

MARIAN RONAN & MARY O'BRIEN

Women of Vision

Sixteen Founders of the
International Grail Movement



Women of Vision is a book that expands significantly public knowledge of the contributions of Catholic laywomen to church and society over the past century.

Despite historic advances in women's recognition and equality over the past half-century, the significant roles played by Roman Catholic laywomen in church and society still go largely unacknowledged. With *Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail Movement*, Marian Ronan and Mary O'Brien contribute substantially to remedying this situation.

Founded in the Netherlands in 1921, just after World War I, the Grail movement was focused, from the outset, on using laywomen's extraordinary gifts to resolve the crises in which the world found itself. By 1961, the movement had spread to twenty other countries, including Brazil, Australia, the Philippines and nine African countries.

Drawn from interviews done with Grail founders in many of these countries, *Women of Vision* highlights the relentless and often heroic work done by Grail women, founding and staffing hospitals and schools, supporting indigenous women and girls, preparing local women for church and Grail leadership, and in some cases, assuming governance roles in their own countries and at the United Nations.

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Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo

*Political power exercised by women
is worthwhile only if it is
power of a different kind.*



Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, Portugal, 1986

Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo calls her appointment as the first woman Prime Minister of Portugal in 1979 a "revolutionary act." Breaking tradition was not a new phenomenon for Maria de Lourdes. Her belief that women can make a difference in all spheres of economic and political life began many years before when, at the age of seventeen, she made the decision to attend engineering school. Her choice was influenced by a conviction that remained integral to her life's work: her belief in the contribution women can make to challenging injustices in society.

By the time Maria de Lourdes graduated in 1953 at the age of twenty-three from the Instituto Superior Tecnico in Lisbon as the only woman with a degree in chemical engineering, she had begun to pose questions about the unique identity of women that would be the catalysts for all her future achievements. What role can women take in professional life? What can they bring that is different? What is their specific place in a society where being a good wife and mother is the norm?

Maria de Lourdes was born in Abrantes, in Portugal's Tagus Valley, January 18, 1930, to Jaime de Matos Pintasilgo, who was in the wool business, and Amélia do Carmo Ruivo da Silva. Maria de Lourdes and her younger brother grew up in Lisbon in a large middle-class extended family. Because the adult members of the family were republicans, they were not practising Catholics, although they had all been baptized.

Later in life, Maria de Lourdes realized the seeming anomaly of someone like herself coming from an "unbelieving" family but recognizing that she was raised with very Christian values. The home atmosphere was strict; she and her brother were raised with a sense of their duty to care for others and a respect for the dignity of all human beings, including the poor. They were also taught to assume responsibility for their own actions as well as to take responsibility for others who did not have the opportunities they did.

Thus, Maria de Lourdes's later attraction to Christianity was an appeal to the idealism inculcated by the high ethical standards of her childhood rather than to a list of rules and dogmas. She recalled another influence on her decision to adopt Christianity. A bachelor uncle who lived with the family knew hundreds of poems by heart. His love of poetry introduced Maria de Lourdes to metaphorical language and to a world of symbolism that later opened her to faith, to seeing what is beyond the eye.

Maria de Lourdes excelled in her studies as a young student, again influenced by what she terms a "tremendous sense of duty." Attending a public high school was an advantage because students like herself were exposed to young people from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds who were valued and respected for their contribution to all of the activities of the school, rather than for their origins only.

Maria de Lourdes's decision to enter engineering school was a difficult one. She was told that this was not a field for women; one female graduate of her high school had already failed in engineering. At this point in her life, Maria de Lourdes, an avid reader, had discovered the writings of Simone Weil, the French Jewish philosopher whose books on spirituality introduced Maria de Lourdes to the worker-priest movement in France.⁶⁷ Inspired by the context of Simone Weil's life, Maria de Lourdes set her horizons on engineering school as a possible way to eventually help the worker.

Maria de Lourdes's six years at university provided the atmosphere for her to develop her intellectual life as a woman who "listened differently and asked different questions." Hers was a generation that was realizing new possibilities for women and Maria de Lourdes felt free to explore her own questions about the potential of women, including her own. Again she excelled in her studies. Of the 250 students who started in her class, fourteen remained for the full six years and she was one of the four best. The other three were men.

