

Notre Dame de Sion
“SAINT JOHN IN MONTANA”
Congregational Novitiate Jerusalem

Ein Karem, Sunday, 28 August 2016

Dear Sisters,

We began the month of August by participating in the Elijah Interfaith Summer School on religious leadership. Meeting the different participants attending the summer school gave both the Novices and the Sisters opportunities to learn, to question our own understandings of religious leadership, and to become more aware of the opportunities for religious leadership today in religious and non-religious societies. It left us thinking about what speaks to our world today, and what needs some response in that context, so as to ensure a life with dignity as well as with respect for all values -- secular and religious -- that contribute to a non-violent society.

For the Novices who come from different countries, it was the first experience of interfaith encounters like this, sharing face to face with persons with different religious insights, and specially becoming more aware of secularism, where religion is viewed with scepticism or even dismissed as not needed in one's daily life. All of us in the Novitiate community come from countries where religion plays a role within the family and in the society.

During the session, we learned principles of leadership and we realised that there is much common ground among our different faith traditions, on which we can build. This experience prompts us to continue to share and study texts together, for a deeper understanding of the values they teach and of the differences that challenge us.

With Sr. Anne Catharine we explored the feast of the Assumption of Mary and the feast of Tish b'Av (when the destruction of both Temples is commemorated). On Tish b'Av the entire Jewish people is in mourning; Jewish tradition says that the first Temple was destroyed because of immorality, bloodshed and idolatry, and the second Temple was destroyed because of hatred and speaking with an evil tongue. This day sends an invitation to all humanity to heal this broken world (tikun olam -- mending the world). On Tish b'Av the book of Lamentations is read sitting on the floor and a 25-hour fast from water, food and sexual relations is observed.

We finished the month of August with a study on Non-violent communication and of the introduction to the Enneagram where we learn to get to know ourselves more again with Fr. Guy Theunis, a Missionary of Africa ("White Father"). We finished the session with a day of silent retreat time guided by Fr. Guy. Along with those sessions, Juliana explored with us the Constitution's chapter on community and shared with us the 2016 General Chapter's draft document on community and religious life. She asked us the question: what today is the ideal of community living,



Notre Dame de Sion

“SAINT JOHN IN MONTANA”

Congregational Novitiate Jerusalem

and in what specific ways do our Constitution and Father Theodore call us to build community? After working together in two's, we prepared research papers of our findings and shared those in one of our weekly community meetings. Our Community Dynamics exercise this month focused on sharing the colour and the shape of our individual images of community based on what is easiest and what is most difficult in living community.

We also created the first draft for our visit to Galilee: which places we want to visit and the responsibilities each one will take on for that week. Sr. Darlene (from Egypt) and Sr. Jilvaneide (from Brazil), who are members of the Congregational Formation Team with Juliana, will also join us.

Our celebration of Nancy's birthday was a joy filled event, including enjoyable story-telling; we also watched a YouTube teaching on St. Bernard, whose feast was on the 20th of August, and about whom Father Theodore wrote a book. We also remembered the arrival of the contemplative sisters in Ein Karem in 1971. We even got into wine-making, thanks to the abundance of grapes that the Novitiate garden produced this year. From the grapes that were not so good, we experimented with making vinegar. During these days, water melon and honey melon from our garden sweetened our deserts, and our figs and kilos of tomatoes filled our kitchen and the kitchens of the different community's on our Ein Karem property. On the feast of the Assumption, the Jerusalem Community gathered at Ein Karem for a Mass of the feast as well as for a celebration to thank Sr. Diane Willey for her years of service as Regional Bursar, and to wish her many blessings as she leaves Jerusalem for some sabbatical time. We wish her especially the enrichment that her sabbatical programs promise, and we look forward to her return to Jerusalem.

Juliana for the St. John in Montana community