

General Chapter 2017

Sisters gather in Montreal to

Joyfully Welcome and Proclaim God's Dream

For three weeks in July, 94 Sisters of Providence from around the globe gathered in Montreal to pray, participate in faith sharing, reflect, discern and celebrate where God is leading them in the years ahead. The theme for this 30th General Chapter, July 9-30, was *Joyfully Welcome and Proclaim God's Dream*. The participants from Mother Joseph Province included Provincial Superior Judith Desmarais and 30 sisters, including three in initial formation.

There were heady issues on the table: a proposed new model of governance, adoption of changes to the

Constitution and Rules, development of orientations which will guide the sisters' lives and actions for the next five years, and election of congregational leadership. But there also were opportunities to reconnect with old friends and to meet new members of the religious community, which is international, intercultural and inter-generational. Fittingly, the proceedings were conducted in three languages, English, French and Spanish. Putting it all together took a small village of support staff handling technology and equipment, food and secretarial support,

along with facilitators. There were reports on finances and demographic projections interspersed with PowerPoint presentations from each of the four provinces and celebrations in song and dance.

▼ *Dances performed in cultural dress were joyful and exuberant, like the one by Vietnamese sisters from Mother Joseph Province (from left) Rosa Nguyen, Hong Nga Nguyen and Huong Nguyen.*



▲ *The tomb of Blessed Emilie Gamelin was a place for quiet reflection for many, including Sister Deling Fernando.*

Smile

▶ *The General Leadership Team engages in conversation.*



By the time the sisters said their goodbyes at the month's end, they were refreshed, energized and ready to go back to ministries serving God's people in Canada, the United States, Chile,

El Salvador, the Philippines, Haiti, Cameroon, Egypt and Argentina.



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Daily broadcast email newsletters provided the sisters at home with a recap of events including photographs. What follows are a few highlights from the 2017 General Chapter:

A social gathering was held Saturday, July 8, in the evening in the Gamelin room located across the hall from the chapel and behind the tomb of our Blessed Emilie. The room was decorated using the visual displays from each province plus the General Leadership Team. Present were 94 sister delegates including the temporary vowed sisters.



◀ "Formation" is one of the orientations that will guide the congregation for the next five years. Sisters Huong Nguyen and Judith Desmarais present that sign.

▼ The congregation is truly international, intercultural and intergenerational!



Day 1, Sunday, July 9

The day began with celebration of Mass. Afternoon session opened with a prayer of blessing that included symbols of Community, our reliance on our Mother of Sorrows and our unity as one body in community and mind as we moved deeper into chapter affairs. Sister Karin Dufault blessed the assembly with holy water and we prepared to hear Karin's presentation, "Weaving together for the sake of the Mission", which delved into our presence in God's dream.

Day 13, July 23

It was announced as a step forward for women in the Church that Sister Pierrette Thiffault (Émilie-Gamelin Province) presided the day before and for the first time at a wedding. She has full official permission to do so as a representative of the Catholic Church. A round of applause greeted this momentous announcement.



◀ T-shirts displayed by Sisters Hong Nga Nguyen (left) and Marita Capili promoted the Providence (Beca) Scholarship Program.



◀ *Prayer, reflection and faith-sharing were essential elements of the General Chapter.*

They all answered: "With God's help and the support of my sisters, I do accept."

We are grateful to each of them for their generosity and availability in accepting this new ministry their sisters of the Congregation have given them.



Day 14, July 24

Later in the afternoon, we performed an acknowledgement ritual for the outgoing leaders, gratefully recognizing the generous and unconditional dedication they showed towards their sisters, Church, society and especially the most vulnerable.

Day 16, July 26

After the ballots were counted, Sister Mary Kaye Nealen announced that Sister Karin Dufault was re-elected to be the next general superior. Thunderous applause broke out in the meeting room, and then Sister Karin was asked if she accepted the election. She did accept. Again, there was great applause in gratitude for her "yes". Sisters and some staff then lined up to congratulate Sister Karin and to promise prayers as she moves into the next five years of general leadership.

Day 17, July 27

The following sisters were elected to the General Council:

- Josefina (Josie) Lerios
- Rollande Malo
- Nancy Arévalo
- Hortense Demia-Mbailaou

After every election, Sister Karin asked the sister if she accepted the call her sisters were directing to her, to fulfill this service for the Congregation.

Day 18, July 28

At 7 p.m. we gathered for socialization. The presentations were dances, games, songs, comic stories of sisters from different countries: Canada (East and West), Chile, United States, Cameroon, El Salvador, Egypt, Vietnam and Ireland!

Day 20, July 30

We ended our Chapter with the closing Mass in the Motherhouse chapel. The Mass was presided by Archbishop of Montreal, Christian Lépine, who blessed the former General Leadership Team as well as the new Team. At the end, we went out in procession to the tomb of Mother Emilie while singing the Hymn to Divine Providence. ●



Providence of God, we thank you for all!

◀ *A giant image of Blessed Emilie Gamelin provided an historical context.*

▼ *Sisters clapped along to the music as Sisters Margarita Hernandez and Vilma Franco took to the floor.*



▲ *The newly elected General Leadership Team is (from left) Sisters Nancy Arévalo, General Superior Karin Dufault, Hortense Demia-Mbailaou, Rollande Malo and Josefina "Josie" Lerios.*

