



THE UPPER ROOM EXPERIENCE

Pentecost 2020

Being artisans of hope in the midst of the Covid-19 global pandemic

What was the experience of Mary and the disciples in the upper room after the death of Jesus? They seemed to be afraid, confused and grieving. They could not see the way ahead – and yet it was out of this experience of vulnerability that Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:19-23). The Upper Room was the place where the role of the disciples in Jesus’ mission sharpened into focus.

What is our experience in our upper room of Pentecost as we grapple with the dark night of Covid-19? Like the disciples so long ago, we might be deep inside fear and grief. At the same time, we support others with our prayer and love. We may be living outside the upper room, engaging in different activities to help alleviate the crisis, or even starting to look ahead at life beyond this global pandemic. Where are we? How are our hearts? How is this global pandemic changing us personally, communally, and globally? What are we learning?

One thing that we are learning is the interconnectedness of the global community. Often we now hear the words, “we are not alone” and “we are in this together.” In the midst of so much uncertainty, change, and chaos, we are impelled to think of one other, to transform our perspectives and behavior, to be creative, and not to let this opportunity for transformation pass us by.

“What we are living now is a place of *metanoia* (conversion), and we have the chance to begin. So let’s not let it slip from us, and let’s move ahead.”

Pope Francis quoted in an interview with Austen Ivereigh “Take care of yourselves for a future that will come,” *The Tablet*, 11 April 2020.

The upper room could be understood as a place of conversion for Mary and the disciples. Their “lockdown” was a place of Spirit-breath awakening them to a new chance to begin. Let us not let our upper room experiences, and our present moment in history “slip from us, and let’s move ahead as “artisans of hope in our blessed and broken world,” ready to be sent by the breath of the Spirit.

On November 30, 1831, St. Madeleine Sophie wrote to Philippine, “*Times change, and we must change with them.*” Philippine bravely took up the challenge. These words are for us today. How might we respond to Sophie’s challenge to change? How is the Spirit breathing us into being and acting in new ways as we participate in the mission of Jesus in our time?

The 1988 General Chapter recalled Sophie's challenge to Philippine as it saw how the world set its agenda.

Let us also be reminded of the words of Mother Bulto in her opening address to the 1970 Chapter. She said:

*"The times call for evangelical daring, broad vision, and courageous listening"...
The gospel challenge is addressed in the first place to each one of us. For if the Society exists at all it is through each individual God-given call."*

The Society has always been trying to be attentive to the world setting our agenda. This became evident at the International JPIC meeting in the Philippines in 2018. One of the extraordinary activities that took place at that meeting was the re-telling of the history of JPIC in the Society. It was recounted as a living history from the memory of those who were present.

In 2012, Mary Hinde (ENW) captured how the Society responds to the agenda set by the world in a presentation to her province on the topic of the development of the Society's understanding of JPIC, as reflected in the General Chapters 1967-2008.¹ Some of her examples are:

- The 1970 Chapter was directly influenced by the Latin American bishops' conference that took place in Medellin in 1967.
- The 1988 Chapter recognized the widening gap between rich and poor nations when it referred to "the political dimension of our apostolic life".
- The 1994 Chapter in a world of AIDS, external debt and arms proliferation stated that, "a world in profound transition" has left us "without a compass".
- The 2008 Chapter, we saw that the interconnectedness of the whole of creation marks our world, especially the effects of human activity on the environment.

The Spirit-breathing of Pentecost 2020 coincides with the global Covid-19 pandemic. This is another moment in the continuation of the JPIC story of the Society. How are we being attentive? Is the world setting our agenda? Are we responding together as One Body? What does our response look like and what might be an image that describes the Society as we live Pentecost 2020?

With you in desire, prayer, and commitment to
"be artisans of hope in our blessed and broken world,"

Anne Corry rscj Joy Luz rscj Sheila Smith rscj

¹ In 2012, Mary Hinde rscj (ENW) was asked to give a reflection on how the Society's understanding of JPIC has developed, as reflected in the General Chapters 1967-2008. Her presentation was subsequently formatted for the ENW website by Silvana Dallanegra rscj and can be found at <https://www.societysacredheart.org.uk/Being-RSCJ/Fully-apostolic/Our-commitment-to-JPIC/The-development-of-JPIC-in-the-Society>. It is further updated with the author's permission by Sheila Smith rscj (USC) to include the 2016 General Chapter, and can be accessed here: <https://rscjinternational.org/news/development-jpic-society-reflection-justice-peace-and-integrity-creation-general-chapters-1967>. The entire time-line is a working document and is not meant to be the final word on this topic in the Society. At the moment it is only available in English.