Perhaps one of the most significant influences on Maria de Lourdes's life from these years was her involvement with Catholic Action,⁶⁸ a student group patterned to some extent after the Young

⁶⁷ In the Worker-Priest movement, founded in France in 1941, priests worked in factories as a way of reaching out to workers. The movement was suppressed by Pope Pius XII in 1954. Windass, *The Chronicle of the Worker-Priests*.

⁶⁸ Catholic Action is a term used to describe groups of lay Catholics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who worked to influence society with Catholic principles and practices. "Catholic Action," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, accessed July 14, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Action. See also 2016 Introduction, vii-xxviii.

Christian Workers, which had started in Belgium in the early 1920s.⁶⁹ Here Maria de Lourdes was introduced to the intellectual life of the Catholic Church that she had heard about in high school through reading the work of Pope Pius XII, himself an intellectual. She was impressed by his having counselled Catholics to be on the edge of new thinking. Maria de Lourdes joined members of the Catholic Action group for heady discussions about the purpose of student life and the place of the Bible and liturgy in their lives. This experience was instrumental in what Maria de Lourdes refers to as her "conversion" to Christianity and her later attraction to the Grail.

In her last year of university, while attending a meeting of Pax Romana, an international movement of Catholic students of which she later became the first woman president, Maria de Lourdes met Rosemary Goldie, an Australian Grail member. Five years later, in 1957, Maria de Lourdes visited the Tiltenberg, in Holland. She was already involved in a successful career, having left the Commission of Nuclear Energy after two years to be project director of research and development at a large industrial complex in Lisbon. By the time she met Rachel Donders, the International President, a few months later, Maria de Lourdes had already decided that she wanted to join the Grail.

That summer, Maria de Lourdes and Teresa Santa Clara Gomes visited Grailville and by fall, the two of them had called together a group of women students from Catholic Action to begin the Grail

⁶⁹ The Young Christian Workers (YCW; French: *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne*) is an international organization founded by Rev. Joseph Cardijn in Belgium as the Young Trade Unionists; the organization adopted its present name in 1924. Its French acronym, JOC, gave rise to the then widely used terms *Jocism* and *Jocist*. It eventually spread to 48 countries. "Young Christian Workers," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, accessed November 21, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Christian_Workers.

in Portugal. Within a few years Maria de Lourdes was asked to serve as a member of the International Grail Vice-Presidency team for two terms, during the presidencies of Magdalene Oberhoffer and then Eileen Schaeffler. As an International Vice-President, Maria de Lourdes helped shape the guidelines resulting from the Grail *aggiornamento*.

By this time, Maria de Lourdes was already known in the Portuguese political arena. In 1959, at the invitation of one of the ministers, she set up a commission on the status of women; several other Portuguese Grail women served as members. By the end of the 1960s she had been invited by the Prime Minister to place her name on the list for Parliament. Maria de Lourdes refused because of her opposition to Portugal's one-party system and its participation in colonial wars. However, she did agree to appointments on two commissions, one having to do with social policy concerning women.

From 1974 until 1979, during and immediately after the Portuguese revolution, Maria de Lourdes served as Secretary of State for Social Welfare, Minister of Social Affairs, and Ambassador to UNESCO. In 1979 she became the first woman Prime Minister of Portugal, called by several writers at that time, "the last upheaval of the revolution." She served from August, 1979, through the first few weeks of 1980.

Subsequently Maria de Lourdes combined her Grail work with active involvement in the political life of Portugal and that of Europe. She ran as an independent candidate for the Portuguese presidency in 1986, coming in third, and sat as an independent in the European Parliament from 1987 to 1989. She served as chairperson of several European commissions and president of the World Independent Commission on Population and the Quality of Life. While on that commission Maria de Lourdes led the attempt, along with other international experts, to broaden the analysis of the population problem to include human rights and ecological

issues on a global scale. She was active in working groups focused on women's employment and structural change and served as a member of the National Bioethics Council. She served on the Inter-Action Council of Former Heads of Government and the Council of Women World Leaders.

Amidst her many commitments Maria de Lourdes found time to write a number of articles and chapters for books on women's issues. She launched and participated in numerous programs concerned with the identity of women in social, economic, and cultural life, politics and development, the construction of Europe and international relations, and theology and Christian spirituality.

Maria de Lourdes's many years in the Grail and in politics strongly influenced her worldview, based on a deep awareness of the connectedness between all the injustices of our times. Her approach was always one of caring for the essential rights and needs of human beings, an approach that challenges the typical political agenda and the values that underpin it.

