Dear Sisters, Associates, and Friends:

Our focus on the commitments we made as a Congregation at the General Chapter of 2010 continues in this issue of Voices. We explore the challenges of living our commitment “to study worldviews and emerging theologies informed by science and our suffering world.”

We begin with an invitation from Sister Esther Kennedy to think about the threshold-crossing implications of this commitment, akin to the “hero’s journey.” Sister Pat Benson then provides us with theological grounding for the journey, surveying new insights emerging from scientific inquiry into the origins and nature of creation.

We next turn to insights on how worldviews informed by our suffering world can help shape justice, as Sister Pat McDonald shares her experiences and reflections. Sister Mary Catherine Nolan invites us to consider the role that story plays, from the lives of saints to the universe story, in expanding our worldviews. From Sister Elaine Lederer, we learn how gestures can provide a window into diverse worldviews. We are offered a glimpse of the learnings Sister Rose Ann Schlitt has been gathering from 37 of our Sisters who were missioned abroad, immersed in other worldviews. Sister Mary Rae Waller shares her journey of recovering her Native American heritage and sitting in sacred circle with healers in the Andes.

Sister Sara Fairbanks brings us back to theological study, describing her unfolding understanding of Christ in the context of an evolutionary universe. The experience of engaging in communal study of this emerging theology is shared by Sister Sharon Bossler. Sister Barbara Kelley treats us to a conversation with theologian Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, who describes her own theological journey, listening to voices on the margins.

Through images and words, Sisters Barbara Chenicek and Rita Schiltz provide us with a visual reflection of their immersion experiences studying art in Japan, Mali, and Mexico. The cover image and a couple of other “galaxy paintings” by Sister Barbara Cervenka draw us into the awesome beauty of the cosmos—and into the reflection questions at the end.

This commitment, ultimately, is about exploring the mystery of the living God. It is a lifelong effort that we are all, in the end, destined to lose. “I just hope to lose as gracefully as possible,” Elizabeth Johnson says.

May that grace be with each of us as we continue striving to live this commitment. And may it be with the 85 Dominican Sisters of Adrian who are celebrating their Double Diamond, Diamond, Golden, and Silver Jubilees this year. We give them thanks and praise!

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COVER: Galaxy 2 (2006) by Barbara Cervenka, OP, is one of a series of galaxy paintings she has created in watercolor. To view others in the collection, please visit: http://barbaracervenka.com

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Within Saharan spareness, daughter, you walk with sufficiency, beauty, and grace.
Our commitment to study other worldviews and emerging theologies is a call that impels us to pass over from one way of viewing the world to another, from one way of being to another, from one way of honoring the sacred to another. The *Hero’s Journey*, made popular by Joseph Campbell, is an apt metaphor for the kind of growth and change this commitment implies. Its basic motif of departure, fulfillment, and return has the hero/heroine eventually coming back—to oneself and to others with new insights and heightened capacities.

The journey begins with a “yes” and the consequent crossing of a threshold from the known into the unfamiliar. The crossing is not always of our own choosing as in the classic story, *The Wizard of Oz*, when a tornado hits a farmhouse in Kansas. Dorothy is thrown out of the only world she knows, finding herself suddenly in a strange, magical, and fearful land. Mythically, she has been swallowed into the belly of the whale, the place of dying to an old self and birthing a new.

Dorothy encounters obstacles, fears, and disbelief along her yellow brick road of trials. With the assistance of allies and spirit guides, she says yes to the challenges, survives the trials, and learns the power of friendship and compassion.

The deepest part of the journey brings Dorothy and her friends to the Wizard, symbolizing her meeting with the beloved, “who then grants the boons/blessings of a brain, a heart, courage and a way home. But as we all know from the film, Dorothy and her allies discover that they had these attributes all along, they only needed to believe in themselves to discover their many latent talents and powers.”

Gifted and ready, Dorothy crosses the return threshold and becomes the orchestrator of both worlds, “able to bring the greening power of the depth world into the graying world of ordinary space and time.”

The journey motif wove itself through a recent seven-week study of cosmology and theology by our women at the Dominican Life Center in Adrian, Michigan, engaging the presentations given by Franciscan Sister Ilia Delio to members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in August 2013.

The sessions plunged the group of 60 women into the heart of the cosmos—and the belly of the whale—as the implications of understanding that we live in a 13.7 billion year evolving universe shook the ground on which so many theological assumptions are rooted. Many experienced a letting go of certainty, a dying to many ideas held dear, a fresh enthusiasm for “newness” and willingness to enter into a world of change, shift and possibility—to attend to the strange attractors in our midst.

The road of trials was fraught with obstacles in the striving to understand quarks and gluons and quantum entanglements! Through soulful conversations, questions, silence, and prayer, voices of courage, hope, and vision were raised from within the group, allies were discovered along the way.

The meeting with the beloved was palpable as individuals broke through fear and grief.

