

Wake Up the World! Celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life

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An Invitation: In anticipation of the Year of Consecrated Life, I was invited to consider three questions that flow from Pope Francis' calls to us. The first and second questions come from Pope Francis' wellknown challenge to us to Wake up the World!

- 1: From what must the world awaken? (Wake up from what?)
- 2: What must the world awaken to? (Wake up to what?)

The third question comes from the two foci, "rejoice" and "console," in *Rejoice!*, the booklet based on Pope Francis' words to religious offered by The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

- 3: How shall you offer your charism very particularly this year to console and to rejoice?

An Invitation to YOU: The call is to everyone living consecrated life, to look at the world around us, consider the gift of charism and vocation we each received for the church and world, and consider how we may offer it in a particular way during this Year of Consecrated Life. I offer here some fruits of prayer, reflection and conversation.

I invite you to reflect on these questions, both personally and communally. Consider having this conversation with your local and larger communities and across congregations. Pope Francis' call is to all of us to further discern the signs of these times as we live the joy of the Gospel. See and hear what invites you, your local communities and your congregation. Finally, consider how you might share your responses. Where might you offer your responses as a way of proclaiming God's Good News?

"Wake Up the World!" From what?

To wake up the world in light of our call to prophecy is quite powerful. Pope Francis reminds us that "Evangelical radicalness is not only for religious: it is demanded of all. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. It is this witness that I expect of you. Religious should be men and women who are able to wake the world up." Prophets hear the Word of God and speak it. Prophets both name how we have gone astray from God's vision of a world of justice and peace and remind us of God's vision, to what God invites us.

Knowing that the call to *Wake Up!* is for ourselves as well as for the world, there are three places where I hear a call to wake up the world. The first two are responses to reality around us that embody two extremes: paralysis and relentless activity. When we see so much vulnerability and devastation in the world today, from climate change to smoldering conflicts and outright wars, fear and despair can take root in us and paralyze us, in mind and in body. If I think I am solely responsible for the world around me, I indeed should be paralyzed by my delusion, for I have forgotten who I am and who God is and that God is intimately in all.

I can also be paralyzed when what I see in front of me has no space for perspective or reflection. Imagine looking at a picture so closely that there is only an inch between your nose and the picture. This would set off an alarm at any museum. If we did this with people we meet, they would also understandably back off! We cannot see well at this point. I can't see borders or edges of possibility in this space; there is no room for God's movements between what I see and me. If I don't back up a bit in order to really see, I can think I have no impact, and thus demean my capabilities and God's movements. Beyond paralysis, and between the spaces, there is hope.

The other extreme is relentless, even frenetic, activity. When we have no end to activity, we run the peril of missing what is in front of us. We run the same route again and again but see no more than the first time. In fact, we see less each time because we think we know what is here, and now we are looking for the next place, often with greater speed because we sense we have no time. Janet Ruffing, RSM, spoke about this years ago as the 'demon of busyness', but I think it can be ever more pernicious and dangerous today.

Such relentless activity can lead to a mentality that more bombing, more repetition of the same 'this is the law, this is the truth' will have staying power and convince people. This is the opposite of thoughtful activity. Depth is lacking, a depth which becomes visible if we look again with eyes open to what we cannot yet see. To this point Adolfo Nicolas, SJ, speaks of a globalization of superficiality. We miss what is underneath so much activity, which can be fear or despair. Here again hope is necessary. Christian hope is rooted in the real yet leaves room for change and creativity because God is in such activity. Hope finds us when we are reflective, seeking to act as God acts, seeking to love as God loves. Relentless activity and the superficiality it endorses are dissipated by attentiveness. Advent attentive waiting, anticipating, is an image of such hope.

Third, we must *Wake Up* from the illusion that people can live on insulated islands of assistance. We forget that we are "one world". The Ebola crisis is a living lesson of this. The virus is virulent, deadly, yes, and no place is exempt from the virus, including the United States. Yet our response has been quite mixed, forgetful that the way to prevent the virus from reaching people in the United States is to prevent the virus from reaching more people everywhere, including in highly hit regions in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. Physician and global justice advocate Paul Farmer reminds us that 90% of people infected with the virus should be able to survive, as in the United States. That is not happening yet, for this requires structures, staff, and supplies; these have been slow to arrive where most needed. Notions of insulated islands of assistance tempt us to forget our common humanity. In their wonderful book *In the Company of the Poor*, Gustavo Gutierrez, OP and Paul Farmer remind us that there really is

no “first” or “second” or “third” or “fourth” world but only “one world.” Or, as one of my students from Togo reminds us, “We all bleed red.”

