



***Incarnational
Spirituality***

**An Introduction
for SHCJ Associates**

Judith A. Talvacchia

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Cornelia Connelly based the spirituality of her Society on the mystery of God in the person of Jesus Christ – a mystery we call the Incarnation. This resource is intended to introduce Associates to the core spirituality of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, specifically:

- *the roots of Cornelia’s spirituality of the Incarnation as found in the Bible, in Catholic theology, and in Catholic spirituality*
- *Cornelia’s particular way of expressing and living out this spirituality in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus*
- *Opportunities for Associates to live out Incarnational Spirituality in light of the four pillars of association:*
 - *personal prayer and reflection which mark us as a people of God*
 - *spiritual development, with the focus on discovering and manifesting the Incarnate God wherever we are*
 - *ministry in daily living which grows out of our spirituality, made manifest especially in “Actions Not Words”*
 - *community, which supports and sustains our journey*

In future publications, we hope to offer references for more in-depth reflection and study.

This resource can be used individually or in groups. It offers:

- *Material for reading and reflection*
- *Questions to deepen individual reflection or to discuss with a group*
- *Suggestions for practical applications in the daily life of Associates*

I encourage individuals and groups to reflect slowly on the material, one section at a time. Stay with a paragraph, a question or a theme for as long as it offers you food for thought. Bring the events of your own life and of life around you into dialogue with the material. This is meant, not just to teach you about Cornelia’s spirituality, but to introduce you to a way of life that she embraced – a way of life that she invites her followers to embrace as well.

If you have any questions/suggestions about how to use this resource or about the contents, contact the Director of the SHCJ Associates in the United States at Associates-usa@shcj.org.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Spiritual Development Committee of the SHCJ Associates USA for their work and their enthusiasm in producing this guide for all Associates. We are in gratitude to Judy Talvacchia, Bryna Bozart, Stephanie and Bob Griffin, Marian Graczyk, and Carol Ann Smith, SHCJ.

May we all gain new insights that guide us to live evermore intentionally in the light of the Incarnation.

*Cathi Duffy
Director of SHCJ Associates, USA
May 2010*

Legend

- I *Informatio for the Canonization Process of Cornelia Connelly*
- M *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism,*
James F. Keenan, SJ (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005)
- P *Positio: Informatio for the Canonization Process of*
Cornelia Connelly
- W *A Woman Styled Bold, Radegund Flaxman SHCJ*

Preface

Could you write “a booklet” that will introduce Associates to the core spirituality of the Society? This request from the Core Team of the Associates in the United States to me as chair of the Spiritual Development Committee launched a year long process which has resulted in *Incarnational Spirituality: An Introduction for SHCJ Associates*. After assembling a team, two of us began to research the evolution of Cornelia’s appreciation of the mystery of the Incarnation and the way she lived it out in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. What we found would certainly fill more than a booklet!

As chair of the committee, I spent a considerable amount of time discerning the best way to approach an introduction that would enlighten rather than overwhelm an Associate. The passage Cornelia wrote, known as the Preamble, has been especially beloved by the Society as an expression of the spiritual vision that would animate her life and the life of the Society. It seemed like a most appropriate way to frame the reflection.

Conversation with committee members and the Director of the Associates fleshed out how the resource would flow: a reflective section based on the Preamble, followed by practical suggestions for living Incarnational spirituality in light of the four pillars of Association. This organization actually reflects Cornelia’s own approach of contemplation leading to action.

With a framework in place, I began writing... and writing! Over the course of four drafts and many suggestions, the present resource emerged. No longer a “booklet”, it will be distributed through a variety of media. The audience has widened as well. Although this is still intended primarily for Associates, reviewers have recognized potential uses for it within the Society and beyond. The Associates in the United States offer it as a gift to the Society to be used in any way that helps to promote the spirituality and charism of Cornelia Connelly.

I offer deep thanks to the many people who have supported me in this effort. Cathi Duffy, Director of the Associates (USA), provided foundational resources for our research, formatted the final version,

added illustrations and offered unfailing encouragement and support. The members of the Spiritual Development Committee contributed time, talent and enthusiasm. Thanks to Stephanie and Bob Griffin for hours of research. Stephanie also wrote a beautiful reflection on the Beatitudes as a practical model for living Incarnational spirituality. Thanks to Bryna Bozart for her reflection on the community experience of the Charlotte (NC) Associates. Thanks to Carol Ann Smith, SHCJ for invaluable suggestions that improved the final version. Thanks to Marian Graczyk for reviewing each draft for readability and usability. And thanks to all the committee members for their input and suggestions throughout the project. Thanks to Elizabeth Mary Strub, SHCJ and Mary Ann Buckley, SHCJ for sharing contemporary resources for Incarnational spirituality. Finally, my gratitude goes to the Core Team of the Associates in the United States whose initial suggestion evolved into a project much larger than I ever anticipated, but also much richer and satisfying than I could have envisioned.

Judy Talvacchia
May 17, 2010

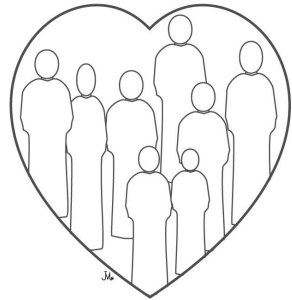
What is Incarnational Spirituality?



As Christians, one of our foundational beliefs is that God chose to become one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. The roots of this belief can be found in the Gospels. Each of the four gospels gives us a unique portrait of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God with us.

Matthew and Luke start at the very beginning of the earthly life of Jesus with his conception and birth. Mark introduces him to us as an adult beginning his public life. John gives us the most lofty introduction by declaring that Jesus is the eternal Word of God made flesh – the Word who has existed from all eternity with God, the Word who is God (see Jn 1:1). At a specific time and place in human history “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14). John tells us that the Incarnation was an outpouring of God’s love. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). All four gospels then present the many ways that God’s love was made manifest in the earthly life of Jesus, culminating in his passion, death and resurrection.

