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OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

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ANN IDA GANNON, BVM, CENTER FOR WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP  
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, CHICAGO

**CAROL FRANCES JEGEN, BVM**  
**Teaching the Way of Justice and Peace**  
by Prudence A. Moylan, Ph.D.

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*“Love and truth will meet.  
Justice and peace will kiss.”  
Psalm 85*

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In May 1996, The Chicago Medallion for Excellence in Catechesis was awarded to Sr. Carol Frances Jegen, Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) in recognition of her pioneering work in religious education and her tireless advocacy for justice and peace. Presented by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, this distinguished honor praised Sr. Carol Frances’s faithful service to the Church and to the world. Plans for the Jegen Center for Catechetical Media and Research were also announced. As an expansion of the Mundelein College Center for Religious Education that Sr. Carol Frances began in 1959, the Jegen Center would offer multimedia resources to all those who seek to better understand and deepen their faith. The naming of the center signified both “the founder’s role of Sr. Carol Frances and the financial and moral support provided by her, her parents, and her siblings.”<sup>1</sup>

Both of these honors celebrated Sr. Carol Frances’s vision of religious education as the growth and development of a lifelong friendship with Jesus—a relationship that needs to be celebrated in the Sacraments, deepened through prayer, and expressed in actions that promote justice and further the mission of Jesus Christ on earth. Psalm 85, an ancient prayer expressing hope and confidence in God’s loving kindness, captures Sr. Carol Frances’s vision for the world and her deep trust in God’s faithfulness.<sup>2</sup> Her ministry of educating the laity, especially women, and educating Church leaders, including clergy and women religious has been fueled by the words of Psalm 85. Sr. Carol Frances has dedicated her life to cultivating the growth of a new catechesis. Her vocation continues to be the embodiment of her lifelong dream of building a society in which the unity of charity and justice will usher in great peace and joy to all God’s people.

Trusting in the interconnectedness of all God’s people, Sr. Carol Frances has readily created and joined multiple communities and di-

verse networks throughout her life—networks that engaged colleagues and students, neighbors and strangers, religious leaders and laity, Latinos and Anglo-Americans, Christians and Jews, women and men alike. She believes everyone is invited into the mysteries of Jesus' life and resurrection. While Sr. Carol Frances acknowledges and respects the hierarchical organization of the Church, she prefers to use metaphors from the Second Vatican Council which describe the Church as both a pilgrim people and the people of God. In that spirit, Sr. Carol Frances is one of forty seven leading religious scholars and activists who signed the 1977 Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern, which was reprinted around the world and led to the founding of the National Council of the Laity housed at Mundelein.<sup>3</sup> Committed to actively engaging the laity in contemporary faith practices, Sr. Carol Frances has helped to transform religious education in the United States and to influence religious organizations all over the globe.

Beginning with her first appointment at Mundelein College in 1957, Sr. Carol Frances has been undeterred in her efforts to expand religious education beyond formal degree programs to engage a wider array of educational formats, including, among others, the development of the Hispanic Institute, the Mundelein Interfaith Center for Religious Education, and the Center for Women and Peace. She also created and participated in many networks of lecturers, bringing both internationally acclaimed speakers to Mundelein and traveling herself to speak to parishes, women's groups, clergy and ministerial training programs. She worked to connect her religious education programs to other educational centers near and far, including Spertus College, now the Spertus Institute for Jewish Leadership and Learning, the Catholic Theological Union, and the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas. She developed lasting relationships with the United Farm Workers of America, the first national union to advocate for the rights of farm workers, and Pax Christi, a nonprofit committed to creating peace through nonviolence. Sr. Carol Frances served on numerous advisory councils, committees established by U.S. Bishops, and the Board of Trustees for the Chicago Theological Union.

Committed to building connections among all people and willing to challenge existing divisions, Sr. Carol Frances's life work has been characterized by this spread of meaningful relationships that link clergy,

women religious, and catechists with people of faith from around the world. This nontraditional approach mirrors that of a rhizome, an expansive underground network of roots that readily produces multiple nodes and shoots. Much like bamboo, a rhizomatic plant has “no center and no defined boundary; rather it is made up of a number of semi-independent nodes, each of which is capable of growing and spreading on its own, bounded only by the limits of its habitat.”<sup>4</sup> This ever expansive and regenerative botanical growth pattern, shared by plants as diverse as ginger, crabgrass, perennial rice, and lilies-of-the-valley, describes the living networks of relationships that make life meaningful—networks that Sr. Carol Frances felt were integral to her understanding of catechesis. This rhizome metaphor also reminds us that Sr. Carol Frances’s passion for catechesis and her love of Jesus continue to be formed in and by relationships that branch and grow simultaneously, and not sequentially.

In her later years, Sr. Carol Frances was encouraged by the BVM community to write an autobiography. She chose instead to compose a deeply moving memoir using the song prayers she had written throughout her life. Throughout her memoir, *Enjoying Jesus: Small Songs of Prayer*, Sr. Carol Frances gives detailed descriptions of the context for each of these song prayers, adding to the richness of her faith journey. Her words offer insight into the pain, confusion, and fear, as well as the grace and abiding joy that Sr. Carol Frances has experienced in her ministry and in her lifelong efforts to live out the vision of Psalm 85. Her lasting friendship with Jesus as well as the love of her family and the BVM community have sustained her and given her the courage to live a life of risk and prophetic witness. To understand the breadth of her compassion for all of God’s people and the depth of her commitment to a new catechesis, we will now explore the adventures of Sr. Carol Frances’s life.

## The Early Years: Rooted in Love and the BVM Community

Sr. Carol Frances was born in 1925, the first born of Julian and Evelyn Jegen. Her parents baptized her Julia Anna and called her Julie. Her mother was a concert pianist and a singer. She was educated at the Chicago Conservatory of Music and grew up in the Lutheran faith tradition. Sr. Carol Frances's father was Catholic and co-owned Jegen Florist on the north side of Chicago. According to the Catholic requirements for an interfaith marriage, the Jegen children were raised Catholic. By 1936, Sr. Carol Frances had three sisters and one brother, all of whom were shaped by their parent's deep religious values. Two of her sisters later joined religious congregations: Marilyn became Mary Evelyn, S.N.D., a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, and Evelyn, who kept her baptismal name, became Mary Evelyn, R.C., the Religious of the Cenacle. Her sister Carol, so named because of her December birthday, married and raised a family of six children. Her brother, Richard, also married and raised a family and succeeded his father in the family floral business.