“Wake Up the World!” To what?

I am grateful that the prophets not only name where we are far from God’s vision but also offer a sense of God’s vision. As religious today I sense we are being called to wake up the world to three calls: *encuentro*/encounter; religious imagination and creativity; communities of communion.

We are called to an encounter. An encounter signifies depth rather than a superficial meeting. This Year of Consecrated Life is calling us all to greater depth, to *encuentro*. The *encuentro* is first with God. Pope Francis says several times early in *Evangelii Gaudium* that we are invited to an encounter with Jesus. “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least openness to letting him encounter them.” The encounter is with Jesus, who takes us as we are. Ours is a God who can only love, whose name is Love. *Encuentro* is our call, rooted in our baptism with all the people of God. We are called to wake up the world to a God who is Love and who creates us as love and for love. The encounter is with us as we are, with our wounds, vulnerabilities and hurts (“what I have done and what I have failed to do”) as well as with our hopes, dreams and longings (“love one another as I have loved you,” “truth and mercy will meet, justice and peace will kiss”). It is this relationship, this encounter, that grounds and nourishes us so that we can work toward the transformation of systems and structures that are unjust as well as open ourselves to God’s transformation in us.

Encuentro is also with one another. Brazil is where I first realized the power of an *encuentro*. I was there for an *encuentro* with fifteen other sisters from my community. Two of us were from the United States and the rest were from Latin America. The language we used for a month was Spanish. My Spanish might be mercifully described as ‘upper beginner’. How can someone with only basic Spanish have an encounter? By seeing. By listening to words and beyond the words, to the faces and tone of voice. Because the other also chooses encounter. How different life looks when we encounter!

In Brazil, encounters happened for me in triads, when each person looked at the other speaking; this meant that others spoke slowly enough for me to understand and waited when I needed help from Google Translate or filled out my lacunae with hand and face gestures! At the end of the first two weeks, I could look at my sisters and realize I knew something of what mattered much to each. Would I know more if I could have understood more and spoken better? Certainly. However, I believe I listened and heard differently, and what was in our hearts came forth because we were committed to being with one another and hearing and understanding one another in the circumstances we were in.

Opening ourselves to encounter, we awaken to the potential of community, and here we wake up the world to the second call: to create communities of communion. Rooted in God and open to encounter with our neighbor, we are better able to see the ‘oneness’ that we are in God, even amid great diversity. We come to see that not only are all welcome – all are necessary. The call is to find ways to live our common global humanity.

This does not mean creating community will be easy, only that it is necessary. Part of the awakening is realizing there is something deeply rooted in our humanity that connects us. One of our Brazilian sisters has spent over 30 years in the Amazon with the Myky people. She shared that the Myky language has no word for 'live' (*vivir*). The only word they have is *convivir* – to live together. We can only live if we live together.

As we know, while this is essential, it is not easy. At a conference and pilgrimage focused on Janet Erskine Stuart, RSCJ, this past summer in England, I met Phil (Philomena) Tiernen, one of our Australian sisters. She was amazing. In the short span of ten days with her I experienced *encuentro*. She not only wanted to get to know me, and I her, but she also called forth the best in me. She wanted to stay in touch and continue our religious life conversations. Three weeks later she was on the plane shot down by a missile over Ukraine. Phil and I had connected, and at depth, and now she was calling me to connect with a land and people I knew little about. My life and that of the people of Ukraine and Russia are now inextricably linked. I am also now linked with all the people on that plane and their loves. I don't yet know what to do with that, and Advent invites attentive waiting even as I am about daily life. I do, however, know that at liturgy the Sunday after she died, I heard "This is my body, this is my blood, given for you" differently. I heard Phil also saying to me and to all of us, "This is my body, this is my blood, given in love." She is calling me to read these signs and these times with the gospel of love. I daily pray to be open(ed).

Third, we are called to wake up the world with our religious imagination and creativity. We can together create the world God longs for, the world we long for. We are invited to 'possibilitize.' Religious imagination, rooted in God and fostered in communities of hope, can create change on a global scale. John Paul Lederach, Philip Keane, SS, and others remind us of the power of our Christian imagination for creating new ways of seeing one another and relating to one another. What might happen if, as Lederach suggests, we considered conflicts as paradoxes instead of polarities, thus inviting more possibilities rather than erecting walls? Hope and imagination are intimately connected, and as Christians, our hope is in our God. From this horizon we see transformation is possible and that we can risk love again and again because we are loved.

