

## CRC MISSION

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. The mission of the CRC is to encourage its members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. The CRC supports its members in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for audacious ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.

September 2010

## *In this issue:*



### **Called to Release God's Energy of Love in the Service of Life**

Resonating the call of the 2010 CRC General Assembly, President Mary Finlayson, RSCJ, launches a reflection on the urgency to live in interdependence with each other and with all creation. How can we support one another as women and men religious, in the face of the challenges of today's world? What choices can we make together so that our compassion will transform the world?

3



### **Where Lies the Pathway Ahead?**

At a time where we enter into the dream of a new frontier of healed relations between earth and human, faith and earth, Linda Gregg, CSJ, and Mary Rowell, CSJ, propose a pathway for the possible role of consecrated life in the public debate on the integrity of creation.

4



### **New Wineskins**

Stéphanie Romiti, CSJ, offers a few reflections on the welcoming of "older" newer members in religious communities. The arrival of candidates rich in experience and accustomed to other ways of doing things leads to inevitable change. New wine requires new wineskins.

6



### **Solidarity with Southern Sudan: Canadian Participation**

An interview with Yvonne Pothier, sc, who contributes to the *Solidarity with Southern Sudan* movement. This group is an international initiative of religious congregations. Currently, 140 religious institutes are participating in the project with 23 members living in four communities in Southern Sudan.

8



### **Brother André: A Friend, a Brother, a Saint**

We already know of Brother André's great devotion to Saint Joseph, the construction of the Oratory, his gift of healing, his humble work as a porter. Is there something new to add? With this question in mind, Francine Cabana met with Father Jean-Guy Vincent, csc.

10

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## News in Brief

### The 2010 CRC General Assembly Declaration

#### Preamble

Energised by the theme *Seize for God the Energies of Love: Choose to Live the Vowed Life*, two hundred and eighty-four members of the Canadian Religious Conference met in General Assembly in Montreal from May 27 to 31, 2010. The Assembly strongly re-affirmed that it is in God's love that religious find the energy to live the vows within the context of universal solidarity and of the new cosmology which highlights the interdependence of all life.

At this critical juncture in the history of the universe, *the future at once holds great peril and great promise* (The Earth Charter). All choices made today have a direct impact on tomorrow's world. Our Christian faith in the incarnation urges us to create a future marked by gospel values. We believe that our religious vows free us to make a covenant of cooperation (Elaine Prevallet) with all of creation.

#### Declaration

Strengthened by the wisdom of the past and the dynamism of younger generations, we strive to read the signs of the times in new and prophetic ways. We will continue to think, to learn, to change. We will look for audacious ways of interpreting our faith and our life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe. We will go forward.

*We can and will be pathfinders and bridges* (E.P.). The Holy Spirit, *the Great Connector* (E.P.), leads us on paths of dialogue and collaboration. It is our role as leaders to hold that vision, to pave the way so that our communities will have the strength and freedom to live it in hope.

### The CRC Is Moving

On **November 9, 2010**, the CRC will be moving its head office to the Dominican convent. Our offices will be located on the 3rd floor. Please take note of our new mailing address:

**Canadian Religious Conference  
2715 Côte Saint Catherine Road  
Montreal (Quebec)  
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The telephone number and email address will remain unchanged. Thank you for passing this information along to the members of your congregation and networks.



# Called to Release God's Energy of Love in the Service of Life

When something beautiful touches me deeply or something provocative catches my attention, I often see and hear resonances of that experience repeatedly in other contexts. Have you had those echo experiences? This summer at every turn I heard echoes of the interdependence of all creation and the one energy, God's love, the source of all life and the hope for transforming the world.

At our CRC General Assembly in May 2010, we explored how, as religious, we are called to release God's energy of love in the service of life; how our vows and faith impel us to live radical compassion and hope. Judy Cannato's new book which I highly recommend, *Field of Compassion – How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life* (Sorin Books, Notre Dame, IN, 2010) explores, in light of morphogenic field theory, how we can create, by intention and action, a field of love and compassion which is transformative for all of creation. How are we, as Canadian religious and in being part of the one energy of Love, transforming the cosmos by our compassion, our love?

