

Imaging Church: Visual Practices, Ecclesiology, and the Ministry of Art

by

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Graduate Program in Religion  
Duke University

Date: 7 April 2014

Approved:

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Robyn Wiegman

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

“Imaging Church” examines the impact of visual practices on a religious community’s ecclesiology. I argue that visual practices potentially encourage others to perceive the church differently and participate in the mission of a community to which they do not belong. Employing ethnographic research and material analysis, I investigate the visual practices of the Congregation of St. Joseph, a Roman Catholic women’s religious community. Seven communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph reconfigured in 2007 to form the Congregation of St. Joseph: the communities of LaGrange Park, Illinois; Tipton, Indiana; Wichita, Kansas; Nazareth, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; Wheeling, West Virginia; and the Médaille community which includes sisters in Louisiana, Minnesota, and Ohio.

My ethnographic research consisted of interviews and participant observation. Between May 2011 and May 2013, I interviewed 107 sisters in the Congregation as well as 17 individuals who were Congregation of St. Joseph Associates (non-vowed members) and/or employees of the Congregation.<sup>1</sup> Interviews attended to the sisters’ personal prayer lives, ministerial activities, congregational life and worship, congregational space, and the commodification of images. To gain an understanding of their visual practices, I worshiped with the sisters and observed several ministries. I employ material analysis to examine the influence of images created by and used in the Congregation. Analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> The names of individuals have been altered to protect their identity; however, to recognize the rights of artists, I provide the names of artists whose artwork is included in this research. Comments by these artists not relating to their artwork appear under a pseudonym.

particular images and spaces employed by the Congregation reveals the messages they articulate and potentially share with those who engage them.

To assess the centrality of practices for examining the ecclesiology and justice commitments of religious communities, the first chapter argues that the Sisters of St. Joseph in seventeenth century France and nineteenth century America articulated and dispersed their vision of the church through their practices (ministries and the production of commodities). These practices provide the foundation for the sisters' contemporary practices and the means through which they work for justice. The second chapter explores the sisters' charism (spirituality and mission) and commitment to justice and how these concepts are articulated in their congregational spaces. I argue that the sisters promote their mission through a visual archive which emphasizes their history and unity as a community, their chapels which display their belief and charism, and their public spaces which attempt to unify the Congregation's visual practices and extend these practices outside of their religious community.

The third chapter argues that the sisters employ visual practices in their spiritual lives and ministries to manifest their mission and to promote engagement with society. I examine these practices in relation to John Fuellenbach's concept of a theology of transformation. Analysis of the sisters' individual and communal prayer lives reveals the way visual practices assist in discerning identity and relationships. I further argue that the sisters' train others in their visual practices through their ministries, including their publications, retreats, and artwork produced in the Congregation. The fourth chapter examines how the Congregation's production of religious commodities evangelizes

viewers and encourages participation in the sisters' mission for social and ecological justice. Through their business, the Ministry of the Arts, the Congregation employs religious commodities to assert a new perception of the church and world and invite others to commit to this vision. Through these visual practices in their prayer lives, congregational life, and ministries, the Congregation demonstrates the transformative potentiality of visual practices and offers techniques through which the church can pursue justice.

## **Dedication**

To my parents, Timothy J. Kryszak, Sr. and Charlene M. Kryszak, who taught me  
how to live and love the church

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spaces. Moreover, the artists within the Congregation of St. Joseph as well as artists who participate in the Ministry of the Arts welcomed and approved of my use of their images. The drawings, paintings, photography, and sculpture of Caroline Benken, CSJ, Rosie Coughlin, CSJ, Nancy Earle, SMIC, Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ, George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ, Richard Mehren, CSJ, Ann Meyer, CSJ, Magdalen Prochaska, CSJ, Mary Southard, CSJ, Phyllis Tousignant, CSJ, Carrie Vall, CSJ, Karen Van De Walle, CSJ, and Patricia Willems, CSJ grace the following pages with their vision of the church, world, and human relationships. Additionally, Grace Skalski, Jeffrey T. Parsons, and Gina Sullivan took the time to ensure that I could include the cover of *imagineONE* Fall/Winter 2011. Ann Terese Reznicek, CSJ and Marcella Clancy, CSJ sought the Congregation's approval for the use of artwork from George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ, Richard Mehren, CSJ, and Magdalen Prochaska, CSJ. The images included in the following pages are used with the generous permission of the artists, *imagineONE*, the Ministry of the Arts, and/or the Congregation of St. Joseph.

While focused on a Roman Catholic women's religious community, this project arises from my interdisciplinary interests and, consequently, benefited from the nature of graduate education at Duke University. In particular, the Duke University Women's Studies Graduate Student Colloquium provided a venue through which to discuss and improve my paper "Material Transformation," which now appears as chapter 4. Professor Kathi Weeks graciously responded to my paper, and graduate students willingly engaged a topic far afield from their individual disciplines. The graduate student leaders, Calina Ciobanu and Ali Mian, masterfully led the conversation to provide me with feedback as

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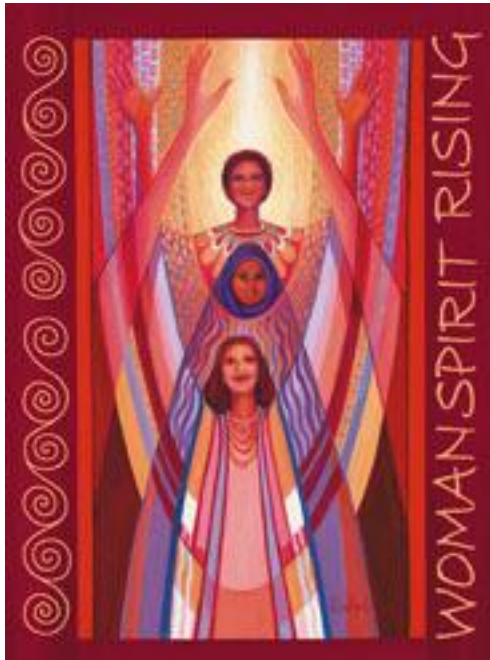
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## Introduction: The Context of a Shared Vision



**Figure 1: Mary Southard, CSJ, *Woman Spirit Rising* (Used with permission)**

How do our practices of seeing affect our understanding of the church? How do religious communities deploy images and spaces to disperse their vision of a just church? Daily we interact with images which attempt to influence our beliefs, thoughts, and actions. We turn to images and spaces to inspire reflection and depict communal relationships. Drawing on this influence, religious communities create and deploy images to elicit support for their mission. Consider an image by Mary Southard, CSJ entitled *Woman Spirit Rising*. This image depicts three women of diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds sharing a common vision. The image seeks to engage the viewer in this vision of women's unity and value.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, created within the Congregation of St.

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<sup>1</sup> As will be discussed later, this image compelled one sister to recognize women of other religious traditions as her sisters (Sister Maria [pseudonym], 20 June 2011).

Joseph, a Catholic women's religious community dedicated to social and ecological justice, the image intends to offer an interpretation of local and global relationships, promote the role of women in society, and emphasize an inclusive vision of a just church. *Woman Spirit Rising* urges the viewer to consider complex social and ecclesial issues through the image of interconnected women.

Nevertheless, we can question whether images such as this one impact religious communities and society as well as how religious communities employ visual practices to disperse their ecclesiology. Religious communities are often united around a shared mission, which directs their ministries and vision of the world. These religious communities frequently rely on the spoken and written word to promulgate their mission within and through their ministries; however, these are not the only mediums through which a religious community could advance their mission. Some religious communities actively engage or create images as another means to spread their mission. As the scholarship of David Morgan and Colleen McDannell recognizes, individuals employ objects and images to create or confirm their world through practices of use, display, and gifting.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, visual practices, engagement with images, potentially assist in shaping and confirming one's religious vision of the world. We can question then how the visual practices employed by religious communities attempt to, and perhaps succeed at, encouraging others to perceive the church differently and participate in the mission of a community to which they do not belong.

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<sup>2</sup> David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012); Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

### *Competing Ecclesial Visions*

For Roman Catholic religious communities, sharing a common vision embraces the universal mission of the church. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) described the church as the People of God, which urged Catholics to reconsider their relationship to the church's mission and to re-envision their role in promoting this mission. Since the Council, the active involvement of the laity in parish life and Catholic institutions has expanded. These changes reveal an emphasis on the participation of the laity; however, they also conceal the diminishing numbers of Religious in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

While the Second Vatican Council did not cause this decline, it occurred at a historical moment in which religious communities were already beginning to contemplate the future form of religious life and their understanding of ministerial activities. For women religious, societal and ecclesial expectations colluded to compel cultural shifts in the women's religious formation, professional education, and the understanding of religious life. In the twentieth century, American educational and healthcare systems embraced professionalization, which demanded changes in how women religious received their training. Prior to these movements, women generally completed their bachelor degrees over the summer or were trained as nurses by fellow nursing sisters. Changing to a dedicated time for their professional training and spiritual formation required that religious communities as well as Catholic organizations adjust to the women's needs. This, in part, required that laity take the place of women religious in classrooms and hospitals.

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<sup>3</sup> When addressing those in vowed religious life, I will refer to the "Religious." Below I address the terminology used for nuns, sisters, and women religious (19-20).

As laity continued to fill these positions, women religious explored new ministries including pastoral ministry and social justice. For many communities, this coincided with a return to their founding documents and charism. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, bishops and superiors of religious communities explored ways of addressing the nature of religious life in the modern world. The Council responded to these movements with *Perfectae caritatis*, which called men's and women's religious communities to return to their founding documents and update their ministries to address the present needs of the church.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, religious communities sought to translate, study, and interpret the meaning of their original constitution and their founder's writings. This inspired communities to consider their present form and purpose, especially as they related to the ecclesiology evident in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. As a result, their charism came to be read through the lens of the Council and a desire for the engagement of the church with the modern world.

As they grew professionally, the women religious similarly extended their social awareness. They were exposed to social realities which previously did not permeate the convent walls. Individually and communally, religious communities recognized injustice in society and often committed themselves to eliminating the causes of this injustice. As Marie Augusta Neal, SNDdeN observes, these experiences affected how women religious examined society as well as how they approached their ministry commitments: "They saw the need of critical social analysis. For them, this meant awareness and analysis of

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<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*: Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, 28 October, 1965, Documents of the II Vatican Council, Vatican Website, accessed 14 March 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html).

the dynamics of political, economic, and social oppressions of the poor and taking action to change those conditions.”<sup>5</sup> Further education into Catholic Social Teaching confirmed and motivated the sisters’ desire to participate in social justice movements.

Consequently, the Second Vatican Council’s vision of the church intersected with social and ecclesial movements which urged the women religious to faithfully embody the mission of the church. Their experiences and education expanded their understanding of this mission and how they envisioned themselves as women religious. Now in the twenty-first century, the women no longer see religious life as superior to life in the secular world.<sup>6</sup> The mission of the church and the specific mission of their community compel them to actively minister to and engage the world.

Women religious such as Joan Chittister, OSB, Mary Ann Donovan, SC, and Sandra Schneiders, IHM have reflected at length on the shape and significance of these changes.<sup>7</sup> Arguing for a new understanding of religious life, Schneiders asserts women’s role in creating “ministerial Religious life” in which the women’s ministerial activities

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<sup>5</sup> Marie Augusta Neal, SNDdeN, “Ministry of American Catholic Sisters: The Vowed Life in Church Renewal,” in *Religious Institutions and Women’s Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 241.

<sup>6</sup> The Second Vatican Council impacted this alternative perspective. Prior to the Council religious life was often perceived as a higher vocation within the church. Rather than separating religious life from the laity, the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Lumen gentium*, locate the Religious as part of the laity. For the relation of the Religious to the church, see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, 21 November 1964, Documents of the II Vatican Council, Vatican Website, § 13, 31, 43-47, accessed 14 March 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

<sup>7</sup> For their reflections on these changes and proposals for the future, see Joan Chittister, OSB, *The Way We Were: A Story of Conversion and Renewal* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), Mary Ann Donovan, SC, *Sisterhood as Power: The Past and Passion of Ecclesial Women* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), Sandra Schneiders, IHM, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World*, vol. 3 of *Religious Life in a New Millennium* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013).

are not seen as secondary to their individual salvation.<sup>8</sup> Instead, ministry and personal salvation work in tandem as Religious manifest the Reign of God.<sup>9</sup> Schneiders does not contend that this movement to ministerial Religious life is complete or perfect; rather, she urges Religious to further contemplate the history of religious life and discern ways in which to faithfully live out their vows in the twenty-first century. Far from minimizing vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, Schneiders challenges Religious to acknowledge the centrality of these vows to their state of life.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, calls to discern the future are mirrored by demands to return to earlier forms of religious life. For women religious in the United States, these challenges to their understanding of religious life intersect with societal movements and issues to which many Roman Catholic women religious communities are committed, including racial justice, immigration reform, and access to affordable healthcare. In recent years, some have questioned the women's active role in these social and ecclesial debates. This critique manifested itself as an Apostolic Visitation of the women religious communities in the United States. From December 2008 to January 2012, the Congregation for

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<sup>8</sup> Sandra Schneiders, IHM, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Women Religious Bearing Witness to the Gospel in a Troubled Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 7, 30.

<sup>9</sup> For Schneiders' discussion of ministry in religious life, see Sandra Schneiders, IHM, *Buying the Field*, especially 99-101, 136-144, 256-286; *Prophets in Their Own Country*, 57-58, 61-2.

<sup>10</sup> Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 104. Mary Ann Donovan, SC likewise emphasizes the centrality of vows for religious life: "The religious life does not exist for the apostolate and ought not be identified with or reduced to its works" (Mary Ann Donovan, S.C. *Sisterhood as Power: The Past and Passion of Ecclesial Women*. New York: Crossroad, 1989), 82.

Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) oversaw this visitation in order to assess their quality of religious life.<sup>11</sup>

This was followed by a doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the organization to which the leaders of over eighty percent of American Roman Catholic women religious belong.<sup>12</sup> In April 2012, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued the doctrinal assessment to review the LCWR because of some of its current practices and the underlying beliefs it either verbally supports or elides. Central to this critique are the LCWR's mission, conference speakers, formation programs, alignment with church norms, and association with organizations such as Network, which lobbies the United States Congress in the name of women religious.<sup>13</sup> The CDF argues that their concerns are justified and needed to assist women religious to properly live a life of faith.<sup>14</sup>

As both the Apostolic Visitation and doctrinal assessment emphasize how to live religious life faithfully, the crux of this argument presumably does not focus on the sisters' beliefs; rather, it addresses their practices: practices of inclusion, dialogue, and plurality. Furthermore, the sisters employ these practices in relation to American society

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<sup>11</sup> For information about and documents from this Apostolic Visitation, see Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States, "Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States," accessed 20 March 2014, <http://www.apostolicvisitation.org/en/index.html>.

<sup>12</sup> This doctrinal assessment was issued on April 18, 2012 after the decision to begin investigating the LCWR in 2008. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious," Doctrinal Documents, Vatican Website, accessed 11 March 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20120418\\_assessment-lcwr\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20120418_assessment-lcwr_en.html).

<sup>13</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious," 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> "It arises as well from a conviction that the work of any conference of major superiors of women Religious can and should be a fruitful means of addressing the contemporary situation and supporting religious life in its most 'radical' sense – that is, in the faith in which it is rooted" (Ibid., 2, emphasis in original).



which is increasingly both secular and plural. As the CDF notes, they want to correct the LCWR's programs to assist in responding to society: "we can hope that the secularized contemporary culture, with its negative impact on the very identity of Religious as Christians and members of the Church, on their religious practice and common life, and on their authentic Christian spirituality, moral life, and liturgical practice, can be more readily overcome."<sup>15</sup> Whereas the CDF desires to resist or eliminate secular culture, the sisters embrace the religious and secular diversity of those they serve in order to minister to many aspects of society.

This exchange between the women religious and the CDF exposes their conflicting visions of the church as well as raises questions concerning how best to achieve the mission of the church. What is the church? How should Catholics faithfully live out the mission of the church? What role do women's religious communities play in this mission? How do their particular charisms and missions intersect with broader conceptions of the church? How does the church relate to secular society? These are not simple questions and need to be discerned within religious communities and in dialogue with the institutional church.

Nevertheless, we can examine the ecclesiology of these women's religious communities and the techniques through which they seek to transform society. Despite diminished vocations, women religious continue to respond to the needs of the church and society. In this response, many of these religious communities engage the teachings

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6.

of the Second Vatican Council and envision the church as the People of God.<sup>16</sup>

Responding to the context of the contemporary United States and the global world, these women have re-formed the structure, government, and ministerial focus of their religious communities. This response compels the women religious to seek dialogue and interactions with diverse people in order to best serve the society to which they belong. They still seek to change society – to bring Christ into the world, but their evangelization of the world does not negate the value, the goodness, of other religions and other ways of life.<sup>17</sup> Thus, through their ministries and life experiences, these women religious recognize and respond to connections with others while they seek to deepen their relationship with God, strengthen their religious community, and serve the Roman Catholic Church.

### ***The Congregation of St. Joseph***

One community which embraces this ecclesiology is the Congregation of St. Joseph. The Congregation is one community of the Sisters of St. Joseph, who were founded in Le Puy, France in the seventeenth century. The early community in France was uncloistered and directly served people by staffing hospitals and schools. Additionally, they made and taught girls and women how to make lace and ribbon. This creative activity both served as a means of financial support and enabled the sisters to

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<sup>16</sup> For the Council's description of the church as the People of God, see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, §9-17.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that the Second Vatican Council or the institutional Roman Catholic Church do not recognize the value of other religious traditions. Council documents such as *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) directly relate to other religious traditions. Nevertheless, there are ways in which women's religious communities possibly exceed the Council's positive valuation of other religions.

train women and girls in these skills and in the sisters' religious vision. In the nineteenth-century, the Sisters of St. Joseph were asked to expand their mission to the United States. Starting from in and around St. Louis, Missouri, the Sisters of St. Joseph spread throughout the United States forming new religious communities in areas that needed their skills and dedication.<sup>18</sup>

Seven of these communities reconfigured in 2007 to form the Congregation of St. Joseph: the communities of LaGrange Park, Illinois; Tipton, Indiana; Wichita, Kansas; Nazareth, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; Wheeling, West Virginia; and the Médaille community which includes sisters in Louisiana, Minnesota, and Ohio.<sup>19</sup> The reconfiguration of these communities into the Congregation of St. Joseph draws together their common charism (mission and spirituality) as Sisters of St. Joseph and their diverse histories and ministries. As part of the process of reconfiguration, the sisters created a mission statement to guide their ministries and communal goals. They maintain,

Our mission flows from the purpose for which the congregation exists: We live and work that all people may be united with God and with one another. It is rooted in the mission of Christ, the same mission which continually unfolds in His church, "That all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; I pray that they may be one in Us." (John 17:21).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Directly serving the needs of the communities with whom they lived, the sisters participated in a variety of ministries including schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other forms of social work. See Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life: 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 41-66.

<sup>19</sup> The individual congregations voted between December 2005 and January 2006 to unite their communities into the Congregation of St. Joseph. The Vatican approved this formation on March 19, 2007. See "LaGrange Park, Illinois: Our History," Congregation of St. Joseph, accessed 11 October 2011, [http://www.csjoseph.org/lagrange\\_illinois.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/lagrange_illinois.aspx).

<sup>20</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, "Our Mission," About Us, accessed 18 April 2011, [http://www.csjoseph.org/our\\_mission\\_vision.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/our_mission_vision.aspx).

Echoing the spirituality of the religious community, the mission statement emphasizes unity with God and others. Accordingly, the Congregation articulates the church in terms of unity, a unity which they perceive as inherent in all of creation.

To further consider the ways in which they should live out this broad mission, the sisters crafted four Generous Promises in which they agreed to attend to social and ecological justice as well as global structures and leadership in the Congregation:

We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to take the risk to surrender our lives and resources to work for specific systemic change in collaboration with others so that the hungers of the world might be fed.

We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to recognize the reality that Earth is dying, to claim our oneness with Earth and to take steps now to strengthen, heal and renew the face of Earth.

We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to network with others across the world to bring about a shift in the global culture from institutionalized power and privilege to a culture of inclusivity and mutuality.

We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to be mutually responsible and accountable for leadership in the congregation.<sup>21</sup>

These Generous Promises articulate a vision of a church committed to justice, dialogue, and inclusion.<sup>22</sup> Here the Congregation pledges itself in word to central values, which guide their spirituality, congregational life, and ministries. These values influence the

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<sup>21</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, "Our Mission," About Us, accessed 7 March 2012, [http://www.csjoseph.org/our\\_mission\\_vision.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/our_mission_vision.aspx).

<sup>22</sup> In *The Social Mission of the U.S. Catholic Church*, Charles E. Curran argues that the Second Vatican Council shifted the church's mission from a prior focus on divinization and humanization. After the Council, the church's mission is articulated as both bringing Christ to the world and transforming the world. These two are not envisioned as separated (Charles E. Curran, *The Social Mission of the U.S. Catholic Church: A Theological Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 57). This shift consequently challenged the Religious to engage the world: "In the post-Vatican II Church the former bifurcation of the role of the clergy and religious in the spiritual realm and the role of laity in the temporal realm was challenged not only by the laity's role in the internal life of the Church but also by the recognition that the transformation of the world is intimately connected with the Gospel and the Church's mission of redemption" (Ibid., 63). For Curran's analysis of how religious communities responded, see Ibid., 63-70. Accordingly, the Congregation of St. Joseph's emphasis on social and ecological justice situates the Congregation's commitments in these larger ecclesial movements.

sisters' ministerial activities as well as how they financially, physically, and spiritually support other agencies and movements.

Moreover, to promote their vision of a just church and inclusive society, the Congregation of St. Joseph creates and distributes mass-produced religious art. In the production of religious commodities, the Congregation attempts to influence how people outside of their religious community envision the church. In addition to this production, the sisters similarly train retreat participants in their vision and deploy their ministerial buildings to depict their mission for unity. Each of these activities is further grounded in the sisters' personal prayer and congregational worship. Consequently, these activities employ the sisters' visual practices to affirm and disperse their ecclesiology.

### ***Visual Practices: A Critical Lens for Justice***

In pastoral and doctrinal statements, the institutional Roman Catholic Church describes its vision of the church's role in the world. While theologians and other interested individuals engage these documents to deepen their understanding of the church, the documents themselves remain unread and unknown by the majority of Catholics. Moreover, these statements depict an ideal vision of how the church should be manifested in the world; however, the church, the People of God, is lived in diverse forms, some of which possibly exceed these institutional statements.

Individuals and communities shape their ecclesiology around their own engagement with the sacraments, readings of scripture, life experiences, and interactions with other Christians. Church for a Hispanic immigrant negotiating life in Louisiana does not necessarily mean the same things as it could for a nurse living in rural West Virginia.

The needs each person encounters in her own life and perceives in the lives of others impact the church she desires. Her personal experiences impact how she perceives the actions of the institutional church as well as the individual action of clergy, Religious, and laity. Church scandals and failures, such as clergy sexual abuse, prevent any simplistic or overly idealized perception of the church as a whole.

How then can we assess the meaning of the church? How can we articulate a faithful vision of the church and encourage others to commit to living out this vision? It is because of the diverse interpretations of and expression of the church that lived religion needs to be taken seriously. As Meredith McGuire argues, “Lived religion is constituted by the practices by which people remember, share, enact, adapt, create and combine the stories out of which they live. And it comes into being through the often-mundane practices by which people transform these meaningful interpretations into everyday action.”<sup>23</sup> The daily practices of religious individuals impact their perception of and commitment to religious values. Christian beliefs are not isolated from the lives of individuals as they interact with secular society; rather, their practices and beliefs intersect with secular conceptions of the church as well as individual perceptions of the role of the church in the world. As Robert Orsi’s *Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street* and *Between Heaven and Earth* demonstrate, material objects, rituals, family expectations, social

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<sup>23</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, “Why Bodies Matter: A Sociological Reflection on Spirituality and Materiality,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 2. Continuing, McGuire emphasizes the central importance of embodied experience for our understanding of practices: “*Human bodies matter, because those practices—even interior ones, such as contemplation—involve people’s bodies, as well as their minds and spirits*” (McGuire, 2, emphasis in original).

change, and systems of power impact the expression and form of religious belief and practice.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, theologians must consider the lived practices of Christians as they intersect with doctrine. As Mary McClintock Fulkerson asserts,

From overly cognitive and orthodox definitions of Christian faithfulness to concepts of practice that ignore the contribution of bodies and desire, prominent theological options risk overlooking both the worldly way that communities live out their faith and the worldly way that God is among us. The very conviction of God's redemptive presence tempts the theologian to map sense and order onto the worldly. The zeal to find good news can slip easily into the desire to smooth out the tangle called 'community', rendering it amenable to the correct theological categories.<sup>25</sup>

Official statements, which describe the nature of the church, need to engage how the church is lived out in diverse communities across the globe. Acknowledging the complex shape of these practices enables theologians to faithfully attend to the lived reality of the church. As Terrence Tilley asserts, tradition including doctrine gains authority through the lived practices of a religious community.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, research on the practices of religious individuals and groups enables reflection on the strength and acceptance of beliefs as well as disconnections between belief and practice and the negotiations individuals and communities make as they attempt to live out the mission of the church.

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<sup>24</sup> Robert A. Orsi argues, "Religions are as ambiguous and ambivalent as the bonds that constitute them, and their effects cannot be generally anticipated but known in practice and experience" (*Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2). See also Orsi, Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), chapters 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 177-184.

To investigate the life of the church, it is beneficial to turn to theorists such as Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu who articulate the importance of practice. According to Marcel Mauss, “techniques of the body” train a person how to be in her body in a particular society. As both effective and traditional, these techniques posit normative ways in which to engage the world.<sup>27</sup> Children, soldiers, and religious individuals all learn particular ways of using their bodies in specific contexts. Moreover, Pierre Bourdieu argues that individuals are enculturated into certain bodily practices through *habitus* which is “a system of lasting, transposable disposition which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified task.”<sup>28</sup> Practice is thus embodied and dependent on particular cultures.

As a result, practice is not static but rather can change as individuals interact with particular practices or as a society changes. Individuals learn when to employ specific practices and how to embody particular values. Roman Catholics learn when to genuflect, make the sign of the cross, stand, or kneel. Significantly, this learning of practice illuminates its ethical aspect.<sup>29</sup> Mastering a practice enables one to know how to correctly

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<sup>27</sup> Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” *Economy and Society* 2 (1973): 75.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 16-17. For an assessment of *habitus* in the study of religion and material culture, see David Morgan, “Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religion,” in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2010), 67. For this concepts’ influence on theology, see McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 35, 38, 42-48.

<sup>29</sup> Scholars have commented on this ethical dimension of practice in diverse religious traditions. As Leela Prasad argues, a person’s (religious) practices reveal her morality. Thus the practice of sharing a story interacts with the context in which it is told. For example, Dodda Murthy tells of a man’s tragic death only after finishing his milk: “To have drunk the milk after narrating such an episode would have been an inappropriate and callous mixing of ‘tragedy’ with ‘satisfaction’” (Leela Prasad, *Poetics of Conduct: Oral Narrative and Moral Being in a South Indian Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 7). In a



deploy it as well as what is deemed immoral. Failing to genuflect could raise the ire of members of a religious community; genuflecting to a secular image would transgress social norms and challenge one's relationship to God. Accordingly, practices build upon one another and create a social context within which practices are ordered.

The women religious in the Congregation of St. Joseph engage diverse practices to manifest their ecclesiology. Spiritual practices, ministries, and the spoken and written word all enable the women religious to articulate and disperse their vision of the church. They are formed in practices of the Roman Catholic Church as well as the spiritual practices of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Through these practices, they articulate and embody their vision of the church. Nevertheless, these are not the only ways in which the Congregation manifests their vision; rather, they also employ visual practices to affirm and disperse their ecclesiology.

Vision or the act of looking at something is not an isolated act; rather vision is embodied and intersects with other bodily practices.<sup>30</sup> The images, objects and spaces we visually engage assist in shaping our world and the way we share this world with others. How do we interpret the images with which we interact? Individuals and groups are not devoid of means of interpretation; rather, belonging to a family, religious community, or

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similar way, Charles Hirschkind examines how Muslim men deployed an "ethics of listening" while attending to tape recorded sermons in Egypt. See Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 67-104.

<sup>30</sup> In *The Sacred Gaze*, David Morgan argues that seeing is more than the act of looking at something: "The study of religious visual culture is therefore the study of images, but also the practices and habits that rely on images as well as the attitudes and preconceptions that inform vision as a cultural act" (*The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 3).

society draws people into a shared vision, a communal way in which to envision the world. While these relationships do not determine how individuals will potentially react to an image, they offer a common means of interpretation. As Morgan contends:

Seeing is vital precisely because it situates viewers within social configurations of power. . . . Understanding how an act of seeing mobilizes people by situating them within the compelling social body of a community that is animated by a common ethos has everything to do with understanding how seeing constructs the sacred in visual practices and images.<sup>31</sup>

Approached through the communal vision of a religious community, visual practices potentially influence people's religious understanding of the world.

Consequently, examining the visual practices of women religious enables us to discern their potential impact on a religious community's ecclesiology and mission. I define visual practices as an individual or group's way of engaging with images and objects in their visual field. This engagement can take different forms including recognition, reflection, assessment, and appreciation. As members of a religious community, the sisters are encouraged to employ similar visual practices within their prayer lives, worship, and ministries.<sup>32</sup> In their congregational spaces, images confront them with the Congregation's communal vision of the church and world.<sup>33</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>31</sup> David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 6. In *The Embodied Eye*, David Morgan examines these communal ways of seeing (Ibid., 5-6).

<sup>32</sup> As we will see, this encouragement takes diverse forms including spiritual direction and communal prayer. This does not mean that the women religious engage the world in the same way. Rather, as members of a community, they interact with communal visual practices and deploy these practices to achieve the Congregation's mission. Individually, the sisters deploy visual practices to various extents and draw on their own experiences to interpret images in different ways.

<sup>33</sup> In *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, Terrence Tilley argues that this shared vision is necessary for religious practices: ". . . a vision is a web of convictions. It expresses the goal of a practice. It links those particular goals to the more general goals of human life. A vision also integrates the means used in a practice to those goals. In this context, convictions also function as a technical term: convictions are not all the beliefs an

the sisters' individual visual practices arise within and intersect with communal practices as well as with the Congregation's ecclesiology and commitment to justice. These visual practices assist the Congregation in promoting their mission among the sisters and educating those outside of the religious community. Deployed by the sisters, visual practices potentially evangelize others into their commitment to social and ecological justice.

To examine the impact of these visual practices, I have interviewed sisters in the Congregation of St. Joseph in eight different states.<sup>34</sup> Between May 2011 and May 2013, I interviewed 107 sisters in the Congregation as well as 17 individuals who were Congregation of St. Joseph Associates (non-vowed members) and/or employees of the Congregation.<sup>35</sup> Interviews attended to the sisters' personal prayer lives, ministerial activities, congregational life and worship, congregational space, and the commodification of images. To gain an understanding of their visual practices, I worshiped with the sisters and observed several ministries.

To interpret the potential ecclesiological impact of these visual practices, I employ material analysis to examine images created by and used in the Congregation. The image itself as well as the way in which it is displayed and functions in the community elucidates the image's relation to the Congregation's pursuit of justice. As

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individual or community holds, but those persistent beliefs that are not easily given up; if they *are* given up, then the character of the community or person is significantly changed" (55, emphasis in original).

<sup>34</sup> For an extended description of my ethnographic methodology, see Appendix A.

<sup>35</sup> The names of individuals have been altered to protect their identity; however, to recognize the rights of artists, I provide the names of artists whose artwork is included in this research. Comments by these artists not relating to their artwork appear under a pseudonym.

David Morgan asserts, “It is not the image itself, as an intrinsically meaningful entity, but the image as it is articulated within social practices that helps to assemble and secure the world of a believer.”<sup>36</sup> Analysis of the congregational spaces, especially chapels, retreat centers, and other ministry centers, reveals the messages articulated in these spaces. The Congregation’s use of visual practices intersects with its role as a religious community committed to manifesting justice in the United States and the global world.

### ***Nuns, Sisters, and Women Religious***

The Congregation of St. Joseph is a Roman Catholic women’s religious community. While some contemporary movements such as Nuns on the Bus or NunsBuild deploy the term “nuns,” the use of this term does not necessarily coincide with these women’s form of religious life. The term “nun” often connotes a contemplative form of religious life, which does not engage in apostolic ministry. The Sisters of St. Joseph were founded to minister to the dear neighbor as an apostolic religious community. Unlike contemplative women’s religious communities, the sisters were not cloistered, did not pray the Divine Office, and directly ministered to French society as teachers and nurses. To acknowledge this history and the continued ministerial activities of the Congregation of St. Joseph, I employ the terms “sister” and “women religious” to refer to members of the Congregation. When discussing the development of religious life, I will use “nun” to connote women who live a contemplative form of religious life.

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<sup>36</sup> David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 207.

The recent reconfiguration of the communities into the Congregation of St. Joseph speaks to the changing shape of religious life in the United States. In contrast to the expansion of religious life in the first half of the twentieth century, women's religious communities currently are not receiving many novices and struggle to provide for an aging population. To address these changes, the individual communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph choose to join together as they attended to the needs of aging sisters and how best to live out their charism in the twenty-first century. As the Congregation recently formed in 2007, much of this research embraces the histories of the founding communities. Thus, I will refer to the Congregation of St. Joseph or the Congregation when I discuss decisions, statements, or practices employed by the newly formed community. When discussing events prior to 2007, I will refer to the specific communities, i.e. the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tipton or the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling.

Moreover, the Congregation of St. Joseph and their founding communities are not the only communities of Sisters of St. Joseph in the United States. Other communities remain separate from the Congregation; yet, some have also reconfigured to form new congregations. While they are juridically separate communities, their common charism unites these women as Sisters of St. Joseph. Thus, women from the Congregation of St. Joseph interact with women religious in these other communities. The U.S. Federation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and the Centre International St. Joseph serve to further unite the individual communities within the United States and across the globe. Consequently,

the women religious seek to promote their mission and ecclesial vision within their own community as well as in relation to the activities of other Sisters of St. Joseph.

To assess the centrality of practices for examining the justice commitments of religious communities, the first chapter argues that the Sisters of St. Joseph in seventeenth century France and nineteenth century America articulated and dispersed their vision of the church through their practices including ministerial activities and the production of commodities. As the sisters encountered social and ecclesial movements in the twentieth century, these practices provided the foundation for the sisters' contemporary practices and the means through which they currently work for justice. The second chapter explores the sisters' charism (spirituality and mission) and commitment to justice and how these concepts are articulated in their congregational spaces.

Drawing on John Fuellenbach's concept of a theology of transformation, the third chapter argues that the sisters employ visual practices in their spiritual lives and ministries in order to manifest their mission and to promote engagement with society. To promote justice, the sisters train others in their visual practices through their ministries, i.e. publications, retreats, and spiritual direction. The fourth chapter examines how the Congregation's production of religious commodities evangelizes viewers and encourages participation in the sisters' mission for social and ecological justice. Through their business, the Ministry of the Arts, the Congregation employs religious commodities to assert a new perception of the church and world. Through these visual practices in their prayer lives, congregational life, and ministries, the Congregation demonstrates the

transformative potentiality of visual practices and offers techniques through which the church can pursue justice.

## **Chapter 1: The Practice of Religious Life: Women Religious, Ministry, and Production**

Over the last four centuries, the role of Roman Catholic women religious has expanded beyond earlier identifications with enclosure and the divine office. These changes have not occurred in isolation; rather, women religious and the church grew into new understandings of what it meant to follow God. Responding to modernity, the church grappled with new technology, science, rapid communication, and plural societies. Definitions of the secular and religious shifted, subtly at first and then dramatically, as secularism challenged the control and influence religions, especially Christianity, possessed in political and civil society. Consequently, women religious engaged these changes – sometimes with trepidation, sometimes with delight – and, as a result, assisted in re-articulating their religious identity and the role of the church in modern society.

Responding to and participating in these changes, the Sisters of St. Joseph articulate, reveal, and disperse their ecclesiology through their practices, particularly in their ministerial activities and the production of commodities. Since their foundation in 1650, they deployed specific practices to demonstrate the mission of their religious community, manifest the church, and promote justice in society. To examine the impact of these practices, I attend first to the practices of the Sisters of St. Joseph in France in the seventeenth century. I argue that the sisters' ministerial activities and production secured their place in society and promoted their vision of the church. Second, I examine how the Sisters of St. Joseph shifted their ministerial activities to serve religious and secular society in the United States in the nineteenth century. Deploying diverse practices, the sisters expanded religious and secular understandings of the role of women religious.



Finally, I explore the impact of professionalization, social movements, and the Second Vatican Council on the Congregation of St. Joseph's ecclesiology and their decision to reform the practices through which they demonstrate their commitment to social and ecological justice. As they negotiate their identity as women religious dedicated to serving the dear neighbor, the sisters employ these diverse ministerial practices to reveal their mission for unity, role in the church, and relation to secular society.

### ***The French Context: Shaping Religious Practice in the Secular Sphere***

The Sisters of St. Joseph were founded in the seventeenth century in Le Puy, France. The context in which the sisters began to serve the church and society served as fertile ground for religious and social movements. In France as well as throughout Europe, this was an era of wars, often associated with religion and confessionalism, as nation states struggled into existence.<sup>1</sup> The Peace of Augsburg (1555), which ended the German religious wars, asserted the monarch's ability to choose and enforce religious beliefs (*cuius regio eius religio*). In France this principle was mitigated by the Edict of Nantes (1598), which gave limited security and freedom of worship to the Huguenots, French Calvinists. Nevertheless, the short period of relative peace ended with the Thirty Years War which began in 1618.<sup>2</sup> War and plague devastated Europe. In France, poverty was prevalent and social institutions such as hospitals were run-down or destroyed.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion about the development of the nation state, see William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of these events and their relation to monastic orders, see Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion: The Story of the Religious Orders and How They Shaped Our World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2011), 163-168.

Paralleling the state of social institutions, the Catholic Church struggled to maintain its presence and influence in French society. Many monasteries and convents lay in shambles with few monks or nuns to repair the damages or even continue to live by the rule of their religious order. Local priests were ill- or uneducated and failed to lead the people. Responding in part to the Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) sought to reform Roman Catholic Church practice, including the form of monastic life and the catechization of the laity. As the Council stressed the continuation of tradition through prior practice and church teachings, their stance toward monastic life did not differ. The Council reinstated the religious rules of the Middle Ages and sought to eliminate recent innovations in religious life such as tertiary orders.<sup>3</sup> This included a return to or revival of original rules in order to correct deviations from “proper” practice. Additionally, the Council sought to enforce the enclosure of women’s religious communities. To address the church’s responsibility to the laity, the Council further emphasized the centrality of knowledge of the faith.<sup>4</sup> In *The Lord as Their Portion*, Elizabeth Rapley notes the diverse problems associated with this task: the lack of standards for priestly education, diverse languages and dialects and customs of Europe, divisions between urban and rural areas, financing the education, and a lack of teachers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 26. For an assessment of the Council of Trent and its relation of women’s religious orders in France, see *Ibid.*, 21-22, 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> As Elizabeth Rapley observes, “The council subscribed to the prevailing spirit of the age, that instruction was essential to salvation. It demanded that priests be trained in the knowledge of their faith, and that they pass the knowledge on, at least in rudimentary form, to their people” (Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 170).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

Nevertheless, by asserting this need for education, the Council opened the way for and justified the presence of women religious dedicated to the education of girls and women.

While France was slow in adopting the reforms of the Council of Trent, when reform began in the early 1600s religious fervor spread among the population.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning with the arrival of Spanish Carmelite nuns in 1604 in Paris, religious devotion as well as religious vocations multiplied. By 1650, forty-eight new monasteries of women had been built in Paris alone.<sup>7</sup> Part of the impetus for this interest in religious life arose from a new spirituality that focused on interiority. In 1609, Francis de Sales published his *Introduction to the Devout Life*. As Elizabeth Rapley argues, this book extended “personal holiness” to all people, not simply those in religious life. Francis de Sales challenged all people to live the devout life even though this life would take different forms depending on a person’s position, calling, and strengths.<sup>8</sup> The impact of the interior spirituality advocated by Francis de Sales coincided with broader movements in Catholic women’s religious life.

Nonetheless, the French Catholic hierarchy did not rush to enforce the Council of Trent’s requirement of enclosure for women religious. As they focused on piety and works of the apostolate, women known as *dévotés* creatively engaged church law in order to live a religious life while serving society, especially by providing female education.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Assembly of Clergy accepted the Council of Trent in 1615. See Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 173.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>9</sup> Nursing sisters likewise resisted cloister. For information on these women, see Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 184-5. In *The Dévotes*, Rapley describes how women, known as *dévotés*, focused on piety and works of the apostolate. Certainly these women had diverse motives for entering religious life, but Rapley asserts one main desire: “The word that appeared with greater and greater frequency was ‘apostolate.’ The Counter-Reformation Church envisaged nothing less than a total rechristianization of society. The new

As teaching orders, these communities combatted the spread of Protestantism through the catechism of girls. According to the Council of Trent, the girls' salvation depended on their knowledge of the faith. Consequently, the nuns emphasized religious education above other forms of instruction.<sup>10</sup>

By moving into the realm of education and catechizing girls and women, the *dévotés* challenged accepted gender roles. The church recognized catechism especially as the prerogative of the clergy. Consequently, women who taught the catechism took on a religious role associated with the priesthood.<sup>11</sup> As a result, societal forces attempted to restrict their movement and activity.<sup>12</sup> Over time, these women were cloistered; however, they continued to provide education for girls within the convent walls.<sup>13</sup> Thus these women succeeded in shifting, albeit slightly, the definition of women religious to include the secular activity of education.<sup>14</sup>

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congregations were, in the large majority, specifically designed to be instruments in this rechristianization” (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 20).

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the teaching activities of the Filles de Notre-Dame and the Ursulines, see Rapley, *The Dévotes*, chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> These women often sought to retain ecclesial approval of their teaching and to demonstrate the distinction of teaching the catechism from sacramental activity. See Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 116-119.

<sup>12</sup> Rapley argues that women became more controlled by society during the seventeenth century: “Before the law, women were actually in the process of being devalued. The concessions which medieval jurisprudence had made to them were being negated; their condition, especially in marriage, was being reduced to something very close to perpetual minority” (*The Dévotes*, 12). Women were subordinated to men to different degrees depending on the geographic location and the social class of the woman. Aristocratic women were the most subordinated to their husbands (Ibid., 12-15).

<sup>13</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 6. As Rapley observes, “By the 1640s it would be a rare town that did not have at least one monastery of teaching nuns. Within their newly established perimeters they proved to a skeptical world that they could combine the contemplative with the active life. That was an achievement in itself. They also proved that their enclosure need not prevent them from contributing to the improvement of society (Elizabeth Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 179).

<sup>14</sup> In *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, Claire Walker argues that the nuns reinterpreted the role of gentlewomen in terms of girls' education and hospitality. Because the nuns were supposed to remain within a traditional understanding of women's roles in French society, they creatively employed these roles

Nevertheless, around the middle of the seventeenth century, other groups of women joined together to serve the church and society. Many of these women lived a religious life but were not recognized as nuns.<sup>15</sup> While the Council of Trent sought to enforce enclosure and a traditional understanding of monastic life, women side-stepped church law by declining to be named nuns. Groups like Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac's Daughters of Charity successfully resisted enclosure in order to serve the needs of local communities.<sup>16</sup> As Rapley argues,

The first active *uncloistered* congregations were born. Their members – “filles séculières,” as they were called – knew full well that they were nuns in all but name. However, they accepted secular status, so as to remain free to pursue their active vocation. They adopted the “intermediate state,” part religious, part secular, which was already being practiced in some masculine congregations, but which had previously been forbidden to women. Their freedom to work outside the cloister represented a serious challenge to traditional thinking, but the services which they offered to society went far toward allaying old prejudices. And among these services – legitimated now by a deep change in social needs and attitudes – was the service of public religious instruction. By the end of the century, women had become not only nurses and teachers, but also catechists.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, the religious fervor that spread throughout France in the early seventeenth century encouraged the women's religious aspirations; Francis de Sales' spirituality

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to shift the activities they could pursue as well as the meaning they had for their religious life in enclosure (Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 94-96).

<sup>15</sup> As Rapley argues, “They were ‘secular sisters.’ But in one way or another they adopted the characteristics of nuns, living communally, performing set devotions, obeying a rule and a superior – all of which made them, in a sense, half-nuns. It amounted to a blurring of the clear lines so recently drawn between the lay and the consecrated states” (Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 193).

<sup>16</sup> Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life 1450-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 224-229. See also Susan E. Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France: The Early History of the Daughters of Charity* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2006), 1-15. Dinan interprets the Council of Trent in light of the creation and activity of the Daughters of Charity. She argues that the location of the women in France enabled them to employ contemporary spirituality and extend women's religious work.

<sup>17</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 7.

further validated their desire to remain in society. Recognizing the religious and social needs of society, women entered a new form of religious life, which emphasized their ministerial activities in service of the church.<sup>18</sup>

The Sisters of St. Joseph arose amid these religious and secular conflicts in seventeenth-century France. Consequently, the early sisters and their founders, Father Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ and Bishop Henry de Maupas du Tour, employed different strategies to validate the presence of the sisters in secular society.<sup>19</sup> One of these strategies arose directly from the purpose of the congregation. As the official authorization of the community reveals, the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded for charitable works, to serve the needy of Le Puy:

We, Henry de Maupas du Tour, bishop and Lord of Le Puy, Count of Velay, Immediate Suffragan of His Holiness, Abbot of Saint-Denis de Rheims, Counselor of the King in his Councils and First Chaplain to the Queen Regent, desirous of advancing the glory of God and the salvation of souls and the service of charity in our diocese, having learned that several good widows and single women, wishing to devote themselves to the laudable works of charity, both for

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<sup>18</sup> Rapley resists interpretations that would minimize the agency of these women. Instead of assuming that a rule was written and women joined an order or that society needed specific jobs filled so women became teachers and nurses, she argues that women first felt a religious desire to participate in the apostolate: “The religious energy of the women came first, and the need to channel that energy into meaningful action came second. Then came the need for institutions within which the women could be protected and maintained while they carried out their new activities – in other words, communities. At this stage the involvement of Catholic society, as a provider and supporter, became imperative. It was usually in the course of this last stage that the secular and ecclesiastical authorities gave their approval” (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 8). In *Nuns Without Cloister: Sisters of St. Joseph in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Marguerite Vacher’s study of the Sisters of St. Joseph affirms Rapley’s conclusion: the women lived together in community serving the city before their constitutions were written and prior to receiving episcopal approval (Marguerite Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister: Sisters of St. Joseph in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Patricia Byrne and the United States Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (New York: University Press of America, 2010), 67-8).

