

PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE: A DOORWAY INTO JPIC

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Introduction: (SLIDE 1)

Thank you for this invitation to be with you for this conference and thank you to the previous speakers who have offered such great insight into the understanding of ‘frontiers’. This opportunity has meant a convergence of several elements for me, both professional and personal. First, it has helped to identify many of the issues of justice, peace and integrity of creation (which hereafter I will call JPIC – the term which is commonly used in congregational circles) facing our world and our young people. It gives me an opportunity to ask the question, ‘What perspective might Philippine Duchesne have to offer this exploration?’

It has also given me a chance to acknowledge one of Philippine’s early roles in the Society and which I now share – that of Secretary General. This responsibility has changed enormously but it gives me a little glimpse into the woman who wrote letters, knew the original 1815 Constitutions first hand and who kept the house journal for Madeleine Sophie Barat in France in those early years in the Society, before she took that extraordinary journey across the Atlantic to the United States.

Another connection is a more personal one. In 1880 Rev Mother Susannah Boudreau had to close the Sugar Creek foundation of St Mary’s in Kansas, a

mission which had been the culmination of the dream of Philippine Duchesne to work among the Native American peoples. However, that event freed up enough personnel in the United States to accept a foundation in Timaru, New Zealand. Susannah Boudreau had received permission from Mother Léhon, then Superior General, to go across the Pacific to begin this new foundation. This little band of pioneers reached Timaru in 1880, and oversaw the laying of the cornerstone of a new convent. **(SLIDE 2)** I know that little coastal city of Timaru in the South Island of New Zealand because I was born there. That is another of the convergences for me today. The Society had left Timaru by the time I was born but it gives me a sense of pride that those early foundresses are buried in the cemetery in Timaru and indeed, I regard that place as holy ground for the Society.

Lastly, in accepting this invitation I have the opportunity to present about JPIC alongside my companion and rscj sister from the Philippines, Joy Luz. Joy has been involved in visioning JPIC for the Society for many years and is currently a valued member of the international JPIC committee to which we both belong.

Outline:

When we were invited to present this paper, our brief was described thus: In honor of Philippine and what she began, we will explore the question: What are the frontiers for us today? We will explore this question under four major themes, including JPIC. A further note said, “We presume that the Chapter Calls will inform your talks.” I asked myself, how do I weave together, JPIC, the four chapter calls and the story of Philippine Duchesne? Therefore, this is how I have structured this talk. I will begin with some of the JPIC issues in our world that challenge and

distress us and I shall refer to the ways in which the Society is trying to address these issues. In many ways, these represent our frontiers today. The area of JPIC is huge so I will try to be as concrete as possible. I have tried to focus these issues through the experience of a group of people about whom I will explain more in a minute. In the light of these frontier issues, we will look at the JPIC as it is articulated in the four Chapter Calls and explore some of its implications. Then, having set out this scenario, let us watch how the presence of Philippine Duchesne illuminates JPIC, and takes us deeply into the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Almost unwittingly, her experience provides us with an attitude for JPIC that is grounded and inspired.

A presentation can only break open a subject. The real work will be your own.

JPIC Issues:

Every year, a group of eleven or twelve women from around the world gathers in Rome at the Villa Lante for nearly five months to prepare for their final profession as Religious of the Sacred Heart. It is a profound experience to attend their Profession. However, they do a lot of work prior to this ceremony. They study together the issues and questions of contemporary religious life and key moments of the Society's history; they examine their life experience during a long retreat and share the challenges of living in an international community – language being just one of them; and they reflect on their international experience, not only of living in Rome, but also of having lived in a country other than their own, as most will have done before they even come to Rome. Each year I am invited to present something to this group about the Society's commitment to JPIC. Importantly, the women begin this sharing with their own responses to the question, "What are

some JPIC issues that are significant for your country or countries?” We gather these issues on a white board, and this is what it looks like. **(SLIDE 3)** Where there are ticks, it means that the same issue has been named more than once. Let me show the list in a way that you are not trying to read the hand-written white board printout. **(SLIDE 4)**

Let us examine a few of these issues:

Extra-judicial killings – where the death penalty is applied regardless of the rule of law.

Land-grabbing of ancestral domains – where local and indigenous peoples are persuaded to lease or sell their land to foreign investors. You have heard or read of the inducements that cause this to happen but the impacts are so costly.

Illegal mining: there are places where unregulated mining practices contaminate the waterways. I recall travelling with an RSCJ sister in the Andes and naïvely admiring a river where women were washing their clothes. With a look of disgust she said, ‘That water is polluted’. Some of our sisters and their local companions participate in peaceful protests – at considerable risk, where there are known injustices caused by mining.