## The Urgent Call to Live Our Interdependence

In July I participated in a forum called *Spirituality in a Globalized World*. One of the presenters referred to the concept of *ubuntu*, an African philosophy referred to by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, among others, which promotes unity and interdependence by saying *I am because we are and we are because I am*. What makes us human is our belonging together. The implications for living this philosophy are myriad and again urgently call us to live our interdependence in this suffering world. The media take us right into the midst of the devastation and our hearts respond compassionately, but individually we might feel helpless and overwhelmed. What can I do?

At that same forum Dr. Paul Farmer, founder of *Partners in Health* spoke on living the corporate works of mercy, in his case as a medical doctor serving in Haiti, in Peru, in Russia and beyond. It was an inspiring talk and Tracy Kidder's book *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World* (Random House, New York, 2004) outlines the far-reaching effects of one who lives *ubuntu*, whose life and love are transforming the world by radical self-giving in relationship and service.

As CRC, one body, a conduit for the creative energy of Love, how do we live our interdependence with each other and with all creation? How do we support one another as religious facing the challenges of today's world? What choices can we make together so that our compassion will transform the world?

From everything I witnessed this summer, I am more confirmed in the belief that:

*"Love by its nature transforms. When we allow love in, we are transformed, and the love that we become then manifests in the world. When we resonate with love, when we are living, breathing vibrations of love energy, we contribute to the Field of Compassion, the new consciousness that is gracing the world."* (Field of Compassion, p.172)

Mary Finlayson, RSCJ  
CRC President

# WHERE LIES THE PATHWAY AHEAD?

## A Role for Vowed Religious in the Public Discourse on the Integrity of Creation

Elaine Prevallet, SL, has illuminated new horizons which beckon us to a more inclusive and a yet more challenging way of living out religious life in the Church and the world.<sup>1</sup> Religious, together with others, are becoming more conscious of the reality that we are immersed in a world of overwhelming wonder as we find ourselves and all beings within a story of sacred relation: a reality of utter interdependence within creation. Yet we also find stories of the death and destruction that human culture has wrought upon the life systems of earth.

Thomas Berry and many others have seen this time as a critical juncture for the human family.<sup>2</sup> Berry has stated that our *“human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish.”*<sup>3</sup> As religious, how then shall we live? What might be our particular contribution in light of our reality? Where lies the pathway?

### PRIMORDIAL PRINCIPLES

We are called to be reconcilers and healers in a fragmented world, a world that continues to bear the scars of an entrenched duality between sacred and secular, human and nature, faith and science. We are called to sense a rhythm, a cadence of life which we can feel in and around us. It is a rhythm of grace and love found in the magnificence and life of the natural world and in the intrinsic principles of the Universe.

With mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry has articulated **three evident and primordial principles** which undergird the unfolding of our universe. These are differentiation, auto-poiesis (subjectivity) and communion.<sup>4</sup> In a further correlation, Berry has traced connections between the Christian understanding of the Trinity, source of human identity and the foundation of a Christian ethic, and the three primordial principles.<sup>5</sup>

Here we can only begin briefly to open the doorway to reflect on these principles in terms of our call as religious today. These reflections may reveal potent graces and approaches to guide us as we discern our role in the discourse on the integrity of creation.

**Differentiation** underlies the whole creative impulse of God showering forth the intense energy of difference and discovery in plant, animal, human, race, culture and religion. As Berry understands it, the principle of differentiation is integral to an evolutionary story and faith which is open to new possibilities of interconnection and diversity. We cannot know all that will be but we can learn to follow the grace of new beginnings always arising from the creative impulse of love's being.

As women and men religious today we can be attentive to the call this new horizon brings to us. In a time of radical transformation in which many fear the questions, do we trust the Spirit enough to stand with those who fear, to be for others, “a home in crisis”?

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Open to the challenges of differentiation, do we recognize and honour life and beauty in diversity, in our world, in our Church, in our own communities? If we do, then we could perhaps become the healers and reconcilers to which these times call us in a particular manner. For the integrity of creation, will we come to the table of discourse respecting our differences, by virtue of our varied charisms, ready to be gift for and gifted by others?

**Autopoiesis** is the *incarnational* aspect of our faith. Jesus reveals this pathway most clearly in our faith's history. It is the profound gift of commitment to love's presence and life in our world. It bears the truth of living with integrity in concert with the rhythms of our faith and universe. In truth they are one and this we will know more deeply as we live into the meaning and challenge of this principle. Every aspect of creation is imbued with this sense of interior being, calling us to deep reverence for all earth and cosmos.

