

**Celebration of Consecrated Life Day-  
Saturday February 3, 2018 11:00 a.m.  
Queen of All Saints, Chicago  
Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB**

“What does it mean for consecrated men and women to be a prophetic witness in Church and society? How do we respond to this call?”

I. Introduction

Thank you for coming to think with us about our common call to be prophetic witnesses in church and society. Each of our communities/congregations has a rich history of being prophetic in responding to the needs of our world. We stand on the shoulder of so many prophetic people, both men and women. And.....We are each called to be prophetic....

Michael (Brother Michael Gosch, CSV) and I are not here as experts.....We each have good energy and many interests. We come simply as one with you so that we can listen to one another at our tables, here, in conversation etc. !

Our goal here is to get us thinking and talking to one another about today’s topic - “What does it mean for consecrated men and women to be a prophetic witness in Church and society? How do we respond to this call?”  
You know these words. You have heard the call. This is a new moment!

II. Overview of our time together

1. I will offer some thoughts from a couple of sources (Walter Bruggemann, Steve Bevens, Jeremy Langford, and from our scriptures) on the prophetic in our tradition (in the next few minutes....) My thoughts will be interspersed with some quiet reflection for you to think about the prophetic in your own experience of life. I will suggest a couple of touchstones for thinking about prophetic witness right now.
2. Michael will share some thoughts on Importance of Language/Importance of Approach will offer a mantra for us in a four-word sentence (Every Human Being deserves...)
3. We will think together about the remarkable work done in Chicago by our communities / our congregations and then, about the unmet needs in church and society.
4. We will invite you to think about and then, to share what it might mean for each of us to be a prophetic witness.
5. We will share a bit about our present ministries

6. The afternoon will be, as on your schedule, with a panel and some chance for interchange among us.

### III. Breaking open the Prophetic

1. As an old (former) english teacher, I always need to begin with exploring words. You know these words, *prophetic, witness, call* - in our tradition, in your own lives. And...often in Francis' call to us, in the gospel call, and more.....
2. My context for talking about the prophetic.....
  - a. Lived my early years among prophetic people (parents, CFMers, priests, international visitors)
  - b. Joined a community of women, many of whom spoke/speak prophetically (Cecilia in liturgy, Gabriel for those in poverty, Laura on racism and church, Miriam on prison and capital punishment, Judy on Latina/Latino education and so many others)
  - c. Earned my Masters in theology under great teachers who focused on the theology of revelation as a living process
3. We all probably have a sense that prophets are way above "us" and that the Old Testament prophetic function of foretelling the future is impossible in these incredibly confusing and challenging days in which we live.....who knows the future???? Not !!!! - probably not you.....
4. I invite you to think of "prophetic" outside of that use of the word. To begin, let's reflect quietly, I would ask you to jot down a couple of words that describe
  - a. people whom you would call "prophetic" ... and then,
  - b. the names of people you have known who have prophetic qualities.....
5. Considering
  - a. some scriptural people we call prophets:
    - Anna & Simeon – old, insightful, waiting to die, faithful, willing to speak hard words to Mary about what she would face in their lives
    - Isaiah – at a critical time in the history of Israel, spoke out clearly, poetically - strongly to confront the moral breakdown of his society, acted as an advisor to the ruler, and, in a 3<sup>rd</sup> section, acts as an

encourager to the people at the end of the Babylonian exile.....

- Jeremiah – in defense, speaks of his human defects (we have many!) specifically “I know not how to speak.” And God responds “See, I place my words in your mouth”
  - Samuel – young, it took 3 times for him to even recognize the call (and only with a little help), then, he was asked to confront his mentor, his teacher about the corruption in Eli’s very own family.....
  - John the Baptist – lived outside of “normal” society and knew who he was.
- b. The circumstances of their calls – young, resistant, startling, misunderstanding..... Our call is so often unexpected, requires leaving something quite comfortable, is not to something we had planned for.....
- c. Prophetic characteristics: irritating, grating, startled, flamboyant, annoying, impractical, unassuming, seeming madness, false, true, poetic, imaginative, .....and most importantly they were each able to see that things could be different
- d. Jesus
- i. One way to look at Jesus as a prophet is to see that his “characteristic idiom is anguish not anger” (e.g. over Jerusalem or at the death of his friend, Lazarus....). He was a feeling person.
  - ii. Another is to look at the way he was critical publicly– often in an act of public criticism (curing on the Sabbath....), his approach was with compassion and at the same time he dared to act against the numbness of the social context in which he lived. He was critical.
  - iii. Jesus is presented as a faithful embodiment of an alternative consciousness. He moved about and people saw that life had been inexplicably changed. He was energizing.