Migration: **(SLIDE 5)** Just over 60 million people were classified in 2017 by the UN High Commission for Refugees as migrants and refugees. The issue of migrants and refugees takes so many forms: environmental migrants, unaccompanied children, victims of poverty, victims of religious persecution, victims of human trafficking.

Religious persecution is an issue that is raised by our sisters in Egypt but we see it in other parts of the world as well.

Racism: On this subject I refer you to the powerful talk given by Catherine Mooney entitled 'Lives that Matter: Philippine Duchesne and Solidarity across Frontiers', which she presented at the Spirituality Forum last year (2017).

What of some of these other issues?

Nuclear power: Our sisters in Japan have an ongoing commitment to Sacred Heart education but more recently their Province has committed itself to a project in Fukushima near the location where the nuclear power plant disaster took place in 2011. The presence of some of our Japanese sisters and the regular visits of foreign RSCJ, including myself, are a gesture of peace and solidarity in the face of this threat. **(SLIDE 6)** The slide shows a school that had been built with money by the Nuclear Power Plant for the local community but with the event of the tsunami and the ensuing explosion, those very children were at enormous risk.

Violence against women: this is mentioned more than once when our younger sisters identify the issues of their home countries. As we know, most JPIC issues are connected, and this is one that has roots in several causes: poverty, war, unemployment, the caste system, addictions, alcoholism and more.

Technology: this is always identified in the list of JPIC issues by our younger sisters because they are in relationship with those who are most affected and they acknowledge that this is also an issue they face themselves.

There are many other issues that we can name that are related to JPIC: climate change, political corruption, human trafficking, and all the issues that have been identified on the list.

None of this is new information to you. You and your colleagues have been working on these issues for so long. You have been activists for justice, you have

been educators and advocates. You have worked through the systems of law, health care and community development for years. Your schools are committed to social awareness and community service. Some of your work through parishes or neighbourhoods or through befriending those who are on the margins. I know that much of your JPIC involvement is done in partnership with other groups. Collaboration and networking is the way forward and you demonstrate it fully. Most particularly, I have seen it in the JPIC Database and others see it, too. What are some ways in which we are trying to grapple with these issues? Some concrete responses: These are practical and exciting initiatives that I would like to share in the interactive part of our session particularly so that Joy can add any input as well.

- The International Service Day on September 15th
- The JPIC Involvement Database where stories and best practices are collected for the whole society's information.
- The Solidarity Fund, where RSCJ-related projects in developing countries are supported financially by the Mother House
- The International JPIC meeting to be held in the Philippines in November, which we hope will have as profound an impact on the Society's story as the Goals and Criteria of Sacred Heart Education have had.
- The RSCJ NGO representative at the United Nations, currently led by Sheila Smith and for the previous 14 years, established and developed by Cecile Meijer
- The impact of *Laudato Si'*

As for the issues, we are always encouraged to go deeper and explore them much more systematically. On a practical note, I recommend the book on the Pastoral Cycle that our RSCJ sister Maria Cimperman has written. **(SLIDE 7)**

So where is Philippine in all this – and the Chapter Calls?

What qualities drew Philippine to the margins of her day? What sustained her, this woman of justice and compassion? She had courage, - we know that. She was determined and strong-willed. “Perhaps I am too Duchesne!” she admitted on one occasion (1) referring to the family characteristic of stubbornness. However, I believe she had some instinct about the transformative power of God in the midst of the roughest, most unpromising of situations - including herself. Why do we hold her in such high regard?

As a backdrop to the continuing story of JPIC and the Society, I will show you the four Chapter Calls – with which you are already very familiar:

(SLIDE 8) To reach new frontiers: To go out, to ‘set sail’ as a Society and go with others to new geographic and existential peripheries – to accompany the life that is emerging there, to defend justice, peace and integrity of creation in response to all who are searching for meaning in their lives, those who have been wounded, displaced and excluded because of poverty, violence and environmental degradation.