Rejoice and Console

We are now invited to wonder. 'Wonder' is a powerful part of the moral imagination because here you open yourself to possibilities. Creativity is invited. When a group or person begins pondering with "I wonder...", much is possible. I invite you to wonder: How shall we offer our charism to console and to rejoice? Within this Year of Consecrated Life, how might we console? How might we offer our charism toward rejoicing? What might this look like in my life? in my community? Within my congregation?

What follows are examples of how we might console and how we might rejoice through the offering of charism. Since charism is a gift of the Spirit for the Church and world today, the invitation is to consider how we might participate in bringing forth God's reign of love and peace in the world today through the gift of our charisms. I offer some examples from my own charism.

While there are many ways to 'wonder' through my charism, I chose some related sections from the Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart for some direction as I pondered and wondered. I invite you to do the same with your community documents.

Console: How shall we offer our charism to console?

The RSCJ mission is to make known the revelation of God's love, whose source and symbol is for us the Heart of Christ. Our charism thus calls us to discover and reveal God's love and to be the heart of Christ in the world today. So, I wonder, how might we console? Our Constitutions say:

The pierced heart of Jesus opens our being to the depths of God and to the anguish of humankind. Jesus draws us into His movement of adoration of the Father and love for all, especially those who are poor (#8).

Two calls emerge here.

Name what we see. The prophets heard God's cries and the cries of God's people. We must listen, hear, and make known and heard the cries of our wounded humanity and wounded earth.

We must name the suffering. Too often people suffer in silence or their cries are not heard where they must be heard. Lament is part of our Judeo-Christian tradition. To lament, naming what must not be, is possible because we are people of hope. We lament because we believe so much more is possible. If we had no hope we would simply despair. We lament because we hope.

Love is not in the abstract but in the particular, ... so love will lead us to make common cause with the poor. How might we love like this? By listening attentively, allowing space for encounters. Solidarity means that the joys and hopes, the cries and anguish of my brothers and sisters are mine as well. My humanity is demeaned or lifted up when that of another is demeaned or lifted up. Phil Tiernen's death by missile is calling me to listen a lot. I lament all the people involved in this war: the people of Ukraine and Russia immersed in war, creating war missiles, shooting and being shot at. Violence and conflict are also present in my city. I sense Phil Tiernen's death is, if we allow it, a powerful call to my community to consider conflict, violence, forgiveness and reconciliation. How do we reveal God's love in places of conflict and violence?

A third call comes from paragraph #32 in our Constitutions:

We want to be discerning communities, living in awareness and sensitivity to the Spirit. This attitude makes us responsive, in our mission, to the sufferings and aspirations of our sisters and brothers. It helps us to respond better to the calls of God in the world around us, and it enlightens us to make choices more true to the spirit of the Gospel.

I wonder: Have we recently assessed all of our present ministries in light of the unmet needs of our day? Doing so may affirm and confirm where we are today and perhaps also open us up to other present needs. One congregation I worked with recently heard a call to discern where the Spirit was leading them in light of their charism of reconciliation. With courage and confidence in God's call to them, they discerned to continue in some ministry places, and in some places, they blessed those who work

alongside them and commissioned them to continue to offer the charism there as the province moved to new places, to new borders of violence.

I personally may be called to tithe my time differently. Not more than a few miles from my relatively serene street are neighborhoods with a lot of gun and gang violence, and the young are particularly vulnerable to both. What current ministries are in this area where I might participate and offer witness? Are some groups already in ministry here and where I may tithe? Or is this a call to be creative?

Rejoice: How shall we offer our charism to Rejoice?

Our Constitutions states:

The community takes to heart the need to create a climate which favors experience of God, sharing among ourselves and with others (#26).

Offer invitations and opportunities for prayer as a way of opening and offering of our very lives

Since this Year of Consecrated Life is also a jubilee year celebrating 50 years since Vatican II, I wonder if we would find a way to offer our Sacred Heart extended family further opportunities for retreat, for steeping in our God and common charism? This could then be extended by all to an even wider community, welcoming all. The opportunities would be a jubilee gift.

