



Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception

## SILENT MARCH PROTESTING ALL TYPES OF DISCRIMINATION

### Leadership Conference Of Women Religious



Drums punctuated a silent march by almost 800 Catholic women religious leaders Aug. 10 as they processed two blocks from a hotel ballroom to the Old Courthouse in downtown St. Louis, the site of the first two trials of the historic Dred Scott case.

This call to action at the general assembly for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious emphasized the conference's

recommitment to a 2016 resolution that recognized "racism as a systemic, structural cause underlying and contributing to the multiple situations of injustice identified in the LCWR Call."

"In the presence of constant and painful reminders of the deep roots of racism in our country," reads the 2018 statement of recommitment, which echoes the wording of the 2016 resolution, LCWR pledges "to go deeper into the critical work of creating communion, examining the root causes of injustice and our own complicity, and purging ourselves, our communities, and our country of the sin of racism and its destructive effects."

The conference unanimously affirmed the recommitment just before marching to the courthouse, which was blocks away from the hotel where the sisters convened Aug. 8-10 for the LCWR annual assembly.

In the 1857 Dred Scott decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that no African-American, free or slave, could claim U.S. citizenship and was therefore unqualified to petition for freedom in court. Opposition to the decision was a catalyst for the Civil War and led to the adoption of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution.

Sisters held signs on the courthouse steps that read "Being in Communion, Standing Against Racism," a continuation of the 2018 assembly's theme, "Being the Presence of Love: The Power of Communion."

Following five minutes of standing on the courthouse steps in silence, the sisters began to sing the lyrics that had echoed in the assembly: "We stand in communion, we stand in grace. We stand in communion with the human race." (Taken from Global Sisters Report)

## LAUDATO SÌ

### Saving our common home and the future of life on earth

I had the opportunity to participate in the International Conference on the third anniversary of Laudato SÌ organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Participants came from all over the world, all generations, all walks of life, to be and/or hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

#### **SEE**

With ample scientific data, various speakers stressed the magnitude of the crisis. Our Common Home is facing a risk of collapse and with it humanity is facing the risk of extinction. The truth is that planet earth will adjust, as it has in the past. Lifeforms will evolve, as it has until now. But human beings may not be able to survive the planet's extreme conditions. Remember the dinosaurs.

#### **JUDGE**

A poet from the Marshall Islands who travelled for 3 days to attend the Conference became a living metaphor of the crisis we are facing. As she read her poem with deep emotion, she fainted and collapsed.

A First Nation elder from Greenland had severe words for us. He told us how the ice cover has reduced to 2 meters and keeps melting. "I invited to the big ice politician people to show them; they did nothing. I invited economist people to show them; they did nothing; I invited religious people to show them; they did nothing."

**We** did nothing.

We know we are causing this crisis and that we are part of the solution. We cannot undo the harm already inflicted. However, it is still possible to limit the damage. But a massive global movement is required.

The time is now. We must do more, better, and faster!

**ACT**

Listen to the heartbeat of God.

Listen to the heartbeat of the earth.

Listen to the heartbeat of the poor.

One heart. Same beat.

The house is on fire.

If we don't do more,

better

faster,

it will burn down to ashes.

Literally.

I remembered the words of St. Francis of Assisi to his brothers, as he was about to welcome Sister Death: "Up until now, we have done little or nothing. Let's begin."

Mother Earth has cancer, her children are suffering, and I am responsible.

Mother can't breathe. Her lungs, the Amazonian forests, are being destroyed. I am responsible.

Coral reefs are dying. Mother earth is disfigured. I am responsible.

Sea creatures are suffocating in plastic waste. Dying. I am responsible.

I must find a better way of doing things, better, and sooner! We must!

As individuals, some of our actions could be to choose to live more simply so that others can simply live. Simple actions in daily life such as eat less meat, eat locally grown organic food (a choice not always available in an institutional setting), consume less energy, less water, use less or even no plastic, walk whenever possible; compost organic waste; reduce (buy less), recycle, reuse, repurpose...

As an international Institute we travel much and long distances, adding to the increase of carbon dioxide levels that are one of the factors of climate change. How can we walk the talk? Offset our impact by financially supporting organizations working to preserve our common home. Maybe setup technology that could allow us to "be together" without having to travel long distances. We could also – if we haven't already done so – divest completely from fossil fuel activities. "If it's wrong to wreck the planet, it's wrong to reap from the wreckage" we heard at the Conference. Invest in renewable energy: solar, wind, thermal.

Could we set a target? By a certain year, maybe 2030, the MFIC Sisters will be carbon neutral, i.e. we will have achieved a state in which the net amount of carbon dioxide or other carbon compounds emitted into the atmosphere by our activities is reduced to zero because it is balanced by actions to reduce or offset these emissions.

