters." Clare wrote to Agnes of Prague, "God sees only good things in you." Our Constitutions say, "Each Sister is a unique gift of the Most High." These three quotations are expressions of the Franciscan perspective which highlights the uniqueness of the individual. They are reminiscent of the line by Hopkins, "Christ plays in 10,000 faces, lovely to look at." Through prayer, we become many manifestations of the image of Jesus and mirror God to each other in the way in which we live. We "make flesh" the face of Christ in the world.

Incarnational, Formative, Marian Community: The preamble to the Franciscan Third Order Rule states that "they are happy and blest because the Lord will make his home and dwelling place with them." In very concrete and practical ways we are called to "enflesh" the Lord. Through our personalities we manifest qualities of Jesus: his compassion, joy, truthfulness, humor, challenge, mercy, obedience, love. Francis says we are "spouses" when we are united with the Lord, "brothers and sisters" when we do the will of the Father, and "mothers" of the Lord when we bring him to birth through a holy life. In this latter sense all communities are formative. We are life-givers as Mary was.

Mary models this "incarnational" aspect of our lives. She is the mother of the Word in ourselves and others. We are likewise called to nourish that "Word." The devotion of our foundress to Mary led her to place the Institute under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception. Each province also bears a title of Mary. Perhaps an unacknowledged manifestation of this evangelical aspect of our charism is reflected in this choice.

When Papua New Guinea became a province, the sisters chose "Mother of the Word" as their title. In their profession ceremonies one witnesses a solemn procession in which the Word of Scriptures is carried in a string bag called, in the Pidgin language, a "bilum." Such a bag is used by the women of the country to carry their babies. Significantly, it is also the word for "womb." A particular focus for this new province is to nourish the word of God in their own individual lives and in the lives of others. This "birthing" process is a unique expression of the way in which a Melanesian Franciscanism has taken root in Papua New Guinea.

Similarly the sisters in the countries of England, Ireland, Italy, and Egypt chose "Queen of Peace" as the title for their province. How significant in areas ravaged by years of hatred and terrorism, organized crime, and extreme fundamentalist sects! To try to "birth" the Prince of Peace in all relationships in such places is a fundamental Franciscan calling. Perhaps it is worth reflecting on the meaning of the titles given to our older provinces. Are there significant expressions of Mary's relation to God also relevant in the titles "Immaculate Conception," the

"Immaculate Heart of Mary," and "Notre Dame de Lourdes" that have bearing on the way we express our charism in these provinces?

The Witness of Elizabeth: Elizabeth Hayes was truly a Franciscan in this evangelical, relational sense of the word. No one could question that God was central to her life. In her prayer she cried:

What have I in heaven, and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?

Oh my God Thee only will I know
 Thee only will I seek
 Thee only will I hope for
 Thee only will I love
 Thee only will I listen to
 Thee only will I study
 Thee only will I imitate
 Thee only will I find
 Thee only will I possess
 Thee only will I keep
 Thee only will I contemplate

Now and through all eternity Amen! God Alone! God Alone!

Such a relationship can be nothing but transformative, effecting not only her communion with God but also her sense of those gathered around the Lord in community with her. In her Diary, written in Jamaica during a very trying period, she found fault with religious life as it was lived there, since it was not "bringing the sunshine of love, charity and mercy to aid the growth of virtues in each other's souls." She felt such a life should be "founded in a generous, broad and noble spirit ... flourishing in a loving, generous, joyful spirit; to see union and trust and confidence in its members." Witnessing the type of relationship between the sisters and their superiors, "she could not conceive that Jesus called his Spouses to give Him such cold service that they must be watched, suspected, scolded into fidelity." She said of such a situation, "This is not in God and with God."