When we share like this, we share the gifts God gives us, and this leads to rejoicing in all that our God does in our lives. All can do this, from the youngest to the eldest. One of our eldest sisters recently offered us "Praying at 93," a beautiful, wide-visioned, honest, global, personal witness. Here are two snapshots from her gift to us:

It is like breathing – something I do without knowing it, though I know when I stop! I breathe in harmony with God's own breathing over our amazing planet – so lovely we are dumbstruck at times. At other times I assert my creaturehood and use the Psalmist's words to cry 'Oh God, my God, how wonderful is your Name over all the earth.' And I know in doing so that God listens to my voice. That sense of God's personal involvement in my prayer is something relatively new. Silent praise wells up without my knowing how, and I get lost in the mystery, as an astronaut in outer space.

Chesterton once said that if a thing is worth doing it is worth doing badly. I often think of that when I sit down to pray. My mind and imagination keep darting about even as I hear the Spirit say, 'Be still and know that I am God.' Of late, instead of trying to center down, I follow the dance and find it always leads me to some corner of the real world where God is waiting: a barracks in Afghanistan where a soldier grapples with a demon saying, 'End it all,' or a room on my corridor where someone tries to remember the way to the dining room.

We are drawn and attracted to prayer, and sharing this intimate relationship, even briefly, invites us to greater depths. That is true whether we are 23 or 93.

Value diversity...by sharing our narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation as well as the different gifts among us.

A second possibility for rejoicing came forth as I read,

“Rooted in him, through contemplation, we wish to be women who create communion”(#6). I wondered how we might be women and men who create communion when I came upon some advice:

Through our mutual trust, the sharing of our prayer and life experiences, through our love and loyalty towards one another, we come to find real joy in living together, welcoming our gifts and our differences of culture and mentality. Our desire to live in mutual love helps us to overcome our egoism and to work through our moments of tension, open to forgiveness and reconciliation (#31).

Part of rejoicing is sharing when we overcome challenges. I wonder what difference it would make to share stories of community and persons working through conflicts? Sometimes they seem so large when we think we are the only ones who struggle. When we celebrate the differences and the conflicts we worked through we can witness to efforts of peace.

Years ago I was in the midst of a conflict that I couldn't seem to get beyond and at one point I just figured that this is how life is and sometimes there are people with whom we just don't get along. I was willing to 'settle' for this. Then I realized that I had a very mistaken assumption (blind spot): I was looking for the person to be in my image and likeness. I forgot that people are really made in God's image and likeness! The diversity is God's diversity. Of course there will be conflicts in the midst of such diversity. Yet how I see the other speaks of where this leads. This realization changed my relationship with the person and we have since worked together.

Creating communities of communion does not guarantee peace, but it is a step toward it. Valuing the other as God's beloved and seeing diversity as gift, not a difference to be eliminated, changes how we see ourselves and one another. Death can and does happen to those who seek to participate in building God's reign, God's way in all. Yet we know that death is not the end; we are resurrection people. Such is the Paschal Mystery that awakens in us anytime we choose to stand alongside people who are oppressed, marginalized, treated as anything less than a gift of God's wonderful creativity. As we look around us, we see there are still people on crosses today. Our call is to awaken the world to the people on the crosses and work to stop such needless suffering. Our lives must witness this; we participate in waking up the world because we ourselves are awakened by God's grace.

Live radical availability/*disponibilidad*

Our province recently completed a series of prayer and dialogue gatherings. At one, a sister said that after praying with our new document on lifelong formation, she felt like she had 'entered again'. A vowed religious for over 50 years, she found herself committing again and even wrote to the provincial team to offer her availability for whatever and wherever she might be needed.

The same is true for students in our school in New York City, who in math class started designing prosthetic hands and using a 3-D printer to create them for other young people. They found an unmet need and are going at it, hands and all.

I too am invited to radical availability, a *Suscipe* to Jesus lived out through my charism in religious life and for the Church and world.

These are all hope-filled invitations, looking at the world around us and offering our charism to be the love of Christ in the world today. Our success is not the point, but our effort is. God does the transforming – of us and of our world. We seek to participate – with love, to wake up the world, to console and rejoice.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you see from which we need to wake up?
2. What do you sense we need to wake up the world to?
3. A. How shall you offer your charism to console, to rejoice?
B. How might your congregation, with the gift of your charism, console and rejoice, in this Year of Consecrated Life?