Crossing Over Thresholds

Dear Subscribers,

Recently, when a prayer group to which I belong met, each member of the group was asked to bring a short prayer for our gathering. Several of us decided on prayers that reflected the feelings and intentions surrounding the upcoming inauguration. As I chose my prayer, I came across an old handwritten copy of the Joyce Rupp poem “Crossing Over”. As I read her words about the hopes and fears that we sometimes face when we cross from one side of a bridge to another, I thought it was rather an appropriate prayer for our country as we cross from one administration to another. In it she writes of God...

You say to me:
“Cross over the bridge. Go ahead, come on over. It's sturdy enough.

Don’t look down, though, or you might get terrified and never walk across.

Don’t look back too long or you will lose courage and want to stay right where you are.

Hang on. Keep going. That’s what bridges are for, to get you to the other side. Trust me to protect you.”

In reflecting further, I am struck by how appropriate this poem is to our current place in religious life as well. Our religious congregations are at an important point in their histories, a point of crossing over. It is not an unfamiliar point, for we have been here before and we will be here again, but it is a critical point for the generations currently in religious life. And just as for many in our nation crossing over from one administration to the next in turbulent times comes with mixed emotion, so too crossing over into the future of religious life also comes with many emotions: fear, hope, excitement, and sadness. Our fears sometimes make us not want to step out onto the bridge, wondering whether it will hold, if we will make it to the other side or what we will find when we get there. From our own lives and experiences, we are familiar with these questions that surface whenever we reach a point of crossing over. We also know that, ultimately, it is the grace of God, which dispels all fears and makes it possible to cross the bridge into a future full of hope. Our own journeys of faith have taught us this much, and we continued on page 7
Slowing Down Across Thresholds

By Lou Anglin, BVM

I TEND TO WALK FAST. This is usually not a problem until I get to a threshold. You also need to know that I live at our Motherhouse where there are many retired sisters and so a doorway can be a dangerous spot. It didn’t take me too long to realize that thresholds required slowing down, becoming more aware of what was going on around me and then a certain amount of trust that all would be well on the other side.

I was in Kentucky for the National Religious Vocation Conference and had the pleasure of hearing Maria Cimperman, OSU, Assistant Professor for Moral Theology and Social Ethics at the Oblate School of Theology, speak about religious life being at a threshold moment. Her experience of religious life being at the brink of something new, some major kind of shift, was one that struck a chord in me.

My doorway experiences living in the Motherhouse challenge me to slow down a bit at this time in our community history. Not to stop, but to take profound times of quiet to reflect on how God is working in and around us. It challenges me to become more aware of whom and what in our world most needs our attention and care. It challenges me then to go into the future, to cross the threshold, knowing that God is with us no matter what awaits us.

The image that keeps coming to me as I think about what is on the other side of the threshold for our community is a huge, spacious, welcoming room. It is a space that requires a great inclusiveness, a way of being with each other that celebrates diversity and a sincere respect for all of creation. My hope for what comes next is that it will mean living more simply and with greater courage to challenge injustice in our church and world. My greatest certainty is that God must be at the center of it all.

I find this time in our country with the election of Barak Obama to be a similar kind of threshold moment. I am excited at the prospect of what comes next, how it might be different, and the possibilities for those whose lives have been adversely affected by our government policies. It’s a scary time, and there are many and complex problems to be faced, but I have great hope for the possibilities of real and positive change.

Maria’s challenge to the vocation ministers gathered in Kentucky and to all of us is an important one to consider. Where do we find ourselves at this time in the history of religious life? Are we as individual members and as communities ready for something more and different? What do we bring with us and what might we leave behind? I certainly don’t have many answers but I do want to slow down, to become more aware of the surroundings, and to continue to pray to trust what God has in store for all of us.

To read the full text of Sister Maria’s presentation, see the Winter 2009 edition of HORIZON, journal of the National Religious Vocation Conference. Copies of HORIZON can be purchased from NRVC for $8 each. Please send your request and payment to National Religious Vocation Conference, 5401 S. Cornell Ave., Chicago, IL 60615. More information about NRVC is available at www.nrvc.net.

We also highly recommend ordering the CD or DVD of this presentation from Veranda Communications. This would include the entire presentation, music played during a portion of the presentation and wonderful question and answer interaction with the speaker and participants.

Veranda Communications may be reached via their website, www.veran-datapes.com, phone (502) 894-0901 or fax (502) 89409780. Their address is 3830 Staebler Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40207.
A Future Full of Hope

By Mary Catherine Redmond, PBVM

“People entering are aware (to different extents) of the challenges of religious life, but see in congregational and community life not impasse but an invitation to this moment in which religious life at thresholds finds itself. In the midst of this they seek to give all, risk all, for God’s mission. In this seeking, one’s entire being is opened, in love.”

– excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation

When I heard Maria Cimperman’s presentation at the National Religious Vocation Conference this past October I was touched deeply both by what Maria shared and where we are as a Congregation at this time. At our Chapter of Affairs last summer, the environment committee had made a door the focus of our meeting space. It was our door to the future. The theme for our Chapter was “A Future Full of Hope”.