I was once talking to an RSCJ sister who for years directed retreats of those who went out to ‘the missions’. They usually arrived with certain expectations. She said a refrain that she often heard was, ‘This is so not what I expected it to be!’ One of her stand-by scripture passages that she asked them to reflect on was

from Genesis 12:1. 'Go forth to a land that I will show you.' In other words, not the land that you expected. 'Go forth to a land that I will show you'. This moment of truth was one that a good RSCJ missionary had to come to terms with if she were ever to integrate into the new culture that she had volunteered for. It was the moment that the control was taken out of her hands. How often we see this with Philippine. She had begged for permission to go a new land in order to teach the 'uninstructed' about the love of God. "For a long time, a very strong and definite attraction has drawn me to the teaching of unbelievers. I thought even of going to China (*Aside: isn't her prescience fascinating considering the Society's ongoing story with China?*), but", she said, "that wasn't practical because women can't appear in public there..." (2)

She had survived the most horrendous sea voyage to get there. 'I could only say "I have left everything for you, O my God".' (Those poor women.) "When one can take anything, it is cabbage broth laden with grease and often made with spoiled meat". (3) Her description of a storm at sea, terrifying but beautifully written very like a page from one of Patrick O'Brian's 19th century sea-faring novels. And when she did get there, the reality was desolating. Carolyn Osiek explained the political and cultural context:

"When Philippine Duchesne and her companions arrived in Missouri, the population was nearly all French and Catholic, but the westward movement of Protestant Americans from the East was well underway. Moreover, the land in which she was to spend the rest of her life had been sold to the US government in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Then, just three years after Philippine Duchesne's arrival, in 1821, Missouri was admitted to the Union as a state where slavery was legal. This was done to balance the simultaneous admission of Maine as a free state." (4)

Philippine's disillusionment was completely destabilizing. John Courtney Murray, one of her biographers, uses this dismaying analogy:

"There are two trials of her (Philippine's) patient steadiness that seem to me to bring her closer to ourselves:

- The first is the fact that all of her life she was in the heart-breaking situation of the competent worker compelled to work without proper tools and consequently compelled to see the product come from her hands, misshapen and unfinished. ...
- The second trial of her patience was the severest of all. Not only did she feel the lack of proper tools for her work but with the years, the conviction grew in her that she herself was not the proper tool". (5)

Here we are talking about the courageous and zealous Philippine Duchesne in terms of these disappointments while we are considering the first of our Chapter Calls. This seems to me the paradox: To reach new frontiers is an act of boldness - but that is only the first step. The next step is finding the way to respond to the reality of reaching those existential peripheries even when we have identified what they are.

Going back to my friends preparing for final profession at the Villa Lante who have named many of the JPIC realities of their contexts, they know that naming them and learning about them is one thing. However, always, always, always, they ask the same question: how do we change the root causes of these realities? That question has to be asked if there is ever to be real structural change. Philippine takes us further into this conundrum through her own experience. She certainly crossed frontiers but she also had to face the unanswerable problems that came with the complex realities of the frontiers and peripheries.

When she finally was able to join the Jesuit mission with the Potawatomi at Sugar Creek, Kansas, (and then only just), she wrote to Madeleine Sophie Barat, saying that they had arrived at the 'land of our desires'. (6) Yet as we know, she struggled so much with language and, belying its lovely name, Sugar Creek was an incredibly harsh environment in spite of the support of the Potawatami people. Philippine was rendered almost powerless apart from her inspirational commitment to prayer.

This experience has something to tell us about JPIC. Even though there is tremendous worthiness in its aims, the whole experience of addressing issues of JPIC is fraught with disillusionment and heartache. The temptation is to become hard-bitten, cynical. Philippine Duchesne did something that might give us heart. She crossed another sort of frontier. It is my belief that through her own resoluteness, her very 'Duchesne-ness', she crossed a frontier from darkness and loss to grace and possibility.

Let us look at the second of our chapter calls:

(SLIDE 9) To live more humanly:

In the radical style of Jesus of Nazareth, we wish to be in closer relationship as sisters with one another and with others; we wish to be simpler, more human and closer to people and their experience, in order to show forth the joyful and compassionate face of God and to be at the service of Life, wherever we are sent.

The most frequently quoted scripture passage that I have ever seen in relation to Philippine Duchesne is this one: *'the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die that the Lord might bring forth the harvest'*. (John 12:20-26) Within her own

lifetime, Philippine experienced this fundamental truth about JPIC. Do not expect to see immediate results for your efforts. The Chapter Call is one that is crucial for many of our sisters and colleagues. Its articulation was discussed thoroughly at the Chapter but in the end, its meaning is simple. Unless we follow Jesus in the gospel, our witness lacks authenticity. Our mission is to discover and make known the love of God in our world. Wherever we are, people can expect to see the joyful and compassionate face of God. ‘To be at the service of Life’ implies that we are compelled to face reality with an attitude of energy and courage. Those whom we serve should expect this of us.