<sup>19</sup> For background information on the earliest Sisters of St. Joseph and their founders, see Marguerite Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 7-37. Vacher notes that the sisters who received approval from Bishop Henry de Maupas du Tour were the second community of the Sisters of St. Joseph established by Father Médaille. In 1649, a group of women formed the first community in Dunières. The Sisters of St. Joseph often recognize the second community as their official foundation as they received ecclesial approval at that time (Ibid., 7).

the service of the principal hospital and of the sick poor of our city and for the education and guidance of the orphan girls of our Hospital of Montferrand, and that to be able to attend with more adequate time to the said works, they desired, with our consent and by our approbation, to form a society and congregation where, living in community, it would be permissible for them without any hindrance to devote themselves to the said services, we considered this design so admirable that we have embraced it with great affection. We have permitted and do permit the said widows and single women to establish their congregation under the name and title of Daughters of Saint Joseph and to come together and live in community in one or several houses as it will be necessary for them better to spread the fruit of their charity and to be able to multiply their said houses in all the places of our diocese where we will judge it appropriate.<sup>20</sup>

As their Constitutions further affirm, the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded for the dual purposes of seeking their own salvation and serving the neighbor: “After providing for their own salvation and perfection, they will devote themselves to pious works of mercy. . . . They will try by means of these works to bring about . . . the salvation and perfection of neighbor.”<sup>21</sup> As Marguerite Vacher observes, these dual goals of sanctification of the self and the neighbor mirror the goals of the Jesuits on whom Médaille based the sisters’ Constitutions.<sup>22</sup> Thus the foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph affirms a prevalent spirituality which emphasized pursuing one’s own salvation as one served others.<sup>23</sup> While

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 62-63.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 72.

<sup>22</sup> For a comparison of the Constitutions of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Society of Jesus, see Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 161. The parallels between the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Jesuits also appear in Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ’s writings for the sisters including the *Règlements* and the Eucharistic Letter. The sisters participated in the same ministries, except sacramental ministries, and the *agrégées* sisters’ daily life paralleled that of the Jesuit scholastics and coadjutors (Ibid., 266-267). Vacher further analyzes the development of the Constitutions of the Sisters of St. Joseph to discern the differences in the early Constitutions and establish which version was accepted by the majority of communities of the sisters (Ibid., 141-171).

<sup>23</sup> This focus on those in need parallels movements in other women’s religious communities as well as in French society. For example, the Daughters of Charity emphasized how essential this service was to the Christian faith. Dinan argues, “Most important to de Marillac were the motivations of her daughters. She expected women to enter the community out of a sense of religious duty; she understood their mission as one of serving God through serving the poor. She did not want a body of women committed to the work of

concern for the neighbor is not unique to the Sisters of St. Joseph, it guided their ministerial activities and interactions with secular society.

Consequently, the early sisters turned outward to focus on the needs of the poor, ill, and uneducated in order to ensure their own and others' salvation and sanctification. Significantly, the Constitutions did not limit the sisters to one particular ministry; rather, the Constitutions challenge the women to undertake any activity needed to serve the dear neighbor: "It seeks first to establish and maintain in very high virtue all of its members. Second, *to practice all the holy works of mercy, spiritual and corporal, of which women are capable*, and at the same time, by means of these works to benefit many souls of the dear neighbor."<sup>24</sup> The writings of Father Jean Pierre Médaille continually reiterate this dedication to the dear neighbor and emphasize the women's dedication to addressing any needs.<sup>25</sup> Significantly for the first sisters, as well as for those who followed, Médaille did not limit the form of their ministry; rather, he urged them to complete any activity "of which women are capable." This allowed the sisters to creatively address the direction of their community as they served the dear neighbor.

As small communities of women formed, Médaille sought to secure the sisters' place in and identification with local society. Because of religious and civil restrictions,

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poor relief if their motivation for doing so was not a Christian understanding of helping one's less fortunate neighbor" (Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France*, 70).

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 69, emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> In *Origins: The Sisters of St. Joseph*, Marius Nepper, S.J. argues that the constitutions clearly show the influence of Ignatius of Loyola and the constitutions of the Jesuits: "Especially would the congregation be following the Ignatian concept by the insistence of Father Médaille upon the apostolic zeal, the concern for organization, the orientation toward the most needy and toward those who one can hope will benefit the most, spiritually and apostolically" (Marius Nepper, S.J., *Origins: The Sisters of Saint Joseph*, trans. The Federation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, U.S.A. (Erie, Pennsylvania: Villa Maria College, 1975), 31).



the women took only simple vows instead of solemn vows. Had they taken solemn vows, the sisters would have been identified as nuns and subject to enclosure; civil restrictions further stipulated a nun's removal from secular society to prevent familial social disgrace and secure a family's inheritance.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, the sisters' dress even served to identify them with the local society as they wore the clothing of widows with only the crucifix setting them apart.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Médaille directed the *agrégées* sisters to attend the village church instead of having a private chapel.<sup>28</sup> In part because of this close connection with local society, Médaille insisted on the correction or dismissal of sisters who did not live according to the rule. As they pursued the dual goals of personal and communal sanctification, each sister was supposed to be a model for others. Indeed, records recount and praise the sisters for the positive influence they had on the local society.<sup>29</sup>

As part of this modeling of a Christian life, the sisters sought to serve their neighbors in a variety of ways. As Vacher notes, "These tasks were mainly the upkeep of churches, care for the poor and sick, and all aspects of the education of girls and women – rudimentary instruction, good manners, tasks and responsibilities of women according

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<sup>26</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 58-59. Vacher observes that the Sisters of St. Joseph employed a notarized act to hold their goods in common. This civil act accompanied their private vows (Ibid., 174-177).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 232-234. As Vacher argues, "Their way of life and style of dress bespoke a way of being simultaneously present in the world and effecting a certain break with the ways of the world by deliberately adopting something that was simple, ordinary" (Ibid., 237).

<sup>28</sup> The *agrégées* were small groups of sisters who lived in smaller towns. In contrast, the principal houses, those responsible for overseeing the smaller houses, did have their own chapel (Ibid., 253).

<sup>29</sup> Vacher observes, "In some rural houses where the sisters were very close to the people – Chomelix (Haute Loire), for instance – it was emphasized that one of the benefits received from the sisters was 'the good example that they constantly give to the public' This sort of remark is not uncommon in the archives of communities of St. Joseph. It witnesses to the truth that people could see the sisters living in their midst, and this presence was often in itself constructive and apostolic" (Ibid., 222).

to their age and social status, some relatively professional training (lace-and ribbon-making), and, always, experience of the Christian life.”<sup>30</sup> Depending on the location, the sisters undertook these activities with varying degrees of independence.<sup>31</sup> Because they could not own property, they often took out contracts with city officials to staff a hospital, orphanage, or school.<sup>32</sup> These types of work necessarily occupied much of the sisters’ time and therefore minimized the extended time periods in which contemplative orders would spend in prayer. Nevertheless, the sisters daily attended mass and participated in vocal prayer, spiritual reading, and the examen of consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

Despite their widespread service to and acceptance by French society, the sisters often encountered conflict with local authorities and financial difficulties.<sup>34</sup> As secular sisters, the Sisters of St. Joseph had no legal standing as a religious community within their society.<sup>35</sup> The Sisters of St. Joseph and other active religious sisters employed

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 138. For a description of the breadth of ministries the sisters were involved in according to particular location and influence of patrons, see Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 221-222, 261-264.

<sup>31</sup> Marius Nepper, S.J. argues that this breadth in the sisters’ ministries reveals the way in which Jean Pierre Médaille, S.J. drew on and expanded Saint Francis de Sales’ instructions for the Visitandines (*Origins*, 11).

<sup>32</sup> For the negotiation of and the example of a contract with the Maison de Recluses in Lyon, see Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 206-208. These conditions were not always ideal as the city officials seldom understood the sisters’ new form of religious life and the need for time and space in which to pray individually and as a community (Ibid., 193). Vacher further observes that the sisters were freer to change the focus of their service if they were not contracted with a particular institution (263).

<sup>33</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 255, 265. Vacher notes that some of the manuscripts insist that the sisters attend “only one Mass’ each day.” She notes that this statement could refer to sisters who attempted to spend more time in prayer than in service, which would redefine the purpose of their religious life (Ibid., 255). For an outline of their prayer and work schedule, see Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 256-257.

<sup>34</sup> These difficulties were not unique to secular sisters like the Sisters of St. Joseph. As Claire Walker observes, the financial position of even well-established convents was precarious in France in the seventeenth century. Due to years of war, wide spread poverty, and inconsistent support from patrons and the families of postulants, enclosed monasteries including the teaching congregations had to creatively approach their finances and the local economy in order to ensure the survival of their community (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 74-83).

<sup>35</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 184-185. Vacher notes that the community “had no juridical existence” because they choose not to take on the status of contemplative nuns; rather, they were simply recognized as a group of women living together. This gave no authority to their superior to act in the name of the

diverse means to ensure the solvency and acceptance of their communities. While some of the *filles séculières* (secular daughters) were founded by a patron, the Sisters of St. Joseph more often had a local patron who invited sisters to come and serve a particular town or city.<sup>36</sup> Early documents from the Sisters of St. Joseph also acknowledge the dowries that some of the women brought to the community.<sup>37</sup> Similar to enclosed convents, the Sisters of St. Joseph also took in female boarders, who could be financially beneficial through gifts and further familial patronage. Depending on the needs of the town or city, many of the sisters also earned a salary from the hospital or school in which they worked.<sup>38</sup>

For the Sisters of St. Joseph, the meaning of these activities shifted as they were pursued outside of enclosure; however, they performed these tasks in order to reform society. The sisters, like many in seventeenth century France, were dedicated to correcting social ills of their day. In contrast to many enclosed convents of teachings nuns, the sisters often ran schools for the poor and orphans as well as a boarding school

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community. The Sisters of St. Joseph and other men's and women's apostolic religious communities did not receive ecclesial approval of their form of religious life until 1900 (Donovan, *Sisterhood as Power*, 19-20).

<sup>36</sup> These arrangements were often difficult for the sisters. While they needed the financial support of wealthy patrons, the sisters had to accept funds with unwelcome conditions. For example, the community in Vienne accepted a donation from *Demoiselle* Marie Antony with the condition that she could choose novices for the community. Vacher concludes that this influence altered the form of religious life for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Vienne. This specific community moved toward contemplative, cloistered religious life as their community's demographics changed. Many of the smaller communities attached to the Vienne house, chose to separate from the community rather than become cloistered and renounce their vocation of service (Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 186-187, 195-205).

<sup>37</sup> A document from February 10, 1662 describes the establishment of dowries for Anne Deschaux, who had founded the community in 1649, and Marie Blanc, who had been in the community for one year (Ibid., 54-5). From this, it is clear that a dowry was not a necessary condition for entrance into the community.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 234, 261, 273-276. Rapley notes that this was common for the *filles séculières*. The religious institute often had contracts with local hospitals or schools (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 184).

for paying students. The school for the poor was the main priority and the boarding school was formed to financially support the sisters' other activities including the school or hospital work.<sup>39</sup>

While they often were involved in hospital work and visited the poor and sick, the Sisters of St. Joseph pursued other activities, including the production of lace and ribbon.<sup>40</sup> The area of France in which the sisters were founded was known for its lace and ribbon. As Vacher recounts,

In Le Puy, Craponne, and in the Velay, the sisters taught lace making to the girls. In the Forez, most sisters in small houses were called "ribbon makers," because making ribbon was how they earned their living, and the technique of weaving ribbon was what they taught the young girls. At the hospital of Vienne, they sewed and spun; early in the eighteenth century, there was also a "place for spinning the work in hemp and wool done by the poor for the people in town." At the Refuge in Clermont, "the work of the community consisted in sewing and embroidery with thread," which was done by both day students and penitent women.<sup>41</sup>

Engaging this production, the Sisters of St. Joseph participated in the local economy.<sup>42</sup> As with other communities of women religious, the Sisters of St. Joseph undertook the production of lace and ribbon for diverse reasons.

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<sup>39</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 138.

<sup>40</sup> As with their contracted work for local institutions, the Sisters of St. Joseph pursued similar tactics to other *filles séculières*. These women often did sewing and spinning for themselves as well as to sell (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 185).

<sup>41</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 262.

<sup>42</sup> In her study of English convents in France, Claire Walker observes the nuns' widespread practice of using their handiwork to finance their community: "In accordance with the social and moral imperatives guiding nuns' work, the English cloisters' constitutions recommended sewing and embroidery as suitable manual labour" (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 96). Nevertheless, the nuns exceeded a simple use of handiwork to prevent idleness and provide for their own needs. Because of the financial benefits, they employed these skills to make silk flowers and other items to be sold by merchants. For example, the Ghent Benedictines had their choir nuns rotate between weeks of making silk flowers and of saying the divine office. In a year, the nuns made around 30 pounds for this work (Walker, 97).

First, the sisters pursued this production for its monetary support. As the writings of Father Médaille reveal, the expectations for sisters differed depending on their social class and financial status. As social positions dictated an individual's behavior in seventeenth century French society, the Constitutions include three categories of sisters: the *demoiselles de service*, from the higher classes; the *demoiselles du travail* who worked to supplement their income; and the *veuves et filles de basse condition*, widows and poor women who needed to work.<sup>43</sup> As Vacher contends, these categories did not seek to assert internal divisions among the sisters: "It aimed to provide better service to the neighbor by women of the same social background as the people among whom they worked."<sup>44</sup> French society limited the interaction between different social classes. Thus, the inclusion of women of different classes promoted service to each of these classes. To further extend their ability to serve all people, the sisters also admitted the *agrégées*, women who took a vow of stability and lived in smaller towns or villages, and the *associées*, who were lay women who lived with their families. These two groups of women enabled more women to be associated with the Sisters of St. Joseph and extend their service to the needy.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 67.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>45</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 67. On the structure of the communities, see *Ibid.*, 178-181. On the relation of and interaction between these groups, see *Ibid.*, 313-314. On the relation of social position and the dress of the sisters, see *Ibid.*, 232-234, 236. It is interesting to note that the Congregation of St. Joseph and many other religious communities presently include similar categories of members of their community. The Congregation accepts Associates, non-vowed members. This group continues to grow as people, single and married, decide to commit to the sisters' charism in their secular lives (Congregation of St. Joseph, "What is a CSJ Associate?" About Us, accessed 30 August 2013, [http://www.csjoseph.org/as\\_an\\_associate.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/as_an_associate.aspx))

Accordingly, these different classes of sisters engaged the local economy to varying degrees. Whereas sisters who brought a dowry with them were engaged in more service to the poor, those who did not have the means of financial support spent a portion of their day involved in work to contribute to the community.<sup>46</sup> Because the *filles séculières* drew members mainly from the working and lower classes, they knew that their members would embrace a religious life, which included labor to assist in the support of the community.<sup>47</sup> For example, the Daughters of Charity engaged in the production of linens and preserves to support their community and deployed donations from the Ladies of Charity to support their ministries.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the Sisters of St. Joseph produced lace and ribbon to contribute to the financial survival of their communities. In particular, the *sœurs agrégées*, who came from the lower classes, worked with their hands to earn their living. Thus, the practice of engaging production sought to ensure the sisters' financial well-being.

Second, the sisters employed this production to justify their religious presence in society. As the example of the first sisters in Le Puy demonstrates, their very existence in a city could be challenged by city officials. In seventeenth century France, communities of women religious proliferated and often could not support themselves which forced the

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<sup>46</sup> As Walker observes, convents similarly replicated the distinction between social classes in the activities expected of nuns. Choir nuns came from upper classes and brought a larger dowry to the community. These nuns would typically be involved in saying the divine office. Lay nuns came from the lower classes and consequently brought a smaller dowry. They often were accepted into the convent in order to provide manual labor for the community (Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 83-84, 98-99).

<sup>47</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 187-188. Rapley asserts, "Though some women of high birth joined the secular institutes, they did so in defiance of the natural order of things. Most *filles séculières* came from more modest levels of society; and for this reason they had to battle against their own, and others', sense that they were inferior to "real" nuns" (Ibid., 191).

<sup>48</sup> Susan E. Dinan. *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France*, 67, 77.

local society to subsidize them.<sup>49</sup> Because of this, city officials sought to control which religious communities were founded in their cities.<sup>50</sup>

Accordingly, the first Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy demonstrated their resourcefulness in order to pacify the city officials. With the official approval of Bishop Henry de Maupas, the sisters founded their religious community in the Hôpital des Orphelines in the Montferrand quarter of Le Puy with the goal of serving the orphan girls; however, the bishop did not seek the approval of the city officials or inform them of the sisters' presence in Le Puy. Learning of the sisters' illegitimate presence, city representatives sought their removal. Nevertheless, their intentions shifted when they were escorted into the sisters ribbon-making room: ““At that moment, these *messieurs* came in, but God so changed the minds of all of them by his Providence that their entire behavior and conversation were nothing other than a proper and very civil visit, as if they had been sent to call on them on behalf of the community, and they left in the same manner.””<sup>51</sup> Engaged in the production of this commodity, the sisters provided evidence

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<sup>49</sup> In a time of rampant poverty, contemplative religious orders also worked to provide for themselves which also assisted the local society. For an analysis of the extensive financial support this provided, see Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 180-1. Even though these activities contradicted a strict interpretation of the nuns' constitutions, the local bishops and other officials often approved of the nuns' work. As Walker argues, “Clerics apparently sanctioned minor contraventions of monastic statutes, so that the cloisters would not become a burden upon the resources of the diocese” (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 98)

<sup>50</sup> See Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 114-115. In addition to the financial strain, the creation of new communities, especially secular institutes, raised issues of social status (civil death of those who entered religious life, dowries) and the role of women in the church (Ibid., 115-119).

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 59-60. As Vacher argues, the sisters worked to support themselves and still cared for the orphans (Ibid., 61-62). This account comes from the narrative of Gabriel Lanthenas who was a merchant and supporter of the religious community. For Gabriel Lanthenas' narrative of this event, see Gabriel Lanthenas, “Recollection of a great miracle that occurred at St. Joseph,” in *Nuns Without Cloister: Sisters of St. Joseph in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, by Marguerite Vacher, trans. Patricia Byrne and the United States Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (New York: University Press of America, 2010), 326-327.

of their financial stability and willingness to engage in diverse practices to support themselves and the orphans in their care.

Within their schools, lace and ribbon-making further justified the education of girls. Engaging societal expectations, the sisters trained the girls in an employable skill as well as shaped them into acceptable female citizens.<sup>52</sup> In her analysis of the Daughters of Charity, Dinan similarly reveals how education in handicrafts supported the schools, gave the students a skill for future employment, and ensured the continuous activity of students thus eliminating idleness and the chance of sin.<sup>53</sup> As Rapley observes, the religious education and training in handwork cooperated to shape the girls into members of the society: “The apprentices worked in silence, sewing, knitting stockings, and lacemaking, to a background of spiritual instructions and improving readings, with occasional group singing, ‘to refresh and recreate their spirit.’”<sup>54</sup> Thus the *filles séculières* educated the girls into a feminine craft and reinforced social positions through the types of work the students learned.

In some areas, the Sisters of St. Joseph consequently emphasized lace-making in order to create a skilled workforce. For example, the sisters in Craponne were valued not only for their charitable work but especially for their efforts in educating girls and women in lace-making. In a letter requesting letters patent for the Sisters of St. Joseph, the people of Craponne contended:

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<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, Rapley argues that this education into femininity varied according to the social class of the students. Higher class students learned basic skills whereas lower classes learned how to produce more intricate work for sale (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 164).

<sup>53</sup> Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth-Century France*, 86, 101.

<sup>54</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 165. Rapley notes that reading and writing were not emphasized in these schools (Ibid., 165).



It cannot be concealed that the establishment of these *demoiselles* forms a veritable workshop of lace; they continually supervise about two hundred fifty girls, and often more than three hundred, of every age and every condition, taking pains to enable them to work. It is they who train and teach the young girls in this work, who are thereby in a position to help support their families, and when they finish there, they have better prospects for marriage. And without the help of lace, what would become of this region?<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, the sisters were valued for this practice. Thus, their production of and education in lace both justified their presence in society and assisted in stabilizing the local economy.

Third, the sisters employed lace and ribbon-making as tools for sanctification. In Le Puy and other areas, the sisters taught young girls and women these skills which provided them with a means of financial support. While this justified their activities to secular authorities, the sisters further deployed this education for religious purposes. As their Constitutions reveal, the sisters dedicated themselves not simply to the salvation of others but to the sanctification of the neighbor.<sup>56</sup>

Consequently, they included religious and spiritual instruction during work times to alter, or sanctify, the lives of the girls and women.<sup>57</sup> At the Maison du Refuge in Clermont, the sisters incorporated the penitent women (women who had been prostitutes)

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 214. For the full letter, see “Deliberation of the Inhabitants of the Town of Craponne to Request Royal Letters Patent in Favor of the Daughters Associated Under the Name of St. Joseph,” in Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 348-350.

<sup>56</sup> Nepper agrees with this emphasis on sanctification over salvation. See Nepper, *Origins*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> This paralleled the activities of enclosed communities. As Rapley observes of the teaching orders, “The pedagogy of Christian living covered the entire school day, and subsumed every subject taught. Much time was devoted directly to behaviour training. . .” (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 157). Rapley notes that after the catechism, reading and handwork were the most important subjects. Reading enabled the girls to have access to scripture; handwork resisted idleness as well as trained girls in femininity (Ibid., 159-163).

into their prayer life including spiritual reading during manual labor.<sup>58</sup> The sisters taught girls and women a useful skill as well as emphasized what it meant to live as a Christian. In other words, the Sisters of St. Joseph produced commodities to justify and support their community as well as promote the sanctification of their neighbors. Importantly, these combined goals were admired by seventeenth century French society. City and village officials often praised the sisters for their diligence and commitment to the larger community even as the sisters continued to alter the understanding of religious life and the role of women in French society.<sup>59</sup>

These practices of providing service and creating commodities arose from or sought justification through contemporary spirituality. The writings of Francis de Sales validated an interior spirituality outside of the convent; the practices of engaging society through service and production found validation in Ignatian spirituality.<sup>60</sup> Dedication to

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<sup>58</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 274-275, 278-282. Likewise, Walker observes that cloistered communities included prayer during work for the benefit of the nuns. Walker points to the example of the Ghent Benedictines who excused nuns from the divine office in order to work on the silk flowers. The time for work was accompanied with prayer (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 98).

<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the production of lace and ribbon operated differently than production in other religious communities. While they engaged local economies, other women religious focused on the production of art including paintings, sculpture, and music. As Clare Walker's study of early modern English convents reveals, artistic endeavors including music enabled the nuns to demonstrate their spirituality in concrete ways: "Like their sisters who transformed personal comportment, daily rituals and physical labour into acts of devotion, they manipulated the terms of their vocation to encompass something of the spirit of early modern activist spirituality" (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 170). These nuns employed music to inspire the spiritual lives of those in their community as well as influence those in secular society. Similarly Evangelisti's study of convents from 1450-1700 acknowledges the internal and external influence of the nuns' artistic activities. She notes that the influence on secular society was limited if the sisters did not sell their artwork. Nevertheless these convents also participated in the production of crafts which in some form extended their influence beyond the walls of the convent (Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 9, 148-163). In particular, as the women moved outside of the convent they were able to use artistic practices as a way to draw attention, and potentially support, to their convent. See Walker's comments on the performances of the Augustinian choir in Paris, Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 170.

<sup>60</sup> Similarly, contemplative orders participated in the production of commodities in order to raise funds for their order. Spiritual readings and prayer accompanied this work. The position of lay sisters in contemplative orders possibly provided the justification and model for a more active spiritual life. Lay

labor and the apostolate was grounded in one's spiritual dedication to God.<sup>61</sup> As evident in their Constitutions, Médaille's formation of the Sisters of St. Joseph draws on these roots as the basis of the sisters' vocation. The production of commodities thus correlated with the religious purpose of the sisters' lives. Dedicated to serving their neighbor, the sisters did not shy away from labor and production, which would enable their spiritual flourishing.

Nevertheless, this production of lace and ribbon as well as their other ministries maintained their location within the bourgeois. Seventeenth-century French society operated under the *ancien régime* in which people lived within particular social positions. Clothing designated one's social class and education inducted one into how to live according to one's station.<sup>62</sup> As we have seen, part of this education included handicrafts such as lace and ribbon making. Through these means women became more controlled by French society in the seventeenth century.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the majority of Sisters of St. Joseph came from the lower classes and did not attempt or desire to usurp a higher class

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sisters came from the lower classes in society and generally joined a religious order with the knowledge that they would provide the manual labor for the religious order. These sisters consequently sought ways to labor while living a religious life. As Walker argues, Ignatian spirituality served as a fertile conversation partner for these sisters' spiritual lives: "Nowhere was the identification of work with godliness so crucial as it was for those women who had entered monasticism with physical, rather than spiritual, labour as their vocation. . . . Although their ministry differed from the strict Jesuit meaning of 'contemplative in action', Ignatian piety presented traditional monasticism with a viable alternative for lay sisters, and others distracted by temporal offices" (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 168-169).

<sup>61</sup> Similarly the teaching orders came to focus on education for their personal sanctification. For an analysis of the development of the teaching orders, see Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 143-153.

<sup>62</sup> For an analysis of the *ancien régime* and education, see Rapley, *The Lord as Their Portion*, 198-199. These trenchant social positions even impacted the formation of religious communities including the Daughters of Charity who undertook works of charity that were often chosen by the Ladies of Charity, who were from the upper classes in French society. For an analysis of social positions and jurisdiction on the formation of the Daughters of Charity, see Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 82-91.

<sup>63</sup> As Rapley argues, this increased social control most affected aristocratic women and served as an impetus toward religious life (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 12-19).

location. Vacher observes, “The sisters may have become part of the corresponding trade associations, which would have given them a degree of social recognition within their own milieu. By their work, as by their dress, the sisters were still, and very much, full members of the local community of inhabitants.”<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, the Sisters of St. Joseph subtly shifted social and religious conventions within particular social locations. By engaging in new practices and asserting their religious value, these sisters expanded religious life to include active service and even commodification.

For the Sisters of St. Joseph, their production of lace and ribbon as well as their work with the poor and needy demonstrated their active spirituality. While not visually or audibly portraying their beliefs in images or music, the sisters revealed their vision of the church in their ministry. Thus, the production of lace and ribbon served to make society used to their presence as well as demonstrate their skill and dedication. This consequently led to support from local communities as well as requests for the sisters to establish new communities in other towns and cities.

### ***The American Foundation: Secular Service for Religious Ends***

Although they were disbanded during the French Revolution, the Sisters of St. Joseph were reformed in the eighteenth century and continued to serve the needs of local communities.<sup>65</sup> Their religious communities expanded which enabled them to accept missions to areas within France as well as to missions in the New World. The sisters began to minister in the United States at the request of Félicité de Duras, wife of Count

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<sup>64</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 294.

<sup>65</sup> Patricia Byrne, CSJ, “Sisters of St. Joseph: The Americanization of a French Tradition,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 5, no. 3/4 (Summer – Fall 1986): 246-248.

de la Rochejaquelein, who learned of the Mission of Missouri from the *Annales* published by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. Mme de la Rochejaquelein requested that the Sisters of St. Joseph take on this mission because she recognized the sisters' ability to adjust to the demands of their society. As Byrne observes, "her perception of the sisters as a pious and versatile labor force was to prove a constant in their history in America."<sup>66</sup> With Mme de la Rochejaquelein's support, six Sisters of St. Joseph traveled to the United States to educate children and convert native Protestants.<sup>67</sup> These Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in St. Louis, Missouri in 1836.

The sisters' path to the United States mirrored that of other religious communities who accepted missions at the request of patrons. European mission-aid societies, including the French Society for the Propagation of the Faith (1822), funded efforts to secure the future of Catholicism in the United States. They and wealthy individuals distributed resources to religious communities as well as parishes and dioceses to support the spiritual and physical lives of the American Catholic population.<sup>68</sup> These organizations as well as religious communities were asked by American bishops to support the mission in the United States. Consequently, the religious communities who accepted a mission to the United States frequently came to serve a particular population or fulfill a specific social or religious need. Through their practices in the United States,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>68</sup> James Hennesey, SJ, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 112. Hennesey notes that these mission-aid societies frequently operated to support a particular ethnic population. The French Society for the Propagation of the Faith was led by lay people (Ibid., 112).

the Sisters of St. Joseph continued to disperse their vision of the church and model the role of apostolic women religious.

While they continued in the charism of their founders, the Sisters of St. Joseph necessarily employed different strategies to more fully serve people in the United States. No longer were they negotiating the political and civil context of France; rather, they came as missionaries in a young nation that elaborated a novel relationship between the church and state and in which they were a religious minority. American Catholics attempted to assert their role within the new nation. Negotiating their relation to the institutional church and their Protestant neighbors, Catholics drew on the democratic principles, which inspired the direction of civil, political, and religious thought and action. In 1783, Rev. John Carroll drew on these principles as he argued for episcopal powers:

You are not ignorant, that in these United States our Religious system has undergone a revolution, if possible, more extraordinary, than our political one. In all of them, free toleration is allowed to Christians of every denomination. . . This is a blessing and advantage, which is our duty to preserve & improve with the utmost prudence, by demeaning ourselves on all occasions as subjects zealously attached to our government & avoiding to give any jealousies on account of any dependence on foreign jurisdictions, more than that, which is essential to our Religion an[d] acknowledgement of the Pope's spiritual Supremacy over the whole Christian world.<sup>69</sup>

Drawing on the experience of the nation, Carroll asserted the juridical independence of the church in the United States. The first Catholic diocese was established in Baltimore in

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<sup>69</sup> "Rev. John Carroll to Cardinal Vitaliano Borromeo, 10 November 1783," in *Public Voices: Catholics in the American Context*, eds. Steven M. Avella and Elizabeth McKeown, American Catholic Identities (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 4. See also Rev. John Carroll's letter to John Thorpe in which Carroll asserts the need for the American clergy to appoint their own superiors (bishop, prefect) so that they are not perceived to be chosen by or under the influence of foreign powers ("Rev. John Carroll to John Thorpe, 17 February 1785," in *Public Voices*, eds. Steven M. Avella and Elizabeth McKeown, 5-6).

1789 only after the clergy asserted their need not to be under the direct authority of a foreign leader.<sup>70</sup>

Aware of their tentative position as a religious minority which still experienced persecution, American Catholics sought ways to acclimate to the American context while retaining their Catholic identity. Following the American democratic spirit, Catholics attempted to establish themselves as patriotic Americans loyal to the Roman Catholic Church. In 1837, a year after the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in the United States, the Third Provincial Council of Baltimore declared that no foreign leader had political power over American Catholics.<sup>71</sup> In the Third Provincial Council as well as in other statements from the institutional church in the United States, the clergy affirmed Catholic identity while encouraging Catholic immigrants to become Americans.<sup>72</sup> These statements by the Catholic Church in the United States reveal the tenuous position of the church as well as their desire to flourish within the context of the United States. In these documents as well as in the actions of church leaders and laity, Catholics defined the role of the Roman Catholic Church in relation to the government and secular society.

Catholics further asserted their American identity as they combatted anti-Catholic sentiment. After the Revolution, Catholics were more widely accepted in society because

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<sup>70</sup> For the statement establishing the Diocese of Baltimore, see “The Brief *Ex hac apostolicae* of Pope Pius VI Erecting the Diocese of Baltimore and Appointing John Carroll as the First Bishop, November 6, 1789,” in *Documents of American Catholic History*, ed. John Tracy Ellis (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1956), 167-171.

<sup>71</sup> Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 114.

<sup>72</sup> Another example of American clergy taking up the democratic spirit is Bishop John England who held conventions within his state and wrote a constitution for the churches in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia (Ibid., 114). For the constitution, see “The Constitution of the Roman Catholic Churches of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, 1839,” in *Public Voices*, eds. Steven M. Avella and Elizabeth McKeown, 21-23.

they had fought for the nation. Nevertheless, Catholics were aware of prior, and the possibility of future, persecution. While Rev. John Carroll wrote mainly during a period of acceptance of Catholics after the Revolution, his letters intimate the fear of Protestant reprisal against Catholics. Indeed anti-Catholicism became widespread again by the 1830s as immigration, urbanization, and industrialization seemed to threaten the nation. As the majority of immigrants were Catholics, they received the blame for the social turmoil and sometimes were feared for plots to take over the United States for the Pope.<sup>73</sup> Battles, including riots, ensued over public education and the inclusion of the King James Bible. Protestants formed political movements to control public schooling and to exclude Catholics from political office as well as the nation.<sup>74</sup>

Women religious were often caught amid these conflicts. Recognizable in their religious habit, women religious were accosted and ridiculed on the street. To protect themselves, they often wore secular dress when leaving the convent.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, the conflict sometimes enveloped them. Tales of Catholic convents, which depicted horrible stories about the nuns' lives, circulated widely. These included Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent* (1835) and Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal* (1836): "The first told of stark austerities experienced by a convert

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<sup>73</sup> For an assessment of anti-Catholicism and nativism, see Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 118-121. Hennesey describes the Protestants and Catholics debates in the public sphere as well as in literary venues. In 1834 Jedidiah Morse published *Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States* in which he argued that Catholic wanted to conquer the Mississippi Valley (Ibid., 121).

<sup>74</sup> For an analysis of the Philadelphia Bible riots and the expansion of political movements, see Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 122-127. Political parties included the American Republican Party, the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, and the Know-Nothing movement.

<sup>75</sup> Ewens describes the experience of four Carmelite sisters who traveled to the United States in secular dress. Their attire was not convincing as the ship captain reported them as escaped nuns when he arrived at Santa Cruz (Mary Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 36). For the experiences of other women, see Ibid., 62, 210-211. For an analysis of how the habit changed, see Ibid., 90-91, 119-123, 147-148, 281-282.



from Protestantism among the Ursuline sisters, the second ran to the pornographic, complete with tales of priest-nun rendezvous, murdered infants buried in convent cellars, and the like.<sup>76</sup> The propaganda against Catholic women religious included a lecture tour for Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk hosted by prominent Protestant ministers.<sup>77</sup> More violent was the anti-Catholic sentiment which provoked the burning of the Ursuline convent in August 1834 in Charlestown, Massachusetts.<sup>78</sup>

Consequently, the Sisters of St. Joseph, who immigrated to the United States or joined the religious order in the nineteenth century, confronted an environment in which they were a religious minority and had to negotiate different understandings of religious life, Catholic identity, and what it meant to serve secular society. In the Protestant context of the United States, the communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph often embraced a form of secularization, a separation between the church and state, as a way to protect and further their Catholic identity while resisting secularization as an ideology which would seek to eliminate a plurality of forms of the religious from the secular sphere.<sup>79</sup> Thus, they, like other Catholics in the United States, utilized the distinction between the religious and the secular to extend, rather than limit, their presence in American society.

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<sup>76</sup> Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 121.

<sup>77</sup> William C. Brownlee, Samuel Smith and William Hogan were among the Protestant ministers who sponsored these lecture tours (Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 121). For an assessment of Maria Monk, ministers who supported these lecture tours, and their relation to political movements, see Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 155-161.

<sup>78</sup> For an assessment of these events, see Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 149-150; Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 121-122. Ewens further discusses the harassment of other women religious (Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 151-154). Anti-Catholic sentiment lessened during and after the Civil War but was rekindled in the 1890s. For the experience of women religious in the 1890s, see Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 292-296.

<sup>79</sup> Casanova distinguishes two general forms of secularism: statecraft doctrine and ideology. See José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan Van Antwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66-71.

This first community of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the United States served the French immigrants and taught French in their schools; however, their ministries quickly expanded within the context of the United States. As different communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded, they were called to respond to specific needs of a local Catholic community. As Patricia Byrne, C.S.J. argues, the sisters continued their focus on and relation to local communities when they began to minister in the United States.<sup>80</sup> In France they had worked in education and hospital care as well as in the local economies through lace and ribbon-making to directly attend to the needs of the local population. Likewise in the United States, the sisters sought to address specific needs of the society while engaging the local economy in a different form.

As they sought to respond to the needs of society, the sisters exhibited a willingness to adapt to American society, which allowed them to serve a larger percentage of the population. In her study of women religious in the nineteenth century, Amy Ewens argues that women's religious communities either adapted to American customs or did not survive.<sup>81</sup> In contrast to other communities of women religious, the Sisters of St. Joseph were not restricted to a contemplative life or to a sole ministry such as education. Their Constitutions had not limited the sisters in France to a particular type of ministry; thus, in the American context and employing the same Constitutions, the Sisters of St. Joseph expanded their involvement in the secular world to serve the Catholic population and promote the Catholic faith while also responding to the needs of

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<sup>80</sup> Byrne, "Sisters of St. Joseph," 246.

<sup>81</sup> Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 32, 68-70, 87-91, 326-331. Ewens further addresses how religious communities had to alter their constitutions in order to recruit postulants and adjust practices to promote their ministries (Ibid., 209-210, 275-278).

the entire society in which they lived.<sup>82</sup> Thus, their schools served Protestant children; they ministered to Native Americans and both free Blacks and slaves; they served as nurses during the Civil War and staffed hospitals.<sup>83</sup> They expanded their service to include a boys' orphanage.<sup>84</sup> This did not simply expand the number of Catholics that the sisters served; rather, they kept their institutions open to all who needed assistance. Ultimately, this endeared the sisters to religious and secular authorities because the sisters were providing services greatly needed in the nineteenth-century.<sup>85</sup>

Central to their early ministry were nursing and education. Both of these areas continued to draw the sisters out of the religious sphere and into the secular where they disrupted secular and religious understandings of Catholicism and religious life.

Paralleling the works of other women religious, the Sisters of St. Joseph nursed during epidemics and staffed hospitals.<sup>86</sup> The sisters even served as nurses during the Civil War

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<sup>82</sup> As Patricia Byrne, CSJ argues, "Not restricted to any specific work, they were free to respond to the needs of a situation – a fact that was to have great importance for their history in America" (Byrne, "Sisters of St. Joseph," 243). Due to the number of native English speakers joining the community, the *Constitutions of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph* were translated into English in 1847 (Ibid., 255).

<sup>83</sup> Studies of the Sisters of St. Joseph in France do not elaborate on whether or not the sisters educated Protestant children; however, it is quite likely that they, like other women religious at the time, educated Protestants. Walker observes that the cloistered communities were recognized for their education as well as their ability to convert the Protestant youth (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 120).

<sup>84</sup> The decision to serve boys proved to be difficult for many communities of women religious. For an analysis of these reasons, see Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 124-129, 282-284.

<sup>85</sup> Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 54-55. Coburn and Smith offer a well-documented history of the Sisters of St. Joseph. They employ the history of the sisters to examine the impact of women religious on American culture and understandings of gender.

<sup>86</sup> The skill of women religious in nursing during epidemics is widely documented. See Mary Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 102-103, 137-140. Ewens discusses the reform of nursing in the nineteenth century and the sisters' skill in this area (Ibid., 221-231). Nevertheless, this praise was not consistent throughout the century as some nursing sisters were not well trained or were reluctant to care for the human body. As nursing schools opened toward the end of the century, religious communities often prevented women religious from attending courses and resisted professionalization (Ibid., 265-274).

and the Spanish American War.<sup>87</sup> In particular their role in the Civil War demonstrates the sisters' ability to utilize their secular service to promote their religious beliefs.<sup>88</sup> While nursing soldiers from both the North and the South, the sisters served in a secular environment that was often hostile to their Catholic identity. Nevertheless, their presence as nurses succeeded in tempering anti-Catholic sentiment among the soldiers and doctors.<sup>89</sup> During the Civil War, the Union Army used the Wheeling Hospital, which the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling operated and staffed. The sisters served as nurses, giving up their beds for the soldiers. Their dedication earned two of the sisters, Sister Ignatius Farley and Sister de Chantal Keating, the Grand Army of the Republic's Bronze Medal.<sup>90</sup> Their desire to serve secular society demonstrated their willingness to renegotiate their religious identities.<sup>91</sup> By ministering to this diverse population, the sisters showed an expansive notion of the religious – to not only serve the needs of

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<sup>87</sup> In both of these cases, the government sought out the facilities and services of the sisters. The government requested the use of the Wheeling Hospital during the Civil War (Ann Hoye, SSJ, *Seasons of Nature and of Grace: History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling 1853-2003* (Wheeling, West Virginia: Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling, 2002), 33). The government also requested sisters to serve as nurses during the Spanish American War (Dolorita Marie Dougherty, CSJ, "The St. Louis Province," in *The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet*, eds. Dolorita Marie Dougherty, CSJ, et al. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1966), 128-129).

<sup>88</sup> Ewens relates how women religious dispensed with rules of their constitutions in order to nurse during the Civil War (Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 207-209).

<sup>89</sup> See Coburn and Smith 63-64, 191-194. The impact of Catholic women religious orders on anti-Catholicism is well documented. These orders often staffed hospitals and nursed in areas that did not have much access to healthcare. Their willingness to serve all in need and to nurse during epidemics served to lessen or overcome anti-Catholic sentiment. For an analysis of the sisters' impact, see Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 137-140, 231-240. The example of Mother Mary Cecilia Bowen stands out among the Sisters of St. Joseph. In Springfield, Massachusetts, Mother Cecilia confronted the almshouse, prison, and hospital to overcome anti-Catholic sentiment. In each of these locations, she sought to make the sacraments available to Catholics as well as to provide better service to people. For her story, see Consuelo Maria Aherne, SSJ, *Joyous Service: The History of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Springfield* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: Sisters of Saint Joseph, 1983), 26-41.

<sup>90</sup> For a description of these events, see Hoye, 33.

<sup>91</sup> Indeed their religious presence was even used by the Union soldiers on the hospital ships to prevent attacks by the Confederates. Coburn and Smith relate how the sisters were gathered on deck to prevent attack. This worked only after the Confederates recognized the sisters' presence (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 192).

Catholics or be focused on the salvation of souls; rather, they sought to combine their religious view of the world with the needs of secular society.<sup>92</sup> By doing so, they contributed to opening up American secular society to Catholic ministry.

Nevertheless, the anti-Catholic environment of the nineteenth century necessarily affected the economic stability of the women's religious communities. Anti-Catholic propaganda and prejudice often limited the sisters' resources and effectiveness.<sup>93</sup> As Ewens argues, these religious communities needed to expand their ministries in order to survive in the United States. Postulants often did not have a sizeable dowry when entering the community, and there were few wealthy American Catholics who could serve as patrons.<sup>94</sup> At a time when limited social institutions existed, the bishops, clergy, and local lay Catholics encouraged the sisters to adapt in order to serve the educational, health, and social needs of the people. Women religious who were not willing to directly serve society were not always welcomed in towns and cities that feared they would have to financially support contemplative religious orders. Consequently, religious communities, including those that were contemplative orders in Europe, tended to open schools to raise funds to support their community and their other charitable works.<sup>95</sup> As Ewens contends, "The free school for the poor was carried on side by side with the select

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<sup>92</sup> This expansive view of religion relates to James Miller's assessment of monist and pluralist views as the basis of conflict in modern societies. Miller argues that our current state does not require the elimination of belief; rather, the struggle exists around how different systems of belief, including secularism, relate to each other. He maintains that the conflict stems from how these groups see themselves in relation to others. As Miller contends, "As I see it, the crucial issue in modern states is the ongoing conflict between closed and open communities of belief" (James Miller, "What Secular Age?" *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 21, no. 1 (December 2008): 9).

<sup>93</sup> Ewens discusses the ways in which anti-Catholic sentiment destroyed schools and other ministries staffed by women religious (Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 146-147, 219).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 134-135.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34, 65, 134-135.

school, often called an academy, in which the more well-to-do paid tuition. The boarding school provided education for those whose homes were at a distance from other educational facilities.”<sup>96</sup> As in Europe, ministry in education served to justify the presence of these women religious.

Likewise, the Sisters of St. Joseph opened schools both as a form of ministry and for the support they ensured their communities. Paralleling the strategy of French sisters, the Sisters of St. Joseph in the United States came to serve the educational needs of both the wealthy and the poor. Significantly, the sisters’ French background attracted students who wanted to learn French.<sup>97</sup> This was true both in the predominantly French area of Missouri and in the eastern portion of the country as the following advertisement from Oswego, New York demonstrates:

*New Advertisements: Select School and Private Lessons.* The Sisters of St. Joseph, having taken the direction of St. Mary’s School, will also open, on the 13<sup>th</sup> inst., a Select School for Young Ladies, in their house, No. 68 West Sixth Street, where they will teach all the branches generally taught in the best Academies. They will also give private lessons in French, Music, Embroidery, Painting, etc., to young ladies who may desire. For terms apply to SISTER STANISLAUS Sup’r.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the appeal of language instruction, artistic pursuits, especially music, drew students to the schools.<sup>99</sup> As Ewens observes of the survival of women religious, “The

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 98. Ewens notes that the schools were largely influenced by European educational standards and practices though the customs of Americans influenced some subjects and teaching techniques (Ibid., 65-67, 98-102, 218-219).

<sup>97</sup> Ewens observes that this was true of many of the schools run by European sisters because the students were often taught by native speakers (Ibid., 99).

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Byrne, “Sisters of St. Joseph: The Americanization of a French Tradition,” 250.

<sup>99</sup> Describing the Sisters of Charity, Mother Guerin wrote, ““They teach the various sciences scarcely known in our French schools, but they excel in music, which is an indispensable thing in this country, even for the poor. No piano, no pupils! Such is the spirit of this country – Music and Steam. At Frederick, of the

greatest source of income often was private lessons in music and art.”<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia directed the sisters not to prevent a student from attending lessons.<sup>101</sup>

The quality of education offered by the Sisters of St. Joseph and other women religious appealed to parents, both Catholic and Protestant. As Ewens describes, “Wealthy Protestants so valued the sisters’ schools that they contributed as readily as Catholics to finance them, and joined their voices to those of Catholics when they urged religious communities to open new schools in their towns.”<sup>102</sup> This positive appraisal of the sisters’ schools served to overcome some anti-Catholic sentiment and further extend the sisters’ influence in American society.<sup>103</sup> Participating in these movements, the Sisters of St. Joseph thus continued the forms of education they offered in France, including selective schools to finance their communities’ other ministries.<sup>104</sup>

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five Sisters, three teach piano and guitar” (quoted in Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 100).

<sup>100</sup> Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 134.

<sup>101</sup> Sister Diane [pseudonym], 15 August 2011. Sister Diane described a letter from the 1880’s, which informed sisters that in order to pay off the \$81,000 mortgage on their buildings they had to promote music lessons.

<sup>102</sup> Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 141. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, critics of the sisters’ schools questioned the subjects taught and whether the sisters were trained enough to fully educate young women in their academies (Ibid., 262-265).

<sup>103</sup> Ewens argues that the establishment of free public schools served to draw Protestants away from the sisters’ schools (Ibid., 141). For an analysis of the impact of religious women on education, including the numbers of Protestant pupils, see Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 140-144.

<sup>104</sup> This parallels the practice in France of having a boarding school to support a school for the poor. See page 34-35 above.

