

THAT ALL MAY BE ONE: SFCC BEGINNINGS  
The Historical Connection Between SFCC and Jesus' Gethsemane Prayer

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Jesus' conversation with God in the Gethsemane Garden is usually regarded as his grand farewell speech. He is arrested moments later, imprisoned, tortured, interrogated, and then led to a gruesome death. Because Jesus had little to say during his final day, his prayer in the garden becomes important. "That all may be one as you and I, Father, are one." Was it a farewell or was it a welcome speech? When the prayer is reduced to just the words, Jesus is not saying good bye. Nor is he saying hello. Rather, he is voicing a deep wish for a new kind of society that sheds hierarchy and division of all kinds. He envisions a society that mirrors the dynamic of the Trinity: diversity that is wholly equal with a single focused energy to nurture all and only what is good. He prays for a unity of purpose: that all may be one.

When you look at the Gethsemane prayer, Jesus was actually asking for a miracle and he knew it.

Has anyone here ever prayed for a miracle? Have you ever asked for something that could not happen on its own – that required the hand of God? Do we even dare to ask for a miracle? I did. The nuns of my childhood school repeatedly told us that everyone is entitled to one miracle. They explained that, if you prayed for the miracle every day and never caused adults a problem, then God would grant your one miracle. So, at age 7, I decided to claim my miracle. That year I was told by my parents that when I turned 12 years, I would be required to make a decision that impacted the future of not just myself but my entire family. I instinctively knew it was not possible to make a decision that would please everyone.

So, I went for my one miracle. And I doubled down. For the next 5 years, I prayed not once but twice a day that God would permit me to skip being 12. I needed a total shift in perception that no one would notice that I went from being 11 to 13 years of age in the span of a second. My behavior was so spotless, I could have been canonized by the end of my 11th year! I awoke the morning of my 12th birthday with full confidence that the miracle happened. Well, you can imagine my complete disappointment when there were 12 candles on the cake. There was no divine shift in perception, no hand of God. I did not get my miracle. Perhaps I was too specific about the date and time. I will never know.

When Jesus told his closest friends that he was going into the garden to pray after the Passover meal, most likely Peter and others urged him to use his prayer time wisely. "Pray for a miracle!" they probably said. "Ask God to divert your arrest and execution." Peter may have recommended. Peter and the others did not want to lose Jesus to a justice system that had already decided his fate. And they most certainly did not want to be associated with a publicly executed criminal.

Well, Jesus did pray for a miracle; but not to save himself from certain death. Instead, he prayed for a society that embraced impartial justice, mutual respect, tolerance, and unity of purpose. He prayed for a society completely different from the one he lived in.

When you think about it, Jesus' request was not time specific. I always notice that Jesus prayed only that it happen, if not immediately, then in the future. His miracle could happen any time, any century, anywhere. Did it?

We know that Jesus' accusers and prosecutors had no change of heart. We know that his followers harbored their fear of being associated with a convicted felon to the point of hiding from anyone who might be searching for them. And we know that human society continued to function as it always had: through the force of power and wealth, intolerance and skewed justice.

So what about the future? Was Jesus' prayer, "that all may be one," kept alive during the years, the decades and centuries ahead? Would all ever be one? Was Jesus asking too much? Like my request to jump from 11 to 13, was it unrealistic? Did God ever intervene? Did the Holy Spirit inspire anyone to bring Jesus' miracle to life?

For the most part, the answer is NO. Oh, there were those who wanted to follow Jesus' teachings. Some became hermits in the desert or anchoresses walled in next to a local church. Others grouped together in vowed communities to live a life of prayer and work. Yet, each of those communities were organized according to the authoritarian structure of mainstream society that institutionalized inequality. They were not the miracle. In fact, they were what Jesus hoped would come to an end. So how was his hope for a miracle kept alive? Could there ever be a living witness of all being one? The answer is, YES

The medieval year 1150 marks the emergence of the Beguines in northern Belgium. The Beguines were women who professed the evangelical vows; but who did not implement the hierarchical authority structure. Each lived in her own cottage. The cottages were grouped together in compounds, known as beguinages. They prayed together and sometimes shared meals. Each earned her own living by teaching and spent her free time in prayer and doing charitable works of her own choosing. The local people loved and respected the Beguines because they demonstrated how normal daily life could be different in a good way.