This Jamaican period of her life was indeed a struggle as she searched for the will of God regarding her future. She suffered immensely from the lack of a spiritual director to guide her. One notices her sensitivity to the uniqueness of each one's call in her reflection that she "often felt she did not like to be regarded as a physician examines a new case that comes before him-at first with all the interest of enquiry-then seeing that it is only an ordinary case loses all interest and becomes indifferent. In hours of desolation," she wrote, "it seems as if I had not grace and strength enough. The greatest miracle is myself, that I should be a Catholic, a religious, a Franciscan." At this time she found herself alone, dependent solely on the Holy Spirit to guide her. We shall consider further on, how she was led to leave Jamaica in search of a new mission. Let us consider first that specific calling as Franciscans to the Third Order.

WE ARE SISTERS OF PENANCE

While the evangelical, relational lifestyle is typical of all Franciscans, the Third Order charism is characterized by a life of conversion and good works. Conversion is expressed through a penitential life, while good works constitute efforts to bring about peace and wholeness through, Ae co-iorate with s of our community living and ministry. We call ourselve "Sisters of Penance," reminiscent of the original group of Francis' followers referred to as the Penitents of Assisi."

When we think "conversion" in reference to Elizabeth Hayes, an image of the baptismal font at the Farm Street Church in London comes to mind. There she renounced her Anglican upbringing for membership in the Church of Rome, an act that made her in many ways a social and spiritual outcast in her immediate family circle. This single act of conversion opened the way for entrance into a life of conversion as God led her step by step into the Franciscan family.

Penitential Lifestyle: Return in your mind to that original circle you imagined, with God in the center, surrounded by members of the community. Consider a second concentric circle of energy spiraling around the first. This represents that interchange that goes on as we are continually shaped by God in our daily interactions and circumstances of life.

Several years ago, during a visit to Tumleo Island in Papua New Guinea, the sisters brought me to see a woman potter. As we approached her house I could hear a rhythmic banging or slapping noise but saw no one. Suddenly, the woman came into view, sitting cross-legged under her limbum house, built high upon stilts. Between her knees was a large clay pot. She had one hand inside, sensitively feeling the smooth clay and slowly turning the container, as she pounded the outside with a paddle. The sound indicated the thickness or thinness of the clay, the touch of her paddle altering to provide the necessary resilience. The sight of her creatively and artistically shaping that pot remained with me as an image of the way the Divine Potter carefully shapes our lives interiorly and exteriorly. As we gaze at the face of Christ in the center of our lives and see and hear Him in the lives of those around us, we are called to be continually transformed into the image of Christ.

The Challenge to be Life-Giving: To "die daily to self" and rise to new life in Christ is indeed a challenge, calling for qualities of humility, adaptability, and flexibility. What exactly does "dying" to self mean? It is closely connected to the choices we make, the "yes" and "no" of our daily living. Communal living offers many opportunities for saying "no" to my own desires, plans, and preferences for the sake of another or for the common good. When such a "no" gives way to a "yes" in which Gospel values can be more deeply expressed, then new life flourishes.

The individualism of the age in which we live can label such conduct as repressive, inhibiting, and nonsensical. That may be true, if a person chooses to respond unreflectively and without freedom. But when a person living in an authentic state of conversion "dies" on one level, it is indicative of new birth on another plane, like the seed that falls to the ground and dies so that the plant flourishes. Franciscan living "in a spirit of prayer, of poverty and of humility ... acknowledging, adoring and serving the Lord in true repentance" leads only to greater fullness.

It calls for courage to call one another forth to active living of the Gospel in this way. To regenerate, protect, liberate, or transmit the life of Christ within each of us is a daily task. I might ask myself, "How am I life-giving by my words, actions, mannerisms, body language, intentions?" As the woman potter in Papua New Guinea kept rotating and shaping her vessel, so does such a life of conversion shape us. As the potter had an image in her mind's eye about what outcome she desired, so too the positive model of Jesus upon which our lives are focused gives direction to our daily task.

