



Extended Family Newsletter

Issue 20 - April 2014

The articles in this Newsletter speak of Life and in this Easter season we rejoice in the New Life gained for us through the Resurrection. On 21st April, Easter Monday, Sr. Kathleen (formerly Sr. Rose) O’Keeffe, RSHM was called definitively to New Life with Christ. For the past six years Kathleen had been the General Treasurer of the RSHM Institute and also worked on raising funds for projects for the poor in Africa and Brazil until she was asked to take on the role of General Councillor. In all she did and in her relationships Kathleen was known for her profound generosity and kindness. Kathleen’s illness had been diagnosed in January while she was still in Rome and she had gone to Dublin for treatment. Her death was unexpected and a shock to her family, her RSHM sisters and other friends. Her funeral Mass took place in the Church in Ferrybank, her home place. In the words of Sr. Rosamond, General Superior, “may Kathleen be experiencing the fullness of life promised to all who believe in Jesus Christ who came that all may have life, life to the full”.

Sr. Catherine Dolan, RSHM

19th February 2014: Extended Family Meeting at Béziers

For their second meeting of the year, thirty-six members of the Extended Family met at the Mother House together with the Béziers RSHM communities.

It was delightful that Sister Mary-Jo and Sister Ursula from the Provincial Council were able to join us for the evening while Father Luc Jourdain, parish priest for Béziers Town Centre, joined us for the meal.



That All May Have Life

At our first meeting last November we had shared the spiritual experience of the Emmaus disciples which marked the General Chapter of the Order and which marks our life as believers. We continued from this by looking at the context of the life in which we are called to be believers. Father Gailhac was alert to the needs of his era and he found both large and small means to bring more life to children and women of his time who were suffering.

Together we searched for those signs that our world of today is making for us here and now. We pinpointed how much we are interdependent with all of creation and called upon not to squander the resources that we use. As an example, water remaining in our carafes after a meal: instead of throwing it away it may be used to water house plants or our gardens.

We recognised that new technologies such as the Internet often pass us by because everything is going too quickly but at the same time it is good to be able to receive photos of young relatives who are far away and to receive a link with them.

We finished our time of reflection by bringing before the Lord the joys and difficulties that surround us before sharing what each had brought for the delight of others.



Our third meeting will take place on May 26th when we will try to determine a concrete action to undertake as a sign of belonging to the RSHM Extended Family.

Sister Thérèse-Marie

1st March 2014: Foundation Day Gathering in Furness

On Saturday, 1st March 2014, Friends, Extended Family members from the Furness Deanery gathered in Sacred Heart Church, Barrow, for our celebration of Foundation Day. We were very pleased that a party of 12 people had travelled from Carlisle to be with us.

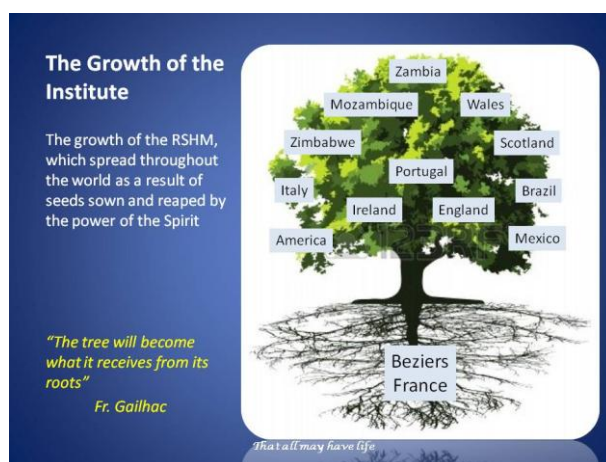
The theme for our day was “Reaching Out”, reflecting one of the major themes for the work of SHM sisters since the foundation of the Institute 165 years ago in 1849.