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2 Ibid., p. 6.
Whether we grew up comfortable with quantum physics and the findings of the Hubble telescope or memorizing the Baltimore Catechism, the answer to “Where is God?” can be the same: “God is everywhere.” Catholic theology traditionally speaks of the immanence and transcendence of God. However, most often, transcendence receives the emphasis.

In emerging theologies informed by science, the immanence of God finds new and powerful expression. Contemporary scientific realizations, further, can enflame our theological imaginations.

Pope John Paul II recognized that expressions of faith are influenced by the prevalent worldview of authors. He wrote: “If the cosmologies of the ancient Near Eastern world could be purified and assimilated into the first chapters of Genesis, might contemporary cosmology have something to offer to our reflections upon creation? Does an evolutionary perspective bring any light to bear upon theological anthropology, the meaning of the human person as the imago Dei, the problem of Christology—and even upon the development of doctrine itself?”


Patricia Benson, OP, is committed to raising consciousness so that all will better care for creation.

A theologian, retreat and spiritual director, Sister Pat works for Voices for Earth Justice as a program presenter.

In Jesus Today, Albert Nolan, a South African Dominican, asserts: “Although most people have not really caught up with it yet, the new scientific mentality is here to stay. It is the way almost everyone will think in the not too distant future. It will change our consciousness as nothing has ever done before. It stands today as a sign of a very exciting tomorrow.”

Recognizing our need for a contemporary cross-cultural story of our origins, geologian Thomas Berry extensively promoted an integration of evolution into contemporary awareness through The New Universe Story, which is based on scientific insights into the formation of the cosmos. For many who interpreted Genesis rather literally, this is an imaginative shift. If we let this shift take hold in our being, it will affect how we imagine God.
Having worked with Thomas Berry, mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme continues to provide scientific fodder for the theological imagination. He teaches that quantum physics indicates that what we have usually called a vacuum is full. The vacuum is fecund. Matter springs forth in it. Some subsides, some remains. He delights in calling it space-time foam, and in his video series Powers of the Universe he calls this pure generativity, seamlessness.

In the context of the seamlessness of the universe, Swimme enumerates 10 powers and challenges us to open our minds and imaginations to learn from them. The world as we know it has been evolving billions of years since the original flaring forth at the birth of the universe, guided by these powers. Swimme notes that these powers reside in each of us since we are part of the universe, and in us the universe has become conscious of itself.

Karl Rahner, one of the great theologians of the 20th century, often referred to God as Holy Mystery. He believed that “the Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.”

Historically, spiritual writers note two intertwining paths to knowledge of God: one using images (kataphatic) and one without images (apophatic). People need both.

Science can provide some good, insightful, contemporary images, but while images, metaphors, and symbols can point to truth about God, in the end they fall short of revealing the whole mystery. One may then continue journeying to God without images, walking the path of not-knowing in a dark night toward Mystery.

Mystics throughout the centuries would resonate with today’s insights from science. Centuries ago Meister Eckhart realized deeply that “all creatures are words of God.” Thomas Aquinas taught, “The universe as a whole participates in and represents divine goodness more perfectly than any single creature alone.”

This perspective might help us recognize our rightful niche in the web of life and temper the view of the human as the pinnacle of creation with a right to everything else.

From a theological perspective, Swimme’s image of seamlessness seems to act as a metaphor for God. Seamlessness is in us, and yet we are in seamlessness, pure generativity. Might not this metaphor be more helpful today than that of God as warrior or king? Fourteenth century Dominican mystic Catherine of Siena uses a similar image when she prays, “There the soul dwells—like the fish in the sea and the sea in the fish.” John's Gospel emphasizes that God is love, and encourages us with Jesus’ words: “Make your home in me, as I make mine in you” (15:4). Could “pure generativity” be a contemporary scientific analogy for God?

Focusing on the Holy Spirit as the source of self-transcendence, Denis Edwards writes: “It is the Spirit dwelling in creatures who enables them not only to exist, but also to become what is new.” Given the seriousness of our ecological situation—the withering of Earth, as Swimme says—today we need to foster this transcendence, not interrupt or stymie it but consciously cooperate with the powers of the universe for the sake of future generations.

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5 Eckhart, Deutsche Werke II, #53.

6 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica I, 47, a.1.
Stories expand the imagination. As a child, my world broadened as I listened to wonderful stories told by my parents: family stories as well as fanciful tales of far away lands and heroic deeds. To love God and to know God’s love for me became important as I listened to the remarkable telling of lives of the saints. I have always had breakthrough moments in my quest to comprehend the mystery of God.

The desire to know, love, and serve God led me to enter the Adrian Dominican Congregation. My study of science, especially the history and philosophy of science, and my teaching experience, led me to appreciate the wonders of creation. A half-century ago, at Siena Heights College (now University), Sister Miriam Michael Stimpson introduced her science students to the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The biggest breakthrough in my understanding of both God and the universe happened as I struggled to grasp Teilhard’s concepts of evolution directed by God from creation to a final fulfillment in Christ.