His followers were so transformed, that life would never be the same again for them. Not only did they record their memories of the earthly life of Jesus; they also passed on the experience of Jesus still present among them. Everything about their lives, about the lives of others, about the created world, about God would now be experienced in the light of Jesus Christ - living and active in the community of believers. The presence of Christ in their midst was so empowering that they felt compelled to proclaim him to others. They felt compelled to act in ways that advanced his mission of bringing about God’s reign in all of creation. The Church is the continuation of the community of believers - united in their belief that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God, united in their desire to continue the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.



One definition of spirituality is - the way we live our lives in light of our relationship with the divine. When the mystery of God becoming human is the focal point of our relationship with God, it is

called Incarnational spirituality. God draws close to us through Jesus Christ, who lived as one of us and is still present and active in creation. As a result, we are able to find God more clearly in our daily life in the created world. We respond with deeper faith, hope and love which empowers us to action in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus brings us closer to God through the created world; our deepening relationship with God through the Spirit empowers us to loving action in Jesus' name. This mutual interplay between God and us continues to deepen over a lifetime. It animated Cornelia Connelly in her own life and inspired her to offer Incarnational spirituality as the foundation of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. As Associates we participate in this way of loving God and in bringing God's love to others.

Cornelia Connelly's expression of Incarnational Spirituality

In an early draft of the SHCJ Constitution, Cornelia wrote:

“And what more sublime teaching can we find among these mysteries than that of the Incarnation? Here it is that God manifests to us in the most wonderful manner the treasures of His Mercy and His boundless love.”

Cornelia's attraction to the mystery of the Incarnation had begun during her years in Grand Coteau where she was exposed to parts of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Through the Exercises, she became deeply aware of Divine mercy and love for creation made manifest in God's decision to enter our human condition and live as one of us. She was attracted to all that the Incarnation stood for, but she found a particularly compelling image in the Holy Child Jesus. She could understand from lived experience how love between two people cannot be contained and overflows into new life. As a mother, she knew the joy of bringing new life to birth and the delight that a child can bring into family life. Her own human experience made it easier for her to experience deeply God's boundless love in the person of the Child Jesus.



The struggles and tragedies of Cornelia's life also helped her to understand “the treasures of God's mercy and of His boundless love” revealed in the Incarnation. During and after the tragic death of her son John Henry, she experienced the God of compassion as one who helped



her to continue on and to maintain a joyful spirit in the midst of suffering. The image of Mary as the Mother of Sorrows was a deep source of support for Cornelia during this time and indeed during all subsequent sufferings in her life. The example of Mary relying on God to sustain her inspired Cornelia to place her trust ever more firmly in God, who would comfort and strengthen her in life's trials.

She also saw God's compassion embodied in the Holy Child who took on our human nature as a helpless child, subject to suffering and death as we are, even during the innocence of childhood. Not only one like us in the joys of human life, the Holy Child "like the poor, is at the mercy of others even while remaining the source of mercy." (I, 162) Strong in weakness, the Holy Child experienced the sufferings of human life with us, but also pointed the way towards fullness of life without end. Cornelia was able to see that all of life, both joyful and suffering, could become meaningful when united to the Paschal Mystery.

In a later version of the Constitution, Cornelia expresses her insights into the Incarnation in words that guide her spiritual children to this day:



"In the humble and hidden life of the Holy Child Jesus, we find mysteries of the most sublime teaching. Here it is that God manifests to us in the most wonderful manner the treasures of His mercy and of His boundless love. In that Divine

Child enclosed for nine months in the womb of His Mother, born for us in a stable, exposed to suffering and poverty, now fleeing into Egypt, and then hidden and laboring for thirty years in a carpenter's workshop, we find our Divine Master, our Model, and our Spouse; and from the living wells of His perfect humility, His divine charity, and His absolute obedience, we are to receive the Spirit of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus".

Each phrase of this passage reveals aspects of the Incarnation that inspired Cornelia's spiritual way of life for herself and for the Society.

Humble and hidden

Humble and hidden – this is the life that most of us live. Even those whose lives are more public - they too are subject to the “daily grind” that is part of the human condition. And yet Cornelia declares that it is in the very midst of the humble and hidden aspects of our lives that God is revealed just as surely as God was revealed in the life of the Child Jesus. Cornelia became evermore sensitive to the signs of God’s presence “hidden, yet manifest” (I, 177) in her life and in creation. In joy and in sorrow, she was able to experience God. She invites us to do the same.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do I recognize the presence and action of God in my daily life?
2. When have I met God in a joyful experience? In a sorrowful experience?
3. How can I sharpen my sensitivity to God in the “humble and hidden” aspects of my life?
4. What aspects of Cornelia’s humility most inspire me to live humbly?

God's mercy and boundless love



In contemplating the Holy Child, Cornelia was most struck by the revelation of God's mercy and boundless love. Seeing our sinful condition, the God of all creation was moved with compassion to "enter into the chaos" (M, 3) of human existence as a helpless child. God's desire was to bring us back into right relationship with God, with ourselves, with all of creation. Cornelia saw that God could only do this out of boundless love. The mystery of the Incarnation was a source of deep joy and consolation to her, as well as a motivation to extend God's love and mercy to others through the Society.

The mystery of the Incarnation is so vast, that one must enter it through a particular aspect of the mystery. As a mother, Cornelia often found herself contemplating "Mother and Child, the embodiment of God's mercy in the Incarnation". In fact it was during a time of such contemplation that Cornelia "seemed to hear the words 'Society of the Holy Child Jesus', and thenceforth 'spoke of it and prayed for it under that name'". (W, 105)

Questions for Reflection

1. Mercy is "an attribute of the heart and compassion its application". (I,166) When do I experience God's mercy and compassion?
2. When do I experience God's boundless love?
3. What do these experiences reveal to me about God?
4. In what ways do I extend God's compassion and boundless love to others?
5. How do Cornelia's insights into God's mercy and love touch me?

In that Divine Child

“...enclosed for nine months in the womb of His Mother...”