Beguine of Lubeck,  
Flanders, 1482

The Beguines steadfastly remained independent of both papal and local diocesan authority. That is why the local clergy and hierarchy were suspicious of them; and often publicly discredited them verbally or even had them tortured or sometimes burned alive for heresy. Yet, the Beguines persisted quietly through several centuries. The Beguines kept Jesus' miracle alive for 9 centuries. They were a living example of diversity with a unity of purpose. They were an example that all may be one. Their numbers

waned rapidly by the late 1800s. Only 6 elderly Beguine remained by the 1990s. The last Beguine, Marcella Pattyn, died at age 92 in April of 2013. That was only 10 years ago. Was her death the end of the miracle? Would the Spirit ever inspire others to keep the miracle alive?



Last of the Beguines:  
Marcella Pattyn, 2013

By the mid-1900s there were several attempts to put Jesus' miracle into motion: in 1945, The United Nations grew out of an earlier multinational alliance. The UN promised that all member nations would be heard equally, and that each nation would be protected at the peril of other member nations: that all may be one in good times



and bad. The US Hippie Movement experimented in communal living that shunned any kind of hierarchical structure using "peace" and "love" for its banner: that all may be one in mutual respect and tolerance. The Women's Equal Rights Movement and Civil Rights Movement of the USA yearned for full equality of all people. Each of these movements were attempting to change a hierarchical, intolerant society into an experience where all were one regardless of gender or color of skin or national

importance on the world stage.

During the same time, Pope John XXIII convened the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965) in hopes of bringing the Catholic Church into contemporary time. His goal was to open the church structure to include the voice of all the faithful. Those were heady times in the Catholic Church when parish councils emerged to decide the direction of the local parish and diocesan councils charted the path of the diocese. It was a brief period when the Church and its faithful believed that all could be one.



If you were alive during the late 1950s, through the 60s and 70s, you felt the seismic surge towards change at all levels of human society: local, national and international. The collective mantra of the era seemed to be: that all may be one.

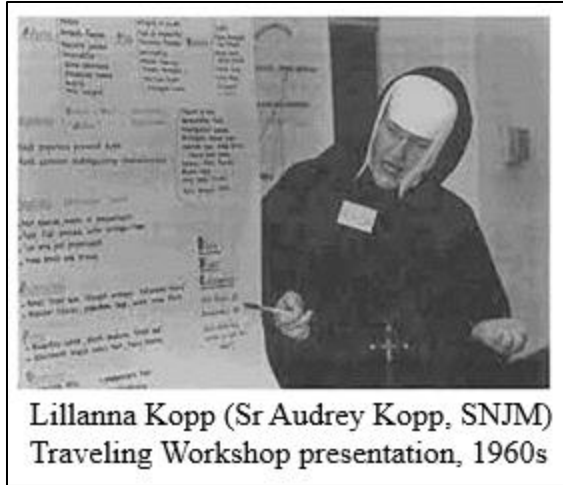


It is from this fertile soil tilled and cultivated by so many efforts at mid-century that the seedling of SFCC appears. Lillanna Kopp often used the image of the seedling sprouting upward through fertile soil into a world that was ready to welcome irrevocable change. But, before Lillanna could tend to the seed, she must first experience an irrevocable change within her own life.

It is important to remember that Lillanna Kopp was a sociologist by academic training. Her intellectual interest was in group organization and function. Academic interest led her to study racial tensions across the US. In 1965 Lillanna's conference presentation, "The Myth of Race" caught the

attention of School Sister of Notre Dame, Margaret Traxler who invited Lillanna to join a team of workshop speakers she was organizing. Lillanna accepted. What Lillanna did not know then was that being part of the workshop would completely change the direction of her life.