Maria brought me more deeply into where we are at this time in religious life and as a Congregation. She used the image of a threshold and spent time reflecting on what brings us to the threshold, being at the threshold, and across the threshold. As Maria said, “Something is shifting in the life, and while I think we were at impasses some time ago, something is moving again”. Maria spoke of optimism and hope. I have to admit that initially when the theme of our Chapter was published I thought – are these people for real? A future full of hope? Have they not looked at the numbers, at our finances? It was through the experience with my Sisters at our Chapter that I again felt the hope that has been promised to us by God. It is the feeling that Maria so vividly and reflectively shared with us of being at the threshold that gives me hope.

I get the sense from different members of our Congregation – and I sense this happening in many Congregations – that something is stirring, calling, beckoning and this is the invitation that will call us to a deeper commitment with each other and our mission. I hear Sisters saying that we want to listen to the urgings of the Spirit within each sister. This will require a renewed sense of relating that will both challenge and bless us. It will call us to something new. I hear the call to again renew our prayer with each other. I hear the call to collaborate with each other in ministry. I hear the call to reconnect once again to the call of our Foundress, Nano Nagle. The threshold will ask much of us. As I reflect, I ask others and myself: Can we be bold enough to risk what is essential for Community, Prayer and Mission? I further ask: Can we risk falling in love again with each other, our call, and the vision of our foundress? I believe that it will be in these conversations that we will go deeper into the stories of

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Passing Through the Thresholds...

By Julie Marsh, PVBM

A “THRESHOLD” is an ENTRANCE that moves us into a new place. We often stand on the verge or edge and ask, “Can I cross over?” I attended the National Religious Vocation Conference in Louisville, KY, last October where Sr. Maria Cimperman, OSU spoke on the thresholds of religious life. These thresholds are personal as well as communal impasses that can cause us to hesitate or prevent us from moving at all. Once we have passed through a threshold, we are changed. Our personal or communal growth is such that we can never go back to the way we were.

Each generation within religious life may find itself at the same threshold, yet each processes how to go through the threshold differently. We are developmentally, spiritually and maybe even theologically poles apart from one another.

Cimperman asked us to reflect on the history of our congregation’s thresholds. The number of thresholds or points of crucial decision-making obviously depends on the age of the congregation’s founding. One of today’s greatest thresholds facing religious communities, regardless of the group’s age, is the threshold of future leadership. As numbers of religious decline, the question is not only, “How will the mission and our charism continue to exist into the future,” but “Who will help lead this mission?”

In passing through a threshold, Cimperman emphasized the importance of the “dynamic of movement,” which is the energy needed to begin a change. Though she did not give a magic number that creates this dynamic movement, there are some who speak of the “critical mass” needed for such movement being ten percent of the membership of a group. If this is true, then it takes only ten people out of one hundred to move or “cross over a threshold” into something new.

A “critical mass” does provide emotional support for an individual when moving towards something new. However, it also requires personal inner work to be done by each person before such a step may be taken. To cross over the threshold of anything meaningful requires a passion for the change and the courage to take the first step. Our founders and foundresses had the fire of the Spirit energizing within, yet when faced with difficult challenges they needed to place their own fears and insecurities aside for something greater.

I have never sought to be in the “limelight” or enjoyed a lot of attention centered on myself. I feel much more comfortable blending into a group. This does not mean I never have a different opinion or that I never stray from the norm. Though my younger siblings may beg to differ, leadership was never an aspiration of mine. In fact, walking to the front of a crowded room to an open seat still makes my stomach churn. I appreciate the back row! It wasn’t until my first ministry position as a parish liturgist that I realized I had to change my attitude. If I was going to be effective in leading people in prayer, I had to be visible...that meant, many times, front and center.

Sometimes I’m still flabbergasted to think my congregational leadership team chose me to be the Director of Formation. I was content ministering on a college campus away from the “central workings” of the community. When I was asked to discern a change in ministry from something I knew quite well to something not so familiar to me, I was extremely hesitant, not to mention very uncomfortable! My initial response was to simply say, “No thank you, I like my life the way it is.” I believe in the future of religious life with all of its possibilities, so I have the passion; however, I had to ask myself, “Do I have the courage?” Being the Director of Formation would cost me something: leaving a familiar ministry and a good community living situation. It would also “put me out there” with all of my imperfections for all of my sisters to see. Having been in religious life for twenty-two years, I know that the formation program is always a hot topic. Did I really want to move into this?

As I stood at this threshold of a new phase of my life, it was with much prayer and the help of good friends that I was able cross over. I knew that I needed to put my own personal fears aside...fears of “Do I have enough experience?” or “How will I have to change my own lifestyle?”

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Reflection on Thresholds

PRIOR TO MARIA CIMPERMAN’S KEYNOTE at the NRVC Convocation in Louisville in October, I hadn’t really given too much consideration to thresholds, especially as the term might relate to religious life. A threshold is defined as a starting point, a step into a new state or experience. When a person crosses over a threshold she or he leaves behind one reality and moves into another one.

