

REFLECT



Ursuline Sisters
Generalate
Rue Musin 1
1210 Brussels

December 2015

Dear Sisters and Associates,

Advent Season



The Incarnation of God's Son is an event for all time. The meaning of Advent is that it is the most decisive moment for us at all times. This coming of Christ in the life of every one of us is important while we await His glorious and final coming. In fact the whole of our Christian faith is "advent-al." Even the Holy Gospel is in this respect "unfinished," waiting for the fulfillment. The last book, the book of the Revelation ends with a passionate cry, "Marana tha" - Come Lord Jesus, come!

The season of Advent gives meaning to the coming of Christmas. For Christ comes to us full of

respect for our freedom: *"Here I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come to him and dwell in him."* Therefore Advent is a call from God to wake up from our sleep and commit to a new beginning to renew ourselves in the faith, with total acceptance of God's law of love to live our life.

Pope Francis writes that, "God does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible." "Love," continues Pope Francis, "can never be just an abstraction, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviors that are shown in daily living. The call is to accept the challenges that



life brings, the sacrifices as well as gifts in the light of Gospel."

In a special way, on December 8th this year, the Church will open the Jubilee Year of Mercy with the theme: "Merciful like the Father." In order to be capable of

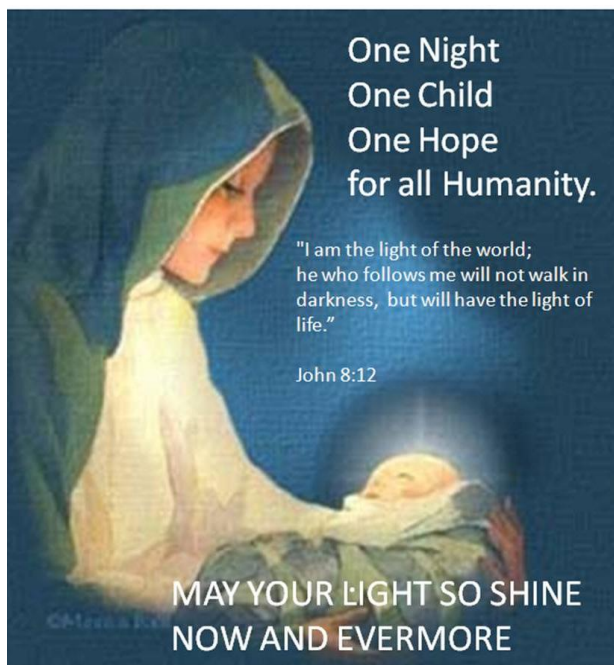


mercy, therefore, we are invited to dispose our hearts to listen to the word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us. In this way, it will be possible to contemplate God's mercy and adopt it in our lifestyle, urges the church.

Our Merciful Savior, Jesus Christ, is coming to us to establish His Kingdom filled with Mercy, Compassion, Joy, Justice, Peace and Love, the Kingdom of Paradise. We wish you a fruitful time of Advent.

Sr. Bernadette Mwavita osu

Christmas Message



*"In the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them... and they were filled with fear. The angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of **great joy that will be for all the people.** For unto you is born this day in the city of*

David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Lk. 2:8-10).

Early one morning while taking a taxi to the airport in Brussels, we said a short prayer in a soft voice for our safe journey. We did not realize that the taxi driver was listening to our prayer. As soon as we ended the prayer, he said, "Were you praying for the safe journey?" "Yes," we said, "and we prayed for everyone who is traveling and for you as well." He was impressed and told us that he also prays before starting any work. He further asked, "Are you Christians?" "Yes" we replied. Then he said, "There is only One God; God is not only for Christians but for all." He was a Muslim by religion.

At this Christmas, the good news for us is that Jesus is born for all people. He is the joy for all people. Jesus is born again in the power of hope, love, peace and joy in the lost, lonely, ill, neglected and forgotten.

How can we enable God's love and presence to be visible in the person we meet; in our world of war and division?

Pope Francis says to the religious men and women in the Year of Consecrated Life, "You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, and love by giving love".

May this Christmas bring you, peace, love and joy.

Sr. Bimla Minj osu





U.S. Province

Applying our Direction Statement, *Live Contemplative Spirituality for Mission Today* to daily life"

Since the publication of the 2014 General Chapter Direction Statement, the US Province has incorporated its content into every regional meeting, province day and province weekend. This has been done principally through the opening prayer for each of the days. We have also done personal reflection and small group sharing on the sections "Living Contemplative Spirituality" and "Being Committed to Mission". We have shared in small groups our personal foundational experiences of God as well as that of our founders. At the end of the June weekend of 2015 each Sister was given a prayer card with the conclusion of the Direction Statement, the logo and a quote from the 10th Legacy of St. Angela.