Cornelia highlights for us the aspects of the life of the Child Jesus that speak to her most about God’s compassion and love. How much more humble and hidden can we be than during the time we are in the womb? Yet that time is one of intense growth, development and formation into a human person. It is also a time of growth for the mother, not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. Like Mary, she ponders the changes within her body, the approaching responsibilities of a parent, her hopes and dreams for the child to be born.

She reflects on the new life as a gift from God, but perhaps also as a challenge. She may be faced with physical, emotional, economic, and political problems that will impact her and her child. For these, she will need God’s help. In lifting up the image of Jesus in the womb, Cornelia invites us to recognize our own times of “gestation” as opportunities for dramatic growth and awareness when lived in the light of the Incarnation.

Questions for Reflection

1. When have I experienced a sense of new life coming to birth in me?
In others?
2. Where was God in those experiences?
3. What joy have I found in anticipating/experiencing new life?
4. What parallels do I see between Cornelia’s experiences of hidden growth and my own?

“...born for us in a stable, exposed to suffering and poverty, now fleeing into Egypt...”

Cornelia recognized that suffering was part of the life of Jesus from the beginning. That God would allow the Child Jesus to experience the suffering of human life, gave meaning to her own many sufferings, especially with regard to her children. As the sufferings of Jesus had redeeming value through God’s love and compassion, so her own sufferings could be united to those of Jesus and be transformed by the loving and compassionate God.

Questions for Reflection

1. How have I experienced God in the daily suffering that is part and parcel of human life?
2. How have I experienced God in a time of deep suffering?
3. Reflect on a past suffering that seemed to have had no meaning. Can I find any meaning by reflecting on it in the light of the suffering of the Child Jesus?
4. How can Cornelia’s response to suffering influence the way I respond to suffering?



“...then hidden and laboring for thirty years in a carpenter’s workshop...”

Cornelia reflected on the slow, hidden process of human growth and maturity modeled in the early life of Jesus. Cornelia found her “Divine Master, Model and Spouse” first and foremost in his hidden life.

Although we know virtually nothing about the hidden years of Jesus’ life, we see their fruitfulness during his public life in his person and in his ministry. All that he had lived and learned and became was publicly manifested in those last three years. Cornelia held up the fruitfulness of Christ’s hidden labor as a model for us. No task, no effort, no learning is wasted – no matter how insignificant or laborious it might seem. Our actions can be united with those of Jesus and be gathered up by our compassionate and loving God to further God’s work of creation.

Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect on the routine and hidden labor of my life in light of the hidden years of Jesus’ life.
2. Does this suggest any new ways of thinking about my daily life?
3. Cornelia focused on the process of growth and maturity, not just the outcome. What does her approach reveal to me about my own journey through life?

The Spirit of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus

“...and from the living wells of His perfect humility, His divine charity, and His absolute obedience, we are to receive the Spirit of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus”.

“His perfect humility”

Cornelia saw the movement from contemplation to action as a process that begins with contemplating the humble, hidden life of the Child Jesus. She was “concerned with being...invited to ‘drink’, ‘taste’, and ‘embrace’ the interior virtues of Christ in a dynamic process as he grew from childhood to manhood... Exterior virtue would then be the simple, unforced outgrowth of the interior life”. (P, 722) In other words, the more deeply we immerse ourselves in the humble, hidden life of the Child Jesus, the more we will be moved to action as a Christian disciple in every part of our lives.



Cornelia says, “There is no virtue without humility. God and truth are one”. (P, 722) Virtue begins with humility which, in its deepest sense, means seeing the truth – the truth of who God is and of who we are in relation to God. God is the Creator, we are creatures – weak, limited, sinful, in need of redemption. Yet God thought so much of humanity that God willingly took on human nature as a lowly child. “The humbled God” (I, 184) began human life in the same way that we begin our earthly existence. The humility of the Holy Child inspired Cornelia to live her own life in a spirit of humility. She was confident that as God used the humble life of Jesus to accomplish salvation, God’s power would use her humble life to bring compassionate love to others.

“Be yourself, but make that self what God wants it to be” (D73:174) expresses Cornelia’s humble, yet truthful understanding of human nature as both weak/limited, yet exalted by God’s willingness to assume the human condition. She reflected on the step by step growth of the Child Jesus into the man whom God called “my beloved”. She realized that God used everything that was part of his early life – humble and hidden,

routine and eventful - to form him into the perfect expression of a human being. From this contemplation Cornelia became acutely aware of God “hidden yet manifest, in all of creation and in every creature” (791, D4), leading creation in a journey of growth into what God intended it to be. Cornelia’s nurturing style of education and formation was the fruit of her insight, from which both her sisters and students benefited. She responded to the unique needs of each person in her care with every resource at her disposal so as to draw them towards their best self – “the self God wants it be”.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do I see myself before God? As weak and sinful? As beloved and exalted? As all of these?
2. In what ways did Cornelia live her own advice to “be yourself, but make that self what God wants it to be”? How have I lived her advice?
3. What do I need to do to become more truly “myself”?
4. What gifts do I have that God wants to use to help others become more truly themselves?

“His divine charity”

Today we use the term “charity” primarily to describe acts of kindness done for the needy. However, Cornelia used the word in its fullest sense of love felt and practiced, given and received. “Divine charity” expressed the immensity of God’s love and benevolence in all its richness, revealed in the Child Jesus.



“When Cornelia awakens to the Incarnation as her congregation’s central Mystery she sees the Heart of Jesus at its heart.” (I, 161) She was devoted to the image of the Sacred Heart as a symbol of God’s love poured out for her through Jesus Christ. It was easy for her to recognize that love already overflowing in the heart of the Holy Child. The hymn “Heart of the Holy Child”, most likely composed by Cornelia, reflects her desire to drink from the “living wells of... divine charity”

contained in the heart of the Child Jesus.

Cornelia’s response was to imitate the generous self giving love that the Son of God showed in assuming human nature. Her insights reflected the passage from Philippians 2:6-11 that described how Jesus Christ “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness”. (Phil 2:6-7) Jesus poured himself out in love, so that we could be brought back into full relationship with the God of love. Cornelia asked the Society to embrace the humble, hidden life of the Child Jesus, not because she thought self abasement was a worthy goal in itself. She had experienced the self emptying love of Jesus enriching her life. She wanted for herself and the Society to imitate that love so that others could have the same experience.

Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect on the passage from Philippians 2:6-11.
2. In what ways have I experienced the overflowing of God’s love in my life?
3. How has my love overflowed to others?

4. How have I experienced the self emptying love of Jesus?
5. When have I “emptied myself” out of love for another?
6. What effect has the love I’ve received/given had on others and on me?
7. In what ways did Cornelia imitate the self emptying love of Jesus? What does her example inspire me to do/to be?

*Let us not resist...
for we are ourselves
the only obstacle to the overflowing
of His Divine Love.*

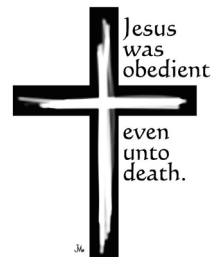
(Cornelia, Epiphany 1857)

“His absolute obedience”

The “absolute obedience” of Jesus from which Cornelia drew her own understanding of obedience, was not a mindless, masochistic behavior. It was grounded in the example of Jesus, whose life was completely focused on discerning and accomplishing the mission of redemption given to him by God. He would do whatever it took to advance that mission of love, even if it meant his own suffering. Cornelia’s obedience was rooted in an awareness that, even in her own time, the “Incarnate Word [was] hidden and at work in the world restoring everything to the Creator through love”. (I, 183) God’s ongoing work could only be accomplished with human cooperation that flowed from attentive listening in prayer. In Cornelia’s words, “They only who listen hear the voice of God...is mine a listening soul?”(CC 54:36) Cornelia listened deeply and responded generously to what God asked of her, even at the cost of suffering. Her experience of God’s mercy and boundless love assured her that whatever God asked of her was in the service of God’s loving plan for creation.

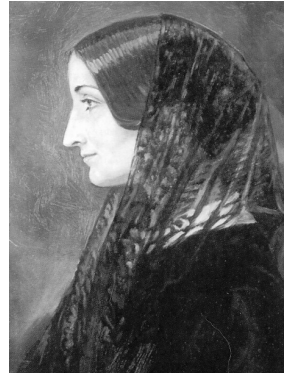
Questions for Reflection

1. How do I understand obedience?
2. How does Cornelia’s understanding of the “absolute obedience” of Jesus affect my own understanding of the term?
3. How am I obedient to God in my daily life?
4. When has my obedience to God meant misunderstanding by others?
5. In what areas of my life do I need to listen more deeply to know what God asks of me? To act with more courage and generosity to what God asks of me?



A Joyful Response to Obedience

Cornelia's "listening soul" recognized moments of pure joy in daily human living as part of the gift of the Incarnation. She is said to have had a naturally joyful nature which carried over into her spiritual life. As a mother, she saw in the Holy Child "all that was charming, endearing and winning in childhood. In his presence her spirit could expand and rejoice mightily, and the remembrance of the loveliness of his youth kept her own spirit young". (I, 190) Her "obedience" to the Giver of all good was to live with joy and gratitude for God's many gifts. She passed that joy to the Society which in turn passes it on to others.



In light of the Incarnation, Cornelia also found meaning for the trials of her life which she referred to as a life of "accepted suffering". (P, 734) In freely accepting what she could not control and uniting her sufferings with those of Jesus, she found comfort, healing and participation in Jesus' redemptive mission. The obedience to which Cornelia directed the Society would always be in the service of extending God's reign of boundless love and compassion. Suffering would be inevitable, but advancing the reign of God would always be the goal.

We are so aware of the tragic aspects of Cornelia's life, that we can easily forget that she was able to be joyful even in the midst of suffering. She says that God gave her "abundantly that jubilee of heart which had not been bargained for in this life of accepted suffering." (P, 734) Her ability to maintain and project a joyful spirit in difficult times was remarkable. Union with Christ and the ability to unite her sufferings with his, gave Cornelia a freedom of spirit in which joy could flourish. Cornelia reminds us that the goal of the spiritual life is not grim endurance, but a life lived in joyful hope in spite of suffering.

Questions for Reflection

1. How easily am I able to recognize the joyful experiences in my life?
2. How do the joyful moments in my life bring me closer to God and God's creation?
3. When have I experienced joy in the midst of suffering?
4. Is there a difference between joy and happiness? Is it possible to be unhappy but still joyful?
5. What can I apply to my life when I reflect on Cornelia's joyful spirit in both times of happiness and times of suffering?

*They only who listen
hear the voice of God...
is mine a listening soul?*

(CC 54:36)

“the Spirit of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus”

The Spirit of the Society is one of both contemplation and action. Cornelia firmly grounded the Society in prayer and contemplation of the Incarnation. The following passage describes Cornelia’s vision of the contemplative spirit of the Society:

“The ‘Spirit’ of the Holy Child Jesus was to be the Spirit of the Society... the same Holy Spirit who knew the depths of God and who led the Child Jesus ‘step by step’ through life was to be the animating and instructing Spirit of each member of the Society”. (I, 188)

From attentive listening to God, apostolic action would flow naturally.

Cornelia’s motto “Actions Not Words” shows a deep understanding of the Incarnation as ongoing action, not just an event in time. God sent Jesus both to reveal God’s love for creation and to continue the work of bringing about the fullness of life that God desires for creation. The Incarnation is therefore a gift to be contemplated as part of our own salvation history and a gift to be proclaimed in word and deed.