For the Workshops, Lillanna spoke about racial tensions in the US and the need for tolerance and equality. Eventually, she was led to consider that the same tension and inequality existed in convent life – the daily life of vowed women religious of the Catholic Church, which was premised on hierarchy and dominance. About the workshops, Lillanna said, “From city to city and from coast to coast our race relations team traveled with a double agenda. We prayed that we might somehow make a small gain toward bettering race relations. But our gatherings made an impact on American Sister renewal, we have no doubt. At each of our workshops, American sisters envisioned together wholly new religious life models for the 21st century.” (Audrey Kopp, 1966)



Lillanna Kopp (Sr Audrey Kopp, SNJM) Traveling Workshop presentation, 1960s



Her Workshop presentations resulted in the publication of a pamphlet challenging convent life. “New Nuns: Collegial Christians” (1968)

Most SFCC members know something about the Workshop. For those who do not, know that, in 1965, Sister of Notre Dame Margaret Ellen Traxler formed a six-member team of speakers from a mix of religious communities across the United States. Each team member was temporarily released from her teaching responsibility by her specific religious community. The team lived and worked together as they traveled across the United States from one motherhouse to the next. Lillanna quickly realized that sisters from very different religious formation programs, training and community experience could live, work and travel together amicably.

Agreeing to join the Workshop team meant you also agreed to share equally in the duties of travel, arrival, set up, take-down and departure. Lillanna experienced fully the meaning of collegiality: shared responsibility among the group members for the benefit of the whole team.



Speakers team: Traveling Workshop, 1966. Philadelphia. Lillanna (Sr Audrey) Kopp is second from last



Margaret Traxler, SSND

Margaret Traxler insisted that all decisions concerning the group be made through consensus: each had a full voice in the discussion. All must agree to a decision before it was confirmed and put into action. In this way, Margaret Traxler tutored the team members in the dynamic of consensus decision making.

The team members' personal and travel expenses were not covered by their respective motherhouse. Instead, the Workshop was funded in part by a grant from a national Catholic organization [The National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice (NCCIJ)], in part from stipends paid by each motherhouse that hosted the workshop, and also by donations from interested supporters. A tectonic shift for Lillanna was her growing awareness that it was possible to do meaningful work without financial dependency on her religious community.

You can see where this is going: the Traveling Workshop immersed Lillanna into what would become the cornerstones of SFCC: equality, collegiality, consensus, and individual financial responsibility. If those are the cornerstones of SFCC, then the foundation upon which they rest grew from Lillanna's academic focus on tolerance and equality, which she knew also found a home within Jesus' Gethsemane prayer, that all may be one. The seedling was planted as a result of Lillanna's experience. Jesus' hope of a miracle remained alive!

As part of her time experience with the Traveling Workshop, Lillanna opened herself fully to the vision and purpose of Margaret Traxler. They co-founded NCAN, a nationwide network of American women religious who communicated openly with one another without supervision or censorship of

either the Vatican or diocesan office. Lillanna befriended Humility of Mary Sister Ritamary Bradley (CHM) who founded the Sister Formation Movement, and Annette Walters, CSJ, both of whom sought expanded higher education for all women religious, not just a select few. Lillanna also became close friends with Anita Caspary of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters in Los Angeles, California. Because of their connection, it is no coincidence that SFCC was publicly "launched" the exact same year when Anita Caspary led over 300 IHM sisters out of the Los Angeles archdiocesan offices and into non-canonical status. That was the year 1970.