Since our focus this year has been to accomplish the goal of financial sustainability, the virtues of hope and trust have been emphasized repeatedly in all of our meetings. As we prepare for our Province Chapter in June 2016, we will remain with the same theme as the General Chapter, "Live Contemplative Spirituality for Mission Today" keeping in mind the words of Pope Francis to the Bishops, "You don't get very

far building walls. It never happens that way. People first have to be able to listen to each other."

Sr. Catherine Talia osu

Support for Father Lambertz in his Later Years

While in active ministry, Father John Lambertz spent long hours in the confessional and in this way he guided his parishioners in a very personal way. We can assume that for years he spent the eve of Christmas this way.

It was on December 22, 1867 that the "saintly cure" as he was called, celebrated his last Eucharist with the

Sisters in Tildonk. The Sisters had to bring him in on a wheelchair. His face was friendly and lit up with joy. By this time in his life, he was worn out by years of a frugal life style and hours of walking as he carried out his visits to the Sisters and other pastoral duties. His great optimism never left him. He had built St. John the Baptist Parish into a model church where people lived their Christian life, and he had founded a school for poor children, now staffed by our early Ursuline sisters who called him "Our Father."

He was instrumental through interventions and prayer, in founding the Minor Seminary in Hoogstraten.

We are called to be signs of hope in our simple lifestyle. We trust in God to face the challenges ahead with perseverance and live in constant gratitude with radiant joy.

Conclusion of 2014 General Chapter Direction



"Love and harmony are a sure sign that one is on the right road and pleasing to God."

10th Legacy of St. Angela Merici



At the end of his life, the convent was served by the vicar l'abbé De Schutter. This young priest used his exceptional priestly qualities to further the growth of the "Institute" as it was called then. L'abbé Van Nerum was named pastor of the parish. Until his death on May 12, 1869, he never ceased saying "Love one another in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary."

We learn from this account of his last Mass that Father Lambertz needed assistance in his old age. The sisters treated him with deep respect and loving kindness and enabled him to live in a supportive environment. We might call the sisters and friends who he stayed in contact with, his social support system. This gave him a good quality of life right up to the end of his life.

For your Reflection:

What supports and sustains you in difficult times?

If you could stay the same age all your life, what age would you choose? Why?

What is the best thing about being the age you are now?

What do you hope will happen to you as you grow older?

When you can see your connection with others

before emphasizing your differences, you will be much happier,

and it will be a much happier world, too.

From- Father Richard Rohr



Happiness Habits in our Later Years

Practice gratitude

Otherwise known as "thank-you therapy," this is about tuning into the positives in your life and expressing gratitude for what you have gained rather than focusing on what has been lost in your advanced years. Happiness comes more from wanting what you already have rather than having what you want.

Savour the positives

Slow down to smell the roses and truly appreciate life's positives. Time seems to fly by as you get older, so make a virtue of being in the here and now to maximize enjoyment of those special moments. Positive reminiscence is a way of savouring the past - retelling the story of life's peak moments and basking in all its glories. Gratitude and savouring go hand in hand, and are both ways of cultivating positive emotions.

Adopt an optimistic mindset

Optimists are better placed to challenge the overwhelmingly negative stereotypes of later life. They enjoy greater physical and psychological well-being and are more likely to cope positively when things go wrong. Optimists view their issues as transient, contained and something they have a measure of control over. If you catch yourself viewing something negatively, try to look at it from a different perspective - imagine what you might say to a friend who was experiencing the same problem.



Live life with meaning

Later life is the time to give up sweating the small stuff and concentrate on what's truly important for you, whether that be certain people in your life or causes you're passionate about. Anne Karpf, author of *How to Age*, describes an important role for seniors as the custodians of the future. There is a deeper kind of happiness which comes from serving a purpose that goes beyond the self. Having meaning and purpose in life is a route to this well-being.

Develop your strengths

Many people do not get a chance to play to their strengths during their working lives, but being liberated from the nine-to-five offers you an opportunity to let your natural talents shine. Playing to your strengths is energizing, drives high performance and generates well-being.

Focus outwards

Isolation and loneliness are an increasing risk as we age. Good relationships and active social lives are key to well-being - they are what the happiest people on the planet have in common. Reach out, create your community, invest in relationships, prioritize your loved ones and maintain your social networks.

Learn to let go

It's best to travel light into later life. Let go of what no longer serves you, forgive those who have hurt you in the past and move on from difficult situations. Decluttering your mind from the people and situations that no longer bring pleasure or

well-being will clear the space for the new to come in.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>

United Nations International Day of Happiness

Day of Happiness is celebrated on March 20, 2016. The International Day of Happiness is celebrated throughout the world on 20 March. It was established by the United Nations General Assembly on 28 June 2012. The International Day of Happiness recognizes the relevance of happiness and well-being as universal goals and aspirations in the lives of human beings. Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being characterized by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy.