Cornelia expressed her understanding of the twofold nature of the Incarnation by the relationship she saw between the feasts of Christmas and Epiphany, the two great solemnities of the Society. Cornelia formed “a permanent association of Incarnation (God made human for me) with Epiphany (God made human for you).” (Elizabeth Mary Strub, SHCJ in the Associates Newsletter, Vol. III, issue 1)

In Cornelia’s vision, the action to which we are called is primarily to “be” the presence of God’s mercy and love in the world. In light of this all encompassing mission of “being”, we are then to engage in specific action. Once action was discerned as appropriate and timely, Cornelia advocated engaging oneself fully. She told her sisters they must “run with ardor in the way that he has pointed out (792, D4), acting with energy (191) and imagination to accomplish that ‘something more to be done for the Glory of God’ (215)”. (I, 187)

It is important to remember that Cornelia’s call to action embraces all of life – actions both great and small. The Incarnation began with the hidden life of Jesus which sanctified even the smallest and most humble aspect of human life. As Jesus grew “in wisdom, age and grace”, the Spirit led him to action that was more public and which at times challenged the accepted order. The Spirit guided him to further action which ultimately led to his death, a death he didn’t feel capable of enduring on a human level (Lk 22:39-46). Strengthened by God, he accepted the Cross and passed from death to the glory of the Resurrection.

As disciples of Jesus Christ and Associates of the Society, we are



*I am God's
handmaid;
may it be
done to me
according to
your word.*
Luke 1:38

privileged and challenged to live every part of our lives in union with the Paschal Mystery, through the lens of Incarnational spirituality and the example of Cornelia Connelly. In the words of the SHCJ Initial Formation Manual, we see:

“...the Child as key to the radical humility and obedience necessary for discipleship. And Cornelia’s own life of great-hearted love, to the point of sacrifice and accepted suffering, is a

model for us of a radical following of Christ.” (Forward to the Initial Formation Manual, 2005)

Questions for Reflection

1. How do I find a balance between contemplation and action in my life?
2. What aspects of Cornelia’s ability to balance contemplation and action can be a guide for my own efforts?
3. How do I respond to God by “being God’s presence of merciful love in the world”?
4. When have I experienced action flowing from my prayer?
5. How do I live out Cornelia’s motto “Actions Not Words” in my daily life?

Living Incarnational Spirituality as Associates

Our mission statement defines the goals of our association with the Society:



SHCJ Associates of the United States are women and men rooted in the charism of Cornelia Connelly and desirous to grow in her spirit. The Associates strive to bear witness to a life grounded in Incarnational theology. Associates are called to help others believe that God lives and acts in them and to rejoice in God’s presence in our midst.

The charism of Cornelia Connelly is grounded in the gospel message of the Word made Flesh and centered in the mystery of God’s life and presence in the lives of women and men.

We use four elements to help us achieve the goals of association:

1. Personal prayer and reflection which mark us as a people of God.
2. Spiritual development which helps us to discover and manifest the Incarnate God wherever we are.
3. Ministry which opens us to engage the crises of our time and place and challenges us to embrace an ecumenical vision in a global world.
4. Community which is fostered through our participation in Eucharist, our share in the charism of Cornelia Connelly and our readiness to welcome one another in faith, hope and love.

These make up the defining elements or “pillars” of our association with the Society. They give us concrete ways of giving flesh to our desires for connection with Cornelia, her spirit and the Society. They help us to move from contemplation to action within the context of our daily lives through the lens of incarnational spirituality. What follows are some specific suggestions for living each pillar of association. More details about practices are listed in the section labeled “Resources”.

Personal Prayer and Reflection



As SHCJ Associates a basic goal of our prayer and reflection is to deepen our relationship with the Incarnate God living and active in all of the circumstances of our daily lives.

Suggested Practices

- Eucharistic Liturgy – our primary encounter with the Word made Flesh
- Scripture - reading and reflection on passages that deepen our encounter with the God who came as one of us in Jesus Christ, in particular:
 - Matthew, chapters 1 and 2
 - Luke, chapters 1 and 2
 - John 1:1-14, 18
 - Philippians 2:6-11
- Daily Examen – a practice suggested by St. Ignatius of Loyola that helps to review the day in light of God’s presence and action in us/ creation
- Spiritual Exercises – a set of spiritual guidelines composed by St. Ignatius of Loyola which have as part of their focus “finding God in all things”. The Spiritual Exercises were instrumental in Cornelia’s spiritual journey into the mystery of the Incarnation.

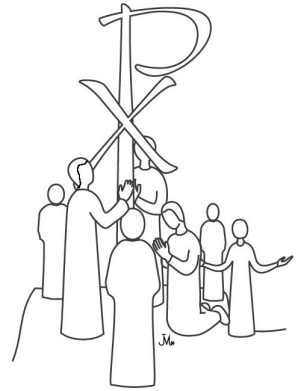
See Appendix A for resources.

Spiritual Development

The practices under this pillar are meant to broaden and deepen our knowledge and practice of Incarnational spirituality as lived by Cornelia Connelly.

Suggested Practices

- Study/pray over/reflect on the life of Cornelia Connelly and her legacy.
- Reflect prayerfully on quotes from Cornelia's writings.
- Reflect on passages from the foundational texts of the SHCJ.
- Participate in retreats with a theme of Incarnational spirituality, either individually or with other Associates.
- Participate in a faith sharing group in your own community or with other Associates.
- Attend lectures, workshops, classes on Incarnational theology and spirituality in the Catholic tradition.
- Have conversation with others who are living Incarnational spirituality.
- Draw on principles of Incarnational spirituality when speaking with others about living in today's world.
- Engage in spiritual direction.



See Appendix B for resources.

Ministry

Prayer, reflection and spiritual development lead to action on behalf of the reign of God. This is most fully expressed by living daily life in union with the Incarnate God whose redemptive mission continues in every aspect of creation. By becoming human, Jesus sanctified all of human living. Our actions, united with his, contribute to his ongoing work of redemption.



A commitment to action can also be expressed more specifically by joining in apostolic activity with other Associates, with vowed members of the Society, with individuals and organizations in the community. An Associate determines the type of action to undertake by reflecting on life circumstances, abilities and interests. No matter which actions an Associate chooses – whether humble, hidden, public or dramatic – each contributes to the mission of the Society when done in union with Christ. As Cornelia reminds us, “Love what he loves and thus make your life one with Him, being one continued act of love, from night to night and from year to year”. (CC8:88)

Suggested Practices

- Intentionally live your daily life in the spirit of Cornelia Connelly by the way you interact with God/self/others/creation.
- Gather with other Associates to support SHCJ ministries.
- Become involved with organizations (religious and/or secular) in your community which address the needs of others and of the world.
- Embrace a ministry of “pray-er” to pray for the needs of others, of the world and of creation. This ministry contributes to the Society’s mission of compassion and love for all of God’s creation.
- Consider how you do/can bring Incarnational spirituality to your existing work/ministry.
- Contribute time, talent, and treasure to the SHCJ Associates organization.

