

## **Energizing Relationships: Partnering with New Eyes**

*From Linda Taylor, CSJ: This article is mostly the words of the presenters and participants at the January 9, 2016 Community Assembly. Having everybody speak for themselves seemed the most authentic expression of what we experienced together. Quotes are taken from the DVD of the event and notes of presenters and participants. Thanks to members of the Community Assembly Planning Committee and staff of CSJ Administration and Carondelet Center for their help and support on this project.*

What made the January 9, 2016 Community Assembly of the Sisters of St. Joseph and Consociates different from all the other assemblies the CSJs have had over the years? In the morning, a panel of four CSJ Partners in Mission ~~who~~ shared how the CSJ Mission energizes and affects their lives, their families and those with whom they minister – and they shared their vision of how all of us together are planting seeds that will continue the CSJ Mission and Values into the future.

The Partners in Mission on the panel were: **Jennifer Tacheny**, Co-Director of Celeste Dream and CSJ Vocation Ministry, (employed by the CSJ membership department for 11 + years); **Brian Bruess**, executive vice president and chief operating officer of St. Catherine University (employed by the university for 20+ years); **Andrea Pearson Tandy**, Program Coordinator of the St. Joseph Worker Program (a member of the first St. Joseph Worker group in 2002 and employed by the program for 12+ years); and **Eric Celeste**, a member of the Friends of St. Joseph Community since its beginning whose ministry has included creating the website of the Grandmother's Circle and being in the Faith Formation Ministry at St. Catherine's for 10 years.

During the first part of their presentation the Panelists responded to two questions: "What does it mean to be a "Partner in Mission?" and "How does it energize my life?" Following are excerpts from their sharing:

**Jennifer:** "In showing up here together, as employee or volunteer, like sisters and consociates, we too are saying that our lives are grounded in and inspired by this great CSJ story and the on-going expression of the mission. I feel my 'calling' is to put seeds in the ground by telling women, men and children about the CSJ charism and mission, and then to nurture the seeds and help them to grow. When I shared the CSJ mission and values with students at Cretin Derham Hall High School recently, a young man said, "Oh, I could do that!" Many students at Cretin Derham see that there is room for them, a way for them to connect with the CSJ mission...."

**Brian:** "My work at St. Catherine's is no longer a job or career. My work is 'a way of 'being', of living the CSJ mission and values that have impacted my whole life, the lives of my family, and the lives of the young women we educate. I am inspired by how you have held yourselves together as a community."

**Andrea:** "I became a St. Joseph Worker in 2002. Today, there are 134 current or former St. Joseph Workers who continue to live out the mission and values we learned so powerfully during our year with the CSJ community. I am also a candidate to become a Consociate because I wanted to go deeper. When I ask others of our group why they don't become consociates, they say, "We don't have to become consociates, we already belong to the CSJ Community".

**Eric:** "I belong to the 'Friends of St. Joseph Community', a group that 'moves toward love of God and love of Neighbor' together. We continue our own ministries, creating opportunities to get to know each other, engaging prayerfully, in love and awe of what we are a part of – a collective energy that draws energy from seeing others drawing energy from mission. We also want in some way to continue the mission."

**Jennifer:** My work is here, but more fully, my **calling** is here: **grappling** with how the mission challenges me to live (as a mother, spouse, teacher, farmer, neighbor, participant in CSJ community), **navigating and imagining** with my colleagues and community members the possible expressions of the CSJ mission amidst current demographics and needs of the Church and world, and **inviting** others who are drawn to join in the CSJ conversation and experience. My family and I put seeds in this ground, and with community, we plan to nurture what grows and invite others to do the same.”

**Brian:** “Being connected to this great story, the great lineage of women and men finding ways to serve and being more than if we were alone.... You have found how to create sustainable change, and it becomes intergenerational as we integrate it into our students’ experience. Sustainability and generativity are important “.

**Andrea:** “What we have in our hearts is the same as you. For me there is a spiritual beauty in what I get from this community. There is a depth of spirit that is important to me right now. I want to be a part of the positive social change.”