Our day started when we joined with parishioners at Sacred Heart church for the 10am mass. Fr Andrew Allman presided and gave a homily that sensitively reflected upon the charism and mission of the RSHM and the great work that they have done so “that all may have life”. Thanks

go to those people who came to join us for mass, even though they could not join us for the rest of the day's events.



After mass and refreshments we settled down for our morning sessions. Sr Pierre opened proceedings with her 'brief introduction', expanding on the theme of the day and explaining how the sacred fire that had inspired Fr Gailhac had sown the seeds from which the world-wide Institute has grown. She also told of the decision at the Chapter in 1975, when it was decided that the RSHM should reach out to communities in South America and introduced our guest speaker.



We were privileged to have as our guest speaker Sr Mary-Jo McElroy, our current Provincial Superior, who was a member of the first group that went to Brazil to reach out to poor communities there. Her story about the life-changing time she spent there and the people she lived and worked with touched the hearts of the people listening to her. Her words and pictures were thought provoking and challenging, daring us to move outside our comfort zones and cross boundaries into areas that we may not have thought about so that Christ's love may be taken to those in need.

Our shared-table lunch provided a challenge of a different kind – as always, so much generously-provided food to choose from - and a chance to mingle and chat with people we knew from of old and people that we had just met.



After lunch, we split into 6 small groups for our afternoon session of contemplative prayer. This was based on the technique we had learned about and experienced at Noddfa gatherings. The invitations had asked people to think about scripture readings that speak to them on 'reaching out', and bring their chosen reading with them to share in this session. The simple discipline of listening to what each other read and spoke about, without any discussion, coupled with periods of silence to contemplate and pray about what had been heard again proved to be a powerful and enjoyable experience. Afterwards, we gathered for a feedback session to discuss what had emerged to guide us towards how we can better reach out.



The emergent points were:

- Don't be swayed from our mission
- Maintain the 'Zeal' of God's Sacred Fire burning within us
- Keep Trying
- Prayers will be answered
- Keep faith alive
- Talk about it
- Pray together
- Listen to God Talking to us in other people, especially people outside our immediate circle
- Grow in our knowledge of Christ
- To help us be Christ-like
(re - Mahatma Ghandi quote - "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.")
- Being Christ to others

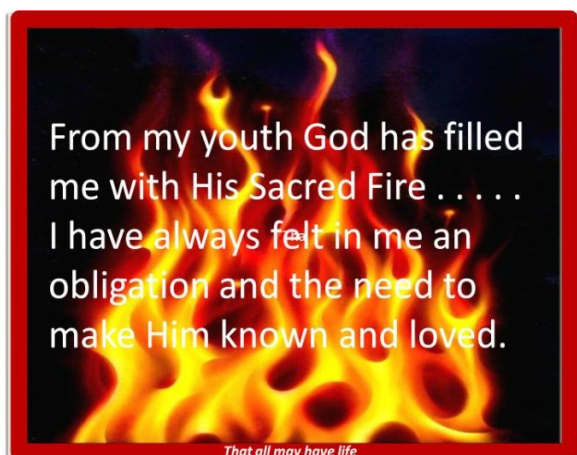
- Remember words of hymn “Christ has no body now, but yours”
- How do we begin? Make a start – like Fr Gailhac

A point that emerged after the meeting, as these notes were being prepared, is that Sr Pierre and Sr Mary-Jo both talked about how the RSHM discerned God’s purpose for the Institute through gathering together, praying and discussing (in a structured way) what needs should be addressed.

Perhaps that is where we need to begin, by taking the Provincial Chapter’s views on the General Chapter’s mission statements and discerning how we can follow them through, as Extended Family, in our local area.

Sr Pierre brought the Gathering to a close, summarising the events of the day and thanking everybody for coming to make it a special day together, with special thanks to those who had travelled from Carlisle; to Sr Mary-Jo for being with us and inspiring us; and to everybody who had worked to make the day happen and run smoothly.

Sr Pierre reminded us that the Sisters and the Extended Family are committed to keeping the flame of Fr Gailhac’s fire burning and that Mary is our model, “She who was able to say YES to God in face of the unpredictable and even the impossible”.