Philippine understood this. ‘I beg you to preserve St Charles and the Indian mission. These little houses perhaps do much more for the glory of God than a brilliant boarding school’. (7) At one stage there was thought of Philippine moving south to one of the Louisiana houses because they were doing so well, but she was firmly against it. Florissant was poor and she liked it that way. (8)

In preparation for Philippine Duchesne’s canonization in 1988, this book was issued. **(SLIDE 10)** Just as it suggests, it gathers responses in the form of journalistic and scholarly articles, music, prayer, art, reflections and poetry. Sister Nance O’Neil was Provincial of the United States province at the time and she wrote in the introduction some comments that bear repeating thirty years later in light of this Chapter Call: “Like all events that happen, God intends us to take them and make them – maybe even transform them – into a reflection of that divine message which the life of Jesus is for us. Philippine Duchesne does this. Her life says that the person for others is most fully a person, most fully the reflection of God’s hope for humanity. Her life tells us that those closest to the down-

trodden are closest to Jesus' way. Her life tells us too, that human measures of success mislead." (9)

Even in her acquiescence to the limitations of old age, Philippine reveals her understanding of poverty. On June 19, 1842, just short of a year since their arrival at Sugar Creek, Philippine returned to St Charles. We know it was to be her final place of residence. (10) I am reminded of our sisters who have been such champions of justice and education throughout their professional lives and who, usually with grace, retire to a less active life but their spiritual wisdom and experience continue to give life. I am thinking of sisters from my own very aged province but I see it throughout the Society. There is something deeply human here.

And, then I think of those newly professed RSCJ returning to their provinces after their experience at the Villa Lante with their new rings and crosses, having been commissioned at their Final Profession ceremony, on fire for the mission. The reality is that, in terms of JPIC, they could be overwhelmed by the needs of their people back home. A maxim that Philippine has to offer us is this: our model is Jesus of Nazareth in all the radicality of his witness. She knew that the downtrodden are closest to Jesus' way and she learned the hard way that human measures of success were utterly misleading. Someone who was asked, what can we DO about the migrant situation? simply said, 'Draw near'. In other words, learn to respond to the people who are nearby and they will be quick to share their situation.... they'll be happy that somebody has an interest in their situation and from there the way forward will become clearer. 'Say hello. Draw near'. (11)

To create silence: (SLIDE 11) To deepen our interior life, our capacity for contemplation and for listening to the heartbeat of God in ourselves and in our world; to discern in silence and welcome the action of the Spirit that transforms us, energises us, and calls us to live our prophetic and educational mission.

Maybe it seems like a contradiction to have JPIC, with its bias for action, alongside this Chapter Call with its value on silence. I would argue the contrary. JPIC and prayer are vitally interdependent. One of the deepest characteristics of the Society's charism is prayer and discernment. Without this quality of reflection, we are rudderless in our response to the needs of the world. We would be 'do-gooders', well meaning but essentially naïve. This call compels us to listen to the heartbeat of God in ourselves and our world. I remember another comment that was made by my RSCJ friend who was a spiritual director to those who went to the 'missions'. She said of Philippine, 'Somehow, we know that her home was in the love of God'. I pondered this a lot, because I felt it had something to do with this call.

In sharing with the group at the Villa Lante who are preparing for final profession in the Society, I hear them declare the absolute necessity of prayer and discernment in facing the issues of JPIC. Maybe it staves off despair in the face of some terrible realities but more significantly, prayer is the means to choose a course of action or in some cases, non-action. These women have come to an understanding that, even though they have identified global issues about needs and sufferings that affect them and their people, they realize that unless they spend time in personal reflection, they are not able to listen to this heartbeat of God and themselves spoken of in the Chapter Call. And while I say 'them' of

course I refer to all of us! The Call carries a deep insight about our mission. We can be very busy people and this can sometimes obscure what is stirring in us. The call reminds us of the need to disengage from the busyness of daily life. Daniel Groody (Associate Professor of Theology and director of the Global Leadership Programme at the University of Notre Dame), speaks about this: “The world is hungry not for busier people but bigger-hearted people. They see not only people who work for God but people who are so at home with God that they become a doorway into God.” (12) I suggest that Philippine was this. Her home was in the love of God. Our response to JPIC is powerless without this capacity to walk through the doorway into prayer and silence.

(SLIDE 12) To be and act as one Body:

To revitalize our unity in diversity and to act as one Body, dynamic, interconnected, linked with other bodies, in the world and as Church, in order to share, collaborate, and be in solidarity among ourselves and with others.