Thinking of our future in terms of crossing thresholds certainly does open up new ways of having conversations. It gives a more concrete way of identifying what an individual and a community hopes and dreams for the future. Throughout Maria’s talk I reflected on what thresholds I need to cross both as an individual and with my congregation. Many congregations are looking at the future, visioning how to keep the mission of their founder or foundress alive. The Presentation Sisters of Fargo are no different. In our identity statement as Presentation Sisters of Fargo we say, “Called by God to be risk takers.” To be a risk taker, to cross a threshold, requires that I am open to what is lying on the other side. It requires that I venture over the threshold or acknowledge that I cannot take the step. It requires belief in God. As Jeremiah 29:11 states, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” I must be willing to lay all of my hopes and dreams out, to look at how those might be affected by crossing the threshold.

As I reflect on thresholds I must recognize that I am not the only one affected, for it requires some movement from the congregation as well. Crossing a threshold, demands that I be willing to listen to my sisters. It demands seeking peace and reconciliation at times when it appears crossing a threshold is too difficult. Maria stated, “Thresholds ask much of us, more than we even imagine, and offer much, more than we even imagine.” I am challenged to ponder thresholds that we, as a community, need to cross, and which invite us to be prophetic.

As Maria Cimperman stated, “we find across the threshold a greater realization of globalizing solidarity.” We are realizing that we are connected to all of creation; and in that connection united with people worldwide. Presentation Sisters minister throughout the world. Most are connected through the International Presentation Association, but still independent, giving voice to the critical issues that affect the global community. We are all called by God. We see the gifts of our sisters in religious life around the world. As our foundress, Nano Nagle wrote, “I think there is no greater happiness in the world than to be in union.”

“Our newer members join us at the thresholds. They come, with their humanity, to religious life with fresh eyes. Having recently crossed a threshold of their own with desire and freedom and hopes, they come to our congregations because they see a common vision and hope, and they desire to join there hopes with ours. Threshold questions are familiar and even welcome for them.”

– excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation

When we cross a threshold, all of us “let go” of some things. We are not the same as we were. At times, the crossing over will call us to be creative, perhaps in order to make the movement less difficult for us or for the community. As Cimperman emphasized, creativity is a contemplative act that we MUST activate within ourselves. Contemplation is the catalyst for the change we need to make.

I have been ministering in formation work now for four years and I am most grateful for the opportunity to share my leadership skills with my community. The thresholds in my life continue to surface fear at times. However, I will not let them paralyze me. My passion and courage along with that “critical mass,” will push me through to new and exciting experiences as it did my foundress.

Cimperman asked us in her presentation to reflect on, “What are we really afraid of?” and “Why are we so fearful?” I believe that once we can answer these two questions honestly, the threshold of community leadership awaiting us can be seen as gift and help to move us.

Another angle, of course, is our religious communities asking these same questions as a group. Prior to any elections, we must discuss “What are we afraid of in putting younger members on our leadership teams?” Such a concept cannot simply be determined due to the size of “the pool.” To not elect us because “they want to save us for a later time” is not a good reason nor can we be chosen simply by default – no one else wants or can physically do the job! With these mentalities, many of our communities may miss crucial threshold opportunities that would strengthen the mission.

Passing Through the Thresholds, continued from page 4

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The Importance of “Us” and “We” at the Threshold

IN REFLECTING ON MARIA CIMPERMAN’S keynote address to vocation ministers at the 2008 NRVC Convocation, I found that Maria's address, centering on engaging the thresholds of contemporary religious life, struck a chord that resonated deep within my heart. Religious life is on the edge of a threshold, a threshold that will change us forever. The image before me is not unlike the threshold I envisioned immediately before I said “yes” to entering into the process of religious life. I saw myself standing at the edge of a cliff dropping off into a vast ocean knowing clearly that this decision to follow my heart, to follow God would change me forever. Would I drown or be lost in the Sea when faced with Truth and a deeper knowledge of self? What about community and community life? How was I going to live with and be in relationship with eighty other women? Could my independent self really become interdependent? I just didn't know. I did know that growth was inevitable. I would know myself and be known as never before. This scared me. Growing means experiencing growing pains that come with every level of becoming, especially when one commits oneself to Truth beyond one's imagining. But I also knew that my heart was yearning to be one with God, my Love, and one in total dedication in service to God's people, through this particular group of women who shared a common vision and Incarnational spirituality.

As I look at some of the thresholds facing my congregation now – changing Motherhouse locations, as well as facing the call to reconfiguration between some or all of our nine Incarnate Word groups – Maria's presentation gave me a greater sense of clarity and a concrete way in which to view the thresholds that beckon my community to greater intimacy with the Word Incarnate and to greater intimacy with each other and with those we serve. Her words, “longing for meaningful conversation, learning with and among each other...,” stirred within my heart. Maria defined threshold as a sacred space in which we ponder together the doorways or pathways before us. “Thresholds call us to a greater freedom and creativity.” And my heart resounded with a passionate “Yes!” I envisioned my community ablaze and consumed with the fire of God's love, living our mission from God so completely that others notice the marvels and love of God in this time and in this place. “Vocations” would not be an immediate concern, if a concern at all. Our purpose and focus (individually, personally, and communally) would be directed completely to the living out of our Incarnational spirituality and the embodiment of our charism in our contemporary society to such a degree that it would inspire others to join us. Others would clearly see and know the Incarnate Word alive within and among us. (While we do now live our spirituality and charism, I do believe that the threshold to which God is calling us is much deeper Mystery than what we have ever known as a congregation.)