Perhaps Maria de Lourdes's most significant contribution to the Grail and to political life was her vision of the different kinds of power that women can exercise in society and in political life, so as to bring a "trustworthy human face" to politics. She learned from personal experience the price women have to pay when they go against the norm by speaking their own truth. As she continued to work with young women toward the end of her life, she strongly encouraged them to envision and work toward a new paradigm, that of a "life-centered" world. Although she acknowledged that we are still at the beginning of this process, she held strongly to the conviction that this can only be brought about when women participate fully in all sectors of society by using their knowledge and experience in the creation of new institutions and new social structures.

Maria de Lourdes remained active till the end of her life, urging the Portuguese government, in her final weeks, to withdraw its military from the U.S. war in Iraq. She died of cardiac arrest at her home in Lisbon on July 10, 2014, at the age of 74. European newspapers acknowledged the passing of this distinguished woman who was Portugal's sole female prime minister to date and, at the time, only the second female prime minister in European history. Grail members around the world mourned her loss.

Interview

Grail Beginnings in Portugal

When Rachel Donders explained to me what the Grail was, I knew that I had found something that would foster my interests in women's contribution to the world and my search for a spiritual life that wasn't pious but came from within and could express itself in many different ways. Also, the international dimension of the Grail was, and still is, very critical for me. Early on, I came to realize it doesn't matter where I am; what matters is what I am doing, because I am rooted in this international family. This is very important. Again it was Rachel who was the thread weaving together the network of Grail people for us in our early years in Portugal. When she came to visit she would tell us about Grail people in America, in Australia, and in other parts of the world. She had such an ability to link people together.

I was a late vocation to the Grail, having made my commitment in the Nucleus at the Tiltenberg in 1961, when I was thirty-one. Teresa Santa Clara Gomes made her commitment at the same time and we had both had what you might call "on the job training," since we did not go through any established formation program.

We had visited Grailville in 1957 after attending a Pax Romana meeting in El Salvador. By then I had been elected the first woman to be the International President of Pax Romana even though I

was no longer a student but a professional woman. That was quite interesting. Before the election, a bishop from Switzerland who was responsible for the movement wired Rome to ask if a woman could head up a group of men and women. Of course, two years before this Anne Hope, another Grail member, from South Africa, had been elected vice president.

Grailville was fantastic. We arrived at the beginning of a summer program and the first evening there was a presentation of Tolstoy's "What Men Live By." At the end of a few days, Teresa Santa Clara, who was twenty-one at the time, said, "This is for me." Just like that! And indeed it was, for all of her life, without a moment's hesitation. I had to return right away to Portugal since I was on vacation from my position, but Teresa Santa Clara stayed for a month and visited different city centers. That was in August and by October we had started the Grail in Lisbon. That's how we became a reality.

We spent the next several years building the Grail in Portugal with a great deal of help and support from Rachel. Our concentration on building community out of city centers was influenced by Teresa Santa Clara's Grail experience in the United States. And we always tried to develop a rich cultural life at each center.

An early emphasis was on liturgical life, trying to give a deeper meaning to liturgy. We studied very thoroughly the documents coming from the Vatican Council and accepted invitations everywhere to discuss them. We also had Bible study groups for women and we concentrated on injustices in Portuguese society. Before long, we began to address the role of women in society. So our focus was on current problems that ranged from those one might face as a Christian, to the political situation, to the situation of women, to a new ethics.

From our earliest days, we have been aware of equality issues. For instance, here in Europe, as in the rest of the world, there's a

big gap between the salaries of men and women. And working conditions for women in this country have been very poor. In my seven years working in a factory, I learned a lot about the condition of women workers. At thirty, they looked like old women. However, our major concern has always been with women's specific contribution. We have always cared most about bringing something different to society. So again, the whole question of identity is still very important for the Grail in Portugal.

Speaking My Truth in Politics

Over the years, I have been able to bring my experience in politics to bear on the Grail. My first intensive course in politics came in 1969, before the revolution, when the Prime Minister appointed me to the Commission on Politics and General Administration.

I quickly learned how this country is run. I was the only woman among twelve men and I voted most of the time in disagreement with the majority. At that time there was strong censorship in our country, so I never could have written my own opinions for newspapers. But because what I said was coming from the chamber, it was published and then reproduced in the papers. This publicly supported what we, in the Grail, believed in. We were working on literacy, and we had started the conscientization process with people in the rural areas based on Paulo Freire's thinking. At that time we also went to Mass together with married couples and after Mass had discussions about the situation in the country, and people wanted to know what I knew.