The unfolding story of the universe expands the imagination. That all of creation is in a state of becoming is an exciting concept. As beloved human beings, we, too, are in this process of becoming. Born in the image of God with intellect and free will, we are privileged to cooperate in the unfolding of God’s plan. That is, we are able to choose freely, with the light of God’s grace, to have a part in directing our own future. This bestows responsibility on us to choose wisely, always with regard for others and their own discernment, for we best serve the Reign of God as preached by Jesus when we are in union with each other in this mission.

The Second Vatican Council opened many doors of theological thought. The scriptures took on deeper meaning as I studied them. The more I pondered the mystery of God, the deeper the mystery became. I can only know what God has chosen to reveal in relationship. Jesus Christ is God’s greatest revelation to us and from Christ we receive our mission to be involved in this dynamic process of the coming of the Reign of God. Revelation teaches us that God’s love is universal.

The 50 years after Vatican II saw a rise of interest in dialogue with other Christians in order to appreciate what we have in common and to work together for a more just society. The Vatican II document, Nostra Aetate, promoted dialogue with non-Christian religions, not to convince or convert, but to understand and work together in areas of world peace and justice.

The Holy Qu’ran of Islam includes a beautiful teaching on Mary the Mother of Jesus. In listening to Muslims who shared with me their understanding of Mary and in studying the texts pertaining to Mary in the Qu’ran, I came to understand that Mary is honored in Islam as an ideal model of submission to God. Surrender or submission to God is central to Islam, which means “submission” in Arabic. In our quest for world peace, Mary is a holy bridge between us and an advocate for peace.

Page from an Islamic prayer book depicting the Annunciation.
Worldviews Shape Justice
Pat McDonald, OP

Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years for his thoughts, beliefs, and actions in support of equality and justice for all people—a worldview that put him squarely at odds with the worldview supporting the system of apartheid in South Africa. In 2004 I visited his small cell on Robben Island, five miles off the coast of Cape Town, where Mandela spent the first 18 years of his imprisonment. It was harrowing to imagine a life sentence of confinement to that cell, broken by hard labor at a nearby quarry.

I was in South Africa as one of 24 mental health professionals from the United States, visiting through the People to People Ambassador Program begun by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s to bring our world closer in knowledge and understanding. Our mission was to interact with South Africa’s mental health professionals and to study and observe the mental health programs available to the people of this nation.

It was extraordinary to realize how, within the confines of that cell, Nelson Mandela focused heart, mind, body, and soul toward one end—justice and equality for all. In the end, he helped to bring about a shift in worldview that toppled the apartheid system in South Africa and inspired millions of people around the world to a new vision of justice.

Worldviews are complicated to grasp because so many of us believe that others believe as we do. In fact, James W. Sire writes, “A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world.”

As people who are called to “act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8), we are challenged to see and question the enormous differences and inequality that are still so pervasive in our world.

Pat McDonald, OP, EdD, is a professor in the Graduate College at Siena Heights University.

Her worldview has expanded through the wisdom, reality, study and action of others and how they have lived their reality and truth.

This study has expanded my worldview to include appreciation of all that is true and good in other faiths. It has also increased my appreciation of my own faith. Our suffering world will not be healed by waging war but by waging understanding and respect for those whose concept of God differs from our own.

Why do we love stories? As a tiny spark of God’s presence in this vast, expanding universe, it is comforting to know that we do not travel alone on the journey to our final destiny, transforming union in Christ. As we attend to the mystery of God’s work in the lives of others, their stories expand our own knowledge of God. Together, we stand in awe at the marvel of creation and share the story of our amazing human adventure.

My citizenship, my education, my family, my friends, my faith and my experiences have molded me. But what privileges I enjoy are truly mine? How were they attained? Who carved out paths for me to be where I am right now?

The worldview and experiences of others challenge mine, make me rethink what I think, take me to new heights or realization of new lows. I am forced to embrace the reality that much of what I consider or take for granted as “mine” is not: It was earned by the sweat of others or is gift resulting from the hard choices and sacrifices of those who came before me.

My worldview shifted when I was 22 years old. It was 1967 and I was teaching grade school in Lansing, Michigan. I learned that César Chávez was marching 70 miles from Saginaw to Lansing to raise awareness about the plight of farm workers. It was one of many such events to show the nation how the nutritious food that comes to our dinner tables or is served in restaurants comes at the expense of unfair wages and harsh working conditions for migrant workers.

Chávez was set to arrive at the Michigan State Capitol on Easter Sunday. I was very excited. I wanted to hear what he had to say about the wages paid to migrant workers. I wanted to be enlightened about social justice. I thought of how I would be able to apply his message in my classroom.

I asked a couple of friends to join me and they willingly agreed. I lived a mile away from the capitol and emphasized that we needed to leave early so we could get a good parking place near the building and not have to walk too far.