Ritamary Bradley chm

Annette Walters csj

Anita Caspary, ihm

Before 1970 the Workshop had run its course. During 1967 and 1968 the team members were recalled to their assigned community ministry. Lillanna did not return to her motherhouse in Portland, Oregon. Instead, she took a leave and worked for a year as director of the Job Corps Center in a remote part of northern Washington State near the Canadian border. The following year, she signed on as sociology professor with Chapman College of California and boarded the



The Seven Seas, Campus Afloat fleet. Chapman College, Orange, California

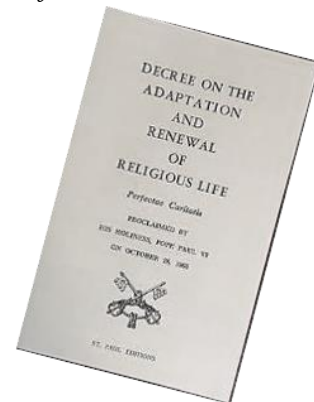
ship, Campus Afloat [pic of ship]. She sailed with the itinerant campus for 1 year and used that time to seek counsel from bishops and motherhouse leadership teams in the several international ports-of-call regarding her ideas for the change she believed Vatican II mandated in religious life. She received extended counsel from

American bishops George Evans and Joseph Breitenbeck, as well as Cardinal Flahiff of the Sacred Congregation for Religious. At nearly every turn, Lillanna was encouraged to create an entirely new form of religious community that implemented the extensive internal renewal of religious life as mandated by Vatican Council II in its 1965 decree, *Perfectae Caritatis*. And for which Jesus prayed during his final hours.

Lillanna was advised by more than one prelate to keep the new community non-canonical in order to remain free of Vatican and diocesan controls and, therefore, fully free to determine its own shape and future.



Sometime during 1969, Lillanna was asked to write a brief description or outline or profile of the new community as she understood Vatican II wanted it to be. Throughout her months on board Campus Afloat, Lillanna reflected on Jesus' Gethsemane prayer while also studying *Perfectae*



*Caritatis*. Finally, she put pen to paper and wrote a one page description, a profile, of how a

Vatican II religious community would look on paper: its reason for existence, how it will be organized, how it makes decisions, how it takes in new members. Her single focus was to draw the broad lines of how such a community would prove that all could be one.

She titled the description "The Profile of Sisters For Christian Community" in order to reflect both Vatican II's mandate and Jesus' prayer. The community existed for the purpose of creating the kind of society for which Jesus prayed and towards which Vatican II led the faithful: a truly Christian community. She shared the profile with the friends she had made during her time with the Traveling Workshop. Ritamary Bradley offered to publish the profile in a 1970 issue of the Sister Formation newsletter. Margaret Ellen Traxler published it in the March 1970 issue of Trans-Sister, the NCAN newsletter. What happened?

The response was immediate. The response was overwhelming. Within a few months over 100 nuns from a wide diversity of communities across the



Dunrovin Retreat Center, St Croix, Minnesota



United States “signed on” with Lillanna. Excited and energized by possibility, they decided that, in the spirit of collegial consensus, as many as possible should assemble for a few days in order to make key decisions regarding the immediate future of the fledgling community. They gathered for 3 days in August, 1971 at the Dunrovin Retreat Center near St Croix, Minnesota: the site of the first SFCC assembly.

Lillanna Kopp and the earliest members/co-founders of SFCC understood that the Profile was all about creating gospel-based Christian community. By example of its own form of collegial community, SFCC aimed to give life to Jesus’ vision of human society that expressed the oneness of all people. Consequently, it was the consensus of all present that the new community would rest on the evangelical spirituality “that all may be one.”

From the beginning, SFCCs sought community that was mutually serving, loving and listening. It was open ecumenically and consciously Spirit-directed. Its collegial sense did not give credence to hierarchy nor ear to dictates of superiors. From the earliest years, SFCC set as its goal the oneness Jesus envisioned. Lillanna Kopp and the first SFCCs understood their relationship to Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer. It would be the charism or binding force of the new community.

The new group had defined its purpose; but had yet to name itself. How would they be known?