Since our meetings were open, we sometimes had people from the secret police come. When I knew one of them was there, I would say, "Well, last week in the chamber this happened, etc." And since the Church enjoyed certain privileges, it was possible to have these little cells of resistance to the regime. After all, things had already been in the newspapers. Of course, there was suspicion of the Grail. After the revolution we were able to read the files they

had about us which said we were against everything. We were against the injustices we saw in Portugal and we were against the colonial wars, such as in Angola and Mozambique. That was our motivation, not overthrowing the regime. We had no big illusions.

I could never be obliged to take a stand against my own conscience. For this reason, I never joined any particular political party; I always remained an independent. When I became a member of the European Parliament, I applied to the socialist group as an independent although I was not a member of the socialist party.

Very often I voted differently from the rest of the group. I always explained why I voted against them and some agreed with me although they felt they couldn't vote against their party. On one occasion, the Secretary General of the group told me I was sowing trouble because I was causing disunity in the group. I disagreed with him and informed him that I was speaking out of my conscience. Unfortunately, women in politics today are coming from the political system just like men, and often they cannot speak from their own consciences.

A Woman Prime Minister: The "Last Revolutionary Act"

One of the reasons I was chosen to be Prime Minister was because I was an independent. After the 1979 election, the political parties couldn't come to an agreement because there was no absolute majority. Because of this deadlock, the President asked me since I was not in any party. I was the first, and thus far the only woman Prime Minister of Portugal. This was five years after the revolution and people were still open to new ideas. It was really the last revolutionary act since our revolution. I don't think this would be possible now.

Despite the activism of the women in the revolution and their input into the new constitution that brought the principle of gender equality to the forefront, the reaction to my appointment

was predictably mixed. Though I experienced great support from many who found that my style and concept of politics breathed a new life into Portuguese politics, this "revolutionary act" also brought about vehement opposition by members of the conservative parties in Parliament.

While I was Prime Minister, I tried all kinds of new things that were not then the custom in Portugal. For instance, in addition to cabinet meetings in Lisbon, I inaugurated mini-cabinet meetings in all the regions of the country so we could listen first hand to local problems. We held public sessions for people to meet and voice their concerns. And then we would formulate and announce plans for action.

This manner of meeting in different places was very important. I made it clear that the government had to work, not from the top down, but in partnership with the living, active forces of society. When a problem arose, such as—can shops be open on Sunday?—we would bring together people from various segments of society, the tradespeople, the consumers, groups who often had no say in these things.

So what I defended was that all groups in society have to be social partners with the government on the questions in which they have competence and which affect them directly. This was pedagogical, bringing together people from the Left and the Right. These ideas were used later by my successors. Just the other day at the opening ceremonies for Expo '98, I saw the president who appointed me. The speaker was talking about social partners and a civil society. The former president turned to me and said, "That's what you used to talk about and now it is a reality."

Women, Politics and Power

I do believe that women can make a difference in political life. For women, politics is connected to daily life, not outside of the

events of life. It is naming things as they really are and therefore establishing different priorities. Political power exercised by women is worthwhile only if it is power of a different kind. Power, to me, is of little interest unless it corresponds to new attitudes, new ideas, to another way of managing affairs at all levels, ranging from the village to the planet.

Women express themselves differently and therefore introduce new breadth and new directions into politics. We speak with a more personal and human voice, a voice of caring and concern that can cut through the bureaucracy and create action. Of course if we really make a difference, we have to pay a price. I have experienced this, and other women involved in politics in Europe say the same thing. Certainly we work harder than men do. And the antagonisms we create often have nothing to do with the subject we are dealing with, but with our identity as women.

For instance, when I was prime minister I created a program that was heavily attacked from the right. In my presentation of this program to the Parliament I asked, "What is at stake here? Is it the program, itself, is it the time, what is it?" At the end I said, "What is at stake is having a woman for prime minister." Before I even reached that point in my speech, one of the male members of Parliament stood up and said, "It is you that's at stake." So it was really clear.

Some people even said I was an invention of the president because he had appointed me. Interesting, since I was known long before he was because of my opposition to the wars the government supported. It's the Adam and Eve syndrome that other women in politics also experience: we are taken from the rib of a man, therefore, we are invented by him.

But I have also experienced very strongly that people want politics to make a difference in their lives. Men often just cannot accommodate to these differences. Men see themselves as actors in the big drama of government that dictates their lines.