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believe that our abundant God will continue to bless us personally and congregationally as we live into the future.

This issue of Giving Voice addresses some of the questions that stem from religious life at a crucial crossing point. In October, Maria Cimperman, OSU addressed the members of the National Religious Vocation Conference gathered in Louisville, Kentucky. In her presentation, Maria used the image of religious life at a threshold. Her talk revolves around three movements: Inviting Thresholds, At the Threshold, and Across the Threshold. The articles collected here are the reflections of several members of the Giving Voice generation who were present at the NRVC Conference. Throughout the issue, highlights of Maria's talk are interspersed with the reflections. Information on how to obtain a full version of Maria's talk can also be found within these pages.

Enjoy,
Joanne Koehl, SC
Newsletter Editor

“Crossing Over Thresholds,” continued from page 1

“Thresholds ask much of us, more than we even imagine, and offer much, more than we even imagine.”
— excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation

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— excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation

A Future Full of Hope, continued from page 3

who we are, and that they will give us the strength to go through the threshold.

Maria spoke of many blessings across the threshold if we move together as a congregation. Maria reflected that the threshold offers a greater sense of belonging, deeper experiences and understandings of community, and the galvanization of both our imagination and creativity. This is an exciting and hopeful time in religious life. Something is stirring. We are being called to something across the threshold that is not yet named but yearns to be birthed. I believe it will be deeply life-giving whatever the cost. It returns me to my initial call to religious life, in which I was willing to give all to be a part of our Congregation. I am at that point again, and I am excited as a younger member in religious life that I will cross this threshold with my Sisters. I believe that the movement, together with loving respect, will open new ways of being Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in our world.

The key is “us” and “we”. This means deep prayer, particularly “communal contemplation” as Maria stated and real, honest, open dialogue about who we are now, who God calls us (collective) to be, and how we are to be. It will take work, time, growth and reconciliation in our relationships with one another, a continued deeper knowledge of “self”, and working out of that Trust that goes beyond us. It will also require knowing ourselves (individually, each other, and as a congregation) on a more profound, more free and more creative level, participating in communal contemplation, and engaging in vulnerable dialogue that makes the Christ in us “transparent as a crystal vase”. These elements are vital if we are to cross the threshold of reconfiguration and find Life standing with us and among us on the other side.

The Way is difficult but not impossible. It means leaving our “ego” behind and completely, irrevocably, embracing both Christ (who completely and irrevocably embraces us) and God’s mission for us as Sisters of the Incarnate Word to be the human face of God to a world that hungers for God’s love and presence, mercy and forgiveness. It will require risks and vulnerability not only with ourselves but in how we direct our corporate ministries and any other ministry in which we engage. It will require an understanding of “other” as “self” in which the only response possible is a deep respect and reverence for all human life and all of creation no matter what the situation. It will call for a collective heart that sees diversity as a highly creative venture that makes for vibrant life, joy, laughter, and peace even as it exacts of us deep understanding, patience, courage, trust and an authentic loving acceptance of one another.

The thresholds before us will challenge us. If we risk crossing the threshold, we will find that it requires work, courage, trust, and most importantly it will require all of us working together, being courageous together, trusting together, and moving ahead together. Maria spoke of the importance of crossing the threshold as a critical mass. We are a small community, almost thirty members less than when I entered. For us “critical mass” will mean nothing less than 100%. Humanly speaking this may sound impossible, but for those of us who believe, “nothing is impossible with God.”

“We bring all we have to this moment—and then move, walk, and journey beyond what we can see to that which we know is deep and true. The threshold invites— and with both trepidation and eagerness we seek to respond.”

…”

— excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation
The other day as I was watching television, a commercial came on for a new series. It was called Legend of the Seeker – Warrior of Hope. The series has the young hero leaving what he has always known and venturing forth across a visible magic threshold into a new land where he seeks to bring hope of a new future. This commercial started me thinking: How would this series look if it were about religious life today? What if the title were changed to Legend of the Seekers – Bearers of Hope? What if it explored various religious communities that were crossing the thresholds that religious are facing today? What would that look like and who would be the Bearers of Hope?

At Called by One – Invited by Many (the National Religious Vocation Directors Conference), Maria Cimperman, OSU gave us a glimpse into what we are facing in crossing the thresholds that we face today.

Thresholds, she stated, are sacred spaces, crossings. At each phase in our life we face a threshold, an intense frontier we must cross that may require risk and loss. As we cross these thresholds, we learn to hold on to what is needed and to let go of what needs to be left behind. But once across, we find ourselves changed and realize that we can no longer go back to the way it was. Often times, we recognize we crossed a threshold only when we look back.

For religious communities today, the thresholds we face are taking many forms. One of the greatest thresholds that I see many communities and congregations facing is the threshold of membership. Can we step across this threshold and envision what religious life may look like in the future? Are we willing to embrace the new size and make up of the communities of our future? Are we willing, as Maria challenged, to hold on, as well as let go, to cross our thresholds?