We left early and got an ideal parking space, walking only one block to the steps of the capitol building where we found a comfortable spot to see and hear César Chávez.

As I stood there, so happy my plan had worked out, it suddenly hit me that this man had just walked 70 miles to preach a message of justice, equality, and peace for all.

My work today sometimes takes me to Lansing, right by our state capitol. I always recall that long-ago experience. My sudden awareness that day of the different walks he and I took to get there altered my worldview. I understood in heart, mind, body and soul that each of us must do our part—taking the steps needed to help create a better and more just world for all.
As a long-time educator, I often like to say that learning is a life-long activity, from the time we’re born through eternity. I believe it is especially important for each of us to study other human beings—and the worldview that each person carries. This worldview is framed by the individual’s culture, colored by values and life experiences.

As an educator, I have worked with people from Africa, China, Ecuador, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam. As I taught them, I also learned from them. I especially learned from a project I undertook while I was teaching English as a Second Language at Mundelein College in Chicago. I invited my students to explain to the class the gestures and words that were held sacred in their culture—and those that were offensive.

Together, my students and I learned that a particular gesture held sacred in one culture could have the opposite effect on people from another culture. Even the simplest gesture—looking into the face of the person who is speaking to you—calls forth varying interpretations from culture to culture. Culturally, most Americans are reassured when someone else looks them in the eye, seeing this as a sign that the other person is in tune with them and listening to them.

Other cultures see this as rude, bold, and even invasive. My class taught me that other seemingly simple gestures—the lifting of feet with soles facing other conversationalists, handshakes, and even the shaking of the head—are fraught with meaning, which changes from culture to culture.

My experience in multi-cultural education has also taught me that human behavior communicates a person’s values. While I was teaching at the University of Michigan, I took my diverse students to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, telling them what time to meet so that we could board our bus. In general, my Japanese students arrived at our meeting place early, while the Brazilian students came at their own time. Many people in Japan—like many in the United States—live by and value time, while many from Latino cultures value persons above time. When they meet somebody, that person comes first before a particular time commitment.

Over the years I have learned the importance of being open to each individual and the various influences that make them who they are—culture, environment, and personal life experience. As we have begun to learn not to put God in a box, so I have learned not to put other human beings in a box, but to learn from them and see them as an expression of the diverse aspects of God.
Multifoliante as the jungle surround, passion explodes into pattern, faith finds form.
Wisdom-Gathering from Overseas Experiences of Mission

Rose Ann Schlitt, OP

A group of Adrian Dominican Sisters who experienced life and mission for a significant time outside their homeland have been reflecting on their experiences and sharing insights. The Sisters are collaborating in support of an effort to surface learnings from one of the most powerful forms of studying other worldviews—immersion in another culture.

Thirty-seven Sisters have been drawing from memories and images of the overseas mission of the Adrian Dominican Sisters that began in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the Bahamas, and later extended to Peru, the Philippines, Nicaragua, Kenya and South Africa. More recent voices have been added from missions in Mexico, Haiti, Taiwan and Norway.

Sisters serving in different eras and countries were invited to look back and name what they consider to have been the main gifts received and challenges faced. Their responses emerge from very different cultural, political, economic, and ecclesial contexts and from the experience of different ways of life and changing perspectives.

What did they learn and come to value? What and who touched and changed them as persons? What have we learned as a Congregation in our responses to global mission since 1945? What do we always want to keep in mind as a mission-sending Congregation?

“The main gift I received was the realization that there were other, and valid/good, ways of viewing and doing things than what I had known,” one Sister responded. “Basically, it was the realization that the American way and the western way was not the only way. Also, American values and western values were not necessarily gospel values.”

“A Haitian man taught me how to walk with the community when he said: ‘Instead of offering a ride, why don’t you leave your car and walk with us?’” another Sister reported. “That has become a literal, as well as a figurative, symbol that has remained with me for 20 years.”

Perhaps the memories from this sampling of our Sister-missioners will serve to add kernels of truth and wisdom to shape our common story of participation in global mission with value for the future. This attempt could affirm what adult educator Tony Saddington claims, namely: “One assumption held about learning is that we learn from experience is only partly true; in reality we learn from reflection upon our experience.”

Our hope is that these emerging reflections and learnings will express wisdom of global dimensions well worth recalling.

1 Tony Saddington, The Nuts and Bolts of Experiential Learning, retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/913251/The_nuts_and_bolts_of_Experiential_Learning

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Rose Ann Schlitt, OP
Annette Sinagra, OP
Jean Tobin, OP

Rose Ann Schlitt, OP, celebrates her Diamond Jubilee in the Congregation this year. She was an overseas missioner for 50 years in seven countries and initiated the collection of reflections by Adrian Dominican overseas missioners.
During the last 14 years I have had the privilege of studying with Paqos, practitioners of Earth-based spiritual traditions and healing arts in the Peruvian indigenous cultures, through Don Oscar Miró-Quesada. Sitting in a sacred circle in the high Andes of Peru with humble people who have less than the poorest of the poor, I have learned the language of Earth. I have experienced how all things are connected. I have arrived in a new way at the central truth in all the world’s mystical and contemplative traditions—that all is One.

