

## Sisters of St Joseph, Lochinvar

# 13TH GENERAL CHAPTER

### DAY TWO—Report

Today, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, the Chapter members and co-workers gathered at Monte Pio Conference Centre, Maitland, which was originally the Sacred Heart College for senior boys, surely visited by Julian Tenison Woods in his diocesan missionary days. After Patricia Egan's words of welcome and the honouring of the original owners of the land, the Wonnarua people, we began with morning prayer focused on Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The hymn and reading led us into a reflection on the image of the three Mary's journeying to the tomb.

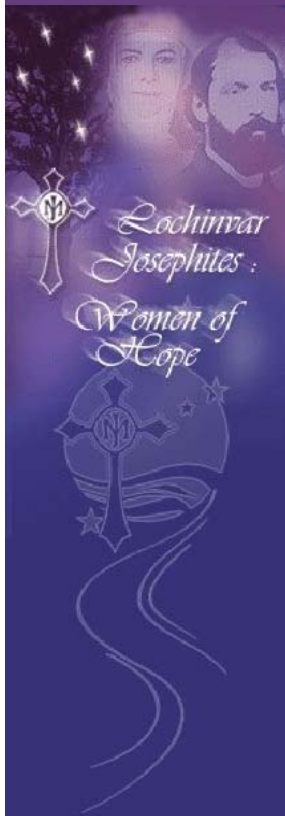
Seeing ourselves somewhere in this scene, we asked

- What are *we* looking for?
- What do *we* have to leave behind as we move forward?

The affairs of Chapter progressed with the members formally accepting the presence of sisters in working groups, the Central Josephite facilitators (Monica & Christina); the Central Josephites assisting in prayer Carmel Pilcher & Monica Barlow) secretaries Margaret Anne Geatches and Marjorie McLachlan (Lochinvar), and Jan Tranter (Lochinvar) who is preparing the website reports, with Carmel Moore.



The members elected Ellen Shanahan as Chapter Secretary, and Ellen Royan and June Flynn as members of the Chapter Co-ordinating Committee.





Patricia Egan formally presented her report as an overview of the Congregation in the last five years under this Leadership Team. She highlighted issues such as communio and the challenge to accept diversity among us, emphasising that we cannot legislate for communio. She challenged each of us to respond to what the Spirit is asking of us personally, concluding her moving and insightful address with sincere thanks 'for the privilege of serving us and for the encouragement and inspiration we have given her to live and love as a Lochinvar Josephite and a radical disciple of Jesus'.

[Click here for Patricia's Response](#)

After the report was formally accepted, the facilitators placed before us four clear areas for our discernment:

- Our corporate stance – what do we stand for?
- Future membership
- The wider Josephite network
- Affairs of Governance.

The main thrust in all of this was seeking our direction or the future.

Susan Martin, Business Manager, was now welcomed and, after reminding us that our greatest resources are ourselves, she gave a thorough and enthusiastic report. Our hearts caught the fire that is in Sue for all that truly assists the welfare of the sisters. She demonstrated her outstanding ability and accountability, as well as her keenness to do all in keeping with the a spirit of our Josephite tradition. Patricia McCarthy thanked Sue on our behalf.

We returned to a thought from Dom Helder Camara that Patricia introduced yesterday:

*'The night was dark, so dark that I was terrified and then I remembered that the darker the night, the lovelier the dawn she carries in her womb.'*

This led us on to consider in our groups the three questions:

- Who are we?
- What do we stand for?
- What is the way forward for us?

The session was most stimulating and even surprising. A rich breakthrough within the responses revealed an amazingly common thread.

Energized and full of hope we concluded by singing :

'God of truth, keep me true  
 God of peace, give me peace,  
 Oh God, all gift, make gift of me  
 Oh God, all freedom, make me free.'

*Kevin Bates SM*

## Presentation of the Congregational Leader's Report

Because you have all read the report, it simply remains for me to present it formally to you as members of the Chapter. In doing so, I would like to highlight a couple of points:

It was a lengthy report, longer than I had intended to be, and for that reason, if for no other, I believe it was beneficial to have distributed it beforehand and given Sisters the opportunity to respond in the regional groups.

We - the Leadership Team and I - greatly appreciated the conscientious manner in which Sisters participated in those meetings, each Sister having come well-prepared to raise issues and comment on things that concerned them; we were impressed by the way sisters really listened to one another in those meetings; had genuine conversations with one another. Of course that is much easier in a smaller group, but, while different opinions were expressed, we were also impressed by the listening and the level of respect shown to the opinions of each person, and overall the level of consensus there seemed to be on the major issues.