Can I follow this call of interiority and integrity with all beings I meet today? What, in particular, does my vowed life mean in the light of such new understandings? Am I able to reverence its particularity as a call to love today, for tomorrow?

**Communion** reveals the urgent longing of love present in every moment of creation from the revelations of the rainforest community and ecosystem to the human desire for community and connection. Every moment bears the revelation of this gift. Nothing exists in isolation. How often, in speaking of religious life do we refer to our common life or, in articulating our vows, to *common good* or a *community of goods*?

Perhaps then, as religious, we are privileged to witness to a principle of communion in a world of abstract individualism, so often characterized by loneliness, dualism and separation. Whatever our configuration of community living may be, if lived well, it can become a prophetic witness to inter-relationship, source of love and support embodied in the gift of God and the foundational principles of the Universe. Our "common and vowed life" by its very nature and practice profoundly expresses responsibility for creation and the reality of a gift-economy in which all earth's commons are to be shared.

These are some of the critical contours of the faith practice of religious as we enter into the dream of a new frontier of healed relations between earth and human, faith and earth. It is only the small beginning of a great journey the beckons our hearts to follow.

Linda Gregg, *csj*

Mary Rowell, *csj*

<sup>1</sup> Elaine M. Prevallet, *Religious Vows: Energies of Life for Life*, in CRC General Assembly (Montreal, Quebec: Canadian Religious Conference, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Dunn and Anne Lonergan, eds., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992; Reprint, Third), page 39.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), pages 71-79.

<sup>5</sup> Dunn and Lonergan, eds., pages 15-16.

## NEW WINESKINS

At the National Association of Vocation and Formation Directors (NAVFD) conference in March, newer members from religious congregations across Canada made a presentation reflecting some of our common experiences. The group consisted of sisters, brothers and priests. It is important to note that the majority of those around that table are living religious life as a second vocation, having been married, religious in other congregations, or having lived the single life for a number of years. It is from this perspective of religious life as a second vocation for older newer members that I will share these reflections.

The image that came to mind when I first began to pray about this article was that of new wine needing new wineskins. Matthew's gospel (9:17) says:

*"Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined... They put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."*

The process for making quality wine has not changed much in past centuries. So, too, religious congregations have developed and maintained quality formation programs, fostering a deepening personal and collective spirituality, studying the vows, as well as the specific charisms and histories of each group. The founding circumstances and lived experiences of the members over the years provide a unique flavour for each of these congregations today.

### Openness to Inevitable Change: A Blessing

Historically, the majority of those who joined religious life did so at a young age, having entered during or shortly after high school. As such they brought with them experiences from their individual family upbringing but oftentimes had limited experiences outside of their homes.

Today, *older newer members* have had several years of work experience, many of whom have held positions demanding considerable responsibility, often juggling more than one job at a time. Besides work experience, we have often owned homes, managed finances, cared for family members or friends, nurtured our spiritual lives, and been involved in ministries in our parishes and throughout the community. In a sense, we've come full circle in that many of our founders also brought years of experience to this new life to which they were called.

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Accepting *older newer members* today means that congregations need to open themselves to the inevitable change that will happen when they receive candidates who bring this wealth of experience and often very different ways of doing things. In other words, we need to provide new wineskins for this new wine. That is not to say that congregations are to throw out the tried and true. As I mentioned earlier, the basics for making quality wine have not changed over the centuries!

Some of the greatest blessings occur when we are open to each other and learn from one another without judgment. As someone said to me recently, *"when we think we know what's best, we limit the possibilities that can happen."*

In no way are we trying to place sole responsibility for adapting onto the established members of the congregations to which we belong. As newer members, we too have to change and grow. The verse that precedes the one quoted above says that *"no one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse."* The "new cloth" must be broken in and made to fit, so to speak, just as the grapes must be gently crushed to release the juice before the fermentation can begin.

So, too, newer members need to be formed in the charism, spirituality, history – essentially in the lived experience – of each congregation. In addition, we need to shift from living often autonomous lives to living interdependently in community. And of course, we too must be open to receive the wisdom stories of those with whom we now share life.

### Delighting in the Nuances of the New

Interestingly in our sharing, one thing that came out frequently as a common experience is the example and acceptance of some of our most senior members. Not only do many of them exemplify the heart of religious life in our congregations, they are often the most open to the newness and change that newer members bring.