Further supplementing the selective schools, the sisters took on contracts with both local and state governments to expand their work as educators.<sup>105</sup> These civil institutions employed the sisters to serve otherwise neglected populations.<sup>106</sup> Because of their religious identities, their presence as educators served to redefine the secular to account for their presence in these schools. Unlike the predominantly Catholic context of France, the Sisters of St. Joseph in the United States challenged Protestant definitions of secular labor. Their religious presence pressured American society to not simply repress diverse forms of religious expression; rather, the sisters' secular labor became an arena for ministry that might or might not include an aspect of evangelization. Their willingness to teach in secular settings demonstrates the sisters' willingness to perform their religious identity through their practices more than through verbal attempts at conversion. Not all of their negotiations were successful because the sisters refused to minimize or elide the religious aspect of their identity and mission. For instance the sisters were contracted to teach in the public school in Troy, New York in the 1880s. After residents challenged their qualifications in 1897, the New York State Board of Education ruled that the sisters were qualified but could not wear their habits while teaching. The sisters refused to give into this secular, Protestant demand and were fired.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The Sisters of St. Joseph joined other religious women in having contracts with the state, including the Oldenburg Franciscans, the Sisters of Providence, and the Josephites (Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 101-102, 261-262).

<sup>106</sup> In areas that did not have access to good schools, religious women often offered better education for students, mainly girls. Ewens notes the repeated praise of Protestants for these schools which educated their daughters and received their financial support (Ibid., 140-144).

<sup>107</sup> Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 132-133. Coburn and Smith relate that this occurred in different locations with some towns being more open to the sisters than others. For example, while publicly funded,



As evident in this conflict, education was a topic of debate in the nineteenth century, and the public fought over funding as well as the inclusion of religion in schools. While many schools were Protestant in the inclusion of the King James Bible and Protestant hymns, Catholic attempts to promote a greater distinction between church and state were resisted by Protestants who identified the Protestant religion with American democracy.<sup>108</sup> Even the creation of separate Catholic schools created tensions as Catholics were seen as anti-American.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, the Sisters of St. Joseph were involved in different types of education including compromise situations where they taught secular subjects during normal school hours and religion afterwards.<sup>110</sup> Resisting other forms of the secular, the sisters utilized these opportunities to demonstrate both a

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the sisters wore their habit while teaching in Waverly, Minnesota (1893-1904). The local population did not express alarm at the habit (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 133-4). Ewens addresses legislative acts that attempted to prevent women religious from wearing the habit. When the Pennsylvania state supreme court ruled that wearing religious dress was permissible, the state legislature moved to prohibit it. Other states followed suit (Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 296-297).

<sup>108</sup> These debates revealed disagreements about what included the religious and the secular and the ways in which Protestantism became identified with the secular. In *Culture and Redemption*, Tracy Fessenden investigates the ways that Protestantism became identified with the secular or democratic culture (Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). For a discussion on Catholic dissent to the use of the King James Bible in schools, see Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 60-83.

<sup>109</sup> For an assessment of the role of education in anti-Catholicism, see Stephen J. Vicchio, "The Origins and Development of Anti-Catholicism in America," in *Perspectives on the American Catholic Church: 1789-1989*, eds. Stephen J. Vicchio and Virginia Geiger, SSND (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1989), 85-103. Ewens argues that the creation of parochial schools created a financial burden on the Catholic population and on the women religious. Without selective schools, the sisters did not have the funds to support schools for the poor (Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 261).

<sup>110</sup> For a description of the education debates in the nineteenth-century, see Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 129-157; and Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1985).

stronger distinction between church and state and the ways in which their religious identities were compatible with secular labor.<sup>111</sup>

Even as the sisters' practices served to trouble understandings of the religious and the secular, this negotiation proved to be productive in critiquing American society. For example, the sisters employed the boundary between the secular and the religious to challenge racial prejudice. Because their mission asserts a calling to serve all people, the Sisters of St. Joseph opened a school for free Blacks in 1845 in St. Louis. Within a year, there were around 100 students enrolled and the sisters were being threatened in order to close the school.<sup>112</sup> After a mob attempted to break into their home in the middle of the night, both secular and religious authorities – the mayor and bishop – decided to close the school.<sup>113</sup> Due to anti-Catholicism and racism, the sisters were forced to stop educating free Blacks; however, they were allowed to continue religious education. This was a moment where the sisters could not successfully impact secular society because of the threat on their lives. Within the antebellum Protestant context of the South, the sisters had to choose the protection of their lives and community life or the secular education of the

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<sup>111</sup> Thus, the sisters sought to reject secularism as ideology, which would seek to restrict or eliminate the religious in the secular sphere. The sisters instead worked to maintain and expand their religious presence in the secular sphere in ways that are similar to the seventeenth-century attempt to sacralize the secular sphere. By 1895, a strict divide had been implemented between the religious and the secular, and the sisters were banned from teaching in public schools. While some scholars connect this to the Protestant context of the United States, it could also be that the sisters were not needed as much to fulfill this role in society. Byrne argues that religious sisters were banned from teaching in public schools because of the Protestant context of the United States. She does not, however, address whether there had been an expansion in the number of Protestant lay people who were willing and qualified to teach or how qualifications by state boards affected this decision. See Byrne, "Sisters of St. Joseph," 271.

<sup>112</sup> Dougherty notes that originally there were not many laws against educating free Blacks in Missouri. Some slaveholders worked to change this, and the Missouri Legislature passed a law prohibiting educating Negroes in 1847 (Dougherty, "The St. Louis Province," 123).

<sup>113</sup> Other religious women experienced similar threats because of their attempts to educate free Blacks and slaves. See Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 101.

free Blacks. Even though they were unsuccessful, the sisters willingly employed their religious identity and ministerial practices to challenge societal conceptions of race. As Byrne notes, the Sisters of St. Joseph returned to this ministry later in the century.<sup>114</sup>

The challenge to society was more tentatively pursued in relation to the Native American missions. With other Catholics in the nineteenth-century, the sisters challenged practices that favored Protestant missions. In 1869, the Sisters of St. Joseph gained federal funding for their Native American schools.<sup>115</sup> While following the government-sanctioned curriculum, the sisters sought other ways to support the Native American children and families. Central to this expansion was the sisters' willingness to engage Native American languages and cultures as well as allow for religious experimentation that valued their religious practices.<sup>116</sup> Indeed the religious status of the sisters even enabled them to seek funds from local businesses to support the Native Americans as well as resist governmental influence on how they should run their school.<sup>117</sup> While often

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<sup>114</sup> For instance, Bishop Augustin Verot brought Sisters of St. Joseph from Le Puy, France to educate the Blacks during Reconstruction: "The labors of the French sisters contributed toward making Georgia and Florida the scene of the only organized effort on the part of the Catholic Church for the education of Blacks during the Reconstruction period" (Byrne, "Sisters of St. Joseph," 260).

<sup>115</sup> This was an attempt on the part of Catholics to gain access to both federal funding for their missions as well as to support Catholic missions to Native Americans in opposition to Protestant missions. The federal board which oversaw the distribution of funds was filled by mostly lay Protestant men (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 109-110).

<sup>116</sup> Coburn and Smith note that the sisters learned native languages, participated in customs, and encouraged the Indian children to take part in or arrange Catholic religious practices (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 112-114). Helen Angela Hurley, CSJ notes that the sisters also served to redefine the religious in the Native American missions. Because of the shortage of priests in the missions, the sisters baptized when necessary and prepared individuals for the Sacraments (Helen Angela Hurley, CSJ, "The St. Paul Province," in *The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet*, eds. Dolorita Marie Dougherty, CSJ, et al. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1966), 334-336).

<sup>117</sup> The sisters would both ask for funds as well as beg in order to be able to support the school and the needs of the Native American community. They also resisted attempts from government officials to include corporal punishment in their schools. As Coburn and Smith assert, "Clearly, the sisters' educational and humanitarian roles crossed gender lines – they functioned as priest, politician, and doctor" (*Spirited Lives*, 115). For an analysis of these activities, see Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 113-115.

not direct challenges to the secular, these approaches served to disrupt the dominant Protestant approach to the missions, which associated forms of Protestantism with American secular society.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps more importantly, these approaches served to educate the sisters into a more inclusive and plural vision of secular and religious life by exposing them to diverse cultures as well as religious practices and beliefs.

As these previous examples also allude, the sisters' practices served to disrupt gender norms in the nineteenth-century. Arguably, it was often not the sisters' intent to move beyond the recognizable role of women in society, but rather their ministries demanded that they be able to take on new roles and expand their previous place in both the church and society. Their desire to serve diverse populations, attend to physical and spiritual needs, and ensure the continuation of their communities encouraged the sisters to challenge authority when it prevented their success. For example, the government failed to reimburse the sisters for their work as nurses during the Civil War.

Consequently, Mother de Chantal Keating, who was the Mother Superior, traveled from Wheeling, West Virginia to Washington, D.C. to argue for their need for payment.

Exceeding conventional gender roles, Mother de Chantal confronted the War Department

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<sup>118</sup> In her *Culture and Redemption*, Fessenden analyzes the ways in which the secular came to be defined by forms of Protestantism in the United States. Aligning Protestantism and the secular enabled other forms of religion to be excluded. As Fessenden argues,

When secularism in the United States is understood merely as the absence of religious faith, or neutrality in relation to religious traditions – for example, an avowedly secular United States is broadly accommodating of mainstream and evangelical Protestantism, minimally less so of Catholicism, unevenly so of Judaism, much less so of Islam, perhaps still less so of Native American religious practices that fall outside the bounds of the acceptably decorative or “spiritual” – then religion comes to be defined as “Christian” by default, and an implicit association between “American” and “Christian” is upheld even by those who have, one imagines, very little invested in its maintenance (Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*, 3).

to ensure the survival of the community.<sup>119</sup> Through instances like this, the sisters succeeded in impacting religious understandings of women's involvement in the secular world as well as secular understandings of both religious life and Catholicism.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, within their communities, the concept of the religious dominated life and negated or minimized one's secular experiences. While their ministry expanded notions of the secular and the religious, the community still needed to preserve their unity. Consequently, within the domain of the religious community, the achievements of a sister in the secular world were overlooked to reduce differences between the sisters themselves and to promote humility.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Mother de Chantal Keating brought with her an orphan and a soldier as well as the soldier's caretaker in order to manifest their need to the War Department (Ibid., 193).

<sup>120</sup> Margaret Thompson argues that religious sisters contributed to a shifting understanding of what it meant to be church. This understanding emphasized service and created an American Catholic Church which valued service in addition to the sacraments. This focus on service expands the American understanding of sacraments: "Through their schools, hospitals and other health care efforts, social welfare institutions, ecumenical outreaches to all who needed their help, indeed, through the very fact of their flexibility and amenability to adaptation, sisters helped to generate a Catholic understanding in which service was as essential as sacrament. More accurately, their service was and remains sacrament to generations of Americans, Catholic and non-Catholic alike" (Margaret Thompson, "Service as Sacrament: Sisters and the Meaning of American Catholicism," *Magistra* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 32.

<sup>121</sup> As Byrne notes, "Although immersed in the concerns of education, social work and health care for nineteenth-century Americans, within their own houses sisters had a separate culture, which operated according to its own dictates" (Byrne, "Sisters of St. Joseph," 263). See also Coburn and Smith's account of the education of religious sisters. They note that the emphasis on the community over the individual created an environment in which religious sisters often did not leave records of their personal achievements (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 67-95, especially 80-81). As scholars have noted, this emphasis on humility led to the bishops eliding the impact of the sisters in both the secular and religious spheres (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 81). As in their experiences during the Civil War, the sisters also had to deal with lay men and clerics' interpretation of their role as nurses. Additionally, the sisters created the Catholic Hospital Association and confronted these men's assumptions about the sisters' role in the CHA and the way they should be trained as nurses. Much of this conflict dealt with whether they should be trained in secular universities and how to best preserve the Catholic identity of the hospitals (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 189-219, especially 202, 219).

Despite this emphasis on humility, the women religious learned how to utilize their religious identity to gain more independence within the secular world.<sup>122</sup> As Coburn and Smith argue, the Sisters of St. Joseph drew on their vows of poverty, obedience and chastity to expand their role in society and to relate to those they served.<sup>123</sup> In particular, the vow of obedience enabled the Mother Superior to reject the unyielding demands of some bishops. The women religious often adapted their constitutions and their charitable works at the request of the local bishops who emphasized the needs of the church and obedience to the episcopacy over fidelity to their constitutions and obedience to their mother superior.<sup>124</sup> The experience of the Sisters of St. Joseph did not differ from that of other women religious; rather, they struggled to discern the correct balance between fidelity to their charism and obedience to the episcopacy and clergy. As American bishops invited the Sisters of St. Joseph to move into other areas of the United States, they questioned how to continue their mission in each new context. Because individual sisters professed the vow of obedience in community and were obedient to the Mother

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<sup>122</sup> Related to the emphasis on humility and vows is the organization of sisters within the congregation. Following the organization of the order in France, a distinction was made between lay sisters, who could not vote on community decisions and often fulfilled menial tasks, and choir sisters, who could vote, were more educated, and often worked as nurses and educators. This distinction sometimes prevented women from joining the order in the United States because it was seen as creating a distinction between the sisters that did not exist in American society. Eventually, this distinction was eliminated. See Byrne, "Sisters of St. Joseph," 266; and Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 84-5.

<sup>123</sup> As Coburn and Smith note, "their ability to adapt to the frequently hostile American milieu and the rugged and often primitive conditions they encountered was firmly grounded in their view of themselves as vowed religious women" (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives* 4). Thus, their vows impacted how they responded to the American context. Indeed, they argue, "Women religious, including the CSJs, learned to utilize their three vows (poverty, obedience, chastity) to justify, create, and control space for their public endeavors" (Ibid., 9). Coburn and Smith analyze the sisters' attempt to expand their role in society in terms of gender restrictions in the nineteenth-century. They argue that the Sisters of St. Joseph drew on religious traditions and images to challenge perceptions of gender and a religious woman's role in society (Ibid., 81-84).

<sup>124</sup> Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 70-1, 105-108, 116-117, 123-124, 206-207.

Superior, and then to Rome under papal approbation, the Mother Superior could decline to fulfill the bishop's request and pursue their mission as they saw fit.<sup>125</sup> This stance enabled the sisters to pursue practices which promoted their vision of the church and society.

To further this vision of the church, the sisters moved to unite the individual communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph into one congregation in 1860.<sup>126</sup> Asserting their common mission to secular society, the sisters sought to create a powerful network through which to promote their religious and secular goals. While the communities did not all unite at this time, the debate over unification encouraged the sisters to contemplate their relation to the institutional church and their role as women religious. Thus, as they decided whether to unite with other communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph or be under the authority of a local bishop, these women reassessed their understandings of the

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<sup>125</sup> Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 84. See also the account of the Sisters of St. Joseph at St. Patrick's parish in Denver. When the parish priest and bishop were fighting over the building of a new church, they both sought to pressure the sisters to side with them. When the sisters maintained neutrality and expressed their obedience to their superior, they threatened the sisters. The superior in St. Louis, Reverend Mother Agnes Gonzaga Ryan, withdrew the sisters from St. Patrick until the clergy stopped fighting (Ibid., 148-149).

<sup>126</sup> Had these communities been able to unite under the leadership of the Mother Superior, they could have created an expansive religious community with the ability to challenge both religious and secular authorities due to both the large numbers of sisters and the impact they had on American culture through their secular ministries. More independence from the bishops would have enabled the sisters to negotiate their relation to American secular society with less influence from the clergy. Indeed the sisters themselves sometimes expressed this idea: Sr. M. Irene wrote, "I re-echo with my whole heart and soul your ardent exclamation – If only there had been union from the beginning what a grand whole we would make! The strongest body of female Religious, I should say, in America. Alas! That St. Louis did not retain its hold on Philadelphia and the latter in turn keep Toronto and we in turn our daughter colonies. Perhaps in God's good time the mistakes may be remedied, even though you and I do not live to see it" (Quoted in Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 61). It is interesting to note that this re-union of the Sisters of St. Joseph has taken different forms in the twentieth-century both through the establishment of the United States Federation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, which serves to unite the sisters in mission and support while retaining the individual government of communities, and the Congregation of St. Joseph, which reconfigured seven religious communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph into one religious community.

religious and secular while asserting their ability as women to inform the decisions of their communities.

As they pursued these ministries, the Sisters of St. Joseph engaged diverse practices to promote their vision of the church and society. As we have seen, the sisters in France deployed participation in the local economy for financial support, to justify their presence in society, and for the sanctification of the neighbor. In contrast, the sisters who immigrated to the United States or joined the communities in the nineteenth century minimized their use of production. Whereas the Sisters of St. Joseph needed to justify their presence and form of religious life in seventeenth and eighteenth century France, Catholics invited the sisters to form communities in the United States. The church greatly needed their work in schools, hospitals, and other charitable works and accepted and valued their apostolic ministry. Nevertheless, the sisters justified their presence to their Protestant neighbors through their various ministries, which slowly changed the perception of women religious and Catholics in the United States. In particular, the positive evaluation of their educational undertakings succeeded in altering perceptions of Catholics as well as women religious.

Even as the sisters' ministries provided justification for their presence, they employed education in forms of production to further validate the goals of their ministries. The Sisters of St. Joseph continued to train young girls in sewing and needlework.<sup>127</sup> In fact, Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul, Minnesota were restricted to

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<sup>127</sup> See for example the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet from the St. Paul Province, Helen Angela Hurley, CSJ, "The St. Paul Province," 141-142.



teaching “the womanly arts” to older girls in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, this education did not necessarily prepare the girls for participation in local economies as the prior training in lace and ribbon-making did; rather, education in sewing more likely served to form young women into productive members of their families and, consequently, of society. Depending on the expectations of parents, girls learned to make and mend clothing or mastered more decorative handwork. Nonetheless, the financial concerns of parents encouraged the sisters to teach stenography and typing at their St. Joseph’s Female Academy of the City of St. Paul in the 1890s.<sup>129</sup> This type of education served to prepare students for participation in the economy.

In contrast, education in schools for Native Americans more directly served to train students to contribute to the local economy. In Graceville, Minnesota, St. Mary’s Academy received government funding to train students in “housekeeping, dairying, sewing, and knitting.”<sup>130</sup> While they also learned the common school curriculum, Native American students were formed into productive members of society to satisfy national expectations as well as provide them with a viable source of survival. The sisters were aware of and sought to address the wide spread poverty among Native Americans. While the national government and many Americans saw this education as a way to “Americanize” children, their parents often saw education in language and skills as a means of providing their children with a better future. Even as the sisters were steeped in the racism of the day, they subtly resisted eliminating Native American culture and

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>129</sup> For changes in the academy’s curriculum, see Hurley, “The St. Paul Province,” 170-173.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

language as they educated the students.<sup>131</sup> Thus, their ministries and the training in production they provided served to justify the sisters' presence to local Catholics, the Native Americans, and the national government.

Although they did not have to justify their presence or ministries to the same extent as the Sisters of St. Joseph in France, the sisters often experienced financial hardship that mirrored the experiences of prior communities as well as other American religious communities. Throughout the United States, women religious sought ways to survive. Often their schools and hospitals did not raise sufficient funds to support the sisters and these institutions. As the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore reveals, the sisters even begged; however, the bishops attempted to eliminate this practice.<sup>132</sup> In Central City, Colorado, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet financed the construction of the school building. To support themselves and their students, they begged from miners at the top of mine shafts.<sup>133</sup> Their precarious position necessitated that the sisters find resources and funding wherever they could.

As a result, the Sisters of St. Joseph, as well as other women religious, engaged in production to support themselves or to contribute to the local economy. Many sisters did their own farming, including ploughing their fields.<sup>134</sup> Production for the local economy

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<sup>131</sup> Letters between Father Gerard Terhorst, SJ and Reverend Mother St. John Facemaz demonstrate the sisters' willingness to learn the language of the Chippewa Indians (Dougherty, "The St. Louis Province," 124-125).

<sup>132</sup> Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 275. Begging was also prevalent in the South after the Civil War (Ibid., 216-217).

<sup>133</sup> Dougherty, "The St. Louis Province," 114.

<sup>134</sup> Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 36, 52, 60-1, 67-68, 135. The Loretto sisters struggled to complete this hard labor under the strict demands of their constitutions. Due to many deaths in their community, their rule was altered to adapt to the strenuous conditions of pioneering life (Ibid., 49-56).

included sewing, spinning, weaving, and book binding.<sup>135</sup> Sisters also participated in local economies by doing laundry.<sup>136</sup> The Sisters of Joseph mirrored these activities of other women religious. Having insufficient income and little support from local Catholics, the first sisters in Carondelet, Missouri, worked as seamstresses in the evening to provide for themselves.<sup>137</sup> As Ewens notes, “The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet found it necessary to apply for work in stores and factories in order to supplement their income. During the Mexican War they made shot-bags for a penny apiece.”<sup>138</sup> Similarly, the Sisters of St. Joseph in Lemay, Missouri worked their own land.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, the Sisters of St. Joseph as well as other women religious did not always receive compensation for their labor. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling did the washing and mending for the seminarians, College borders, and Cathedral without remuneration.<sup>140</sup> Consequently, the women religious relied on forms of production to supplement their income even as some of their labor was further identified as free labor for the church.

While the American sisters mirrored the use of production as forms of justification and financial support, they did not pursue these practices as a means of sanctification of the neighbor. The sisters in France employed religious readings and reflection during the times when students or incarcerated women learned lace- or ribbon-making. There is little evidence that the sisters in the United States followed this pattern.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 36, 47, 52, 60-61, 67-68, 275. Refusing to give up their contemplative life, the Carmelites bound prayer books including *The Pious Guide* by Mother Clare Joseph. This was the first prayer book printed in the United States (Ibid., 36).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>137</sup> Dougherty, “The St. Louis Province,” 63.

<sup>138</sup> Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America*, 135.

<sup>139</sup> Dougherty, “The St. Louis Province,” 75.

<sup>140</sup> Hoye, *Seasons of Nature and of Grace*, 53.

In their schools, the sisters included religious instruction as well as training in handwork including sewing and knitting.<sup>141</sup> Rather than combining these activities to employ production as a means of sanctification, education in specific subjects appears to have separate allotted times. This change likely occurred because the sisters were adjusting to educational standards in the United States as well as national debates about the role of religion in education. The sisters continued to emphasize the sanctification of the neighbor through religious education; however, they did not assert a religious basis for secular activities. Instead of pursuing production or training in production as a means of sanctification, the sisters deployed these activities as a means of survival and as further justification for their ministries and presence in American society.

Through their practices and commitment to the church and society, the sisters demonstrated their willingness to adapt to the American society and desire to impact understandings of secular and religious life. While their attempts did not always prove successful, they illustrate the way a religious group can engage the relation of the religious and the secular to expand understandings of these terms and challenge societal conceptions of race and gender. Furthermore, the sisters' engagement with production forms a basis from which to evaluate the practices of sisters in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### ***Mission of the Church, Charism of the Community***

The Sisters of St. Joseph and other apostolic congregations received ecclesial approval in 1900. It was only then that Pope Leo XIII asserted that women and men

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<sup>141</sup> Depending on the location, they or a local priest taught the catechism. For the experiences of the sisters in St. Paul, see Hurley, "The St. Paul Province," 170, 171, 178.

living under simple vows were Religious.<sup>142</sup> While their communities had lived religious life for three centuries, this ecclesial recognition afforded apostolic congregations an approved status in the church and in relation to its mission. This validated the Sister of St Joseph's efforts to combine devotion to God and ministry to society. Yet the twentieth century would again disrupt the location of the Religious and the role of sisters in the Roman Catholic Church and American society. As they moved into the twentieth century, the sisters encountered diverse social and ecclesial movements which challenged them to reconsider how they lived out their role as women religious.<sup>143</sup> Professionalization, social movements, and the Second Vatican Council compelled the women to assess and shape their practices to manifest their ecclesiology in a new ecclesial and social context.

In the early twentieth century, the Catholic Church remained an immigrant church in the United States. Sisters sought to serve the needs of Catholics, especially in parochial schools. In contrast to the earlier praise for their educational institutions, many sisters were ill prepared to teach; many young sisters possessed only an elementary education. While they were coached by older sisters, they often learned through the process of teaching. Additional training took place during the summer; however, a sister likely

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<sup>142</sup> Donovan, *Sisterhood as Power*, 19-20. Donovan observes that Pope Leo XIII's approval of apostolic congregations was issued on 8 December 1900 in the Apostolic Constitution *Conditae a Christo*. She further notes that the Code of Canon Law of 1917 affirmed the status of these apostolic congregations in Canon 488 (Ibid.)

<sup>143</sup> As Coburn and Smith observe, after the 1920s the sisters' ability to negotiate the secular-religious boundary was impeded by both changes in the secular and religious societies. The United States was no longer classified as a mission, which further emphasized the authority of the bishop. An increased emphasis on training and qualification also affected the sisters' ability to impact secular society (Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 225). Changes in the end of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries continue to impact how religious sisters negotiate the relation of the religious and secular.

earned her first degree over the course of twenty summers.<sup>144</sup> As Jay Dolan observes, this training occurred within the religious order and often did not engage new pedagogical methods or theories.<sup>145</sup> To answer the need for women's education, Catholic University opened their teacher's college in 1911, and other colleges soon followed suit.<sup>146</sup>

Nevertheless, educational standards shifted and challenged the credentials of religious and lay teachers. Recognizing the need for quality Catholic education, Bertrande Meyers, DC wrote her dissertation on "The Education of Sisters." Published in 1941, her book argued for adequate training for sister teachers and urged each religious community to organize its own junior college to educate sisters in their community's spirit.<sup>147</sup> By the mid-1940s, the National Education Association (1946) and the National Catholic Educational Association (1948) formed commissions to research and improve teacher education.<sup>148</sup> In its Teacher Education Section, the National Catholic Educational Association specifically turned its focus to the education of sister teachers. In *From Framework to Freedom*, Beane observes, "Two specific reasons for this concern which appeared to stand out above the rest were the interest of parochial teachers not to be outdone by their public counterparts and the interest of a select group of sisters in raising

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<sup>144</sup> Marjorie Noterman Beane, *From Framework to Freedom: A History of the Sister Formation Conference* (New York and Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1993), 3.

<sup>145</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 287. Unlike the sisters in seventeenth and eighteenth century France, the American sisters did not transcend congregational boundaries in order to benefit from each other's teaching strategies and knowledge. In contrast, teaching orders in Europe communicated with one another, often sending nuns to other communities to train or be trained in diverse pedagogies (Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 147-156).

<sup>146</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 288.

<sup>147</sup> Beane, *From Framework to Freedom*, 3.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

the professional standards of their own sisters.”<sup>149</sup> Those who benefited from higher education or led their religious community in various leadership positions knew that they had to ensure the proper training of their fellow sisters while maintaining the spirit of religious life.

To further respond to these concerns, the National Catholic Educational Association formed the Sister Formation Conference (1954) to address the challenge of professionalization within religious life.<sup>150</sup> As this organization drew women religious together to address their needs and future, the Sister Formation Conference affected a change in the practices of women religious. As Lora Ann Quiñonez, CDP and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN argue:

First, it converted American sisters into the most highly educated group of nuns in the church and placed them among the most highly educated women in the United States. Second, it became the vehicle for the transmission of common ideas and a common language about change in religious life. Third, it effected the first mass shift in the worldview of American sisters.<sup>151</sup>

No longer would young sisters move directly from the novitiate into the classroom; rather, communities emphasized extensive education which attended to the sisters’

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>150</sup> A 1952 survey of the major superiors of apostolic congregations involved in education revealed the extent of the challenge. In addition to observing the challenges of educating the sister teachers and staffing an ever-increasing number of Catholic schools, the major superiors revealed that they could not afford this education and that communities had never been paid to educate the women religious as teachers (Beane, *From Framework to Freedom*, 15). The survey responses themselves reveal the extent to which communities were concerned with professionalization and the problems it posed. Eighty percent of the apostolic communities who received the survey responded (Ibid., 14-15). In the 1950s, the sisters were earning on average \$30 a month. This amount could not cover the needs of the sister, the aging members of the community, and her education (Ibid., 17). Nonetheless, there was widespread resistance to assisting the sisters in this process: pastors complained about the prospect of increased salaries for the sisters as well as the void that lay teachers would have to fill with even higher salaries (Ibid., 16).

<sup>151</sup> Lora Ann Quiñonez, CDP and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 6.

professional and spiritual education.<sup>152</sup> Beyond attending to the individual sister's education, the Sister Formation Conference drew the women out of their individual communities and into communication with other women religious. Information and inspiration circulated during meetings, workshops, at juniorate colleges, and in the *Sister Formation Bulletin*, which included news about the conference, articles on education, formation, and church documents.<sup>153</sup> Consequently, apostolic women religious turned to practices of dialogue and discernment to consider how best to respond to the needs of the church and society. These practices shaped the way they responded to calls for professionalization in the fields of education and healthcare.

Moreover, this call for professionalization coincided with ecclesial movements, which urged the women to consider their ecclesiology and relation to the church's mission. In particular, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) offered a reinterpretation of the church as well as called for a renewal of religious life. The Council's document on religious life, *Perfectae caritatis*, urged religious communities to update their customs, practices, and ministries to more fully serve Christ and society:

Religious communities should continue to maintain and fulfill the ministries proper to them. In addition, after considering the needs of the Universal Church and individual dioceses, they should adapt them to the requirements of time and place, employing appropriate and even new programs and abandoning those

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<sup>152</sup> For how this educational program developed, see Beane, *From Framework to Freedom*, especially 55-70. Beane addresses the development of curriculum in the Everett Workshop. She argues that this plan placed an emphasis on the quality of education, specialization of topic, and exposure to extra-curricular activities like art and music. The plan also included theological training (Ibid., 69-70). This curriculum and its vision further developed after Pius XII published his apostolic constitution *Sedes sapientiae* (31 May 1956), which addressed the training of priests and monks. Cardinal Arcadio Larraona, CMF and Father Elio Gambari, SMM applied the apostolic constitution to the formation of women religious (Ibid., 74-75).

<sup>153</sup> For the development of the *Sister Formation Bulletin*, see Ibid., 39-43. For the impact of juniorate colleges, see Ibid., 74-75.



works which today are less relevant to the spirit and authentic nature of the community.

The missionary spirit must under all circumstances be preserved in religious communities. It should be adapted, accordingly, as the nature of each community permits, to modern conditions so that the preaching of the Gospel may be carried out more effectively in every nation.<sup>154</sup>

This call for renewal challenged religious communities to resist accommodation to modernity without assessing its impact on their forms of religious life. After the Second Vatican Council, documents like *Evangelica testificatio* (Apostolic Exhortation On the Renewal of the Religious Life) reflected on the evangelical councils (vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience) to retain essential features of religious life but to enable a fruitful response to modern society.<sup>155</sup>

Due in part to the Second Vatican Council's call to examine religious life, women religious reflected on their role in the church and actively pursued a new vision for religious life. Two related changes affected how women religious manifested this new vision after the conclusion of the Council. First, after discerning their response to changes in the church, a large number of women religious left their communities.<sup>156</sup> This in part compelled the second change: they increasingly questioned and reformulated what it meant for them to live in community and serve the church.<sup>157</sup> Thus women religious

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<sup>154</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, § 20.

<sup>155</sup> See Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio: Apostolic Exhortation, On the Renewal of the Religious Life According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council* (29 June 1971), Vatican Website, especially §13-39, accessed 14 March 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19710629\\_evangelica-testificatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19710629_evangelica-testificatio_en.html).

<sup>156</sup> Marie Augusta Neal, SNDdeN notes that many reasons including the rate of change, conflict in communities, and a desire to actively work for social justice contributed to the sisters' choice to leave their communities (Neal, "Ministry of American Catholic Sisters," 237).

<sup>157</sup> Lora Ann Quiñonez, DCP, and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN argue that this questioning began before the Second Vatican Council in the Sister Formation Movement, which was active already in the early 1950s. The Sister Formation Movement sought to better educate young sisters for ministry, specifically as educators, and combined spirituality and professional ministry. Responding to the needs of the sisters as

assessed their spirituality and ministry as well as community governance to determine whether they should alter the emphasis or direction of their religious life.

One aspect of analysis included returning to the charism (spirituality and mission) of their religious founders.<sup>158</sup> Religious communities researched the documents from the time of their foundation to rediscover, reclaim, and re-apply their charism to their contemporary situation. This return to founding documents and movements sought to productively inspire renewed interest in living out their specific charisms. As Terrence Tilley asserts, “To be faithful members of a religious tradition is to engage in *traditio* faithfully, the practice of passing to the future our inheritance from the past.”<sup>159</sup> Called by the Council to return to their founders, women religious sought knowledge of and faithfulness to the charism and practices of their founder.

For the Sisters of St. Joseph, this reclamation included study of the original constitution and the history of the sisters in France, including their ministry to the poor and tradition of lace-making. For many sisters, this reclamation was a revelatory experience.<sup>160</sup> One member of the Congregation of St. Joseph asserted: “I look at how

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well as the apostolate, this movement easily informed the women’s religious response to the call for renewal of religious life. See Quiñonez and Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters*, 3-30.

<sup>158</sup> *Perfectae caritatis* asserts, “The adaptation and renewal of religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time. . . . It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore let their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions—all of which make up the patrimony of each institute—be faithfully held in honor” (Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, § 2).

<sup>159</sup> Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 185.

<sup>160</sup> Doris Gottemoeller argues that this reclamation of a founder and his or her work was not as powerful for religious communities whose founders were uninvolved, apathetic about the communities they founded, or revealed negative characteristics (Doris Gottemoeller, “Religious Life for Women: From Enclosure to

people have embraced mission and charism and the documents, and how we continue to use those documents, and how they continue to be opened to us as a mystical expression as opposed to a discipline. It's an amazing thing."<sup>161</sup> While they previously were unfamiliar with the history of their religious community, sisters came to value it as a resource for their faith, ministry, and the future direction of their religious life. Indeed some sisters express a desire for all novices to read and master the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in France.<sup>162</sup> For many members of the Congregation of St. Joseph, knowledge of this history is essential for the future of their religious community. Often drawing on their congregational histories, women religious reframe previous or create new practices to respond to the needs of the church and society.<sup>163</sup>

Thus, the reclamation of their foundation affected how the sisters' assessed their charism as well as how they interpreted their vocation as apostolic women religious. Their spiritual and professional training urged them to discern the meaning of their ministry. How did ministry to the dear neighbor relate to their religious commitment? Resisting ministry as mere financial support of a religious community, many women religious intricately relate ministry to the mission of the church. According to Mary Ann Donovan, SC, "A working definition of ministry is public activity, flowing from

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Immersion," in *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations*, eds. Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 236-237.

<sup>161</sup> Sister Julia [pseudonym], 17 May 2012. Sister Julia reflected that some sisters involved in this process of reclamation wondered if anything would come of their effort. She contended that this research had made a difference for the Sisters of St. Joseph.

<sup>162</sup> In particular, they value and recommend Marguerite Vacher's masterful study of the early Sisters of St. Joseph in France. See Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*.

<sup>163</sup> This reclamation is evident in the Congregation of St. Joseph's use of lace to manifest their unity with other Sisters of St. Joseph as well as to recall their justice commitments. For an analysis of these practices, see 84-89, 96, 147-149.

discipleship, leading to the building up of the Christian community for the sake of the kingdom.”<sup>164</sup> Arising from their position in the church, the women focus their ministerial activities on extending the mission of the church. For the Congregation of St. Joseph, their mission further emphasizes the goal of unity in Christ.<sup>165</sup> Their ministry must arise from their identity as vowed women religious and seek to manifest Christ in the world. This consequently raises questions about the relationship of vowed life to the secular world.

According to Sandra Schneiders, IHM, Religious are called to create an alternate world through engagement with the present world. Instead of escaping or rejecting the world, Schneiders argues that Religious create this new world through engagement: “They choose to live in the Reign of God. The construction of that world, which is not simply a vision of reality but also an institutional incarnation of that vision in the time and place in which they find themselves, is accomplished through the living of the vows.”<sup>166</sup> Schneiders elaborates the purpose of ministry as promoting the church’s mission. This mission is “a global project,” “universal in its application,” seeks to “announce and effect the Reign of God specifically by their struggle against moral evil,” and “is not exclusively the work of the Church.”<sup>167</sup> Articulated in this way, ministry in service to the mission of the church must promote the Gospel as well as address injustice. As Schneiders contends, “Ministry. . . is about the eradication of the root cause of suffering in this world and the mediation into this world of the absolute love of God

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<sup>164</sup> Donovan, *Sisterhood as Power*, 24.

<sup>165</sup> For a discussion about the Congregation’s mission, see 10-12 above.

<sup>166</sup> Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 104.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-139.

poured forth in Jesus' paschal mystery."<sup>168</sup> In other words, ministry is interconnected with ecclesiology. Consequently, the religious identity of women religious arises from and seeks to promote their vision of the church.

As the Sisters of St. Joseph reassessed their form of religious life, many sisters moved out of education and hospital work to pursue diverse ministries including pastoral ministry, spiritual direction, and work for peace and justice.<sup>169</sup> By doing so, women religious gained more knowledge of society and encountered diverse social movements. While women religious were already engaging these movements, the Second Vatican Council affirmed this direction: "Institutes should promote among their members an adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they live in and of the needs of the Church. In such a way, judging current events wisely in the light of faith and burning with apostolic zeal, they may be able to assist men [sic] more effectively."<sup>170</sup> As a result, social movements, including the Civil Rights Movement and the women's movement, often confronted individual sisters or entire congregations with the realities of social injustice.

Beyond an earlier focus on education or healthcare, the Congregation of St. Joseph now extends their ministerial activities, as well as prayer lives, to address diverse social issues including poverty, racism, capital punishment, domestic violence, human

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>169</sup> For reflections by women religious on these changes in religious life and their ministerial activities, see Ann Patrick Ware, *Midwives of the Future: American Sisters Tell Their Story* (Kansas City, Missouri: Leaven Press, 1985).

<sup>170</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, § 2d.

trafficking, immigration, and environmental destruction.<sup>171</sup> These justice commitments were not always simple correlations to the sisters' religious practices or prior beliefs. Engaging secular society and the specific injustices people encountered challenged the women to reassess their understanding of the Gospel and their vocation to manifest the church in the world.<sup>172</sup> As they discerned the shape of apostolic religious life in the modern world, the sisters expanded their understanding of ministry to correlate to their vision of a just church.

Consequently, the Congregation of St. Joseph's congregational life and ministries demonstrate the sisters' expansive notion of the church. As evident in their *Generous Promises*, their own discernment led them to commit to social and ecological justice as central to their ecclesiology.<sup>173</sup> For the Congregation of St. Joseph as well as other women's religious communities, reflection on their practices continue as they respond to social and ecclesial movements, which urge them to reconsider the role of women religious, the meaning of the church, and their relation to secular society. Deploying diverse practices, including visual practices, the sisters respond to these challenges and further articulate their vision of the church. As we will see, the Congregation of St. Joseph builds on the practices of their prior sisters and demonstrates the productive use of visual practices to impact societal values and the pursuit of justice.

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<sup>171</sup> The author of *Dead Man Walking*, Helen Prejean, CSJ powerfully recounts her journey to eliminate capital punishment. For her reflection on how she came to commit to this, see Helen Prejean, CSJ, "Would Jesus Pull the Switch?" *Salt of the Earth* 17 (March-April 1997): 10-16.

<sup>172</sup> For an analysis of how Roman Catholic women religious manifest their environmental commitments, see Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>173</sup> For a discussion of these *Generous Promises*, see 11-12 above.

## Chapter 2: Constructed for Unity: The Visual Practice of Space

Throughout the United States, the Sisters of St. Joseph and other women religious constructed buildings in order to house their growing communities and to serve the surrounding society. Called to minister in a particular location by the local Catholic bishop, these women often received little financial support as they struggled to provide education and hospital care. Constructing a school or hospital enabled the women to provide a needed service; yet, they frequently did so with no secure funding.<sup>1</sup> Thus as women religious expanded their mission in the United States, their use of space asserted their commitment and relation to the Catholic Church and the nation. In the twenty-first century, the Congregation of St. Joseph continues to draw on their diverse spaces to promote their mission. The flexibility of their constitution and commitment to serve the dear neighbor enables them to shift their ministry, location, and use of space in order to assist those in need.

In order to fully articulate and embody their mission, the Congregation of St. Joseph employs the space of their motherhouses, chapels, and ministry centers to visualize their mission for unity and justice. To examine the relation of the sisters' visual practices and use of space, I will first address how current research on religious spaces relates to the Congregation's spaces and their identity as a women's religious community. Second, I will analyze the Congregation's use of space to affirm and disseminate their

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<sup>1</sup> As one sister noted, knowing that their early sisters constructed buildings often with no secure funding demonstrates their trust and desire to serve. She commented, "The one thing I have found this summer and last summer with the archives is the absolute total sacrifice of the first sisters. I mean to put up a building and know that you don't have a penny in the bank. Knowing that they trust in God to take care of it" (Sister Susan, 15 August 2011).

common history and desire to promote the role of women in society. Third, I explore the Congregation's use of images and objects within particular spaces to impact their present ministries. Fourth, I explore the visual archive created through renovated spaces, commissioned art pieces, and the sisters' artwork that seeks to educate and encourage the viewer to commit to the sisters' charism and mission of unity. Next, I examine the influence of the Congregation's chapels on their religious belief, charism, and mission for unity and justice. Finally, I attend to the use of public spaces, which intend to unify the Congregation's visual practices and extend this vision to those outside of their religious community.

### ***Changing Spaces: Gender and Religious Life***

The history of the Congregation of St. Joseph incorporates diverse locations and various types of spaces. Seven communities reconfigured into the Congregation of St. Joseph in 2007. Each of these communities possesses different types of property including land and buildings dating from the early twentieth to early twenty-first century. While some previous buildings were destroyed by fire, natural disasters or the passage of time, they continue to be present in various forms in new spaces. Buildings previously known as the motherhouse or convent now bear the name of "Center" because they house more than the women religious. Prior to the 1970s many of these spaces were the homes of the women religious – the locations in which they lived, prayed, and prepared for their ministerial lives as teachers and nurses. Some of these motherhouses served as permanent homes for the women; others welcomed back women after they had been missioned to a parish school for a year.



As the women religious left these occupations, they increasingly moved out of the motherhouse in order to live closer to the parishes and offices in which they work. Now as the women religious minister as pastoral associates, social workers, spiritual directors, and teachers, they have reconceived the space of the motherhouse to house new ministries as well as to provide for the needs of aging sisters. The space of a motherhouse shifts as libraries become bookstores, wings are constructed to include hospital care, and hallways display works from local artists. The reconstruction of these spaces demonstrates the Congregation's engagement with their meaning and influence on the sisters' lives and ministries.

Accordingly, the shifting nature of the motherhouse demonstrates the relation of the Congregation's vocation and ministries to these spaces. As Christopher Tilley asserts, "These spaces, as social productions, are always centred in relation to human agency and are amenable to reproduction or change because their constitution takes place as part of the day-to-day *praxis* or practical activity of individuals and groups in the world. They are meaningfully constituted in relation to human agency and activity."<sup>2</sup> Thus practices and space interact and assist in shaping the form and meaning of each other. Recognizing the call to respond to the needs of individuals and society, the sisters resist static conceptions of space and engage their ministry centers and chapels to affirm their

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (Oxford and Providence: Berg, 1994), 10.

religious beliefs, encourage their religious commitment, and promote their vision of the church and society.<sup>3</sup>

This production of space, its meaning, and influence has been widely attended to by scholars. Scholars such as Gretchen Buggeln, Richard Kieckhefer, and Jay M. Price have analyzed the development of modern worship and community spaces.<sup>4</sup> Much of this research focuses on spaces predominantly used by lay members of Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations. As narrated by these scholars, modern architectural and social movements impacted the construction and corresponding influence of these religious spaces. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, churches were often constructed to attend to the worship style of particular ethnic groups. In the postwar years, many worship and congregational spaces were built to fulfill the needs of a growing population, movement to the suburbs, and their desire for social as well as worship spaces.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In similar ways, Maureen H. O’Connell’s study of the community muralism movement in Philadelphia addresses the transformative possibilities of deploying artwork in public spaces to address issues of poverty, racism, and violence. In *If These Walls Could Talk*, O’Connell analyzes how members of society crossed boundaries to discuss particular issues and create murals for the walls of religious and secular spaces. As O’Connell contends, “Storytelling, deep listening, imagining, humility, and consensus building transform these sites into constructive spaces of contact among communities – both among the members of the community who create these images as well as with folks from outside communities who venture into otherwise bypassed communities in order to experience this art firsthand” (Maureen H. O’Connell, *If These Walls Could Talk: Community Muralism and the Beauty of Justice* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>4</sup> For their analysis of sacred and social spaces used by Christian communities, see Gretchen Buggeln, “Form, Function, and Failure in Postwar Protestant Christian Education Buildings,” in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 193-213; Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Jay M. Price, *Temples for a Modern God: Religious Architecture in Postwar America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Price, *Temples for a Modern God*, 10, 13-14.

Nevertheless, these studies focused on the development of parish churches and do not consider the way in which religious orders or secular institutes employed space to address their religious goals. Furthermore, these studies do not offer close attention to the impact of gender on these spaces, their design, or their influence. In *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History*, Teresa Berger argues that scholars need to attend to the impact of gender. Focusing on the early church, Berger examines the intersection of sacred spaces, gendered bodies, and theological thought. She argues, “no gender-free space exists in liturgical history, not least because Christian communities emerged out of, and developed in, cultural contexts in which space was clearly gendered.”<sup>6</sup> In her analysis of spaces, Berger challenges static understandings of sacred space as public, ecclesial spaces. Instead, she investigates the shifting nature of these spaces (profane to sacred) and argues that household or otherwise non-public spaces potentially become sacred.<sup>7</sup>

Berger does not limit gender to a simplistic division of male and female. She attends to the complex ways in which gender is interpreted in relation to age, social and marital class, and religious vocation, including the presence of eunuchs in sacred spaces and challenges to gender norms by women and men religious.<sup>8</sup> According to Berger, acknowledging this history will assist the church as it examines issues around gender and sexuality: “Contemporary struggles have a genealogy in the life of the church and

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<sup>6</sup> Teresa Berger, *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History* (Farnham, Surrey, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2011), 64.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. Berger resists a simple public/private dichotomy by examining the domestic sphere as the space of early worship (*Ibid.*, 42). The intersection of gender norms and the definition of sacred space impacted whether women or men would be excluded from particular spaces. In contrast to public, ecclesial spaces, gender differently affected women’s convents where men were welcomed into their sacred spaces (*Ibid.*, 65-66).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-2, 178-179.

deserve to be seen as part of this larger whole, namely a history of liturgical life and practice that has never been devoid of gender as both a fundamental given and also as deeply contested.”<sup>9</sup> Attending to the impact of gender on the use of space and church practice thus supplements our understanding of the history of the church as well as promotes greater theological reflection on the construction and use of spaces used by religious groups.

In the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, gender continues to affect the conception and use of spaces constructed for and deployed by women’s religious communities. Nonetheless, the impact of gender affects the spaces of the Congregation in different ways than it would have affected the spaces of previous women religious. As they are not a contemplative order, the Congregation of St. Joseph leaves the space of the convent as well as invites others into this space.<sup>10</sup> While this was not common practice prior to the Second Vatican Council, contemporary apostolic women religious often welcome guests into the motherhouse where few spaces would be restricted from the vision of others. Opened up to the sisters and those outside of the community, these spaces offer subtle and explicit ways to visualize their history and mission.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>10</sup> The space of the convent historically has been used to restrict and extend vision. In *Invisible City*, Helen Hills examines how the architecture of convents and churches promoted the nuns’ vision as well as their religious and social position. The raised location of the nuns’ choir enabled them to see into the church without being seen. See Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially 139-160.