My journey as a Dominican woman of German and Native American lineage has given me an opportunity to grow, incorporating and distinguishing differences among these rich traditions during the course of my life. Our commitment to study other worldviews has been very personal; taking me, among other places, to the heart of my father’s lost matrilineal ancestry.

In 1958, when I was 13 years old, my grandmother insisted that my parents send my brother, 8, and me to spend the summer with her in Mississippi. We lived in Florida and had to take the bus to Mobile, Alabama, where she picked us up. My grandmother was tall and very Indian looking. One morning when I was out in the field helping her pick corn and field peas, I told her about a class assignment I had that year doing our family tree. My mother’s tree had lots of leaves, I told her, because she knew everybody. But I hardly had any leaves on my father’s side—and didn’t get a good grade because of it. Whenever I asked him about our family, my dad said, “Don’t ask me, ask your grandmother.”

“Why wouldn’t my dad tell me?” I asked her. My grandmother answered, “He didn’t tell you because he doesn’t know.”

She then started talking to me about my great-great-grandmother. “My grandmother,” she said, “was removed when the great removal came through, stolen by white men. She never spoke about her people. Didn’t talk much at all.” Even as a 13-year-old, I was getting the picture that she had been a slave.

“We what we know is that she was either part of her tribe’s ruling family or a healer or maybe both.”
By now the field peas and corn were on the ground; my grandmother and I were squared off. She looked at me and said, “Some day you will reclaim this for the family.”

I was a happy child, and reacted like one—as if she had told me we were going to the movies later. But it stayed within. When I was in college and later teaching, I found myself drawn to study the history of my Cherokee ancestors and other Native Americans. Eventually, I was drawn beyond studying history to learning about the lives and ways of indigenous people.

I did not see my grandmother again after that summer; she died of leukemia the following winter. Two decades ago when I participated in a gathering in Oklahoma at the end of a re-enactment of the Trail of Tears, I came to understand that my grandmother had given me a “spiritual bundle” that summer.

Spiritual bundles are given and people carry them until they are complete. In our Cherokee tradition, spiritual bundles are given from grandmother to granddaughter; I was and am the last granddaughter, and now carry the bundle for my great-great grandmother.

We are all indigenous to Earth. Some of us live with greater presence and awareness of this reality. The thread of awareness I carry in my cellular memory has drawn me to places that I wouldn’t have gone otherwise. Studying or immersing oneself in another worldview requires a long-term commitment to be attentive and to go outside of one’s comfort zone to the places of the teachings.

As I sit in various sacred circles, I am aware that you don’t lay down a spiritual bundle; you open it. You recover and uncover.

The journey continues as I weave this thread with the other threads of my life, finding my authentic voice. In the joy of the Dominicans I witnessed as a child in grade school, in the message of Jesus to become conscious—one with the Spirit and one another—and in living the understanding that all communities of life on Earth are “all my relations,” I find my soul song.

Mitakuye Oyasin.
As our Congregation began to study the universe story of evolutionary science, the challenge became: How do I make sense of my Christian heritage in light of this “new creation story”? Through study, I broadened my worldview to see that God’s providential love for humanity extends to the whole interconnected universe.

First, my understanding of God as Creator expanded under the lens of evolutionary theory. The Triune God is the source of all being and becoming. God’s creative genius is at work not just in the beginning, but continuously, even now, as the emerging universe opens up to a fresh and unforeseen future.

Furthermore, the world’s evolutionary history enhances the biblical affirmations that plants, animals, and human beings have a common divine origin in God and a common natural origin in the “ground.” We share the same genetic makeup with bio-diverse otherkind and embody the geology and life history of Earth. We are the universe come to consciousness, kin with all creation.

Likewise, the story of evolution amplifies the intrinsic value of the natural world before God. Theologians point out that for centuries Christianity has narrowly focused on the human predicament, emphasizing our sin and need for salvation. I was pushed to consider: What was God doing for billions of years before we entered the scene? Now we come to understand that God cherishes the world for its own sake. God created the world as a habitat for all living creatures.

Furthermore, I was pleasantly surprised to learn through my studies that, according to biblical witness, God enters into a covenant partnership with the natural world as well as with humanity. The references are too many to enumerate, but here are a few: God makes a rainbow covenant with Noah, his descendants, and “every living creature” (Genesis 9:16). In the psalms, human voices are joined with all of creation in the worship of God (Psalms 65, 98, 148). Job proclaims that nature has something to teach humanity about God:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you, and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Job 12:7-8

The Gospels portray Jesus drawing from the lessons of nature to illumine the ways of God.