I hope these thoughts challenge all of us to be open to the inevitable newness and change that come from being and receiving newer members, especially *older newer members*, into our congregations today. No one knows what the future will bring. Let us go forward together and face it with hope, savouring the richness of the well-aged wine and delighting in the nuances of the new!

Stephanie Romiti, CSJ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Romiti, CSJ, is a Sister of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie who professed temporary vows in 2008. She was a member of another congregation for 18 years; then lived as a single woman for over 8 years before returning to religious life. She earned a Master's degree from Trinity College (now known as Trinity Washington University) in Washington, DC. She is an educator by profession, currently teaching kindergarten in Sault Ste. Marie, as well as working in the area of adult spirituality. Nature photography is one of her many passions.

## SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTHERN SUDAN: CANADIAN PARTICIPATION



**Seated, left to right:** Br. Denis Loft, FSC; Fr. Callistus Joseph, CMF; S. Antonine Meleady, Holy Faith Sister; S. Yvonne Pothier, SC.  
**Standing:** S. Barbara Paleczny, SSND, and S. Luz Enith Galarza, Sister of St. Philip Neri.

### WHAT IS SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTHERN SUDAN?

Solidarity with Southern Sudan (SSS) is an initiative of religious congregations throughout the world who are members of the Union of International Superiors General (UISG/USG) under the direction of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference. Inspired by the 2004 Rome Congress on Consecrated Life (*Passion for Christ Passion for Humanity*), SSS is a collaborative venture on the part of congregations of women and men religious who commit to support in prayer, give financial assistance and/or provide volunteer personnel to help the Sudanese reconstruct their society following years of civil wars.

### WHAT HAS BEEN CANADA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAM TO DATE?

SSS personnel first arrived in Southern Sudan in 2008. Presently, 140 religious congregations are participating in the SSS projects; 23 members are now in Sudan. This includes 18 women and 5 men from 12 different congregations and 13 different nationalities who live in four communities located in Juba, Wau, Malakal and Riimenze. S. Barbara Paleczny, SSND, is the only Canadian sister now in Sudan while six Canadian congregations are among those contributing financially to the projects.

A recent communication from the SSS indicates that it is currently looking for two professional studies teachers, one English teacher, one nurse tutor and one agricultural expert to direct the SSS agricultural project in Riimenze. Financial contributions from congregations or other donors to support the volunteers would be greatly appreciated.

## HOW I CAME TO BE INTERESTED IN SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTHERN SUDAN?

For the last ten years, my ministry has been refugee sponsorship for the Archdiocese of Halifax. This contact with newcomers to our city evoked within me and nurtured a desire to visit some of the countries from which they came. Thus, in January, 2010, I went to Africa and visited in Nairobi (Kenya), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), and Juba (Southern Sudan) staying two weeks in each country. Before leaving, my congregational leader, S. Donna Geernaert, shared with me a brochure about SSS and I subsequently contacted SSS Executive Director, S. Pat Murray, *IBVM*, in Rome, inquiring about the possibility of meeting or staying with an SSS group in Juba. As a result of this communication, I benefited greatly from the friendly and gracious hospitality of two SSS groups.

I had accommodations with the Comboni Missionary Sisters but spent the daytime with the SSS group in Juba (see photo) and observed the four religious who were teaching English to teachers there. In the Yambio Diocese, I stayed with another SSS group of four in Riimenze and observed some of their classes in Yambio and in Nzara. With this group, I visited a refugee camp of Congolese people where the sisters also minister.

Being an educator, I was moved by the great need for education in Southern Sudan. Currently, the statistics are grim; illiteracy is around 85% and only 25% of children attend elementary school. To compound the situation, only 6% of teachers are certified. The establishment of a Teacher Training Institute run by qualified personnel is an acute need and is being established by SSS in Malakal with centres in different dioceses.