However, for women I see some dangers. Appointing and electing women can be mere tokenism. When I was part of the European Parliament, we were allowed to join three commissions rather than the usual two if the third one was not considered important. So I joined a third one, the Commission on Women's Rights.

And simple "infiltration" into politics is not enough. Women then find themselves overwhelmed by this double task of being a woman and a politician, but also by a style that is not theirs. Frequently, then, they assimilate for survival and become like men by mimicking their behavior. As a result, they become unbearable, doing the same things men do in all kinds of enterprises, including politics. And often when they "succeed," they block other women.

The other danger is that women become subdued and therefore invisible. What we are trying to do now is to find out how to walk between these two extremes. This is a new way and I think we are still in the beginning—very much in the beginning.

The strength of one or two women in politics is not enough to generate a new system. What could be significant for society is that women in politics question the established norms so that politics returns to the basics, to structuring social relations for the common good. In order for this to happen, we need to do more than apply human rights to females as human beings. This just makes them objects of a process. The challenge of our age lies in the possibility of women as subjects, leading the way in society.

Toward a Politics of Caring

I think what we need today is to go beyond an interdisciplinary approach to a transdisciplinary one where everything intertwines, where our point of view comes from a knowledge of sociology, philosophy, and economics across cultures. We thus allow new terms of reference for human knowledge to emerge and a new paradigm of social organization to take shape and gain momentum.

I call this "walking among fields of knowledge," a methodology for me which is extremely important and which is not reductionist or linear; it does not limit the issues.

The methodology I am suggesting assumes that every human being is in the center, the human person is not just dissected into small segments. We are part of a complex whole and everything relates to everything else. Therefore, not only is knowledge important, but feelings and emotions, the total context of human life.

There was a reason that the title of the book coming from my commission on population and quality of life was *Caring for the Future*.⁷⁰ The book is about much more than studying or planning or predicting the future. It's really about caring. When we care, we share with others and we learn new ways. Today there is such an escalation and fragmentation of knowledge that people don't know where they fit any more. Hence, the search for modes of belonging lead people away from community to seek refuge in a world of immediacy rather than through the bonds of basic and rooted solidarity. Participation and empowerment of people in the process of improving quality of life are the key words for a new life-supportive society. I believe we need a new set of values for knowledge to do this. At the same time, personal frontiers for knowledge ask for the realistic appraisal of the limits imposed by the higher value of life. All this is essential for me.

In addition, the method of "walking among fields of knowledge" helps us to understand the relationships between militarism, ecological destruction and poverty. I would say that the main issue for today and for the coming decade is one of poverty. Among every four human beings on this planet, one lives in total destitution. Most of these live in the southern hemisphere.

⁷⁰ Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo and Paul Harrison, *Caring for the Future: Making the Next Decades Provide a Life Worth Living* (New York, NY and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Something is wrong. It's not just a matter of sharing with those in need; it's more than that. It's a matter of reorganizing our national and global priorities and systems. During the Cold War we were all concerned with democracy and freedom from fear. I don't deny the value of liberty but I have always felt that, coming from a poor country like mine, liberty without housing and food is an empty word. Our world population is close to six billion, and one billion nine million of them don't even have the most rudimentary sanitation facilities in their houses. One billion three hundred million people don't have drinking water in the house where they live. Many have to walk miles to get it. For me, the revolution, or whatever needs to happen, has to involve a relentless combating of poverty.

It is now very clear that as we move towards more globalization, not only do people become disposable, but so do regions and whole countries. Take the situation of Africa. Africa now has a smaller share in international trade than they did under colonialism. This is one of the ironies of political life.

But when I think of poverty and being disposable, I think of women and children who make up the greatest number of the poor. The children, of course, suffer because the women suffer. If we don't find the mechanisms to regulate and control globalization we will have more and more poverty and women will be greatly affected.

Unfortunately, there are many women involved in decision-making positions leading to a kind of globalization that especially hurts women and children. So we need a tremendous awakening, a consciousness-raising, not as we had in the 1960s and 1970s with the women's liberation movement, but in terms of what we are doing to others. What are we doing as women? Where are the possibilities for doing for others? By what values do we live? What are we working for? What is our vision, how do we look at the world? Do we look at the world only through the eyes of

professionals with one kind of power, or do we see from a spiritual perspective?