As members of St. Robert Bellarmine parish, the Jegen children attended the parish school and were taught by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. During an interview in 2005 for *Salt*, a magazine of the BVM Congregation, Sr. Carol Frances reminisced about how at the age of ten she had confided to her mother that she was only learning about the life of Jesus in her religion class. She was not learning the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Her mother assured her that learning about the life of Jesus was sufficient.<sup>5</sup> Sr. Carol Frances's friendship with Jesus, which became the source of her lifelong happiness, has deep roots. While in grammar school, Sr. Carol Frances joined a sodality. The sodality movement, which focused on Catholic youth, spread widely in the Chicago area. Sodality members committed to deepening their faith understanding and living their faith through prayer and action for social justice.<sup>6</sup> It was Sr. Carol Frances's good fortune to be introduced to many theological understandings in her childhood that would be more fully realized in the new catechesis following the Second Vatican Council, a catechesis she worked passionately to develop.

Through the shared faith traditions of her family, Sr. Carol Frances has developed a profound respect for different religious insights and an

early formation in ecumenism. From her mother, she learned both the integral relationship of justice and peace and the transformative power of music and song. In her personal prayer life, Sr. Carol Frances writes prayers songs of her relationship with Jesus and uses musical metaphors in much of her writing. From her father's strong Eucharistic faith, she was introduced to the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which later became a central theme in her theological work. From an

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early age, Sr. Carol Frances understood the inner-connections among different faith traditions. The communities and networks she engaged in throughout her adult years reflect this belief.

Sr. Carol Frances's early faith, nurtured by her family and through her membership in the sodality, deepened and expanded in high school. In 1939, Sr. Carol Frances won a scholarship to Immaculata High School where she first met the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM). She was an active participant in the Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action (CISCA), a union

of high school sodalities led by the Jesuits. CISCA included more than 15,000 Chicago Catholic youth who participated in Saturday sessions exploring Catholic tenets and coming to understand Catholic Action, defined as the responsibility of the laity to exhort Catholic influence in the world. CISCA students sought opportunities to put faith into action through the Catholic Action process of observe, judge, and act.<sup>7</sup>

As members of the CISCA community, Sr. Carol Frances met students from St. Elizabeth High School, the first and only African-American Catholic high school in Chicago at the time. She visited their school, and the contrast in facilities and lack of resources shocked her. She and her friends from CISCA wanted to take action against this injustice. Recognizing the complexity of the issue, the director of CISCA sent the students to talk to Ed Marciniak, who was a doctoral candidate in sociology and race relations at Loyola University. He worked with the students to develop a survey for all Catholic schools, which they then circulated, tab-

ulated, analyzed, and reported.<sup>8</sup> The survey findings, which highlighted these disparities, challenged the leadership of the Archdiocese of Chicago. While the CISCA students did not see the immediate results they had hoped for, the survey helped to set change in motion. For Sr. Carol Frances, this was an early lesson in advocating for justice that she has never forgotten.

In 1943, Sr. Carol Frances graduated from Immaculata High School and along with many of her classmates continued her education at Mundelein College, which was also run by the BVM sisters. Having grown up during The Great Depression, Sr. Carol Frances developed a keen sense of frugality and later recalled her satisfaction at having determined that being a commuter student saved her half the cost of attending Clarke College in Dubuque Iowa, another BVM college.<sup>9</sup> Once she discerned her call to join the BVM Congregation, however, Sr. Carol Frances went to Dubuque in September 1944. She entered the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary right before her nineteenth birthday. On her reception day six months later, she became a novice and received the name of Carol Frances. This name honored her sister Carol and established a special relationship with Francis of Assisi and Mary Frances Clarke, the founder of the BVM Congregation.

For the next two years, Sr. Carol Frances developed a growing understanding of how to live a life of faith in a prayerful and supportive community of women. As a novice, she heard the Annals of the Community read at mealtime and learned the history of the BVM Congregation, including their early formation in Ireland, their formal foundation in Philadelphia, and their later relocation to Iowa. Through these stories and the BVM traditions of prayer and song, she added a love of her BVM sisters to her love for the Jegen family. Her deepening theological understanding of her vocation to religious life led Sr. Carol Frances to make her temporary vows in 1947. She was then sent to teach at St. Xavier grammar school in St. Louis, where she also continued her studies at nearby St. Louis University. In 1951, Sr. Carol Frances earned an undergraduate degree in history and was sent to Holy Angels Academy in Milwaukee where she taught high school girls.

In 1958, Sr. Carol Frances joined a small group of women religious who were numbered among the first women to earn graduate degrees in theology. Advanced courses in Catholic theology were typically restrict-

ed to men, almost all of whom were either priests or seminarians. Marquette's graduate program in theology and subsequent doctoral program in religious studies were intended primarily, though not exclusively, for women in religious congregations. Sisters were the majority of students in the early years but were later joined by other lay women and lay men.<sup>10</sup> Sr. Carol Frances completed her master's degree in 1958. She later enrolled as a full time doctoral student in 1964 and completed her Ph.D. in 1968. Her doctoral dissertation was on the *Acts of the Apostles*, a study of Pentecost and the early Christian community.

## Mundelein College: Spreading a New Catechesis

In September 1957, Sr. Carol Frances accepted an appointment to Mundelein College. The president of Mundelein, Sr. Ann Ida Gannon, BVM, knew Sr. Carol Frances from their days as graduate students, and she requested that Sr. Carol Frances establish a Department of Theology at Mundelein. Excited by the possibilities, Sr. Carol Frances also understood the need. The BVM Congregation of sisters had long been advocating for the continuing education of its members. Sr. Carol Frances and the BVM leadership believed that one of the dangers facing the Church was the increasing number of ill-prepared teachers of religion who had little or no access to a high quality theological education.<sup>11</sup> Sr. Carol Frances set out to remedy this situation. She believed that to "help impart an ever-deepening understanding of the mystery of the Church in all its aspects is the great work of those dedicated to religious education."<sup>12</sup> Together with her BVM colleagues and a growing number of lay women and men, Sr. Carol Frances developed a theology curriculum for undergraduate students that incorporated the theological understandings promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, including a strong focus on Scriptural foundations, developmentally appropriate instruction, and the active participation of the faith community.

Under Sr. Carol Frances's leadership, the theology department grew rapidly, and by 1960, the BVM Provincial superiors requested that Mundelein develop and host a summer institute for elementary and high school religious education teachers. Seventy five BVM sisters and fifteen diocesan priests attended the first Summer Institute in 1961. Courses

included Scripture, theology, and catechesis. All students earned a certificate upon completion of nine courses over three summers, and many students expressed interest in continuing their studies. Sr. Carol Frances encouraged them all. By 1967 more than one third of inquiries about the Summer Institute were about graduate work.<sup>13</sup> The institute continued until 1970 when it was incorporated into the graduate degree program. An undergraduate major in theology was approved in 1968, and Mundelein's first graduate degree program in religious studies was approved in 1969, both of which made high-quality theological education accessible to the laity, particularly women.<sup>14</sup>