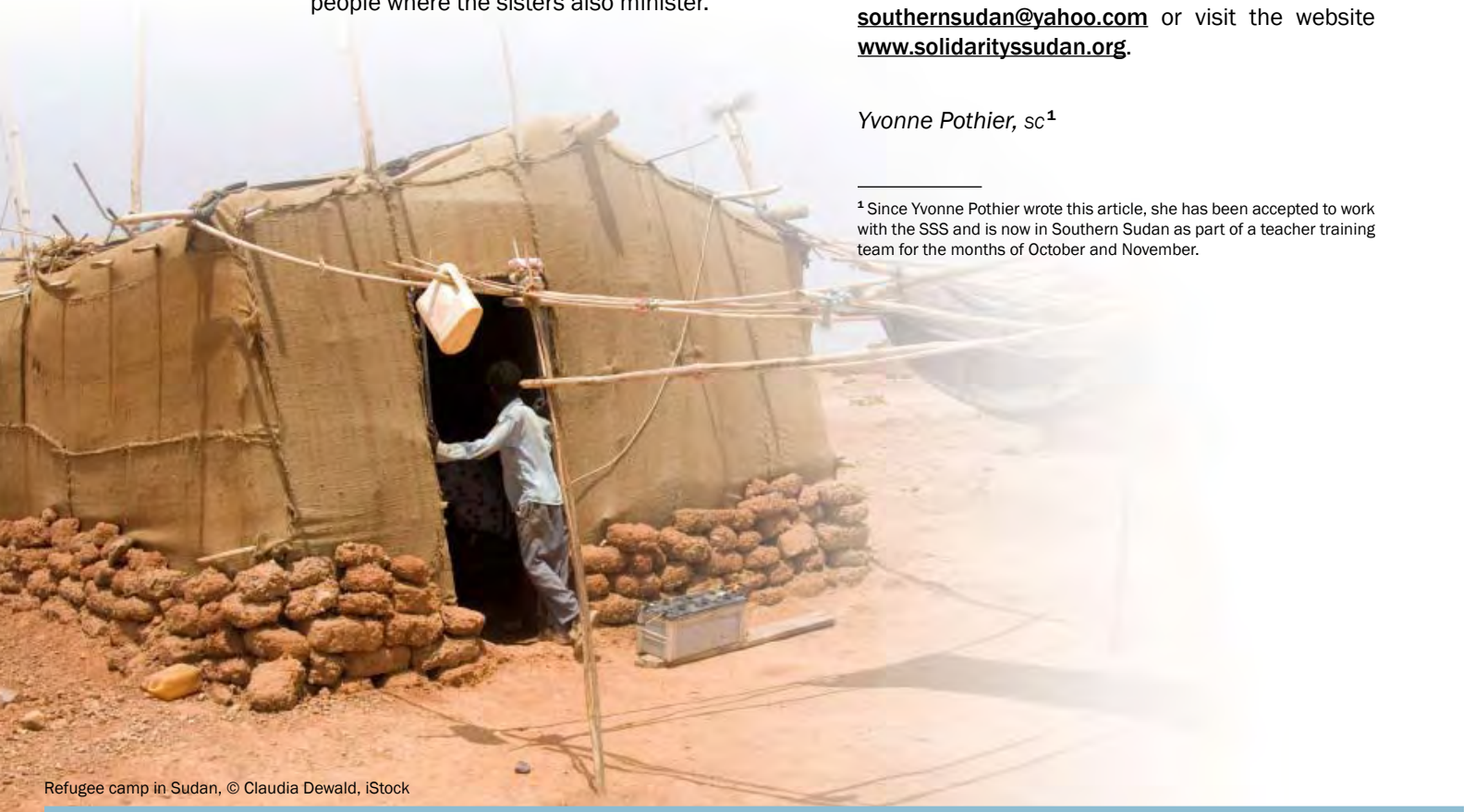
The health care needs are also huge. There is only one doctor for 100 000 people and the need for trained medical personnel is critical. Statistics show that nearly 25% of children less than 5 years die and that less than 25% of the population has access to safe water. SSS recently opened a Health Training Center in Wau where the first ever State Registered Nursing course is being offered.

A recent development is that S. Cathy Arata, *SSND*, is developing projects in Pastoral Ministry for the SSS.

I invite you to think about how you or your congregation can assist SSS in its projects. For more information about SSS, you may e-mail [solidarity.southernsudan@yahoo.com](mailto:solidarity.southernsudan@yahoo.com) or visit the website [www.solidarityssudan.org](http://www.solidarityssudan.org).

Yvonne Pothier, *sc*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since Yvonne Pothier wrote this article, she has been accepted to work with the SSS and is now in Southern Sudan as part of a teacher training team for the months of October and November.



# BROTHER ANDRÉ

## *A Friend, a Brother, a Saint*

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, Brother André was canonized in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI. Then on October 30<sup>th</sup>, people from all over Quebec, Canada, the United States and even further gathered at the Olympic Stadium in Montreal to celebrate the event. We already know of Brother André's great devotion to St. Joseph, his construction of the Oratory, his gift of healing and his humble work as a door-keeper. What else can we add to this? It is with this question in mind that I met with Father Jean-Guy Vincent, CSC, who agreed to reflect with me at length on the life and personality of Brother André.