Secondly, my understanding of the Incarnation—God becoming flesh—now includes the entire web of life. God’s offer of measureless love and solidarity with the human race in Jesus Christ includes the whole of the interconnected universe. In the Incarnation, the Spirit of God enters into the long evolutionary history of life, embracing the entire natural world from within. The incarnation confers worth and dignity not only on humankind, but on all of creation, sanctifying the entire biophysical world.

This new understanding upset my view of the afterlife with God in a celestial realm reserved exclusively for humans. In my “stingy heaven,” the natural world had no intrinsic
value for God, is unredeemable in Christ, and utterly disappears into oblivion. I now believe that the Holy One, the Creator, is also the Redeemer, who defeats death and evil and opens the way for all creatures into the indescribable mystery of God. The symbol of the cross and resurrection proclaims that not only was the humanity of Jesus restored to transfigured bodily life, but that all of humanity and all of creation are taken up and transformed in the life of Divine Communion.

My study of ecological theology has been transformative. It deepened my communion with nature as I listen carefully every day for what creation has to teach me about God. I incorporate the insights of ecological theology into all of the courses I teach at Barry, and use my role as an educator to serve the cause of environmental justice.
I have always had a passion for science from the time when, as a child, I was lured each month by the arrival of my father’s copy of Scientific American. My love of science accompanied me into my years of teaching.

In 2009, Sister Renee Richie invited me to help her renew the Cosmic Walk at Weber Retreat Center. This brought me into contact with the new cosmology and the story of the universe. Soon I was reading everything I could find on this topic. In 2011, I came upon The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe by Ilia Delio, OSF, and attended a three-day workshop/retreat given by her. I was fascinated by her books and I longed for some conversation partners to discuss all that I was learning.

I invited the Sisters in the Dominican Midwest Chapter to gather to discuss the relationship of faith and science. To my delight, 10 Sisters responded. We began meeting monthly to discuss Ilia Delio’s Christ in Evolution (2008), an enriching and challenging adventure.

At our first meeting, each person shared what drew her to join the discussion group. Several came with a long-time interest in the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit philosopher and author who integrated faith and science and who served as a scientist-mystic guide in Ilia’s book. Some were drawn by the opportunity to delve deeper into the new cosmology and its relationship to religion. Others were captivated by the coalescence of scientific ideas and mystics in the same book. For me, the chapters on “Christology Reborn” and “Technology and Extraterrestrials” promised enlightenment around my own questions: Who is Christ for me? Are we alone in the universe?

As we journeyed through the chapters, we struggled to understand the philosophical idea of the axial age—when similar revolutionary thinking appeared around the world—and our shift today into a second axial age.

Women from the Dominican Midwest Chapter who joined the study, standing, from left: Jamie Phelps, OP; Marilee Ewing, OP; Xiomara Méndez-Hernández, OP; and Sharon Bossler, OP. Seated, from left: Associate Carol Fowler; Eunice Drazba, OP; Mary Catherine Gagliano, OP; Catherine McKillop, OP; and Dorothy Dempsey, OP.
We reflected on how technology has altered our view of the world and ourselves. We came to understand why Ilia insists that “the tribe is no longer the local community but the global community, which can be accessed immediately via television, Internet, satellite communication, and travel.... No longer is the human person content with the subjective, reflective critical awareness of the first axial period. Now one is in need of relatedness.”

We found hope for our world in the thought of Raimon Panikkar, a Catholic priest theologian who, after years of participating in interreligious dialogue, came to view the whole body of the world’s religions as expressions of the Trinity. “The silence of the Father is expressed in Buddhism, the Logos is found in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity; and the varied movements of the Spirit are present in in multiple forms in Hinduism.”

Our spiritual guides, Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths, introduced us to the transcultural Christ. Ilia suggests that “a transcultural person does not repudiate society but lives and acts within it from a new level of consciousness, a new reality that embraces all people and all life.”

A few months into our discussions, one of our members, Sister Donna Kustusch, died as the result of injuries she sustained in an auto accident. Her often repeated question, “How is all this helping the suffering poor?” still sits in the middle of the table each time we gather.

As we concluded the discussion of the last chapter of Christ in Evolution we asked ourselves what difference our participation in the group has made in our lives. We all agreed it has transformed the way we read, hear, and reflect on the Scriptures. After a winter break, a number of the original and some new “Evolutionaries,” including Associate Carol Fowler, are taking up another of Ilia’s books—the one I first read—The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe.

Sharon Bossler, OP, is committed to fostering an ongoing conversation between science and faith, believing that, although they ask different questions, they may interact powerfully to help us resolve our current ecological and faith crises. Sister Sharon serves at St. Leonard’s Ministries, a non-profit agency that helps men and women returning from prison to lead successful lives in their communities.

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2 Ibid, p. 87
3 Ibid, p. 106
Whence comes such consummate sensibility?
Falling of a yellow leaf, toll of a temple bell.
What prompted you to begin your quest for different theological understandings of God than you were exposed to at theology school?