As I talk with members of various communities throughout the country, I hear many responses to this threshold. Some communities are choosing to stay the course, continuing to faithfully live the life set forth by their founders as best they can in these circumstances. Some are choosing to merge with other communities of similar charisms. These communities have chosen to combine their resources and membership to better serve the people of God. And finally some communities are choosing to combine into a completely new congregation to set forth a new course while honoring the past.

All three choices face a future that is unclear but the second two choices challenge community members to cross a new threshold into the future together. It calls each of us to bring all our hopes, dreams, fears, challenges, gifts and talents with us and together move forward to a future that may be unsure but that we know God is calling us to. But this crossing is never easy. It may mean redefining who we are as vowed religious, letting go of ministries or missions that we have worked with for generations, finding ways to respond to new needs within society, incorporating a global perspective, finding new ways to embrace a multicultural and multigenerational community, exploring the changes and influence created by a high-speed, high-tech generation, and challenging ourselves to try to understand the spiritual needs of our newer members.

As a vocation director and younger community member, I agree with Maria’s idea that some of our help in crossing this new threshold can come from our newer members. Maria sees the newer members entering religious life with an awareness of the challenges they will face and embracing the invitation to this moment of religious life and to the threshold at which religious life finds itself. They seek to give all, and risk all, for God’s mission. Their entire being is opened, in love.

As a Benedictine, I embrace the beauty, wonder and awe of the traditions that have been handed down from Benedictines around the world for the last 1500 years. We are a community that is steeped in tradition and that embraces the gifts those traditions have been, not only to us but also to the world. But part of the tradition that many times is forgotten, is the tradition of courage and strength to cross new thresholds according to the times. Throughout time, monasteries have been as small as two or three members and as large as over 1000 members. But no matter the size, there has been a tradition of attempting to maintain a balance between the traditions and the events of the day.

“Across the threshold we find a greater sense of belonging. We sense that we belong across this threshold, even as many still do not know exactly where it will lead. We have a sense of our deeper belonging to all of creation. There is a deeper sense of identity, knowing what we offer the church and the world because of who we are and where we are.”

– excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation

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US RELIGIOUS LIFE demographics reveal clearly that we are on the brink of dramatic change. The data prompt me to put before God dozens of questions. After all, if God wants us to cross the threshold from well-known to unknown expressions of this life, some clarity would be helpful. Finding myself wondering about the very essence of religious life and its value for the future, I ask:

- What can the presence of persons who live their lives most lovingly in the context of communal religious life offer to the larger world?
- What does our spiritual presence bring to a suffering global community?
- Does the world still have any need for persons to choose this way of life?
- How would the world be any different if religious life did not exist?

As hard as I try to listen, I haven’t received any clear and certain answers to any of these questions. At times I find this utterly frustrating. I hear myself inquiring with more than a hint of irritation in my voice, “Why can’t you, God, give us some assurance that this way of life still matters in the world?”

In my calmer, more gentle moments, however, I recognize this lack of surety is – actually – God’s gift. If all were certain in religious life, I could grow quite comfortable and complacent. I ponder: Would I be open to the new? Would I attentively listen for the call of the world to us today? Would I consciously try to imagine new expressions of this life that would be responsive to the yearnings of the global community? Would I be inclined to even imagine new thresholds and what lies beyond them?

So rather than demanding certainty, I spend time reflecting on this insight of John O’Donohue, “There is a river of creativity running through all things, all relationships, all beings, all corners and centers of the universe. We are here to join it, to get wet, to jump in, to ride these rapids, wild and sacred as they be.”

Even though certainty and security have appeal, more appealing is a life lived soaked in the wild and sacred waters of religious life today. At the same time, I recognize that navigating fast-moving rapids requires discipline to foster the courage, insight, and imaginative spirit needed for such adventure. To keep myself agile enough for the ride, I find these practices render me supple:

**Enter the dark, willingly.** It has been said that we see in the dark that to which the light blinds us. To see with the eyes of God today, I find I need times apart, in solitude, where I can contemplate the unknown and the mysterious unfolding of life. When I approach the threshold between light and darkness, I always pray for courage. Matthew Fox notes, “Courage is amazing because it can tap into the heart of fear, taking that frightened energy and turning toward initiative, creativity, action and hope. When courage comes alive, imprisoning walls become frontiers of new possibility, difficulty becomes invitation and the heart comes into a new rhythm of trust and sureness.” I long to live my religious life on that frontier of possibility.

**Study and learn.** I find that study can be a most prayerful experience; study opens my heart to the many worlds that today claim our attention. In addition, each night I ask myself: What have I learned today? Is what I am learning contributing to the beauty of the world and making my own heart more compassionate? I want to ride the rapids of religious life today with an expansive mind and heart.

**Call on the communion of saints.** We all know other seekers, beauty-makers and truth-tellers. Some are still living; others have passed on to the next life. I try to call on these companions and ask for their wisdom, guidance, and creativity. I believe these beings – living and dead – yearn to accompany us. I too yearn to cross thresholds in their company.

**Develop a contented heart.** When I can put aside the frustration of unanswered questions and my fears of a

“Across the threshold we find both imagination and creativity further galvanized. Creativity flows out of our deepest desires…We also know from our experiences that creativity is a deeply contemplative act, and it moves us to integrate our lives (prayer, community, and ministry – in essence, mission) again bringing forth our active contemplative dimensions.”

— excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation
Reflections on “Invited by One, Called by Many”

By Patti Donlin, RSM

During the National Religious Vocation Conference Convocation Maria Cimperman, OSU spoke about “Thresholds.” The talk was powerful and after personal reflection, the discussions at the tables led to an energy that was life-giving. I would like to take some time to reflect on what struck me during Maria’s presentation, my reflection time, and the table discussions following.

What is a threshold?

We have all experienced threshold moments in our lives: choosing religious life, changing ministries, moving to new places. What they have in common is that we make the choice for change in our lives. We make these choices with the virtue of “hope,” not having evidence of a positive outcome, but with the experience of being called by God.

In reflecting on a move 1,000 miles from all I knew, I could touch into the experiences of letting go of the fears, and holding on to the belief that this change was in response to a call I had heard. I believed that this meant I was where God wanted me to be in this moment. Looking back, I recognize that at each threshold I bring the gifts I received from crossing other thresholds in my life. This is what keeps the forward movement in my life. The call to move continues to challenge me to allow hope to be present when I arrive at the next threshold.

At the threshold

Maria quoted John O’Donohue who calls the threshold a “place of restless energy,” and spoke of the root of the word thresh, which comes from the experience of threshing - to leave the husks behind and bring forth the grain. Both are powerful statements in the call to move forward. Living a reflective life struck me as the key component. Reflecting helps us to see what we need to let go of in order to make room for the future in the way we live religious life today. The questions for reflection (What are the questions that have patiently waited for you? What are the questions that have no right to go away?) moved people to look at the lives they and their communities are living. As I reflected on the Sisters of Mercy and all of the changes made in reconfiguring, I recognized that now is the time for the next step – to re-imagine our life for the future.

On the Threshold

Maria shared the following four gifts: we hear cries for spirituality and justice in our world; people are looking for deeper meaning in their lives; people want to live lives in which they know one another from the depths; and what we have received from religious life assists us in living more deeply. Is that the call for the future? How can we assist those around us in living a deeper life of justice and spirituality? Communal discernment speaks to our need to come from who we are today, to reflect on what our identity and role are today, and make choices. This goes beyond our community chapters. It is looking at what is most essential, our intrinsic desires, that lead us to creativity in our community living and ministry choices.

“Dispensibilidad,” is an experience of “Radical Availability” in response to a call. This is in fact our “suscipe.” It is the more we sense calling to us. Temptations and risks call us beyond the need to know it all before we take the step across the threshold. It goes back to looking at hope and having the freedom and responsibility to look at our dangerous memories. The stories of our communities speak of the risks taken to make a significant change in our world for the good of the people of God. To take that step we need a critical mass because hope is communal. As I reflected on the question, “What threshold beckons your community,” I wondered are we as communities so set that we are unwilling to risk taking that step across the threshold and losing the comfortable life we live today?

Across the threshold

When we cross the threshold we will indeed receive gifts – haven’t we in prior experiences? Maria shared four gifts she saw communities receive across the threshold. Among these gifts, we find greater belonging and identity – in what we

continued on page 11
WHEN MARIA CIMPERRMAN, OSU delivered her keynote address at the NRVC Convocation in the context of “Thresholds”, I began to reflect on my own experience over the past eight years in a religious community that has always supported and encouraged me at every threshold I have crossed. And as I have crossed these thresholds, I discovered both a new identity, deeply rooted in our congregational identity as Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, and a spirituality of communion that has rekindled in me a belief that who we are and what we do as religious still compels women and men to join us, to cross thresholds of their own in faith, trusting that God and the community will be their faithful companions on the journey!

One aspect of threshold moments is that they are always accompanied by a degree of risk. This is why it requires courage and faith to cross any threshold. Maybe some, who have been in the life for a long time, stand at the threshold wondering how it could be that things have changed so much. Maybe some look across the threshold paralyzed with fear when they think about how much things will change once they cross the threshold. But then there are others who embrace the possibilities that lie across the threshold. They recognize that there is a risk, but they also remember the women and men in the community who went before them risking it all because they knew something better would be revealed when they crossed that threshold. I think of the 12 women from our congregation who came to the United States from Canada nearly 150 years ago. It would have been so easy to stay in Canada and wait for this fledgling religious community to grow stronger before venturing off to the Wild West. But instead, they embraced their threshold moment with courage and faith and crossed over to face the challenges of their time. And we are better and stronger because of their audacity!

Religious life today is at a threshold moment. How we live the life is evolving and changing. But what hasn’t changed is the relevance of religious life in the church and in the world. We continue to make a difference in the world and because of that, young men and women continue to want to be a part of our life. They are excited to face the challenges of the world in the context of a caring committed community. They are willing to risk all for the Gospel just as we said we were when we first entered our communities. The question for each of us is this: “Are we willing to cross that threshold with them and invite creative and imaginative new ways of living religious life?”