### **The Choice of the Congregation of the Holy Cross**

When it becomes clear to young Alfred Bessette that he wanted to devote his life to God, he had to choose a congregation. As did many men and women religious of his time, he did not go through an arduous process to choose the community that will welcome him. He sought the advice of his parish priest, André Provençal, in whom he trusted completely. He directed him to the Congregation of Holy Cross and even brought Alfred to Montreal himself to introduce him to the community. It is in

his honour that Alfred Bessette chooses the name Brother André when he joined the community on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1870.

### **Love of God and of One's Neighbour**

St. Joseph held a prominent place in Brother André's prayer life but in reading testimonials by people who were close to him, we realize that his spirituality went against the official discourse of the times. Already, he introduces a God who is in very close proximity. He firmly believes in God's mercy and unconditional love rather than talk of hell and the punishments awaiting those who sin.

*"What wouldn't one do to please this little brother introducing a kind God who forgives all mishaps, as long as we recognize them, and who dares tell those who think that heaven is reserved for saints: It would be insulting (to God) to believe that we will not go to heaven if we tried our best."*<sup>1</sup>

This simple faith in a God of kindness and mercy takes in Brother André the form of a great love of his neighbours, which will lead him to try to relieve the spiritual as well as physical miseries of the people who come to seek comfort from him. To quote one of his confrères, Father Emile Deguire, csc: *"Brother André's faith was a living and radiant faith. It appeared to me that Brother André saw all things in God and judged all things according to God's interests. If the proof of the love of God is clearly established by the love of our neighbour,* →



*I will be entitled to proclaim charity towards the God of Brother André through his long life spent in the service of neighbours. I do not believe I have met in my life a person who has seen to such an extent God in his neighbour and who went to such trouble to prove his affection for him”.*

## An Unconditional Welcome

We all know that Brother André welcomed all those who came to him. Interestingly, he does not only welcome Catholics, but all believers who come to him and who are well-intentioned. *“The religion of the visitors does not matter – whether Jewish, Catholic, Protestants or Freemasons. But he insists that they must seek goodness, kindness and beauty. Otherwise, obtaining a cure will be difficult”.*<sup>2</sup>

This openness of Brother André to everyone is reflected today in the mission of St. Joseph’s Oratory. Indeed, for frequent visitors, meeting people of other religious confessions who come to pray and seek renewal is not a rare occurrence. Here, one comes to nourish one’s spirituality and experience transcendence. One also comes to give thanks for a favour obtained. We often hear sometimes: *“I come to see Brother André”*. His heart and his active faith can still be felt on Mount Royal.

## The First “Associates”

Brother André encountered difficulties in his community life. His confrères are not all in agreement with his behaviour and his projects. That is why he rapidly attracted lay people to his spirituality and his initiatives. With them, he prayed, gave comfort and transformed them into allies for the realization of his great dream. *“But André, who likes to work with lay people well connected in society, gave them confidence and energy”.*<sup>3</sup> His daring faith enables him to approach people and to secure financing for the construction projects of the Oratory.

If he were alive today, Brother André would probably speak of his associates to use the language current in religious communities.

## Faith and Works

*“One cannot love God  
without helping one’s neighbour.  
Place yourself  
between the hands of the Good Lord,  
He does not abandon anyone.”*

Brother André lived his faith in God in a concrete way. He looked after and visited the sick and he gave his life for his friends and his work. Above all, he was for many of his contemporaries a source of hope in the difficulties of life and a guide who always turned people towards God. His radiance persists even today. That is why one can truthfully say that he is a friend, a brother, a saint.

Francine Cabana  
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<sup>1</sup> *L'étrange destin d'Alfred Bessette dit FRÈRE ANDRÉ*, Françoise Derooy-Pineau, Fides, 2004, pages 55-56.

<sup>2</sup> *Frère André, le saint de l'Oratoire*, Françoise Derooy-Pineau, Médiaspaul, 2010, page 38.

<sup>3</sup> *L'étrange destin d'Alfred Bessette dit FRÈRE ANDRÉ*, Françoise Derooy-Pineau, Fides, 2004, pages 59-60.