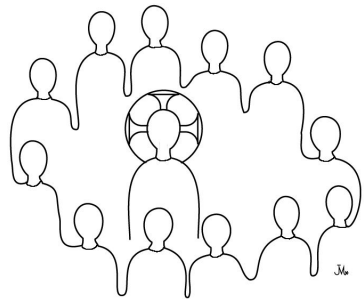
See Appendix C for resources.

Community

Shared goals can be more easily attained and lived with the help of a supportive community. We strive to provide opportunities for Associates to come together with other Associates and/or Sisters for prayer, sharing and socializing. Opportunities also exist in our daily lives – both to deepen Incarnational spirituality and to manifest it to those with whom we interact. Our families, friends, parishes, places of work, civic organizations, etc. can be sources of support and witness in the practice of Incarnational spirituality. Your own location and circumstances will be the context for the practices you choose in order to foster community.

Suggested Practices

- Celebrate Eucharistic liturgy with others who are committed to Incarnational spirituality.
- Attend or lead prayer services with an Incarnational theme, e.g. for the feast of the Epiphany.
- Celebrate feasts, significant events of the Society.
- Participate in a faith sharing group, either in person or online.
- Maintain contact with retired Sisters as a way of mutual sharing about living the charism.
- Participate in projects with the SHCJ, with Associates or with organizations in your own community that embody God's compassionate and boundless love.
- Work with other Associates to develop and support our organization (e.g. sub committee, contributing to newsletter/website, planning/ participating in formal gatherings).
- Be a presence that reflects/reminds others of God's presence with them.



See Appendix D for resources.

Conclusion

In a talk given to Holy Child Associates in Mayfield, England in April, 2009, Sister Judith Lancaster, SHCJ summarized what an Incarnational spirituality means for us today. Because God chose to become a human person:

- We know God as relational
- We desire to live fully human lives
- We see the world as fundamentally good
- We see God in all things
- We live in a life affirming way

She expresses Cornelia's vision of Incarnational spirituality in contemporary terms. Cornelia's ministry was always focused on "meeting the wants of the age". Incarnational spirituality gave Cornelia the lens with which to recognize God's presence and action in her day and age; to adapt her ministry to cooperate more fully with God in a particular time and place; to manifest God's mercy and boundless love in ways that were accessible to her contemporaries.

Today the Society and we as Associates are called to do the same.

We are called to use our talents, the fruits of our prayer and spiritual development - the very self that God wants us to be - in service to

the wants of our age. Our involvement as Associates goes beyond affection for the schools we attended, for the Sisters we know and love.

We are part of God's larger project of bringing creation to the fullness of life. God's project depends on our generous cooperation. Cornelia showed us a particular way of entering into cooperation with God – through the humble and hidden life of the Holy Child Jesus. May

her spirit and the vision she left us inspire us to make our own unique contribution to the coming reign of God in union with the Society and with the Holy Child Jesus.



Questions for Reflection

1. Do I see the world created by God as fundamentally good? Why or why not?
2. How does Cornelia's understanding of the world as loved by God affect my way of relating to others? To creation?
3. Do I see my own human flourishing as a part of God's loving plan?
4. In what ways do I (can I) live in a life affirming way?
5. How is God calling me to cooperate in bringing fullness of life to the world?
6. What in Cornelia's response to God inspires me to give myself more fully in service to God's project for the world?

*The invitation comes from God,
and to him you must give your answer.
Don't talk about what you
are going to do for God, but
reflect on what God is doing for you.
(D73:209)*

Appendix A: Resources for Personal Prayer and Reflection

The spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola had a profound effect on the development of Cornelia's spirituality. The Ignatian focus on "finding God in all things" was very compatible with Cornelia's attraction to the mystery of the Incarnation as the privileged place of encounter with God. In Grand Coteau, she was introduced to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius through a retreat she attended for 3 days with the Religious of the Sacred Heart. This retreat was a turning point in the deepening of her faith. The Exercises and Jesuit spiritual directors facilitated her spiritual growth for the rest of her life. Because of the intimate connection between Cornelia's spirituality and Ignatian spirituality, several Ignatian resources are included in this section.

Guidelines for Ignatian Examen

- Pray for the light of God's grace as you reflect on your day.
- Review the events of your day.

What were God's gifts to you today?

What was your response to God's presence and action in the people and events of the day?

- Pray in gratitude for God's gifts.
- Pray for forgiveness for the ways in which your response was not what God wanted it to be.
- Pray for God's help and for the people and events in the day to come.

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

Books that may be helpful if you are unfamiliar with the Exercises:

Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises by William Barry, SJ

Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality by Margaret Silf

Ignatius, The Spiritual Exercises & Cornelia: A Retreat by All Means by Elizabeth Mary Strub, SHCJ

Websites that offer information and resources for Ignatian spirituality

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html>

<http://ignatianspirituality.com>

Two passages from the Spiritual Exercises are particularly helpful for reflecting on Incarnational spirituality:

- The Principle and Foundation
- The Contemplation on the Love of God

The Principle and Foundation

The goal of our life is to be with God forever.

God, who loves us, gave us life.

Our own response of love allows God's life to flow into us without limit.

All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.

As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.

But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives, they displace God

and so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all these created gifts insofar as we have a choice and we are not bound by some obligation.

We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.

For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a deeper response to our life in God.

Our only desire and our one choice should be this:

I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening life in me.

(Paraphrased by David L. Fleming, SJ in *A Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises: A Companion to St. Ignatius' Text*)

The Contemplation on the Love of God

The Contemplation on the Love of God is the concluding meditation of the Spiritual Exercises (Spiritual Exercises, 231–237). It presents a God who loves without limit and who invites us to make a generous response of love in return. The contemplation invites reflection on four themes.