Somebody once said: ***You haven't really heard another's point of view until you so savour its essence that you feel the pull of its persuasion.*** That seemed to be the experience at the regional gatherings: sisters really listening to one another and feeling the pull of opinions different from their own.

Sisters commented that they found the questions/comments highlighted in bold throughout the report a great help. They were of course meant to draw attention to things we considered important for us to consider as a congregation and as individuals.

As I mentioned yesterday the report was an effort to present an overview of the life and mission of the congregation at this time and as we see it. We tried to honour the many good and wonderful aspects of our life and mission, and also to challenge some of the not-so-good aspects.

The *Communio* issue came up in every meeting, perhaps because it was one of those 'challenging the not-so-good' issues. In one of the meetings someone said: Look we are human; we're never going to be perfect; we've got to expect ourselves to fail: why not just accept that? There is truth in that but I guess the question we might ask is M. Aquin's question: should we be satisfied to stay at that?

We raised the issue in the report because it was part of the mandate of the last chapter, but if as a congregation we keep bringing it up there must be something more the Spirit is prompting us to do.

I personally believe that is a challenge for each one of us individually. We can't legislate for *communio*. We can **name** our concerns, we can even formulate **inspiring statements** about the issue, but it's up to each of us to be open to what the Spirit of God might be asking of **us**. If any one individual or group refuses to do that, then as a congregation we will continue to live out our life and mission in a less-than-ideal way.

There were two quotes I myself highlighted on pages 9 and 10 that seemed to me to be vital to our deliberations about *communio*:

Other things that came up consistently in the regional meetings were:

**Issues around our mission and ministries.** How do you find people who are willing to carry on a work you consider important? Are we so lacking in energy and imagination now that we have given up our sense of creativity in addressing real human needs? And, of course, the question: What could be our corporate focus? What do we stand for? One group of highlighted questions that were not discussed to any great extent but I would consider of fundamental importance to a lot of the issues we have named this year is the first group:

**The Implications of accepting new members** into the Congregation and/or doing something more formal about Associates.

**The issue of Josephite Connections.** From my perspective, and I have been involved in Josephite issues for many years, since the first Federation meeting I went to in 1974. One of the issues has been the stop/start nature of developments on over the years with the changes in leadership. It's happened with Federation leadership teams and with Brown Josephite leadership teams. One group works really hard and the next group comes in with little or no understanding of, or interest in, what has gone on before. During our term a tremendous amount of time and energy and commitment has gone into strengthening the bonds amongst us and we hope and pray that that will continue. Next Tuesday I will be going to the first meeting of the newly established Conference of Josephite Leaders which resulted from a couple of wonderful days we shared with all the current congregational and provincial leadership teams in August: just after our last congregational day.

**The future of religious life.** Another really significant issue for me personally, and it is not unrelated to the Josephite issue, is the whole future of religious life and of our congregation and its governance within that. I don't expect that at this Chapter we can make any decisions about that, beyond mandating the new Leadership Team to pursue the issue further.

Finally, Sisters, I would like to express publicly my very deep and sincere appreciation for all those who have collaborated with me in the work of governance these past five years, in particular:

The Leadership Team: Carmel, Maureen, Christine and Louise. What I wrote in the report, based on the words of the Constitutions, I sincerely believe. But could I say over and above that, that having prepared for, and attended many, many meetings or one kind or another over the years, and often dreading the thought of the next meeting, I can honestly say that I looked forward to every Team meeting we had: I never had an awful feeling in the pit of my stomach approaching a Team meeting; they were always for me a much-anticipated opportunity to tap into ideas that were often very different from my own, and wisdom and experience much greater than mine. So to Carmel, Maureen, Christine and Louise, I offer my deepest gratitude.

Similarly, I want to acknowledge the collaboration and support of the others I have mentioned on pages 11 and 12: Andrea, the office staff, Margaret Anne and Celie and the members of the Congregational Committees who, as Ellen described it yesterday, were very much an extension of our governance role, and all those who generously responded from time to time to work on a particular issue or task. Committee work requires a lot of time, energy and generosity, and as the Liturgy report suggested, the number of Sisters with that level of time, energy and commitment is becoming fewer.

Finally, Sisters to each and every one of you and to all the Sisters of the Congregation I say thank you for the privilege of serving the congregation over the past five years. Thank you for your tremendous support and collaboration and encouragement, and for the inspiration you have given me to live and love as a Lochinvar Josephite and a radical disciple of Jesus.

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