Eager to engage even more people in contemporary religious education, Sr. Carol Frances worked diligently to attract noteworthy theologians to speak at the Summer Lecture Series that complemented the institute. These lectures were open to the public and drew large audiences from Chicago and the surrounding area. Many of the speakers were Jesuit faculty members and visiting scholars from Marquette University, including Bernard Cooke, SJ, who would later direct Sr. Carol Frances's doctoral studies. Other speakers were nationally and internationally acclaimed, including, among others, Scripture scholars Reverend Barnabas Mary Ahern and Father Carroll Stuhlmüller; founder and editor of *Theology Digest*, Gerald Van Ackeren, SJ; Assistant Director of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) for Chicago, Reverend Theodore Stone; and a member of the international Grail women's movement for world transformation, Joan Lark. The Jesuit, Johannes Hofinger, who helped organize the influential international catechetical conference in Eichstätt, Germany in 1960, also addressed a capacity crowd of 1,100 people at Mundelein that included lay catechists, priests, sisters, and students.<sup>15</sup>

Passionate about the interconnectedness of all God's people, Sr. Carol Frances expanded the Summer Lecture Series in 1965 to include ecumenical and inter-faith perspectives from faith leaders like Dr. Martin Marty, a Lutheran pastor and professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, and Rabbi Herman Schaalmann of Temple Emanuel, who participated in many Jewish-Christian conversations at Mundelein. Issues of peace and social justice were addressed by speakers from Pax Christi USA/International and Bread for the World, an advocacy group to end world hunger. Through Sr. Carol Frances's tireless efforts, this successful speaker series spread contemporary religious education to an

ever-widening audience and created lasting connections between Mundelein students and teachers, women religious, lay women and men, and Jews and Christians. By 1967, this program was named the Mundelein Interfaith Center for Religious Education. It found a home in the “Yellow House,” as it was called, on the Mundelein campus with its first full time director, Victoria Baldino.<sup>16</sup>

Together the speaker series and the Summer Institute became the foundation of the graduate program in religious studies. Sr. Carol Frances explained the need and the foundation for religious studies in an essay entitled, “A New Pentecost,” that appeared in *Worship* in 1963. Here she lays out the model she will follow in all her writing. She begins with Church tradition and then explores both Scripture and the human experience as important sources of theological reflection that speak to contemporary society. She takes her theme, a new Pentecost, from Pope John XXIII’s call for the Second Vatican Council and from the resulting encyclicals. She felt they revealed “the direction in which the Holy Spirit was moving the Church.” These encyclicals explore “the nature of the Church herself, the meaningful communication of the inspired word of God as found in Sacred Scripture, the...participation...of all the faithful in the complex problems of the modern social order.” For Sr. Carol Frances, Scripture and liturgy, especially the Eucharist, are the wellspring of the mystery of the Church. This has been a consistent theme throughout her life. As she explains, “In proportion to the way that charity is expressed in the liturgy each day and week will the expression of charity in the apostolate be genuine and valid.”<sup>17</sup>

To further facilitate this new catechesis, Sr. Carol Frances worked in partnership with Sr. Margaret Mary Whalen, BVM, to launch The Mundelein Center for Religious Education. The Center was committed to engaging the whole person in the spiritual experience of becoming a Christian. Sr. Carol Frances and Sr. Margaret Mary understood how audio-visual technology brought an immediacy of experience to biblical stories and the witness of saints for children and adults alike. Together they began building an audio-visual lending library for area schools and parishes where fellow BVM sisters were teaching. As Sr. Carol Frances tells the story, she and Sr. Margaret Mary wrote letters to “beg materials from publishers” and invited donations of materials from friends and colleagues.<sup>18</sup> They also received financial support from the BVM com-

munity and the Jegen family. Sr. Mary Margaret was already taping the theological lectures given at Mundelein, and when the Summer Lecture Series began in 1961, those tapes were added to the collection. Sr. Carol Frances was always eager to expand Mundelein's reach and to draw more adults and children into a deeper understanding of their faith and friendship with Jesus.

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This collection of tapes would prove to be exceedingly important to the BVM congregation. Building on Sr. Carol Frances's vision, the BVM community launched a theology tape of the month program in 1961 that began circulating 100 tapes each month to BVM convents across the country. The library and circulation of tapes grew quickly in the years that followed. By 1967, when Sr. Marie Augusta Neal, SND deNamur, did a national study of congregations of women religious, the BVM sisters ranked first in theological understanding.<sup>19</sup> Sr. Carol Frances was justifiably proud of this result. She credited the vision of the BVM leaders who worked to provide the best education for all BVM members and to fund advanced degrees for BVM sisters on the Mundelein faculty. When the Second Vatican Council

issued the 1965 document *Perfectae Caritatis (Perfect Charity): Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life*, in which religious Congregations around the world were directed to renew their founding charism in light of the needs of the modern world, the BVM Congregation of sisters already had the theological foundation necessary to the task.

As a result of this forward-thinking leadership, Mundelein continued to expand as a center for introducing Catholics to the new catechesis. And so did Sr. Carol Frances's influence. As a member of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine, Sr. Carol Frances was elected to the planning committee that created the National Catechetical Forum in 1964. This forum hosted leaders from around the world who

worked together to formulate a national model of catechesis in support of the bishops' mandate to educate Catholics in their faith. In a report to the president of Mundelein, Sr. Carol Frances explained that the students needed a "solid grounding in Catholic theology from a biblical, liturgical, and dogmatic point of view."<sup>20</sup> She further explained that achieving this goal presented a significant challenge because "...religious education in America is currently involved in a transition which includes much lack of real understanding of Christianity, a legalistic and authoritarian distortion in the student's notion of Catholicism, unevenness of high school background, and the many tensions inherent in Church renewal."<sup>21</sup> Later that year, when Sr. Carol Frances began full time doctoral studies at Marquette University, she did so with the intent to prepare herself for the task she had helped to define.

Her passion for religious education only grew in the years that followed and expanded well beyond the walls of Mundelein and her BVM community. Appointed by Cardinal Meyer, Sr. Carol Frances became a member of the Archdiocese of Chicago Liturgical Commission. In 1965 she was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Liturgical Conference, which played a leading role in the reform of the Catholic Mass. Her work on the National Bishop's Subcommittee on Liturgical Adaptation contributed to the development of "The Children's Liturgy of the Word," which is still used regularly in Catholic parishes and schools across the country. In 1969 when the bishops established their first Advisory Board, Sr. Carol Frances was one of three women appointed to a five year term. That first meeting of the Advisory Board was also the beginning of her friendship with Bishop Joseph Bernardin, who would later become the Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago. In 1971, she was elected to the Illinois Catholic Conference and later attended the International Catechetical Conference as a representative of the bishops of the United States. The ongoing working relationship Sr. Carol Frances developed with the bishops strengthened her conviction that the collaboration among the people of God was indeed the work of the Spirit and the blessing of a new Pentecost.<sup>22</sup>

