

NACAR



North American Conference
of Associates and Religious

The Associate

October 2020 ♦ Volume 25 No. 4



Message from NACAR

MISSION

The North American Conference of Associates and Religious (NACAR) is a membership organization that acts as a catalyst to serve, empower and promote the associate-religious relationship.

VISION STATEMENT

A vibrant, viable organization that collaborates with regional partners to promote association in all its forms.



“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Ephesians 4:2-6

For this issue of *The Associate*, we are focusing on the theme of connecting and learning during the pandemic. These reflections and articles explore how we are connected as one body and one spirit. During these tumultuous times, it is comforting to see how we are finding new and adaptive ways to connect with sisters, associates, friends and family members.

In addition to connecting during the pandemic, many of us are using this time to learn and grow. As shown in reflections in this issue, we are also focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement and learning about the role of racism in our lives. We are hoping to unite in peace and we call on the Spirit to help us.

May we all bear with one another in love through this difficult time.

Associate Carla Rush,
Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati,
editor of The Associate



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Finding Hope: Laid Off During the Pandemic

by Associate Carrie McClish, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary

I had been working from home for a little over a month when the phone rang in my bedroom-turned-home office at 4:38 p.m. on April 21. I could tell from the number that the call was coming from the chancery office where I worked.

At first I was alarmed, concerned that something terrible had happened to one of the other employees. Thankfully that was not the case but the news from the chancery was almost as bad.

In my diocese the loss of parish collections and fundraisers meant that drastic cost cutting measures had to be taken to address the situation. Several hundred people around the diocese lost their jobs while at the chancery office nearly 30 chancery employees were laid off or furloughed, including me. My last day on the job, and a position that I had held for 35 years, was April 30.

Although the chancellor, who apologized for having to tell me by phone, emphasized that the staff reductions were because of the economy and not due to job performance, the message hit hard and hurt deeply.

Being at home and sheltered in place with only my feline roommate and with my closest family members living thousands of miles away, I frankly didn't know who to turn to or what to do next. Eventually I made a couple of phone calls and left messages and then I turned to social media to ask for prayers. Over the course of several hours the replies I received on my Facebook timeline brought much comfort and reassurance.

As I slowly began to emerge from the shock, I learned that the journey of healing was one that I would not have to walk alone. Along with

the virtual hugs and prayers from family and friends from farther than six feet, I received much emotional and spiritual support from the associates and sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Even though I had been a Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary Associate for less than three years, I received phone calls, text messages, emails and even handwritten notes of concern and encouragement from community members near and far.



Over the weeks that followed, a number of associates and sisters checked in with me regularly. Some community members passed on possible job leads, while a couple even let me know that if I came up short financially that they had my back. Others contacted me just to let me know that they cared, were thinking of me, and that they were praying for me. To say that these expressions of concern and support touched my heart is an understatement.

While the journey going forward has had its ups and downs, I've grown to appreciate the hope that each new day brings. Continuing the search for steady employment, I take the following words, attributed to Blessed Marie-Rose Durocher, foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Names, to heart: "Courage, you can well see that God is blessing you!"

2020: What a Year

This Has Been!

by Associate Carl Madigan, Congrégation de Notre-Dame

In so many ways we have been afforded a marvelous opportunity to reflect on the long journey of this year, a year that is drastically different from all the years we experienced to date. It is a journey that we have been walking together, closer though separated.

We came into 2020 with our hearts and minds focused on the climate emergency. Young people around the world were challenging us, individually and corporately, to right the devastation we are causing to their future and to Mother Earth.

The wildfires in the Amazon and Australia with the accompanying loss of millions of acres of forests and animals, alerted us to the fragility of our planet.

In the spring the coronavirus came and taught us about our own fragility as human beings, drawing us to a deeper understanding of how interconnected our lives are with each other. We have seen how our own personal choices directly affect the health and well being of others.

The Black Lives Matter movement confronted us with our own embedded privilege. We are learning to listen more closely to our Indigenous brothers and sisters, to hear their protests and those of other radicalized people who experience routine systemic racism and injustice. We are listening with new ears, with greater compassion, understanding and love. The lockdown has forced us to find new ways to be community with one another. Our faith is drawing us into new ways to draw closer to our God and to new ways to celebrate our being.



One must ask if the challenges we are facing today are the universe telling us that a new vision of the human is needed, one that includes all people and resonates with the dynamics of the Earth community and with the Universe.

Thomas Berry wrote that the great work of our time is to reinvent ourselves in a new way that enables us to live with mutually enhancing relationships — not just with humans but with our Earth — so that our activities actually enhance the world around us.