A Joyous and Positive Outlook: Perhaps Clare more than Francis expresses directly the encouragement that supportive, communal living offers. To Agnes she writes, "I sigh with such happiness in the Lord because I know you see that you make up most wonderfully what is lacking both in me and in the other sisters in following the footprints of the poor and humble Jesus Christ ... You are a coworker of God and a support of the weak members of His ineffable Body. Who is there, then, who would not encourage me to rejoice over such marvelous joys? ...

Place yourself before the mirror of Jesus" and be transformed! Such a life of biblical metanoia is the only authentic response that can be made in the face of Love.

The Witness of Elizabeth Hayes: Elizabeth also echoes the same positive attitude toward this transformation of life. She writes, "I think that much that befalls us is sent to teach us to know ourselves and so we are permitted thus to learn our own weaknesses-this ought not make us despond. Grace would be stronger than nature if we were faithful in seeking diligently for it."

Because it was difficult to find a spiritual director, Elizabeth's Diary was to her a kind of friend to whom she poured out her soul. So often in her journal entries Elizabeth reflects on her own need for deeper conversion. Being a convert to the faith, she at times was particularly hard on herself, criticizing her shallowness of faith and tendency toward "natural impetuosity, rashness and impatience." She knew that she "should act from principle not from impulse however good those impulses may be." She had a "fondness for argument" and was determined to "check every rising of self, every perception of the fault of another." Elizabeth longed to grow in sanctity resolving "to be patient, obedient and cheerful." Knowing that God was shaping her life in community, she sought to have "charity, long-suffering and sweetness." Though hard on herself, her attitude toward the failings of others was "to correct with gentleness, to show tenderness, sympathy ... for severity is hardening."

Throughout her Diary, Elizabeth shows a deepening attitude toward the value of confession as a means of growing in sanctity. Being a convert, it is a practice she is not used to, and at first she is tempted to dread and dislike confession, feeling that she did "not seem to say things as they really are." She felt "in danger of making cold, formal, routine confessions." Her writings indicate that she was more used to ongoing spiritual direction from someone with whom she was familiar. The lack of someone in whom she could confide was a source of great anguish to her. "I cried out from the bottom of my soul give me one to lead me to Thee, or give me Thyself." Asking herself how she could possibly be a saint, she writes, "An interior voice seems to be constantly whispering in [my] ear — you are just in the best condition to be a Saint. Even while [I] weep a whisper seems to say — there is something in all this that would make you a Saint if only you were willing and used it so."

Several journal entries speak of this topic:

Was there ever a saint who lived without a spiritual director? There have been Saints who would only ask advice perhaps once in one or two years. There have been others who sought direction several times in the week or even many times in the day. Would it be possible to become a Saint without any spiritual direction? It is a law God has imposed upon man (connected with our nature) that each one sees the faults, defects, inconsistencies of others better than our own. We may try to act as wisely as we will, yet we do not know ourselves we do not see the effect of our own actions. Consequently, a spiritual advisor is of great benefit and assistance. Then can we be safe without one? That is a difference! God does not require impossibilities-if he withholds a director from us or if we are in a place where we cannot obtain direction or, though surrounded by spiritual directors have no confidence in any of them, God Himself becomes our director-we are more directly dependent upon the Holy Spirit and if we are sufficiently instructed in all necessary spiritual truths ... then we need not fear-it is a dispensation from God.

Later in Rome circumstances were different and she found directors more easily. Elizabeth's sensitivity to the uniqueness, special giftedness, and beauty of each person is evident as she comments on the value of frequent confession. "A soul that aspires to high perfection goes to

confession often." At this point she refers to the soul as a "delicate, fragile object we value much, we do not let dust accumulate upon it, we blow it off gently, we look at it often. A coarser conscience [is] like a common object-a strong duster gives a hard rub."