## The Hispanic Institute: Reaching New Communities

Furthering that spirit of collaboration, Sr. Carol Frances began laying the foundation for the Hispanic Institute when she returned to Mundelein. As part of the 1968 Summer Institute, the Spanish and Portuguese Department organized a series of free public lectures and films that “[high-lighted] the cultural contributions and acculturation problems of the Spanish-speaking population in the United States.”<sup>23</sup> These events were well received among the students and faculty. Sr. Therese Avila Duffy, BVM, the chairperson of the Spanish and Portuguese Department, envisioned this summer program as the beginning of Mundelein’s long term commitment to people of Hispanic heritage. She and Sr. Carol Frances worked together to “find ways for Mundelein to be of genuine service to the Hispanic Community, particularly in the Chicago area. Right from the beginning our ideas focused on language, culture and the religious education components of such an Instituto.”<sup>24</sup> In 1970 Mundelein began offering evening theology courses in Spanish to better support the development of lay leadership within the Spanish-speaking community. Additional summer sessions were also offered from 1972 to 1975 in cooperation with the Archdiocese of Chicago Religious Education Center and the United States Catholic Conference Midwest Regional Office for the Spanish Speaking. A bilingual and bicultural program was launched at Mundelein in 1975 in the Department of Education.

Sr. Carol Frances’s personal commitment to this vision was strengthened and transformed by her involvement with the California farm worker movement which led a successful national boycott against California grape growers. Organized by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, the United Farm Workers (UFW) fought to protect the rights of migrant workers against unfair and harmful labor practices and to honor their human dignity. Sr. Carol Frances deeply respected Chavez as the first Catholic leader to use the practice of nonviolence in the cause of justice. In July 1973, Sr. Carol Frances traveled to Fresno County to celebrate a Mass with the farm workers. Once there, she chose to participate in the UFW strike and be arrested. In a letter she wrote to her sister, she describes her life changing experience that day:

*One of the local priests...told how he was the only priest in one of the picket lines so far and explained how much it would mean to these people to have some of us with them on the line. It was clear we would be arrested.... I must admit that for these few moments I became fearful of the whole situation, but moved immediately to the group.... I can never thank Our Lord enough for helping me and the others make this decision. We celebrated our Mass then and there in the park, literally a dawning. About seven sisters and seven/eight priests were driven in a little bus by Jesus, one of the UFW members, to join one of the picket lines which had already started. We were arrested by 8:20a.m—the first group.<sup>25</sup>*

In this letter, Sr. Carol Frances highlights her experience of being with the farm workers: “Meeting Cesar with his people must be very similar to meeting Mother Teresa.... It’s so exciting to be right in the heart of non-violent action.”<sup>26</sup> True to their choice to stand with the farm workers, Sr. Carol Frances, along with her BVM sisters, declined the early release they were offered. Their decision was felt both inside the jail and out. Sr. Carol Frances had been scheduled to speak at the BVM Senate during her jail stay, but she and her fellow sisters had the support of the whole Congregation.<sup>27</sup> For the next two summers, Sr. Carol Frances volunteered for the UFW in California and developed a lasting friendship with Chavez. He embodied her understanding that the strength to seek justice with all your heart could only come from a life of prayer and a continuing dialog with Jesus.<sup>28</sup> In 1974, Mundelein welcomed a group of the farm workers to the campus and hosted them in the “Yellow House.” The farm workers were working on behalf of the UFW Red Coach Lettuce boycott. That summer, when Mother Theresa visited Mundelein, she was delighted to meet with them.<sup>29</sup>

Fueled by this national movement, Mundelein deepened its commitment to the Hispanic Community. The Hispanic Institute became a formal program in 1976. It was a collaborative effort as Sr. Carol Frances explained when announcing the program: “The Hispanic Institute has been designed through the combined efforts of Mundelein faculty members, the Chicago Archdiocesan Adult Religious Education Center, and the Commission Católica de Habla Hispana Midwest Regional Office.”<sup>30</sup>

The goal of the institute was to engage and serve the larger Latino community through a broad based appeal to lay men and women, vowed religious, and clergy who were of Latino descent or who worked with Latino communities. Addressing the need for greater cultural competency was also a central theme of its programming.

Early changes in the leadership of the Hispanic Institute, however, raised awareness for the need to deepen cultural understanding among Mundelein faculty and staff as well.<sup>31</sup> Committed to bringing people together and eager to build understanding, Sr. Carol Frances returned to the role of director. She quickly initiated a program known as *Comite del Pueblo* (*A Village Community*) that directly engaged Hispanic students in the design of programs. Sr. Carol Frances believed deeply that their voices needed to be heard. The design of the *Capitacion*, Pastoral Certificate, introduced in 1984, came out of the work of the *Comite de Pueblo*. In addition, hoping to increase the number of faculty with roots in the Hispanic community, Sr. Carol Frances established a visiting faculty exchange with the Mexican American Cultural Center (MAAC) in San Antonio, Texas. Similar to the Hispanic Institute, MAAC is a national center for pastoral education and language studies that support ministry to the Hispanic community. Sr. Carol Frances taught classes at MAAC and began learning how to speak basic Spanish. Her friend and colleague, Father Virgilio Elizondo, a scholar of liberation theology and often called the father of United States Latino theology, taught courses at Mundelein's summer Hispanic Institute program.<sup>32</sup>

In 1979 Mundelein was deeply honored to host Chavez. Sr. Carol Frances helped plan the evening and the liturgy. Chavez was in Chicago to generate support for the lettuce boycott and he spoke passionately about the fight for justice. The Lerner newspaper reported on his remarks: "Free collective bargaining has been established in this country as a way or American workers to improve their lives, Chavez says. We are convinced that it is the only way farm workers can escape poverty and exploitation. But there can't be free bargaining when growers are permitted to respond to their workers' legitimate needs with the use of strikebreakers."<sup>33</sup> The evening was memorable for all who attended, and a blessing of renewal for Chavez and Sr. Carol Frances. Frank Ortiz, Boycott Director in Chicago, wrote to Sr. Carol Frances thanking her "for all the work [she] did to make the Mass and talk with Cesar possible. Our thanks go out to

all the sisters who organized the evening, did the calling, planned the liturgy, provided music and songs, served, decorated and did all the things which made the Mass with Cesar a meaningful and warm celebration.”<sup>34</sup>

That same year, in an essay on worship and mission that was published in *The Jurist* magazine, Sr. Carol Frances explains the powerful connection between the Eucharist and action for justice that she experienced, particularly in her involvement with NFWA. “In the Emmaus mystery, worship and mission come together. Suffering is there; joy is there; love is there; power is there. As today’s Church continues the Emmaus mystery, entering deeply into the suffering of the human family, and confronting that suffering with compassionate love, then Jesus will be recognized anew in a Church which breaks bread.”<sup>35</sup> Her connection with the farm workers reignited her passion to more fully develop this concept of worship within the field of religious education. Citing a common expression of putting faith into action for justice and peace, she magnifies this need:

*To take but one example, feeding the hungry no longer has much to do with food baskets at Thanksgiving or Christmas time, laudable and helpful as such a custom might be. The staggering statistics of starvation and malnutrition in the world today can only be met by global efforts of long and short range planning. Such efforts reach right into political and economic life. Such efforts cry out for sacrifice and generosity on the part of all who partake of the Eucharistic bread of life.*<sup>36</sup>

Sr. Carol Frances’s lasting friendship with Chavez and the farm workers she worked with enabled her to forge new networks of people focused on the interconnection between catechesis and justice.