We are entering into a new and exciting era of our being where the future is bubbling up. We are being nurtured, moved, inspired and filled with wonder and awe by the reality of who we are and of why we are. Learning what it truly means to be human.

Reflection: To Be Alive in Such an Age

Associate Julia Townsend, Sisters of St. Martha,
Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada, director of associates

About two weeks ago I enjoyed an old episode of “Touched by an Angel,” a favorite series of mine. I have all nine seasons, and every now and then I watch an episode or two. There was a quote in that last episode that has resurfaced in my mind over the past two weeks: **“to be alive in such an age.”** I decided to look it up, and discovered it is from a famous poet, Walt Whitman. The whole quote reads like this: **“To be alive in such an age, when miracles are everywhere and every inch of common air throbs a tremendous prophecy, of greater marvels yet to be.”**



As I was pondering the quote, I wondered how it connected with the times we are currently living in. The world is battling an unseen enemy, a virus, which has unleashed a pandemic. We must stay at home; we cannot gather or hug or chat over a good cup of hot tea. We now wear masks out in public, if we go out in public at all, such as going to the grocery store. Going for a walk is like entering a hamster maze, criss-crossing the streets so as not to pass each other. We attend Mass online or watch on television. It has been a very challenging and painful time for all of us. Add to that the unthinkable events which occurred in our beautiful province of Nova Scotia during the month of April, it has been unbearable! **“To be alive in such an age ...”**

“When miracles are everywhere ...” And yet, the miracles are everywhere! The sun has continued to rise; the little crocuses are poking happily up from the ground to spread color

and encourage smiles. People are waving to each other across the streets as they walk, acknowledging that “common throb” of what we are all feeling. People are caring for people, making phone calls or using social media to check in on each other, ensuring everyone has what they need. We are seeing musical kitchen parties online to lift our spirits; spring flowers and rainbows made by children; candles and flags, proudly hung in windows, all hopeful signs of

brighter days ahead. Women and men on the front lines are caring for our health as political and spiritual leaders guide us and support us each day, providing human faces of calm and strength to help us move forward. And everywhere, prayer ... time for personal prayer

and reflection, and time for global prayer all around our world! Even Mother Earth has had a reprieve from the usual insults we unleash on her! **“To be alive in such an age, where miracles are everywhere ...”**

The very real problems of our world still exist and will be there to be worked on after this pandemic and time of grief has passed. I believe it would be **“tremendous prophecy”** to recall how we came together to work for the common good of all, to remember that we are more than Canadian, American, British, etc. We are all global citizens!

And, in the middle of it all, is our God! God’s love is reaching out to us all, allowing us the freedom to cry, while letting us know we are not alone. The love and care we show to each other is God’s way of passing on light, love, hope and peace. That is an infection we all want! It is the source of **“greater marvels yet to be.”**

Invitational Zoom Event

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

Associate Kathy Noether, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

An invitational Zoom event on systemic racism and our response to it was well-attended by sisters and associates of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, East West Unit, on July 25, 2020. In response to the congregation's Anti Racism Team, which aired a Zoom conversation earlier in June, associates felt the need to expand this experience so that more participants could be part of the discussion.

Associates Kathy Noether and Amy Jobin facilitated this presentation with over 50 sisters and associates participating. Sister Teresita Weind, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur international congregational leader, led participants in prayer, citing James Robert Lewis and the profound model of his life and impact on the hopes of equality and anti racism. Sister Patty Chappell, member of the leadership team, Anti Racism Team co-chair and former executive director of Pax Christi, presented an overview of the formation of the Anti Racism Team. This included a history of how we got where we are and where we are going, recognizing the historical shame we as a culture have tried to cover up, but not erase. Associate Sabrina Harper, one of the Anti Racism Team members, shared her perspective as an associate and

researcher of American history. She gave insights stating reasons she is committed to the Anti Racism Team and how it is moving forward with dialog and structures within Notre Dame.



In the breakout session, sisters and associates shared ideas and stories allowing them to express emotions and giving them a forum to support one another. Individual sisters and associates stated what they experienced within their groups and what was in their hearts. This time felt sensitive and healing, particularly in light of both the pandemic and protests.

Sister Teresita closed with a prayer and blessing for us all in communal fellowship as sisters and associates, companions and dear friends. We look forward to another time of deep sharing and coming together in this space of uncertainty and unrest. Our conversation gave us time to breathe and move ahead with a commitment to our Gospel values and shared charism in Notre Dame.