One wonders how she would advise us today when the prevalent attitude toward the sacrament of reconciliation is one of such ambivalence. In many places, catechesis on the new rite, since Vatican II, has been sadly lacking, and many Catholics are at a loss as to what to make of the sacrament in their lives. For us as Third Order Franciscans, for whom an attitude toward daily conversion is essential, do the words of Elizabeth present a new challenge? The sacrament of reconciliation expresses the invitation of Jesus to freedom, wholeness, and peace. To be people of peace is central to any expression of lives representative of the Risen Christ. This brings us to the third aspect of our charism as expressed through the good works of our daily living and ministry.

WE PROCLAIM PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

Ironically, the circumstances that surrounded the life of Elizabeth Hayes were, in some ways, characterized by lack of peace. The Oxford Movement highlighted the antagonism between the Church of England and that of Rome. Her first foundation in Sevres, France, was uprooted by the outbreak of the FrancoPrussian War. Conditions of slavery in both Jamaica and the United States witnessed to injustice and cruelty. Revengeful arsonists in Minnesota wrecked havoc on her infant Community, eventually giving rise to a painful period of struggle and separation. How did such lack of peace touch the heart of this Franciscan woman? Let us consider first what it means to be a peacemaker in the broad sense of the word.

Peacemaking and Interior Attitudes: Apart from Jesus himself, I am not aware of any other founder or foundress except Francis who instructed his followers to always give the special greeting: "Pace e bene" or "Peace and good." It is not sufficiently acknowledged that being peacemakers or messengers of peace is our primary mission and most direct manner of expressing Christ's presence to others. Referring to Bernard, one of the early followers of Francis, Celano wrote, "Taking up the mission of peace ... he joyfully hastened to follow the saint of God." Regardless of the particular work we do, "peacemaking" is the ambience in which the work is carried out. Peace is a foundational value of the Franciscan family.

Consider again the image of two circles: the first one, that of our communities gathered around God in the center, and the second, a spiral of energy shaping , and transforming us by our daily interactions into the likeness of God. The dynamism of conversion generates a third spiraling ring of harmony and unity in some form. This third ring is the gift and task of peace. God intends that we all, whether animate or inanimate beings, live together on planet Earth as brothers and sisters. For Francis all were children of the Most High: the flower in the field, the earth beneath his feet, or the person with whom he walked. Right relationship with all creation was the intention of God. Franciscans view justice, peace, and integrity of creation as comprising a single unity. They all focus on relationships. Peace implies "good" relationships between persons, communities, nations, and creation. Justice implies "well ordered" relationships, and ecology or integrity of creation implies "reverential" relationships. The innate giftedness, uniqueness, and goodness of all creation coming from the hand of God calls for nothing less.

Promoting peace outside is impossible without maintaining peaceful attitudes inside. To announce peace with the lips, says Francis, one must be careful to have it ever more within your heart. The Franciscan Rule does not so much give norms of action but rather describes behavior. The tiny book, comprised of thirty-two short articles, is filled with adjectives. Let the

brothers and sisters be "gentle, peaceful, unassuming, mild, humble, neither quarrelsome, contentious or judgmental toward others." It stands to reason that energies of peacefulness can not emanate from a divided heart. Being peaceful is a prerequisite for making and building peace.

An Option for the Poor and Powerless: We generally find those who are poor and/or powerless where situations of injustice and lack of peace exist, for it is power that ordinarily is the root cause behind relationships that are manipulative, disrespectful, envious, and antagonistic.

Solidarity with the poor and powerless is one primary way of restoring the order of peace. Through the witness of evangelical poverty we try to make our lives one with the poor. While our vow of poverty is made primarily to identify ourselves with Jesus and his Mother, who chose poverty, to live in simplicity has further ramifications. "No one is justified in keeping for his/her exclusive use what s/he does not need, when others lack necessities" (*Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI). To share things in common, to live on a budget, to refrain from middle- and upper-class benefits is to effect more just living conditions for others. This solidarity with the poor invites us to active participation for the furtherance of peace. Francis is a model for such peacemaking.