When I did my graduate work, it was in the post-Vatican II period and there was a great renewal of Catholic theology going on, by people like Karl Rahner, Han Urs von Balthasar, Jurgen Moltmann, and Edward Schillebeeckx. I had a wonderful education in post-Vatican II theology.

But the one thing that began to occur to me as my education continued is that there were no women being mentioned. I was studying a rich, 2,000-year tradition of Catholic and Protestant theology. At that point, feminist theology was beginning in this country, so the question began to arise in my mind: where were the women? Because however rich the tradition was, it was only half the human race that we were hearing from.

Out of intellectual curiosity, I started asking what we can say about God from women’s experience and not just from men’s. That was really how it started.
We had liturgies, in those days back in the ’70s at Catholic University, in which some of the presiding priests would be calling on God our Mother. After Mass, there would always be these big conversations, lots of arguments, about whether that was right to do or not. It was a wonderful period—a lot of experimentation going on, and a lot of pushing forward these different ideas. So I was surrounded by a lot of interest, but nobody actually had tackled the question. So, as I went forward as a younger scholar, choosing research projects to work on, feminist theology became a natural area to consider.

**What were the challenges you needed to overcome in yourself, your own worldview/theological view, to arrive at the feminist insights of God and Trinity in She Who Is?**

Challenges to overcome in myself, none, but in the field of theology, enormous. Either the question would be dismissed as trivial or unimportant, or I could find no resources in systematic theology.

I turned to Biblical scholars who were women, who were discovering female ways that the Bible was talking about God. The great discovery of Sophia in the text was hugely important. And some historians in Church history were finding people like Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen and the way they wrote of God. But mostly I just had to sit down and take what I had learned of the principles of thinking about God and make them apply in a different way, starting out with women’s voices rather than with men’s. So, it was very new ground to be tilling, and the challenge for me was just to be creative and to be clear at what I was trying to do. But, personally, I didn’t have any challenges, because I was loving it.

**What drew you into the study of various theological views of God that you explore in Quest for the Living God?**

As I was teaching various theology courses, liberation theology from Latin America was starting to bloom. In the ’90s, I was put on a Vatican committee that was studying Christ and the world’s religions. My encounter with African-American and Latino/Latina theology came from my students and my colleagues. So, my professional engagement in the field of theology kept opening new doors for me.

One day after class, I thought, “I would like to write a little book that would put the ideas out there for a wider audience, because not everyone can be sitting down taking courses.” And so, *Quest for the Living God* is really a version of my graduate course on God as we study what issues have come up in the 20th and 21st centuries.

**Do any of those theologies resonate with you especially?**

Liberation theology taught us to listen to the voices on the margin. I used liberation theology methods when I was doing my own work in feminist theology. And then I saw it play out in African-American and Hispanic theology, and other oppressed contexts. It makes a huge difference to think about God from a perspective other than that of the elite gender, race, and class.

**How has your journey through feminist theology and then into mapping diverse theologies of God brought you to the insights in your latest book, Ask the Beasts?**

I extended that same method to those that are not of the human species. So I crossed the species line into plants and animals as living...
beings in their own right, with their own relationship to God. That was, again, liberation theology’s method of listening to voices in the margin.

I was very impelled by the ecological crisis and wondering why inclusion of animals and plants doesn’t catch fire with church-going people. So I thought, there’s something wrong here, that we think God is mainly interested in human beings and not as much in the rest of the cosmos. So, with that clue, I investigated the theology of creation.

**What are you helping us to uncover in your book, *Ask the Beasts***?

The presence of God in the natural world in an ongoing way. This is a theology of the Holy Spirit, indwelling and empowering the Earth. Also a Christology that extends the redemptive grace of Christ to all living creatures and not just humans—extends it especially to those who suffer and die. Also the presence of God as the origin and goal of all creation, which enfolds the whole world in a great embrace. It’s a Trinitarian understanding of God, in, with, and under the world.

**How has this quest changed you as a person?**

My study of theology has been such an enormous privilege, and the ability to write and teach and converse with people about this understanding of God, which is at the very core of faith, has been wonderful. For myself as a Sister, a woman religious, it’s at the core of religious life as well. The change has been very subtle. I had no St. Paul on the road to Damascus moments to point to, falling off my horse and being converted or changed. It’s a slower, gradual appreciation of what this religious path of faith is all about, and increasing my desire to show that to others.

**How has it changed your relationship with God?**

It’s made the relationship more peaceful and more grounded. I don’t think about my relationship to God very much. I just live it, that sense of God as all-encompassing, as indwelling, as well as being utterly different and transcendent. It brings a great deal of joy to me—and, of course, a great deal of anguish when you see how much destruction is done to the world, to people, and to other species. So, it just becomes more firmly centered in who I am.