Some were not able to take part in the June conversations and/or July 25 conversations. We have included the video link that will give a sense of the conversations that took place in June. We invite you to view this video [Anti Racism Team](#) with these questions in mind:

1. After watching the video, hearing George Floyd's dying words, and hearing the responses from our sisters and associates, how are you feeling at this moment?
2. What can I do to continue the personal and communal transformation called for in Notre Dame as a sister, as an associate and a co-worker?



The Difficult Journey To Redemption

Associate Marybeth Irvine, Dominican Sisters of Peace

The days of COVID-19, with its related “Stay Healthy at Home” directives, have left me with time to reflect, read, and pray differently. Mostly, the time is bringing me to questions and few, if any, answers.

This past week, I visited Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest (Clermont, Kentucky) and spent time with Nis, one of the Bernheim Forest giants built using recycled wood from the region. Nis sits at the edge of a pond and is glancing in, seeing his image reflected for the first time. I finally got it! Nis sees himself and only himself and that image is the same one he sees every time he looks, barring changes in the water. My disco ball also presents a self-reflection; but rather than one, it provides many ever-changing ones.

So what does this have to do with anything? To me, it feels like the journey that I, like many other white-skinned people, have begun again in the last few months as issues of police brutality have light shown on them; as the deaths and significant illness related to COVID-19 reflect disparities based on skin color; as the education system as we have known it comes to an abrupt stop with its replacement form, impacting the poor and, most often, students of color significantly. For me, it means looking at all the facets of the disco ball and seeing all of me.

The first thing I needed to confront is my arrogance. I was in high school and college when the last “big” civil rights movement took place, so I thought I understood race relations and equality of all persons. I have a biracial cousin so I thought I accepted blackness in my family circle. Professionally, I often chose to work in the black sections of town, meaning I drove down streets that often made the news because of the violence that occurred on them the night before. I go to lunch with my black co-workers not really thinking about them as different from me. I worship with



Bernheim Forest giant Nis watching his reflection in the pond, as photographed by the author.

a community that is the most culturally diverse in the city. I am arrogant — I think I understand what it is like to live in skin that is not white.

My one-dimensional view really has been unraveling for a couple of years, starting with an innocent comment I made to a woman of color: “I really don’t see color.” The response I received was: “Then you don’t see me.” This short interaction became the first of many facets in my



Journey to Redemption

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disco ball reflection. Most importantly, it freed me to ask questions and seek insight.

I hear myself asking: How did I not know that the private school education I received was any different from that others were receiving in the public schools down the street? How did I not know that the all-white pool I spent my summers in was that way because others were not allowed in? How did I not know that my all-white neighborhood was not that way only because people of the same ethnic background like to live close to each other? Have I ever wondered what my cousin experienced being black in an all-white family?

My father is from Virginia, so I have spent endless hours touring plantations and battlefields, seeing the monuments to heroes of the Confederate south. Names like Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee have been part of my vocabulary from a very young age. How did I not know that the Civil War was about more than a dispute between states?

I still struggle with my understanding of slavery. My family's immigration history starts in the 1900s, so we don't have direct experience with it. This, coupled with my seeing "black help" being much loved when I moved south, prevented me from seeing the pain still being inflicted today.

Why did I never wonder what it was like to live in black skin? What was it like when they went home? How do I understand my feelings, as I sat with a group of high school girls as they processed the death of a friend and I could not understand their vocabulary or speech patterns? How do I say to them: "Can you tell me more so I can understand?"

The world of education has been my professional focus. I wonder what the impact has been of my

school system's middle school for students of color with its Afrocentric curriculum? When/how will the rest of the students get a different view of history?

And I ask myself would I rather be called racist or privileged? Can I acknowledge the fear I experience when I am in loud, seemingly disorganized gatherings of mostly folks who don't look like me? When I am sharing my financial resources, am I willing to risk and trust that they will be used for good? Can I be vocal enough to say publicly that my white standards are not the only ones that are appropriate? Can I keep risking to ask questions like what is a *Green Book* or what does a reference to a watermelon imply? Can I risk knowing I don't know? Can I live with the discomfort of shifting my beliefs?

In the midst of the unrest in the country, I often find myself saying: "Just tell me what you want me to do." Slowly, I am understanding that would be the easy way out; it would not change my heart.

But I still have more questions: If George Floyd's painful death had not been played and replayed so often, would Breonna Taylor's name ever been a part of the conversation? I wonder, is the nation's outrage about the brutality allowing us to forget the other areas where suffering occurs? Is access to health care, education, employment, just and equal wages being forgotten? How do I keep asking myself the hard questions and be willing to sit with the discomfort?

My disco ball keeps spinning. It keeps asking me to see me in every changing reflection. It keeps challenging me to seek to understand and to ask myself in the words of Resmaa Menakem: "Can I commit myself to the long road ahead?"