Active Non-Violence: Francis' own conversion followed on his experience of participation as a soldier amid warring city states. Jesus led him to see the futility, of such violence. In his early Rule, Francis forbade those who followed him to "take up arms." This requirement is not to be dismissed lightly. Not "taking up arms" does not necessarily mean for us simply the non-use of weapons such as guns. Words can be weapons, attitudes can kill, looks can paralyze. To be a true peacemaker requires deep examination of one's own conscience to root out any semblance of violence.

One of the first principles to learn in peace-making is that the aim and the means used to attain that aim must be compatible. Using violent means to bring an end to discord can end the discord but does not necessarily bring peace. In every country where our sisters live and work, there are situations of tensions and violence of one sort or another. To develop active responses of non-violence takes reflective consideration of each situation and deliberate courses of action. Sometimes non-violent action takes the form of "healing the wounded, binding up those bruised and reclaiming the erring." Sometimes forms of action that make for systemic change are more appropriate and effective.

Passivism and the stance of the conscientious objector can be strong statements against war and violence, but they are not synonymous with a position of active non-violence. Sometimes the image of "peacemaker" can be reduced to that of someone who does nothing or refuses to interfere. A simple example! A heated argument between two people can be halted when one passively refuses to continue the quarrel. Peace does not necessarily ensue. To actively engage in dialogue in a non-violent way, trying to understand the position of the other, to read their thoughts and motivations, is one step toward a genuine, more lasting peace.

Peacemaking, as a total perspective, is a new way of thinking for most of us. It is certainly more than just the responsibility of local justice and peace coordinators or committee members. It is an essential component of our Franciscan charism. International groups are presently working in Rome on a formation document for all Franciscan novitiates in which formation for peace is integral to the entire Franciscan vocation.

The Witness of Elizabeth Hayes: It would seem forced to say that Elizabeth Hayes was a "peacemaker" with the same degree of awareness of which we have been speaking. Yet, the choices she made and the motivations underlying some of her actions indicate that she was a woman who sought harmony, wholeness, and integrity. To begin with, we can ask ourselves what would motivate a woman of more than fifty to seize the moment and volunteer her service as a nurse to tend the wounded during the Franco-Prussian war?

Newspaper clippings in the archives (Box 7, folder 19a) describe the work of the National Society for Relief of the Sick and Wounded in War, October 22nd, 1870. A doctor responsible for the Anglo-American ambulance wrote of women volunteers, "he infinitely prefers female nurses and vindicates with strong and earnest feeling the employment of women in military hospitals. They are far more tender and for wounded men, who are little better than 'great children,' tenderness is a matter of no small importance. They are also far more attentive and efficient than men, and especially are less given to go to sleep and neglect their patients." The article goes on, "we are not surprised to learn that Dr. Sims would not exchange one woman for a dozen men."

Perhaps a comparable image would be to envision Elizabeth in the midst of present-day war-torn Bosnia or Somalia. Courage, compassion, and a spirit dedicated to "making whole" would mark her service. Her deep desire for restoring and upbuilding the human spirit lies behind the yearning to minister to the poor, the needy, and the powerless. Immigrants uprooted from their homelands and black children denied the basics of family upbringing and education are also victims of injustice and lack of peace. To these Elizabeth was drawn.

One could not question her ability to dialogue with opposing forces by a simple reading of her request to bring the Poor Clares to America with her (*Unless the Seed Die*, p. 124). "A day of anguish," she called it. The account is full of exclamation marks! Those who resisted her could only envision dire consequences for the little group, "an inferno"! "What right have any of us to claim authority and not take responsibility," she argued with the representative of the Franciscan Minister General. "If we poor women can take responsibility, why not a General of a great Order like ours?" Eventually Elizabeth's conviction that God would provide once the "way of faith and confidence" was followed, prevailed.