In 1979, the Holy Cross fathers at Notre Dame recognized Sr. Carol Frances’s effective and inclusive approach to religious education and invited her to develop a program for ministerial formation of the young men in their Congregation. She worked with this program at Notre Dame from 1979 to 1982.<sup>37</sup> The following year, the Association of Chicago Priests focused its efforts on supporting clergy to build more collaborative ministries within both the lay and Hispanic communities. Their goal for action in 1981 was “Sharing Ministries in the 80s with the

Non-collared and the Unordained,” which was intended to help priests redefine lay ministries as integral to the work of the Church and not as a “stop gap” labor resource.<sup>38</sup> In 1987, at the invitation of the Bishop, the Hispanic Institute expanded its programs to the Joliet Diocese. In 1991, when Mundelein affiliated with Loyola University, the Hispanic Institute became part of the Institute for Pastoral Studies and in 1997 the formation of lay leadership in the Archdiocese was placed under the auspices of the Office for Hispanic Ministry.

Sr. Carol Frances received numerous awards for her service to the Hispanic community and her action for justice. In 1980, the Association of Chicago Priests honored Sr. Carol Frances for her work on behalf of Hispanics.<sup>39</sup> Many Chicago priests had themselves initiated ministries in Mexico and Central America. Benefiting from her leadership and the work of the Hispanic Institute, the Association of Chicago Priests was better able to support their members in serving the needs of the Hispanic community. The following year, Loyola University recognized Sr. Carol Frances with an award for Civic Leadership, praising her work in religious education and her active support of economic justice for farm workers. Her colleagues at Mundelein and Loyola would also nominate her as one of 160 outstanding North American *Christian Educators of the Twentieth Century*.<sup>40</sup> But the award that spoke most to her heart came from within the Hispanic community. In 2000, Sr. Carol Frances was deeply honored to receive the Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Award from the Office for Hispanic Ministry in recognition of her pioneering contribution and service to the community over many years.<sup>41</sup>

## Jewish-Christian Relations: Embracing Other Faiths

From her early ecumenical foundation, Sr. Carol Frances valued different faith traditions. The Second Vatican Council echoed this view and in 1965 issued *Nostra Aetate (In Our Time): Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, which called for a greater understanding of the “common spiritual heritage” among Christians and Jews to be achieved through “theological inquiry and friendly discussion.”<sup>42</sup> A Catholic-Jewish discussion group soon began meeting at the Mundelein’s Interfaith Center for Religious Education. One of the participants sug-

gested that the opportunity to pray together would deepen understanding, and the tradition of a shared Seder celebration was begun. Rabbi Herman Schaalman from Temple Emmanuel presided at the first Seder.<sup>43</sup> This Jewish-Christian Seder was the inspiration for a Liturgy Training Publication Booklet entitled *The Passover Celebration: A Haggadah for Seder*.<sup>44</sup> Equally passionate about religious studies as his friend Sr. Carol Frances, Rabbi Schaalman taught undergraduate and graduate courses at Mundelein. Dr. Byron Sherwin, a scholar on Jewish Mysticism, also taught a popular course in the master's program. Mundelein students frequented Temple Emmanuel as well. On several occasions Rabbi Schaalman hosted them and explained the rituals of Jewish worship. Over the years more than a hundred BVM sisters were among the students who enjoyed this ecumenical hospitality.

In 1983, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and leaders of the Jewish Federation established a Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue. Sr. Carol Frances, Rabbi Schaalman, and Dr. Sherwin were among the first invited. As the academic vice president of Spertus College, now the Spertus Institute for Jewish Leadership and Learning, Dr. Sherwin worked with Sr. Carol Frances to develop a collaborative relationship between the colleges, which led to many faculty and student exchanges. In 1985 Sr. Carol Frances was invited to give the Solomon Goldman Lecture at Spertus. Dr. Sherwin pointed out that she was the first scholar to address the school as an interfaith speaker on the Jewish tradition. Sr. Carol Frances chose Psalm 85 as the text for her lecture entitled, "Justice and Peace Shall Kiss: An Impossible Promise?" Throughout her talk she explored "the context of Jewish and Christian efforts for justice and peace in light of their common biblical heritage."<sup>45</sup> In this lecture, Sr. Carol Frances explained how Psalm 85 required Christians and Jews to move from the logic of possession to the logic of gift, to see their lives as a gift from God and the purpose in life as sharing the gifts they have received. The Jewish song of praise and thanksgiving linked Jewish tradition with Sr. Carol Frances's theological understanding of the Eucharistic liturgy as the foundation of mission for Catholics. It is the logic of gift, Sr. Carol Frances argued, that is the basis for collaboration between both faiths in work for justice and peace.

In the spirit of that collaboration, Mundelein hosted the twentieth anniversary celebration of *Nostra Aetate* that same year. It was one of

the largest gatherings of the Catholic and Jewish communities in Chicago. The Jewish Federation of Chicago was integral in the planning and suggested holding the celebration at Mundelein, which they often called “our college.”<sup>46</sup> Sr. Ann Ida Gannon, former President of Mundelein, and Sr. Carol Frances were deeply honored that Mundelein was chosen and gladly directed the planning of the event. Sr. Carol Frances, Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, Rabbi Schaalman, and Doctor Sherwin were all in attendance as well as many other Jewish and Catholic leaders and members of both faith traditions. It seemed only fitting that the poster for the event pictured both Pope John XXIII and Rabbi Abraham Heschel, the two leaders who initiated and ushered in the restoration of Jewish-Christian relations. Twenty years later, at the fortieth anniversary event in Rome, the executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Chicago spoke about the success of the Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue in Chicago. He described it as a model for the world.<sup>47</sup>

In 1989, after years of collaboration between Mundelein and Spertus, Sr. Carol Frances and Doctor Sherwin co-authored the book, *Thank God: Prayers for Jews and Christians Together*. The book honors both faith traditions and is intended to encourage and facilitate opportunities to pray together, much like the shared Seder between Temple Emmanuel and Mundelein. In 1991, the Jewish Federation of Chicago proposed taking the Catholic-Jewish Scholars on a tour of the Holy Land. Sr. Carol Frances was quick to say yes. Once there, she felt deeply moved at seeing Jerusalem in the company of her Jewish and Christian friends. Reading from her book, she often led the community of travelers in prayer. Doing so was an amazing fulfillment of their vision of shared prayer.<sup>48</sup> Sr. Carol Frances found the blessing of friendship with members of the Jewish community and the integration of her work for justice and peace. The relationships she forged continue to grow and spread to this day.