1. Reflection on God’s gifts to us (life, family, friends, faith, church, eternal life).
2. God’s self-giving in Jesus.
3. God’s continuing work in the world.
4. The limitless quality of God’s love. As a contemporary paraphrase has it, “God’s love shines down upon me like the light rays from the sun, or God’s love is poured forth lavishly like a fountain spilling forth its waters in an unending stream.”

At the end of this contemplation we are invited to make a generous response in return. Ignatius Loyola suggests the *Sucipe* prayer:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.

(Paraphrase of the Contemplation on the Love of God found on the Creighton University Online Spirituality website:

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/guide33.html>)

Appendix B: Resources for Spiritual Development

Books about Cornelia Connelly

Yes, Lord, Always Yes by Elizabeth Mary Strub, SHCJ

A biography of Cornelia written especially with Associates in mind.

One Woman's Journey in Faith, published in 2003 by the USA Associates Core Team

A synopsis of Cornelia's life along with reflection questions.

A Woman Styled Bold by Radegund Flaxman, SHCJ

A more detailed life of Cornelia and the beginnings of the Society.

A Sampling of Quotes and prayers from Cornelia Connelly

Let us love one another with God, in God, and for God. (London, 1851)

They only who listen hear the voice of God...is mine a listening soul? (CC 54:36)

Let us not resist...for we are ourselves the only obstacle to the overflowing of His Divine Love. (St. Leonards-on-the-Sea, Epiphany, 1857)

He will dwell with us in secret and condescend to love and be loved by his creature with an intensity far beyond all comprehensible human love. (CC 8:4)

Keep yourself in the presence of our good, good God who is all truth and gives the spirit of truth and simplicity to all who walk in his holy presence. (CC 1:24)

Sustain a bright and joyful spirit. (1870, Rule for Local Superiors)

Love what he loves and thus make your life one with Him, being one continued act of love, from night to night and from year to year. (CC 8:88)

The invitation comes from God, and to him you must give your answer. Don't talk about what you are going to do for God, but reflect on what God is doing for you. (D73:209)

Let us simply give God what he asks of us. (D 76:20)

Yes, Lord, yes my Father, yes, always yes. (CC 23:8)

Remember of yourselves you can do nothing; but in God and for God and with God you can do all things. (D 74:362)

Generosity, generosity, generosity, must be the beginning and ending of life. (CC 54:13)

As you step through the muddy streets, love God with your feet; and when your hands toil, love him with your hands. (Rome, Epiphany, 1854)

*To do anything well we must do it with our heart,
with our mind and with our strength for the love of God,
of ourselves, and of our neighbor. (CC 1:27)*

Open to me O Jesus thy Sacred Heart! Unite me to it forever... that each breath, each palpitation of my heart which ceases not even in sleep may be a witness of my love and say to thee without ceasing "Yes Lord I am all thine"...

Receive O my God the little good that I may do this day and give me the grace to repair the ill done, that I may bless thee during this life and praise thee through all eternity. Amen. (CC 21:54)

*O charity patient! O charity kind! Charity bearing all things.
Charity full of hope. Charity thinking no evil.
Charity rejoicing in all good.
Possess me –rule me – inflame me –
that I may remain in God, and God in me forever. (CC54:19)*

Give me, O Lord, a love full of action; a love patient in labor, exact in daily employments, pure in intention, so that I may ever accomplish the things that are most pleasing to thee. (CC 54:26-27)

Note: For additional quotes see *Cornelia Connelly Anthology: Selections from the Writings of Cornelia Connelly*, African Province SHCJ, 2009.

Retreats

- The Associates periodically offer retreats for its members. Contact the Director/Coordinator of Associates for further information.
- Jesuit retreat houses are a good source of retreats with an Incarnational theme. You can find websites and locations for their retreat houses by going to:
<http://www.jesuit.org/index.php/main/ignatian-spirituality/parishes-and-retreat-centers/retreat-centers>
- You can also check with your parish or diocese for retreat resources in your area.
- There are books available that allow you to make a private retreat at your own pace. *Moment by Moment: A Retreat in Everyday Life*, co-authored by Carol Ann Smith, SHCJ and Eugene F. Merz, SJ is a good resource, especially for those not familiar with Ignatian spirituality.
- There are online retreats available from a number of websites. One of the most popular is from Creighton University. Some of their retreats can also be downloaded in podcast format.
<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html>

Faith Sharing

Faith sharing involves a small group of people reflecting prayerfully on God's Word and sharing their reflections with each other. The goal of faith sharing is to integrate faith with daily life and to live faith more concretely in all the circumstances of life.

- If you live near other Sisters/Associates, you could form a group among yourselves. The Director/ Coordinator of Associates can provide you with guidelines, if needed.
- If you are not near other Sisters/Associates, you can check with your parish or diocese for opportunities in your area.
- You might also share with Associates online, via Skype or another networking tool.

Books, Lectures, Classes, Workshops

Of the many resources available, some possibilities are:

- A local school of theology or seminary in your area that offers educational opportunities for the general public.
- Boston College sponsors a center called Church in the 21st Century. It offers many resources that address contemporary Church issues: www.bc.edu/church21

Church in the 21st Century
Boston College
Heffernan House
110 College Road
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
617 552-0470

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction involves one on one spiritual conversation with a trained companion. Several Sisters of the Holy Child offer spiritual direction. Contact the Director of Associates for more information. The organization Spiritual Directors International offers more detailed information about spiritual direction and a resource for finding a spiritual director near you. See their website www.sdiworld.org.