Traditionally, religious congregations took the name of a specific devotion (Sisters of the Sacred Heart) or the place of their founding (Sisters of Notre Dame). Just think, we could have been known as the Sisters of Portland or the Dunrovin Sisters! Others took the name of their founder (Benedictines, Franciscans, Dominicans). But what about a community that claimed no single founder nor a specific geographic location of origin? Naming such a group was no easy task!



Naming the group was the assignment of those gathered in Dunrovin, Minnesota during that August weekend in 1971. Prayer and discussion revealed that all present were in accord that the over-arching goal of creating Christian community best expressed the purpose and vision of the group. That is why those assembled in Dunrovin said, we will let the purpose be the name of the community. They did not intend to be sisters in community. No, they would be sisters for community, the community of co-equals for which Jesus prayed. They would seek the type of Christian community that Vatican Council II envisioned.

And that is why we are called Sisters For Christian Community. The “for” is important because it indicates that SFCC members tirelessly strive for the realization of collegial Christian community and encourage Lillanna Kopp put it, SFCC community wherever we are inclusive presence.



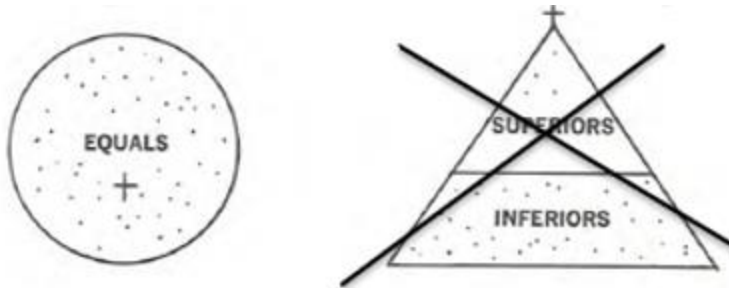
others to do the same. As is a “model of collegial Christian found.” SFCC is about being an

SFCC’s primary ministry, ministry of presence, SFCC greater love, freedom, and collegiality are the results of true Christian community. SFCC provides a living example to anyone who is willing to watch and learn that all may be one.

therefore, is presence: through a is a reminder to all people that

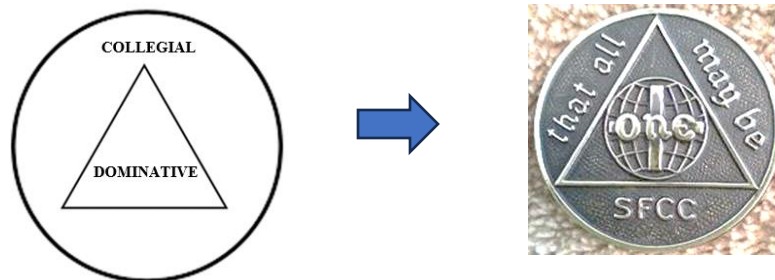
How shall we pray together, they asked in Dunrovin. What will be our common prayer? Our spiritual focus? Do we need to declare a specific common spirituality, such as the Sacred Heart, the Eucharistic Presence, the Benedictine Rule, or adopt the Franciscan Way? The answer: Each member is free to pray according to the spirituality that leads her most fully towards God while, at the same time, remembering that Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer for a community of co-equals holds a central spiritual place at the heart of SFCC.

The community logo would be a visual of the miracle Jesus requested: a non-hierarchical society.



Lillanna used the triangle to represent the traditional authoritarian structure. She called it dominative. She used the circle to represent the structure Jesus hoped for and Vatican II encouraged: a collegial presence of co-equals. Lillanna understood that Jesus

wanted the triangle (dominant) to be replaced by the circle (egalitarian) where no one holds power over another. The SFCC logo provides visual expression of that vision: the circle embraces the triangle, replacing it as the primary social structure. The circle embracing the triangle visualizes that all may be one throughout the world is translated into the SFCC logo.



The co-founders in Dunrovin believed that SFCC must always in every way: through our name, our presence, our structure our vision and mission and our logo endeavor to give life to the miracle Jesus so clearly requested in the Garden of Gethsemane.