6. Two suggested touchstones for the word “prophetic”:

- a. According to Jeremy Langford in God Moments, the strongest claims placed on Jesus followers (I Cor 12:3-7, 12-13) were to:
  - i. form community
  - ii. serve the common good
- b. Three other thoughts that might be a touchstone is from a talk by Steve Bevans. The prophetic voice was / is:
  - always toward a better keeping of the covenant (In other words, the prophetic is always rooted in our deepest relationship with God.)
  - is rooted in dialogue (and therefore requires listening well to ourselves and to others)
  - willing to speak out

7. (WB) “ Although the Church has never officially applied the term “prophet” to anyone not so named in Scripture, It is nevertheless plain that God spoke through many different instruments throughout history...” (JBC) some have been canonized (Teresa, Frances, Catherine, Hildegard, Therese, and maybe now Dorothy Day.... And so many others.....)
8. We often think of prophecy being crystallized in individual voices but it is really part of each of us and only when we
  - a. form community and serve the common good.
  - b. remember the covenant, practice dialogue and good listening, and are willing to speak out

#### IV. The Challenge is that

1. the prophetic imagination is so often blocked. Take a moment to jot down what you think might block the prophetic in our world today: ..... (Wealth, oppressive policy, static religions, what Bruggemann calls “a management mentality (one without a sense of mystery and only of control....)
2. the prophetic imagination requires passion – the readiness to care, to suffer, to die, to feel...
3. the call in a situation such as ours is formidable (so was Samuel’s! ...and we are listening people (CF - Weston hymn. “When God opens the eyes of our lives, and the ears of our years are unsealed, then, we will be a people fully awake, a people who may listen deeply”...)

#### V. Our call

1. As I listened to the daily readings these past weeks, I kept hearing stories of “CALL”. It almost seemed planned....
2. Our call comes in so many ways:
  - a. In our baptism

- b. In our vocation to religious life
- c. In the gospel
- d. In the voices of people around us
- e. In silence
- f. In listening
- g. In the cry of those who are poor in our world

You know it maybe better than I!

- VI. The call today is that we be prophetic witnesses so for a moment let's think about that word – *WITNESS*.
1. Some one who sees / hears/ something and is willing to do something with that knowledge (in court, at the scene of an accident, .....)
  2. Someone whose life of authenticity calls others to follow.....
  3. *This is what we are called to witness – our own knowledge and conviction that things can be different and that our actions can bring that about (sometimes very slowly..... for, as Teilhard says, “the work of God moves very slowly”*

When I completed my local and national leadership roles, I decided I wanted to learn about immigration .....so guess whom I called???? I asked where I could begin to listen to immigrants and to learn about their reality in our country.....

At his suggestion, I began to volunteer with ICDI.....

Here's Brother Michael....

Unmet Needs:

*What are the unmet needs in today's society?*

Our city is rich with the work done and being done currently by men and women religious. You know it in ways that neither of us do...You know too, that the current reality is changing and new needs are emerging for us – regarding our roles in our church and in our world. New ways of responding are emerging too – multi culturally, technologically.

We are called to day to stretch our horizons.... So...think about your neighborhood, your section of the city or suburbs. What are the needs of the people you meet each day or those you hear about in the media? Who is not getting a lot of attention these days?

We are seeing unmet needs in the immigrant populations and you may too.... What needs? Where else? Where are we not speaking out for justice in our land? Where are people not being kind and respectful to one another?

Pope Francis urged us to be creative and to “abandon familiar rhetoric”. God is doing something new in us and through us. When we have a listening heart and openness to the unexpected and to the Spirit,  
What do you hear and see? What do you observe?

Take a moment of quiet to think about life as you see it and the unmet needs that are around you, the unmet needs that are in our land? .... in our world?

2-3 minutes of quiet

I invite you to talk at your tables. We will not ask you to report on this. Rather this is just a chance for you to talk at your tables about what you see.... What you hear..... what causes you to feel anguished? Of what are you feeling critical? What needs energizing in your world?

4-5 minutes of conversation

Our response:

*How do we respond as women and men religious today?*

So, your conversations were lively.....take one or two of those things and share with one another a creative way that men and women religious might respond to that reality in our world.

4-5 more minutes of conversation

During the LCWR’s scrutiny by the Vatican (you remember that....), over and over again we participated in contemplative dialogue on the Scripture passage “Behold I am doing something new.....”

Here we are at a new moment in time. God is indeed doing something new. ....and maybe so will we.....

Now we want to share what we each did to respond to a need that caused us anguish.