Christmas Traditions in our Diverse Cultures

"We will deepen our understanding of our charism and our diverse cultures."

It is interesting to learn how the feast of Christmas is celebrated in each of the countries where we as Ursulines live and minister. A little summary of each country shows the diverse ways our Sisters will be experiencing the joy of Christmas in their respective lands.



Belgium

Christmas is a time for festivity and closeness of family. The children in Belgium are always excited by the approaching Christmas season, and they celebrate the primary gift giving early, December 6th. Saint Nicholas, riding



a horse, and carrying great bags of gifts, somehow makes the entire journey in one evening, and after gift giving and celebration, the theme of Christmas switches to the birth of the Christ Child.

Guyana

Christmas is the ultimate celebration of all the holidays in Guyana. The birth of the Baby Jesus as Savior of all mankind tradition goes back to the early Dutch in Guyana. Christmas in Guyana is about Christianity and family. The entire country prepares weeks in advance for Christmas. It is a time when nostalgic adults remember what it was to have the innocence of childhood. Christmas celebrations begin months before December 25th. The soaking of fruits in wine and rum is the earliest preparation.

India

Only a small percentage of the Indian households celebrate the Christmas faith, and yet decorating for the season seems to permeate even non Christian households in every village. Houses are typically decorated in greenery, mango leaves, strings of light and the Star of Bethlehem is hung inside the home. Many homes and churches display a large Nativity scene. Small personalized gifts are the norm and are exchanged even in non Christian homes. Catholic Churches celebrate the birth of Christ with great solemnity. During the day, people visit relatives and enjoy a shared meal together.



The United States and Canada celebrate in similar fashion

Christmas trees are decorated and stockings are hung on the fireplace for Santa Claus to fill with gifts. Christmas is celebrated on December 25th, with certain of the French Canadian communities preferring December 24th. Many families celebrate on Christmas Eve with presents, family feasts, and midnight Mass. Cards and gifts are exchanged with friends and relatives. Nativity scenes are often placed on church grounds. In addition to the typically Catholic, and Protestant themed celebrations, there are also massive public celebrations of the Christmas season with non-religious themes. Additionally, in both the US and Canada, the people are known for massive outreaches to the poor and homeless during this Christmas celebration period.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Heri ya Krismas is Kiswahili for Happy Christmas. In Congo, Christmas is a religious holiday; so much of the commercialism is lost. In all African societies, spirituality is of great significance. This shows in the way African people live and celebrate life in general and holds true with how they celebrate Christmas. You may see some decorations in palm trees or mango trees and especially on banana plants. Some people light candles, but there isn't a tradition of decorating on a large scale. Gift-giving may consist of a new set of colorful clothes for church, soap, sweets, pencils and books. On

Christmas Eve, churches will often hold nativity plays and lengthy musical concerts. On Christmas Day, most families try to have a better meal than usual with chicken or pork. Families spend time with neighbors and often eat a shared meal with food brought by each family. Despite all of the celebrating on Christmas Eve, the main focus is on a church service on Christmas morning.

Preparing for Epiphany



Epiphany by [Janet McKenzie](#) - [Bridge Building Icons](#)

We don't know much about the Magi in Matthew's gospel but we know that following them to the Christ Child is a long line of wise women and men who seek the One who saves us. start here: The interpretation of Epiphany (above) portrays women from around the world gathered with their sister, Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Janet McKenzie's painting has been praised for its "powerful, protective and tender manifestation of a mother and child, embraced and nurtured by a loving community... a global

inclusiveness proclaiming again and anew: Christ for all people. God's favor extends to all!"

The Queens Came Late;

The Queens came late, but the Queens were there

With gifts in their hands and crowns in their hair.

They'd come, these three, like the Kings, from far,

Following, yes, that guiding star.

They'd left their ladles, linens, looms, Their children playing in nursery rooms,

And told their sitters:

"Take charge! For this

Is a marvelous sight we must not miss!"

The Queens came late, but not too late

To see the animals small and great,

Feathered and furred, domestic and wild,

Gathered to gaze at a mother and child.

And rather than frankincense and myrrh

And gold for the babe, they brought for her

Who held him, a homespun gown of blue,

And chicken soup--with noodles, too-

And a lingering, lasting, cradle-song.

The Queens came late and stayed not long,

For their thoughts already were straining far-

Past manger and mother and guiding star

And a child aglow as a morning sun-

Toward home and children and chores undone.

-Norma Farber in [When It Snowed That Night](#)

Merry Christmas