Sr Pierre then called us to close the day by uniting in praying the Prayer of the RSHM Institute. All told, about 43 people were present for the morning sessions and about 40 for the afternoon sessions. This is roughly twice the numbers attending the early Extended Family gatherings in the Convent on Abbey Road.

After yet more refreshments, we said our farewells and all went on our way filled with thoughts of what we had heard and learned during this day of celebration. Thanks be to God.

John Newby and Sr Pierre

9th March 2014: Extended Family Meeting at Seafield

Sisters Eleanor, Gertrude, and Paula welcomed 18 Members of the Extended Family to a meeting at Seafield where the Emmaus Story and how it relates to our own stories was the main topic.

After introductions were made, Eleanor opened the meeting and mentioned that the lovely banner on display had been designed and made in both English and French by Sister Monica Gribbin.

Kath Nolan said it could be that each time we hear the Emmaus Story we take it for granted that we know it but now it has more meaning. Remember that the Apostles did not know that they were walking with Jesus; they only recognised him in the breaking of bread. Our lives are similar in that we do not always know who we are walking with.

Kath mentioned her voluntary, 6-week trip to Ethiopia in 1984 to teach the teachers there. There the Gospel really came alive for her when meeting people with completely different backgrounds and culture. Not only did Kath teach them, but she was taught so much by them, especially the fact that they do not put themselves first. A Polish Sister, there to teach RE, wanted to impress on the children just how much God loved them and since there were no pictures or displays on the school walls, she wanted to make a poster, so Kath helped her. Sister pulled out 4 very blunt crayons. Prior to going to Ethiopia, Kath's School in Croxteth had raised £500 which they had converted into stationery items which she took with her. The Polish Sister, though invited to take a complete set of everything, simply wanted only one thing – a pencil sharpener and a silver one at that because she believed God was special and they were all trying to please God. Kath learned a huge lesson from this one example (and there were many more such examples during her stay).

The Gospel came alive out there not least because, despite poverty and problems, the people still smiled, respected everyone and were always hospitable. They taught Kath, she believed, far more than she taught them. So, this afternoon, Kath invited us all to think of someone or something that had happened in our own lives. Often it is only after the event that we realise the significance of that person or thing.

Eleanor wondered what we could do to change/correct the imbalance in the world where we have and so many have not. At her suggestion the meeting divided into two groups, one of which went outside because of the clement weather, and the other which stayed inside. In groups of 2 or 3 we shared and compared our experiences of life.

The young Albanian couple, Esmerelda and Bekim, with their 2-month-old son, Dren, joined the meeting to bring us up-to-date. They are now living in a warm house in Wavertree but they are still unsure of their fate and await the Home Office's decision which could take very much longer and ultimately even be unfavourable.

Kath said how helpful it had been for everyone to share experiences. Sister Eleanor said that in her group it had been agreed that one of the bonuses of living in Liverpool (as opposed to other big cities such as London) was that Merseysiders were very friendly and provided so much companionship. A general discussion followed (with a number of members contributing prime examples) of how we need to listen instead of thinking we know what others need. Phil Maher advised us about a forthcoming lunch event at St. Helen's where Mass and Prayers for Syria would be said. Two Syrian nationals would be guests.

Bekim described the differences between Mass attendance in Albania compared to elsewhere. Masses there start at 10 a.m. and do not finish until 1 or 2 p.m. At Easter in particular everyone had to provide something to the Church and the Church then provided for the needy. Christmas is more a time of celebration and Easter a time of reflection and a perfect time to sort out any family feuds. Interestingly, Albanians cannot approach their Priests unless they had a problem or a

specific point to make. Bekim believes ours is the best country in Europe for Asylum seekers. Kath led us in Prayer and the meeting ended at 5 p.m., followed by refreshments generously provided and served by the Sisters

Pauline McManus

16th April, 2014: Sedar Meal at Lisburn

Lisburn Community, as preparation for the Celebration of Easter decided to have a Sedar Meal or a Passover Haggadah in the Community and past pupils and friends were invited to join us. Due to limitations of space we had only eight people which made it very intimate and manageable.