We are an international family of the Sacred Heart and more and more we are trying to learn the reality of our sisters and brothers throughout the world. Increasingly we have this urge to work together and to learn from one another, in effect, to be one Body. Philippine had an instinctive understanding of this when she resisted creating an autonomous American congregation in spite of the frustrating delays in communications from France. (13)

Nowadays there is not the same difficulty with communication although some of our provinces are challenged by internet services. Nevertheless, there are ways and means of reaching out to each other. We are much better networked and

therefore able to be responsive to adjustments and changes. The current focus on organizational development through the U-Theory that is being promoted by our General Council is a current demonstration of this consolidation of one Body.

Most theologians will highlight the interconnectedness of all creation – from Teilhard de Chardin to Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. For JPIC the work is one of relational transformation - personal, communal, social, ecological, planetary and cosmic.

The Society's Constitutions of 1988 have a particular reference that gives enormous meaning to our understanding of One Body and JPIC. From Paragraph 8 we read "The pierced Heart of Jesus opens our being to the depths of God and to the anguish of (human)kind". Now we might also add, 'and to the anguish of our suffering earth'.

This is what that paragraph says to me about One Body: It seems that a transformation is taking place in the piercing of Jesus' side. We know something about that piercing because we experience suffering, walk with others who suffer, and are grieved by our world. We are impelled to reach out, to accompany others, to pick ourselves up, to encourage the gift of hope. Sometimes we are drawn to the deepest prayer and sometimes we feel compelled to some sort of action no matter on what scale, large or small. This is our response as One Body.

Conclusion:

The Society of the Sacred Heart has a deep commitment to JPIC. Evidence of this is seen in the preparation for the General Chapter 2016, where JPIC was named as

an emerging call by nearly all provinces of the Society. As a result of this the Chapter called for an international JPIC meeting to take place within two years of the Chapter. It will take place this November in the Philippines. I have maintained that Philippine Duchesne is one of our foundresses who shows us the way in JPIC. However, as educators we need to be careful when we say this. We need to know what her reality was as much as we know what our reality is. Our image of a doorway is possible because she experienced the principles of JPIC as we know them now and we can apply her experience, - brave but full of set-backs, - to our own circumstances. I really like the comments of William Schickel, famous for his artwork of Philippine, on the eve of Philippine's canonisation 30 years ago. He shows a lovely insight into the woman who has her feet on the ground yet crosses the frontiers and boundaries of our blessed and broken world.

“This strong woman who led a cow from St. Louis to St. Charles, Missouri, will be a cosmic hero canonized on July 3rd 1988”.

And then he said, - and this is such a wonderful question for each of our themes of spirituality, education, internationality and most certainly JPIC, -

'Where to next, Philippine?' (14)

Notes

1. Patricia Rice, Missouri's Pioneer Nun, *Philippine Duchesne, RSCJ, A COLLECTION*, CEDC, 1988 (First published in the St Louis Post-Dispatch Magazine, August 23, 1987), p.22
2. Letter from Philippine Duchesne to Euphrosine Jouve Feb 1, Amelie de Mauduit, Feb 5 1818 (L 77)
3. Letter from Philippine Duchesne to Madeleine Sophie Barat May 16, 1818 (L.93)
4. Osiek, Carolyn, RSCJ, *St Rose Philippine Duchesne, A Heart on Fire across Frontiers*, Society of the Sacred Heart United States Canada, 2017, p.25

5. Courtney-Murray, John, 'The Magnificence of Heart that Can Dare Great Things', *Philippine Duchesne, RSCJ, A COLLECTION*, CEDC, 1988, p.51
6. Letter from Philippine Duchesne to Madeleine Sophie Barat from Sugar Creek, July 21, 1841 (L 569)
7. Letter from Philippine Duchesne to Madeleine Sophie Barat Sept 10, 1847 (L.610)
8. Osiek, *St Rose Philippine Duchesne*, p.34
9. Nance O'Neil, RSCJ, 'Introduction' *Philippine Duchesne, RSCJ, A COLLECTION*, CEDC, 1988, p.14
10. Osiek, *St Rose Philippine Duchesne*, p.51
11. Michael Czerny SJ, Interview, 'Migrants and Refugees', www.refugeesmigrants.va
12. Daniel G Groody, CSC, Reflection, 'What is Stirring Within', Give us this Day, January, 2018, pp.150-151
13. Osiek, *St Rose Philippine Duchesne*, p.63
14. William Schickel, 'This Blessed Woman', *Philippine Duchesne, RSCJ, A COLLECTION*, CEDC, 1988, p.34

Questions

- What struck you most from any of this information?
- What is a JPIC frontier issue that concerns you?
- What have I learned about Philippine Duchesne in relation to justice, peace and integrity of creation?