

## Founding Day 2019 by S. Melanie Paradis

When I first volunteered to offer this reflection I thought what I needed to share would come easily; it didn't. I prayed for inspiration, I asked M. Clara what she would like me to say, I read the Founding Constitution, I thought about what we needed to hear and reflect on at this time in our Province as we anticipate our Pre-Chapter meeting together. Nothing came. I was getting a bit desperate. And then one morning while I was reading the Global Sisters Report in my email I came across an article in the Horizons section which is dedicated to young sister writers. The article is titled: Forging Foundations without Forgetting our Founders. I'd like to share a selection with you.

This is what Colleen Gibson, a young Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia has to say to her congregation. Imagine she is speaking to us.

(That, after all, is what) our founders, no matter the congregation, called for: a spirit ready for any good work — ready to serve, to love and to live the Gospel without boundaries.

Remembering that call is the first step in more fully living it out; the first step in fostering and furthering the mission we have committed ourselves to, to becoming founders for the future.

Such a call requires a remembering of the past, an engagement in the present, and a desire for the future. There is no clear road map for such living, but (if my experience in the classroom is any indication), flexibility certainly stands as a paramount virtue of firm foundations for the future.

To trust the Spirit is to quickly realize you aren't in control. As much as you might want a specific outcome or desire a certain course of events, no formulation is a failsafe path to your desired outcome. Formulaic foundations can come off as contrived and overbearing. Yes, we must plan for the future, but some of the greatest planning allows us to let reality, relationships and individuals breathe life into the structures set forth. (Think Bob Makowski, form follows function).

Thus, we lay groundwork on which something, perhaps unknown even to us, can be built. To do so, we must ask ourselves: "What is the goal of this undertaking?"

"What is the foundation we hope to build on?" "What do we hope to embody in this endeavor?" (imagine what M. Clara was hoping for then and where we are now).

We must plan with an eye toward flexibility, doing the deep inner work of personal and communal reflection that allows a structure to flex rather than falter. This requires listening attentively — not only to the Spirit within (me/)us, but also to the Spirit among us, the Spirit that speaks in the voices of those with whom we journey.

The voices that *stand* out in these conversations *are* not those that *give* pat answers or *propose* old models; the outstanding voices *are* those who *want* to invest in a vision that, although uncertain at times, *seek* to do what our first sisters did: meet the needs most pressing in the community. (meet the needs of the time)  
(Change in verb tense is mine.)

(This brings us to one of the most vital lessons of laying foundations: Failure is always part of the option.

What feels like failure in the moment is an opportunity for growth,"( I wrote earlier in the process of setting up this new ministry.) "With any luck, as we free ourselves and our institutions to fail, we will discover a new form of success: success in faithfulness to the Spirit, that far exceeds anything we could ever accomplish on our own.")

This is what our first sisters did as they founded ministries and strived to live out the call planted in their hearts. They were grounded in God's call to actively live the Gospel, and with that firm foundation, they were able to face the trials and tribulations of doing something new. Time and again, they were ready for any good work. Their example and the many needs of our day compel us to do the same: choosing not to fear failure, to practice flexibility, and to remain faithful to those who've come before us and the Spirit that calls us forward.

Colleen Gibson, Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia  
Forging foundations without forgetting our founders  
October 18, 2019  
Global Sisters Report: Horizons

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Those were the words of a young temporary professed sister of St. Joseph.

What are we, Wheaton Franciscans, being called to, 159 years after the Founding of our Congregation?

And, what “foundation” do we have as guide?

Both the Founding Constitution written by M. Clara and today’s readings from Ezekiel and John offer us guidance, wisdom and inspiration.

M. Clara tells us in our Founding Constitution

Love accomplishes great things if it is great; it produces nothing if it is not great.

What love was able to accomplish among some thousands of Christians, that will it also accomplish among a few Sisters.

We know from our foundation, from our beginning that love will lead us where we need to go.

Ezekiel reminds us that God will give us a new heart and a new spirit, replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh.

Our hearts are softened so that we can listen and hear each other in love.

John offers us Jesus’s great commandment to love God with our whole selves and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

This is our founding value, charism, way of life to follow. It provides us with the inner strength to do together what needs to be done for our future.

On the last page of the Founding Constitution the page Bishop Konrad Martin signed it reads:

“This present Rule read and approved for use for the time being.”

For the time being.

What is ours to do, for the time being?

Next year will be the 160 year anniversary of our founding.

When we look back at this year, what do we want to see?

Let us follow in faithfulness the foundation our foundress laid out for us, living our charism of love.

Let us live into the life God offers us, now, knowing that those sisters who came before us did the same.

Let us remember our ability to meet the needs of the times in new ways.

Let us be courageous and hopeful to take the next steps together as we: Forge foundations without forgetting our foundress.

I invite us to pray together our Chapter 2016 Wisdom Statement

Compelled by the Spirit to fresh expressions of our  
Franciscan life,

We commit:

To exploring again the heart of our charism,  
To deepening our bonds with each other, and  
To facing the mystery of the not-yet-known,  
That we may respond anew to the needs of our times.

We go forth to be a blessing in the heart of the world.