## Peace Work: Living the Call of Jesus and Mary

Sr. Carol Frances remembers wondering about the Church's teachings on war back when she was in high school. In 1942, she and her CISCA friends questioned how a Catholic soldier could justify killing another person.<sup>49</sup> What she did not understand then became a genuine theological pursuit in her later years. When the Second Vatican Council, heralded as a "New Pentecost," invited theologians to explore Christian tradition, Scripture, and the human experience to bring the Gospel message to new generations, Sr. Carol Frances responded enthusiastically. In addition to working to make catechesis accessible to the laity and to both the Hispanic and interfaith communities, she wanted to deepen her theological understanding of the Christian responsibility to live in peace. She also wanted to explore the role of Mary "in the mystery of Christ and the Church."<sup>50</sup> In 1983 these two themes came together in her life and in her work.

In response to the challenge of the Second Vatican Council "to undertake a completely fresh reappraisal of war"—and with the threat of nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union a growing reality—the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral letter to all the faithful in May 1983.<sup>51</sup> This seminal letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, addressed the Church's complex history with war and peace and articulated a Catholic response to modern warfare. It was widely received by the public because the process through which it was developed was unique. The bishops openly invited the laity, clergy, women religious, and the general public to review and respond to a total of three drafts between the summer of 1982 and the final publication in 1983. Largely due to the leadership of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, with whom Sr. Carol Frances shared many common interests about catechesis, the openness of the process garnered a great deal of public debate and feedback.<sup>52</sup>

Passionate about the role of the laity in working toward peace, Sr. Carol Frances was pleased by this open process. In her dissertation on the Acts of the Apostles, Sr. Carol Frances had written extensively about the Pentecost event in the early Christian community.<sup>53</sup> In her eyes, the building of community in the early church and the negotiation of con-

flicts provides a model for living in peace that could benefit the modern world. In her own life, she frequently reflected on her two-week experience of life in the Fresno jail and her work with UFW, the first Catholic nonviolent campaign for justice. She also supported her younger sister, Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND de Namur, who became the executive director of Pax Christ USA in 1979 and the vice president of Pax Christi Interna-

**Sr. Carol Frances was beginning to develop a theology of peace that recognizes peace as a gift that Jesus gives to all of God's people.**

tional in 1982. Mundelein became a host site for Pax Christi retreats and conferences, which served to fuel their work in promoting peace around the world. Through these experiences, Sr. Carol Frances was beginning to develop a theology of peace that recognizes peace as a gift that Jesus gives to all of God's people.

Being a reviewer to the pastoral letter on peace became an important part of Sr. Carol Frances's response to the bishops' call "to develop a theology of peace."<sup>54</sup> Her critique of the early drafts focused on the need for greater emphasis on justice for the poor. The bishops had

asserted that, "The arms race...is an act of aggression against the poor."<sup>55</sup> Sr. Carol Frances wanted to see more practical suggestions for remedying this situation. She was deeply disappointed that the bishops accepted nuclear deterrence as a step toward peace, even though they added strict conditions on how that would happen. Following the publication, the bishops decided to work with theologians on how best to educate both the faithful and the general public in the ways of peace. Sr. Carol Frances's work deepened appreciation of the title of the pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, in linking the gift of peace (God's promise) with the liturgical exchange of the gift of peace in the Eucharistic liturgy (our response). This integration of the Eucharistic prayer and social action are deeply interwoven in Sr. Carol Frances's understanding of catechesis. Through her own prayer and lived experience, Sr. Carol Frances found a ready connection between religious education and peace studies. The link was—and continues to be—a foundational friendship with Jesus. She would later develop her ideas on a theology of

peace during a sabbatical at The Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at St. John's University.

But in 1983, at the time the bishops signed the pastoral letter on peace, Sr. Carol Frances was working on the plans for the Mary Festival to be held at Mundelein in honor of the BVM Congregation's sesquicentennial. Four years earlier at an assembly of leaders of religious Congregations, Sr. Carol Frances indicated the need for developing a fuller theological understanding to facilitate the "worldwide awakening of the equal dignity and role of women in human history." The Second Vatican Council had presented Mary as "actively present in the midst of a renewing church, now more conscious than ever of its mission." For Sr. Carol Frances, the Mary Festival was an opportunity to both celebrate the BVM community's dedication to Mary for 150 years and to offer contemporary theological reflections that celebrate Mary and the role of women. The Festival included sessions on prayer, media and catechesis, Marian music, and book and art displays. A BVM sister beautifully described the success of the Mary Festival: "Processions, evensong, Eucharistic celebrations, and an agape picnic made a contemporary theology of Mary vibrant with the joy and excitement that belong by right to the proclamation of God's good news."<sup>56</sup> Sr. Carol Frances was pleased that the event was an incarnational, feminist theological celebration.

The Mary Festival was just the beginning. Sr. Carol Frances was eager to do more. She was rightly proud of Mundelein for being a college "whose theologians were the first women to design, inaugurate, direct, and staff a graduate program in religious studies." Hoping to expand upon that legacy and reach a larger audience, Sr. Carol Frances invited six of her BVM sisters to join her in preparing theological explorations of the "Mary's vital role in today's Church." In tribute to the long tradition of Marian devotion in the Church, each of the contributors chose invocations from the Litany of Loreto, a litany to the Blessed Virgin Mary that was developed in the Middle Ages, and then explored them in a contemporary context. Woven throughout their writings was the presentation of women as equal contributors to the mission of the Church, the ministry of education, especially theological education, the expansion of pastoral ministries, and the Church's work for justice, peace and freedom. These reflections were published in 1985 as a collection of essays, *Mary According to Women*, which Sr. Carol Frances edited.<sup>57</sup>

Sr. Carol Frances's essay, "Mary Immaculate: Woman of Freedom, Patroness of the United States," unites her two passions: working for peace and spreading a deeper understanding of Mary's role in the modern world. Sr. Carol Frances skillfully roots her theological reflection in the Scriptural text which reveals Mary as one who hears the Word of the Lord (Luke 8:19-21). Sr. Carol Frances describes Mary's life and faith journey as a "dialogical" experience, one that involves engaging with God through conversation. Mary's prayer and her ongoing dialog with God reveal Mary as a disciple of Jesus—the Magnificat being the fullest expression of that dialog in which "Mary's joy-filled spirit proclaims the greatness, the holiness, the mercy of God for all ages." In conversation with God, Sr. Carol Frances explains, Mary reveals her heart as "perfectly free from any kind of self-centeredness, reach[ing] out to extend such freedom to others, confident that the same redeeming power of God will continue to free the rich and the hungry, the lowly and the mighty, for greater enjoyment of God's own life of love." Mary's life signifies the link between personal freedom and the creation of a free society. "In Mary we see most clearly what our own life of love in God is capable of becoming, because the same powerful freeing action of Jesus is operative in us." And like Mary, Sr. Carol Frances concludes, our freedom is dependent on a "continuing, loving dialog with God."<sup>58</sup> This dialog, she believes, is the foundation of all efforts to seek justice and peace.