**Eric:** “Often I feel as if I am not doing enough to sustain the mission into the future. I don’t quite share Brian’s confidence that it will sustain itself. Maybe it will and maybe it won’t, but always I feel I have a responsibility to help make that happen and it’s never enough. I really resonated with Sister Kathy’s statement, ‘This is not our work. This is the work of the Spirit.’ because I need to be reminded of that. It is not a matter of doing enough, it is just a matter of being present and saying ‘yes’ every now and then. Recently, the Friends were divvying up responsibilities, and I decided I would say, ‘I will do whatever you ask’. I think it’s important to just say ‘yes’ every now and then--that is enough, and if we say ‘yes’ and we do what is asked, Spirit will find a way... I heard that in this room... and that gives me hope for the future.”

Following are responses to the panelists by some who heard them:

**Marie Grossman, CSJ:** “I feel so much energy from this experience. At my age, I don’t know what I’m going to do with this energy, but I’m going to do something! I was thrilled by the Partners in Mission! These are all people who have worked in our ministries and they have absorbed our charism and mission, what we stand for, how we treat people. We don’t have to worry when we have people like that ... they will be the leaven. I was very, very encouraged! It’s like they say, “Something new is happening...Can we not see it?”

**Mary Lamski, CSJ:** “I heard many wonderful comments about the Community Assembly, especially the morning session with the partners in mission. One Sister said, “That was the best assembly I’ve ever been to!” What a grace it was for me, too!”

**Terry Casey, Consociate:** “Today was inspiring—the community is thriving in totally different ways we didn’t expect. It’s still alive! There is great hope for the future!”

**Helen Janssen, CSJ:** “When I entered the CSJ Community, I was number 1003. At present, I am very close to the top of the list of elderly CSJs. It was so encouraging to hear from individual members of the group of lay persons who are and will continue to live out and spread the charism and ministry of the CSJ Community here in the St. Paul, Minneapolis area and beyond. Now that I am nearing my entrance into the heavenly kingdom, I know that I can approach with much peace. This is because I know our CSJ charism is being carried on to many of the people that we have ministered to.”

**Peg Schwendeman:** I was really inspired by how much the mission lives in these partners and I think there are so many partners out there! There are those that are associated with the community or have been in former ministries that the community started. All those are, or have been Partners in Mission and I see in their commitment the desire to live that out. That is the future, I think, of CSJ St. Paul.”

**Kathy Ryan, CSJ:** “I am moved by each of you. This has not been our work—This has been the work of the Spirit—We are part of it as it evolves but it is the work of the Spirit, and we’re part of it.”

**Jill Underdahl:** I appreciate the panelists’ thought and care about sustainable change because it is something I think about a lot, too. In our work, Jennifer and I often say this mantra: "Life begets life." As we think about interfacing more as Sisters, Consociates, and Partners in Mission in the Community Assembly, I wonder how we will mutually benefit each other: What will the impact be on the future of religious life, the Consocium and Partners in Mission?”

During the afternoon, Assembly participants listened to the plan for the selection of members for the Relationship and Association and the Ministry Commissions. Representatives from the group planning the processes asked sisters and consociates to watch for their letter of invitation to nominate themselves and for Sisters to nominate another Sister, and Consociates to nominate another Consociate to the Commissions and to send their reply by the date on the letter. The selection of members for the two Commissions continues in March, at the Consociate and Sister Assemblies and by mail-in ballot.

Assembly participants also discussed a proposal for expanding participation in the Community Assembly. They accepted the following statements:

The 2016 – 2017 Community Assembly participants will be Sisters, Consociates, Candidates, and Commission members.

In addition, each of the three Community Assembly Commissions (Justice Commission, Ministry Commission, and Relationship and Association Commission) may invite up to five people to a particular Community Assembly”.

The group generally agreed on the concept of including other people to participate in future Community Assemblies and discussed several ways to invite them. There was not enough time to reach a decision on the invitation process. This will be discussed further at Community Assemblies in the fall of 2016.