### *A Common Visual Thread*

After the Second Vatican Council, religious communities researched the founding documents and events of their communities in order to return to the charism of their founders and revive the direction of their communities. As *Perfectae caritatis* argues, “The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.”<sup>11</sup> Compelled by the Council, the Sisters of St. Joseph sought knowledge of their earliest sisters, ministries, and missionary work in the United States. Individual sisters, as well as groups formed within and across local boundaries, researched and educated other women religious into this shared history.

As a result, the Sisters of St. Joseph gained a deeper awareness and appreciation for their charism and the history of their religious order. They learned that as the Sisters of St. Joseph accepted missions to the United States in the nineteenth century, they struggled to survive as women religious separated from their motherhouses in France. Over time the communities in the United States broke apart from those in France. This often took place after bitter struggles about the needs of the sisters in the United States and their vows of obedience to their superiors as well as familial connections with those in France.<sup>12</sup> After the Second Vatican Council and the reclamation of their historical foundations, congregations recognized the benefit of reuniting with a common purpose or focus. Consequently, separated communities reconciled and seek means of demonstrating

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<sup>11</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, §2.

<sup>12</sup> The Médaille congregation separated from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Bourg, France as recently as 1977. For their history, see Congregation of St. Joseph, “Medaille,” Our Founding Communities, accessed 11 February 2014, [http://www.csjoseph.org/medaille\\_louisiana.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/medaille_louisiana.aspx).

their shared histories and charism. As Sister Julia noted, “We were able to establish our own identity. We were able to be who we needed to be, and now we need to be able to be with the world. That respects both and knows that there is a core that we share that is the same language that we all speak.”<sup>13</sup> Published statements and communal acts solidified these recommitments by emphasizing a common mission for unity and dedication to the dear neighbor.

And yet, their search for connections confronts the physical distance that separates each community. Sisters of St. Joseph in France, Louisiana, West Virginia, and Kansas remain physically separated. For the Congregation of St. Joseph, this distance even affects their own Congregation as sisters live and minister at great distances from each other. As they seek to create unity within the Congregation and promote it in society, the sisters contend with the effects of distance and their attachments to particular locations.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the Congregation consciously seeks to minimize this distance and educate members about the physical and remembered places occupied by each community. As Judith Garber argues, identity and place interact. Consequently, identity can serve as a way to unite a group whether locally or across distances.<sup>15</sup> For the women

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<sup>13</sup> Sister Julia [pseudonym], 17 May 2012.

<sup>14</sup> According to McClintock Fulkerson, the past continues to impact the formation of present places: “Places are *emergent* realities or practices. Dependent upon elements of previous places and times, places contain these elements as *residuals* in their new synchronic formation” (*Places of Redemption*, 34). Consequently, the past continues to exert an influence on the present shape of places. As we will see the Congregation of St. Joseph deploys this presence of the past to shape their own and others’ understanding of their form of religious life and commitment to the church.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Garber “Defining Feminist Community: Place, Choice, and the Urban Politics of Difference,” in *The Community Development Reader*, ed. James DeFilippis and Susan Saegert (New York: Routledge, 2008), 299. Garber goes on to critique the concept of community for the ways in which it can exclude diversity and prevent political action. She argues for “communities of purpose for mutual responsibility and cooperation” (*Ibid.*, 301). These communities could be likened to the sisters’ Mission Circles and Renewed Local Communities in which they pray and reflect on their personal and communal vocation.

religious, their common identity as Sisters of St. Joseph serves to locate them in broader social and ecclesial networks. Consequently, their desire to affirm their common foundation from the Sisters of St. Joseph in France affects how they employ their spaces to demonstrate their identity and religious commitments.

In the Congregation, each center emphasizes particular aspects of their common history; however, all of the centers acknowledge the early sisters in France and their role as lace-makers. The prevalence of lace demonstrates its reclaimed position in the Congregation. Each center displays lace, often from Le Puy, France, in a prominent area as a visual reminder of the history of the sisters in France.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tipton, Indiana display a circular piece of lace on a blue mat. An inscription displayed with the lace asserts:

#### Threads and Spaces

The Sisters of St. Joseph were founded in LePuy, France in 1650. The first Sisters supported themselves by making lace. For this reason, lace continues to hold a special place in the hearts of the Sisters today. It is among the threads and spaces of lace that the patterns of life are created.

This piece of lace, made in LePuy, was a gift from the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph, and was presented in June 2000 to the Tipton congregation in recognition of 350 years serving the *'dear neighbor.'*

Our very special thanks to Phyllis Manda, CSJ, Executive Director of the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph.

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<sup>16</sup> Sister Ruth noted that each center displays the lace and that it was a gift from the Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy, France or the United States Federation of Sisters of Saint Joseph (Sister Ruth [pseudonym], 15 March 2013).



**Figure 2: Lace Displayed in the Tipton Ministry Center, Tipton, Indiana  
(Photograph by author)**

As it is displayed in the main hallway off of the foyer, the lace continually interacts with passersby. Whether pointed out to guests, examined by visitors, or glanced at by the sisters themselves, the lace connects the Tipton community to the Federation, to the Sisters of St. Joseph in France, and to the individuals who made this lace as well as to their earliest sisters who worked on similar designs.

This visual display reminds the contemporary sisters of the intricate, creative work in which the founding sisters participated and its relation to their spiritual lives. Similarly, the sisters in Wichita display the bobbins with which the sisters would have made the lace, and several of the centers display images of the kitchen in which the first sisters worked as lace makers. In these ways, they value the founding sisters' commitment to creative, productive labor and to educating women and girls in these



skills.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the sisters in Cleveland, Ohio connected this aspect of their history to their spiritual practices in the design of their chapel. As one enters the main chapel, a wall separates the chapel from a side chapel for the tabernacle. Much of this wall consists of sliding panes of glass on which is etched a lace pattern. Thus, this aspect of their history serves to visually remind the sisters and their visitors of their history as well as their dedication to the Eucharist.



**Figure 3: Glass Doors Inscribed with Lace, Cleveland Ministry Center Chapel, Cleveland, Ohio (Photograph by author)**

Nevertheless, this lace does more for the sisters than remind them of their common history; it visually recalls the charism and mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph, especially their focus on social justice. One sister stopped in front of a framed piece of lace and whispered, “You know, our first sisters taught prostitutes how to make lace.”<sup>18</sup> The lace serves as a way to remember and reclaim the original dedication to women who were excluded from respectable, French society. Consequently, the sisters identify lace

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<sup>17</sup> Many of the sisters commented on the importance of this early activity. They reflected on making lace and ribbon as a form of work, a service to the society, and as a direct ministry to women in need.

<sup>18</sup> Sister Maria [pseudonym], 23 May 2012.

with gendered ministry or service focused on other women in society. Framed lace makes these women present in the ministry centers and acknowledges the sisters' willingness to disrupt other social norms in order to challenge capital punishment, human trafficking, immigration laws, and poverty. Serving the dear neighbor urges these women religious to exceed expectations of their gender, age, and vocation. Visual displays of lace consequently encourage the sisters to remember earlier sisters' work for social justice and to commit themselves to this common cause. As they trace the history of the lace and display it in their buildings, they demonstrate their connection to the other congregations of the Sisters of St. Joseph and manifest their commitment to justice.

While framed lace serves to connect the sisters to a common history and ministry to the dear neighbor, a banner manifests the recent formation of the Congregation of St. Joseph and seeks to shape the future of the new community. This blue, cosmic themed banner employs symbolism to depict the identity and goals of the Congregation. Seven stars and seven circles moving toward a center represent the seven founding communities.<sup>19</sup> The cosmic image recalls their mission for unity as well as the commitment to ecological justice that appears in their Generous Promises.<sup>20</sup> One employee of the Congregation reflected on this use of art to represent the Congregation. Noting that "they choose art to express who they are," the employee asserted, "This is

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<sup>19</sup> Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011. Sisters likewise commented on the Congregation's logo and its connection to unity and their ecological commitments: "I love how we have used art in our new congregation. . . . I love the logo that we use and the inclusivity of everything. Our emphasis on care of the Earth, care of Earth, our Mother Earth is so permeating throughout everything we do, and you see the connecting of everything in the universe. We are one, and the symbolism we use is so powerful, I think, to show that" (Sister Ursula [pseudonym], 28 July 2011).

<sup>20</sup> The commitment to Earth is central to the Generous Promises. For an analysis of the Generous Promises and their relation to the Congregation of St. Joseph's mission for unity, see 10-12, 141-143.

what we cannot let go of in the process of becoming one [congregation].”<sup>21</sup> The sisters historically relied on artistic practices in the form of words and images to manifest their role in the church and dedication to serving the dear neighbor. The present dependence on the banner as well as other images succeeds in continuing the sisters’ visual practices in order to promote justice. Accordingly, this banner serves to visually connect the seven founding communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph and their individual histories.



**Figure 4: Side Altar and Congregation of St. Joseph Banner, Holy Family Chapel, Nazareth Center, Nazareth, Michigan (Photograph by author)**

Even as they deploy images and objects to emphasize their history and mission, the Congregation engages their spaces to elucidate their identity as women religious and their corresponding role in the church. Often without words, these images seek to offer their mission to people visiting these spaces. For example, in Nazareth, Michigan, the women religious prominently display the Congregation of St. Joseph banner in the Holy Family Chapel between the sanctuary and the altar to Mary. Including the banner

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<sup>21</sup> Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011.

reframes this space as a chapel not only for the sisters from Nazareth but for all members of the Congregation.

The banner's location further situates the sisters' ministry in relation to the Eucharist. Visually it elucidates the sisters' ecological commitments in relation to the meaning of the sacrament. In the space of the chapel, the sacrifice of the mass intersects with the cosmic image, which potentially challenges the viewer to connect the Eucharist to the rest of creation. While not all viewers might make this connection, the sisters articulate a commitment to Earth in their Generous Promises. As members of the Congregation of St. Joseph, they share a common vision of unity, which includes Earth, and consciously work and pray for ecological justice. Furthermore, this relationship of the Eucharist and creation recalls the LaGrange Park Chapel in Illinois which consciously deploys these connections.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the banner seeks to recall and reaffirm the sisters' religious values as they participate in the central practice of the Eucharist.

The banner consequently depicts the connections to other Sisters of St. Joseph and to their religious commitments; yet, its position further locates the Congregation itself as central to the Eucharistic celebration. Situated just left of the sanctuary, the banner connects the ministry of the Congregation to the priestly ministry of the Eucharist. Does the banner bring to mind the needs of the sisters and those to whom they minister? Does the sisters' mission and ministerial activities participate in the sacrifice of the Eucharist? Perhaps unintentionally, this placement of the banner places the value of the sisters' mission for unity and justice in relation to the Eucharist. Thus, without asserting this, the

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<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of the LaGrange Park Chapel, see 123-130.

sisters display their mission and assert the centrality of their role in the church.

Accordingly, the sisters' mission and a subtle challenge to gender norms threads its way through their display of objects in prominent spaces.

### ***Reclaiming History***

While a subtle display of lace or a banner potentially elicits thought about their mission and the role of women in the church, portions of their buildings seek to educate and challenge viewers to commit to the Congregation's vision of the church. The Congregation of St. Joseph deploys the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Congregation to reclaim their apostolic ministries and the charism of the founding sisters. They seek to educate themselves and their visitors into this history in order to shape people's relationship to the history of the sisters. The individual communities sought to disperse this history through published texts including books on the foundation and ministries of particular communities and in the form of illustrated books for school-aged children.<sup>23</sup> While printed media and the spoken word assist in dispersing this historical memory, space provides a tangible way in which to display and subtly educate or remind the viewer about particular events and values. Nonetheless, the sisters recognize the increasing number of people who enter their buildings with little prior knowledge of the community. Consequently, they employ the space of their motherhouses, chapels, and ministry buildings to display important events that have shaped the present form and mission of the Congregation. In these spaces, the architecture and decorations assert a

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<sup>23</sup> For an analysis of the Congregation's publications, see chapter 3, 190-197.

historical and global consciousness, which connects the contemporary church with the past.



**Figure 5: History Hallway in the Wichita Ministry Center, Wichita, Kansas  
(Photograph by author)**

In Wichita, Kansas, the sisters dedicated one section of the original section of the Mount St. Mary Convent (now called the Wichita Ministry Center) to their history. In this space, the sisters consciously employ visual media to educate the viewer.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the newer sections of the motherhouse, the history hallway is located in a section of the building that holds enduring memories for the sisters. Situated by the original entrance to the motherhouse, this hallway contains the original chapel in which the majority of sisters professed their vows as well as parlors where the sisters would have received guests.

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<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of how visual and material objects assist in this education, see Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 8-11. See also Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 5-6, 55-83. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 73-109.

Consequently, the location of this hallway and the adjoining rooms possesses communal significance. The space itself resounds with their individual and communal memories, which the sisters verbally share with visitors and each other.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, this portion of Mount St. Mary Convent is not used as often by the sisters as other sections of the building. As the motherhouse expanded, they included a wing to attend to aging and ill sisters as well as a new chapel located on the main level close to the hospital wing and the dining room. Consequently, the parlors and chapel are not consistently used by the sisters. Nonetheless, this hallway is easily accessed from the Magnificat Center, their spirituality and retreat center, and used for diverse programs including the Spiritual Strengths Cancer Care program. Because the spirituality center makes use of the adjoining rooms, this hallway does not only educate the viewer about the Congregation's history; rather, it reinforces the importance of the past for the sisters' present ministries and vision of the church.

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<sup>25</sup> One sister noted that the front entrance held meaning for her. She reflected on first walking up the stairs to the main entrance of the motherhouse. Thus, the sight of those steps recalls her first moments when she joined the Sisters of St. Joseph as well as meaningful events that occurred in the rooms close to the entrance (Sister Jane [pseudonym], 15 August 2011). While none of the sisters commented on the negative influence of this space, it could easily operate to remind sisters of a time of their history to which they do not want to return. Nevertheless, the Congregation seeks to emphasize the positive value of this history and its impact on the future direction of the community.



**Figure 6: Chapel, Wichita Ministry Center, Wichita, Kansas  
(Photograph by author)**

As many people gain access to this historical center, they encounter the tangible memory of the sisters and are drawn into the sisters' visual practices. For example, the Magnificat Center makes use of the chapel, which visually displays traditional Catholic beliefs through the architecture and the statues of Mary and Joseph as well as the Stations of the Cross. The domed nave draws the viewer's attention down the length of the chapel to the altar and crucifix.<sup>26</sup> The centrality of the altar and crucifix as well as the repeated arched ceiling focuses one's vision. While maintaining the visual integrity of this chapel, the sisters removed pews in the rear of the chapel to enable groups to pray in a circle. Significantly, this alteration does not negate the central focus of the chapel; the circle breaks for the central aisle, and statuary for the Stations of the Cross line the walls directing the viewer's attention to the altar.

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<sup>26</sup> For a more intensive analysis of some of the Congregation's chapels, see 114-130. Kieckhefer categorizes this type of chapel as a classic sacramental church, which focuses on the altar (Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 11-5).



This visual emphasis on the Eucharist challenges recent criticism of apostolic women religious. The Apostolic Visitation and doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious assert a waning focus on the Eucharist among these religious communities.<sup>27</sup> Analysis of the Congregation's use of space reveals instead a sharp focus on the sacramental life of the Catholic Church. In addition to their daily worship, a financial commitment to the preservation or redesign of existing chapels, construction of new chapels, and a visual emphasis on the altar or the chapel itself ground the actions of the sisters in the sacraments. Even as the sisters' seek to attend to their visitors' logistical and spiritual needs, they retain their commitment to their faith as evidenced in the continued presence and design of this chapel.

Similar to the chapel's function, the hallway and the adjoining rooms visually assert the historical commitment of the sisters. Several rooms located along this hallway are dedicated to the history of the sisters. One room which was used as a parlor displays artifacts from the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita. Throughout the room, lace and bobbins for making lace remind the viewer of the sisters' foundation in France. A larger artifact serves to elicit memories of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita: a piano. Reflecting on the common beginnings of the Sisters of St. Joseph, as well as other women's religious orders, one sister commented:

They started an academy. That's the way they had to make their living. Associated with the academy was usually a piano. We had a, we'll say, a feud with [the Sisters of St. Joseph of] Concordia for many years over a piano. . . . The

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<sup>27</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious."

diocese was split. It left our community in a different diocese. They wanted their piano back, and we wouldn't give it to them.<sup>28</sup>

Because of a demand for lessons, music education often enabled the financial survival of women's religious communities in the United States.<sup>29</sup> As Catholicism expanded in Kansas, it divided the community of the Sisters of St. Joseph into two dioceses, which strained their financial situations and their personal relationships. The piano helped to ensure some income, even with the cost of disrupting personal connections. The sisters in Wichita recognize the importance of music education in the survival of their community as well as the impact on the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia. Consequently, the presence of the piano enables reflection on the expansion of Catholicism in Kansas, the resulting challenges for women's religious communities, and the continued (perhaps complicated) relationship with former members of one's religious community.

While the piano impacts the personal and communal memories of the sisters, it also potentially educates those who visit the Wichita Ministry Center. The sisters share their memories of the piano and its surrounding narratives with those who visit the center.<sup>30</sup> Recounting these stories potentially educates others into a knowledge of the community's history, the educational ministry of women religious, and the financial struggles of women's religious communities. Consequently, the piano becomes associated with this larger narrative. As people return to the center, the sight of the piano potentially recalls this narrative. Consequently, the piano serves to remind the viewer of

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<sup>28</sup> Sister Diane [pseudonym], 15 August 2011.

<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of the impact of music education on women's religious communities in the United States, see 53-54.

<sup>30</sup> Throughout the Congregation, I received tours of their ministry centers which included aspects of the sisters' history. The sisters turned to particular images and objects to recall significant events in their communal life.

the sisters' role in education and perhaps enables the viewer to be educated in the financial struggles of women religious.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 7: Piano in the Wichita Ministry Center, Wichita, Kansas  
(Photograph by author)**

This historical consciousness expands to the global in another room adjoining the history hallway. In 1950, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita expanded their mission to Japan.<sup>32</sup> To affirm this connection, they designed a Japanese prayer room. Along the walls, display cases contain pottery made by the sisters in Japan as well as gifts from them. Together with the rest of the hallway, this room challenges any limited interpretation of the service and commitment of the sisters. Lace prods the viewer to acknowledge the roots of the Sisters of St. Joseph's desire to serve the dear neighbor; a piano emphasizes those local commitments and challenges; the Japanese prayer room urges the viewer to recognize the global commitments of the women religious.

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<sup>31</sup> These financial struggles continue into the present day as communities attempt to care for aging sisters with fewer novices to gain income for present and future needs.

<sup>32</sup> There are presently twenty-six Japanese sisters ministering in Kyoto, Japan. For their history and information about their ministries, see Congregation of St. Joseph, "Kyoto, Japan," Our Founding Communities, accessed 13 March 2014, [http://www.csjoseph.org/kyoto\\_japan.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/kyoto_japan.aspx).

Nonetheless, this global focus values local participation as further visualized in the history hallway.



**Figure 8: Japanese Prayer Room, Wichita Ministry Center, Wichita, Kansas  
(Photograph by author)**

Throughout the hallway, the walls display the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita and the Congregation of St. Joseph. These frames contain photographs, symbols, central statements, and a record of what appears in each frame. As a whole, the hallway demonstrates the longevity of the community and their service to the people of Kansas and other areas of the world, especially Japan. Photographs of abbesses, sisters, founders, and individuals who supported the sisters as well as locations where the sisters ministered demonstrate the sisters' communal dedication and service. Images of the first and present sisters in Japan demonstrate the shift from missionary to native sisters.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Within Catholicism, this emphasis on local ministries guides the development of missionary work and local churches. In *Ad gentes*, the church emphasized forming and nurturing local churches including supporting individuals called to ministry and educating the laity (Second Vatican Council, *Ad gentes*: Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, 7 December 1965, Documents of the II Vatican Council, Vatican Website, § 15-18, accessed 14 March 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_)

These images further evidence changes in religious life and ministry. Black and white photographs of sisters in their habits give way to colored photographs of sisters clad in modified habits and lay clothing. This visual progression prevents the viewer from simplifying the experiences of women religious and the Congregation's history.



**Figure 9: Framed History of the Sisters of St. Joseph displayed in the Wichita Ministry Center, Wichita, Kansas (Photograph by author)**

This consequently educates the viewer who wanders through the halls and rooms. The sisters are visually reminded of the charism and ministerial focus of the sisters who preceded them. Visitors and individuals participating in ministries sponsored by the Congregation gain more knowledge of the sisters' long term goals and commitment to the church and society. Instead of limiting their presence to the convent, classroom, and

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vatican\_council/documents/vat-ii\_decree\_19651207\_ad-gentes\_en.html). For the sisters, this idealized thought agrees with their charism as well as parallels the practical necessity of promoting a religious vocation in the areas where they minister. If they failed to accept Japanese sisters, the Sisters of St. Joseph in Japan would simply not survive because of the decrease in vocations presently in the United States.

hospital, the history hallway extends the historical and global influence of the sisters in the church and society.

### *A Visual Archive*

As they redesign their ministry centers, the sisters further visualize the value of the history of the community and evidence their mission for unity and focus on creation. As the Sisters of St. Joseph settled in each location, they constructed spaces to house the sisters and provide for those they served. Over time the need arose to rework many of these spaces to attend to the needs of aging sisters and the changing nature of their ministerial work.<sup>34</sup> Each community reflected on how best to use particular buildings. Consistently, the women religious choose to create a visual archive of the past by recycling objects from earlier spaces and creating new images to visually recall their prior ministries.<sup>35</sup> In this process they situate the past in their present mission and ministries.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This activity of reflecting on the proper recasting of spaces or the construction of new ones occurs in many women's religious communities at this point in time. In her "Living Sustainably Toward Social Justice," Paula Coeey examines the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet's construction of a sustainable home for seniors as a form of ascetic practice ( Paula M. Coeey, "Living Sustainably toward Social Justice: Asceticism Revisited," in *Theological Perspectives for Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Public Intellectuals for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, and Rosemary P. Carbine, New Approaches to Religion and Power (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 51-53, 57-60.

<sup>35</sup> This archival practice often deploys stained glass windows from previous buildings. The Sisters in Baton Rouge, Nazareth, Tipton, Wheeling, and Wichita display stained glass from some of their previous buildings. In Nazareth, these windows decorate the retreat center thus connecting the new ministry to a previous ministry of education. The administrative section of the Tipton Ministry Center displays stained glass from their academy (Sister Ursula [pseudonym], 28 July 2011). In Wheeling, a stained glass window anchors a library bookshelf. In Baton Rouge, the Holy Family window graces the hallway leading to the Holy Family Chapel. The new chapel in Wichita employs the stained glass windows from their former college, St. Mary of the Plains College.

<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, we can question whether the re-structuring or re-designing of rooms successfully expresses the message the Congregation intends. In "Form, Function, and Failure in Postwar Protestant Christian Education Buildings," Buggeln analyzes the intention behind architecture and the influence it had on the children who used them. She argues that these buildings often failed to manifest the goals of the religious

In Tipton, Indiana, the sisters came to share their convent with others. They offered spaces for retreats and workshops in convention and break-out rooms and welcomed elderly lay people to reside in the building.<sup>37</sup> These decisions were made to provide income for the community as well as to make use of the large space that they no longer needed. This once vibrant community had only fourteen sisters living at the convent in 2011. Accordingly, the sisters reflected on how to best use the space whether for the needs of the women religious or for their ministries.<sup>38</sup>

Prior to the reconfiguration into the Congregation of St. Joseph, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tipton decided to renovate the foyer and adjoining parlor in the motherhouse, the St. Joseph Center. Even as they altered the space, they sought to reflect the sisters' history in Tipton and in the world. They deploy "chairs with French flair" to recall their foundation in France.<sup>39</sup> A photograph of their foundress, Mother Gertrude Moffitt, manifests the sisters' presence in Tipton since 1888. Lamps from St. Clair Glass in Elwood, Indiana further demonstrate the sisters' local connections. Similarly, a marble statue of St. Joseph recalls the construction of the St. Joseph Center in 1957, and a

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community that built them because their goals did not align with the unconscious intention of the buildings (Buggeln, "Form, Function, and Failure," 194-195). As we will see, the sisters in Tipton consciously deployed particular images and objects to reflect their history and mission. Those sharing the sisters' vision or educated into their history would recognize significant themes. Others entering these spaces for the first time might not identify the reason for particular decisions.

<sup>37</sup> While this might seem like a novel concept, the early sisters in France likewise boarded lay women. For information about this practice, see Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 221-222, 261-264.

<sup>38</sup> This negotiation between vocational and larger social needs characterized earlier use of space and architecture by religious women. In *Invisible City*, Helen Hills argues that the convents in the seventeenth century in Italy weighed the religious requirements of enclosure against the social expectation of accepting the daughters of aristocrats. The architecture of the convent demonstrated the ways in which Italian convents sought to redesign or construct new spaces to ensure enclosure while also demonstrating the social status of the women (Hills, *Invisible City*, 7-8, 9-13, 54-5).

<sup>39</sup> Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011.

photograph of Bishop William Higi, bishop of Lafayette Diocese, manifests their contemporary relationship with the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>40</sup> These images and objects concretize the sisters' ministry to the people of Indiana. Displayed in a prominent space, these objects' individual histories and relation to the sisters visualizes the global history and embedded commitments of the women religious.



**Figure 10: Great Commission metal sculpture, St. Joseph Center, Tipton, Indiana  
(Photograph by author)**

Nevertheless, the renovation of the foyer and parlor does not only manifest these relationships but also encourages the direction and focus of the sisters. To do this, the foyer includes the Great Commission metal sculpture, which depicts Jesus instructing the disciples. One of the employees of the sisters reflected that the sculpture used to hang in a different room in the convent: “When they would go every fall to get their mission assignments that is the room they would go to. . . . that is what they had over the table. . .

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<sup>40</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, “Welcome to our home . . . our sacred space” (unpublished manuscript, 28 July 2011), print.



That piece always had a lot of meaning for the sisters.”<sup>41</sup> While it was difficult for the sisters to remove the sculpture from its original location, its presence in the foyer emphasizes the sisters’ mission to serve the church as well as their connection to the earliest history of the church. Significantly, the movement of the sculpture from a separate room to the entrance of the St. Joseph Center manifests the changes the women religious encounter as they live out their religious vows. Whereas they used to receive their yearly mission assignments and go where they were assigned, they now reflect with their prayer groups about where they are being called and how they can best serve the church and the Congregation. Thus, the movement of the sculpture parallels this more open process of discernment and their willingness to serve where they are needed.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless the renovation of the parlor and foyer did not only manifest these relationships; rather it used the design of the space to offer a visual lesson in the sisters’ values and mission. The area was redesigned and used at a time when the sisters were discerning whether to join with other communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph and as the sisters focused more on the lives of women. One person from the renovation committee remarked that the prior format was unwelcoming, “masculine,” and ill-equipped to enable elderly sisters to safely and comfortably use the space.<sup>43</sup> They used the choice of color

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<sup>41</sup> Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Perhaps unintentionally, this movement of the Great Commission metal sculpture also foreshadowed the community’s departure from Tipton. As the seven communities joined together into the Congregation of St. Joseph, they committed themselves to discerning how best to use their property. As the size of the Tipton community no longer justified their presence in this space, the sisters in Tipton decided to close the St. Joseph Center in 2013 after having served the area since 1888.

<sup>43</sup> Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011. The renovation committee consisted of two sisters, two lay residents, and two staff members. The committee member remarked that the chairs were uncomfortable and did not enable the sisters to safely stand up. She described the straight, linear format of the parlor as “masculine” (Ibid.).

and a circular theme to create a more welcoming, “feminine” space.<sup>44</sup> Articulated as “feminine,” this space at the entrance of the motherhouse visualizes the priorities of the community in the subtle inclusion of social and ecological justice. The circular shape and arrangement of the furniture recalls curves of a female body as well as promotes inclusive conversation. The space welcomes in the natural world with unadorned windows and warm, golden tones.

Images on the walls further demonstrate the sisters’ commitments. *The Gleaners* and *The Angelus* by Jean-François Millet affirm the sisters’ commitment to the poor and dedication to God.<sup>45</sup> Pottery from Karen Van De Walle, CSJ and sculpture from Mary Southard, CSJ further demonstrate the creation of and union among the communities forming the Congregation of St. Joseph. In order to manifest the openness of the space to those of other faiths, they also included an image of the resurrected Christ instead of a crucifix.<sup>46</sup> Thus the space manifests the central claims of the community. Their values adorn the walls and welcome others into this vision of unity.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> A booklet describing the foyer and parlor explains the meaning of these paintings for the committee:

The Gleaners

This painting, by Jean Froncois Millet [sic], depicts peasants picking up grain left by the harvesters, a reminder to think of the need of others. Landowners were commanded to leave the grain that fell during harvest for the poor. They also had to leave the corners of their fields uncut so the gleaners could pick up grain there.

The Angelus

This painting by Jean Froncois Millet [sic], speaks of gratitude for God’s guiding hand in our lives. The peasants remind us to take time to give thanks. We see a man and his wife stopping for devotion after hearing the bell from the church in the distance. When the church bell rang, people stopped their work and said a prayer three times a day; morning, noon, and evening (Congregation of St. Joseph, “Welcome to our home . . . our sacred space” (unpublished manuscript, 28 July 2011), print).

<sup>46</sup> The committee member reflected that it was difficult for some of the sisters to exclude the crucifix from the foyer. She continued, “We welcome people of all faiths here and it is probably more appropriate to have a joyful Christ welcoming with up-raised arms” (Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011).



**Figure 11: Mary Southard, CSJ, *Holy Family of the Mountains*,  
Displayed in Mount St. Joseph, Wheeling, West Virginia (Used with permission)**

In contrast to the archival practices of Tipton, the women religious in Wheeling, West Virginia employ recent artistic productions to trace the history of their community. For the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling, they commissioned a painting by Mary Southard, CSJ. This image, *Holy Family of the Mountains*, demonstrates their connections to the people of West Virginia.<sup>47</sup> At the center of the image stand the Holy Family. Around them, yet smaller than the Holy Family, gather people of West Virginia of different social classes, ages, and occupations including mine workers, farmers, and Sisters of St. Joseph. Behind them rise the mountains of West Virginia capped by a star filled sky. A caption under the image reads: “AS WOMEN ALIVE WITH HOPE IN GOD WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO STRENGTHENING

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<sup>47</sup> Sister Julia [pseudonym], 17 May 2012.

AND PROMOTING THE WELL BEING OF THE HUMAN FAMILY AND  
CREATION.”

Aspects of the image visually display the foundation and values of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling. The size of the Holy Family manifests the centrality of the sisters’ faith and commitment to the church. Directed by their founder Fr. Médaille, the sisters seek to manifest the heavenly and earthly Trinities.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the image balances the amount of space given to the people and the mountains, which affirms the sisters’ commitment to serving the dear neighbor as well as caring for creation.<sup>49</sup> Significantly, the inclusion of diverse people challenges perceptions of church to include those often excluded from such artistic representation. Thus, the sisters visually affirm their commitment to the dear neighbor, all who are in need, through the depiction of people who the sisters have and currently serve. Consequently, this original piece of art serves to capture the lives and mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Wheeling since 1853.

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<sup>48</sup> For the importance of the two trinities to the Sisters of St. Joseph’s spirituality, see Nepper, *Origins*, 50, 78-83.

<sup>49</sup> This dual emphasis on humanity and creation thus guided the ministries and justice commitments of the sisters prior to the reconfiguration into the Congregation of St. Joseph. While the Generous Promises verbally articulate these commitments, this image visually delineates these values.



**Figure 12: Art work by Karen Van De Walle, CSJ, Ann Byrne, and Kerry Byrne in the Narthex of Mount St. Joseph Chapel, Wheeling, West Virginia (Used with permission, photograph by author)**

In a similar way, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling commissioned an art piece for the narthex of their chapel. Karen Van De Walle, CSJ (Tipton, Indiana) and Mary Ann and Kerry Byrne collaborated on this piece. Van De Walle contributed the pottery while the Byrnes completed the brass and stained glass pieces. Van de Walle's pottery depicts the mountains of West Virginia inscribed with "WE LIVE AND WORK THAT ALL MAY BE ONE," which is the mission of the sisters in Wheeling. The inclusion of circular pottery emphasizes the sisters' commitment to unity with God and others and extends to the natural world as the mountains stretch through the design.



**Figure 13: Detail of Artwork by Karen Van De Walle, CSJ, Ann Byrne, and Kerry Byrne in the Narthex of Mount St. Joseph Chapel, Wheeling, West Virginia (Used with permission, photograph by author)**

Nevertheless, this piece accomplishes more than recalling the sisters' connections to West Virginia. It also calls to mind the continued presence, service, and needs of the sisters. A pamphlet for Mount St. Joseph connects the art piece to the contemporary ministries and beliefs of the sisters: "It holds a candle that will burn continuously as part of the sisters' Ministry of Prayer. It also provides a place for holding the Oil of Anointing of the Sick."<sup>50</sup> At the right side of the art piece, the candle burns above an opened book of intentions. Next to it stands a vase shaped like a woman, which could hold or be replaced by the holy oil.<sup>51</sup>

The candle visually recalls the continued spiritual service of the sisters in the form of their prayers. Located within Mount St. Joseph, this visual reminder serves to affirm

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<sup>50</sup> *Welcome to Mount St. Joseph* (Wheeling, West Virginia: Congregation of St. Joseph, n.d.).

<sup>51</sup> This vase was designed by Mary Southard, CSJ and is available through the Congregation of St. Joseph's business, the Ministry of the Arts.

the many retired sisters who live in the center. While some may no longer actively minister, they continue to work for unity through their prayer lives as well as in their ministry of hospitality. As it is continually lit, the candle further recalls a similar candle perpetually lit near the tabernacle. Similar to the banner in the Holy Family Chapel, this visually connects the ministry of the sisters to the Eucharist.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the Oil of Anointing of the Sick connects the sisters' ministry of prayer to the sacramental life of the church. While not identifying the ministry of the sisters with the sacraments, the candle and holy oil intersect with Catholic practice and belief which underscores the value of the sisters' religious lives. Moreover, the inclusion of the Oil of Anointing of the Sick further recalls the needs of the aging or ill sisters who are cared for in Mount St. Joseph. Thus, this art piece manifests the relation of the sisters to West Virginia and the Catholic Church as well as reminds those entering the chapel of the sisters' continuing need for financial, physical, and spiritual care.

Consequently, this use of historical objects and commissioned art grounds the Congregation in the rich past of each of the founding communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph. As the sisters travel between the Ministry Centers, they are educated into the history of the individual communities. While unique in aspects, these objects serve to remind the sisters of their similar struggles to serve the Roman Catholic Church and American society. Moreover, visitors encounter the history and mission of the sisters and

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<sup>52</sup> This is an intriguing connection because of the role of the Eucharist in the sisters' lives as well as the increased importance of the Eucharist after the Council of Trent. Prior to Trent, nuns' prayers were highly valued. After Trent, the estimation of this intercessory prayer decreased because of the high value of the Eucharist (Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe*, 74-101, especially 83-87). Associating the sisters' prayers with the light by the tabernacle more closely aligns these two practices.

are encouraged to recognize the societal impact of women religious and their relation to the sacramental life of the church.

### *Visualizing Membership*

Not only the communal history but also the individual lives and accomplishments of the women religious are celebrated in this visual archive. Each of the centers displays artwork from their former and contemporary sisters. Paintings, photography, sculpture, and calligraphy adorn walls and library shelves. While some of the sisters noted that not all of the work was of the highest quality, these images demonstrate the talent and commitment of their sisters. These women often received little artistic training yet sought ways to express themselves in creative ways as well as to encourage artistic expression in others. Nonetheless, some of the sisters received artistic training and employed their considerable skills to educate others within and outside of their religious community.<sup>53</sup>

In Wheeling, West Virginia, the sisters recalled the life of former and current members of their community in works displayed in the Mount St. Joseph building. The sculpture and calligraphy of Rose McBreen, CSJ graces diverse spaces including the library in which her sculpture of St. Joan of Arc gazes at visitors. Sister Rose also used calligraphy to memorialize a postulant for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Wheeling. In 1977, Robin Elam was beginning a retreat at the convent when she was murdered on the convent property. In Rose's beautiful calligraphy, Robin's poem calls to mind her presence as it is displayed in the library.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, this use of artwork serves to

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<sup>53</sup> For other sisters' artwork, see 167-170, 171-173, 176-183 as well as Chapter 4.

<sup>54</sup> Sister Julia noted that it meant a lot to have Robin remembered through her own words (Sister Julia [pseudonym], 17 May 2012). The rape and murder of Robin Elam continues to be unsolved today.



materialize the presence of past members of the community. The physical presence of the framed poem acts as a constant visual reminder of Robin's life and eagerness to join the sisters in their mission.



**Figure 14: Magdalen Prochaska, CSJ, *Last Supper*  
(Used with permission, photograph by author)**

In Cleveland, the display of sisters' art corresponds with years of education and the talent of these treasured sisters. Art from Marguerite Donahue, CSJ, Janice Horchy, CSJ, Mary Magdalen Prochaska, CSJ, Irma Donahue, CSJ, and Carrie Vall, CSJ adorn the walls of the St. Joseph Center. Many of these sisters received training as artists. Sister Mary Magdalen Prochaska, CSJ (1907-1999) received her B.A. in Art at Cleveland College of Western Reserve University and her M.A. in Art at Western Reserve University after which she served as an art teacher at St. Joseph Academy from 1954 to 1964 and Nazareth Academy from 1964 to 1977. Much of her artwork graces the halls of the St. Joseph Center. Oil paintings as well as metalwork recall her talent, training, and

commitment to her students.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the paintings of Sister M. Irma Donohue, CSJ recall her skill and presence. After earning her B.A. in Education at the University of Dayton and M.A. in English at Notre Dame University, she received training at the Cleveland School of Art, the Chicago Art Institute, and the Carnegie Institute of Technology.<sup>56</sup> The display of their religious and secular themed artwork manifests their continued presence within the community.

While some of these images evade religious topics, others attempt to affirm the mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Sister Carrie Vall, CSJ employs her artwork to visually remind the sisters and guests in the St. Joseph Center of the core values of the Congregation. In one of the gathering spaces, a fabric screen prods the viewer to recall and embrace the mission of the Congregation. In gold and orange hues, “Loving God and Neighbor without distinction” crosses three panels which display significant images and sayings. The prominence of this saying serves to focus the viewer’s attention as well as relate the other sayings to this guiding principle. Located in the gathering space outside of the dining room, this screen daily engages individuals to recall and promote the Congregation’s values. Vall’s watercolor paintings similarly challenge the viewer to consider aspects of Christian belief and spirituality. Thus, the presence of her paintings and other artwork in the St. Joseph Center manifests the mission and charism of the

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<sup>55</sup> Her image of the Last Supper demonstrates both her skill and religious belief. Below the image the inscription reads: “and taking the chalice he gave thanks and gave to them saying: drink it, all of you, this is my blood, which seals God’s covenant. . . . Matt XXVI:27-8.”

<sup>56</sup> Sister Irma did not finish her Ph.D. in Art; however, she continued to teach art in St. Joseph Academy (Sister Christine [pseudonym], 22 May 2012.

Congregation and seeks to shape the visual practices of those who live and work in or visit the Center.



**Figure 15: Screen created by Carrie Vall, CSJ  
(Used with permission, photograph by author)**

### ***Communal Worship***

In addition to the gathering spaces, the Congregation's chapels employ architecture and artwork, such as painting, statues, and stained glass to reaffirm or subtly rearticulate their Catholic faith as well as display their communal vision of the church and society.<sup>57</sup> These physical spaces provide a venue through which to exhibit the community's beliefs and values. Often in dialogue with written statements, space subtly offers an alternative way in which to understand humanity, belief systems, and societal

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<sup>57</sup> In *Women, Art, and Spirituality*, Jeryldene M. Wood examines how the Poor Clares did not only deploy architecture to satisfy the demands of enclosure but to also depict their continued relation to the surrounding society. The convents and their attached churches revealed the presence and absence of the nuns. The strategic use of art, especially images of Saint Clare and other virgins, was directed at a public audience to explain or assert women's inclusion in the Communion of the Saints (Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapter 2, especially 57, 61-62).

values.<sup>58</sup> While demonstrating Catholic belief, some of the newer chapels further articulate concepts of unity and ecological consciousness.

While chapels are constructed to potentially elicit specific responses, they do not determine how people interact with them. In *Theology in Stone*, Richard Kieckhefer argues that a variety of factors influence responses to a church building including whether the church is being used, the size of the congregation, a person's cultural training, and personal and communal attitudes. Furthermore, liturgical practices impact how individuals interpret the meaning of the space.<sup>59</sup> In other words, the physical space itself gains meaning and intention through the practices of those who see and use it. According to Kieckhefer, the meaning a church building holds develops over time: "Response to a church is learned, and the process of learning requires informed reflection."<sup>60</sup> A person's initial reaction to a particular chapel might well be negative depending on how one encounters it. Nevertheless, engagement with the building promotes conscious and unconscious reflection on its meaning and value for an individual and community.

For the Congregation of St. Joseph, this interpretation develops over years of worship in a particular chapel and benefits from the sisters' diverse spiritual practices, including spiritual direction and communal worship. If they live in the ministry centers, the sisters encounter these spaces on a daily basis for celebrations of the Mass or silent prayer. Others who live at a distance from the ministry centers worship in these spaces

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<sup>58</sup> For an analysis of how place affects tradition including embodied conceptions of race and ability/disability, see Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, especially 24-52.

<sup>59</sup> Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 4-7.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

less frequently; however, they attend Mass or communal celebrations in these chapels.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, simply experiencing these chapels does not guarantee that the sisters will react in a desired way; rather, their practices encourage them to respond to the chapels.<sup>62</sup> The sisters' education into a common vision and communal practices impacts how they see and respond to the messages displayed in the chapels' architecture and decorations.

As members of the Congregation, the sisters bring a common charism to their interpretation of these chapels, an emphasis on the sanctification of themselves and the neighbor, a devotion to the Eucharist, and a focus on the heavenly and earthly Trinities. Despite these commonalities, their individual preferences in architecture and art influence their interpretation of these spaces. Moreover, the chapel holds individual and communal meaning for the sisters. Many of the sisters professed their vows or celebrated their jubilees within these chapels. Years of reflecting on one's belief and practices within the same space further concretizes these experiences. Consequently, their education within the Congregation as well as their personal experiences impacts the meaning and influence of the space. As we will see, the sisters redesign these spaces to emphasize various aspects of their Catholic belief as well as to promote a variety of religious and social practices.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Sisters who are still in active ministry sometimes attend daily Mass at a parish closer to their homes. Mass schedules at the ministry centers are not flexible enough to enable all sisters to worship together on a daily basis.

<sup>62</sup> As Kieckhefer asserts, "Architecture does not force people to do anything" (Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 9). A vaulted skylight does not compel a person to focus on a transcendent God; rather, a person's practices and the liturgical use of the space can use that light as a way to demonstrate the immanence of the divine.

<sup>63</sup> Kieckhefer argues, "Like liturgy itself, liturgical architecture must overcome the numbing effect of familiarity, and it can do so only through the ways it is used and the ethos that is cultivated" (Kieckhefer,

The chapels serve different purposes for the Congregation. In part dependent on the time period in which they were constructed, each chapel features various styles and emphasizes different beliefs and goals.<sup>64</sup> Interacting with the sisters' broader visual practices, the design and decoration of each chapel manifests their ecclesiology and promotes a desired response from the viewer. Three chapels stand out as exemplary of these functions: the Holy Family Chapel in Nazareth, Michigan; the Holy Family Chapel in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and the LaGrange Park Center Chapel in LaGrange Park, Illinois.



**Figure 16: Holy Family Chapel, Nazareth Center, Nazareth, Michigan  
(Photograph by author)**

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*Theology in Stone*, 8). Overtime each of the chapels has been designed to attend to changes in Catholic liturgy as well as to enable the sisters to benefit spiritually from these spaces.

<sup>64</sup> Kieckhefer distinguishes between three traditions of church building: the classic sacramental church; the classic evangelical church, and the modern communal church. The Congregation's chapels deploy two of these traditions: the classic sacramental church and the modern communal church. The classic sacramental church employs a longitudinal structure with an emphasis on the altar. The modern communal church emphasizes the community gathered for worship through changes in the seating and the placement of the altar among the congregation. For a description of these traditions, see Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 11-15.

Dedicated in 1925, the Holy Family Chapel in Nazareth, Michigan remains one of the more traditional chapels. The Congregation notes, “The chapel is a modern interpretation of the ancient Roman Basilica patterned from St. John Lateran in Rome.”<sup>65</sup> Adorned with gold leaf, this chapel contrasts with the other Congregation of St. Joseph chapels. The ornate design and Stations of the Cross created by Dominico Mastroianni, a papal sculptor, evidence the financial commitment to designing and maintaining the chapel. The obvious care and value placed on the appearance of the chapel displays the Congregation’s emphasis on worship. Indeed, the pamphlet provided for visitors encourages people to contemplate this: “The changes that have taken place in the chapel focus our attention on prayer as being at the heart of our life and mission. It is through prayer in solitude and in community as well as in listening to the Word of God and celebrating together in the Eucharist, that we grow in union with God and with our neighbor.”<sup>66</sup>

Yet, these words are not necessary for the viewer as the structure of the chapel and its ornamentation direct one’s attention to the Eucharist. The consecutive arches lead the viewers’ attention down the length of the nave to the altar, tabernacle, and crucifix.<sup>67</sup> While the original pews have been removed, the placement of the chairs retains the central aisle with a slight diagonal. Consequently, this format enables the worshipper to see others in the congregation while retaining the focus on the Eucharist. Similar to the chapel in Wichita, the viewer’s gaze is drawn toward the altar and the sacramental center

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<sup>65</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, *Dedicated in 1925, Nazareth Center, Nazareth, Michigan* (Nazareth, Michigan: Congregation of St. Joseph, n.d.) n.p.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Price classifies this type of building as “basilican” (Price, *Temples for a Modern God*, 17).

of the chapel. Constructed for a community of women religious, the chapel's structure reinforces the sisters' charism and dedication to the Eucharist.

The visual focus on the Eucharist interacts with various aspects of the chapel's design to prod the viewer to further contemplate her religious vocation. For example, the chapel includes wood rafters to recall the stable in Bethlehem and side altars to Mary and Joseph.<sup>68</sup> These features potentially encourage the women to reflect on Mary and Joseph's care for the child Jesus and how they are called to embody Joseph's care in their ministry and prayer.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, twelve pillars representing the twelve apostles manifest the importance of responding to their vocation.<sup>70</sup> Stained glass windows depict Christian symbols, events in Christ's life including miracles and his teachings, and saints including Mary, Joseph, and Patrick. Consequently, the chapel abounds with Christian symbolism and narrative which educates the viewer in the Christian faith. For the Sisters of St. Joseph who continue to interact with this chapel, these features offer visual reminders of and encouragement for their religious vows.