A life of active non-violence does not mean a life devoid of suffering and struggle. In fact, many times the pursuit of peace brings with it the experience of the cross. We can only ponder the depth of suffering caused in the heart of this woman at her seeming inability to reconcile differences within her own beloved community. It remains among the "mysteries" to know what words, uttered or not, crossed between the shores of the Atlantic during the aftermath of the fire in Belle Prairie and the resultant separation of our Institute into two groups. Did Elizabeth leave us the challenge to promote peace through our relationships, our words, both spoken and written, our ministries among peoples the world over?

It was the calling of Elizabeth Hayes to be a missionary that brought her to Belle Prairie in the first place. That same vocation also brought her into obedience to Rome. This final element of our charism, that of "being missionary," is what we owe most especially to our foundress.

WE ARE FOUNDED BY MOTHER MARY IGNATIUS

That Elizabeth Hayes had a missionary calling, there is no doubt. Her fourth vow, to serve on the foreign missions, attests to this personal charism. Island born, bilingual, she had the natural propensities for such a vocation. None of us has taken the fourth vow she did-she never

required it of her Sisters; and yet who can doubt that it was definitely a missionary community that she had in mind when she began her Institute. Her vision was global, limited to no one country or shoreline. Her universal perspective is evidenced in the internationality represented in the articles she edited in the *Annals*. She sought vocations wherever she went: Canada, America, Italy, England, and France. Furthermore, she expected the sisters to be adaptable to any country. Though only a remnant of her original community still held together at the time of her death, what are some of the factors that make up the missionary vocation that she envisaged for them?

Being Missionary and Ecclesial: Imagine a fourth circle added to the three concentric rings we have imaged throughout this reflection. First, there is a community of persons emanating from God, who is their dynamic and energizing Source. Their daily interactions challenge them to deeper and deeper affiliation and conversion toward the One who sustains them. Peacemaking effected through healing, wholeness, forgiveness, integrity, and justice, all expressed through various apostolates, characterize their way of being in the world. In your mind's eye situate the entire symbol in the last outer circle of the world itself. "Go out to all the world" is the mandate of Jesus. "Renew the face of the earth!" Renewing this earth means making it whole, united in harmony and peace. The "whole" world indicates peoples of all races, cultures, and nationalities.

Lumen Gentium states that the Church is sent to be "the sacrament of unity of the whole human race." And further in *Ad Gentes* it is stated that "the whole church is missionary." Vatican II documents continually reiterate the need for global vision, stating that "the grace of renewal cannot increase in these (local Christian) communities unless one enlarges the extent of its charity to the ends of the earth and has a solicitude for far-off peoples like the one it has for its own members." Being missionary cannot be divorced from a sense of Church.

The Fact of Internationality: Responding to a call to be missionary implies being international, but the two concepts must be distinguished. Different peoples, lands, nations, cultures, languages, customs, traditions are the "stuff" of which internationality is made. It is not enough to say we are international because we have houses in eleven different countries. Being international requires an interior disposition of heart which acknowledges the giftedness of each culture with a healthy respect for difference. To relativize one's own culture so that no one land is "numero uno," no one city is the "hub of the universe" requires the ability to esteem one's native land with pride, yet have a sense of the positive and negative elements of one's culture. One of the greatest sins and subtlest ways to undermine a spirit of internationality is the habit of stereotyping. "Americans always. . ., the Irish never. . ., All Australians . . ., and so on." And yet stereotypic vision is generally an innate tendency all of us must overcome.

Because former norms of church law cautioned religious from speaking about their families, differences in culture were passed over and often suppressed. Today we are beginning to raise consciousness regarding attitudes of dominance and oppression, differing world views, values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, different ways of communicating, problem solving, decision making, praying, and relaxing. There is a new sensitivity to learning second languages and respectful acceptance of pluralism.