Reflections on “Invited by One”, continued from page 10

choose to hold on to and what we choose to leave behind. This clear identity increases visibility, transparency and public witness. I can see this happening in the Sacred Circle conversations that Sisters of Mercy are having across the Institute on the difficult issues we face today. Our creativity flows out of our deepest desires, bringing forth contemplative activity. Religious imagination that is creative and persistent shapes a vision beyond where we can see. The gift of community and communal spirituality is the recognition of our common friendship with God. As in our Mercy conversations we are learning how to dialogue our differences with respect and charity. Global solidarity is the final gift that communities receive across the threshold. How do we see ourselves locally and globally – the increasing connection with our world, with all of creation – challenges us to recognize the needs of today and to imagine the needs of the future.

So what is the Spirit inviting all of us to, in particular as younger/newer members of our communities? Do we take time to live a reflective life? What am I/what are we willing to let go of that are the husks of religious life? What is the grain of religious life/what are the non-negotiables that are an integral part of religious life that will assist in moving us ahead into the future? As a younger sister, although I have been in the community for 22 years, I have the hope that having deeper conversations and letting go of the past in order to move into the future will leave us with a re-imagined religious life. I would like to see this new generation of women religious as women committed to God, centered in spirituality and prayer. I want to serve others in new and creative ways that address the needs of our time right now and bring us forward into the future full of hope.

“The communion we seek with one another and in God is present, both here and across thresholds. Religious life is indeed at significant threshold moments, and the more familiar and even comfortable we become with them, the better we will be able to fruitfully respond to the Spirit’s call.”

– excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation
WHAT IS SHIFTING IN RELIGIOUS LIFE?

IN HER TALK at the NRVC Conference, Maria Cimperman, OSU said, “Across the threshold we find both imagination and creativity further galvanized. Creativity flows out of our deepest desires... and it moves us to integrate our lives.” This integration is one of the major shifts occurring in religious life today. While in the past, some people entered because they felt called to a community’s ministries, the younger religious I know (women deeply rooted in prayer, community and mission) tend to seek an identity that goes deeper than the ministry they do. Flowing out of our deepest desires, we seek a way of life that is communal, led by the Spirit, and that promotes the giving of oneself to God and to others. In other words, we seek a way of life that is integrated and all encompassing. Creating this way of life calls for the sharing of our deepest desires and our truest selves. The ability and willingness of all members of the community to tap into and share their deepest desires is essential if the community is to cross the threshold into a more vibrant life-giving future. It is also essential if there is to be a next generation in religious life.

As I look at the current reality of religious life, I wonder, as I know many do, why have so few of my generation (Gen X) entered religious life. Religious life has been for me a place where I can give my all to God in communion with others. However, this radical call to serve isn’t the only voice heard today. God’s radical call to love and service must compete with the culture’s call to a comfortable and secure life. This competing call can result in religious women who appear to be too much like the rest of society. I believe this is a problem. Gone are the days when people will choose to enter a community in order to become a teacher, a nurse, or any professional. Our culture is filled with too many opportunities for both career and ministerial development for most people to ever consider entering religious life for ministry alone. As an example, consider the many wonderful lay men and women who serve the mission of Christ, in both the church and the world, in numerous vibrant ministries. So, if we are to have a future filled with hope, our religious way of life must be clearly lived as an integrated whole. Only when lived wholistically does religious life have the ability to entice a new generation, and only when it is lived wholistically does it fulfill some of the deepest desires of those younger sisters already in our communities.

“Something is shifting in the life, and while I think we were at impasses some time ago, something is moving again. My hope is that during our time together engaging inviting thresholds, we together can attend to some of the movements and moments.”

– excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation

Riding the Rapids of Religious Life, continued from page 9

rapidly changing and demanding world, and when I can befriend the uncertainty of threshold crossing, a surer tranquility envelops me. Here, remarked John O’Donohue, “we gain the courage to search out where the real thresholds in life are, the vital frontiers, the parts of our life that we have not yet experienced. We awaken our passion to live and are no longer afraid of the unknown, for even the darkest night has a core of twilight.... We learn to befriend our complexity and see the dance of opposition within us not as a negative or destructive thing, but as an invitation to a creative adventure.” I am eager to walk into the creative adventures that await us in religious life with this depth of tranquility, trusting light and life await us.

Will continued fidelity to these disciplines free me from wanting answers to all my questions? Probably not. I trust, nevertheless, that in practicing these disciplines while simultaneously riding the wild and sacred rapids that is religious life today, I will live into the future with steadfast purpose and conviction.

Legends of the Seekers, continued from page 8

This requires the faith, trust and willingness of all the members of the community to constantly look to the future with hope. To fully embrace our vow of conversatio morum (a vow to a continual change of heart, a daily reshaping of the mind and heart according to God’s plan for us), it is up to us to listen to where God is calling us to today and to allow our newer members to help expand our vision of who God is calling us to be and it is up to us to take these visions and balance them with the past. In his great wisdom, Benedict even made provisions for this in his Rule. “All should be called for counsel, because the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best” (RB 3:3). Together we must cross these new thresholds we face. And while it may ask a great deal from each of us, we will also find that we are blessed in ways we never imagined.

This is the challenge of today, to be willing to find ways to step across these new thresholds together into an unfamiliar land and to be voices of hope within our communities, to this generation and to the world. That is the true Legend of the Seekers and we are the true Bearers of Hope.

“Across the threshold we find both imagination and creativity further galvanized. Creativity flows out of our deepest desires... and it moves us to integrate our lives.”