Though not visually present from the nave of the chapel, the Reliquary Chapel and Scala Sancta (Holy Stairs) further reinforce this commitment to the Christian faith. Located at the front left of the main chapel, the Reliquary Chapel entices the viewer to contemplate the dedication of the saints. Not far from the Reliquary Chapel, the Scala Sancta rise behind the sanctuary. As a religious practice, the Scala Sancta enable a sister

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<sup>68</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, *Dedicated in 1925, Nazareth Center, Nazareth, Michigan*, n.p.

<sup>69</sup> The Congregation states, "As you walk through Holy Family Chapel may you be reminded of our call as Sisters of St. Joseph to serve others with the same care and loving attitude that Joseph had in serving Jesus and Mary" (Ibid.).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



to physically pray stairs like what Christ would have climbed during his trial.<sup>71</sup> While not visually present to those in the chapel, the presence of the Scala Sancta is potentially recalled as they look toward the altar. As a result, the visual focus on the sacrifice of the Eucharist intersects with memories of the sisters' own practice of praying the Scala Sancta. Thus, visual practices within the chapel reaffirm the religious practices and commitments of the women religious.

Accordingly, the Holy Name Chapel in Nazareth employs its design and decoration to visually persuade the worshipper to focus on the sacramental life of the church and the dedication of the saints. The viewer is encouraged to reflect on this rich history as she views representations of particular Christian beliefs or is prodded to recall particular religious practices. Significant images and objects are deployed to draw one to reflect on specific aspects of the faith and their connection to other beliefs depicted in the chapel. Consequently, the chapel intends to educate and promote prayerful reflection on the Catholic faith. As noted earlier, the chapel displays the Congregation's banner to emphasize the unity and goals of the recently formed community. Interrelated to the other images in the chapel, the banner serves to connect the community's central beliefs to their recent formation and future goals. Thus, the sisters potentially find visual encouragement for their vows and commitment to the church.

Whereas the Holy Name Chapel in Nazareth visually connects the women's religious vocation to traditional Catholic beliefs and practices, the recent construction of other chapels employ other strategies to reinforce the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

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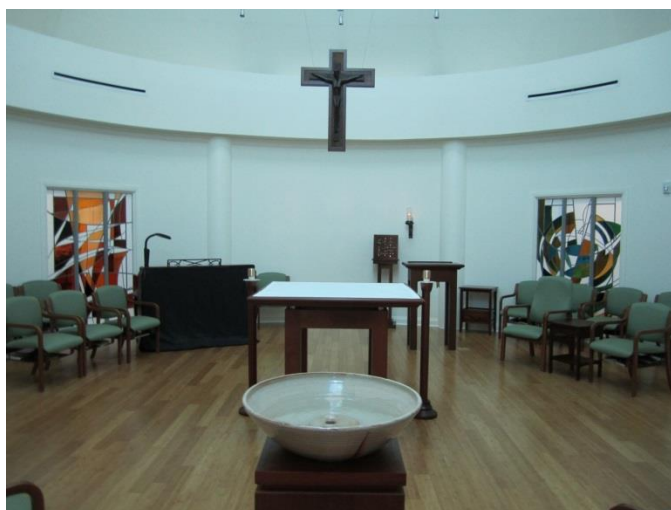
<sup>71</sup> The stairs are supposed to recall the staircase leading to the praetorium of Pontius Pilate. The religious practice of praying the Scala Sancta encourages the participant to reflect on Christ's Passion.

After Hurricane Katrina destroyed their prior building, the sisters in Baton Rouge, Louisiana needed to construct a new center and chapel. In order to create the new space, the sisters drew on their memory as well as tangible pieces of that past. Images of prior spaces decorate the Hundred Oaks Center's walls. As Sister Lynn notes, these images and objects reveal who the sisters are, where they have come from, and how they have served the church and society.<sup>72</sup> After the destruction and upheaval they experienced following the hurricane, the visual reminder of important locations and people serve to ground the sisters in the lived experiences of the community. For example, the Holy Family window graces the main hallway that leads from the entrance to the chapel and the cross in the chapel is made from wood preserved from the Sisters of St. Joseph's first center in Citeaux, Mississippi.<sup>73</sup> These objects assist in reminding the sisters of their prior ministries and of their community's commitment to serve the church and society.

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<sup>72</sup> Sister Lynn [pseudonym], 14 March 2013. This is important as the sisters who live at the center are now retired. Many of the sisters commented on the continued presence of their motherhouse and ministry locations. As Sister Ruth gave me a tour of the building, she recalled many stories about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Médaille through the tangible reminders of particular people, places, and events (Sister Ruth [pseudonym], 15 March 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Eleanor Bernstein, CSJ, *Holy Family Chapel* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Congregation of St. Joseph, n.d.), n.p.



**Figure 17: Holy Family Chapel, Hundred Oaks Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
(Photograph by author)**

Beyond including images and objects to recall the history of the congregation, the structure of the building in Baton Rouge clearly manifests the sisters' charism. As you enter the lobby of the building, a hallway leads you directly to the Holy Family Chapel, which is at the center of the building. From this location, three hallways radiate leading towards the sisters' rooms and community spaces. Consequently, wherever you are in the building, you are directed towards the chapel. Moreover the circular shape of the chapel emphasizes the community gathered to worship. As they are assembled with the common purpose of honoring God and celebrating the Eucharist, the participants see not only the priest celebrating the Mass and the backs of those in front of them but also the faces of others across the room. Consequently, the celebration of the Mass challenges people to move beyond an individualized understanding of God and to pray for and with the congregation. This echoes the Sisters of St. Joseph's constitution: the sisters are

committed to working for their own and the neighbor's sanctification.<sup>74</sup> Centered on their relationship with God, the sisters dedicate themselves to their community and the People of God. Accordingly the structure of the chapel and the building itself emphasizes the sisters' mission for unity.

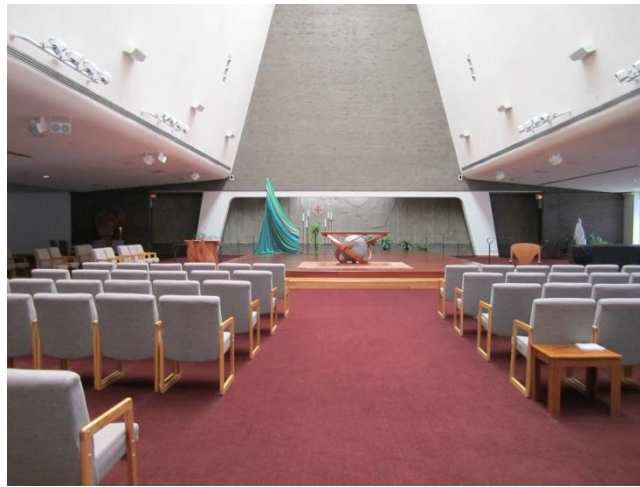
In addition to the structure of the chapel, the decoration itself endeavors to demonstrate the beliefs and practices of the sisters. Stained glass windows employ abstract designs to depict baptism, religious consecration, scripture, and Eucharist. Depending on where one is sitting in the chapel, you view a particular aspect of the sisters' religious commitment. These abstract designs encourage the viewer to reflect on the many facets of religious life, scripture, baptismal commitments, and the meaning of Eucharist. The side doors to the chapel further call to mind central concepts in the spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In abstract shapes, these doors depict the heavenly and earthly Trinities, which the sisters are called by their constitution to manifest in their ministry. Thus the structure and location of the chapel aspires to remind those in the building of the sisters' sacramental focus, the Sisters of St. Joseph's charism, and mission for unity.

The Holy Name Chapels in Nazareth and Baton Rouge depict traditional Roman Catholic beliefs and the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In contrast, the LaGrange Park Center Chapel employs the architecture and objects to subtly alter people's relationships to God and the created world. The original artwork in the chapel was

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<sup>74</sup> Vacher, *Nuns Without Cloister*, 72, 161; Nepper, *Origins*, 58.

created in 1968, and the chapel was renovated between 2009 and 2010.<sup>75</sup> This chapel is bare in comparison to the chapel in Nazareth as it is devoid of much obvious Christian symbolism and statuary.<sup>76</sup> One statue of Mary graces the front of the chapel. Yet, the chapel resists the communal emphasis of the Baton Rouge chapel as it is neither centrally located at the LaGrange Park Center nor circular in shape or format.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the chapel was constructed to fulfill not only the sisters' needs but also to provide a worship space for the adjoining high school.



**Figure 18: LaGrange Park Chapel, LaGrange Park Ministry Center, LaGrange Park, Illinois (Used with permission; photograph by author)**

As you walk into the chapel, the ceiling is low but suddenly rises to a vaulted skylight. Similar to the Holy Name Chapel in Nazareth, the altar serves as the focal point

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<sup>75</sup> Maria Hill, CSJ, ed., *Congregation of St. Joseph La Grange Park Center* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: St. Joseph's Press, 2010), n.p.

<sup>76</sup> Church architecture from the 1960s and 1970s has been criticized for this empty, unwelcoming affect. As Price notes, "The emphasis on having the assembled community be the primary decoration of the space, the much-heralded ideal of the 1960s and 1970s, left little for the individual worshipper who might arrive for quiet personal devotion" (Price, *Temples for a Modern God*, 181).

<sup>77</sup> This is in contrast to many religious buildings constructed in the 1960s and 1970s which emphasized the community over devotion. For an assessment of this development in religious architecture, see Price, *Temples for a Modern God*, chapter 5.

at the end of the nave. Nevertheless, the viewer is not directed toward the altar by a series of arches; rather, the vaulted skylight draws the viewer's sight down the length of the chapel to the altar. The length and height of the chapel endeavor to direct the viewer's vision toward the altar and up toward the sky. As one sister commented, "It just lifts you up the minute you walk in."<sup>78</sup> This dual focus on the altar and sky serve to emphasize the created world.<sup>79</sup> While the emphasis on ecological justice appears in the Congregation's Generous Promises, a commitment to creation and theological reflection on humans' relationship to the created world was central to the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange Park prior to the reconfiguration into the Congregation.<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, the structure and design of the chapel sought to manifest the intricate relation of creation, humans, and God.

Several aspects of the chapel direct the viewer to contemplate creation in relation to Christian belief. Behind the altar, the East Wall displays an eight by sixty-five foot sculpture created by Sister Richard Mehren, CSJ.<sup>81</sup> The "Congregation of St. Joseph La Grange Park Center" booklet interprets the sculpture: "All creation is in process and moving toward the Omega Point, the Christ. Beginning with simple shapes at either end of the wall, creation evolves toward the more complex forms in the center panels which

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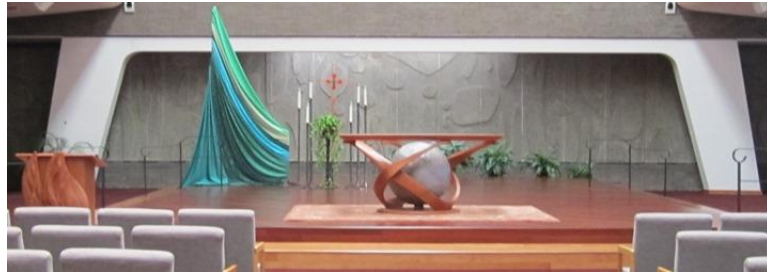
<sup>78</sup> Sister Evelyn [pseudonym], 28 July 2011. Not all sisters agree with this comment. Some expressed a strong distaste for the architecture and bareness of the La Grange Park Chapel.

<sup>79</sup> As one sister noted, "When people walk in, it's 'oh my gosh.' They are taken up with it. . . It's God's hands and they know it" (Sister Monica [pseudonym], 18 July 2011).

<sup>80</sup> This is evident by the presence of a statement supporting the Earth Charter, which was signed by the Sisters of St. Joseph in LaGrange Park, in the hallway leading to the chapel. The Earth Charter seeks to promote ecological sustainability. For information on the Earth Charter, see The Earth Charter Initiative, "The Earth Charter," Read the Charter, accessed 13 March 2013, <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Maria Hill, CSJ, ed., *Congregation of St. Joseph La Grange Park Center*.

symbolize humanity and consciousness.”<sup>82</sup> Drawing on the work of Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, Mehren created the sculpture to urge the viewer to reflect on the movement of creation and of humanity.



**Figure 19: East Wall Sculpture by Richard Mehren, CSJ and Altar designed by Mary Southard, CSJ, LaGrange Park Chapel, LaGrange Park, Illinois (Used with permission; photograph by author)**

While the booklet describes the sculpture, the viewer does not need this explanation in order to discern the importance of the sculpture for the sisters’ thought and worship. Both the size and location of the sculpture evidence its connection to their Christian belief and practice. The sculpture is strategically placed behind the altar in order to connect the Eucharist to the message portrayed in the sculpture. Further, the altar is centered in the sculpture, where the complex shapes converge. Without prior knowledge of the theological inspiration behind the sculpture, the viewer would still be drawn toward the center of the sculpture and the altar.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> The altar and other recent additions to the chapel employ more traditional Catholic symbols than some of the previous works, including Mehren’s sculpture. This parallels a movements in the construction of Roman Catholic church buildings. As Price notes, “New Catholic construction has been marked by a tendency to return to greater use of symbols, statuary, decoration, ornament, and woodwork, in contrast to the spare, hard, minimalist spaces of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s” (Price, *Temples for a Modern God*, 181).

The altar itself further prods the viewer to contemplate the centrality of creation. Built in 2009, the altar was designed by Mary Southard, CSJ, who is a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph and a visual artist.<sup>84</sup> The altar seeks to manifest the connection of God and creation. In the center of the altar is a sculpture of Earth, which is gently surrounded by wooden arms which support the transparent altar table top which “rests” on Earth. This altar visually embodies God’s compassion for the world.<sup>85</sup> Thus Southard’s altar both participates in the original meaning and power of the altar as a place of sacrifice but also extends the viewer’s attention to the relationship of that sacrifice to the reality of it being lived out on Earth.<sup>86</sup> The creation of the altar hopes to shift how people understand the Eucharist and God’s relationship with humanity and the world.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, the altar and sculpture visually reinforce the intersection of creation and Christian belief and practice.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Southard sculpted the Earth. Mike Holtz and Holtzmacher Ltd. of Sycamore, Illinois built the altar (Hill, *Congregation of St. Joseph La Grange Park Center*).

<sup>85</sup> Southard comments, the altar “is for me an expression of God’s love and care and compassion for our planet and our universe. . .” (Mary Southard, CSJ, 22 June 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Because of her personal commitment to the mission of the Congregation, her altar as well as her other artwork seeks to transform how people perceive the Eucharist, God, and creation. For further analysis of Southard’s artwork, see chapter 3 and chapter 4. As Kathleen Hughes, RSJC argues, “Eucharist is uniquely able to mirror our experience back to us even as it transforms that experience, but it does so to the extent that we learn to pay attention to the interior movements of our lives and to the unfolding of the eucharistic celebration” (Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 185). For Hughes, this attentiveness includes both a person’s response to the sacrament as well as the symbols and words of the sacrament. Thus, the celebration of the Eucharist employing Southard’s altar potentially shifts the meaning of the sacrament as the individual worshipper reflects on and engages the meaning of the sacrament in this new context.

<sup>87</sup> This is similar to other artists drawing on the image of Our Lady of Lourdes to employ the power of the image while at the same time subtly shifting its meaning. In “Traveling Images,” Eli Seland traces how the image of Our Lady of Lourdes takes on different meaning through the re-presentation of the image. She contends that art, even kitsch, holds meaning because it employs the image (Eli Heldaas Seland, “Traveling Images: Our Lady of Lourdes in Popular Piety and Art,” in *Mind and Matter: Selected Papers of Nordik 2009 Conference for Art Historians*, ed. Johanna Vakkari (Helsinki: Society of Art History, 2010), 38-39).

<sup>88</sup> The addition of this altar as well as the ambo and tabernacle stand supplements the original design of the chapel. One sister noted that the “chapel is much warmer now” with the additions of the woodwork: “There



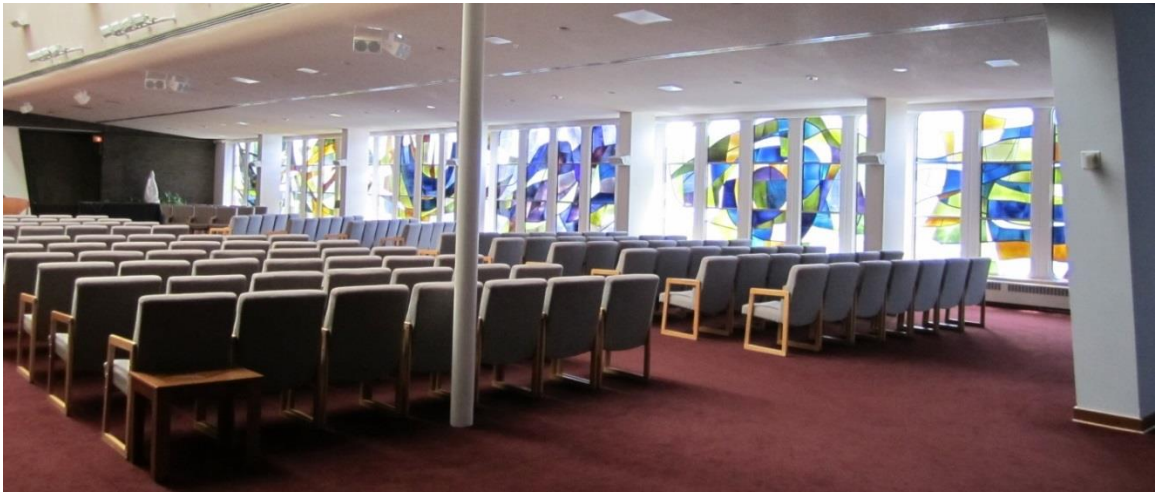
Another member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange Park, Sister George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ, created the stained glass windows.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, the windows encompass the majority of the northern and southern walls of the chapel. As the skylight draws the viewer's sight down the length of the chapel, the stained glass windows reinforce this visual movement. Thus the viewer, though centered on the altar, recognizes the presence and changes of light from outside, which further underscores the relationship of creation, humanity, and God.<sup>90</sup>

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was always a desire that it would change in time" (Sister Monica [pseudonym], 18 July 2011). The "warmth" of the maple plays against the grey sculpture to further entice the viewer. As Price argues, "Ultimately, the fate of the postwar religious landscape will depend on how well congregations can adapt structures from a unique period in American history to the ever-changing nature of demographics, liturgy, theology, worship, art, and architecture. These buildings were well suited to their times" (Price, *Temples for a Modern God*, 182). Thus, these additions to the chapel seek to recast the space to manifest and deepen the Congregation of St. Joseph's theological commitments to God and creation.

<sup>89</sup> A framed statement offers Holmgren's inspiration for these windows: "When the idea hit, I was reading Roman Guardini's *Sacred Signs* (pp. 16-18). He said that hands and the face are the most expressive parts of man. I was struck by his analogy of a handshake, an embrace, an action of receiving. It was in that moment that all the ideas came and I took a marker and crudely jotted a shorthand of ideas in movements of line. That was the time of inspiration. After that came the WORK, which lasted two years (in between teaching high school)" (George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ. "The Windows, Bethlehem Center – La Grange Pk. IL," framed statement in the LaGrange Park Ministry Center).

<sup>90</sup> The booklet for the chapel asserts, "We are not separated from the outside world by walls, but are invited to see with new eyes, through colored glass, with the eyes of faith" (Hill, *Congregation of St. Joseph La Grange Park Center*).



**Figure 20: Stained Glass Windows designed by George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ, LaGrange Park Chapel, LaGrange Park, Illinois (Used with permission, photograph by author)**

The windows consist of abstract designs, which deploy color, light, and movement to promote reflection on one's life and spirituality. Groupings of four or five windows depict themes such as yearning, receptivity, confidence, sorrow, God with us, peace, humility, jubilant thanksgiving, the Spirit flows out and up and everywhere, sacrifice, detachment, and union.<sup>91</sup> As the booklet asserts,

These windows express in stained glass the story of each of our lives as well as that of the human race as we are on the journey to be one with God, ourselves and one another. The cut of the glass pieces is exceptionally large and the play of texture, color, and movement allow one to enjoy creation beyond as well as within.<sup>92</sup>

The windows thus urge the viewer to think about or sense concepts of receptivity, growth, and relationship. Several sisters commented on Holmgren's use of color and how

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. After Holmgren designed the windows, they were produced by Emil Frei Associates of St. Louis (Ibid.).

it impacted their spiritual reflection.<sup>93</sup> Located within this chapel, the windows urge a woman to reflect deeply on her own religious life as it relates to other theological concepts, especially creation and the Eucharist. Through her visual practices, the sister engages the space of the chapel in relation to the Congregation's common vision and her personal commitment to the church and world. Consequently, the altar, sculpture, and windows challenge the viewer to consider a new direction for the church or self as well as to comprehend the unity of the created world.

### ***Many Places, United Practice***

Nevertheless, the Congregation's chapels are not always available to a wide audience. Consequently, the sisters have consciously crafted the physical spaces where they minister in order to illustrate their vision of the church and society. While the location and architecture of the motherhouse or chapel potentially visualizes the history and central role of the women religious, their ministerial buildings and art commissions for public areas further locates the Congregation within the wider society and offers their vision of the world to those outside of their community and often outside of the Catholic Church.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Sister Frances [pseudonym], 20 June 2011; Sister Hannah [pseudonym], 18 July 2011.

<sup>94</sup> In *Invisible City*, Helen Hill examines seventeenth century conventual architecture in Naples to elucidate the connections between convent space, urbanism, religious and aristocratic identity, and the politics of visibility. Convents expanded vertically and horizontally in order to emphasize their religious and social importance in the city. Bell towers, belvederes, and open courtyards in front of convents were strategically deployed to visually remind people of the presence and thus impact of the nuns. As their social mobility became increasingly limited after the Council of Trent and the enforcement of enclosure, aristocratic nuns employed the architecture of their buildings to demonstrate their relationship to those in the city as well as their religious identity. In particular, convents in Naples constructed chapels which privileged and emphasized the nuns' religious identity (Hills, *Invisible City*, especially 120-138).

The Congregation of St. Joseph sponsors the Ministry of the Arts (MOTA), the business through which they produce and distribute religious images and objects.<sup>95</sup> This enterprise succeeds in dispersing images throughout the Congregation and its ministry buildings. Paintings from Mary Southard, CSJ, Patricia Willems, CSJ, Frankie Dutil, CSJ, and Richard Mehren, CSJ as well as Madeleva Williams, CSJ, who is a Sister of St. Joseph of Orange, California, grace the walls of diverse buildings. Frankie Dutil's tapestries employ words, color, and texture to manifest the core values of the Congregation of St. Joseph. For instance, her *Generous Promises* depicts the vision of the church and world supported by the sisters. Thus, as it travels throughout the Congregation, it serves to remind the sisters of these promises as well as educate those outside of the community. Less common are images from Richard Mehren, CSJ and Patricia Willems, CSJ. Nevertheless, their paintings circulate among the centers affirming the messages evident in these images. For instance, Mehren's *Sleeping Joseph* appears in retreat centers. This image of a sleeping Joseph holding the infant Jesus depicts Joseph's humanity, compassion, and care for the child. As Sisters of St. Joseph, they value images of the saint which demonstrate his active role in the life of Jesus and Mary.<sup>96</sup> Displaying images such as *Sleeping Joseph* disperses this vision of Joseph and their charism to those outside of their community.

Likewise, the paintings of Mary Southard, CSJ are prevalent in almost all of their buildings. Many of Southard's images and statues directly relate to the charism of the

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<sup>95</sup> Chapter 4 provides a close examination of the Ministry of the Arts, its role in the Congregation, and its impact on individual's visual practices.

<sup>96</sup> These images of Joseph circulate in various forms. Sisters commented on the age and action of Joseph in images and statues. I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 3, 163-164.

Sisters of St. Joseph and mission of the Congregation of St. Joseph. Consequently, the Congregation's ministries employ her images as their logos and display them to affirm their core values. For example, the Magnificat Center in Wichita, Kansas employs Southard's *Visitation* as its logo.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth serves to establish the role of the retreat center as well as influence those who enter the center for spiritual direction. Significantly, images such as *One Sacred Community* appear in retreat centers and schools, such as the Cardinal Bernardin Early Childhood Center in Chicago, Illinois.<sup>98</sup> This image depicts the celebration of the Eucharist among a diverse group of people not separated from the natural world. As the Congregation emphasizes social and ecological justice, Southard's *The Children Are Asking*, *Woman Spirit Rising*, *We Are One*, and *Be Friends* circulate widely in schools, retreat centers, and other ministry buildings.<sup>99</sup>

The presence of these images seeks to underscore the values and vision of the Congregation as well as connect the Congregation's ministries together under a common visual practice.<sup>100</sup> Ministries in seven different states displayed images from Southard as well as other images from the Ministry of the Arts. The images travel in diverse locations and elicit reflection and potentially action. Accordingly, the prevalence of these images

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<sup>97</sup> Stephane [pseudonym], 16 August 2011. For an analysis of this image, see 219-222 below.

<sup>98</sup> For how this image is also used in liturgical celebrations and in the Ministry of the Arts, see 153, 202-203 below.

<sup>99</sup> For discussion of these images, see 1-2, 206-207, 209-210, 217-221.

<sup>100</sup> As McClintock Fulkerson argues, places are continually produced by the groups employing them and the interrelation of particular spaces. This constant production reveals the "fluidity" of places: "The overlappings of places have a temporal character. Never static, they create the possibility for the emergence of new places in the form of the *centripetal* and *centrifugal* forces that constitute place" (McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 35, emphasis in original). The Congregation employs centripetal forces to demonstrate their common identity as a religious community; they likewise deploy centrifugal forces to evidence their connections to the history of and other communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

offers coherence to the sisters' ministries. As Morgan notes, "To see is to sense, intuit, and collectively imagine what lies beyond an image."<sup>101</sup> This collective visual practice occurs in diverse locations yet connects the sisters and those they serve in a common vision.

Significantly, these images serve to further connect the Congregation with other communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph. As the Ministry of the Arts sells these images to other religious communities as well as the general public, the images' circulation arguably connects the sisters' vision of the church and world to those outside of their community. Likewise, as the Congregation deploys images from outside of their community, they interact with different images of the church and world. Yet some of the images they employ originate from other communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In particular, the posters of Madeleva Williams, CSJ appear throughout the Congregation.<sup>102</sup> As a Sister of St. Joseph of Orange, California, Williams shares the common charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Employing vibrant colors and calligraphy, these posters comment on St. Joseph, religious life, and Christian beliefs. Consequently, these images connect the Congregation to the broader visual practices of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Accordingly, images from Williams, Southard, and other Congregation of St. Joseph

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<sup>101</sup> Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 70.

<sup>102</sup> One employee and CSJ associate commented on their presence in the buildings and the ways in which the images emphasized a connection to the broader community of Sisters of St. Joseph (Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011).

artists elicit a shared commitment to serve the dear neighbor as they circulate in these public spaces.<sup>103</sup>



**Figure 21: *Joseph & Jesus, Father & Son*, Mary Southard, CSJ, displayed in the St. Vincent Mercy Hospital, Elwood, Indiana (Photograph by Rosemary Coughlin, CSJ, Used with permission)**

Additionally, the Congregation deploys particular images to elicit a desired response from the viewer. For example, a statue in the foyer of the St. Vincent Mercy Hospital in Elwood, Indiana, models the intimacy and care the sisters want expressed in the hospital and in the surrounding community. Since the 1850s, the Sisters of St. Joseph served as nurses and then chaplains in the hospital. One sister emphasized how the statue entitled *Joseph & Jesus, Father & Son* sought to visualize the sisters' role in the hospital

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<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, distance from and a lack of education in the sisters' mission and charism allows these images to be interpreted in various ways. For an analysis of how particular images operate within and outside of the Congregation of St. Joseph, see Chapter 4.

and community.<sup>104</sup> The statue exudes intimacy between Joseph and the young Jesus – an intimacy that does not leave the viewer isolated. In fact, the statue invites people to interact with it. The life size Joseph sits in such a position that children can climb into his lap. One employee of the sisters remarked, “It is not real until you touch it. . . . It is such an endearing representation of Joseph and Jesus.”<sup>105</sup> As Jesus gazes into Joseph’s eyes, others are invited to share that vision. People are called not only to see, to recognize, the values demonstrated by the relationship of Joseph and Jesus but to also participate in that communion.<sup>106</sup> The intimate vision of Joseph and Jesus thus attempts to use people’s visual practices to prod them to greater awareness of others and to elicit intimacy and compassion.



**Figure 22: *Joseph on the Journey*, Mary Southard, CSJ, Cleveland Ministry Center, Cleveland, Ohio (Used with permission; photograph by author)**

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<sup>104</sup> Sister Clara, [pseudonym], 27 July 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Tiffany [pseudonym], 28 July 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Helen A. Fielding similarly analyzes Louise Bourgeois’ *The Welcoming Hands*, six sculptures located in a park in central Paris. She argues, “The sculptures, as art works, are not only about monstration, about the revealing of truth, the erecting of constructions, but are also about constructing identity. For it is not only a thing that can be a work of art; identity also needs to be created” (Helen A. Fielding, “Touching Hands, Cultivating Dwelling,” in *Luce Irigaray: Teaching*, ed. Luce Irigaray with Mary Green (New York: Continuum, 2008), 74). People interact with the sculpted hands thus creating relationships with the sculpture as well as others present and absent.



Likewise statues of St. Joseph and the Holy Family abound on the grounds of the Congregation of St. Joseph. In particular, images of St. Joseph unite the different locations of the Congregation as well as other communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph. As a recognizable Roman Catholic saint, Joseph serves to further connect the sisters to the activities of the church throughout the world. Mary Southard's statue *Joseph on the Journey* welcomes guests to the Cleveland Ministry Center in Ohio and the LaGrange Park Center in Illinois. This statue offers a different perception of Joseph to the viewer. Whereas other images of Joseph might emphasize his relationship to Mary or Jesus or his activity as a carpenter, this sculpture focuses on the movement of Joseph. It seeks to encourage the viewer to join in this journey. This statue contrasts with *Joseph & Jesus, Father & Son* in that it does not encourage physical contact with the viewer. Instead, Joseph directs the viewer's gaze into the distance, which encourages reflection on the destination or future. With Joseph, the women religious and guests to these centers are encouraged to consider where they are heading as an individual, a community, and a church.

### ***A Consistent Vision***

As is evident in the recently renovated chapel in Wichita, Kansas, the sisters' visual practices affirm their religious beliefs even as they challenge the sisters to more fully dedicate themselves to their vision of the church and world. Entering the chapel, you encounter the baptismal font, the ambo from which the Gospel is preached, and the altar on which is celebrated the Eucharist. This linear format further directs your vision to an image of the Resurrected Christ under which the Doors of Life are located. Displaying

metalwork in the shape of a vibrant flame, the doors open as the women religious escort a deceased sister's body to the cemetery. Baptism, the Word, Eucharist, and Resurrection thus prompt the Congregation to respond faithfully to their vocation.



**Figure 23: Chapel of the Resurrection, Wichita Ministry Center, Wichita, Kansas  
(Photograph by author)**

Similar to the Wichita chapel which directs the sisters to contemplate their religious lives in relation to the resurrected life, other spaces employed by the Congregation of St. Joseph urge the women religious to remember and promote their central values. The history and mission of the Congregation of St. Joseph weaves through their visual practices. Even as the sisters elicit this history in conversations and publications, they evoke the events and ministries of the past to locate the meaning of contemporary practices and shape their approach to the future. In their ministry centers and chapels, the sisters employ architecture and images to demonstrate their religious vows and the mission of the Congregation. Thus, the sisters daily interact with diverse spaces which influence their understanding of their role as women religious and their

vision of the church. Committed to serving the dear neighbor, these women contemplate, affirm and disperse their mission for unity and justice through the spaces in which they live, minister, and worship.

### Chapter 3: Visualizing Transformation: Prayer and Ministries

A woman sits with her journal reflecting not in word but in images. A photograph of a ballet dancer's feet forces another to rethink her understanding of God. Another woman directs a group of retreat participants to use a camera as God's eye. All of these women are Roman Catholic sisters from the Congregation of St. Joseph, a religious community of vowed women religious in the United States. Through their ministries and spiritual practices, the sisters live out and transmit the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. Even as they continue to participate in and value the sacraments and religious devotions of the church, the sisters supplement these with diverse visual practices that encourage reflection on and commitment to their religious values and mission. It is through these visual practices in their spiritual lives and ministries that the sisters contemplate and manifest the mission of their religious community and promote the transformation of society.

As Terrance Tilley argues, practices are essential to living out the central concepts of the Christian tradition.<sup>1</sup> In *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, he describes tradition as “a practice or complex set of practices in which initiates learn how to participate in local communities that teach them how to live in and live out that tradition.”<sup>2</sup> Passing on tradition is not merely routine activity; rather, the practice involved in tradition entails conscious activity and reflection on those practices. Practice should not be merely

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<sup>1</sup> In “Communication in Handing on the Faith,” Tilley argues that practice is central because tradition is an educational task, which trains people how to live (Terrence W. Tilley, “Communication in Handing on the Faith,” in *Handing on the Faith: the Church's Mission and Challenge*, ed. Robert P. Imbelli (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 154-155).

<sup>2</sup> Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition*, 80. Tilley further describes tradition as “communicative” (Ibid., 80) and religious practices as employing a “shared vision” (Ibid., 55).

individual or stop at the doors of the church; rather, it should move beyond the institution and engage society as a whole. As modern society abounds with visual stimuli, the visual practices of the church likewise must encompass individual, ecclesial, and societal elements. Thus, the Congregation of St. Joseph demonstrates how visual practices, including image creation and use, potentially inspire action for justice and compassion as well as reveal the challenge of manifesting a theology of transformation in a global world.

### ***Communal Vision: The Practice of Theology***

As scholars such as Marcel Mauss, Paul Connerton, and Mary McClintock Fulkerson have demonstrated, bodily and visual practices form individuals into members of communities or cultures which share common behaviors and ways of seeing the world.<sup>3</sup> In *The Embodied Eye*, David Morgan elaborates on the embodied and social nature of vision. As physical beings belonging to particular communities, individuals see and thus interpret the world from their physical and social location.<sup>4</sup> One's body and perception of the body impacts how a person sees. Gender, race, sexuality, and social class all influence the way in which a person perceives individuals and society as well as her own membership in particular groups. Thus, the physical body itself affects how a person perceives the world.

Moreover, society impacts how people see and respond to images. As Morgan asserts, "By participating in a way of seeing, a viewer enters a community of viewers and

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<sup>3</sup> Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society* 2 (1973): 70-88; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 5-6.

sees from the perspective of a collective body, a social body characterized by shared feelings or sentiments.”<sup>5</sup> Membership in particular groups draws one into a specific way of seeing and, often, of being seen. Strategies in the home, among peers, in educational settings, and in media potentially educate individuals to affirm specific values, behaviors, and appearances. Education into this visual practice consequently trains individuals in how to interpret the world around them as well as how to interact with that world. Consequently, individuals are trained to see and behave in particular ways because they are disciplined by the groups and cultures to which they belong.

For those who belong to religious groups, this education into a common vision further affects their religious understanding of the world. While religious traditions verbally articulate central beliefs, embodied and visual practices further elucidate their values and how doctrines intersect with lived practices.<sup>6</sup> It is through diverse practices that individuals and communities manifest and promote their theological interpretation of the world. Communities that are committed to engaging society do so not only through the written word but through visual practices which enable them to interpret and see the world differently.

Accordingly, the visual practices of the sisters are not isolated events; rather, the Congregation as well as the church contributes to the format and value of these visual practices. As a result, they incorporate multiple layers of Catholic history and devotional

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<sup>5</sup> Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 68. Morgan discusses visibility in terms of the gaze which he defines as “a visual structuring of relations that organizes power as a situation in which people find themselves in relation to one another, a social body, and a sacred referent” (Ibid., 70).

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of how the beliefs of one religious community interacts with their conceptions of race and ability, see McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 55-88.

practices as well as American history and culture. Even though the Congregation of St. Joseph recently formed in 2007, they articulate a common vision of the world which affirms their communal values and identity as Roman Catholic women religious. Central to their communal vision is the sisters' mission for unity. As Sisters of St. Joseph, unity dominates their values and goals. Among the values central to the spirituality of Father Jean Pierre Médaille, the founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph, is the focus on the double union, love of God and of neighbor.<sup>7</sup> For the earlier sisters, this entailed seeking their personal salvation and the sanctification of others.<sup>8</sup> This emphasis continued to guide the individual communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the twentieth century.

Following their reconfiguration (2007), the Congregation of St. Joseph articulated a mission for unity with God and others: "Our mission flows from the purpose for which the congregation exists: We live and work that all people may be united with God and with one another. It is rooted in the mission of Christ, the same mission which continually unfolds in His church, 'That all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; I pray that they may be one in Us.' (John 17:21)."<sup>9</sup> Articulated as Christocentric, this sense of unity remains grounded in the Gospel message as well as impacts the Congregation's vision of and goals for their community, the society, and the church.

Evident in the mission statement and in discussions with the sisters, this sense of unity is meant to be all-encompassing. Unity is not merely a person's individual

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<sup>7</sup> Nepper, *Origins*, 74.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 1 for an assessment of how the sisters pursued this double sanctification in France and in the United States (29-31, 40-42, 66-67)

<sup>9</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, "Our Mission," About Us, accessed 18 April 2011, [http://www.csjoseph.org/our\\_mission\\_vision.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/our_mission_vision.aspx).

relationship with God; rather, union with God provides the foundation of unity with others and creation. As one sister noted, if God created everything, then all is one in God.<sup>10</sup> Thus the sisters do not envision themselves as creating an otherwise non-existent unity; rather, they seek to recognize and reveal unity that is inherent in all of creation and all human relationships. As we will see, the sisters contemplate this unity in their communal and individual prayer lives and attempt to train others in this vision of unity through their ministries and publications.

To further consider the ways in which they should live out this broad mission for unity, the sisters crafted four Generous Promises which call the Congregation to give of themselves and the community.<sup>11</sup> The Congregation employs these four commitments to assess and guide their social and ecological justice commitments, relation to global culture, and the Congregation's leadership. Missioned to serve where they are needed and capable of providing service, the Congregation currently ministers in education, healthcare, spiritual direction, and pastoral care as well as to the poor, prison inmates, immigrants, and victims of domestic violence.<sup>12</sup> In these diverse ministries, it is evident that the sisters engage the church and society, Catholics, other Christians, and those of other or no faiths.

Thus, the Congregation seeks to fully practice the Catholic faith as they engage, and attempt to alter, American and global society. This outwardly focused mission

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<sup>10</sup> Sister Natalie [pseudonym], 22 June 2011.

<sup>11</sup> For the relation of these promises to the Congregation of St. Joseph's mission, see 10-12 above; Congregation of St. Joseph, "Our Mission."

<sup>12</sup> For information on these ministries, see Congregation of St. Joseph, "CSJ Ministries, Inc.," How We Serve, accessed 30 August 2013, <http://www.csjoseph.org/csjministries.aspx>.



pursued in their ministries manifests a theology of transformation as envisioned in the work of John Fuellenbach, a Roman Catholic theologian. In *Church for the Kingdom*, Fuellenbach affirms a theology of transformation, which seeks to engage the secular world while proclaiming and visibly manifesting the kingdom of God.<sup>13</sup> Rather than fearing or rejecting the world, a theology of transformation productively dialogues with society and challenges troubling trends to elicit justice and compassion.

Forming the basis of his theology, Fuellenbach draws on the work of Gerhard and Norbert Lohfink who offer the “contrast society” as a model for the church.<sup>14</sup> Fuellenbach notes, “the church is seen primarily as a community in which justice and compassion are the basic rules of conduct, which must be demanded from society at large as well if the church wants to fulfill its primary mission to lead all human societies into the kingdom of God now and to come.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, a theology of transformation asserts the centrality of belief in Jesus Christ while dialoguing with society to resist and eliminate values counter to the kingdom. For Fuellenbach, this contrast to society cannot be manifested as withdrawal from society but rather as engagement with society to present an alternative way in which to live in the modern world.<sup>16</sup> This engagement demands that the church dialogue with cultures and diverse religious traditions because of the reality of

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<sup>13</sup> John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 208-210.

<sup>14</sup> For Fuellenbach’s assessment of the model of the church as a contrast society, see *Ibid.*, 196-207.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 197. For an extended discussion of models of the church, see Avery Dulles, SJ, *Models of the Church*, expanded edition (New York: Image Books, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Fuellenbach contends, “This model could also be called the *subversive kingdom*, because it consciously seeks to replace society’s dominant values and structures. The kingdom is a reality and a set of values to be lived out now, in the present order in radical obedience to the Gospel and in opposition to the powers of the present age” (*Ibid.*, 204).

inculturation and the need for solidarity with the poor.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, a theology of transformation seeks to engage society and elicit justice and compassion.

While this theology is evident in the mission statement and range of ministries in which the Congregation is involved, we can investigate how the sisters' other practices embrace and transmit the desire to engage society. Apart from the articulated goals of transforming society, how do the sisters train themselves and others into this theology of transformation? To what extent do the sisters productively employ visual practices to proclaim the kingdom and elicit justice and compassion? Like many religious groups and paralleling movements in other women's religious communities, the sisters employ visual practices in their individual prayer lives, congregational life, and ministries. Challenging themselves and others to productively engage and potentially transform society, the sisters deploy visual practices as theological reflection, edification, and evangelization. Accordingly, the sisters employ the transformative potentiality of visual practices to affirm and invite others into their vision of a just and compassionate church.

### ***Manifesting a United Community***

The reconfiguration of the communities into the Congregation of St. Joseph draws together both their common charism (mission and spirituality) as Sisters of St. Joseph and their diverse histories and ministries. These practices have their foundation in the history of the communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph. As we have seen, the communities deployed physical space to shape the prayer life and ministerial foci of their members. Praying, ministering, and living in these spaces visually affirms the goals of the women

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 205.

religious and encourages their commitment to a mission of unity and justice. In addition to this use of space, the Congregation has historically deployed other visual practices to recall their communal history and emphasize their mission for unity.

While the contemporary sisters employ some different methods and, perhaps, are more conscious of employing the visual arts as a form of prayer, each of the communities that formed the Congregation of St. Joseph previously deployed images and performances in their congregational life to subtly shape the communal vision of the sisters. Reflecting on their early years in religious life, sisters in Kansas remembered that they put on plays while they were novices and young sisters.<sup>18</sup> These plays often enacted aspects of their history, which prompted the young women to relive the history of their religious community. As Paul Connerton elaborates, communal memory inhabits bodily practices.<sup>19</sup> Not only did the women religious learn or were reminded to recall the events of the sisters in the nineteenth century, they also physically took on the roles of previous members of their community. This appropriation promotes contemplation about the struggles the sisters endured even as they celebrated the fact that the community thrived in the present.

Thus, they embodied the history of the sisters while enabling the audience to see the history enacted. This bodily and visual practice serves to underscore the communal memory and charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph.<sup>20</sup> For women religious who had

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<sup>18</sup> Sister Gloria [pseudonym], 17 August 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 72, 102.

<sup>20</sup> The women religious not only participated in visual enactments of their history. They also engaged music as a way to share significant songs. Sisters in Baton Rouge and West Virginia produced records of religious and popular music (Sister Vivian [pseudonym], 13 March 2013).

previously enacted these scenes, the plays reinforced the persistence of the early sisters as well as played on their own memories of being in the novitiate. Their visual practices thus reinforced their connections to this shared history as well as the present form of the religious community.

Other sisters re-appropriate prior practices for their own spiritual lives. Among these practices is lace-making. The first sisters in Le Puy, France participated in the local economy by making lace and ribbon and trained women and girls in these skills. As they made lace or taught others, the sisters included spiritual readings and prayer.<sup>21</sup> After the Second Vatican Council, the women religious reclaimed this history to visually demonstrate their unity as Sisters of St. Joseph. Consequently, their buildings employ lace and lace patterns to affirm their relationships and commitment to social justice.<sup>22</sup> Responding to this communal focus, contemporary sisters draw on these foundational practices as a prayer form. For example, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia offer a lace-making retreat, which some of the sisters in the Congregation of St. Joseph have attended. For Sister Elizabeth, this practice connects the contemporary sisters to the founding community, back to the kitchen where the sisters first made lace as a community.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the practice of making lace hopes to call to mind and reaffirm their founding justice commitments.

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<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of this historical practice, see chapter 1, 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> The Congregation of St. Joseph deploys these visual displays of lace as visual memories of their foundation, a form of education for visitors, and impetus to (re)commit to justice. For more on this display of lace and its relation to the sisters' use of space, see chapter 2, 84-89.

<sup>23</sup> Sister Elizabeth [pseudonym], 18 August 2011. Indeed, the Sisters of St. Joseph even deploy the image of this restored French building and the interior of the kitchen to recall the previous ministerial focus and dedication of generations of women religious. The image circulates among the many communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph, which further connects them to their communal history.

Nevertheless, this practice does not only recall the practices of the Sisters of St. Joseph in France. While on retreat with other Sisters of St. Joseph from diverse communities, the women learn to make lace and contemplate how the practice relates to their lives. Thus, the retreat combines lace-making and prayer, which urges the women to reflect on the role of practices in their relationship to God and others. Sister Elizabeth asserted, “It is a contemplative type of thing. . . . Your hands are busy and your mind is busy, but they don’t have to be on the same thing.”<sup>24</sup> The lace enables the women religious to free their minds to reflect on other things. As the retreat paired religious readings and prayer with lace-making, the women were encouraged to continue their individual prayer or to reflect on their interpretation of a scriptural passage. Significantly, this combination of lace-making and spiritual reflection enables reflection on life as well: “You make mistakes. In life you can’t always rip it out, but in lace you can rip it out. You can start again. You get yourself in tangles and knots and you have to work that out.”<sup>25</sup> For this sister, the practice of making lace elucidated the complexity and continued growth of one’s life. Personal relationships, ministerial activity, and one’s commitment to her vocation necessarily encounter rough patches, which might need to be reworked. Religious life, indeed any form of life, is an on-going process in which a person must learn as she lives and reflects on her experiences.

While the physical practice of lace is important here, Sister Elizabeth also examined the lace in front of her and pointed to particular stitches. The lace itself enabled her to reflect on how life itself entails continuous growth and reflection. As she discussed

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<sup>24</sup> Sister Elizabeth [pseudonym], 18 August 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

the process involved in creating particular designs like a cross or the nativity scene, she related these processes to prayer and contemplative practices. Privileging action over conscious thought, she recalled how another woman religious turned to her lace when sleep evaded her one evening. This sister soon found that she was creating the complex image of the nativity scene without reflecting on how this should be done.<sup>26</sup> While Sister Elizabeth had not experienced this herself, her own lace elicited this memory and prompted reflection on the power of this practice. Thus, the image or design in the lace elicited a further response from her after the process of making the lace was completed. The object itself continued to offer further reflection on life and prayer.