In the fall of 1984, Sr. Carol Frances had the opportunity to further develop her thoughts on the freeing action of Jesus when she was accepted to The Institute of Ecumenical and Cultural Research. Her intent for this year of sabbatical was to define her theological understanding of Jesus as peacemaker. Sr. Carol Frances understood well the social teachings of the Church, which instruct that the Gospel message must find expression in works that free the human person from oppression of any kind. In the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, the Second Vatican Council identifies freedom as "an exceptional sign of the divine image within the human person."<sup>59</sup> During her time at the Institute, Sr. Carol Frances contemplated that meaning deeply and wrote extensively. She completed the manuscript for her next book, *Jesus: The Peacemaker*, in which she offers a historical study of Jesus' teaching and a practical model for living a life of peace in the modern world. She also completed several articles. The director of the Institute noted that

Sr. Carol Frances had the most prolific publishing record of any of their participants.<sup>60</sup> Mundelein's director of the graduate program celebrated her writing as both a continuation and expansion of her teaching and organizational work.<sup>61</sup> Sr. Carol Frances's year of sabbatical not only illuminated her singular focus and determination but also her longstanding commitment to catechesis and peace work.

In *Jesus: The Peacemaker*, Sr. Carol Frances proposes a Christology that establishes "peace and peacemaking as central in the concerns and works of Jesus, including his passion, death and resurrection."<sup>62</sup> Peacemaking, she asserts, is the action of Jesus and the action required of his followers. She begins the book by setting the context: the challenge of the Second Vatican Council and the inclusion of the laity and "peacemaking Christians" in developing the bishops' pastoral letter.<sup>63</sup> She describes the interplay of peace and justice throughout the Church's history, noting that the bishops of the world who gathered at the 1971 Synod taught that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."<sup>64</sup> Sr. Carol Frances also explores the Servant Songs in Isaiah and the theology of liberation that emerged in Latin America. Again and again, she sees the radical affirmation of life experience as both a way of coming to understand and proclaim the meaning of the Gospel.

Sr. Carol Frances also focuses on the playfulness of Jesus' spirit. Taking her cue from Robert Neale's psychological study of play, she says of Neale, "he emphasizes that a playful person is someone who is not concerned about resolving inner conflict and consequently is free to respond to the needs of others, even to the point of suffering." She also explores Reverend Walter Ong's work on applying this playful concept to God, noting that, "Ong states that because God's work is always joyous, spontaneous, and completely free, the work of God is always play."<sup>65</sup> Sr. Carol Frances then goes on to describe the playfulness of Jesus, including the post-resurrection picnic he prepared for Peter and his friends (John 15:15). She notes that the resurrected Jesus greets Mary Magdalen and the disciples on the road to Emmaus with the words, "Peace be with you," suggesting that his appearances have both an element of surprise and an awareness of his suffering and death. For Sr. Carol Frances, these post-resurrection stories are a sign of the new future that is possible because of Jesus' gift of peace. The followers of Jesus, she argues, need to learn (or

remember) how to play if they are to express the joy, spontaneity, and inner freedom needed to create a peaceful world order.

In the summer of 1985, Sr. Carol Frances is invited by her sister to present her insights from *Jesus: The Peacemaker* at the Pax Christi retreat in Montbard, France.<sup>66</sup> She accepted the invitation eagerly. There, Sr. Carol Frances met European Christians working with the World Council of

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Churches, an ecumenical fellowship of Christian churches advancing the cause for unity. They later invited both her and her sister, Sr. Mary Evelyn, to participate in their Symposium on Peace in Budapest in 1987. Again she happily agreed to participate and to chair the theology events at the Symposium.<sup>67</sup> Inspired by this global approach, Sr. Carol Frances returned to Mundelein determined to begin a Peace Studies program. Peace Studies emerged after World War II as an interdisciplinary study of violence, the causes of war, and the socialization of peace. In 1988, Sr. Carol Frances made sure that Mundelein was a founding member of the Peace Studies Society. By 1989, an interdisciplinary faculty committee of biology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, religious studies, history, literature and women's studies professors had developed a curriculum that was approved for an undergraduate minor

degree.

That same year, Sr. Carol Frances returned once again to the theme of Mary Immaculate in the book, *Restoring our Friendship with God: Mystery of Redemption from Suffering and Sin*. The editor, who invited Sr. Carol Frances's contribution, explained that the purpose of the book was to respond to the interest of educated Catholics "in doctrines that raise new questions in a contemporary setting, and teachings that now call for wider and deeper appreciation."<sup>68</sup> Having dedicated her life to a more

contemporary catechesis, Sr. Carol Frances set out to tackle original sin as one of the main stumbling blocks to a more modern understanding of our friendship with God. In *Restoring Our Friendship with God*, she directly challenges the popular idea that suffering is God's punishment for sin. As she explains, sin does bring suffering because sin hurts people and creation itself. God, however, does not intend suffering, but rather, she asserts, extends unfailing love to all creation. In her definition, sin is the "rejection of love and therefore is somehow a rejection of the God who is love."<sup>69</sup> She goes on to explain:

*The more deliberate the rejection, the greater the disorientation in a person's life and in a community's life. We are created to enjoy God's life of love. When that basic orientation is skewed or disrupted, our whole being suffers the repercussions. All our societal relations suffer as well.*<sup>70</sup>

For Sr. Carol Frances, it is Mary, the first disciple in the Christian community, who best shows us how to restore our friendship with God. As she explains in the book, Mary is a model for all of us because the loving action of God that was active in her is also active in us.

Rooted in her relationship with both Mary and Jesus, Sr. Carol Frances continued to collaborate with her sister, Sr. Mary Evelyn, on peace projects. They envisioned the Center for Women and Peace at Mundelein which would bring young women together to reflect upon their contributions and ongoing responsibility to creating a peaceful society. With help from faculty and administration, Sr. Carol Frances and her colleague Patricia Bombard, BVM, developed a proposal for the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which awarded Mundelein a two-year grant to launch the center. Sr. Mary Evelyn was chosen to serve as the director on a half-time basis.<sup>71</sup> The center hosted international faculty exchanges and engaged faculty and students in understanding a Global Peace Service, which encourages a service component in peace studies programs. The center also brought together a diverse community of women from Chicago to share their faith journeys across differences of ethnicity and religion. *A Dwelling Place* was published as a collection of these stories. It celebrated the sacredness of everyday life, of human relationships, and of our relationship with the earth.<sup>72</sup>

In 1991, when Mundelein affiliated with Loyola University, the Peace Studies minor was accepted, but the Center for Women and Peace did not continue beyond the life of the grant. The two Jegen sisters, however, were undeterred. They offered a summer course on peace at Loyola in 1993. A collection of their writings on peace and justice formed one of the texts for the course.<sup>73</sup> Sr. Carol Frances also taught in Loyola's Institute for Pastoral Studies for many years. After her retirement in 2000, she actively maintained her work with Pax Christi. She continued writing and attending conferences. She joined a BVM ministry for men and women who are incarcerated and she continued her involvement in interfaith dialog. In 2004, both she and her sister participated in an interfaith symposium at Marquette entitled, "Peace Service in the Abrahamic Traditions."<sup>74</sup> Sr. Carol Frances was 78 years old at the time and was still as equally passionate about working toward peace and justice as she was in her younger days.