Inculturation: The demands of inculturation sometimes can be placed in opposition to being missionary. Yet, they are not necessarily incompatible. To learn the nuances of a culture well enough to allow the Gospel to take root in the soil of a country requires time and attentive listening to the ways God is manifested to and in a people. The tension between staying long enough for the people to be secure in the faith and moving on to answer the call to respond to

other pressing needs can give rise to difficult discernment and problematic choices. Even Jesus had to choose to leave at times, even when he was pressed to stay on.

Missionary Mandate and Obedient Listening: The root of the word "missionary" comes from "missio," which is to be "sent" by someone. The "Someone" is ultimately God, whose desire it is that the Gospel message go out to the ends of the earth. But this mission is confirmed through obedience to the voice of the Spirit, expressed by the Church through commissioning by the provincial or general minister of the Institute. A missionary calling implies an obedient readiness evident in attitudes of mobility, of flexibility, of adaptability.

Our model is Jesus, who had "nowhere to lay his head." Our rootedness cannot be grounded in place but in a God who can surprise and invite and beckon from anywhere on the face of the earth. This adaptability is not just limited to change of location but can be applied to willingness to alter attitudes, views, expectations, dreams, and hopes for oneself and those with whom and to whom we minister. A true missionary must develop listening ears attentive to the whisperings of the Spirit, for an obedient heart is of the essence of such a lifestyle.

The Witness of Elizabeth Hayes: A Canadian priest who recently read the life of our Foundress said without hesitation that he thought her charism was obedience. Another reader called her "the woman who never gave up." A third person, a Franciscan sister and scholar of Clare and Third Order history, commented that we should never overlook that fact of the fourth vow. These three observations are integrally connected to understanding the charism we have received from her.

No one of us could read the Diary without noting the Foundress' unswerving attachment to the will of God. Despite the almost inconceivable number of undertakings this woman initiated during her lifetime, she never took one step without the consent of her superiors or the mandate of the Church. We can never know exactly what sentiments were in her heart on that 26th day of November, 1859, in the Charlotte Street convent in Glasgow, Scotland, when she voluntarily added a fourth vow, "to devote myself to foreign missions and never by an act of my own will seek to be removed from them." Whatever Voice motivated her, she spent every day of the remainder of her lifetime, conscious of carrying out that call.

Mother Mary Ignatius prays often for the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit on her future: "Pray hard to be guided by a right spirit, to have the spirit of discernment between good and evil, right and wrong, to have much wisdom from above, not the knowledge of the world." When her days in Jamaica become increasingly difficult, she writes: "My soul is in a martyrdom of loneliness and misery, resolved to offer this suffering, this very absence of all support of any friend on earth as part of the penance taken when the vow was made." During a retreat she is advised: "Converse with Jesus in your heart, listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. If God sends you consolation, thank him and receive it with joy. If not, if He leaves you in dryness and desolation, resign yourself to his Holy Will."

Her attentiveness to God's will is not a blind obedience, however, because she can also read indications of the way God speaks through her own spirit. "I am content to suffer and to do the will of God as known to me at the present time but I do not see that I am obliged to be satisfied with my position. Is it wrong to hope that if God wills me to live, he will call me to some labour for His glory and the salvation of souls ... I go neither to place or person—simply God calls me to leave my home and country and to join a foreign mission."

Although "an incessant longing to work for the poor dwelt in her heart and was the subject of her prayers," she found that her original enthusiasm waned when she was isolated in her cell, unable to reach the poor and needy around her. A Franciscan life that does not radiate outward in mission seemed to her a contradiction: "A mission without work for the poor and sick, doing little or nothing for the place in which we live has not a very enticing aspect."

She feels justified in writing to the Bishop about permission to leave the island. She writes: "I am not happy here-you said you wished for a cheerful giver. That I am no longer and besides this my absence would be little felt. .." As the voice of the Church, he grants her request to depart, but as yet she does not know where to go. She continues her self-examination in her journal: "I never looked upon my desire to leave as a temptation against vocation only as the natural result of circumstance. I do not ask to move until I see the will of God distinctly marked out nor without the full consent of Superiors."