As members of a religious community, this practice of lace making and the reflection on the meaning of lace is important for their role in the church and world. This practice recalls the earliest sisters in France and their commitment to serving the dear neighbor. This communal memory encountered in the lace prods the women religious to recall and commit to the justice commitments of the earliest sisters; yet, the lessons learned in bobbin lace encourage them to reflect on how to best live out their vocation and commitment to justice in the modern world. As women religious in the United States in the twenty-first century, they encounter diverse expectations and interpretations on their role as women religious. As a result, these practices potentially assist them in discerning their response to gender roles, ministerial expectations or limitations, and definitions of religious life.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

### ***Envisioning Church through Communal Prayer***

In addition to these communal plays and the practice of making lace, the Congregation employs diverse religious practices to reflect on their religious vows and role within the church and world. Daily prayer and the sacramental life of the church, especially the Eucharist, remain central to their religious life. Drawing on their constitution, the women religious also practice sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House as well as participate in Mission Circles and Renewed Local Communities. Each of these forms of prayer or worship directs the women to reflect on their relationship with God and others as well as their mission in the world.

Some of the traditional prayer forms in which the sisters engage privilege their experiences as women. Central to their spiritual practices as Sisters of St. Joseph is sharing the State of the Heart and the Order of the House. In the *Règlements*, Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ initiated these practices for the first Sisters of St. Joseph. Paralleling the Jesuit practice of the Examen of Consciousness, sharing the State of the Heart incorporates a reflection on the day and where God is calling you as well as discernment about how one will respond. Likewise the Order of the House entails reflection on the state of the community and promotes communal discernment about ministries and a shared life of prayer. Incorporated into the sisters' weekly activities, these practices intersect with the women's prayer, ministries, and religious life.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, the sisters

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<sup>27</sup> For a description of this practice and its role in community life, see Christy Cogil, CSJ, et al., *State of the Heart and Order of the House: A Way of Nonviolence* (Bearers of the Tradition, Concordia, 2005), 7-8, accessed 13 March 2014, <http://brentwoodcsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/State-of-the-Heart-Order-of-the-House.pdf>.

engage in spiritual practices which call to mind their own experiences and encourage them to reflect on their personal and ministerial actions.

One description of these practices elucidates their relation to one's experiences as well as how one chooses to live in the world:

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 world with others is a way of practicing nonviolence in the Congregation of St. Joseph today.<sup>28</sup>

Offered as a form of nonviolence or minimally as attentive reflection, the State of the Heart and the Order of the House encourage the women religious to continuously reflect on their approach to members of their community, those to whom they minister, and all whom they encounter. Regularly practiced by the sisters, these prayer forms involve repeated analysis of one's thoughts and actions, the way vows are lived in community, events in society, and one's personal and communal responsibility to respond to instances of injustice. Consequently, these practices promote engagement with society and prod the sisters to transform the world through their prayer and ministry.<sup>29</sup>

Because the women's own experiences are central to these practices, gender continues to affect how women religious perceive their own role in the church as well as how they live their religious lives. In *Fragments of Real Presence*, Teresa Berger argues

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>29</sup> Cogil et al argue, "Nonviolence calls us to choose engagement over distance, relationship and community over isolation and separatedness, 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. We need to enter into such transformation consistently and to open ourselves to be made ONE with each other, God, and the universe" (Ibid., 5, emphasis in original).



that spiritual practices developed in contemporary society to address a prior distancing from people's lives and an emphasis on the role of the clergy. Consequently, new liturgies or ways of mapping these liturgies are needed because of the cultural changes that have affected how Catholic women perceive themselves and their relation to religion.<sup>30</sup> As women religious who individually and communally reflect on their mission within the church, the Congregation of St. Joseph engages gender roles and definitions of religious life in their communal worship. While not overtly subverting traditional Catholic conceptions of gender, the women religious foreground their role in liturgy and display their understanding of Catholic teaching, religious life, and the Congregation's mission.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, practices such as sharing the State of the Heart do not necessarily employ visual practices to promote reflection on one's religious life.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the women religious draw on other communal forms of prayer which employ traditional and novel visual practices. Daily mass remains central to their religious life and identity as

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<sup>30</sup> Teresa Berger, *Fragments of Real Presence: Liturgical Traditions in the Hands of Women* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), 11.

<sup>31</sup> This emphasis on the women's role in liturgy reveals the sisters' conscious reflection on their relation to the institutional church and continued engagement with the sacramental life of the church. Scholars likewise have called for more attention to women's involvement in liturgy and encouraged changes to account for women's experiences. See Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998), especially chapter 7.

<sup>32</sup> While it is not necessary to employ images or objects for these practices, Cogil et al do suggest using a symbol or image as part of the Order of the House: "Finally, what symbol or image represents God's action in us? The group reflects on a word of wisdom, song, phrase, poem, scripture, maxim, or anything that captures how they were moved during communal reflection. Together they name a symbol or image and then reflect on how it might guide the group's remembering until the next meeting. (Marcia Allen, csj and Bette Moslander, csj)" (Christy Cogil, CSJ, et al., *State of the Heart and Order of the House*, 11).

women religious.<sup>33</sup> As we have seen, the shape and decoration of their chapels urges the women to reflect on their role as women religious and commitment to justice. Their embodied and verbal practices during mass intersect with the visual. Daily they encounter visual reminders of their relationships and commitment to religious values.

In addition to daily celebrations of the mass, the sisters also create liturgies to celebrate important moments in their individual and communal lives, including the Feast of St. Joseph, Founder's Day, the profession of vows, and jubilees (the anniversaries of vows). It is important to the women that they create liturgical celebrations, which honor their identity as Sisters of St. Joseph, their commitment to their religious community, and the ministries which helped shape their understanding of their role in the Catholic Church. In particular, the women consider at length how to celebrate the profession or anniversary of their vows. For Sister Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ, creating the liturgy for her profession of final vows elucidated layers of meaning for herself and the people gathered to celebrate with her on July 30, 2011. To celebrate this profession, Curtsinger contemplated the meaning of her vows as they related to her Catholic identity. She sought to bring the assembly into her ecclesiological vision as they celebrated an event in her own religious life.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> As noted earlier, not all of the women religious can worship together for daily mass. Because of mass schedules, some women are prevented from participating in this form of communal worship because of their ministerial responsibilities. Nonetheless, the women seek out different locations and times to worship.

<sup>34</sup> Significantly, Curtsinger's view of her vows embedded in the sacrament of the Eucharist correspond to theologians' views about the ability of the sacraments to shape individuals' relationships to God and others. As Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ argues, "Sacrament is, from beginning to end, God's action, God's initiative, God's invitation to a new and deeper relationship. Every sacrament, in one way or another, is an experience of conversion through which God invites us and draws us more deeply into the divine life, in faith, in trust, in service, in acceptance, in healing, in sorrow, and in all the daily ways we die and rise in union with the dying and rising of Jesus" (Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, *Becoming the Sign: Sacramental Living in a Post-*

The Congregation's mission of unity weaves throughout the liturgy in the choice of readings in English and Spanish, songs, and the Litany of the Saints. Demonstrating her continued relation to the Catholic Church, Curtsinger chose to include the Sunday readings in addition to a reading from the *Constitution of the Congregation of St. Joseph*. She asserts, "It's really more in sync with our spirituality that we celebrate the liturgy – the readings of the day – that the universal church is celebrating."<sup>35</sup> Instead of simply accepting or rejecting the Sunday readings, Curtsinger reflected at length on the meaning of the scriptural passages and how they related to her own decision to profess perpetual vows. Even as she described the significance of the readings for the Congregation's magazine *imagineONE*, Curtsinger returned to central Catholic beliefs and sacraments as well as the Congregation's mission:

Verses from the prophet Isaiah, "Come to the water! I will renew with you the everlasting covenant" (Is 55: 1, 3) and the gospel texts relating Jesus' miracle of the loaves and fishes (Mt 14:13-21) provided the context for the liturgy when Sister Mary Jo professed her final vows in the Chapel of the LaGrange Park Center near Chicago. Interestingly, the story of the loaves and fishes is the only miracle that is in all four gospels, and Sister Mary Jo describes it as "a prefiguring of Eucharist – a sign of our unity with God and each other."<sup>36</sup>

This conscious affirmation of religious beliefs continues throughout the liturgy in songs such as *Table of Plenty* by Dan Schutte, *You Will Show Me the Path of Life* by Kathy Sherman, CSJ, and *We Come to Your Feast* by Michael Joncas. Each of these songs challenges the assembly to consider their role in the church and world by

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*Conciliar Church*, 2012 Madaleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013), 39).

<sup>35</sup> Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ, 18 July 2011.

<sup>36</sup> "Final Vows Run Deep for Sister Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 8.

emphasizing their relationship to God, the decision to embrace one's vocation, and the challenge of responding to the presence received in the Eucharist. Through hearing readings and proclaiming song and prayer, the assembly verbalized and embodied Curtsinger's vision of the church and the meaning of her vows. The choice of readings and songs revealed the intricate connection between her identity as a woman religious and her baptismal commitment.

Nevertheless, Curtsinger did not only rely on the spoken word to elicit the participation and commitment of the assembly; rather, she employed the liturgical space as well as images to announce and guide the celebration. At the opening of the profession, Curtsinger processed into the chapel holding her profession candle, which featured a painting by Pat Willems, CSJ. Featuring the date and a watercolor painting of the natural world, the candle connected the celebration of Curtsinger's vows to the rest of creation. As she processed into the chapel with the lit candle, it visually recalled her baptism and the light of Christ, which she had symbolically received in a candle lit from the Paschal Candle. The simple green decorations of the liturgical space further situated her profession within the liturgical season of Ordinary Time while flowers connected the space to the natural world. Family members also brought up flowers during the offertory procession. As the liturgical booklet relates, "*Sr. Mary Jo's family sets our table with gifts of Earth.*" This visually included those who supported her commitment to religious life as well as connected the celebration of the Eucharist with the rest of creation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Liturgy of Perpetual Profession, Sister Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: St. Joseph's Press, 2011), emphasis in original. While the gifts of bread and wine offered in the Eucharist are the central aspect of this sacrament, they visually interact with aspects of the natural world.



**Figure 24: Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ's Profession of Final Vows, 30 July 2011, LaGrange Park Chapel, LaGrange Park, Illinois (Photograph by author)**

The booklet for the liturgy featured two additional images: *One Sacred Community* and *Bread & Wine, Water & Stone* by Mary Southard, CSJ.<sup>38</sup> *One Sacred Community* depicts a group of people gathered around a table celebrating the Eucharist. The celebration is centered in a cross which holds additional representations of creation including fire, the sun and moon, and animal and plant life. For the sisters in LaGrange Park, this painting holds special meaning as the original hangs in their gathering space and was painted by a member of their own community. Within the liturgical celebration, the image visually reinforced the connection of the natural world with the Eucharist as it was embodied in the Offertory Procession.<sup>39</sup>

The other image included in the liturgy booklet was created for Curtsinger's profession. Reflecting on the readings and her past ministries as well as the meaning of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of this image as it is employed by the Ministry of the Arts, see 206-207.

her vows, Curtsinger envisioned this image and asked Mary Southard, CSJ to paint it. The booklet describes the importance of the image: “This art was inspired by the site called Dalmanutha on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus is remembered to have multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed his hungry followers.”<sup>40</sup> The image itself depicts a stone slab table or altar at the end of the sea. On the table rests a glass of wine and a loaf of bread. While the image foregrounds the altar, much of the image offers the still water framed by the distant hills of Galilee. Thus, the image embraces the messages of Isaiah (“Come to the water!”) and the multiplication of the loaves in the Gospel of Matthew, the readings through which Curtsinger reflected upon the meaning of her profession of final vows.

Yet, the image does more than solidify one moment in her life. As Curtsinger reflects,

Right now that painting speaks a lot about who I am and how I’ve journeyed to this moment because I also feel very much that our vows and our constitution situate us very much within the church. And, you know, coming up through the ranks of ministry within a parish and diocese, even though I have not really been there very much in the last 10-12 years, that was my formation and so that picture captures a lot for me about this particular moment.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, the image displays Curtsinger’s vision of her own interrelatedness with the Congregation’s history and her own activities within the church. The Eucharist is not depicted as separated from the rest of the world. Likewise, Curtsinger expressed the embeddedness of her vows within her baptismal commitment, her prior ministry, and the community gathered physically or spiritually with her. Accordingly, Curtsinger employed

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<sup>40</sup> *Liturgy of Perpetual Profession, Sister Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ.*

<sup>41</sup> Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ, 18 July 2011.

this image to demonstrate her vision of religious life and disperse this vision to those in her religious community and those who came to share in her celebration of vowed commitment.

In similar ways, other sisters affirmed the importance of visual images and objects to celebrate their jubilees (anniversary of their vows). In these celebrations, the women religious consciously reflected on readings and songs in order to employ the spoken word to celebrate their religious commitment. Often in tandem with these verbal messages, images and objects urged those gathered to contemplate a different dimension of religious life and ministry in the church. Removed from these liturgical celebrations, the images continued to elicit reflection on the jubilee celebration and their ministerial commitments. Thus, as they gather together to worship, the Congregation visually affirms and disperses their conception of religious life and the church.

### ***Seeing Relationship: The Visual Practice of Prayer***

Even as communal worship gathers the women religious together and promotes reflection on religious life and their role in the church, their individual prayer lives anchor the women to their religious values and challenge them to personally engage their beliefs and mission in the church. As Sisters of St. Joseph, the women religious emphasize the integrated nature of their spiritual lives. Instead of envisioning their prayer, ministry, and congregational life as separated, they recognize the enduring connections between their various activities and the relationships they have with fellow women religious, family, friends, and those to whom they minister as well as the natural world. They relate the unity evident in creation to their commitment for justice, which in

turn affects and is affected by their personal prayer lives. Much like they would use the space of the chapel to elicit reflection on particular values or beliefs, the sisters individually deploy their prayer spaces to influence the direction or focus of their prayer. For instance, sisters include particular images or natural objects in their prayer space to provide visual reminders of important events in their lives or their commitment to the environment.<sup>42</sup>

As they deploy particular imagery within these prayer spaces, the sisters integrate their visual practices into their prayer. Images and objects possess the power to influence our thoughts and actions, to remind us of people and past events, and to direct our thought towards our hopes and dreams. Crosses, crucifixes, icons, religious images, angels, and candles abound in these spaces as do images and objects from loved ones and from the natural environment. The sisters acknowledged the influence of these objects as they described their prayer space in their own rooms. Consequently, a prayer space might include photographs of loved ones, a crucifix, a candle, a rock, a symbol of a ministry, and list of death row inmates. Each of these visual clues impacts the prayer – for what a sister prays, how she prays, how she relates different aspects of her prayer to one another, and importantly, how she responds to this prayer in her own life.

Because of the powerful influence of these images, many of the sisters vary what is in their prayer space. While they might have a particular image or object that continues to hold meaning for a greater length of time, they draw on various images, objects,

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<sup>42</sup> Scholars have observed the impact of objects on women's rituals. For a discussion of these practices, see Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), especially chapters 9 and 10.



candles, and crosses. To benefit from their visual practices, some sisters change these images and objects depending on the liturgical season, to include a gift from a loved one, or to speak to a particular moment in their lives. For example, Sister Barbara commented how different crucifixes spoke to her throughout her life.<sup>43</sup> Each particular crucifix deepened her prayer life at one point. Alternating the crucifix enabled her to grow in her understanding of and relationship with God. Acknowledging this, the women religious deployed particular images or objects to elicit different reflections or responses during prayer.

For Sister Barbara, as well as the other women religious, the significance of these particular crucifixes or images depended on whether they were received as a gift, were connected to a particular experience, or reminded one of important relationships. For instance, one sisters' prayer corner abounded with angels. Noting that she loved to collect angels, Sister Gloria described who had given her particular angels or the meaning associated with those she purchased for herself.<sup>44</sup> As she displayed the angels in her prayer corner, she intended the statues to visually remind her of these people and events. Thus, as she daily prays in this space, gifts from her siblings and their children call them to mind and potentially direct her prayers to loved ones. Angels associated with her years as a teacher recall her students and colleagues as well as her joys and struggles as an educator. The display of statues or other images conceivably recalls the relationships and experiences that inspired the gift. Thus, the statue then aspires to influence her prayer life and how she responds to that prayer in her daily life.

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<sup>43</sup> Sister Barbara [pseudonym], 24 June 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Sister Gloria [pseudonym], 17 August 2011.

Accordingly, the combination of dominant images and cyclical changes confirms the sisters' engagement with and attentiveness to images in their visual field. This engagement and attentiveness is not necessarily exhibited in conscious reflection; rather, the engagement often manifested as a responsiveness to particular images or objects. Sisters who minimized their own use of art often described in great detail their engagement with particular images for prayer.<sup>45</sup> For example, Sister May described how she sits in front of an image of Jesus for her daily prayer. In this way, she imagines herself speaking with Jesus.<sup>46</sup> The image itself assists in affirming this dialogue with God.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the image itself is not the central feature of this practice; rather, it is the sister's relationship with God that enables this visual practice to employ this particular image. Engaged during prayer, the image takes on diverse layers of meaning and relationship.

### *Gendered Images*

Nevertheless, not all sisters turn to images to manifest their relationship with God; rather, their image use deploys various visual practices which enter into conversation with the women's understandings of humanity and the divine. As women religious, they belong to a community which consciously reflects on theological concepts and religious values. While not all of the sisters earned graduate degrees in theology or religious

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<sup>45</sup> Many interviews began with sisters declaring that they did not draw on images and did not find art important for religious life; however, as our conversation progressed, the sisters typically recalled central features of their prayer spaces or particular images in the motherhouse which spoke to them. This does not mean that visual practices equally affect all of the women religious; rather, to varying degrees they drew on visual practices in their prayer and congregational lives.

<sup>46</sup> Sister May [pseudonym], 15 July 2011.

<sup>47</sup> For this people's engagement with Sallman's *Head of Christ*, see Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 4, 56-57, 66.

studies, they possess more knowledge of debates about inclusive language and the impact of gendered images of God. They participate in prayer groups and community meetings which engage scholars' work, employ inclusive language, offer different images of God, and subtly disrupt gender norms. Additionally, their experience as women religious and encounters with people to whom they minister further urge the sisters to reconsider their conceptions of women's roles in the church and society.

How does the human body affect these considerations? As members of the Congregation of St. Joseph, they express a strong appreciation of the created world and an inclusive vision of all people. These theological positions accordingly impact the sisters' use and reception of images of the human body. For some of the sisters, gendered images, specifically of women, served as positive examples of what it means to be a woman in the Roman Catholic Church and American society. For one sister, an image of a nude woman urged her to accept herself as she was created. She recounted how she had received the image and used it while on retreat. As a source of spiritual reflection, the image prodded her to consider a positive vision of the female body as well as to fully value herself as a being created by God.<sup>48</sup> This process assisted her as she reflected about her religious life and ministries while on retreat. Accordingly, the image came to hold meaning for her and her religious life. Afterwards, she displayed the image in her room in the motherhouse, which prompted some sisters to question the wisdom of exhibiting such an image where maintenance workers might see it. Resisting an outright rejection of the female body, she urged others to acknowledge the positive message she perceived in the

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<sup>48</sup> Sister Laura [pseudonym], 23 July 2012.

image as well as support her desire not to hide such images.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, interaction with images of women impacted the sisters' understanding of themselves and their vocation.

Nonetheless, not only images of women elicited these responses; rather, images of men prompted the women to further consider their own role in the church. In particular, images of St. Joseph frequently appeared in conversations and revealed the sisters' perceptions of masculinity, religious vocation, and age. Images of St. Joseph abound in the Congregation's buildings since they are dedicated to the saint and are missioned to serve the world as he served Mary and Jesus. Often sisters rejected images of an older, inept Joseph as not representing the father, protector, of Jesus; rather, they emphasized a younger (perhaps middle aged) man who possessed direction, ability, and dedication.

While this reaction possibly reveals their interpretation of masculinity, it more probably reflects their own identification with Joseph as Sisters of St. Joseph. As many of these sisters are themselves in their sixties and beyond, remain active in various ministries, and are committed to their religious lives, this focus on age perhaps reveals their reactions to societal depictions of women religious or the elderly. Resisting negative descriptions of themselves, the women religious identify with images of an active Joseph. Thus, the use of or reflection on a gendered image evaded simplistic understandings of gender, revealed aspects of the sisters' identity, and offered a subtle critique of societal attitudes. Consequently, these images enabled the sisters to reflect on their own

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

understanding of what it means to be a woman religious and how that impacts their ministries and spiritual life.

### *Images of God*

These reflections on gender and women's roles in the church also interact with the sisters' perceptions of God and the images they turn to in their prayer lives. Theologians, especially feminist theologians, have questioned traditional images of God and interrogated their effects on human understandings of the divine and relationships with the creation. For instance, Sallie McFague challenges Christians to expand their images of God beyond that of God as Father, Ruler and Judge. Concerned about nuclear war and ecological destruction, McFague argues that these metaphorical conceptions of God impact people's relationship with God as well as their relationship to the world. McFague asserts, "The world is our meeting place with God, and this means that God's immanence will be 'universal' and God's transcendence will be 'worldly.'"<sup>50</sup> Consequently, McFague offers images of God as Mother, Lover, and Friend to disrupt prior understandings of God and to create benevolent relationships in human society.<sup>51</sup>

As members of a religious community, the sisters encounter these theological assertions. Some members of the Congregation possess degrees in theology or religion. Others read widely because of their own personal interest in these questions. While some

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<sup>50</sup> Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 185.

<sup>51</sup> For her analysis of these metaphors of God, see *Ibid.*, 91-180. Turning her focus to ecological destruction, McFague examines the benefits of viewing the universe as the Body of God. McFague argues that the Incarnation and Christianity's inclusivity are positive aspects of this model, which could assist in valuing the world and all people (Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 207).

of the sisters may not personally engage these debates, they interact with the culture of their religious community, which urges the women to deeply consider their relationship to God and how they are envisioning that relationship. They attend meetings, prayer groups, and communal worship which offer both traditional and untraditional images of God. In their personal and communal prayer, some sisters continue to turn to famous images of God, Christ or the Trinity.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, the sisters draw on a large range of images to reflect on the meaning of and their relationship with God.

While a number of sisters did express concern about gendered images of God, more of them simply discussed how their understanding of God developed over the course of their religious life.<sup>53</sup> They did not express a static conception of the image as representing the truth of God; rather, the images enabled the women religious to reflect on and engage their relationship with God in a different manner. The images even impact their understanding of God: one sister described an image of a ballet dancer's legs and feet as "an image of a God who continues to labor over us, always ready to move, kind of ragged."<sup>54</sup> This image challenges the sister to reconsider her conception of God. If God is

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<sup>52</sup> In particular, a number of sisters employ icons in their prayer lives. They discussed using icons in prayer, the iconography included in the images, and the inspiration icons offered for considering their own relationship with God.

<sup>53</sup> Part of this development included the use of female images for God as they encountered new experiences in their religious lives. Scholars such as Elizabeth Johnson have examined the impact of gender on people's experience of God. According to Johnson, "Because the mystery of God is always and only mediated through an experience that is specifically historical, the changing history of women's self-appraisal and self-naming creates a new situation for language about divine mystery. . . . In and through women's conversion experience and its many articulations new language about God is arising, one that takes female reality in all its concreteness as a legitimate finite starting point for speaking about the mystery of God" (Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 75). The sisters often embrace these female metaphors in their worship. Artists in the community further deploy feminine images to depict God or humanity's relationship to the Earth or to the divine. For an analysis of these images, see chapter 4 below.

<sup>54</sup> Sister Julia [pseudonym], 17 May 2012.

portrayed as continually at work on humanity, how should she respond? As a result, prayer and reflection on images compel the sisters to re-envision their individual and communal relationship with the divine.<sup>55</sup>

Significantly, not all of the sisters employ anthropomorphic images of God in their prayer lives. Some of the sisters draw exclusively or heavily on images of the natural world as the basis of prayer. This reliance on the natural world reveals the sisters' acknowledgment of God's presence in the world. The created world reveals and manifests the divine. For Sister Natalie, this connection to the natural world promotes reflection on one's relationship to God and the rest of creation.<sup>56</sup> Changes in nature promote reflection on one's own life and how to live out a life of faith. Accordingly, images of creation compel reflection on God as a Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the created world.

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<sup>55</sup> In "Cry Beloved Image," Mary Catherine Hilbert assesses the traditional use of images of God as well as ways in which images of God seek to address social concerns by drawing on the symbol of creation: "The history of Christian preaching and teaching offers multiple examples of the symbol of creation in the image of God fostering social transformation and personal conversion" (Mary Catherine Hilbert, "Cry Beloved Image: Rethinking the Image of God," in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann O'Hara Graff (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1995), 194). Hilbert discusses the symbol of creation in the American bishops' pastoral letters on racism and AIDS. Thus, images of God can be deployed to affect personal relationships as well as address social inequality.

<sup>56</sup> Sister Natalie [pseudonym], 22 June 2011. When first hearing their reflections on the importance of images of the natural world, I expected to hear gendered language to describe the Earth; however, the sisters rarely deployed gendered language in this way. This demonstrates prior knowledge of the impact of gendered language on our understanding of nature and our relation to the environment. Nevertheless, this lack of gendered language does not account for the creation of gendered images by some of the sisters to depict the Earth or humanity's relationship to the Earth. In particular, Mary Southard, C.S.J. includes images of Mother Earth and often employs female images to demonstrate the connectedness of humans to the Earth. This contrast between the sisters' deployment of non-gendered language and the artists' use of gendered images reveals diverse ways in which images work within and outside of a community. For an analysis of Southard's images, see chapter 4.

### *Creating Art, Envisioning Relationship*

Due to the emphasis on their own spiritual lives, the sisters encounter diverse practices in spiritual direction, on retreats, in communal prayer groups, in their individual reading, and within their communal life. Thus, their visual practices often trace back to another person or a specific retreat which opened the sister to examining life through visual practices.<sup>57</sup> Many of the sisters journal with images or use photography or painting as a form of spiritual practice. Others reflect on works of art made by famous or unknown artists. Some sisters draw images of the natural environment or deploy particular colors to express their thoughts and feelings. Others simply doodle in their journals and reflect on those images.

On their own these sketches do not stand out for their artistic value; rather, they demonstrate the power of visual practices in sustaining and altering religious belief and tradition.<sup>58</sup> As they are often not trained in the arts, the sisters experiment with art forms and use the process of creating to examine and articulate their vision of the church and world. The process of drawing, praying, and discerning guides the sisters to deeper knowledge of themselves as they reflect on who they are and what their role is in the Congregation, the church, and the world. Likewise, as the sisters pray with the image, they question where they are being called and how God is speaking to them. While the

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<sup>57</sup> Frequently, the sisters commented on the importance of prior art classes (often high school courses taught by religious sisters) and retreats for exposing them to the prayerful and transformative nature of visual practices.

<sup>58</sup> The women religious themselves are quite humble concerning their artistic endeavors. Many women commented on the skill of an artist in the community while she herself downplayed her talent. This humility possibly reflects their communal identity and the traditional emphasis on the community over the individual's skills and accomplishments; however, it also reveals the artist's own emphasis on the process of creating and reflecting on the image in contrast to an emphasis on the finished product.



image might be a masterful piece of artwork, the image itself is not the central aspect of this process; rather, it is the sister's act of seeing, of looking at a particular image and interacting with it, that elicits the response.

Like many others, Ann Meyer, CSJ articulates the power of visual practices as a form of theological reflection: "I need to do art to discover what is inside myself, to celebrate what is within myself. To me it is a prayer form."<sup>59</sup> For her the practice of drawing and painting promotes the exploration of her interior life and relationship to God and others. The creation of the artwork is not the essential aspect of this spiritual practice; rather, Meyer continually emphasized the need to reflect on the meaning of that creation either during or after the process of creating.<sup>60</sup> What does the image reveal about her? What does it demonstrate about her vision of the world? of God? For Meyer, the process of painting and drawing was more than an enjoyable hobby. It evoked a response from her – a response that altered previous conceptions and promoted compassion.

This is evident in many of her paintings. When sharing these images with me, she talked about the meaning and iconography she employed and how the images displayed her understanding of Catholic belief. She did not stop at describing what these images represented but proceeded to discuss the meaning that they held for her personally and what they revealed about her own identity. While she paints and draws religiously

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<sup>59</sup> Ann Meyer, CSJ, 15 August 2011.

<sup>60</sup> In *Women, Conscience, and the Creative Process*, Anne E. Patrick argues for creativity as a virtue which should be developed to address social and ecclesial issues (Anne E. Patrick, *Women, Conscience, and the Creative Process*, 2009 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2011), 11-12). She asserts the importance of "creative responsibility" which includes "the element of prudence, discernment, and caring as well as imagination" (67). Aligned with Patrick's argument for creative responsibility, Meyer and other sisters connected this element of creativity in their prayer lives to the ways they potentially responded to conflict or calls to commit their time or talent to particular activities or issues.

themed images, the majority of her work focuses on the natural environment, especially the land, vegetation, and weather systems of her home state. Central to many of these images are sunflowers and butterflies. For example, a portion of a sunflower dominates one of her paintings. The flower's petals flutter in the wind as three small butterflies recede from view. Shades of brown, gold, yellow and white demonstrate the movement of the flower. For Meyer, this close attention to a flower prompts her to recognize more detail in the world around her. How do petals react to wind? How does the small size of a butterfly relate to the nourishment found in the flower? Discussing her images, Meyer reflected on the power of looking closely at something as well as taking a unique perspective to see something from a different standpoint.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, these images offered her a way to further reflect on how she saw and reacted to the world.



**Figure 25: Ann Meyer, CSJ, *Blowin' in the Wind* (Used with permission)**

Not only creating this image was significant for Meyer; rather, the practice of sharing these images with others revealed much about her relationships and spirituality.

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<sup>61</sup> Meyer's attention to the details of flowers recalls the work of Georgia O'Keefe. Meyer noted this similarity but reflected that flowers were important to her even before she was aware of O'Keefe's artwork (Ann Meyer, CSJ, 15 August 2011).

As she reflected on this and other images, Meyer discussed her childhood, her experiences being raised on a farm, and her relation to her home state. Her attention to the detail of these images demonstrates her attachment to and knowledge of this land and its vegetation. Moreover, she further reflected on how she had grown through the process of creating and sharing these images. While she initially recognized this creative process as important to her spirituality, she struggled to share her images and, consequently, a part of herself with others. Over time, she came to share these images with people, including her religious community.<sup>62</sup> This in turn led to members of her community asking her to create a series of paintings to display in their community dining room. For her, as well as for other sisters, the process of drawing, praying, and discerning guided her to a deeper knowledge of herself and her relation to the Congregation, the church, and the world.<sup>63</sup>

Consequently, these visual practices promote the exploration and articulation of identity and mission. Whether it is in journaling with images or praying with a piece of art, the sisters expand their knowledge of themselves, the purpose of their religious community, and the role of the church in the world. In *For the Beauty of the Earth*, Susan

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<sup>62</sup> Indeed some of her paintings now grace the walls of the Ministry Center and depict the land and foliage of her home state. Meyer emphasized this as a way to share herself with the religious community (Ann Meyer, CSJ, 15 August 2011).

<sup>63</sup> For other sisters, these visual practices moved beyond one's own identity and focused on revealing one's spiritual life to another person. For one sister, the desire to assert visual connections is directed at her family. Sister Gloria asserted, "I love to paint. I'm not an artist, but I love to create things" (Sister Gloria [pseudonym], 17 August 2011). To explore her spiritual life and share that aspect of herself with her family, she creates a book, a notebook she calls it. This book contains both poems she wrote on retreats and images that she has recently added. Creating the book enables her to reflect on her experiences on retreat and to further deepen relationships and connections with God and her family. She wants the book to manifest her spirituality and to be passed on to members of her family. Thus, the book contains aspects of her identity and faith life and will potentially serve as a visual reminder of her religious life and commitments.

Ross asserts, “To engage in a decentering process and even to act humbly before the beauty of the work of art or craft is to participate in a dialogue, where one can learn from the artist and the work, where we allow the work of art to speak to us and to direct our attention to dimensions of the world that we may have never seen.”<sup>64</sup> Some are surprised by the power of this practice. Indeed one sister noted that her newly acquired sense of unity with women of other religions arose after reflecting on an image of women from diverse religious traditions: Mary Southard, CSJ’s *Woman Spirit Rising*.<sup>65</sup> The experience of this sister demonstrates the non-cognitive impact of these visual practices. This recognition of unity arose from her affective response to the image and not from consciously considering the implications of the image. Thus, these visual practices stimulate theological reflections at multiple levels of being including affect.

### ***The Power to Heal***

In contrast, others intentionally employ visual practices to examine their purpose in life and to promote individual and communal healing. After working for many years with the elderly and in pastoral ministry, Phyllis Tousignant, CSJ turned to painting as a way to illustrate and explore the grief which she and those to whom she ministered experienced.<sup>66</sup> When taking an art course, she stumped her instructor by asking how to draw grief. Tousignant reflected, “How do you draw your soul? How do you draw your feelings?”<sup>67</sup> While she desired to express her experiences, she did not have a given

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<sup>64</sup> Susan A. Ross, *For the Beauty of the Earth: Women, Sacramentality, and Justice* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2006), 83.

<sup>65</sup> Sister Dolores [pseudonym], 22 June 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Phyllis Tousignant, CSJ, 23 July 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

technique or image through which to express an individual's struggle with loss. Consequently, she employed abstract art to visually express her thoughts and feelings. Centered in her image, a golden globe radiates behind layers of black and green. While darkness seems to cloud sections of the image, the globe resists being covered, and the dark colors dissipate on the right side of the globe. This globe possibly represents a person struggling with loss or even a person's hope for the future. The dark colors partially encompassing the golden center evidence the varying stages of grief as one struggles from a place of darkness to recognizing the possibility of light or hope in the future. The multiple layers of this image encouraged Tousignant to consider the broader implications of experiences of grief.



**Figure 26: Phyllis Tousignant, CSJ, *Grief* (Used with permission)**

While the act of painting this image held meaning for her, Tousignant further articulated the deeper meaning of the image as offering her and others a tangible way to reflect on grief and its role in individual and communal life. She noted her and others'

reactions to the colors in her image as well as the power of this abstract image to elicit multiple responses.<sup>68</sup> Shared with others, the image further promoted dialogue and crafted connections among those who grieved. Indeed Tousignant recounted how the image enabled a woman who was recently widowed to open up and express multiple levels of her own grief as well as recognize and overcome her depression. In a letter to Tousignant, the woman wrote, “Little did you know that part of you was on that journey with me. I cherish you and the painting and let your work remind me of a Dark Night that a loving God brought me through to new days.”<sup>69</sup> The gift of this image enabled the woman to begin to articulate her own experiences and recognize her own grief in Tousignant’s image. Tousignant’s *Grief* continues to offer this solace to others as it circulates as a sympathy card. Thus, Tousignant employed her visual practices to enable others to explore the experience of grief and to begin to heal.

For these sisters, visual practices stimulated reflection on their identity and relation to others. This reflection in turn encouraged the sisters to extend justice and compassion to others. As Ross has noted, the decentering process of reflecting on beauty draws a person outside of herself.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, the practice does not only affirm what the sister previously acknowledged; rather, these visual practices prod the sisters to live out a theology of transformation, to engage with society to elicit justice and compassion. Through exposure to these visual practices the sisters engage the world in new ways by

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. As with the sister who was affected by an image of diverse women, the individuals seeing this image of grief respond at multiple levels of their being with cognition not being first or most important aspect of their reaction.

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous, letter to Phyllis Tousignant, CSJ, undated.

<sup>70</sup> Ross, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 83

seeing themselves and others differently as well as by promoting dialogue on complex racial, religious, and social issues. Thus, these visual practices urge the sisters to deepen their theological reflection.

This reflection consequently assists the sisters as they currently serve in a variety of ministries including education, healthcare, pastoral care, prison ministry, and peace and justice work as well as ministries to immigrants and victims of domestic violence. The multiple demands of these ministries often call the sisters to move beyond their comfort levels and be challenged by new people and ways of thinking. As a result, the sisters draw on their prayer lives to reflect on the meaning of their ministerial work, its relation to the mission of the Congregation, and their personal relationship with God. The sisters employ various prayer forms to promote this constant reflection including the sacraments, sharing the State of the Heart, journaling, and silent prayer.

The creative power of the arts offers additional ways to pray and step back from the strain of ministry. Due to the continuous changes in religious life and the ministries in which the sisters serve, they often confront individual's perceptions of women religious and their role in the church. As they took on a role in pastoral ministry after the Second Vatican Council, some sisters encountered clergy members who resisted the involvement of women religious and sought to limit their visibility, influence, and power in parish life. Confronting these views in a rural church setting, one sister reflected on the many demands on her time and energy from her ministerial work. She noted that art courses provided a "release" from the burdens of ministry.<sup>71</sup> This creative activity provided her a

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<sup>71</sup> Sister Laura [pseudonym], 23 July 2012.

way to detach from this burden as well as a tangible way in which to work through her thoughts, aggravation, doubts, and fears.

As movements in art therapy demonstrate, art possesses the power to heal – to enable individuals and groups to reflect on their struggles and identity. Since the Second Vatican Council, this reflective power of art has perhaps been deployed more by the sisters. As religious life and the Roman Catholic Church sought to engage the modern world, women religious confronted their own identity and role within the church and American society. Nevertheless, this is not always a conscious activity. The creative process enables people to produce or make visual their thoughts and feelings. This in turn enables them to reflect on the meaning of the image.

As a result, healing can be present in this process without the person knowing why she creates a particular image or what meaning it holds for her or her faith. Sister Jane regularly employs paintings and drawing as part of her spiritual life. These images helped her address changes in religious life and the movement of her religious community out of the hospital where they had ministered. Even as she expressed the meaning of several of her images, she maintained the inscrutable quality of others: “I started drawing with colored pencils and it was almost healing for me. I don’t know what that was about.”<sup>72</sup> This process of drawing enabled her to produce images that had certain meaning for her and yet resulted in a healing process that upsets any simple conscious analysis of her paintings. The entire process, including reflecting on the images, produced an unintended result.

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<sup>72</sup> Sister Jane [pseudonym], 15 August 2011.



### ***The Artists' Vision of the Church***

Despite the evident influence of art and visual media on the sisters' spirituality, there is a lack of institutional support for these activities. As one woman recounted, "Sisters have to do their artwork in their bedrooms. It's an institutional mentality that they haven't quite overcome."<sup>73</sup> Often because space is not readily available, the sisters do not have rooms for art set aside in each of the ministry centers. Consequently, women religious who are trained artists or who came to art in retirement encounter limitations on their creative activities. Nonetheless, the Congregation does support a number of women religious whose main ministry is a form of art or who consciously deploy their artistic training as a central aspect of another ministry. While images and objects impact the sisters' visual practices in their prayer lives, we can question whether the artists themselves desire this impact or even recognize the impact their art could have on drawing others into the Congregation's mission and vision of the church.

Artists in the Congregation vary in how they perceive their own role and the impact of their art. Some artists directly connect their work to the mission of the Congregation. Caroline Benken, CSJ argues, "Art is integral to our mission as CSJs. Through it we manifest our oneness with all of creation. Gratefully, the prayerful act of creating and the art itself will enable us to know our God better in the world around us as well as among us and within us."<sup>74</sup> Benken maintains that both creating and reflecting on art can draw one deeper into relationship with God and enable one to recognize the

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<sup>73</sup> Sister Laura [pseudonym], 23 July 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Caroline Benken, CSJ, "Wondering What it is that Artists Seek so Passionately," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 25.

interdependence of creation. Accordingly, she employs photography to challenge people to accept an interconnected vision of the world. These images are used within the Congregation for presentations, greeting cards, and their magazine, *imagineONE*.<sup>75</sup>



**Figure 27: Caroline Benken, CSJ, *Untitled* (Used with permission)**

Focusing on particular details of a person or object, Benken urges the viewer to interact with the image, to contemplate how the image relates to one's life and faith. For instance, she created one greeting card which features the hands of a presumably elderly person resting on knitting needles and red yarn. Inside the saying reads, "Our future needs from us a lived, warm, worn faith with fingerprints all over it."<sup>76</sup> Together the image and saying promote a positive valuation of a long life or those who are elderly. Additionally, it challenges simplistic conceptions of faith as something given or easily received. The worn hands of the knitter demonstrate the continued effort it takes to purposefully live out a life directed toward God. The reverse side of the card moves outward from a focus on an individual's faith. Here Benken urges those buying or

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<sup>75</sup> For an analysis of the visual impact of this publication, see 185-189.

<sup>76</sup> Caroline Benken, CSJ, Greeting Card (n.p., n.d.).

receiving her cards to consider the inspiration behind the image: “Photography helps me image and express the holiness of creation, reverence beauty and be contemplative. Through this art I plead the cause of ecologists and all those respecting life in all its forms.”<sup>77</sup> Significantly, Benken’s inspiration for this image arose from one of the sisters who knitted scarves for the poor despite her arthritis.<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, Benken employs specific images to prod the viewer to recognize the interrelation of creation.

Nevertheless, not all of the artists in the Congregation are as explicit in their emphasis on the mission for unity. For some of these women, the mission of the Congregation is part of who they are and would be present in what they did – even if they did not explicitly reference it in their artwork. This is evident in the work of Patricia Willems, CSJ. Her watercolors portray landscapes or public places where people gather joyfully. Reflecting on her years as a teacher, Willems observed that you “teach more from who you are than what you say.”<sup>79</sup> Thus she often taught students about the Congregation’s focus on unity indirectly, which is also how her peaceful images direct an observer to the sense of unity with God and creation that seems to underscore Willem’s work.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Benken comments, “I was drawn by her arthritic hands that she continued to give of her talents to help others” (Caroline Benken, CSJ, e-mail message to author, 20 March 2014).

<sup>79</sup> Patricia Willems, CSJ, 14 July 2011.



**Figure 28: Patricia Willems, CSJ, *Solitude* (Used with permission)**

Because the mission is part of her own identity, it reappears in the works she creates even though her art does not explicitly make connections to the mission or the Generous Promises. Rather, by crafting images that speak to her own spirituality and her commitment to the mission, she offers paintings that can lead to a greater awareness of one's connection to creation and others. Reflecting on her process of painting, Willems asserts, "You see something and then get started; only God creates."<sup>80</sup> Thus her painting reflects her religious beliefs of God as a Creator and humans and all of creation as being interrelated with God. For instance, Willems' *Solitude* depicts a small boat on a pond surrounded by trees with the sun looming overhead. Each aspect of the painting blends with the others. The solitude experienced in this scene involves serenity with the natural world. Thus, the image represents our connections to the environment; however, Willems does not make that obvious. She does not depict a human being in this setting; rather, the solitude of the viewer is also the solitude of the environment. The viewer is not separated

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

from but rather invited into the calm. Many of Willems' paintings similarly emphasize natural scenes, which suggest solitude with nature as a way of connecting with God. Through images such as these, Willems indirectly depicts the mission of the Congregation. Union with the world and others resonates in the images.

In contrast, Mary Southard, CSJ more overtly advocates the use of art in addressing ecological justice. According to Southard, "Our creative work is . . . our way of expressing how we see the world and what is important to us. . . and it is also a way we can discover what is going on inside because our head is the last to know."<sup>81</sup> Creating and reflecting on particular images and objects enables a person to contemplate personal and social issues. Consequently, Southard argues that art is both healing and revelatory and applies these qualities to different issues, especially ecological justice.<sup>82</sup> Through retreats that combine art and the universe story, Southard seeks to educate others into this understanding of creation because she maintains that a shift in consciousness takes place first through imagery.<sup>83</sup> As Southard observes, "Most of the work that I do is not teaching as such, but it is inviting people into this reality, which is the Universe, through poetry, through art, through some teaching in terms of telling the story, using Hubble images, my images, because it is a whole new way of seeing."<sup>84</sup> Through these retreats, she encourages individuals to embrace creativity through knowledge of the creativity of God and of the universe.

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<sup>81</sup> Mary Southard, CSJ, 22 June 2011. For an analysis of Southard's artwork, see chapter 2 and chapter 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Reflecting on her own life, Southard surmised, "...doing art is a healing process. And it is also very revelatory; it reveals what's happening in one's inner life" (Ibid).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

Other artists similarly emphasize the power of the visual arts to affect the viewer. Karen Van De Walle, CSJ works as a potter and photographer. After teaching art at both the elementary and high school levels, Van De Walle pursued the integration of art and spirituality and is a licensed spiritual director. Like several other artists who are involved in spiritual direction and retreats, Van De Walle urges retreat participants or Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) students to experiment with the arts in order to see differently. In Van De Walle's assessment, the arts potentially affect one's interaction with the world:

I hope that [art] teaches us an awful lot about the world. When I look at a painting, when I go to the museum and am really, really looking, I am making choices. I am making decisions. I am letting line and color and texture impact what I am thinking or feeling, and I hope that impacts what we believe about diversity. I hope that because we can look at something and make choices that it teaches us that we need to take in all sorts of information before making a decision.<sup>85</sup>

Consequently, she contends that art training impacts people in the way that they see and interact with the world. Those who take these courses make "a contribution to society;" however, she does not limit this contribution to a particular career or set of values.<sup>86</sup> Rather, the opportunity to see subtle details and acknowledge the effect of small changes potentially impacts how an individual perceives and responds to God, humanity, and creation.

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<sup>85</sup> Karen Van De Walle, CSJ, 27 July 2011. Van De Walle asserts, "After you take a drawing class, you can't walk the street without being bombarded with images that were always there, but all of a sudden you are awake. That is the blessing and the curse for the artist" (Ibid.).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 29: Karen Van De Walle, CSJ, Pottery and Photography, The Potter's Studio, Indiana (Used with permission; photograph by author)**

Accordingly, Van De Walle's pottery and photography deploy color, texture, and form to elicit thought and response from the viewer. In her studio, the display of her artwork demonstrates this conscious deployment of color and form. Pink orchids contrast with reddish-brown and golden orange hues of pottery pieces. These smaller pieces of pottery play off of each other emphasizing variations in shape and color. Separated from the other pieces on a lower shelf, a large blue and grey textured platter intends to draw the viewer's attention to itself. As it is surrounded by shelves of diverse pottery and photography, this piece becomes a focal point with which the other pieces interact. Separated from Van De Walle's work area only by this bookshelf, the displayed pottery further interacts with the creative process even as the artfully shaped clay plays against images of diverse flowers. Natural and human-made objects intersect to prod the viewer

to contemplate the beauty before her. Consequently, Van De Walle employs her artwork to encourage viewers to attend to diversity in the created and natural world.

Nevertheless, other artists are more hesitant to draw connections to the mission, doubt the power of the visual arts, or outright question the validity of their position as an artist in a religious community. One sister hopes her artwork affects the consciousness of others, but she questions whether she could better serve the community and church by doing social justice work: “I think somehow I’m torn too between what it is to be in a justice ministry that you are doing things, directly with the poor, directly with the illiterate, directly with people who are suffering. It is sometimes hard for me to weigh what that means.”<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, she and other artists in the Congregation use art in retreats and courses as a way to challenge or inspire others to see the world and themselves differently. As several of the sisters noted, creating objects and images or observing the work of an artist can teach a person about making decisions. How an image is made reflects the decisions and goals of the artist, which then possibly impacts the individual viewing or using the image.