Years ago, in a book about my work, I ended up by saying what I would like on my tombstone: “She lost as gracefully as possible in the effort to explore the mystery of the living God.” Ultimately, God cannot be encompassed by any of our words or concepts or teachings, but the effort to articulate that is an important moment in the ongoing relationship. But in the end, we all lose, and I just hope to lose as gracefully as possible.
Congratulations and many blessings to the 2014 Double Diamond, Diamond, Golden, and Silver Jubilarians. Together they represent 4,790 years of dedicated service to the Adrian Dominican Mission. May these Sisters know the heartfelt gratitude of the Congregation and of all the people whose lives they have touched.

Silver Jubilarians

Golden Jubilarians

Diamond Jubilarians

Judith Friedel, OP
Myra Jackson, OP
Dianne Koszycki, OP
Patricia Millerbach, OP
Mary Margaret Pachucki, OP
Patricia Walter, OP
Mary Ellen Plummer, OP
Adrienne Piennette, OP
Rosemary Asaro, OP
Judith Boisniano, OP
Mary Ann Letzgus, OP
Carmen Rose Alvarez, OP
Carmen Rose Alvarez, OP
Rosemary Asaro, OP
Judith Boisniano, OP
Mary Ann Caulfield, OP
Viviana Custo, OP
Mary Frances Heischaker, OP
Joan Baustian, OP
Jeanine Boivin, OP
Louise Borgacz, OP
Beth Ellen Butler, OP
Rose Irene Calvert, OP
Dorothy Dempsey, OP
Ana Felz, OP
Marilyn Francoeur, OP
Barbara Gentry, OP
Anele Heges, OP
Joyce Hibbert, OP
Gail Himrod, OP
Ruth Anne Kelly, OP
Esther Kennedy, OP
Phyllis Kreiner, OP
Mary Ann Letzgus, OP
Diamond Jubilarians continued

Mary J. Beaubien, OP
Mary Catharina Bereiter, OP
Mary Ellen Brodeur, OP
Rosemary Conlon, OP
Marie Rosanna Flanagan, OP

Barbara Gass, OP
Noreen Marie George, OP
Barbara Hengeschbach, OP
Anne Herringer, OP
Dolores LaVoy, OP
Francis Elizabeth McDonnell, OP
Margaret Mary McGill, OP
Alma Marie Messing, OP
Patricia O’Reilly, OP
Ruth Habib, OP

Jean Annette Rudolph, OP
Helen Walsh, OP

75 & 85 Years of Service

Helen Patrick Bartley, OP 75 years
Mary Margaret Beh, OP 75 years
Dorothy Joanne Burns, OP 75 years
Marie Anzada Garcia, OP 75 years
Irma Gerber, OP 75 years
Virginia Marie LaTourelle, OP 75 years
Maura Philips, OP 75 years
Heleen Sonch, OP 75 years
Marie Bride Walsh, OP 75 years
Anna Kosinski, OP 85 years
Reflection Questions

- Can you recall an experience of study or immersion in another worldview that tracked the hero’s journey?
  
  What was the call?

  When did you know you had crossed a threshold where there would be no turning back? What were the trials and blessings on the way?

- As you reflect on the changes you have experienced in your worldview over your lifetime, what story would you tell to describe change?
  
  What stories would you tell about the change in our communal worldview as a Congregation over the years?

- Are you intrigued by or resistant to any of the new theological insights or understandings described by any of our authors?
  
  How might you answer the question, “How is all this helping the suffering poor?”

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One assumption held about learning is that we learn from experience. This is only partly true, in reality we learn from reflection upon our experience.

– Tony Saddington
We Dominic an Preachers of Adrian
impelled by the Gospel, and outraged by the injustices of our day
seek truth; make peace; reverence life.

Stirred by the Wisdom of God and rooted in our contemplative prayer, communal study and life in community, we challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation, and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.

We confront our racist attitudes and root out racist practices in our lives and systems.

We confront systems where women are denied freedom, equality, and full personhood.

We walk in solidarity with people who are poor and challenge structures that impoverish them.

We practice non-violent peacemaking.

We promote lay leadership and shared decision-making for a renewed Church.

We live right relationships with Earth community.

We claim the communal authority and responsibility of our Dominican heritage.

We commit ourselves to live this vision.

Our Vision continues to impel us...

As contemplative ecclesial women, global citizens, and humans in God’s unfolding universe:

We commit to live simply and sustainably for the sake of the whole Earth community.

We commit to study worldviews and emerging theologies informed by science and our suffering world.

We commit to open our hearts to the other and deepen our understanding of diverse cultures and beliefs.

We commit to claim our moral authority to speak truth in Church and society in the spirit of Catherine of Siena.

We call one another to mutual accountability and transformation.

General Chapter 2010

What new frontiers of study or understanding are calling you to further expansion?

To what new frontiers are we being called as a Congregation?

What does it mean to “lose gracefully” in the effort to explore the mystery of the living God?