## **BVM Constitution:**

### **Honoring the Leadership of Sr. Carol Frances**

All of the connections and communities that Sr. Carol Frances has engaged in throughout her life are linked to her life in the BVM community. In 1968, she was elected as a senator to the first General Chapter of Renewal and served a full five terms. In response to the Second Vatican Council's call for religious Congregations to rekindle the fire of their founding charism and bring this energy to bear on contemporary life, the BVM community began work on a new constitution. Sr. Carol Frances was asked to serve on the Constitutions Committee to help her community discern the wisdom of the past and the direction for the future. Revered as a theological leader among BVM sisters, Sr. Carol Frances dedicated herself to this work and the process of renewal that began in 1974 and continued until 1989 when the Vatican approved the new BVM constitution. While the process was not always easy, and at times even painful, it revealed much about her playful pondering and dialog with God as well as her legacy of leadership within the BVM community.

Sr. Carol Frances's story as a member of the Committee on the Constitutions began even before she received a formal appointment. She and several other sisters were on retreat together when they discovered "the

wonderful freedom of spirit in Mary Frances Clarke as [they] recalled times when she broke through the legalism and harshness of her day.” This freedom of spirit became the guiding light of the renewal process. In May 1981, Sr. Carol Frances presented the work of the committee to the BVM Assembly at Clarke College in Dubuque, Iowa. She began by defining the relationship between mission and ministry. All Christians, she explained, share in “one mission, that of Our Lord Jesus Christ who was sent to give abundant life to the world.” But, there are many ways to be of service. She defined mission as “the basis of historical continuity for the congregation” and ministry as the opening “to innovation and creativity...in fulfill[ing] the congregational mission.” Reaffirmed by the inner freedom of Mary Frances Clarke, the committee suggested that the BVM mission be that of “freeing others to enjoy God’s life of steadfast love.”<sup>75</sup> It won enthusiastic approval from the community. When the BVM Constitution was finally approved by Rome in 1989, it read as follows: “As Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we are called to participate in the mission of Jesus. Our choice of ministry is in keeping with our BVM mission: being freed and helping others enjoy freedom in God’s steadfast love.”<sup>76</sup>

While deeply respected by her community for her theological insights, Sr. Carol Frances reveals in her memoir how she struggled to understand her leadership role. She explains that at the Eucharist for her perpetual vows, “I offered myself for leadership in whatever ways God needed me.” Through her work at Mundelein and her leadership in catechesis, she was indeed a gift to her community and to the Church. But five times she accepted the invitation to run for the office of BVM president, and five times she failed to be elected. In her song prayer, “The Bald Eagle Cry,” she reflects about the meaning of that loss: “The imagery in this song speaks of poverty, of virginal love, of maturing prayerfulness, and of a willingness to ‘suffer humiliation for the sake of the kingdom,’ a familiar Ignatian spirituality theme. In its own way the imagery referred to my role in the BVM presidential elections.” Another time, while on retreat, she came to a new understanding of her leadership role:

*...God used the egret to help me understand more clearly my special role in our BVM Congregation. The first time was an evening experience as I sat near the river bank. On the other side of the*

*river I was attracted to what appeared to be a piece of driftwood. ...Then to my surprise, this apparent bird-like driftwood spread its wings and began to fly. Later in this retreat, I was near the place where I had noticed the egret for the first time. A flock of geese were swimming downstream when all of a sudden the egret appeared flying alone in the same direction as the flock of geese. God then helped me to understand that often I would have to lead alone. I had already been called the "John the Baptist" of the Congregation.*

A final reflection on that struggle was revealed during a prayer vision in which she saw Jesus as the lamb enthroned within her womb. She writes about how that united "Jesus the Lamb with Mother Jesus continuing to birth new life in the Church. ...I pray that our BVM Congregation will be closely and fearlessly united with Jesus to influence his people, including his bishops and other leaders in the ways of more genuine Gospel living."<sup>77</sup> Through her dialog with Jesus, Sr. Carol Frances comes to understand more deeply his teaching that leadership in the creation of a just and peaceful world is not defined by office but by service to the needs of the community. Such service has characterized her life.

Sr. Carol Frances's memoir also reveals the integration of her prayer life with her work life. She explores the meaning of "everyday mysticism" as contemplative prayer available to those who recognize Jesus as a friend and companion. She includes carols, an ancient form of prayer, which were inspired by family events, liturgical feasts, and contemplation during retreats. In reading this collection we get a glimpse of her family connection and what it meant to her throughout her life. It was with her family that the intimacy of her friendship with Jesus had its origin and continued to find support and expression. At Sr. Carol Frances's surprise seventieth birthday party, her sister, Sr. Mary Evelyn, celebrated her life and wished for her sister more time in retirement to play with her friends, Jesus and Mary, and the rest of us.<sup>78</sup> Her sentiment echoed Sr. Carol Frances's exploration of play in her book, *Jesus: The Peace-Maker*. "Joy, spontaneity and freedom" are the qualities Sr. Carol Frances identifies as "key in understanding genuine playfulness, whether it be the playfulness of God or the playfulness of the children of God."<sup>79</sup>

Playfulness may not be the first characteristic that comes to mind

when colleagues and friends describe Sr. Carol Frances who has been an intensely hard worker throughout her life and has accomplished so much. Her memoir offers insight into her delight for nature, particularly flowers and birds, and her ever deepening and often playful friendship with Jesus. As she noted in the introduction, “We need to be aware of Jesus’ hope filled promise of joy, even in the face of suffering.” Her goal in writing her memoir was the same as her goal in all of her ministry: “I hope to encourage others to really enjoy Jesus and all he means for us.”<sup>80</sup>

Sr. Carol Frances’s pioneering work in catechesis, for which she is renowned, has opened many hearts to the grace of friendship with Jesus. And this grace continues to inspire actions for justice and peace among all God’s people including neighbors and strangers, teachers and students, clergy and laity, Latino and Anglo-Americans, Christians and Jews, women and men. Let us honor Sr. Carol Frances by thanking God for a woman whose life and work teaches us that friendship with Jesus gives us the freedom to play—and it is in playing well with one another that we realize the mission of Jesus and help to bring justice and peace to the world.

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