The instructions and the script were available so it was a case of all hands on deck to set the table and to prepare the Passover Meal. The various herbs, the three Matzot, Matzah, Maror and Haroset were assembled. Wine and the various cups were set in place and Elijah was not forgotten.



The participants approached the Celebration with great interest and enthusiasm. They were fascinated by all the symbolism and the realization of our connection with our Jewish ancestors including Abraham Our Father in Faith also the relationship to the continued presence of slavery and oppression in its many forms around us today and our need to bring about a new Passover.



It seemed to have made a deep contemplative effect for each one. We were very happy that they were able to enter into the symbolism and saw it as a fitting preparation for the Great Paschal feast of Easter.

Sister Kathleen McCartan

NEWS FROM AROUND THE RSHM WORLD

Extended Family Gatherings at Marymount International School Rome

On **October 21, 2013**, Sr. Eugenia Bonetti, a Consolata Missionary Sister who lives in Rome, visited Marymount International School. As most of us know, Sr. Eugenia has been a powerful advocate against trafficking and prostitution for more than 25 years. She is currently the chairperson of “Slaves No More” and coordinator of the Italian Religious Superiors’ “Counter-trafficking Office for Women and Children”. In 2013 she was one of the recipients of the European Citizen’s Prize in recognition of her exceptional work for trafficked persons.



Sr. Eugenia spoke to members of the SHM Extended Family on the terrible reality of women and girls who are trafficked here in Italy. She also told of the work she and other sisters are doing to counteract this reality. Before her presentation, Sr. Eugenia led us in prayer entitled “The New Samaritans of the Third Millennium” which was based on the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan. Her presentation was powerful and raised many questions on the part of the participants as to what we could do to work against the trafficking of women and children - to be the new Samaritans of our day.

A reception with Sr. Eugenia followed her presentation.



On **December 13, 2013** Brian Kirby, the Elementary School Music Teacher, led the Extended Family members in prayer for Advent. Brian, a frequent visitor to Taize, used the Taize format for this Advent prayer.

On **Monday, March 17, 2014** the Extended Family met at Marymount International School and was privileged to hear a presentation from Dr. Donna Orsuto. Donna is the director and co-founder of the Lay Center in Rome, a professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and an adjunct professor at the Angelicum. She lectures extensively, gives retreats in various parts of the world, and served as a consultor for the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and as a member of the Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the Diocese of Rome. Donna's subject was "Women of the Church: Making a Difference Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow."



She noted that women who make a difference have a profound friendship with God, are women of their times with their feet on the ground, and are women of the church, even in difficult times and situations.

Donna (centre in picture above with EF members Gabriela Castelli and Kathy Zappia) chose Catherine of Siena and Dorothy Day to illustrate these points. She noted that these women were contemplatives in the midst of the world, and linked them to the story of Martha and Mary in Luke's Gospel, commenting that the story emphasizes the need for integration of prayer and action. Donna also quoted some of Pope Francis' recent statements that women "could have greater decision-making power in the church's hierarchy."

Following the presentation and discussion, Extended Family members and RSHM gathered for a reception in the community room at the Villa.

Sister Michaeline

The newsletter is published in English and French versions. If you (or someone) else would prefer to receive the French version then please get in touch. The current issue in French should be ready in a week or so.

Could you contribute an item to the newsletter? Photos and articles – no matter how short – are always welcome and will be held for the next available newsletter. Don't delay - exercise your literary talents now! Contributions in English or French (both, even!) are equally welcome.

Electronic copy by email or as an attachment is preferable, as are digital photos - but handwritten copy and prints are welcome too. See below for the email and postal addresses:

E-mail: efnewsletter@outlook.com

Post: 12 Huntsman Lane, Carlisle, CA1 3TQ, UK