### ***Ministry as Invitation into a Vision***

Even as the sisters consciously employ visual practices to challenge and expand their own understanding of themselves, the church, and society, they direct the power of some visual practices to those outside of their religious community. As one sister observes, “We invite people; we are not trying to create different mindsets. We want them to recognize where they are in their spiritual journey. Life is a journey; they are not

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<sup>87</sup> Sister Veronica [pseudonym], 27 July 2011.



standing still.”<sup>88</sup> For this sister, the Congregation invites others into their vision and into their theology of transformation. The Congregation’s ministries subtly and directly encourage participation in the sisters’ vision. Through training in visual practices as well as congregational publications, the sisters help to form the visual practices of those outside of their religious community.

Nevertheless, this engagement with society did not spontaneously arise within the communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph; rather, they sought to respond to the needs of the church. In particular, the Second Vatican Council called religious communities to reflect on the role and form of religious life in the modern world. As the council contends in *Perfectae caritatis*:

Religious communities should continue to maintain and fulfill the ministries proper to them. In addition, after considering the needs of the Universal Church and individual dioceses, they should adapt them to the requirements of time and place, employing appropriate and even new programs and abandoning those works which today are less relevant to the spirit and authentic nature of the community.<sup>89</sup>

Responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council as well as the needs of the church and society, the Congregation presently engages a variety of ministry settings. Whereas they predominantly served in the classroom and hospital prior to the council, many now minister in parishes or in social justice. These decisions were not easily or quickly made; rather, the communities reflected over time and returned to the founding documents of the Sisters of St. Joseph to discern how they would approach their ministries as well as congregational life.

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<sup>88</sup> Sister Marie [pseudonym], 9 August 2011.

<sup>89</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, § 20.

As a result, the Congregation has responded in many ways to the church's request. In particular, they employ their diverse ministries as forms of evangelization. As *Perfectae caritatis* urges, "The missionary spirit must under all circumstances be preserved in religious communities. It should be adapted, accordingly, as the nature of each community permits, to modern conditions so that the preaching of the Gospel may be carried out more effectively in every nation."<sup>90</sup> As teachers, pastoral associates, and artists, the women religious employ some more traditional ministerial forms. Exceeding earlier conceptions of women religious, they also work with victims of domestic violence, challenge immigration laws, and work to eliminate human trafficking as well as run a print shop, St. Joseph's Press, and commodify images in the Ministry of the Arts. Each of these ministries seeks to fulfill the needs of the church.

Accordingly, the sisters attempt to implement the universal mission of the church as they embody the Congregation's mission for unity and promote social and ecological justice.<sup>91</sup> Even as they engage the mission through visual practices in their prayer lives, the sisters employ these practices to draw others into their mission and transform society. Their focus on unity enables the congregation to address a variety of ecclesial and societal needs and encourages creativity in these pursuits. Since they are not confined to a single type of ministry or a narrow way of pursuing the mission, the sisters have the freedom to experiment with how best to promote unity and serve the dear neighbor.<sup>92</sup> As

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, § 1, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Often in interviews sisters would comment on the breadth of the mission of the Congregation and their ability to address the mission in the variety of ministerial activities and use of space as well as in their publications or conversations.

noted earlier, participation in a group trains one in how to see, how to envision and interpret the world.<sup>93</sup> The Congregation draws on this visual education to extend their vision of the church through their ministries.

Education was one of the central ways in which the Sisters of St. Joseph influenced generations of Catholics. In their many years in classrooms, the women religious drew on images and objects to teach and inspire students. As they taught religious or secular subjects, they employed images in the classroom to display course concepts as well as positive messages and values. Reflecting on these experiences, sisters recognized the power of images to elicit thought and action from students. Creative assignments enabled students to express themselves and reflect on their place in society. While they were crafted to elicit thought from the students, these images often urged the sisters to also consider their conception of society. Repeatedly they recounted stories of a particular image crafted by a student that revealed a different aspect of the student's experience or a novel interpretation of the world. Years after viewing these images the women were still able to describe in detail the image itself or the reaction they had to it. Likewise, students continue to recall their reactions to projects or images used in the classroom. These practices, visual and reflective, continue to educate students years after their production.

As the sisters recognize the educational power of these images, many of their ministries directly draw on the art created by the sisters as the logos for their ministries or as tools to educate those they serve. For example, Taller de José, a community resource

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<sup>93</sup> For an analysis of this education into a shared vision, see Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 6, 68-70.

center that ministers to people in Chicago, employs a silkscreen image by Richard Mehren, CSJ as their logo. Mehren’s image depicts Joseph guiding the toddler Jesus as he learns to walk. Sister Becky described this image as reflecting Taller de José’s role in the neighborhood.<sup>94</sup> The image of Joseph assisting Jesus visually manifests their role as being companions to those who need assistance. As Taller de José seeks to match people with organizations that can meet their needs, Sister Becky argued that they were there to “walk with” people.<sup>95</sup>



**Figure 30: Richard Mehren, CSJ, *Untitled*, Displayed at Taller de José, Chicago, Illinois (Used with permission; photograph by author)**

As the logo for the ministry, the image appears in diverse forms and locations. As she displays it in her office, Sister Becky intends this image to remind her of the goals of Taller de José. Located on top of the radiator, the image of Joseph and Jesus stands alongside the framed mission statement of Taller de José. Centered between the mission

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<sup>94</sup> Sister Becky [pseudonym], 5 August 2011.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

and the image rests a wooden vase holding leaves of wheat. Displayed in this manner, the image visually reinforces their mission and intersects with Christian symbolism. The wooden vase potentially calls to mind Joseph's role as a carpenter as the wheat recalls Gospel parables and the Eucharist. Consequently, the display of this image at Taller de José intends to remind employees of their role as companions and grounds their ministry in Christian values. The image further circulates on materials advertising the ministry. As a result, the painting impacts the employees' visual practices as well as those they serve and those who receive publicity from Taller de José.<sup>96</sup>

Furthermore, many of the sisters' ministries attempt to train individuals in how to see the world through visual practices such as photography or water color retreats. As a retreat and spiritual director, Sister Marie oversees a photography retreat in which participants employ a camera to train their vision to recognize God's presence in creation. She notes, "The camera becomes a devotional element for truly seeing what I am looking at."<sup>97</sup> The goal is not to craft a beautiful picture but to recognize the unity inherent in creation. As with the visual practices of praying with an image, the search for and reflection on these images decenters the person. In *God's Beauty: A Call to Justice*, Patrick McCormick argues that beauty calls one out of oneself and compels a commitment to justice.<sup>98</sup> The recognition of the beauty inherent in the world encourages a person to reconsider the value of individuals and creation and to protect the poor and

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<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Sister Monica draws on a painting by Mary Southard, CSJ in her massage and healing work. She employs *Meditation* to explain the Chakras and to assist her clients in finding healing (Sister Monica [pseudonym], 18 July 2011). As a tool to remember and meditate on the Chakras, this image can serve as a reminder of her teachings and ministry.

<sup>97</sup> Sister Marie, [pseudonym], 9 August 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Patrick T. McCormick, *God's Beauty: A Call to Justice* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2012), ix-xii, 3-8.

powerless. Echoing the work of scholars, the sisters hope that training in this visual practice will further elicit a response from the individual.<sup>99</sup>

These practices are not meant to replace traditional prayer forms or the sacraments; rather, the sisters recognize their centrality in the tradition of the church and the life of individuals. Nevertheless, the sisters seek to expand people's understanding of God, the church, and the world. One sister recounted how she wanted to share these concepts in her ministry to the elderly:

What can I give these people that is not just stagnant and open them up to a whole new way of how you can approach God? The rosary is fine, the mass is fine, but there's lots of other ways that God is present in our lives. . . . These were people in their 80s and 90s who were set in their ways, of course. But I wanted to introduce them to . . . a whole new approach to God.<sup>100</sup>

This desire to broaden and indeed strengthen people's understanding of God arises from the sisters' recognition of God's presence in the world and emphasis on unity. Different types of spiritual direction and retreats enabled participants to more fully recognize the presence of God in different aspects of creation: "We had different kinds of retreats. I didn't want it to be a preached retreat all of the time – like this art retreat – because I wanted them to broaden their ideas. God isn't only there in preaching but is in art."<sup>101</sup>

Employing formats which taught participants about icons or enabled them to create a

<sup>99</sup> Deploying these techniques in their spiritual ministries potentially encourages people to support or participate in some of the sisters' other ministries. The growing number of Congregation of St. Joseph Associates provides good evidence for this connection. They currently have over 500 CSJ Associates (Congregation of St. Joseph, "Who We Are," About Us, accessed 30 August 2013, [http://www.csjoseph.org/who\\_we\\_are.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/who_we_are.aspx) ). As non-vowed members, these individuals commit themselves to the values and mission of the Congregation. Many of them come to know the Congregation through its ministries including retreats and spiritual direction. These encounters with the Congregation assist the sisters in shaping the visual practices of potential Associates. For more information on the CSJ Associates, see Congregation of St. Joseph, "What is a CSJ Associate?" About Us, accessed 30 August 2013, [http://www.csjoseph.org/as\\_an\\_associate.aspx](http://www.csjoseph.org/as_an_associate.aspx) .

<sup>100</sup> Sister Laura [pseudonym], 23 July 2012.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

mosaic presented them with an alternative way of thinking about and approaching their beliefs.<sup>102</sup>

Accordingly, this involves urging people to see and respond to the world differently. This goal is evident in the names of the sisters' ministries, including the Transformations Spirituality Center in Nazareth, Michigan. Reflecting on the Feast of the Transfiguration, one sister argued that people needed to live out the experience of Peter, James and John.<sup>103</sup> Even though Jesus was transfigured in front of them, he resisted the disciples' desire to remain in that moment. Likewise retreat participants need to "tap into the peak experience" and "carry something back." They cannot remain within the retreat experience; rather, they must "go back to life" as Jesus urged the disciples to do.<sup>104</sup> As a result, the participants return with additional visual practices through which to see humanity and the world. With these tools, they return changed and are called by the sisters to continue to see and live differently. As in the lives of the sisters, people are directed to apply that new vision to their everyday lives by manifesting a theology of transformation.

### ***Dispersing a Vision: Congregational Publications***

Nonetheless, a limited number of individuals participate in retreats and spiritual direction sponsored by the Congregation. To further impact people outside of the Congregation, the sisters deploy these visual practices in printed materials which

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<sup>102</sup> Sister Laura noted the positive impact that this variety of retreats had on the elderly population with which she worked. Not only did it prompt them to consider new ideas and see new aspects of their beliefs, it also urged them to reflect on practices which they had undertaken for many years (Ibid.).

<sup>103</sup> Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36.

<sup>104</sup> Sister Marie [pseudonym], 9 August 2011.

circulate among diverse populations. Those who participate in their retreats, worship with them, support them financially or simply request information about the Congregation can receive local newsletters, bimonthly email updates, and their biannual magazine. As they circulate outside of the Congregation these materials disperse the sisters' vision of the church and promote the transformation of society.

Prior to the reconfiguration into the Congregation, the communities crafted newsletters featuring their ministries, congregational activities or history, and celebrations. These newsletters often drew on images to display a message related to a particular article. Artists within the religious communities employed their talents to depict central themes and draw the viewer into the article. In Cleveland, Ohio, Sister Magdalen Prochaska's artwork emphasized the goals of the Sisters of St. Joseph through the simplicity of her images. Depicting the history of the sisters in Ohio, Prochaska employed a minimalist technique in order to emphasize the action and compassion of the sisters. This is evident in her image of a Sister of St. Joseph nursing an ill child.<sup>105</sup> The relationship of the sister and child captures the viewer's attention.

This image, as well as others by Prochaska, illustrates *Connections*, the newsletter of the Cleveland Congregation of Saint Joseph, in the 1990s. At this time *Connections* sought to educate their readers about the community's 125 years in Cleveland and the direction of the religious community. Thus her image entices a person to read the narrative about Mother Evangelista O'Brien's service during the influenza epidemic in 1918, which leads to a reflection of how the congregation continues to attend to the needs

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<sup>105</sup> For this image see, *Connections*, Spring 1996, n.p.



of the church. Indeed, *Connections* continues to note that the community seeks to attend to particular spiritual and physical needs including welcoming associates (non-vowed) members into the community. Marietta Sattrie, CSJ queries, “How are we to be in this third millennium?”<sup>106</sup> Reflecting on the future of the community required reflection on societal changes as well as changes in religious life.

Publications such as *Connections* urge readers to consider the goals and values of the religious community. Through images and articles they challenged people to contemplate the future of the church. Often this was accomplished through reflections on the past with an eye toward reading the signs of the times to direct present and future ministries. For the Congregation of St. Joseph, *imagineONE* continues the visual practices of the founding communities with an even greater emphasis on transforming the surrounding society. This biannual publication employs visual and verbal information to promote the mission and ministry of the sisters. Focused on a theme, each issue includes articles and images which challenge the reader to consider and perhaps commit to the Congregation’s mission for unity. The emphasis on unity appears in cover titles such as “Stand Up, Stand For, Stand With: When Our Faith Puts Us to the Test,” “Transforming Times,” “The Time of the Singular Leader is Past: We are the Ones We have been Waiting for,” and “Together for a Great Love.”<sup>107</sup>

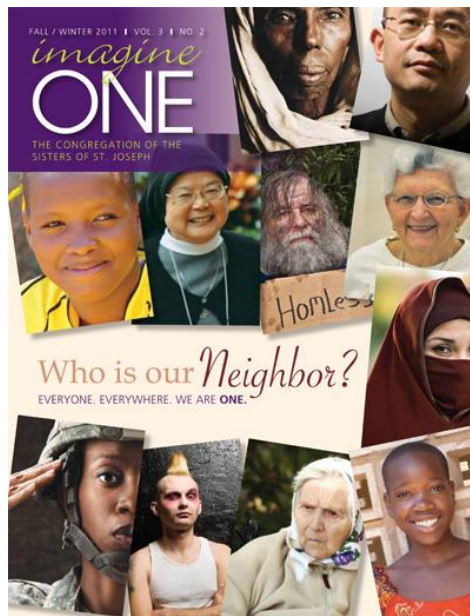
The Fall/Winter 2011 issue of *imagineONE* centers on the Sisters of St. Joseph’s dedication to the dear neighbor. The cover questions “Who is our Neighbor?” and

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<sup>106</sup> Sr. Marietta Sattrie, “Viewpoint,” *Connections*, Spring 1996, n.p.

<sup>107</sup> See *imagineONE* 1, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009); *imagineONE* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011); *imagineONE* 4, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2012); and *imagineONE* 5, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013)

answers “EVERYONE. EVERYWHERE. WE ARE **ONE**.” Surrounding this question are eleven images of people of various ages, races, and social classes. These images prod people to extend their conceptions of the neighbor from the person living close to her with whom she identifies to people about whom she might know little, fear or avoid. How can I be neighbor to a homeless man? To a woman in the armed services? Is the dear neighbor only the clean, safe, “normal” individuals among these photos? Accordingly, the cover challenges the viewer to expand the concept of neighbor and consider more ways to be neighbor to others.



**Figure 31: Cover of *imagineONE* Fall/Winter 2011 (Used with permission)**

The articles reinforce this consideration of the neighbor. Addressing the Congregation’s continued reflection on the neighbor, Marie Hogan, CSJ discusses how the sisters came to embrace a global understanding of the neighbor:

As we became aware of our global reality, we became aware that neighbors are not only those who are next to us physically, but everyone across the globe as well. With the use of technology, those across the globe are indeed our neighbor.

Not only are our neighbors all persons around the globe, but we realize that everything created by God is also our *dear neighbor*. Water, air, trees, animals, all of creation is neighbor to us.<sup>108</sup>

Significantly, Hogan grounds her description of the dear neighbor in the Congregation's mission for unity. Thus, the images and articles reinforce the challenge to be a neighbor to all people and all of creation.

Interestingly, *imagineONE* further promotes a congregational unity through images. The contents page consistently includes an image from one of the Congregation's ministry centers or property. For Fall/Winter 2011, the image is of the cross in the ceiling of the Holy Family Chapel at Hundred Oaks Center in Baton Rouge. Significantly, the inclusion of this image extends a visual familiarity of the Congregation. People at Hundred Oaks or from Louisiana experience visual recognition of a feature of their worship. Individuals who have visited the center potentially remember the cross as well as its history and the experience of worshipping in the chapel. For those who have no personal history with Baton Rouge, this image creates a visual connection to this particular group within the Congregation. The image educates the viewer – a sister, associate, or supporter – into their communal spaces. Accordingly, those who read the magazine encounter the physical presence of the sisters' spaces across distances of space and time.

Reflection on the dear neighbor further promotes the Congregation's commitment to social and ecological justice. An article recounting the U.S. Federation of Sisters of

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<sup>108</sup> Marie Hogan, CSJ, "Who Our Neighbors Are," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 4. This global awareness has a long history in the Congregation. One sister emphasized this as she described the Congregation's investment practices. Earlier they had refused to invest in businesses funded by South Africa during apartheid (Sister Rita [pseudonym], 20 June 2011).

Saint Joseph's work to end human trafficking employs an image of a young Asian woman inscribed with "NOT FOR SALE."<sup>109</sup> Leaves placed to look like footprints lead to the title of another article: "Congregation Discovers Carbon Diet Works, Reduces Footprint."<sup>110</sup> The creative and powerful use of these images attempts to draw the reader into the articles and consequently extend the sisters' experiences and commitments to those outside the Congregation. Articles on the healthcare reform, the ministries of the sisters, and Mary Jo Curtsinger, CSJ's profession of final vows all employ some image to attract the reader to the story. These images urge the reader to consider the offered information in new light.

*imagineONE* frequently employs images that are recognizable to readers, images which could easily include the viewer. In an article about polluted water and the future scarcity of this resource, an image of water slowly dripping from cupped hands prods the reader to contemplate her use of water. The author asserts:

Of course, scarce water limits food production; so we can anticipate increased hunger and famine. More and more of our *dear neighbors* will suffer. Certainly this is not acceptable; it is not just; and it clearly is not according to God's plan for the fullness of life for all of God's beloved creatures.<sup>111</sup>

Following the image and article, the Congregation offers ways to conserve water and sources for more information on conservation.<sup>112</sup> Thus the image, article and suggestions work together to impact an individual's perception of the world. Drawn into the article by

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<sup>109</sup> "U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph Expands Partnerships to End Human Trafficking," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 5.

<sup>110</sup> "Congregation Discovers Carbon Diet Works, Reduces Footprint," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 7.

<sup>111</sup> Virginia (Ginny) Jones, CSJ, "Water is Becoming 'Blue Gold,'" *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 26

<sup>112</sup> "Here are Ways We Can Help," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 27.

the image, the person potentially learns about social and ecological issues and hopefully begins to commit to some aspects of the Congregation's mission.

Significantly, the final four pages of the Fall/Winter 2011 issue demonstrate this internal conversion through examples about sisters, associates, and those outside of the community. Containing the image of a previous article and two more recent projects, "Readers Show What They Can Do" illustrates the concrete actions people took after reading *imagineONE*. They made dresses for orphans in Haiti, participated in the NunsBuild project in Louisiana, and raised money to support Isaac's Wells, a project to provide clean water for villages in the Sudan.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, the last page recounts the many small and large ways the dear neighbor is valued by the sisters.<sup>114</sup>

Most powerfully, an article by Karen Salsbery, CSJ describes "Seeing with Sacred Eyes." Salsbery considers her own gift of vision and whether she truly sees on a daily basis. Getting her first glasses enabled her to see the world better. An encounter with a homeless man in Chicago reminded her to see the dear neighbor even as she hurried through the city. Truly seeing, recognizing, and valuing this man continues to impact her approach to life. Drawing on the roots of the Congregation, Salsbery notes, "Ignatius knew that our path to God was through all the events, moments, and days of our lives – that everything created has the potential to lead us closer to God. . . to one another if we look with the Beloved's eyes. If we do that we can't help but see that we are neighbors, that we truly are all One."<sup>115</sup> Thus, *imagineONE* employs images to impact the

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<sup>113</sup> "Readers Show What They Can Do," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 28-29.

<sup>114</sup> "Let Your Light. . ." *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 31.

<sup>115</sup> Karen Salsbery, CSJ, "Seeing with Sacred Eyes," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 30.

visual practices of its readers. This seeks to impact the way in which people see the world around them as well as to challenge them to be changed by this new vision. Seeing the dear neighbor in people and the created world urges readers to live out this vision of the world in their daily lives.

### ***The Visual Practice of Church***

By examining the visual practices in the Congregation of St. Joseph, we come to a better understanding of the importance of visual practices in religious communities and in the church as a whole. Through these visual practices, the Congregation articulates and invites others to commit themselves to their religious values. Taking up these visual practices enables Christians to question how they envision God and the church as well as different social and religious groups. Consequently, this ethnographic research demonstrates the way in which the practices of creating and employing images in religious life promote a theology of transformation and call the church to attend to problematic visual practices, which often underscore or illuminate deeper issues in church doctrine and practice. The benefits and challenges encountered by the sisters can assist the church in strategically and fruitfully deploying visual practices as it fulfills its mission.

## **Chapter 4: Material Transformation: Religious Commodities and the Quest for Justice**

Throughout Christian history, religious groups have differed in whether they embraced or rejected the use of religious images or commodities. Some explicitly note and resist the power of images to capture and influence the thought and practices of believers. Still others consciously draw on the power of images to transform their religious group and the society in which they live. In contemporary American society, religious believers daily engage numerous images and commodities which vie for their attention. As one more way to reach a broader audience, the production and dispersion of religious images and commodities enhances a religious groups' ability to effect change in the world. Art, in the form of religious commodities, enables a religious community to promote social and ecological justice and to affirm or alter how an individual perceives the church and the world.

The Congregation of St. Joseph clearly recognizes the ability of religious commodities to appeal to broad numbers of people in conveying their values. Beyond merely reinforcing previously held beliefs or practices, the Congregation of St. Joseph employs religious images in the form of commodities to challenge prior views and assert a new perception of the church and world. Their production of religious commodities evangelizes viewers and encourages participation in the sisters' mission. To examine these practices, I attend first to the history of artists in the Congregation and second to the formation of the Ministry of the Arts, the business through which the sisters promote and

distribute these commodities.<sup>1</sup> Third, I examine the specific techniques employed by the Ministry of the Arts to actively engage the consumer and encourage her commitment to aspects of the Congregation's mission. Fourth, I analyze particular religious images and commodities to reveal how they challenge the consumer to reform her understanding of unity, gender, and the environment. Finally, I consider whether the Congregation's use of these religious commodities adequately challenges the passivity of consumer culture as they attempt to transform the Roman Catholic Church and American society.

### ***A History of Religious Life, Art, and New Ministries***

Since the foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy, France, the religious community continued to include aspects of the arts in their community life and ministries, which was especially evident in music and art courses taught in their American schools. While continuing this creative heritage, the way in which the sisters employ the arts has changed over time and has been impacted by movements in the church. In particular, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) offered a reinterpretation of the church as well as called for a renewal of religious life. The Council's document on religious life, *Perfectae caritatis*, urged religious communities to update their customs, practices, and ministries to more fully serve Christ and society:

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<sup>1</sup> To protect the identities of individuals, pseudonyms have used for reflections on the Ministry of the Arts or the role of visual practices; however, the names of artists are retained in order to give them credit for their artwork.



Religious communities should continue to maintain and fulfill the ministries proper to them. In addition, after considering the needs of the Universal Church and individual dioceses, they should adapt them to the requirements of time and place, employing appropriate and even new programs and abandoning those works which today are less relevant to the spirit and authentic nature of the community.<sup>2</sup>

Responding to the Second Vatican Council and other ecclesial movements, women religious discerned how best to live out their role in the church and faithfully embody their religious vows. As they researched their founding documents and communal history, the Sisters of St. Joseph sought ways to adjust their communal life and their ministries to the needs of the church in the modern world. As we have seen, the sisters employ their history and the tradition of lace-making in their spaces and personal prayer practices. Likewise, the sisters drew on movements in prayer and spirituality that employed artistic expression to develop their own personal prayer life.<sup>3</sup> As a result, sisters were individually more exposed to the potential of the arts in spirituality.

Beyond their individual appreciation and use of art, the Sisters of St. Joseph encouraged sisters to develop their artistic talents. While many of these artistically inclined sisters frequently taught art in elementary and high schools, they often were given the opportunity to pursue graduate courses and degrees in art and art history.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, § 20. See also *Ibid.*, 8. This call for renewal challenged religious communities to resist accommodation to modernity without assessing its impact on their forms of religious life. After the Second Vatican Council, documents such as *Evangelica testificatio* (Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life) reflected on the evangelical councils (vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience) to retain essential features of religious life but to enable a fruitful response to modern society (Paul VI, *Evangelica testificatio*, especially §13-39).

<sup>3</sup> Much of my ethnographic research with the Congregation of St. Joseph investigates how women religious employ artistic or creative work within their prayer lives and ministries. These women often reflected on the power of art to expand their understanding of their personal spirituality as well as their ability to use various forms of art or artistic practices to benefit those to whom they ministered. For an analysis of visual practices in prayer and ministries, see chapter 3.

<sup>4</sup> For information about some of these artists, see 111-114, 176-183 above.

Increasingly, after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) as the sisters began to discern their ministerial calling with the leadership of their religious community, these artists gained the support and encouragement of their communities to devote some or all of their time to creating works of art. Among the seven communities that formed the Congregation of St. Joseph, the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange Park stand out for the number of artists and an emphasis on the arts in their religious community. The artists who were active in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s shared their artistic vision with their students, including sisters who belonged to or joined the community. These sisters left a visible mark on the religious community. In particular, Richard Mehren, CSJ's sculpture and George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ's stained glass graces the LaGrange Park Chapel and Ministry Center. Both Mehren and Holmgren drew on contemporary ecological issues, scientific knowledge, and theological reflection in some of their religious art.<sup>5</sup> These creations offered their religious community visual means through which to contemplate the connections of their religious belief and practices to contemporary spiritual and ecological issues. The inspiring presence of these sisters offered the community a deeper appreciation for the visual arts as well as encouraged the religious community to continue supporting sisters who were artists.

Because they sought to promote the efforts of individual artists, the Sisters of St. Joseph in LaGrange Park investigated ways to free these artists from other

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Mehren, CSJ created the sculpture which covers the East Wall behind the altar. This sculpture manifests the evolutionary process of consciousness with simple forms becoming more complex towards the center of the sculpture. George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ created the stained glass windows which employ abstract art to trace the journey of individuals and humans towards unity with God. For a description of this artwork, see Hill, *Congregation of St. Joseph La Grange Park Center*. For an analysis of the LaGrange Park Chapel, see chapter 2, 123-130.

responsibilities. As a prior member of their leadership observed, the LaGrange Park community recognized the value of these women's artistic productions.<sup>6</sup> In the 1990s, the leadership encouraged some of the sisters including Mary Southard, CSJ (visual artist) and Kathy Sherman, CSJ (musician) to consider financially viable ways to pursue their art. Unless the sisters could support themselves and assist the religious community, they could not function as independent artists. Thus in 1994, they formed the Ministry of the Arts, which is the business through which the sisters produce and distribute religious commodities including images, statues, cards, and music.

Early on, the Ministry of the Arts (MOTA) promoted the artistic endeavors of only a few artists from the Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange Park. They published a calendar and produced statues, cards, and prints which often featured the work of Mary Southard, CSJ, and cassette tapes of Kathy Sherman, CSJ's music.<sup>7</sup> Over the years, the MOTA expanded the number and types of commodities which it distributes as well as the number of artists involved in this enterprise. Even before the reconfiguration into the Congregation of St. Joseph, sisters from other communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph were participating in this ministry. Additionally, the MOTA solicits artwork from lay and religious artists. Currently, they distribute religious commodities featuring the work of over thirty artists. Manifesting the reclamation of their history, the MOTA also produces several images, statues, or other religious commodities which feature the artwork of earlier sisters like Holmgren and Mehren.

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<sup>6</sup> Sister April [pseudonym], 6 January 2012.

<sup>7</sup> An advertisement from 1993 demonstrates this reliance on a few artists. Only Richard Mehren, CSJ, George Ellen Holmgren, CSJ, Kathy Sherman, CSJ, and Mary Southard, CSJ are named as contributing artists.

### ***Ministering Through Art, Manifesting the Mission***

But what is the purpose of the Ministry of the Arts? How does enabling sisters to work as artists and produce religious commodities correspond to religious life? And, how is the Ministry of the Arts perceived as a ministry within the Congregation of St. Joseph? As noted above, *Perfectae caritatis* urged religious communities to reassess their ministries and the means through which they served modern society.<sup>8</sup> Women religious including the Sisters of St. Joseph questioned how they could more fully serve the needs of the church and society as well as share their religious vision with others. As the Second Vatican Council asserted a common mission for all Christians of bringing Christ into the world, the Sisters of St. Joseph implemented this call and articulated the charism of their community as a mission for unity.<sup>9</sup>

When they reconfigured their individual communities into the Congregation of St. Joseph, the sisters created a mission statement to guide their ministries and communal goals. They maintain, “Our mission flows from the purpose for which the congregation exists: We live and work that all people may be united with God and with one another. It is rooted in the mission of Christ, the same mission which continually unfolds in His church, ‘That all may be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; I pray that they may be one in Us.’ (John 17:21).”<sup>10</sup> Echoing the charism of the religious community, the

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<sup>8</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, § 20.

<sup>9</sup> For this mission, see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, § 1, 5, 10. For how the mission of the church relates to modern society, see Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Promulgated by Pope Paul VI, 7 December 1965, Documents of the II Vatican Council, Vatican Website, especially Chapter IV “The Role of the Church in the Modern World,” §40-45, accessed 14 March 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>10</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, “Our Mission.”

mission statement emphasizes unity with God and others.<sup>11</sup> To further consider the ways in which they should live out this broad mission, the Congregation crafted four Generous Promises in which they agreed to attend to social and ecological justice as well as global structures and leadership in the Congregation. The Generous Promises call the Congregation to give of themselves and the community to address these issues.<sup>12</sup> These four promises serve to guide and assess the activities and goals of the Congregation.

As a result, the Sisters of St. Joseph of La Grange Park and then the Congregation of St. Joseph worked to incorporate their mission into the newly formed Ministry of the Arts. Through the creation and distribution of religious images, objects, and music, the MOTA seeks to creatively manifest the Congregation's mission for unity and draw others into their commitment to ecological and social justice. Their vision statement for MOTA evidences these goals:

We encourage and affirm creativity in ourselves and all persons. Our mission of unity brings us in our time to a deeper awareness of our communion with God and all creation.

Through the arts we contemplate and express the unity and holiness of all creation, and the heights and depths of the human heart in response to the great mysteries of existence. We affirm the power and prophecy of the arts and believe

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<sup>11</sup> *The Constitutions for the Little Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph* assert, "They should so live that their Congregation may bear the name of the Congregation of the great love of God. . . . They will also show great charity towards all classes of neighbors, particularly the poor. . . . Let all dread the slightest disunion as they would a monster. They should be formed with extraordinary care in this spirit of love and charity" (Jean-Pierre Médaille, *The Constitutions for the Little Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph*, trans. Research Team of the U.S.A. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (Erie, Pa: Sisters of St. Joseph, 1969), 12, 34, and 64, in ACSJC-G. Quoted in Coburn and Smith, 23). The sisters seek to "serve the dear neighbor" and assess "the state of the heart." Both of these statements of their ministerial work and their individual and communal approach to their spirituality emphasize the relational nature of humanity. These ways of reflecting are not unique to their use of images in the Ministry of the Arts; rather, all of their ministries seek to manifest this vision of unity in diverse ways. Central to many of their ministries is an emphasis on social and ecological justice.

<sup>12</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, "Our Mission." For a discussion of these Generous Promises, see 11-12 above.

the arts to be an important ministry for hope and healing in a critical moment of world transformation.<sup>13</sup>

This vision statement articulates the arts as a transformative process, a process which enables the sisters to share their religious vision with others. As we will see, the MOTA developed specific techniques to enable the dispersion and implementation of the Congregation's mission.

Nevertheless, their emphasis on mission corresponded not only to their religious motives but also to practical concerns. In an interview, the director of the MOTA reflected that the ministry gradually developed as they realized that producing items that corresponded to their mission offered them a way into the market.<sup>14</sup> They choose to produce images and other commodities, which harmonize with their mission and appeal to their customers. The images that they mass-produce circulate in various forms as prints and canvas, greeting cards, prayer cards, bookmarks, and calendars.<sup>15</sup> They also produce music, sculpture, and jewelry which manifest their mission. The production of commodities in these diverse forms enables the Congregation to reach a larger audience. The director noted that while many of their customers are Catholic, not all of them are.<sup>16</sup> Thus they distribute images which appeal to Catholics as well as people who are neither

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<sup>13</sup> Ministry of the Arts, "Vision Statement," About US, accessed 13 March 2014, <http://www.ministryofhearts.org/servlet/the-template/about/Page>.

<sup>14</sup> Christina [pseudonym], 20 June 2011.

<sup>15</sup> While MOTA sells items produced outside of their community as well as items created by the sisters, this chapter will focus on the mass-produced images and commodities that are created and distributed by the Ministry of the Arts. Other items are chosen to be sold through the MOTA if the staff perceives the message of the product to be in line with the mission of the Congregation. Thus pictures, cards, and books that either visually or verbally promote issues to which the Congregation is committed as well as products such as candles produced by organizations seeking to support causes to which the sisters are committed, such as domestic violence victims, are sold through the MOTA. In recent catalogs from the MOTA, these products and artists are either described in such a way to make these connections to the mission obvious or are categorized according to the Generous Promises, which are part of the Congregation's mission.

<sup>16</sup> Christina [pseudonym], 20 June 2011.

Catholic nor Christian. This diverse audience as well as their experimentation with the market acknowledges the MOTA's role as a source of financial support for the Congregation. The larger their audience is the more support MOTA is able to give to the Congregation's other ministries. As their commodities and catalog remark, purchases support the future of ministries to the poor, inmates, immigrants and various ministries including work to end human trafficking and capital punishment.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 32: Mary Southard, CSJ, *One Sacred Community* (Used with permission)**

Relying on religious commodities to disperse their mission, the sisters acknowledge the power of images to embody their message in modern culture. The sisters are not merely distributing these images because of their aesthetic appeal or for the financial profits; rather, they distribute images which recall their mission, especially their emphasis on social and ecological justice. As the director of MOTA notes, the artists who are involved in the ministry, both religious and lay, are “dialed into the charism” of the

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<sup>17</sup> Reminding their consumers that the Congregation ministers to various populations can also be another way to encourage donations to these ministries. For a list and description of these ministries, see Congregation of St. Joseph, “CSJ Ministries, Inc.”

sisters.<sup>18</sup> Thus, they produce images which reflect the unity of people as well as assert humans' interconnection with the Earth. The image presently used for the MOTA website demonstrates this visual focus on unity. Created by Mary Southard, CSJ, *One Sacred Community* images a meal, perhaps Eucharist, at which people gather; however, the meal is not secluded in a building but appears to take place outdoors with no great distinction being drawn between the group and the surrounding natural environment. The image itself visually presents the ideal of unity for which the sisters are working. The strategic use of this and other images evidences the MOTA's belief that images can influence the way a person perceives the world.<sup>19</sup> They are not merely producing popular religious images; rather, the production of these images seeks to demonstrate and draw others into their mission of unity.

### ***Altering One's Vision: Techniques for Change***

As the Congregation sponsors ministries of social justice as well as of the arts, we can question whether the sisters are training people in how to view the commodities they produce and whether this then correlates to an awareness of oppression and action for justice. Does the production of religious images and commodities draw others into their

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<sup>18</sup> Christina [pseudonym], 20 June 2011. The MOTA solicits images both from sisters in the Congregation and from individuals, both lay and religious, who create images that manifest their vision for the church and world. Sisters have commented during interviews that they recognize the mission in the images produced by the Ministry of the Arts. The artists within the Congregation often reflected on the presence of the mission within their paintings, sculpture, and photography. Some noted that these connections were not necessarily explicit, but the mission extended into their art because it is an aspect of their personal identity. For an analysis of the artists' use of visual practices, see chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the sisters themselves acknowledge the power of images and art. Caroline Benken, CSJ asserts, "Art is integral to our mission as CSJs. Through it we manifest our oneness with all of creation" (Caroline Benken, "Wondering What it is that Artists Seek so Passionately," *imagineONE* 3, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011): 25). Benken and other sisters argue that the creative process affects both the artist and the viewer, who actively reflects on the artwork.



religious mission? Can the sisters employ images to both demonstrate and elicit their vision of unity? In *Image and Insight*, Margaret Miles argues that religion needs to educate people in how to see or interpret religious images.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps recognizing this need, the MOTA attempts this re-education through several different techniques. First, the MOTA frequently pairs an image with a quote that initiates the interpretation of the image. Second, the MOTA uses these images to produce different commodities which attempt to reform a person's practices to correlate with the mission of the sisters. For instance, they produce both prayer cards and calendars which potentially draw the person into their mission by creatively using the form of the prayer card or calendar to disrupt the normal use of these commodities.

One would not assume that using a prayer card potentially disrupts religious belief or reframes religious or secular practices. Nevertheless, MOTA attempts to focus the viewer's attention on social and ecological justice by altering the type of images and quotes used on the prayer card. Normally, the prayer card offers an image of Jesus, the Holy Family, or one of the saints for an individual to meditate on in prayer. In contrast, the MOTA creates prayer cards which subtly shift the focus of one's prayer to align it with the mission of unity. No longer is the focus only on the life of a deceased loved one

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<sup>20</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 4. Miles argues that modern people are without the traditional means of interpretation; interpretation of religious images depends on the individual instead of communal forms of interpretation (*Image as Insight*, 33-34). This view of modernity can be critiqued as images continue to circulate within particular contexts and discourses. In modernity as in the medieval ages, people rely on these discourses to deploy the meaning of particular images. Nevertheless, Miles notes the importance of education in a shared vision as a means of promoting justice. For Miles, this training serves to both help people recognize images as liberatory or oppressive as well as to work for liberation: "The exercise and strengthening of our visual understanding by disciplined critical image use is not, of course, an alternative to political and social action toward the alleviation of oppression. But it must accompany these efforts if an ideology of inclusiveness is not to remain abstract" (Ibid., 154). Thus education in interpreting images can encourage a correct seeing and action for social justice.

or of a saint; rather, the MOTA's prayer cards reframe the focus of the prayer by emphasizing relationships with God, other humans, and Earth and thus urge people to consider their relation to a number of different social issues.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 33: Mary Southard, CSJ, *Be Friends* (Used with permission)**

Consider the prayer card *Be Friends*, which was created by Mary Southard, CSJ.

Across a background of the continents of the world, non-descript, various colored figures stand holding hands.<sup>22</sup> While their faces and bodies are featureless, each figure has a heart on its chest. Around the image, the card reads, “I have a dream that we can all be friends! That we will become people of honor, tall in spirit, full of reverence for earth and each ‘other.’ We will drop our guns and our walls and our greeds. Then there will be

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<sup>21</sup> In *The Sacred Gaze*, David Morgan examines practices of seeing that assist in shaping people's beliefs and customs. He argues that religious visual culture includes images as well as the practices and beliefs that impact the act of seeing (David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, 3-8). The use of images and objects to assert religious meaning is evident in many contexts but perhaps is most evident when two distinct religious traditions meet. In his treatment of religious visual culture, Morgan argues that images have been used within mission history to promote and resist evangelization. Images circulate within cultures and enable religious traditions to present religious belief through images which resonate with a given culture (Ibid., 147-187).

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe seem to dominate the globe. This visually disrupts the centrality of the United States.

enough for all and the world will be safe again for children and living things.”<sup>23</sup> Through this quote, the prayer card situates the image within a tradition of petitionary prayer and encourages individuals to reassess the focus of prayer. In contrast to traditional prayer cards, the image along with the quote directs one to pray for the future of Earth and humanity. This physically small commodity attempts to challenge violence, capitalism, isolationism, and ecological destruction. Through this and other images, MOTA uses an individual’s prayer life as a way to align one with their mission. The prayer card encourages a person to pray, and perhaps take action, for this dream of a united world.



**Figure 34: Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ, *God's Ecstasy* (Used with permission)**

In a similar way, the MOTA employs their annual calendar to promote the mission of the Congregation. For example, *With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar* includes the

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Southard, CSJ, *Be Friends* prayer card (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, 1998).

image *God's Ecstasy* by Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ.<sup>24</sup> This image draws together references to creation, the crucifixion, the cosmos, humanity, animal and plant life as well as city life. Like the previous images, *God's Ecstasy* envisions humans within the larger cosmos; however, it goes further by directly referencing the crucifixion as affecting all of creation. Thus, the image seeks to demonstrate the unity of humans and creation as part of God's plan. A quote from Holmberg which accompanies this image further underscores this connection: "When we Create we are one with the Creator, one with the Universe[,] One with each other and One in ourselves."<sup>25</sup> In addition to this quote, the MOTA sets up the calendar to be a daily conversation between the viewer, the image, and daily actions (suggestions for each day for the viewer to do or contemplate). Many of the daily actions suggested for this month emphasize an awareness of the Earth and humans' impact on it.<sup>26</sup> The image and the format of the calendar challenge the viewer to reshape one's actions and thoughts to account for ecological justice, justice that starts with the image of a united God and cosmos. As a result, the use of visual images and commentary in these commodities reframes the viewer's relationship with the world within the Congregation's mission of unity.

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<sup>24</sup> Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ, *God's Ecstasy*, in *With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, 2003), January 2004. Holmberg is a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet. While she is not a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph, she shares a common charism with the Congregation and her artwork emphasizes a similar focus on unity and justice.

<sup>25</sup> Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ, in *With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar*, January 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Some of the daily actions include: "Where you stand is HOLY GROUND," "Beauty evokes hope / See the beauty of diversity," "Open the Door. Step out into the Universe," and "Cook Vegetarian / Invite a friend" (*With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar*, January 2, 18, 24, and 29). The calendar also seeks to expand one's vision with references to individuals, events, and publications: "J.P. II Pastoral: 'Ecological Crisis a Moral Issue' 1990," "Haley's Comet (1531)," "Maghi (Sikh)," "1916: Einstein – General Theory of Relativity" (January 1, 4, 14, 24). A viewer who actively engages the calendar would presumably learn a lot about world history and be encouraged to contemplate her relation to these events and to the Earth.

### ***Re-forming the Consumer: Creating Dialogical Relationship***

This goal of dispersing their mission of unity necessitates an active consumer: a consumer who engages the commodities in such a way as to employ these images and objects as dialogue partners. The pairing of images and quotes and the reframing of commodities encourages the consumer to do more than observe the religious image; however, by engaging and re-forming the consumer, the MOTA further extends the invitation into the sisters' mission. The MOTA posits an active consumer who is a dialogue partner, one who responds to their religious commodities and mission. This emphasis on dialogue arises from the spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Since the founding of the religious order in France, the sisters have been guided by several spiritual practices including sharing the State of the Heart. In this practice, a group of sisters (normally those living or ministering together) share events and concerns of their lives, reflect on where they are being called to serve, and respond to the insights of the other sisters. This practice draws the sisters closer together as they move through life united with a common purpose. It also acknowledges one's continual process of growth – one is never finished growing or changing whether it be physically or spiritually. Reflecting this, their religious commodities resist a static spirituality and an inactive religious life.

As a result, many of the commodities and the way they are used by the Congregation of St. Joseph enact dialogue with the consumer. Beyond dialogue between an image and accompanying quote, the MOTA promotes dialogue with the artists or with the commodity itself. Products often include the artist's vision or purpose for creating a piece. Others offer questions for the consumer to consider. Still more are crafted to

physically manifest unity and elicit dialogue and compassion. For example, the MOTA produces several prayer jars in which one would place a piece of paper containing a prayer. They suggest that these prayer jars be used at weddings for guests to share a prayer for the couple. These prayers could then be reflected on during marriage and serve as a reminder of the support the couple has and offer future direction. As prayer jars are used for multiple occasions, MOTA models this practice in Joseph's Corner, the store for the MOTA in LaGrange Park. In the middle of the store, the sisters have a prayer jar and invite their guests to place their prayers in the jar. With the promise to remember these intentions in their daily prayer, the sisters draw their guests, their customers, into their religious life.

Through another practical means, the MOTA challenges the consumer to reflect on and become committed to different social justice issues. In their catalogs and on their website, the MOTA connects particular commodities to aspects of their Generous Promises, the specific issues to which they have committed themselves as a Congregation. For example, one of their Generous Promises calls for ecological justice: "We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to recognize the reality that Earth is dying, to claim our oneness with Earth and to take steps now to strengthen, heal and renew the face of Earth."<sup>27</sup> Products associated with this Generous Promise inspire consumers to personally participate in the Congregation's mission. For example, a book for children, *God Is Everywhere*, combines children's artwork with the music of Kathy Sherman, CSJ to encourage children to recognize God in the natural environment. Similarly, *Table*

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<sup>27</sup> Congregation of St. Joseph, "Our Mission."

*Graces: "Earth Charter" Prayers for Meals* employs images and prayers to encourage individuals and groups to pray for and take action for the Earth.<sup>28</sup> These products offer consumers concrete ways to include ecological justice in their own religious practices. By creating and distributing these products, the sisters invite others into their mission of unity.

The invitation into their mission is explicitly expressed in relation to the Congregation's prison ministry to which MOTA has been donating their annual calendar. For the 2014 year, MOTA donated approximately six thousand calendars to prison inmates.<sup>29</sup> To broaden this ministry, their catalog directly appeals to customers: "Inmates' thank you notes revealed the positive impact the Calendar was having on their lives so we began to dream of expanding the practice to even more prisons, and for this we need the help of 'Calendar Fans.'"<sup>30</sup> Indeed their catalog for Fall – Winter 2013 includes comments from some of the inmates: "For some reason the calendar keeps coming to my mind...I really appreciate it in this SO lonely place where one's eyes open and learn how to value even the smallest things and take NOTHING for granted. Keep me in your prayers...(Edwin)."<sup>31</sup> Addressing customers who already actively engage the calendar, MOTA encourages their customers to donate calendars to the prison ministry and to

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<sup>28</sup> *Ministry of the Arts Fall – Winter 2012* catalog (LaGrange Park, Illinois: St. Joseph Press, 2012), 47. As we will see below, even though these products make explicit connections to the Congregation's mission and the Generous Promises, it does not guarantee that consumers will take action for the mission. Individuals can passively approach these products if they choose to. Nevertheless, the person who engages the products, has been educated into the mission of the sisters, and agrees with their goals for the church and society will be more likely to actively commit to their mission.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of the Arts, "Prison Ministry Update," Home, accessed 20 March 2014, <http://www.ministryofthearts.org/servlet/StoreFront>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ministry of the Arts Fall – Winter 2012* catalog, 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ministry of the Arts Fall – Winter 2013* catalog (La Grange Park, Illinois: St. Joseph Press, 2013), 2.

remember the inmates in their prayers.<sup>32</sup> Thus they use the relationship with customers that was created by their religious commodities to further promote their other ministries. Their dialogical approach to these commodities draws the consumer further into their mission.