*To do anything well we must do it
with our heart, with our mind and with our strength
for the love of God,
of ourselves, and of our neighbor.*

(CC 1:27)

Appendix C: Resources for Ministry

Ministry in Daily Life

To deepen your awareness of how you can and do live daily life as a collaborator with the Word made Flesh in bringing about the reign of God:

- Reflect on the Beatitudes – Matthew 5:3-10. Understand that Jesus is speaking of the basic values and attitudes that mark the life of a disciple. See the beatitudes as guides to ministry in daily life and look for opportunities to practice them in your own life.
- Reflect on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, the Church’s expression of concrete actions motivated by Christian love by which we help our neighbors obtain what they need spiritually and materially. The works of mercy are not optional, but essential to living a Christian life. Our motivation, as SHCJ Associates, comes from the desire to embody God’s mercy and boundless love in the world.
 - The spiritual works of mercy can be summed up as instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.
 - The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead.
- As part of the daily examen, think of one way that you have intentionally lived Incarnational spirituality during the day; consider what you might do in the day(s) to come.

SHCJ Ministries

The ministries of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus are focused on meeting the wants of the age. For many years, the Society worked almost exclusively in the field of education. While this is still a major focus, the wants of our age have drawn the Society into other areas of ministry such as social work, legal assistance, chaplaincy, spiritual direction and retreat work. In all of these endeavors, however, the Society’s primary mission continues to be living the Incarnation by being an embodied presence of God’s merciful love in the world. Some resources for collaborating with SHCJ ministries:

- Consult the website for the American Province of the Society

which lists all of their sponsored ministries:
shcj.org/american/ministries_province_ministries.html

- The American Province website also has links to the European and African Provinces for a view of the international ministries of the Society.
- Contact Sisters/Associates in your area for information about local SHCJ ministries.
- Contact the Director/Coordinator of Associates for information about opportunities for collaboration in Holy Child ministries.

SHCJ Associates

In the United States, the Associates of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus are organized by a full time, paid Director and a part time, volunteer Core Team of nine people. The active involvement of Associates is essential if the association is to grow and thrive. Consider offering your time, talent or treasure to help build up the Associates and their mission. Contact the Director/Coordinator of Associates to discuss ways in which you might become more involved.

Other Ministries

The lens of Incarnational spirituality allows us to see opportunities for ministry in every facet of life. There may be pressing needs in your own community that would benefit from your involvement in both religious and secular organizations. As an Associate of the SHCJ, your grounding in Incarnational spirituality and in the inspiration of Cornelia Connelly enhances your actions on behalf of others, no matter what form your ministry takes.

The workplace is also fertile ground for the influence of Incarnational spirituality. Your ability to be the presence of God's compassionate love is especially effective in this area of your life. Even if you never discuss your spirituality or your association with the Society, the way in which you talk to co-workers, the way you treat them, the way you do your job - all of this will communicate your spiritual values.

Reflect, by yourself or with others, on the ways in which Cornelia influences/inspires choices you make in the workplace; in organizations or projects in which you participate.

Appendix D: Resources for Community

Resources have been offered for these practices in previous sections. Community grows by participating in these activities with Sisters and/or Associates. Community is also built by sharing with Sisters/Associates your experiences of ministry in daily life, in your parish, with religious and secular organizations in your local area and beyond. It is a source of inspiration and of bonding for Sisters/Associates to know how each one lives out Incarnational spirituality and the example of Cornelia Connelly in different facets of life.

Associate Bryna Bozart describes the growth in community experienced by the Associates in Charlotte, North Carolina:

Experiencing Community as Associates of the SHCJ

Community, especially as understood as a faith community, is an increasing area of interest among us today. Whether as Associates or as parishioners, we seem to be collectively experiencing a desire for more intimate bonding and more intentional focus on ourselves as persons bonding together to live lives reflecting Christ Incarnated. This desire can be seen among SHCJ Associates.

There is a vibrant and authentic experience of lived community now going on with the Associates of the SHCJ located at St. Luke's parish in Charlotte, North Carolina! We are excited to share this experience as a means of encouragement to all Associates. Here, at St. Luke's we have come together as a small faith group under the leadership and loving companionship of Veronica Grover, SHCJ. Together, we pray and share reflections. We gather frequently in the homes of various Associates where we also have refreshments and catch up on the latest items of mutual interest. We know, not only each other intimately, but also we are familiar with our families and our ministries, whether they be domestic, parish-focused, or parish outreach. Our conversations are warm, engaging and carried on with close attention to what is happening in each of our lives. All of this we bring to prayer and reflection.

Recently, we experienced community even more abundantly in an Associates' retreat which was hosted in a lake house by an associate couple, John and Amber Ockerbloom. The beautiful setting along with the good food, music and liturgy

further enhanced our sense of building community which was highlighted as the theme for this retreat. Separate candles were lit at each session. These candles were ultimately extinguished so that only one remained burning, as a symbol of our bonding into one expression of lived unity in Christ incarnated. While on this retreat, the Associates shared moments of laughter as joy overflowing as we danced and sang our way into sister/brotherhood! Stories were read with a daring touch of humor and jokes were told which brought tears of laughter. Personal narratives were deeply infolded in moments of sacred trust and bountiful blessings. All of which was renewed and affirmed in our liturgy as we became even more aware of ourselves as Eucharist received and poured out for many. Thanks to Cindy and Greg Plako, this retreat gave witness to what we had dreamed and spoken of many times in home gatherings. We left even more assured of our purpose and joint mission with all SHCJ Associates everywhere: to live and serve together in the spirit of Cornelia Connelly, in her understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation.

We also realize that we are not living a form of community just for ourselves. We see the Spirit of God working in us and calling us to go forth into the world. Thusly, some of us are called to serve in the R.C.I.A. program at St. Luke's, some volunteer at the Room at the Inn, at the Homeless Shelter, in music ministry, at Hope – a ministry to those in need. Some respond to the call to serve the poor with the SHCJ in the Dominican Republic. This is an outreach all of the Associates support either by going there or by donations or by prayer. Our community meetings frequently focus on this mission. Another outreach is the ministry in Jamaica with The Fathers of the Poor. It can be readily seen that our experience of community is one that is inclusive and open to those beyond our intimate circle at St. Luke's.

In conclusion then, it may be suggested that community seems to just naturally evolve within Associate gatherings. Perhaps, our challenge is simply to be aware of this and to celebrate it as a blessing of association and as a sequence to the vision and mission of the SHCJ!

January, 2010