The Global Challenge for the Grail

Within the Grail, we need to study more. I am not referring necessarily to degrees and academic life, where people often just talk to themselves. People go on building theories and reproducing ideas so that praxis is often fed by very little thought. What we need is the interplay between theory and praxis that often are totally separated in the real world. So I think it is very important when we have projects in the Grail to ask why we are embarking on this, what is the rationale for this project. For instance, we need to ask, what is globalization, what does it mean? And then, what can we do about it? I see this as a necessary commitment of the Grail.

I think in order to face globalization we have to become more global ourselves. This sense of globalizing has to expand to our countries, our cultures, to other Christian denominations and to other religions where women are searching spiritually in other ways. So our first group is not necessarily the group of our country, because we work with people from other cultures.

For instance, Eileen Schaeffler and I were not close before she became International President and I was Vice President. Although we were very different we had the same vision about the Grail so there was a companionship, a solidarity between us. And the same was true with Magdalene Oberhoffer when she and I worked together. It was only after living under the same roof in Paris for two years that I realized she was a woman with a tremendous culture in music, in literature, in art. I still feel a great friendship with her and there are others in the Grail I feel the same way about.

We in the north have to look at the south in total partnership regardless of our backgrounds. At this point, the solidarity is

there but sometimes it is there in a patronizing way, left over from colonialism; this undermines the international spirit. Change is structural but it also has to be psychological. We have to see the poor as ourselves. We need real networks of people within the Grail who feel the same way, who are developing new communities. This is already happening through e-mail with some of the young members.

We are a small movement and we can't change everything, but we can work with the two linking threads. The first is a very important shift in our responsibility—to denounce what in globalization leads to more poverty and to the social exclusion of people. This would not just be theoretical, but would include the actual poor in our own regions. We know that development does not necessarily bring human rights and quality of life. The president of the Grail in Brazil reminds us that Brazil is not an underdeveloped country—it is an unjust country.

Anne Hope and Sally Timmel worked on this in Africa using the best of tools from Marxist theory. We need now the same kind of analogies of society but done with the tools of globalization. Namely, the center of power is no longer in the political sphere. The center of power is with the multinationals. Power is now in the marketplace.

In my youth and early adult life, when I held political positions, one of the principal convictions was that political power had to control economic power because economics and the market are blind. The market doesn't see women, it doesn't see the poor, and it doesn't see the vulnerable or those who are not organized or are too weak to organize. Now the market only sees those who are able to make profits and not even those who share the profit.

Again, we have to understand poverty from various perspectives, not just poverty in itself. With poverty come issues such as the disappearance of systems of life, our exploitation of the

environment and nature that is criminal because it destroys life support systems. This analysis of our societies is a very important element. Then we need to take a stand against the specific aspects of globalization that bring about and maintain poverty in our own countries.

A Personal Challenge

Change, though, is both structural and personal. So there is another thread that links to our concerns in the Grail, one that is very important for us in terms of globalization. Not only do we have to confront economic power but we need to take care of ourselves by supporting and being in solidarity with all Grail members as we strive to embrace a certain lifestyle, one that is a spiritual expression of the dignity of all things and beings in God's creation.

Even if we want to live according to certain values, the pressure of the milieu is very strong, with the power of the economic market. And conversion doesn't happen once and for all. Conversion comes from understanding at any time in our lives what prevents us from seeing the face of God. We know that's not the same at twenty, forty, or sixty years of age. We live in a world in transition and we are experiencing a tremendous change of paradigms. This makes the need for lifelong renewal very important.

For my own spiritual life and renewal, I have to remind myself that my work is only a little drop; it's not going to change the world, and sometimes I won't see any results. I spend time in nature and I also read a lot. In the evening, I read the text for the next day's liturgy.

Occasionally I go to Taizé, a Protestant monastic community in France that attracts people from all over Europe. Talking to the young people there is so stimulating. I feel a tremendous bridge to the future with the younger generation. Taizé has a very joyful and

prayerful atmosphere centered on the essentials. I am reminded that prayer for me is not a dialogue but is part of an orientation and direction—to be quiet and silent before God. For me, also, while traveling in other countries, the meeting of people from other cultures and sharing in conversation has often touched me at the core of my spiritual being.

All of these experiences continue to deepen my conviction that across the spectrum of those who have nothing and those who have a lot, the solidarity of women is something we have to build in a very clear way. Our very survival depends on this, so that somehow we have to create another type of world and other types of rules, mechanisms, values that emphasize our global reality and the creation of a more humane world for all.