Most productively, the annual calendar produced by MOTA becomes a conversation between the consumer and those involved in its production. The discourse of the calendar elicits involvement and commitment to its vision. The calendars often include a description of the theme, how the calendar team agreed on it, and an invitation into the dialogue of the calendar. The calendar for 2010 *Pathways to Peace* demonstrates this dialogue: “We invite you to walk a ‘path’ with us each month, being more mindful of your actions and practices. May this practice gift you with a more peace-filled life, and inspire you to expand outward to further ignite peace on Earth.”<sup>33</sup> *Pathways to Peace* directly addresses the consumer and attempts to change her thought and action throughout the year. Images, commentary, daily actions, and a monthly note to the consumer offer ways to alter one’s habits. The format of the calendar reveals that the calendar team does not perceive the person who purchases or receives this calendar as a passive viewer; rather, the calendar team posits the engaged interaction of the consumer.

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<sup>32</sup> “We invite you to consider joining this outreach with two actions: (1) Give \$1.00 toward the cost of a Calendar for an inmate. (2) Add these inmates to your prayers. We especially want them to know that along with making their Calendar possible that we are keeping them in our personal prayers” (Ibid.).

<sup>33</sup> Calendar Creator Team, *Pathways to Peace With Notes for the Journey 2010 Calendar* (La Grange Park, Illinois: Ministry of the Arts, 2009), Introduction.





**Figure 35: Patricia Willems, CSJ, *Phlox* (Used with permission)**

Indeed, the calendar often invites the consumer to contact the MOTA with suggestions or comments. As the calendar *1999 a Time to Gather, Gives Thanks and Dream* demonstrates, people actively respond to this invitation, which furthers the dialogue between the Congregation, the consumer, and the religious commodities. For the month of October, Pat Willems, CSJ's watercolor *Phlox* challenges one's perception by drawing the viewer's eye through the image.<sup>34</sup> Very few flowers are in focus while much in the image blurs into the background while the background itself – the straight lines of tree trunks and the brightness of the sun – competes with the flowers for attention. The complexity of this image emphasizes the melding of vegetation and sunlight, flowers and sky, but this complexity appears simple. Who would question the union of sunlight and vegetation? The commentary for this month revolves around simplifying one's life, one's needs, one's possessions.

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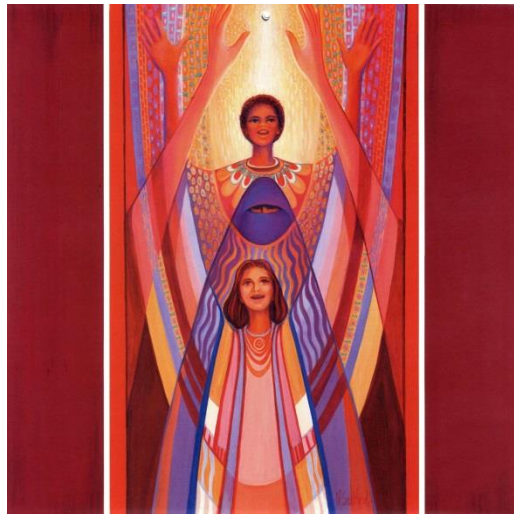
<sup>34</sup> Pat Willems, CSJ, *Phlox* in *1999 a Time to Gather, Give Thanks and Dream* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, 1998), October 1999.

In addition to daily actions which encourage various forms of simplifying, the calendar includes comments from several individuals and groups who had used the MOTA calendars in the past. Moving the dialogue to another level, the calendar shares comments from past consumers for present consumers' reflection. These comments entail an active engagement with the calendar as they thread throughout the horizontal and vertical lines of the grid. Reading these comments involves physically moving the calendar or one's body. As a result, the person viewing the calendar cannot passively behold its message; rather, the calendar encourages engagement at multiple levels. Thus the values that Willems, Southard and the other artists offer in the calendar are intended to alter or direct one's daily reflections, thoughts, and actions. Beginning with the assumed active dialogue partner, the calendar team creates the calendar as a religious practice in which one grows in knowledge of oneself, others, the universe, and God. In particular, the calendar works to reform the viewer's understanding of unity, gender, and ecological justice.

### *Producing Unity*

Because of their reliance on the mission of the Congregation, MOTA emphasizes unity as a central theme for the religious commodities which they produce. They promote unity with other humans, creation, and God through images that draw together diverse topics and present an ideal image of the church and global relations. Thus the commodities distributed by MOTA address social justice issues and seek to shift the way people see human relationships. This is especially evident in the representations of

women.<sup>35</sup> One image that several sisters mentioned during interviews is *Woman Spirit Rising* by Mary Southard, CSJ.<sup>36</sup> Also used for the 2004 calendar, this painting visualizes the unity of women through three figures of diverse racial and religious backgrounds. During an interview, one sister declared that the first time she saw this image she finally understood that women of other religions were her sisters.<sup>37</sup> The image at least in some form achieved a change in understanding, an understanding that their mission seeks to promote.



**Figure 36: Mary Southard, CSJ, *Woman Spirit Rising* (Used with permission)**

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<sup>35</sup> In *Carnal Knowing*, Margaret Miles contends that representations of women have not presented women's subjectivity. Miles discusses the ways that images of women are employed to reinforce conceptions of women. She argues that these visual presentations as well as theological writings offer a socially constructed image of women with which women had to interact: "The social function of representations, then, is to stabilize assumptions and expectations relating to the objects or persons represented" (Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 10). See also *Ibid.*, 139-169.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Southard, CSJ, *Woman Spirit Rising* in *With Sacred Eyes* calendar (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, 2003), July 2004. The image also circulates as a prayer card which includes a quote stating, "Relationship is at the heart of who we are and who we are becoming" (*Woman Spirit Rising*, Ministry of the Arts, <http://www.ministryofthearts.org/servlet/the-975/Woman-Spirit-Rising/Detail> (accessed 19 March 2012)).

<sup>37</sup> Sister Maria [pseudonym], 20 June 2011.

While the image demonstrates the interrelation of women of diverse religions or cultures, it does not only succeed in doing this through the depiction of these women. Rather, the image functions within the religious community as a source of reflection and commentary on social issues. As David Morgan argues, “It is not the image itself, as an intrinsically meaningful entity, but the image as it is articulated within social practices that helps to assemble and secure the world of a believer.”<sup>38</sup> The sister who commented on the revelatory power of this image belongs to multiple communities within American society, one of which is the Congregation. Drawing on her experiences and knowledge of the world, she sees the image as social critique and a call to manifest unity in both the United States and the world. Arguably, she recognized other women as her sisters not only because of the image itself but because of the religious community to which she belongs. She has been trained by her community to see images through this lens of unity.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, images like *Woman Spirit Rising* travel both inside and outside of the Congregation. Acknowledging the circulation of these images, the MOTA works to engage the viewer in dialogue as well as influence the thought and action of those who consume these religious images. As part of the calendar for 2004, *Woman Spirit Rising* engages the viewer in dialogue with the image itself, the commentary for the month of July, and the rest of the calendar. This month alone refers to civic holidays for three

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<sup>38</sup> Morgan, *Visual Piety*, 207.

<sup>39</sup> In *The Embodied Eye*, Morgan argues, “To belong to the community means to *look* a certain way” (Morgan, *The Embodied Eye*, 5). Morgan notes that this belonging includes both how one visually sees another as well as how one is perceived. Thus ways of seeing affect how people perceive themselves, others, and their world (Ibid., 5-6).

nations, holidays for five religious traditions, and such historical events as the First Women's Rights Conference, the "First Earthling Walks on the Moon 1969," and the Geneva Agreement.<sup>40</sup> References to Christianity span both time and space by including Thomas the Apostle, Benedict, Kateri Tekekwitha, Bonaventure, Mary Magdalene, Ezekiel the Prophet, and Ignatius Loyola. Clearly modeling an awareness of other nations and religious traditions, the calendar draws the viewer's attention to individual authors, artists, poets, psychologists, and statesmen, and suggests diverse books including poetry, a memoir, and feminist theologies.<sup>41</sup> The calendar thus seeks to expand the viewer's focus and knowledge. While calendars are often used for individual, family, or group planning, the MOTA calendar ruptures the insularity of any group and insists upon global and historical connections.

Indeed, the daily actions and commentary in the calendar urge the viewer to acknowledge and act for unity. These reflections address the individual, other humans, the created world, and God. For example, daily actions include "Listen for the sacred voice of women," "Observe a pond – all the exchanges of life," "Contemplate Earth (yourself) from the moon," and "Observe the world drenched with light – Drenched with God."<sup>42</sup> Thus the image of *Woman Spirit Rising* collaborates with the daily actions and commentary to instill in the viewer an appreciation for the unity evident in the universe.

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<sup>40</sup> The civic holidays included are Canada Day, Independence Day, and Bastille Day; religious holidays include Guru Purnima (Hinduism), the martyrdom of Bab (Baha'i), Pioneer Day (Mormonism), Tisha B'av (Judaism) as well as references to Christian saints (*With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar*, July 2004).

<sup>41</sup> These individuals include Marc Chagall, Henry David Thoreau, Rembrandt, Degas, Carl Jung, G.M. Hopkins, Dag Hammarskjold, and Henry Moore. The calendar also encourages the viewer to read poetry by Joyce Kupperman, the memoir of Melissa Walker, and feminist theology from Ivone Gebara and Chung Hyun Kyung (*With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar*, July 2004).

<sup>42</sup> *With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar*, July 5, 13, 20, 18-19, 2004.

The other images in *With Sacred Eyes*, including Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ's *God's Ecstasy*, similarly demonstrate unity. Likewise Southard's introduction to the calendar asserts this fundamental unity: "What mystics have seen throughout the ages, science now confirms – that in the natural world everything is interconnected, everything is kin, and everything is in communion with everything else."<sup>43</sup> Challenging materialism and a sense of separation from the natural world, Southard and others involved in creating this calendar urge the viewer to observe the world through a lens of unity. Indeed, Southard concludes the introduction with a series of questions for the consumer – questions that posit the consumer as a part of a community which is both responsible for past and future approaches: "Are we ready to recognize ourselves as participants in the dynamic, on-going creativity of this Earth community – co-creators, unifiers, healers, lovers?"<sup>44</sup> Addressed by the calendar, the consumer furthers the dialogue by reading, contemplating, and potentially responding to these questions, images, and commentary.

### *Disrupting Gender*

This dialogue between the religious commodities and the consumer further attempts to reframe one's conception of gender. Thus images and commentary address both biblical and theological issues as well as contemporary perceptions of gender. While

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<sup>43</sup> Southard, Introduction, *With Sacred Eyes 2004 calendar*.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. The other questions similarly include the viewer as part of this community and question her commitment to changing the future:

"Are we ready at last to let our eyes, our beings open to the Sacred, and to let ourselves be dazzled?

Are we ready to live each moment of life in the beautiful Garden – radiant, nourishing, abundant, a blessing! ...a feast for our souls?

Are we ready to quit all the feudin', fightin' and fussin' with each other, and our over-consuming of the Garden, to live the truth of who we are?

Are we ready to see with Sacred Eyes, to let ourselves fall in Love, and **live** in Love, in Holy Communion with the All of Life? Yes!" (Ibid., emphasis in original).

the annual calendars frequently include images of women which disrupt traditional understandings, the calendar for 2005 *The Treasure's Within: A Celebration of the Feminine* explicitly engages with the concept of the feminine and subtly alters a Catholic understanding of women's roles in society. In the Roman Catholic tradition, men and women are conceived of as complementary. Women have particular gifts and callings that enable them to nurture and be compassionate whereas men have particular gifts and callings that enable them to lead and protect. This complementarity impacts the specific roles women and men should fill in society.<sup>45</sup>

While not directly challenging this traditional Catholic understanding of gender, MOTA shifts the distinction from applying to men and women to applying to all of humanity, all of creation. In an introduction to *The Treasure's Within*, Southard argues that the masculine and feminine spirits are within each person: **“The masculine and feminine energies are the ‘image of God’, two creative forces present in the universe from the beginning which, when working together create wholeness.”**<sup>46</sup> Southard distinguishes between these two energies but maintains their necessary interdependence for the flourishing of creation.<sup>47</sup> Because of the desire for “wholeness,” Southard grieves the repression of the feminine spirit in the past and promotes the full elaboration of both

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<sup>45</sup> For an example of this complementarity, see Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), §7, 11. John Paul II argues, “Womanhood expresses the ‘human’ as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way” (§ 7). Catholics differ in how they approach this traditional understanding of gender. For a range of responses from Catholic women, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, ed., *The Church Women Want: Catholic Women in Dialogue* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2002), especially Sara Butler, M.S.B.T., “Embodiment: Women and Men, Equal and Complementary,” 35-44; Elizabeth A. Johnson, “Imaging God, Embodying Christ: Women as a Sign of the Times,” 45-59; and Colleen M. Griffith, “Human Bodiliness: Sameness as Starting Point,” 60-68.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Southard, CSJ, Introduction. *The Treasure's Within: A Celebration of the Feminine a Calendar for 2005* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Ministries of the Art, 2004), emphasis in original.

<sup>47</sup> “The feminine is a wisdom and spirit which is present in all of us, but which has been suppressed in women and almost totally crushed in men” (Ibid.).

spirits in the future. She argues that the reclamation of the feminine spirit will enable humans to heal humanity and creation: “In the evolutionary story of our planet, this is OUR moment as a species, and we have **within us** what is required to bring about LIFE instead of death.”<sup>48</sup> Connected to the rest of the universe, humans possess the power to affect other aspects of the world, and through the feminine spirit, humans can protect the world.

Southard visually manifests the centrality of the feminine spirit in several paintings included in the calendar for 2005. Most striking is her image for August, *Visitation*, which engages the Christian narrative and elaborates on the impact of the feminine spirit. In *Visitation*, two women greet each other, presumably Elizabeth and Mary. Standing on the left, Elizabeth is visibly pregnant and her hair is covered with a red veil. In contrast, Mary’s pregnancy is not showing and her hair is uncovered. Elizabeth appears to be taller than Mary or else is standing slightly above her. Mary moves forward toward Elizabeth as her hair and dress flow behind her. The women’s arms reach gently toward each other with their hands down toward their waists. Between Mary and Elizabeth, another woman stands and observes the meeting. She wears a gold head scarf that is intricately embroidered with white and red thread.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., emphasis in original.





**Figure 37: Mary Southard, CSJ, *Visitation* (Used with permission)**

Each of these women is represented realistically in terms of her facial features and upper body, but her lower body disappears into the surrounding colors. Yellow rays of light appear to envelope these three figures from above. The brightness of the light seems to resound between Mary and Elizabeth remaining contained between their arms and descending to the ground between them. Thus, the use of this light forms the shape of a chalice between Mary and Elizabeth.<sup>49</sup> In the back right and left of the painting, the yellow rays darken to orange, red, and black and contain the figures of more people whose features are indistinguishable. While other images of the Visitation may also contain additional people, they are not generally placed in between the figures of Mary and Elizabeth nor are they abstract figures leaving their identity to the viewer's

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<sup>49</sup> Southard observes the shape of the chalice in her commentary for the month of August. The shape of the chalice recalls the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholicism. In this image, Southard thus intertwines traditional Catholic imagery with a re-interpretation of Mary and Elizabeth's encounter to emphasize the centrality of the feminine spirit (Mary Southard, CSJ, *Visitation* in *The Treasure's Within: A Celebration of the Feminine a Calendar for 2005* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Ministries of the Art, 2004), August 2005).

imagination. The addition of these figures draws the viewer into the painting. Indeed, Southard writes, “I began painting Mary and Elizabeth coming toward each other – the joyful welcome, life, light, and energy between them; others were there—family members? us? . . . . What does it evoke for you?”<sup>50</sup> The painting and Southard’s reflection are meant to interact with the viewer, to elicit thought.

While the Feast of the Visitation is celebrated on May 31<sup>st</sup> by Catholics, this image is used for the month of August, which celebrates the Assumption of Mary. Since this painting is entitled *Visitation*, it can be located in the Christian tradition and visualizes the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth as it is recounted in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>51</sup> In the painting, Mary’s mouth is slightly open. Is this the moment when she utters the Magnificat? One of Southard’s reflections for the month states, “Today woman is singing a new song, telling her story, giving birth to herself, filling the chalice, releasing new energies that will heal and unify the planet.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, Southard employs the Christian image of the Visitation to provoke viewers into a deeper contemplation of women and society. Indeed, she comments that the narrative of the Visitation operates as “an archetype of what happens within when we TRULY MEET another being.”<sup>53</sup> Through this image and the daily actions, Southard challenges the viewer to acknowledge and employ the feminine spirit. She promotes a feminist vision of the world, one that values peace and all of creation. The daily actions emphasize interdependence and an

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Luke 1:46-55. The entire encounter between Mary and Elizabeth occurs in Luke 1:39-56.

<sup>52</sup> Southard, *The Treasure’s Within*, August 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., emphasis in original.

affirmation of the other.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, other reflections comment on patriarchy and ecological justice. The reflections paired with this image thus encourage the viewer to reflect on the relationship of Mary and Elizabeth and relate them to the viewer's life and society. These stand in stark contrast to daily reflections that include Hiroshima and the International Day of Remembrance of the slave trade and its abolition.<sup>55</sup> This juxtaposition challenges the viewer to acknowledge the consequences of repressing or dominating the feminine spirit.

In contrast to Southard's explicit use of Christian narrative, Sandra Bierman's *The Planting* manifests another aspect of the feminine spirit.<sup>56</sup> *The Planting* portrays a voluptuous woman, possibly of African or Hispanic heritage, kneeling outside. She wears red pants and a blue shirt with light blue trim. Her hair is covered with a black scarf. While kneeling, she leans close toward the ground, her chest touching her legs. On the ground in front of her is a small plant. Her hands gently enfold the seedling and light emanates from the plant or from her hands and illuminates her face. Bierman's use of shadows emphasizes this secondary source of light. Behind the woman are simple green lines representing trees. From the trees and the woman, shadows trace the ground toward the viewer and the woman's back appears covered in light while her side and arms remain in shadow.

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<sup>54</sup> Daily actions emphasize this interdependence through individual contemplation ("Awaken to the New in You" and "Listen! Direction comes from within. . ."), actions towards others ("Affirm a man in your life" and "Let a child show you. . ."), and actions towards nature ("Spend time out in nature. Practice 'interbeing'" and "Be stirred within by an encounter with a tree") (*The Treasure's Within: A Celebration of the Feminine a Calendar for 2005* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Ministries of the Art, 2004), August 1, 16, 10, 31, 13, and 11).

<sup>55</sup> *The Treasure's Within*, August 6 and 23.

<sup>56</sup> Sandra Bierman, *The Planting* in *The Treasure's Within: A Celebration of the Feminine a Calendar for 2005* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Ministries of the Art, 2004), May 2005.

What then is the source of this second light? Does it emanate from the plant itself? Does it come from the woman's hands? Does it form from the relationship between the woman and the plant? Who is the woman? Bierman's reflection for the month does not explain the meaning of the painting but offers her hopes: "Although I approach the canvas working with composition . . . shapes, lines . . . the human figure . . . my unconscious adds the element of inner yearning for tranquility, strength and well-being."<sup>57</sup> Other reflections for the month push the viewer to further contemplate the identity of the woman: "Contemplate the artist's message . . . it is the way . . . of nature, the way of woman, the way God creates."<sup>58</sup> While the image creates a realistic figure of a woman nurturing a plant, the meaning of the image moves into the allegorical by presenting the woman as an image of God creating and nurturing the world.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, *Visitation*, *The Planting*, and the other images in the calendar engage the viewer to disrupt conceptions of gender and how gender impacts cultural and religious practices as well as theological understandings of God and humanity. This concept is furthered by Southard's reflection for the month in which she critiques patriarchy for oppressing women and the earth: "Fear of nature, fear of women, fear of what is tender, dark, mysterious, strong, these fears characterize patriarchy. Perceived as 'savage' and dangerous, Earth and Woman must be controlled! The coherence of women and nature,

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<sup>57</sup> Southard, *The Treasure's Within*, May 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Southard, *The Treasure's Within*, May 2005.

<sup>59</sup> We can question whether or not Bierman associated the woman with God. In several of her paintings, she employs a similar use of light emanating between figures such as parents with a child; however, this could also be her way of symbolizing the holiness of the family. For her artwork, see Sandra Bierman, "Sandra Bierman," accessed 19 March 2014, <http://www.sandrabierman.com/intro.html>.

Woman's body and Earth's body, is Holy."<sup>60</sup> Southard's comments and the calendar as a whole challenge the viewer to rethink the value of women and the earth in terms of Christian values.

*Acting for Ecological Justice*

In addition to unity and gender, the images created and distributed through MOTA both implicitly and explicitly draw the viewer's attention to ecological justice. As one of the Generous Promises the Congregation made after its formation, ecological justice permeates the prayers, ministries, rituals, and daily practices of many sisters in the Congregation of St. Joseph. They reflect on the creativity evident in nature and the impact of human actions on all life forms. To do this some of the sisters use the Universe Story to narrate the creative process of evolution and humanity's relation to and responsibility for the Earth. As a result, connection to the Earth threads its way into the images, music, cards, statues, and, of course, the annual calendar produced by MOTA. While ecological justice impacts many of the images and commentary included in the annual calendar, it is sometime taken as the guiding theme for particular years.

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<sup>60</sup> Southard, *The Treasure's Within*, May 2005.



**Figure 38: Mary Southard, CSJ, *Once Upon A Universe* (Used with permission)**

Centered on the Universe Story, *Once Upon A Universe calendar 2009* disrupts humans' perception that they are separate from the rest of the universe. As a collaborative project, *Once Upon A Universe* draws on theological reflections, music and art to urge the viewer to acknowledge and honor the connection to the universe.<sup>61</sup> Southard's introduction to the calendar asserts a fundamental unity with creation and critiques societal trends which isolate humans:

Over time, our cultural and religious stories have created the illusion that we humans are separate and superior beings. In recent centuries we have manufactured a noisy and fast paced world devoid of this intimate sense of belonging. The farther we have wandered from our Earth home, the more we have lost our connection with our own souls and the Soul of the World. Our "inventions" have become ever more dangerous to ourselves and to the life of our Planet. This we have come to know.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Southard notes in her introduction that Kathy Sherman, CSJ wrote music to correspond to the calendar and Barb Foreman, CSJ Associate and John Surette, SJ wrote some of the commentary for the calendar (Mary Southard, CSJ, Introduction, *Once Upon A Universe calendar 2009* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Ministries of the Art, 2008)).

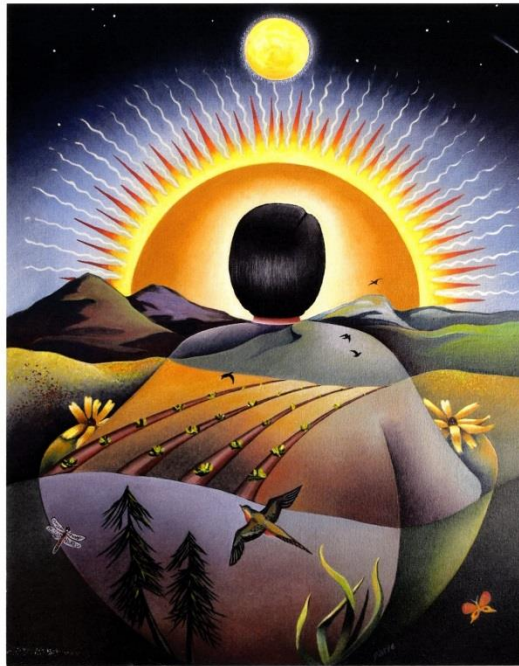
<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

This societal critique guides the narrative of the Universe Story, the images, and the reflections throughout the calendar. Scientific knowledge blends with theological assertions to create a unified vision of the universe. For example the image for March is *Once Upon A Universe* by Southard.<sup>63</sup> This image contrasts light and dark and a solitary figure dancing, embracing the universe. The commentary connects this image with the energy of gravity, of attraction, which ultimately leads to the formation of stars and galaxies: “This same energy of attraction exists on every level of being – alluring atoms, cells, ecosystems, and communities of people. It is the energy we call love; it is what shapes our lives, draws us toward what and whom we love, and allures us toward that for which we give our lives.”<sup>64</sup> The image and commentary encourage the viewer to contemplate her own attraction. To what is one committed? The calendar unambiguously promotes a commitment to the Earth and urges the viewer to alter practices and beliefs in order to protect and nourish the world.

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<sup>63</sup> Mary Southard, CSJ, *Once Upon A Universe* in *Once Upon A Universe calendar 2009*, March 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Universe Story, in *Once Upon A Universe calendar 2009*, March 2009.



**Figure 39: Nancy Earle, SMIC, *Communion* (Used with permission)**

The use of the Universe Story clearly affirms the mission of the Congregation of St. Joseph: unity with God and others. The calendar team and MOTA reframe humanity's relation with the universe from one of separation to one of interdependence. This is vividly manifested in Nancy Earle, SMIC's image for December, *Communion*. In this image, an individual sits or meditates out in the natural world. Through the person's body, the viewer can see a cultivated field, a bird in flight, and other aspects of the natural world. Centered in the image is the individual's head within the sun which sets just below the moon. The alignment of the person, sun and moon invites the viewer into the image and thus into the meditation and desire for communion. Paralleling the commentary for other months, the calendar calls the viewer to a deeper awareness of the creativity of the universe, of God, of humans as well as to one's place in the universe: "Individual needs encounter the needs of our planet. The one paralyzed by fear comes to



delight in the mystery of existence. The competitive consumer is converted to enchantment with the natural world. Our human imaginations are set free to co-create with Earth a vibrant community of life.”<sup>65</sup> The image of *Communion* challenges the viewer to re-assess one’s use of or relation to the universe.

Through the images, Universe Story, and other commentary, the calendar reforms the consumer, the calendar’s dialogue partner, as an engaged member of their community. As a result, the calendar places the responsibility for the future in the hands of the consumer: “The story, however, is not finished. It continues on into our twenty-first century, and we are the writers of the new Sacred Text. It is being written in the lives of each of us.”<sup>66</sup> This “we” – constructed through the dialogue with the religious commodities – potentially transforms the world with the Congregation’s mission of unity. Because of this creative potential, humans possess the responsibility for their action and inaction in relation to the rest of the universe. As a result, MOTA calls humanity to steward creation and to responsibly limit the strain on the Earth.

### ***World Transformation: Global Vision or Local Blindness?***

What then are the implications of the distribution of mass-produced religious images? Can the sisters ensure that others will recognize the message of unity inherent in these images and commodities? Or, do they merely offer their religious images as another commodity for individuals to display or disregard depending on their present mood or desires? In *Consuming Religion*, Vincent J. Miller questions the relation of religious belief and consumer culture in the United States. He argues that consumer culture is “a

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<sup>65</sup> Universe Story, in *Once Upon A Universe calendar 2009*, December 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

set of *habits of interpretation and use*” that trains individuals in how to approach, use, and reject commodities as well as traditions, beliefs, and practices.<sup>67</sup> Because it is a “set of habits,” consumer culture impacts how people relate to religious traditions. It often prevents them from fully engaging the tradition due to an abstraction of beliefs and practices from their religious context.<sup>68</sup> We can question then whether religious communities which create mass-produced images succeed in engaging people in their religious tradition or whether these images are either passively consumed or consumed in such a way as to reject or minimize the importance of the religious tradition.<sup>69</sup> Do the commodities mass-produced by the Congregation, actually influence the practices of those who purchase or receive them?



**Figure 40: Mary Southard, CSJ, *The Children Are Asking* (Used with permission)**

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<sup>67</sup> Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. For an assessment of consumer culture and its impact on religious traditions, see *Ibid.*, 73-106.

<sup>69</sup> As Miller concludes, “When we relate to cultural and religious traditions as commodities, they lose their power to inform the concrete practice of life” (*Ibid.*, 13). He argues that there is a fragmentation due to commodification that requires that individuals create their own “synthesis” of beliefs and practices (*Ibid.*, 94). This fragmentation disrupts the ability of religious communities to train individuals in how to see and live in the world. Miller suggests several tactics that religious communities can employ to counter the consumer culture including analyzing how they are appropriating other traditions and engaging in actions instead of passively consuming (*Ibid.*, 193-194). Religious communities should seek to embed beliefs within traditions and communities while at the same time strengthening popular agency.

Consider one of the MOTA's prayer cards which pleads for unity, especially around ecological justice. *The Children Are Asking* by Mary Southard, CSJ prods the viewer to consider the plight of Earth.<sup>70</sup> The image demonstrates that the future of Earth affects all people through the inclusion of diverse children surrounding the Earth, which has a jagged crack in it. The title of this prayer card encourages the viewer to reflect on the state of the environment, his or her responsibility to the Earth. The cracked globe seeks to elicit compassion and action from the viewer. Or does it? Taking Miller's critique of consumer culture seriously, we can question whether an image like *The Children Are Asking* succeeds in influencing the habits or practices of the viewer. If an individual is not also educated into the sisters' understanding of the universe as being an aspect of God's creation and humans being intimately connected to and responsible for the Earth, then the viewer is unlikely to recognize or act on the theological underpinnings of this image. Perhaps one might become more aware of the environment and the fact that it affects diverse people, but this awareness is likely to be one of the many messages with which an individual interacts in consumer culture. Consequently, the image can be used or interpreted in ways not sanctioned by the sisters.<sup>71</sup>

While maintaining their Catholic focus, the sisters also clearly seek to address contemporary American culture. They attend to issues within culture and attempt to

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<sup>70</sup> Mary Southard, CSJ, *The Children Are Asking* prayer card (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, 2002).

<sup>71</sup> Other scholars have likewise noted the problematic nature of images and their interpretation in modernity. In *Material Religion and Popular Culture*, E. Frances King examined the use of images in Northern Ireland. She observes that because religious images/artifacts are "free-floating" they can be used to support different identities/identifications: "The problem for modern society is that this makes them even more contested and hence even more likely to be called upon to support ethnic, political and social agendas of different kinds" (E. Frances King, *Material Religion and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 151).

address the needs of society and the environment.<sup>72</sup> The calendar for 2012 *Transforming Love: Seeing with the Eye of the Heart* includes a number of images, which challenge the viewer to see the world differently. For June 2012, Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ's *Green Spaces in the City* depicts a central garden area surrounded by homes. In the homes, people gaze out at the garden. This oasis of green appears to further connect the homes with wider "green spaces" outside of the city. The calendar pairs this image with a quote from Annie Dillard: "The dedicated life is the life worth living. You must give with your whole heart."<sup>73</sup> Arguably, the image seeks to present the benefit of being exposed to the natural world. But what are the implications of this image? Should the viewer take action to create green spaces? Is recognizing the importance of these spaces enough? Is the desire for green spaces identified with the hope that others will have access to these spaces? While the calendar creates a dialogical relationship, it does not fully educate the viewer in how to live out the sisters' mission.

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<sup>72</sup> Roman Catholics have attempted to respond to American culture in a variety of ways. R. Scott Appleby argues that Catholics have given in to secularism and have forgotten or rejected their traditional beliefs and practices. Appleby also points to a "fractious pluralism" in American culture that undermines a diverse and yet unified moral and religious community (R. Scott Appleby, "Decline or Relocation? The Catholic Presence in Church and Society, 1950-2000," in *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholicism Since 1950 in the United States, Ireland, and Quebec*, ed. Leslie Woodcock Tentler (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 230). Appleby's critique of rampant secularism contrasts with the activities of religious communities such as the Congregation of St. Joseph that attempt to dialogue with other denominations and religions while still asserting their Roman Catholic tradition.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in 2012 *Transforming Love: Seeing with the Eye of the Heart*, June 2012.



**Figure 41: Nancy Earle, SMIC, *Perhaps the Future* (Used with permission)**

More problematic than this incomplete training in the sisters' mission is the MOTA's use of and references to other religious traditions. While these references arguably seek to demonstrate the unity of all people, the MOTA does not adequately contextualize or educate the viewer in the significance of these references. For example, the calendar for 2007 includes the image *Perhaps the Future* from Nancy Earle, SMIC. By depicting individuals from different races and religions, this image challenges the viewer to contemplate one's view of human relationships.<sup>74</sup> Both through the lines of the painting itself and the iconography employed, Earle visually demonstrates the relations inherent among people. Commenting on the image, Earle contends, "Perhaps the Future' recognizes that it is possible to live in harmonious relationship with people from every nation and with our environment, but first we must understand that all is interconnected

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<sup>74</sup> Nancy Earle, SMIC, *Perhaps the Future*, in *Our Sacred Community 2007 calendar* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Congregation of St. Joseph, 2006), November 2007.

and in relationship to everything else.”<sup>75</sup> Earle’s comments correspond to the mission of the Congregation and challenge the viewer to consider her own relationship to other peoples and the environment; however, the MOTA also pairs this image with a quote from the Upanishads: “The little space within the heart is as great as the vast universe.”<sup>76</sup> While the calendar does direct the viewer to a website about the Upanishads, it does not attempt to contextualize this saying within Hinduism. Quite probably many viewers did not take the time to discover this information on their own.

Consequently, it is questionable what unity means in some of the images and products promoted by the Congregation. While their mission asserts unity with God and the Congregation remains committed to their role in the Roman Catholic Church, some of their products expand beyond Catholicism or even Christianity. Thus items like the calendar evidence a pluralism that definitely affirms the unity of all humanity; however, it does not fully reflect on how this unity should be lived out or how the presentation of others by a Catholic religious community could affect those in other areas of the world. The optimistic version of unity in both the images and reflections of the sisters does not fully address the complexities of the global culture.

As these mass-produced commodities circulate outside of the Congregation, they are interpreted by the individuals who receive and use them. Individuals negotiate the meaning of images and commodities, which does not statically remain as the artist or

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted in *Our Sacred Community 2007 calendar* (LaGrange Park, Illinois: Congregation of St. Joseph, 2006), November 2007. Earle continues to comment on how this relationship should be realized: “We are interdependent beings. . . We must change our orientation and realize that we are a species among species. Only then can we have a flourishing of life communities once again” (Quoted in *Our Sacred Community 2007 calendar*, November 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in *Our Sacred Community 2007 calendar*, November 2007.

producer intended.<sup>77</sup> Consequently as the sisters draw on a commodity in their ministries and as it travels outside of the Congregation, its meaning shifts. They cannot guarantee that others will see these images and recognize or agree with their message. If encountered with a knowledge of the Congregation's mission for unity and their understanding of social and ecological justice, these religious commodities could assist an individual in understanding and perhaps committing to the sister's mission; however, taken individually they do not demonstrate a consistent or well-articulated message that could elicit action for social and ecological justice.

Nevertheless, the religious commodities produced and distributed by the Congregation of St. Joseph do offer the Congregation's mission to those outside of the community. The MOTA enables the production of these religious commodities and their consumption both inside and outside of the Congregation. People may choose not to recognize or embrace their mission of unity, but they still encounter a different way of perceiving one's relation to the entirety of creation and to God. Whether these images affirm people's previous views, subtly shift their understanding of a particular issue, or challenge the basis of their beliefs, they offer the possibility of committing oneself to or participating in the mission of the Congregation of St. Joseph.

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<sup>77</sup> In *Inside Culture*, David Halle examines the types of art people include in their homes and the meaning that these cultural products hold for individuals. He argues that some images are incorporated into homes because people "adapted them into their own systems of meaning" (David Halle, *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 194). Halle also questions what the role of culture/art is in maintaining systems of economic or political power. He argues that art does maintain systems of power but is also active at the individual level: "artistic meanings and choices are located in the particular lives and experiences of people, at every level in the class structure" (196).

## Conclusion: Imaging Church

Throughout the history of the church, individuals and groups have deployed various means through which to demonstrate their understanding of the church and its role in the world. As the Second Vatican Council contends, “Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church.”<sup>1</sup> The Council recognizes the need to proclaim this message and attends to the various roles people have within the church. For the Council, these roles affect how a person will assist in bringing Christ to the world. Bishops, priests, laity, and Religious take on different responsibilities because of their unique role within the church and relation to ecclesial and secular society; yet, each of these roles is still called to reveal Christ to the world. How then can Christians achieve this? How can they reveal Christ as “a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church?”<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen, a religious community reveals its ecclesiology not only in published statements but also in its daily practices, including visual practices. For the Congregation of St. Joseph, published statements such as their mission statement and Generous Promises succeed in articulating their vision of the church and their responsibility for the created world. Nevertheless, these statements remain mere words if they are not embodied by the religious community. Consequently, the daily lives of the sisters – their prayer lives, communal worship, ministry, personal relationships, and

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, §1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



interactions with strangers – must reveal their emphasis on unity and commitment to social and ecological justice. In these daily activities, the sisters deploy diverse practices, including visual practices, which reveal, affirm and disperse their ecclesiology. Attending to the creation and use of images within the Congregation reveals the extent to which visual practices can impact a community's ecclesiology and the ways in which they succeed in promoting their mission as well as social and ecological justice.

Nonetheless, these visual practices are not isolated activities; rather, they are shaped and nurtured by the communities to which one belongs. While individuals do not simply subsume the visual practices of a religious community, they engage in a communal vision which impacts how they see and live in the world. Belonging to a religious community potentially shapes the way a person sees the world and, consequently, how she responds to that world. Individuals are educated into this vision in many ways. Parents and educators train children in how to assess and value people and the world. Likewise, groups educate new members into their common understanding of the world. In religious communities, neophytes receive instruction on beliefs and actions, which further underscore their shared vision.

For the Congregation of St. Joseph, this communal education encourages the sisters to embrace a shared emphasis on unity and justice. The sisters' visual practices then intersect with this common vision of the church to promote commitment to and action for these values. As we have seen the sisters deploy visual practices in their prayer lives to manifest and affirm their relationships, values, and understanding of God. In communal worship, these visual practices intersect with the spaces of chapels in ways

that can underscore communal memory and values as well as shape relationships within the community. Ministries and publications deploy visual practices to disperse these values outside of the Congregation. More consciously, the commodification of images in the form of the calendar attempts to train others into the sisters' vision. Thus, a wide range of visual practices can be deployed by a religious community to shape and disseminate their ecclesiology.

Consequently, attention to visual practices potentially enables religious communities and the church as a whole to assess the impact of images and objects on their ecclesiology. Individuals can discern whether images in their visual field are positive influences on their prayer lives. Parishes and religious communities can better assess whether worship spaces reflect their ecclesiology. For those involved in social justice work, spaces and publications can be deployed to manifest their values and commitments.

This assessment will potentially reveal areas of non-coherence between a community's visual practices and ecclesiology. While they might articulate a vision of church in their worship services or published statements, their ministerial or worship spaces might display conflicting messages. As individuals and groups employ spaces, they can experience disconnections between their practices and the messages received from these spaces. Does a worship space truly reflect God's relation to the gathered community? How do ministerial spaces depict Christians' responsibility to the created world? If a group asserts an emphasis on the diversity of all people but displays only

Eurocentric images, then their articulated ecclesiology fails to cohere with the visual messages received in their spaces.

Because images might not fully cohere with the community's ecclesiology, they raise opportunities for further reflection on an ecclesiology and its embodiment as well as challenges for how best to manifest this understanding of the church in lived practices. Communities might retain a particular image because of its connection to their communal history even if its visual message contradicts the mission articulated by the community. If unarticulated to visitors, the image fails to manifest the intentions of the community. Consequently, attention to visual practices promotes a consistently articulated ecclesiology supported by multiple aspects of a community.

These practices further offer ways to discern how best to embody communal commitments. For the Congregation of St. Joseph, a commitment to unity continues to be central; yet, unity remains a nebulous category which calls for explanation in relation to the sisters' practices. Likewise, religious communities which articulate the value of other religions demonstrate this value in different forms. While a group might be tempted to deploy images from other religions, they should reflect on the messages depicted in this practice. Decorating Christian spaces predominantly with images from other religions fails to recognize the distinct message of another religion, subsumes a diverse array of images under Christianity, and muddles the community's ecclesiology. Attention to this non-coherence consequently reveals opportunities for how a religious community can better reveal their understanding of the church in relation to other religions.

Consequently, attending more to visual practices potentially enables Christians to better demonstrate and embody their ecclesiology. While the study of the Congregation of St. Joseph reveals the intersection of visual practices and ecclesiology in their religious community, the conclusions drawn from this research can be applied to the creation and use of images and spaces as well as the role of the artist within other religious communities, parishes, and the worldwide church. Discerning the potential impact of visual practices provides individuals and communities with concrete ways through which to manifest Christ in the world.

## **Appendix A: Ethnographic Methodology**

### ***The Congregation of St. Joseph***

To investigate the impact of visual practices on a religious community's ecclesiology, I chose to focus my ethnographic research on the Congregation of St. Joseph. The analysis of the Congregation of St. Joseph is beneficial because of the recent formation of the Congregation and because of the production and use of commodities and images in the Congregation. First, the Congregation was recently formed (2007) when seven communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph joined together. The formation of the Congregation of St. Joseph has enabled the sisters to reflect on their ministries and mission individually, as members of the original communities, and in groups within the newly formed Congregation. The recent formation of the Congregation offers a heightened awareness to the mission of the Congregation and their relation to the church and world.

Second, due in part to the formation of the Congregation, the sisters exhibit different approaches to images including the use of devotional images and employing images in individual and communal spirituality. This is evident in many of the retreat programs led by or supported by the Congregation. This diversity enables an in-depth analysis of the multiple ways in which visual practices can be used to promote an ecclesiology and the ways these practices have historically been used in their communities.

Third, as part of the reconfiguration, the sisters affirmed the arts as one of their ministries. Thus, they support the Ministry of the Arts, which both produces and sells

various religious images including an annual calendar and works of art such as paintings and sculpture. This commercial undertaking requires a reflection on which images the Congregation will distribute to ensure that they correspond to their mission. Thus, an analysis of these images can help to reveal the Congregation's vision of the church and world.

Fourth, the Congregation has a number of artists who are involved in different ministries including education, retreat work, and the Ministry of the Arts as well as a few who are independent artists not presently involved in other ministries. The diversity in the experiences of these artists as well as in the images they produce offers a range of views on the authority of the artist and images in religious communities. The images created by the sisters provide one way of assessing the Congregation's mission and ecclesiology. Interviews with these artists encourage further reflection on the image's relation to this vision of the church.

Fifth, the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph enables an assessment of the changing role of practices within a religious community. The Sisters of St. Joseph were formed in Le Puy, France, in the seventeenth-century. Among their early ministries were lace- and ribbon-making. An analysis of the sisters' involvement in the production of these commodities offers a fruitful comparison to the production of other commodities in the United States and the decision to produce and distribute religious images. Due to their unique history and use of commodities and images, an analysis of the Congregation of St. Joseph offers insight into the way a religious community employs visual practices to promote a specific understanding of the church.

## ***Methodology***

For this ethnographic research, I employed interviews and participant observation. The International Review Board approved of the purpose and design of this research. In the course of two years (May 2011 to May 2013) I interviewed 124 individuals, 107 of whom were sisters in the Congregation of St. Joseph and 17 of whom were Congregation of St. Joseph Associates (non-vowed members) and/or employees of the Congregation. Interviews attended to the sisters' personal prayer lives, ministerial activities, congregational life and worship, congregational space, and the commodification of images. See "Interview Format" below for a list of questions that guided the interviews. These questions served to provide a common basis of information; however, I adjusted the structure of the interview to accommodate the experiences of each individual sister. Consequently, interviews devoted a greater or lesser amount of time and conversation to various aspects of the sister's life and ministry (prayer life, communal worship, artistic practices, and commodification). On average interviews lasted forty-five to sixty minutes.

I conducted this ethnographic research at the Congregation's Ministry Centers and particular ministry buildings in eight different states: LaGrange Park, Illinois; Tipton, Indiana; Wichita, Kansas; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Nazareth, Michigan; Cincinnati, Ohio; Cleveland, Ohio; Twin Cities, Minnesota; and Wheeling, West Virginia. I spent approximately a week at each location and lived among the sisters at the Ministry Center or their retreat center (except when working in Illinois, Minnesota, and Michigan). Having this time with the Congregation enabled me to interact with more members of the Congregation and observe their use of visual practices in their daily life and worship.

Consequently, I employed participant observation to better understand the sisters' practices in communal worship and in their ministries. I attended daily mass, engaged the sisters in informal conversation, and visited different ministry sites. When invited, I observed the sisters' ministries and received tours of buildings, grounds, and important local sites.

### *Names and Pseudonyms*

The sisters in the Congregation of St. Joseph graciously spent time with me and answered my questions. In doing so, they potentially opened themselves and their community up to critique. To protect the identity of the sisters, I have employed pseudonyms and cited only the date of an interview as a reference (i.e. Sister Emma [pseudonym], 16 March 2011). To minimize the identification of sisters within the Congregation, I choose not to include references to their location, especially where they lived or ministered. In cases where sisters spoke about a particular ministry or referenced the name of the ministry, I have included that identifying information if it was vital to their commentary. In other cases, I have minimized references to the particular ministries in which the sisters work.

While I have employed pseudonyms for the majority of interview data, I do identify a small number of sisters by their names. To recognize the rights of artists, I provide the names of artists whose artwork is included in this research; however, comments by these artists not relating to their artwork appear under a pseudonym. Likewise, I have retained the names of sisters who are the authors of articles cited in this research.



### ***Interview Format***

Interviews attempted to draw out the participants' relation to and use of images and objects. Thus, the interviews drew on these questions but also sought to encourage participants to expand on their responses.

- When did you join the Sisters of St. Joseph? What drew you to this congregation?
- What is the mission of the congregation?
- How were you trained for ministry?
- In what ministries have you been involved? Please describe some of your experiences.
- How do you see your ministry in relation to the mission of the congregation?
- Did you ever draw on images or objects in your ministry?
- Are you involved in the Ministry of the Arts? If so, in what way?
- How do you perceive the Ministry of the Arts? How is it related to the mission of the Congregation of St. Joseph?
- Do you use the calendar that is produced by the Ministry of the Arts? If so, how and how often? Have you shared this calendar with others within or beyond the congregation?
- Do you use art or other material objects in your prayer life? In what ways? Do you draw on the art produced by members of the Congregation?
- Have you given the art produced by the community as gifts to other sisters or to individuals outside of the community?

- How do you perceive the Congregation's relation to the Roman Catholic Church?  
How does the production of the calendar and other art reflect the Congregation's vision for the church?
- How do you perceive the Congregation's relation to American society? How does the production of the calendar and other art reflect the Congregation's vision for the United States and the global world?

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Jennifer Kryszak was born on 1 February 1978 in Oak Lawn, Illinois. In May 2000, she earned her Bachelor's in Religion and English from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. In May 2002, Kryszak earned a Master's in Theology from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California where she affiliated with the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. Her publications include "Deconstructing the Subject: A Beneficial Dilemma" and "Crafting a Mission: The Impact of Images Created in Religious Communities." In 2012-2013, Kryszak was a Preparing Future Faculty Fellow at Duke University. She received the Futures of American Studies Institute Grant (June 2012), the Ernestine Friedl Research Award (2012), and the Gurney Harriss Kearns Summer Research Fellowship (2011).