Her consideration of many different possibilities is evident in the lists of pros and cons spelled out in her Diary. Finally, Elizabeth leaves Jamaica and begins a ten-year period of continually searching for ways to respond to that missionary calling. She says: "My principal prayer has been to know the will of God and my only resolution to do it so that if made known to me-St. Thomas, Jamaica, home or anywhere in religion, I am ready to do it. After all the ideas suggested to me, one thing seems always uppermost-to retain my Rules and Constitutions. There is in them all that is needed for a most fervent and perfect life. What ever has been wanting in me as a religious is my own individual fault. I cannot leave the Franciscan Order. I shall feel that the curse of God is upon my soul. I entered it in obedience; God therefore will perfect me in it if only I am faithful to His grace. Every other suggestion I will look upon as from the evil one."

Several years later when her little community has been founded and she herself is in Rome, she receives encouragement from a visit to a renowned Italian holy woman who says to her: "You love the Lord much, desire to please him and do his will but you are often in doubt. You must follow all the illuminations of the Divine Spirit, the light, the inspiration God sends you. Go onward, do not doubt."

That she did "Go onward" and that her charism and spirit continue, we know from the unfolding history of our Institute. Obedience to God's will was the motivating force behind her missionary vocation. Impelled from within, she knew "it could only be done for God and in God.... Love counts nothing hard it does for the Beloved." Only with such a disposition could Elizabeth be accepting of the suffering and struggles attendant on the growth of the early years of her infant Community. Her self-emptying is expressed in her prayer, "I offered my life for these missions. God has not accepted it. Today I felt inspired to offer myself in life or death, to give up all, keep nothing for myself, throw myself into God's Providence. Accept me, O Lord, and all I am and have for the furtherance of this foundation. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Francis, Anthony hear and intercede for me."

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Now, one hundred years after her death, what would she say to us? We, who celebrate this centennial, are the "furtherance" for which she died. During her lifetime the word "charism" was not used in connection with religious life. Only as recently as the reign of Pope Paul VI has it been in vogue. Elizabeth would not be able to explain to us what her "charism" is, because she did not know she had one. Nonetheless, I feel certain that were she to appear to any one of us with a personal gift for our celebration of her birth into eternal life, she would have in her hands

a copy of our Rule and Constitutions. For her, they were God's gift. In Glasgow in 1859, she promised obedience to them. They were what sustained her during the difficult period of discernment in Jamaica and afterwards. When she labored over their revision in Rome for the Glasgow Franciscans, she herself had the Church's authorization to use these Constitutions for us, her community yet unfounded.

The printed word of the Rule and Constitutions is not what is so priceless to us. The real gift is the FRANCISCAN, MISSIONARY SPIRIT OF CONVERSION AND PEACEMAKING within them that energized Elizabeth. The printed word cannot capture charism because charism is not a thing. It is only when we allow the daily events of our lives to be shaped by that word that we enter into the dynamism of God's love emanating throughout the world. To be caught up in this spiraling energy is to know that our charism is alive. On this one hundredth anniversary of the death of our Foundress, she presents anew to each' of us the Rule and Constitutions that embody that energy. Imagine what she would say to you personally?

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[Note from the USA Minister: This article is a wonderful reflection of our charism. However, it was written in 1995, and within the past few years we have undergone a change in the structure of our Institute, so some of the terms and titles used have changed. Following the leadership model of St. Clare, we are no longer organized as provinces but rather as Circles of Communion. The circle representing England, Ireland, Egypt and Italy is now known as the "Portiuncula Circle," and the the circle representing Australia is known as the "Southern Cross Circle." The Mother of the Word Circle (Papua New Guinea), Notre Dame de Lourdes Circle (Canada), and Immaculate Conception Circle (USA) have retained their names but are now circles rather than provinces.]