– excerpt from the 2008 NRVC presentation
Changes Coming to Giving Voice

As you may have already noticed, changes are coming to Giving Voice. Starting with the last issue, the newsletters have been made available online for all who visit our website. As we continue to find the best way to engage the voices of religious life, this coming year we are moving to an entirely web-based newsletter, making our newsletter more accessible to women around the globe. This being said, in lieu of a subscription to a print newsletter, we are offering memberships to both individuals and congregations. By signing up as a member on the Giving Voice website (www.giving-voice.org), you will be included in our database and receive email notification of new postings on the website, including the newsletter, information about gatherings and new resources as they are developed. We also encourage congregations to become supporting members. In the 10 years of Giving Voice, the generous support of over 100 religious congregations has been vital to our existence, and we hope to continue that relationship with the many congregations who have been integral in our effort to gather the voices of younger women religious.

Additionally, Giving Voice is looking at a new organizational structure to ensure its sustainability. In the past, Giving Voice has relied primarily on the work of a few volunteer core team members to organize and plan all of its efforts. The structure that Giving Voice is moving into will allow it to couple the work of the core team with the insight and vision of a group of discerners who will help the core team to set the on-going vision for Giving Voice. These ‘circles of discernment’ will be hosted a few times throughout the year after Giving Voice gatherings. In these circles we will have the chance to glean some of the wisdom expressed in our gatherings and be attentive to what we are hearing. From these times of deep listening we will be able to lean into the future of religious life as it emerges. Our continued communications through our website will make these learnings available to all who wish to engage them. The diagram shown here illustrates the new structure that Giving Voice is moving toward in the coming year. Stay tuned for ways to engage with Giving Voice on one or more of these levels in the future.

Thanks for all the ways you continue to give voice to what’s emerging in religious life today!

Lisa Buscher, RSCJ  Maria Cimperman, OSU
Katherine Feely, SND  Joanne Koehl, SC
Kristin Matthes, SNDdeN  Mary Stanco, HM
In this, the fourth intercongregational national conference sponsored by Giving Voice, we invite you to join conversations as we continue to articulate the experiences of religious life of women under 50. Our days will include input from Louisa Saffiotti as well as insights and engagement from across the Giving Voice Generations (the 20s, 30s, and 40s). Come and break open with us the living of community in the 21st century.

Just as in the other intercongregational national conferences sponsored by Giving Voice, there will be a limited number of spaces for sisters over 50 in order to provide for intergenerational conversations. We will also include space for women under 50 discerning a call to religious life.

**PRESENTER**

Luisa Saffiotti, PhD  
(peace psychologist, clinical psychologist, spiritual director, retreat director, and founding director of the Kairos Center, a collaborative practice that provides consultation, education and clinical services to religious communities and other groups internationally)

**FACILITATORS**

Maria Cimperman, OSU  
Katherine Feely, SND

**ROOMS**

- Double room - $300  
- Private room - $350  
- Commuter - $250  
(Financial assistance is available.)

The conference will begin the evening of Thursday, June 11 and will end at noon on Sunday, June 14, 2009.
NAME

STREET ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP CODE

DATE OF BIRTH

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL

CONGREGATION

Status in the congregation
Please check whatever applies:
____ I am presently discerning with my community and have not yet entered.
____ I have entered my community and have not yet made first profession.
____ I have made first profession and have not yet made perpetual profession.
____ I have made my perpetual profession.

Room choice
Please mark your choice:
___ single occupancy ($350)
___ double occupancy ($300)
___ commuter ($250)

Name of person with whom you would like to room __________________________________________________________

Special needs
Please mark whatever applies:
___ I have special dietary needs – please specify ____________________________________________________________
___ I have special mobility needs – please specify ____________________________________________________________

Payment

Total cost: ________

Amount enclosed: ________ (please include at least $50 to hold your spot)

Amount to be paid on arrival: ________

Please make all checks out to Giving Voice. Mail your check and this registration form to
Giving Voice  |  548 West 3rd Street  |  Mesa, AZ 85201
Questions for Reflection and Discussion

• What threshold beckons you now? What threshold beckons your congregation now? What threshold moments does religious life face at this moment?
• What gifts are present at this threshold moment?
• Maria points out the need for a critical mass to cross a communal threshold. How do you see this operative in your own experience of desiring greater vitality in religious life?
• What does crossing thresholds in religious life demand from you individually? What does it demand from your congregational life?
• How does framing questions regarding the future of religious life in terms of “thresholds” open up new ways of having conversations?
• In what ways do we need to slow down as both individuals and congregations to allow us to lean into the future across the thresholds of our lives?
• What are you being asked to hold onto and to give up as you cross the thresholds in your life, either individually or congregationally?
• What hopes do the threshold moments in your life bring you?

Upcoming Issues

Spring 2009 – Discernment
• What are your experiences of communal discernment?
• What does communal discernment look like when done well?
• What is necessary for communal discernment to be done well?
• What do to find to be important in times of discernment?
• What has discernment meant in your life or in the life of your congregation?

Summer 2009 – Living Community in the 21st Century

If you are interested in contributing an article for the next issue please contact editor@giving-voice.org