My final thoughts draw me to the greater picture. To the cosmic spirituality. The Spirit of God breathing through the universe during billions of years has evolved it towards consciousness. We are the universe contemplating itself. Would we be the end of evolution? Would the universe really stop evolving us, a creature now capable of destroying itself by destroying its own home? The Spirit, always creating something new in the universe, is more than likely to evolve us into someone better. It always has. It always will. And this is the work of the Cosmic Christ breathing his Spirit into the Universe.



To continue our reflection and motivate our actions, maybe we could read again Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si* and his address to the participants at the Conference.

*Vatican City, 5-6 July 2018*

*Sr Danielle Julien, mfc*

## **This new team of Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, will serve the congregation from June 2018 through June 2023**

On March 2, the Franciscan Sisters elected Sister Carol Schmit as the Community Minister and President. Serving as the 21st community minister, Sister Carol, along with three assistant ministers, will be responsible for the spiritual and ministerial life and mission of the congregation.

Originally from Wayzata, Minn., Sister Carol received a bachelor's degree in social studies and speech from the College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minn. and a master's degree in sociology from Fordham University, New York, N.Y. She also studied at Purdue University, Purdue, Ind., University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minn., and St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo.

Sister Carol is a former secondary teacher, vocation director, missionary in Venezuela, administrative board member of the Franciscan Sisters and co-founder and director of Clare's Well. At the time of the elections, she was serving as a missionary in Ocampo, Coahuila, Mexico.

Elected as assistant ministers were Sisters Grace Skwira, Charlene Grossman and Carolyn Law.

Sister Grace Skwira was raised on the farm near Opole, Minn. She earned degrees in nursing and theology and ministered in nursing, midwifery, health care education, Hispanic ministry and as a missionary for many years. She served in Yunguyo, Peru; Chonburi Refugee Camp, Thailand; Carmen Pampa, Bolivia; Oneonta, Ala.; and Monterrey, Mexico. In Minnesota she served in health facilities in Breckenridge, Onamia and Little Falls. She also served her Franciscan Community as vocation minister and community secretary. A member of the current Leadership team, she has been elected to a second term.



Sister Charlene Grossman, a native of Chokio, Minn., earned a licensed practical nurse certificate from North Dakota State School of Science, Wahpeton, N. Dak., and became a chaplain at Abbot Northwestern Hospital, Minneapolis. She ministered as a licensed practical nurse, chaplain and director of pastoral care and served in Little Falls, Onamia, Breckenridge, Moorhead, Fergus Falls, Minn., and Fargo and Wahpeton, N. Dak. Her most recent ministry was as pastoral assistant at St. Elizabeth Catholic Church, Elizabeth, Minn. Sister Carolyn Law, originally from Yankton, S. Dak., received a bachelor of arts degree in humanities, theology and secondary education from the College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minn., and a master of arts degree in counseling psychology from Loyola University, Chicago, Ill. She served in education and parish ministry and as a missionary in Venezuela and Nicaragua. She is a licensed professional counselor and a trained brain integration technique practitioner.

These four Franciscan Sisters bring energy, wisdom and experience as they prepare for their new leadership roles. "We renew our commitment to live into the future guided by the life-changing teachings of Francis and Clare and Assisi, in these times which are both troubled and longing for a new level of consciousness," Sister Carol Schmit said.

They all agree that is a privilege and honor to serve their sisters in Community in this important way.

The Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota, are a congregation of women religious committed to the gospel and Franciscan way of life. They advocate for the poor and marginalized, work for social justice and seek to create communities of peace wherever they are called to serve.

Sharing Franciscan life and values, the sisters are accompanied by some 300 Franciscan Associates from North, South and Central America who proclaim their call to live the spirit, charism and mission of the Franciscan Community. They are women, men and families who commit to a formally recognized mutual relationship and live this commitment within their own lifestyle.

### Sharing the same Foundress Elizabeth Hayes

Our two Institutes meet each year at the LCWR Banquet to celebrate this special connection, the same roots going back to 1873. We experience a true connection as Sisters in the Franciscan Tradition sharing the Charism of Elizabeth Hayes.

**Back Row:** Julie Franchi, Grace Skwira, Carolyn Law, Marie Puleo and Char (Charlene) Grossman.

**Front Row:** Carol Schmit, Community Minister and Pauline Robinson, General Minister



#### UPCOMING EVENTS:

- ✓ **Mary of the Southern Cross (Australia) Governance Circle** will hold their Chapter on September 18-21.
- ✓ **Mother of the Word (Papua New Guinea) Governance Circle** Visitation will be on October 1-18.